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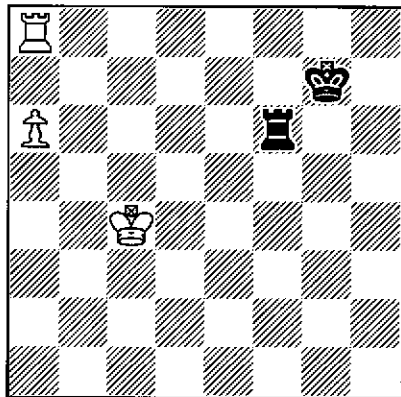
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Some studies by

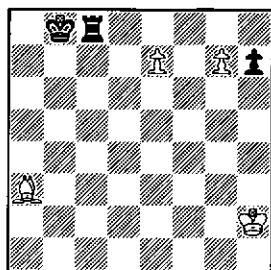
Jan Vančura



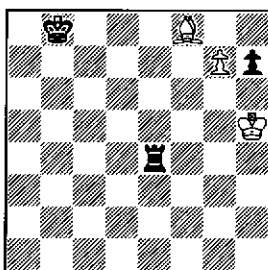
The "Vančura draw"

Some studies by Jan Vančura

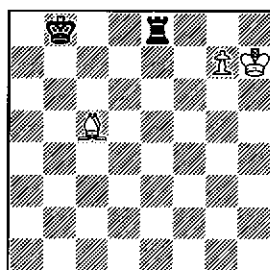
This seems to have been one of the chess world's sadder tragedies. According to the Czech *Malá encyklopedie šachu*, the endgame analyst and composer Jan Vančura lived only from August 1898 to November 1921, and most of his studies appeared posthumously. But he produced work of high quality during his short life, and he made two important contributions to endgame theory. Seven of his studies appear in the Russian edition of Averbakh (five in the English edition), eleven are in Chéron, and five are in John Nunn's *Secrets of rook endings*.



1 - win

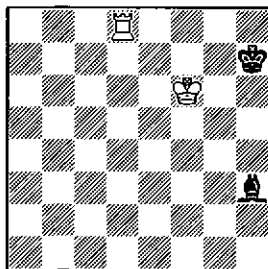


1a - after 5 Kh5

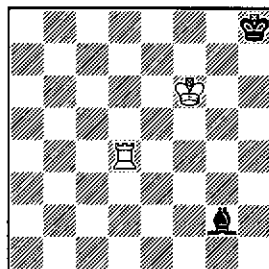


1b - after 8 Kxh7

1 appeared in *Časopis českých šachistů* in 1916. 1 e8Q Rxe8 2 Bf8, and Black must try 2...Re2+. If White goes to the g-file now or later, Black will play ...Re6, and meet g8Q by ...Rg6+. 3 Kh3, therefore, and 3...Re3+ 4 Kh4 Re4+ 5 Kh5 gives 1a. Can Black play 5...Re1 and attack from below? No, 6 Bd6+ K- 7 g8Q Rh1+ 8 Kg4 Rg1+ 9 Bg3. Hence one more check, 5...Re5+, and after 6 Kh6 Re1 this line doesn't work. But 7 Bc5! covers g1, and after 7...Re8 8 Kxh7 we have 1b. Now Black's king fatally restricts his rook: 8...Rd8 (8...Rc8 9 Bf8 at once) 9 Be7 Rc8 10 Bf8 Rc7 11 Bd6 pinning. My computer doesn't see why the White king cannot start on h1.

