CHESSLIFE

THE
NEW CHESS BOOM!

IM MARK DVORETSKY AT THE 2014 TASHIR CHESS TOURNAMENT IN MEMORY OF TIGRAN PETROSIAN.
PHOTO COURTESY HANON RUSSELL AND TASHIR CHESS PRESS.

Life after Death

Our editor takes a very personal look at the new edition of *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual.*

By **JOHN HARTMANN**

While the chess world is not—Edward Winter excluded!—known for the ruthlessness of its critics, it is rare that a book is published to such universal acclaim as was *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual* (*DEM*) in 2003.

Writing for *The Week in Chess*, IM John Watson described it as "a masterpiece of research and insight ... a tremendous contribution to endgame literature, certainly the most important one in many years." IM Jeremy Silman said it "[offered] up an enormous amount of deeply explored material" in "digestible form" with "delightful examples." And John Roycroft, reviewing for *EG*, proclaimed it a "top-class work."

Because neither theory nor technology stand still, *DEM* underwent three revisions over the years, the last being the fourth edition published in 2014. Each revision incorporated the latest analysis and corrections generated by Dvoretsky, by his students, and by readers (especially those on Chessable) across the globe, with key improvements coming in rook endings in the second and fourth editions.

With Dvoretsky's death in 2016, I (like many others) assumed that the fourth edition of *DEM* would be the last. So I was very surprised this past April when I saw an announcement of a new, fifth edition on the Russell Enterprises website. I quickly emailed Hanon Russell, Dvoretsky's long-time American publisher, to inquire about this, unwittingly initiating the chain of events that led to this article.

MAKING THE SAUSAGE

Russell told me that Dvoretsky had been sending him corrections to the fourth edition up until his death, telling him to "hold these [improvements] for the next edition." After his death, Dvoretsky's son, Leonid, was in contact with Russell as a series of posthumous translations were published, and soon the question of when to update *DEM* arose. This presented a number of questions for both publisher and copyright holder, not the least of which was who could be trusted to do the job properly?

"Karsten was clearly the guy to do the revision," Russell told me. GM Karsten Müller had been writing an endgame column for ChessCafé, Russell's website at the time, and

when Dvoretsky had asked who might serve as a "cross-checker" for the first English edition, Müller was Russell's suggestion.

It was an inspired choice. Dvoretsky and Müller traded analysis via e-mail—indeed, the two never met, as Müller told me during our May interview—and the result was quite positive. The first edition of *DEM* quickly took on near-legendary status among chess fans, and to this day, it's often referred to by top players as the book on endings, perhaps only rivaled by Müller's own *Fundamental Chess Endings*, written with IM Frank Lamprecht.

For the fifth edition, Müller would play the part of Dvoretsky, writing up all of the new analysis and theoretical discoveries. But who would be his "Karsten?" Here again Russell dipped into his stable of authors. He tapped GM Alex Fishbein, who studied with Dvoretsky on multiple occasions, to check the new additions and, assuming they were correct, insert them into the text, making narrative changes where necessary.

It is hard to explain the amount of work that went into this revision, especially given that there was no existing manuscript or database to start with. The manuscript for the first edition of *DEM* emerged from Dvoretsky's legendary card collection, and not from a centralized ChessBase file. Lacking such a resource, changes were made directly to the manuscript with each new edition, and by the time the fifth edition came around, the publisher could not locate the most recent version! A MacGyver-like workaround was found—they hired someone to "jailbreak" the text from the commercial e-book.

Fishbein told me that he and Müller agreed on about three quarters of the proposed changes to the book. What they disagreed on—what they called "the sausage," as opposed to the "real list" of agreed changes—had to pass by both men before it went to Russell for insertion into the manuscript. Fishbein saw his role as both fact-checker and guardian of Dvoretsky's wishes. On at least one occasion he successfully argued for editorial restraint on that basis.

WHAT'S NEW?

