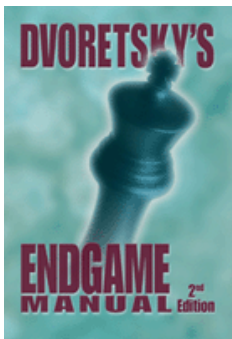




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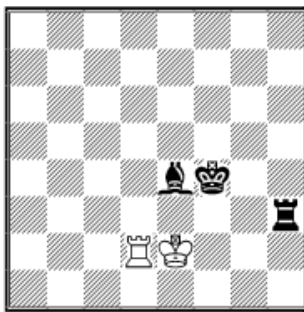
Rook and Bishop vs. Rook

Rook and bishop vs. rook endings can be exceptionally difficult if the defender's king is restricted to the edge of the board. With the king in a less dangerous position, the defense is easier – if you know the main ideas: “Cochrane's position” and “the seventh rank defense.” In *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual*, we examined the instructive game Timman – Lutz (Wijk aan Zee 1995), in which both defensive methods were used. Nevertheless, the defender finally strayed off the proper course, turning the game into a won Philidor position. However, Timman had to take the draw in accordance with the “fifty-move rule.”

In practice, players in this situation – nearly always suffering from a severe time shortage – rarely manage to avoid committing fatal errors, altering the evaluation of the position. I could present a number of instances, some from the careers of leading grandmasters. I hope this article helps reinforce your understanding.

The first endgame we will examine was played over a decade ago. I use it to draw your attention to one significant theoretical detail, which I myself only found out about very recently. The other two examples are taken from recent games played by strong grandmasters.

*San Segundo – Beliavsky*  
Madrid 1997



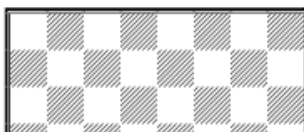
One of the defensive systems is called “the seventh-rank defense”: the rook stays within one square of the king.

White had already maintained the position for a number of moves by this defensive method, and should have continued in the same style: 108.Kf2!. After 108...Rh2+ 109.Ke1, Black's rook is attacked, and thus he has no time to bring his king closer. And the attempt to

play for zugzwang by 108...Bd3 doesn't work, because White has a stalemate defense: 109.Ke1! Ke3 110.Re2+!. This short variation makes clear why **this defensive method is only effective from the second (seventh) rank, or from the knight's file.**

Instead of 109...Ke3, Black could try 109...Re3+!?, hoping for 110.Kf2?! Rf3+!. Now the king has to retreat to g1 or g2, and the defensive redoubt on the second rank breaks down, making the defense more difficult. Such a position did indeed occur, in our third example: Rychagov – Grischuk.

A safer defense is 110.Kd1! Rf3 111.Kc1 (or 111.Rh2 Ke3 112.Kc1 111...Ke3 112.Rh2; for instance, 112...Kd4 113.Kd2, returning to the second-rank defense on a different set of squares. And if 112...Rf1+ 113.Kb2 Kd4, then White could set up the “Cochrane position” by 114.Rh4+ Be4 115.Kb3 Rb1+ 116.Ka4 (but not 116.Ka3? Kc3!+)).



The fourth-rank pin restricts the mobility of Black's king. On 116...Kd3, there

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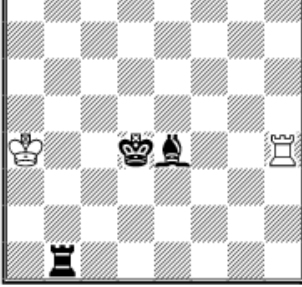
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[Victor Bologan: Selected Games 1985-2004](#)

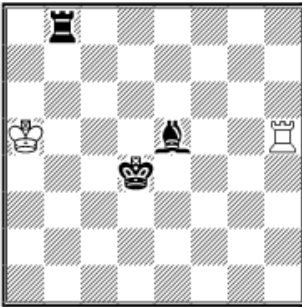
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follows 117.Ka5! Bd5 118.Rb4, freeing the king from the edge of the board. A symmetrical variation would be 116... Kd5 117.Ka3! Bd3 118.Rb4. 116...Re1 117.Kb4 is useless; and if Black plays the waiting 116...Rb8, White can wait too: 117.Rg4.

By the way, the position after 116...Kd5 (if you rotate the board on its horizontal axis, reversing the upper and lower halves) also occurred in the game Iljushin – Inarkiev, Moscow 2008.