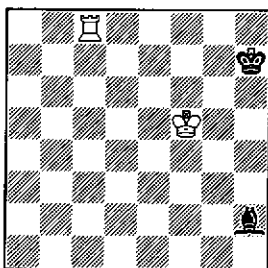


2 - win

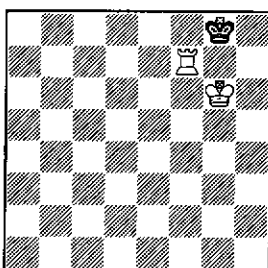


2a - after 3 Rd4

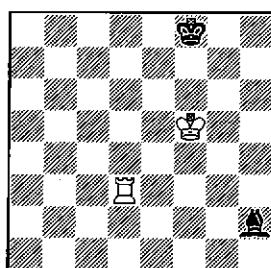
In 2, from *Časopis českých šachistů* 1917, 1 Rd1! Bg2 (given after 1...Bc8 is 2 Rd4 Ba6 3 Kf7, but 2 Ra1 provides an elegant alternative) 2 Rd7+ Kh8 3 Rd4! (see 2a) and Black is helpless: 3...Bc6 4 Kf7 or 3...Bf3 4 Kg6. If 3...Bf1, either will do.



3 - win



3a - White's target

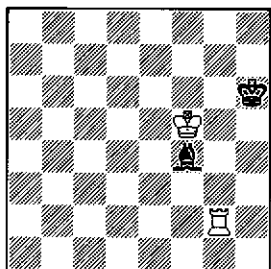


3b - after 2...Kf8

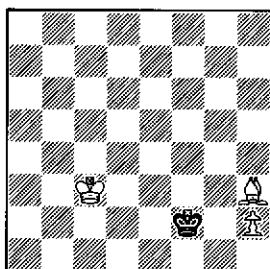
3 appeared in 28. *Říjen* in 1924. This time Black has a dark bishop, and White will win if he can confine Black's king to the h8 corner. It is in fact sufficient for White to reach 3a or an equivalent position - if he can do this, he can force a win wherever the Black bishop goes - but Black can expect to draw if his king can safely reach f8 or any point west. So White must act quickly, and play starts 1 **Rc3**. The natural reply is 1...Kg7, but let us look at some alternatives first. 1...Bb8 2 Kf6, with 2...Bf4 3 Rh3+ Kg8 4 Kg6 and if Black plays 4...Kf8 his bishop will be pinned, or 2...Bd6 3 Kf7 and the same. 1...Bd6 2 Kf6 Bb4 (else much the same again) 3 Rg3, with Rg6 and Kf7 to follow. 1...Kg8 2 Kf6, with a reflection of the position after 1...Bb8 Kf6.

So we confirm 1...Kg7, and White must reply 2 **Rd3**. The main line is 2...Kf8 (see 3b) 3 **Ke6 Kg7 4 Rd2** (quickest) **Bb8 5 Rb2** (again quickest) **Bf4 6 Rg2+ Kh6 7 Kf5** giving 3c below, and White will soon reach a reflection of 3a (say 7...Be3 8 Rg6+ Kh7 9 Kf6 etc). Some sidelines are also of interest, for example 2...Kf7 3 Rd7+ Ke8 4 Ke6 Bf4, when 5 Rd3 (quickest) wins even though Black has got as far away from the corner as e8, and the study is well worth playing through with a computer.

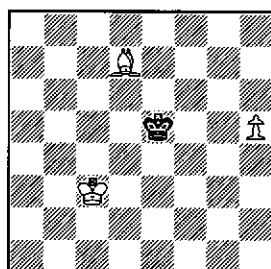
According to Ken Whyld's *Chess columns*, 28. *Říjen* was a Prague daily, with a chess column edited by F. J. Prokop from 1924 to 1926. "28. Říjen" means "October 28", the day in 1918 when what became the first Czechoslovak Republic was founded.