DEM became famous, in part, because of its innovative use of blue print to demarcate around 220 "precise positions" that Dvoretsky felt should be memorized by the reader. (More on this shortly.) The problem, as many buyers pointed out, was that the quality of that blue print was rather variable. Some printings were fine, while others saw pages with very faint and barely legible blue script. The new fifth edition replaces the blue print with light gray highlighting, which has already divided
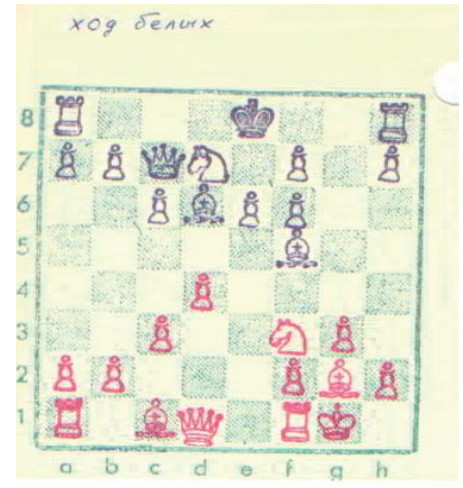
TWO POSITIONS FROM DVORETSKY'S FAMOUS INDEX CARD COLLECTION: #1596 (LEFT) AND #1598 (RIGHT). SEE PAGE 43 FOR MORE. COURTESY OF LEONID DVORETSKY.

readers in on-line discussions. For me, I find it quite easy to read, and a definite improvement on the previous system.

Cosmetics aside, there are also many substantive improvements to be found in the fifth edition. The discussion of the Kantorovich / Steckner position (*DEM* 9-158) was fundamentally rewritten by Alex Fishbein, taking him the better part of a week. Knight endings thought to have been winning, like those (*DEM* 3-21) with four pawns against three on the kingside, were discovered to only offer "good winning chances." Bahr's rule, dealing with a specific set of pawn endings, was reworked for clarity.

Perhaps most interesting, according to Müller, was the trend in rook endgame theory towards a recognition of the importance of Vančura-style defenses. The Vančura Defense, for those unfamiliar, gives defenders a way to hold some positions where the attacking side has a rook pawn on the sixth rank. It takes its name from a study by Josef Vančura in 1924.

THE VANČURA POSITION
J.Vančura, 1924
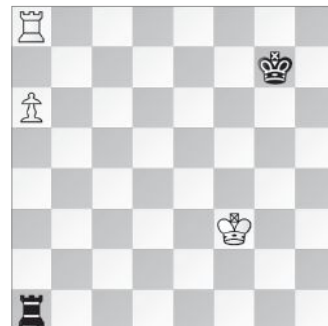
BLACK TO MOVE

1. ... Rf1+ 2. Ke4 Rf6!

Dvoretsky writes: "This is the so-called

'Vančura position.' Black follows the same 'pawn in the crosshairs' method found in endings with bishops of opposite colors. The rook attacks the pawn in order to prevent the enemy's rook from leaving a8. What can White do? If a6–a7, Black always has ... Ra6 (his king will obviously never leave the g7– and h7–squares). If White defends the pawn with his king, a series of checks follows, and then the rook returns to f6. For example..."

3. Kd5 Rb6 4. Kc5 Rf6! 5. Kb5 Rf5+! and White cannot make progress.

Vančura-style resources kept popping up. GM Erwin Ľami discovered one in the Kantorovich / Steckner position (*DEM* 9-168a), while GM Anish Giri found another in Heinemann-Zelbel (Bundesliga, 2014; *DEM* 9-208e). And these discoveries continue to be found. Writing for *Chess Life* in May of this year, GM Joel Benjamin analyzed a surprising Vančura-type idea in a game between GM Igor Novikov and GM Jakob Meister.

DEEP RESOURCES
GM Igor Novikov (2551)
GM Jakob Meister (2427)
2020 World Senior Team Championship
(6), 03.11.2020
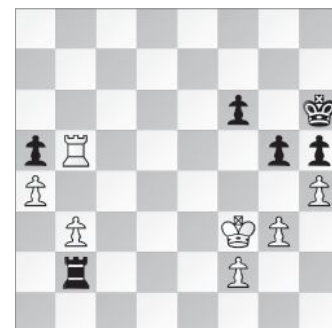
WHITE TO MOVE

41. g4!

Benjamin gives this an exclam in his analysis, as it is White's best chance. It doesn't work *if* Black finds the correct defense.

41. ... hxg4+?

The wrong capture.

Benjamin correctly notes that 41. ... gxh4! leads to a Vančura-style draw with best play, i.e. 42. gxh5 (*42. Rxh5+ Kg6 43. Rb5 Rc2 44. Kg2 Rc3 45. Rxa5 Rxb3 46. Rb5 Ra3* should be drawn, following Benjamin) 42. ... f5!! 43. Rxf5 Rxb3+ 44. Kg2 Rb4 45. Rxa5 Rg4+ 46. Kh3 Rf4 47. f3 (Benjamin recognizes that the pawn must fall at some point if White wants to continue) 47. ... Rxf3+ 48. Kxh4 Rc3! and we eventually reach a version of Vančura with a- and h-pawns. Incredible.