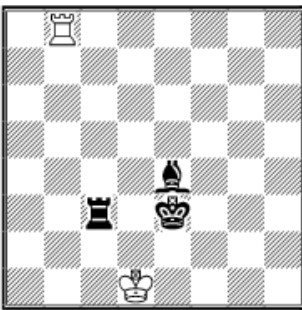
Here, instead of 117.Ka6!, White played the inaccurate 117.Rg5?!, to which his opponent replied 117...Bc7+! 118.Ka6 Kc4. The defense was now more complicated, since the king could no longer leave the edge of the board. Twelve moves later, Iljushin committed the decisive error and lost.

After this theoretical excursion, let us return to our game where, instead of the approved defensive method, Pablo San Segundo played a losing move:

**108.Rd8? Rh2+ 109.Kd1 Ke3 110.Rb8??**

Unbelievable! White overlooks a mate in one, 110...Rh1# – and Beliavsky doesn't see it. On the other hand, as we shall see, 110.Kc1 Rc2 + 111.Kd1 Rc3 (but not 111...Rb2 112.Rc8 =) would not have saved him either. After the text, the game is also lost.

**110...Rd2+? 111.Kc1 Rc2+ 112.Kd1 Rc3**

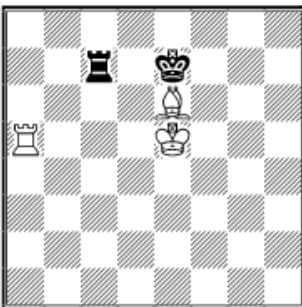


**113.Rb2?**

Loses quicker. In the opinion of the annotators – Hecht in *ChessBase*, Beliavsky and Mikhalchishin in their book, *Modern Endgame Practice* – White is saved after 113.Re8. This isn't true: 113...Rc7 114.Re5 Rh7 115.Kc1 Rb7→.

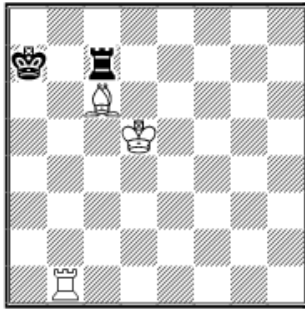
**113...Bf3+ 0-1**

**Bologan – Rublevsky**  
Poikovsky 2007



The last capture occurred on move 76. Black has held out for more than half the required 50 moves, and hasn't very far to go before the "final" 126th move. Rublevsky has successfully employed the "seventh-rank defense," and had he played 103...Rb7 here, could have continued with it even longer. But he allowed his opponent to change the course of the battle.

**103...Kd8?! 104.Kf6 Rc6 105.Ra7 Rd6 106.Ke5 Rc6 107.Kf6 Rd6 108.Rb7 Rc6 109.Rh7 Rd6 110.Ke5 Rc6 111.Rd7+ Kc8 112.Kd5 Rc7 113.Rd6+ Kb7 114.Rd8 Kb6 115.Bd7 Ka7?! (115...Rc5+ 116.Kd6 Rc7 would have been simpler) 116.Bc6 Kb6! (only move!) 117.Rb8+ Ka7 118.Rb1**



The only way to hold the draw in this position was 118...Rh7(g7)! 119.Kc5 Rh3(g3)! – but not 119...Rh2? 120.Be4! +- . The exact reason why Black would have to bring the rook precisely to the third rank would have been difficult to see, even with much more time available to the players. In our next example, a similar situation occurs, but turned 90 degrees to one side. There, the key factor becomes control of the c-file.

### 118...Re7? 119.Kc5 Re5+

Now 119...Re3 is useless, in view of 120.Ra1+ Kb8 121.Kd6, as the rook is placed too close to the king, and is therefore unable to deliver a check from the side.

### 120.Bd5 Rh5?

After 120...Re7, White's remaining six moves would not be enough for mate or the win of the rook: 121.Rh1 Rc7+ 122.Bc6 Kb8 123.Kd6 Rg7 124.Rh8+ Ka7 125.Kc5 Ka6 126.Rh1 Rg5+ 127.Bd5 Ka7 128.Rh8+- (Black would have had to resign, if this had been White's 125th move).

### 121.Rb7+! Ka6 122.Rg7!

122.Rb8 Rh7 123.Rb3 Ka7 124.Ra3+ Kb8 125.Ra8+ Kc7 126.Ra7+ wins also. But White's last move would be the 50th move without a capture, and the rook only gets taken on the following move – so it would be a draw! Viorel Bologan accurately counted the moves, and saw that in the other line, he would win in time (one move before the deadline, in fact).

### 122...Re5 123.Rg1 Ka7 124.Rg8 1-0

We begin our study of the following example long before the material imbalance under consideration appears – there are a number of interesting and instructive moments before it that we don't want to miss.