3c - after 7 Kf5

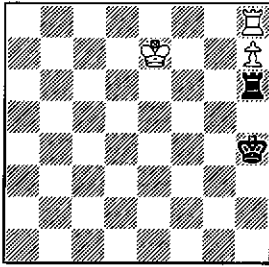


4 - win

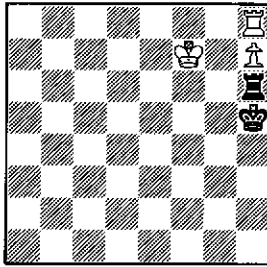


4a - after 3 Bd4

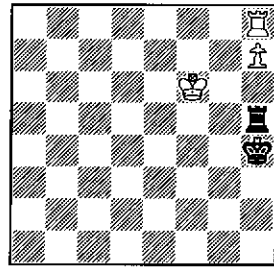
The lovely little 4 (*České slovo* 1922) has been innocently reproduced several times, including by Frink in the *Chess Amateur* in 1923. 1 **Bd7!** (only here) **Ke3** (1...Kf3 makes things easy for White, 2 Kd4 Kf4 3 h4) 2 **h4 Ke4 3 b5 Ke5** gives 4a, and the natural continuation is 4 **h6 Kf6 5 Be8** though 4 Be8 and 5 h6 also works.



5 - win



5a - reciprocal zugzwang



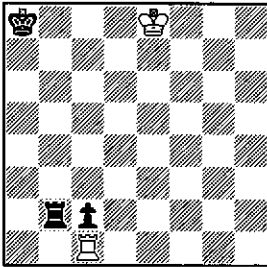
5b - after 4 Kf6

5 (*České slovo* 1922) depends in part on 5a, which is reciprocal zugzwang. White to play in 5a has only 1 Kg7 (any other king move allows 1...Kg6 winning the pawn), and after 1...Rg6+ 2 Kf7 Black has 2...Rh6 repeating the position; if instead 2 Kf8, 2...Kh6 again leads to capture of the pawn. But Black to play must retreat, 1...Kh4, and now 2 Kg7 wins (2...Kh5 3 Rf8 Rg6+ 4 Kf7, or 2...Rh5 3 Rf8 Rg5+ 4 Kf6).

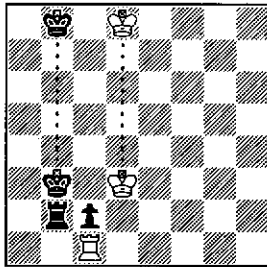
Hence, in 5, not 1 Kf7 Kh5 drawing but 1 Kf8, ready for 1...Kh5 2 Kf7 winning. But Black also has 1...Rh5, met by 2 Kf7 (quickest, though 2 Kg7 also wins) Rf5+ 3 Ke6 Rh5 4 Kf6 and again Black has no good move (see 5b). (A minor note in passing: 5b isn't reciprocal zugzwang because White to play can triangulate.)

All right, so why not 1 Ke8, again ready for 1...Kh5 2 Kf7? Because Black has 1...Kh3, giving himself some extra room. Now, after 2 Kf7 Rh4 3 Kg6 Rg4+ 4 Kf6 Rh4 5 Kf5, we have 5b with wK/bR/bK all down a rank, and 5...Rh6 holds the draw.

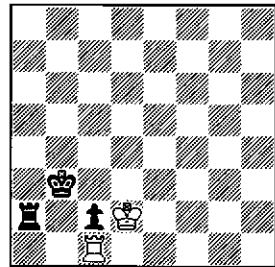
It is almost a little textbook in itself.



6 - draw



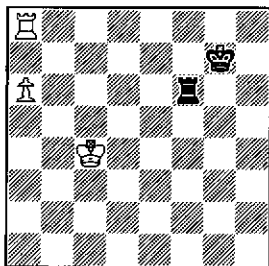
6a...6f - reciprocal zugzwang



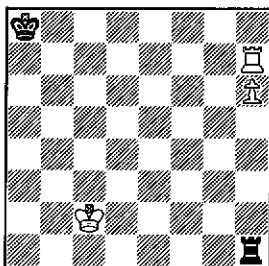
6g - reciprocal zugzwang

6 (28. *Rijen* 1926) is another study that appears in the textbooks. It depends on a series of reciprocal zugzwangs, the most important being 6f (kings on d3/b3) and 6g. Black to play in 6f, 1...Ra2 (everything else loses the pawn) 2 Kd2 (6g) Rb2 3 Kd3 (6f again). White to play, 1 Kd2 (anything else releases the pressure) Ra2 (6g) 2 Kd3 Ra8, and 3 Rxc2 can be met by 3...Rd8+ winning the rook. Given this, it is soon seen that 6e back to 6a are also reciprocal zugzwang.