42. Kxg4 gxh4 43. f3 Kg6 44. Kxh4 Rd2 45. Rxa5 Rd3 46. Rb5 Rxf3 47. a5 Rf4+ 48. Kg3 Rf1 49. Rb4, Black resigned.

Had Meister found 41. ... gxh4, he could have drawn. But he needn't feel bad for missing it—neither GM Glenn Flear (writing for *Chess*) nor GM Alex Yermolinsky (writing for *chessbase.com*) found the key idea in their post-event analysis.

THE WOODSHED

COVID-19 has stopped almost all serious, slow time control play, at least here in Nebraska, and I don't see myself playing over-the-board until either a vaccine is produced or we have established herd immunity. The enforced layoff is admittedly no fun, but it does offer all of us the chance to take a hard look at our game and try to paper over the cracks.

Musicians speak of "woodshedding," or doing the hard work involved in learning the basic techniques and phrases that make up a difficult song. (One would presumably go to the woodshed to do it, as the noise would not bother others.) After looking at my recent games, and realizing that I was not as strong in the ending as I thought, I decided to use my time to "shed" my endgame skills.

Dvoretsky describes his vision of proper endgame study in *School of Future Champions 3: Secrets of Endgame Technique*. There, he distinguishes between "exact" and "problematic" endgame positions. Exact positions are those for which we know the correct evaluation. They serve as guideposts or terminal points for thinking, helping orient us in problematic positions—those in which we must "fight, seek the best moves, and calculate variations." (8)

Different authors have assessed the number of exact positions to be studied with quite a bit of variety. For Dvoretsky, the number is around 220—the light gray "exact" or "precise"

MARK DVORETSKY, CIRCA 2001. PHOTO COURTESY HANON RUSSELL.

positions in *DEM*. GM Jesus de la Villa prescribes exactly 100 key positions in his well-regarded *100 Endgames You Must Know*. FM John Littlewood was even more frugal in his choices, arguing in *Chess Coaching* that players could get away with knowing just 57 key positions!

Because I'm a perfectionist, and because it looks like COVID-19 is going to be with us for a while, I have decided to work through and memorize all of Dvoretsky's "exact" positions. As of right now, I'm working through the rook endings, and learning quite a bit about how I learn in the process.

"Knowing that" and "knowing how" are turning out to be very different things for me. It's one thing to say that I've studied the Lucena position, but reaching it (and winning it) in a practical game is another thing entirely. Here's

where I think another of Dvoretsky's books, the oft-neglected *Tragicomedy in the Endgame*, comes in handy.

Besides providing useful insights into how to play "problematic" positions, the first chapter of *Tragicomedy* is filled with positions where we see the world's elite mishandling theoretical wins and draws. I find it useful to pair the two titles, seeing how theory and practice often collide. I have also been playing out some of the positions against the computer, and while I often make silly mistakes, I like to think I'm getting better.

Everyone needs a hobby, especially right now. Perhaps there are better ways to improve my game—goodness knows there's a lot to improve— but this endgame work is proving a pleasant way to while away the time. Whether it leads to a rating jump, we'll find out in a few months.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

Dvoretsky wrote for an advanced audience, probably low master and beyond, and *DEM* is no exception. The book is very, very difficult, and there are other books—*Silman's Complete Endgame Course* by IM Jeremy Silman, the out-of-print *Essential Chess Endings* by GM James Howell, and *Winning Chess Endgames: Just the Facts!* by GMs Lev Alburt and Nikolai Krogius come to mind—that might work well for those readers looking for gentler introductions to endgame theory.

But Dvoretsky was adamant that his book could be read profitably by even "Class C" players. For this reason he insisted upon the blue (now gray highlighted) text, giving class players what he saw as the basic knowledge needed to succeed in the endgame. He may have overestimated his quarry in doing so. It requires a lot of time and effort to get through even the "exact" positions in *DEM*, as I'm finding out, and there's no guarantee that any of it will make a jot of difference to my playing strength.

Does that really matter? Yes. No. Maybe?