### *Rychagov – Grischuk*

Russian Championship, Moscow 2007



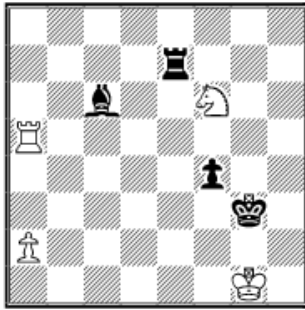
**In-between moves are a powerful tactical weapon**, but they can be hard to handle. Frequently, in-between moves can be so subtle that players either fail to notice them altogether or underestimate them. That's what happened in this game.

At first glance, everything's clear: Black brings his rook to e7, winning the pinned knight. Note that he may do this either immediately, or after a preliminary

check on e1. Why give the check? We will find the answer to that question once we discover and calculate the tactical defense White has at his disposal.

Black wins after 42...Re1+!! 43.Kf2 Re7 44.g4!? fg! 45.Ra5+ Kf4 46.Nf6 g3+ (the pawn advances with check – this is why it was necessary to bring the white king forward to f2) 47.Kf1 g2+ (47...Rf7!? is also very strong) 48.Kf2 Re2+ 49.Kxe2 g1Q.

**42...Re7? 43.g4! f4** (43...fg 44.Ra5+ Kh4 45.Nf6 =) **44.Ra5+ Kh4 45.Nf6 Kg3 46.Nh5+ Kxg4 47.Nf6+ Kg3**



**48.Ra3+?**

48.Nh5+ looked right. The text is illogical: why allow the pawn to reach f3? *In chess – a game ruled by iron logic – every inconsequential move is soundly punished* (Rudolf Spielmann).

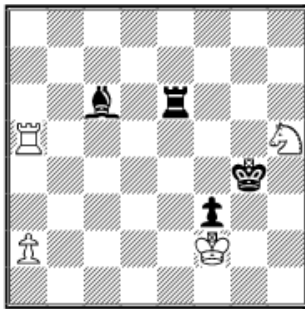
**48...f3 49.Nh5+ Kg4**

In Grischuk’s opinion, Black had a simpler way: 49...Kh4 50.Nf4 Kg4, or 49.Ra5 Re1+ 50.Kf2 Re2+ 51.Kf1 Rb2 52.a4 Be4 (with the king on g4, this move would not be available because of the check on f6) 53.Nf4 Kg4.

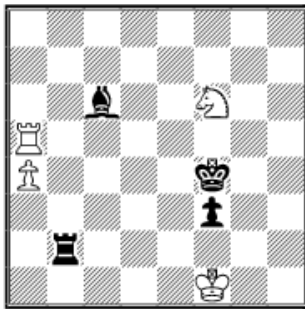
**50.Ra5**

White does no better after 50.Nf6+ Kg5 51.Ra6 Re1+ 52.Kf2 Re2+ 53.Kf1 Rc2+, or 53.Kg3 Rg2+ 54.Kh3 f2+.

**50...Re6 51.Kf2**



Black might have exploited White’s badly placed pieces by 51...Re2+! 52.Kf1 (52.Kg1 meets the same reply) 52...Rb2! 53.Nf6+ Kf4 54.a4.



Now, the quiet move 54...Bb7!! would have placed White in zugzwang. The rook cannot move along the fifth rank, because of 55...Ba6+; on 55.Ra7 f2! 56.Rxb7 Rxb7 57.Kxf2 Rf7! decides, or if 56.Ra5 Ba6+! 57.Rxa6 Kf3. King moves are refuted in exactly the same way: 55.Kg1(e1) f2+ 56.Kf1 Ba6+! And knight checks would allow Black’s king to invade the third rank: 55.Nh5+ Ke3 56.

Re5+ Be4+, or 55.Nd5+ Kg3 56.Nc3 Bc8+.

**51...Rh6? 52.Rc5!**

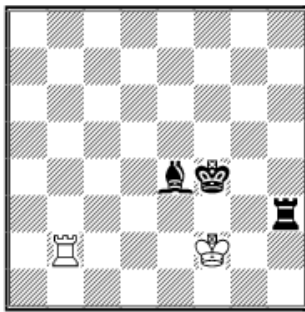
As long as the bishop remains on the a8-h1 diagonal, the rook will chase it. As soon as the bishop leaves the diagonal, White gives up his knight for Black’s last pawn on f3.

**52...Bb7 53.Rb5 Bc6 54.Rc5 Be8 55.Rc4+ Kxh5 56.Kxf3**

Now I will cease commenting on the ensuing “rook and bishop vs. rook” endgame, until it reaches the critical position, which is important for endgame theory.