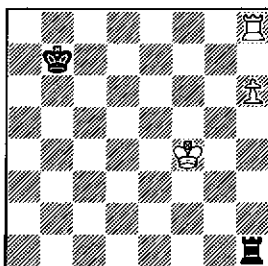
The solution to 6 now becomes clear: 1 Ke7! (1 Kd7? Kb7z, 1 Kd8? Kb8z) Ka7 (1...Kb7 2 Kd7z) and so on down to 5 Ke3 Ka3. Now simplest is 6 Kd2 though 6 Ke2 and even 6 Ke4 do not forfeit the draw, and after 6...Kb3 7 Kd3 we have 6f.



7 - White can only draw



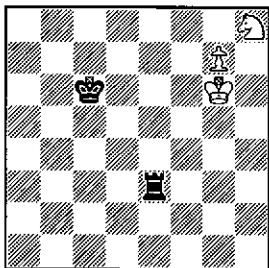
8 - win



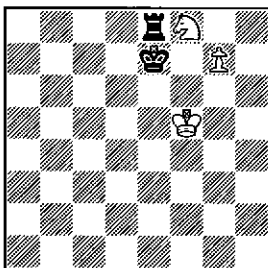
8a - after 4 Kf4

Vančura's most significant contribution to endgame theory was his demonstration that 7 (28. *Říjen* 1924) was only drawn. Suppose 1 K**b5**, to free the White rook for R**c8** etc: no, 1...R**f5+**, and if White advances Black will simply check on f6/f7/f8 until he comes back again. Nor will playing the king towards the rook help, because Black will play ...R**b6**, and if White plays a7 Black will draw by ...R**a6**. According to John Nunn in *Secrets of rook endings*, this revolutionized the theory of R + aP v R, and "many pre-1924 analyses appear incomprehensible to the modern eye because this drawing method wasn't known". John goes so far as to call 7 "the Vančura draw".

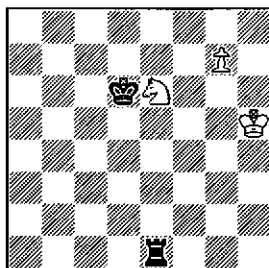
In 8, also from 28. *Říjen* 1924, White must avoid this, hence not 1 K**d3** (1...R**d1** + 2 K~ R**d6** etc) but 1 K**d2**. Given as "main line" is 1...K**b8**, and after 2 K**e3** (quickest) K**c3** 3 R**h8+** the given move is 3...K**b7** aiming for 7 although 3...K**c7** holds out for one move longer. Now comes 4 K**f4** (quickest) giving 8a, and it is soon seen that Black cannot reach a drawing position (given is 4...K**c7** 5 K**f5** R**f1** + 6 K**g6** R**g1** + 7 K**h7** K**d7** 8 R**g8**). Black has alternatives, but none leads to survival.