My COVID-19 inspired "shedding" is absolutely aimed at making me a better player, but more than that, I view it as a way to reconnect with a game I sometimes forget I love. The simplified positions one finds in the ending are deceptive, revealing the frightening depths of ideas and analysis that we so often skate past as we play. Bashing my head against the pages of *DEM* is sometimes frustrating, but more often than not, it prompts just enough of those "aha!" moments to make it worthwhile.

I think that the fifth edition of *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual* is the best since the first, and any serious student of the endgame should have it on her shelf. Those who already own a copy may not feel the need to pick this one up, unless they are completists or zealots like me, but the technical and theoretical improvements would certainly justify the purchase price.

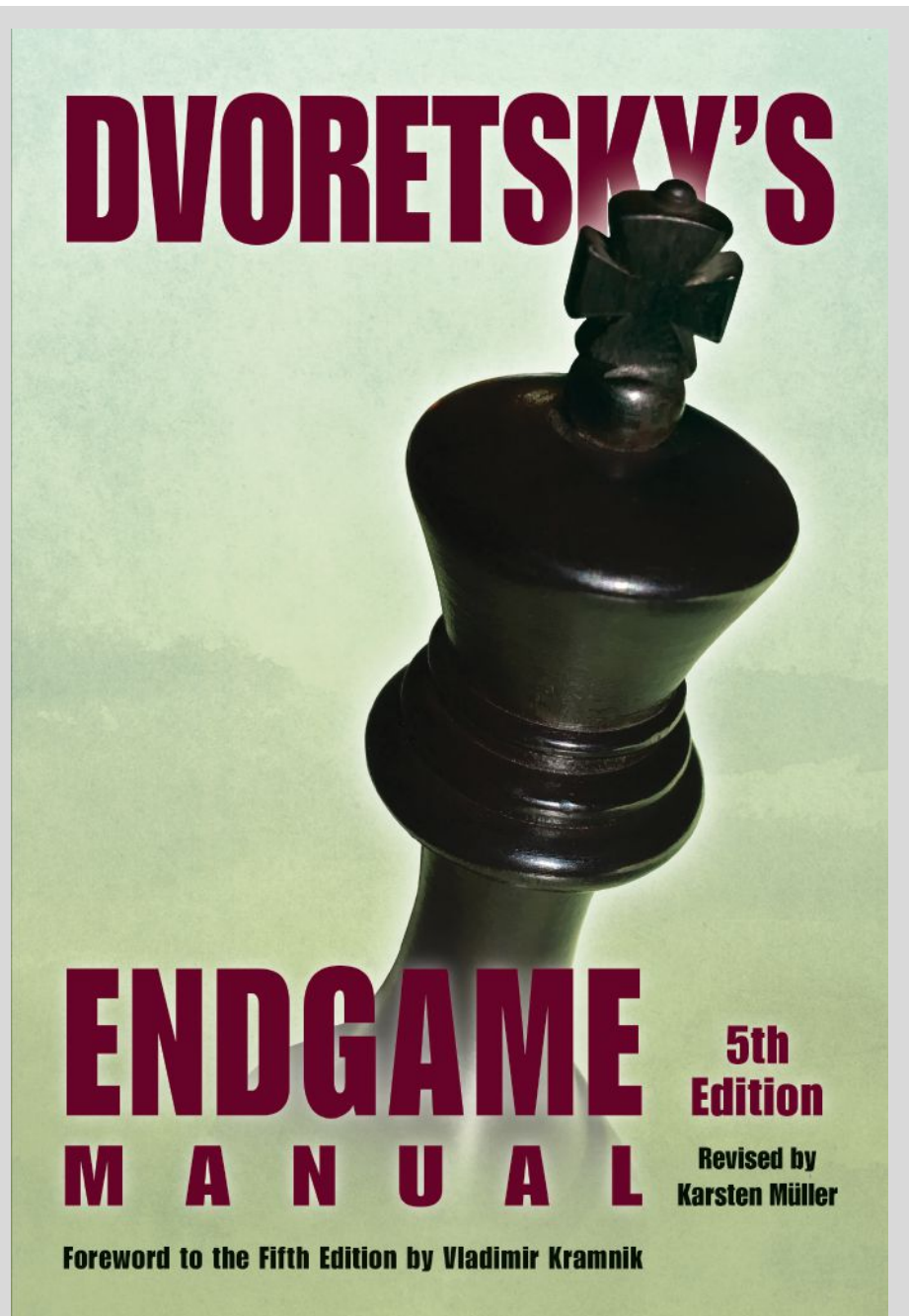GM ALEX FISHBEIN (PHOTO COURTESY STLCC / AUSTIN FULLER)