**56...Ra6 57.Kf4 Kg6 58.a4 Kf6 59.a5 Rxa5 60.Rb4 Bc6 61.Rc4 Rf5+ 62.Ke3 Re5+ 63.Kd4 Rd5+ 64.Ke3 Bb5 65.Rd4 Rh5 66.Kf4 Ke6 67.Ke4 Bc6+ 68.Kf4 Rf5+ 69.Ke3 Ke5 70.Rd3 Rh5 71.Rc3 Bd5 72.Kd2 Rh2+ 73.Ke3 Rh4 74.Kd3 Rg4 75.Ke3 Bc4 76.Kf3 Rh4 77.Ke3 Re4+**

78.Kf3 Be2+ 79.Kf2 Kf4 80.Rc2 Bd3 81.Rb2 Re3 82.Rb4+ Be4 83.Rb2 Rh3



#### 84.Re2?

An inaccuracy, making White's task considerably more difficult. He should have continued either with 84.Rd2 (refer to the endgame San Segundo – Beliavsky), or with 84.Ke1.

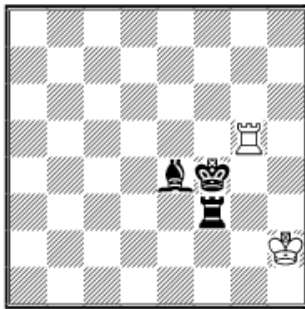
#### 84...Bd3 85.Rd2 Rf3+!

In this way, Black breaks up the defensive redoubt on the second rank. The concluding portion of the game took place in mutual time-pressure: the thirty seconds added for each player per move was clearly not enough time for successfully resolving the problems they faced.

#### 86.Kg2

White's defense would have been simpler after 86.Kg1!? Ke3 (87.Rf2 was threatened) 87.Rg2 Rf7 (87...Bf1 88.Rg7, intending either 89.Rf7+ or 89.Kh2) 88.Rg3+ Ke4 89.Kh2. Here, Black would have had a more difficult time coordinating his pieces.

**86...Bf1+ 87.Kg1 Ke3** (87...Kg3 88.Rg2+!) **88.Rd5** (88.Rd8 or 88.Ra2 would have been no worse) **88..Bd3 89.Rg5 Be4 90.Kh2 Kf4**



We can hardly make sense of what follows without computer assistance. We can no longer rely on simple variations, or logically understandable approaches – we must now deal with the hidden geometry of the chessboard.

According to the endgame tablebase, there are only two moves to draw here:

a) There's the pretty stalemate defense:  
91.Rg3! Rf2+ 92.Kg1 Ra2 93.Rc3; and

b) Moving the rook to one of the "correct" files (the c- or a-file): 91.Rg7! Rf2+ 92.Kg1 Ra2 (92...Rc2 93.Ra7!) 93.Rc7!.

#### 91.Rg8? Rf2+ 92.Kg1 Ra2?

The only move to win was 92...Rc2!! 93.Rb8 (the rook can't get to the a8-square – this is why White's 91st move was a mistake) 93...Rg2+ 94.Kf1 Rd2! 95.Rb4 Ke3 96.Rb3+ Bd3+ 97.Kg1 Kf3 98.Rb8 Bc4! (the rook takes away the vital g8-square from the rook) 99.Rb6 Rg2+ 100.Kh1 Ra2!–+.

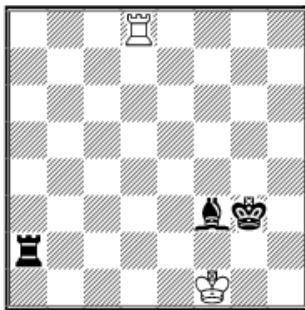
#### 93.Rb8?

The rook belongs on the c-file: 93.Rc8! Rg2+ (93...Ke3 94.Rc3+) 94.Kf1 Rd2 95.Rc4 (95.Kg1) 95...Ke3 96.Rc3+ Bd3+ 97.Kg1 Kf3 98.Rc8! =, now the vital c4-square remains under White's control. Inhuman finesses, indeed!

#### 93...Bd5?

Black wins by 93...Rg2+! 94.Kf1 Rd2!.

#### 94.Rd8 Kg3 95.Kf1 Bf3



### 96.Ke1?

The final mistake. The draw was his after 96.Re8! or 96.Rg8+ Bg4 97.Re8!.

**96...Re2+ 97.Kf1 Re3! 98.Rg8+ Bg4 99.Rg7 Re8 100.Rg5 Rh8 0-1**

White resigned, in view of 101.Ke1 Rd8+.

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