AN EXCERPT FROM *DEM*

Asked to opine on an appropriate excerpt for this piece, Alex Fishbein chose the Spielmann-Rubinstein (1909) rook ending as the best selection. After very deep analysis, the book showed for the first time that Rubinstein's play was not perfect. But Fishbein feels that this ending exemplifies how *DEM* teaches us to approach the best level a human can reach. He said: "The Rubinstein rook ending against Spielmann has for 100 years been indelibly etched in the minds of chessplayers all over the world. I first saw this ending as a young teenager, and although I was almost a master, I couldn't at first understand why Black is even better. It seemed like pure magic."

In *DEM 9-251*, Mark Dvoretsky explains:

"*A positional disadvantage that occurs often is an abundance of "pawn islands." White now has four islands against two; this means that White has more vulnerable pawns that cannot protect each other. Therefore his position is inferior.*"

Here is the analysis as written in the new *DEM*, with some abridgments for style and space. It is used courtesy of the publisher and Leonid Dvoretsky, the copyright holder, who reserves all rights.

DVORETSKY'S
ENDGAME MANUAL

5th Edition

Revised by Karsten Müller

Foreword to the Fifth Edition by Vladimir Kramnik

PURE MAGIC
Rudolf Spielmann
Akiba Rubinstein
St. Petersburg (17), 1909

BLACK TO MOVE

1. ... Ra8!

The first stage of Black's plan is to attack White's pawns so that the white rook will be chained to their protection. Chasing after material gain with 1. ... Rb3? would have been a grave error, because after 2. Ra2 Rd3 3. a4 Rxd4 4. a5 Rc4 5. a6, the white rook is actively placed behind a passed pawn while the black rook must stand passively on a8.

2. Rc3

2. Ra2 is a passive placement for the rook [for reasons explained in *DEM* - ~ed.]. After the move played, the rook's position on the third rank offers counterchances that, however, Spielmann fails to exploit.

2. ... Ra4 3. Rd3 Ke7

The second stage: the king goes to the center.

4. Kg3

4. d5 is met with 4. ... g5! (*4. ... Kf6 5. Rf3+*) 5. Kg2 Kf6 6. Rf3+ Kg6 7. Rd3 f6 with the idea of ... Kf5, although White should not lose here either.

4. ... Ke6 5. Kf3?

An obvious positional error. Letting the black king pass to d5, White condemns himself to a passive defense that, as we know, forebodes gloom in rook-and-pawn endings. He could draw with 5. Re3+ Kd7 (*5. ... Kd5 6 Re7*) 6. Rf3!? (or *6. Rd3 Kc6 7. Rc3+! Kd5 8. Rc7 Rxa3+ 9. Kg2 Ke6 10. d5+! Kf6 11. Rd7 Ra6 12. h4*) 6. ... f6 7 d5! Rd4 8 Rb3 with equality.

5. ... Kd5 6. Ke2?

Another mistake, and a fatal one now (although demonstrating that in a game requires the highest degree of mastery). It was necessary to restrain Black's pawns on the kingside by means of 6. h4!. It is worth mentioning that here, as well as later on, White is not afraid of 6. ... Rxd4, because he has a distant passed pawn in the ensuing pawn endgame after 7. Ke3.

6. ... g5!

The third stage of the plan: it is important to improve the pawn structure on the kingside.

7. Rb3

7. ... f6!

Another precise move! After 7. ... Kxd4? (not *7. ... Rd4? 8. Rd3*) 8. Rg3! (*8. Rb7? loses to 8. ... f6! 9. Rxg7 Rxa3 10. h4 gxh4 11. Rg4+ Kc3 12. Rxh4 Ra2+* and Kasparov correctly evaluated this as winning for Black) 8. ... Ra5 9. Rg4+! Kc3 10. Rg3+ Kc2 11. f4 draws. The player fighting for a win should avoid pawn exchanges. Rubinstein's move keeps White in a bind.

8. Ke3

8. Rb7? can be met with 8. ... Rxa3 9. Rxg7 Rxh3 (*9. ... Kxd4* transposes to an above-mentioned variation which also wins) 10. Rg6 Ke6 11. Rg8 Rh4 12. Ke3 Kd5, winning a second pawn and soon the game.

8. ... Kc4 9. Rd3

9. Rb7 Rxa3+ 10. Ke4 d5+ 11. Kf5 Rxh3 12. Rxg7 Rf3+ is hopeless.

9. ... d5

Black has improved his pawn structure and optimally placed his king. Now it is time for the rook. It has completed its mission on a4 and may find a new application for its talents.

10. Kd2 Ra8 11. Kc2

11. Ke2? would lose quickly to 11. ... Rb8 12. Kd2 Rb2+ 13. Ke3 Rb3! (or *13. ... Rxf2!*).

11. ... Ra7! 12. Kd2 Re7?

Rubinstein has hit upon the right idea of placing his opponent in zugzwang, but he implements it inaccurately. As Karsten Müller discovered in 2019, Black should first play 12. ... Rb7! 13. Kc2 (*13. a4 Rb2+ 14. Ke3 Ra2; 13. Rc3+ Kxd4 14. a4 Rb2+! 15. Rc2 Rb3*) 13. ... Re7! (now Black is threatening the check on e2) 14. Kd2 Re4 15. a4 Kb4 and White's pieces are much more passive compared to the game. This single mistake by Rubinstein, not detected by analysts, including world champions, for 110 years after the game was played, and found with the help of modern technology, in no way detracts from this game. On the contrary, it helps establish a level of endgame virtuosity that we, as humans, can hope to approach.

13. Rc3+!

White must take this opportunity to activate his rook. To that end, perhaps even simpler is 13. a4! Ra7 14. Ra3 Kb4 15. Rc3 Rxa4 (*15. ... Kxa4 16. Rc5 Ra5 17. Rc7 Kb4 18. Ke3 Ra3+ 19. Ke2 Rxh3 20. Rc5*) 16. Rc7 Ra3 17. Ke2 Rxh3 and now 18. f3 or 18. Rc5 with a draw, but not 18. Rxg7?, letting the black king back in with 18. ... Kc3! But a continued passive policy would have led to an inglorious demise: 13. Kc2? Re2+ 14. Rd2 Rxd2+ 15. Kxd2 Kb3!, or 13. Re3? Rxe3! 14. fxe3 (*14. Kxe3 Kb3*) 14. ... f5 15. Kc2 g6 16. Kd2 (*16. Kb2 g4* and Black wins) 16...Kb3 and Black is winning.

13. ... Kxd4 14. a4! Ra7 15. Ra3 Ra5!

The pawn needs to be stopped as soon as possible. Black intends to approach it with his king, either simply to win or block it, releasing the rook from its passive position.

16. Ra1 Kc4

17. Ke3?

White had another opportunity, at the cost of a pawn, to push the black king to the edge while making his own pieces more active.

Levenfish and Smyslov correctly recommended 17. Rc1+! Kb4 18. Rb1+! Kxa4 19. Kd3. This position is drawn with correct defense: 19. ... Rc5 20. Kd4! (*20. Rb7? Rc4! 21. Rxg7 Kb5*) 20. ... Rc2 21. Rb7! Rxf2 22. Rxg7 Rd2+ 23. Kc5 Kb3 24. Rf7! (*24. Rg6? f5! 25. Rxg5 d4 26. Rxf5 Kc3!* and Black is winning) 24. ... Kc3 25. Rxf6 d4. [diagram omitted - ~ed.] Now White saves himself with 26. Ra6!

d3 (*26. ... Kd3 27. Kd5 Ke3 28. Re6+ Kf4 29. Rf6+ Kg3 30. Rg6 is equal*) 27. Ra3+ Kb2 28. Kb4 Rd1 29. Rb3+ (or *29. Rc3*) 29. ... Kc2 30. Kc4 d2 31. Rc3+ Kb2 32. Rb3+ Ka2 33 Kc3 with equality. After White's mistake, Black is again winning.

17. ... d4+ 18. Kd2 Rf5!

Black's precise 15th move tells: the rook may leave the blockade position.

19. Ke1

If 19. a5, then 19. ... Rxf2+ 20. Ke1 Rb2 (rather than *20. ... Rh2? 21. Ra4+ Kb5 22. a6!*) 21. a6 Rb8 22. a7 Ra8 23. Kd2 Kc5 24. Kd3 Kb6 25. Rb1+ Kxa7 26. Kxd4 Rh8! 27. Rb3 Rh4+ 28. Kc5 g4 and Black is winning.

19. ... Kb4?!

More forceful is 19. ... Rf3! Letting the White passed pawn advance looks scary, but the black rook can capture the h-pawn and return home in time: 20. a5 Kb5 21. a6 Rxh3 22. Kd2 Rh8 23. Kd3 Ra8 24. Rb1+ Kxa6 25. Kxd4 Re8!, cutting off the white king and quickly winning.

20. Ke2 Ka5

White now has a trick whereby he can cut off the black king without immediately losing a pawn.

21. Ra3?!

Missing a good practical chance. After 21. Rc1!, while Black is still winning, perhaps only Akiba could win this in an actual game. We continue with 21. ... d3+ (*21. ... Kxa4? 22. Rc4+ is equal*) 22. Ke3 d2! 23. Rd1 Re5+ 24. Kd3 Rd5+ 25. Kc3! (*25. Ke3 Kxa4 26. Rxd2 Rxd2 27. Kxd2 Kb4 28. Ke3 Kc4 29. Ke4 g6! and Black is winning*) 25. ... Rf5! (returning to the f2-pawn after the white king had to abandon it. *25. ... Rd7? 26. Rxd2 Rxd2 27. Kxd2 Kxa4 28. Ke3*, and now, unlike the previous line, White is in time to draw the pawn ending. *25. ... Kxa4?? loses to 26. Kc4! with mate coming.*) 26. Rxd2 Rf3+ 27. Rd3 Rxf2 28. Kb3 Rf5!. More work is still required to win here, but it can be done (analysis by Müller and Fishbein, 2019).

21. ... Rf4 22. Ra2

Black wins after 22. Kf1 Kb4! 23. Ra1 Re4 24. a5 d3!. 25. a6 d2 26. a7 Re8!.

22. ... Rh4 23. Kd3

23. Ra3 Kb4

23. ... Rxh3+ 24. Kxd4 Rh4+ 25. Kd3

25. Ke3 Rxa4 26. Rd2 Kb6! and if 27. Rd7, then 27. ... Ra7.

25. ... Rxa4 26. Re2

With the idea of Re7.

26. ... Rf4

26. ... Kb6? is wrong: 27. Re6+! and 28. Re7.

27. Ke3 Kb6 28. Rc2 Kb7!

Another accurate move. Black prevents the maneuver Rc8-g8 and prepares to cross the c-file with his king after ... Ra4-a6-c6.

29. Rc1 Ra4 30. Rh1 Kc6 31. Rh7 Ra7 32. Ke4 Kd6 33. Kf5 g6+! 34. Kxg6 Rxh7 35. Kxh7 Ke5 36. Kg6 g4, White resigned.

Postscript: After *DEM* went to print, Karsten Müller invited *Chessbase.com* readers to analyze this for themselves to see if the newest assessment was correct. Several analysts found minor inaccuracies in the new analysis, but the most important discovery was made by Charles Sullivan, who showed that Black's 19th and White's 21st move, questioned as doubtful by Müller and Fishbein, are in fact errors, and Spielmann missed one more chance to draw!

In the variation that starts with 21. Rc1, White has a big improvement with 27. Kc2!!, immediately accepting a position two pawns down with pawns on the same side of the board. Amazingly, White holds a draw after 27. ... Rxh3 28. Kd1 Kxa4 29. Ke2 Kb5 30. Rd7 Rh7 31. Kf3 Kc6 32. Rf7 Kd6 33. Kg4 Ke6 34. Ra7 Rh4+ 35. Kg3 g6 36. Rg7! Kf5 37. f3! and Black cannot win: his king is tied to the g6-pawn and if the rook defends it with ... Rh6, the white rook goes to the side and the black king cannot use the h6-square to escape side checks. ♦

While he became proficient with ChessBase over time, preferring older versions of the program for certain depreciated features, Mark Dvoretsky never stopped adding new positions to his famous collection of index cards. Here—and for the first time, to our knowledge—*Chess Life* is proud to publish images of two of Dvoretsky's cards. The first edition of *Dvoretsky's Endgame Manual* came directly from the thousands of positions Dvoretsky collected over the years, featuring bits of analysis added to each based on his work with his students. Thanks to Leonid Dvoretsky for providing these historic photos for our readers. ~*ed*.