9 - win

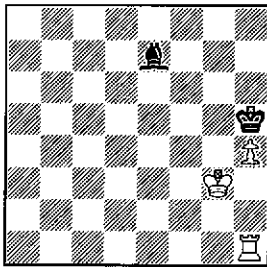


9a - 1 Kf5, after 3...Ke7

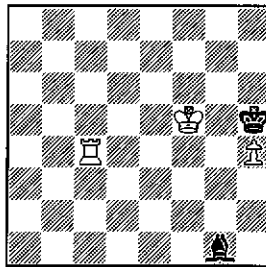


9b - main line, after 4 Ne6

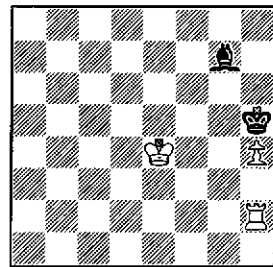
9 (28. *Říjen* 1924) is a worthy addition to the ranks of knight-against-rook shut-off studies. Try 1 K**f7** or 1 K**f6**: no, 1...R**f3** + 2 K~ R**g3**(+). Try 1 K**f5**: no, 1...R**e8** 2 N**g6** K**d6** 3 N**f8** K**c7** (see 9a), and 4 g8Q will be met by 4...R**x**f8+. Correct is 1 K**h5**, and after 1...R**e8** 2 N**g6** K**d6** 3 N**f8** Black has nothing better than 3...R**e1**. Now comes the second fine move: 4 N**e6**! (see 9b). 4...R**h1** + 5 K**g6** R**g1** + 6 N**g5** is clearly hopeless, hence 4...R**e5**+, but it is to no avail: 5 K**g4** R**e1** 6 K**f5** R**f1** + (no choice now, 6...R**e5** + 7 K**f4** and no more checks) 7 K**g6** R**g1** + 8 N**g5**. If Black tries ...R**e1** at move 1, White plays 2 N**g6** R**e8** 3 K**h6** K**d6** 4 N**f8** with an easy win.



10 - win



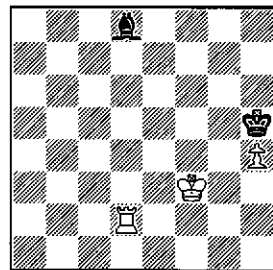
10a - after 4...Bg1



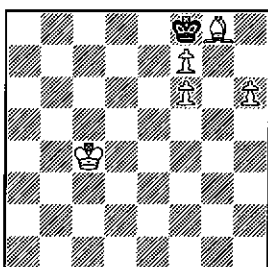
10b - after 10...Bg7

Vančura's second major contribution to endgame theory came in the ending R + P v B with a side pawn and the bishop able to command the promotion square. It had been known since the 1860s that White could win if he could successfully get his pawn to the fifth rank, but it was believed that Black could hold the draw by a fifth-rank blockade. Not so, said Vančura, whose **10** appeared in 28. *Říjen* in 1924. I haven't seen the original source, which may well have been restricted in space, but Dedrle and Mandler both published analyses of the study, and Chéron devoted nearly four pages of his *Lehr- und Handbuch der Endspiele* to it with a host of variations and subvariations. Here, I give just the main line, letting readers interested in the details consult the definitive computer analysis now available to anyone with an Internet connection or the relevant CD. Be it noted that this being a theoretical study, whose objective was solely to prove that White could force a win, uniqueness of White play was not an issue. Indeed, Black being wholly passive, inaccurate White play does not normally forfeit the win, though I imagine that there are places (for example, after **10a**) where a specific move or manoeuvre is needed in order to make progress.

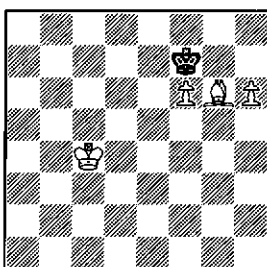
1 Kf4 Bd6+ (after 1...Bd8 Chéron gives play to move 6, after 1...Bf8/f6/c5/b4/a3 to move 5) **2 Kf5 Bc5** (Chéron devotes nearly a page to answering Black's alternatives, one line going to move 11) **3 Rc1 Be3** (alternatives analysed to move 6) **4 Rc4** (the computer has shown that 4 Rc3 forces the win slightly more quickly) **Bg1** (see **10a**, alternatives analysed to move 7) **5 Ra4 Bb6** (another page of analysis, one line going to move 23) **6 Re4 Bg1** (alternatives analysed to move 10) **7 Rc4** (now we are back at **10a** but with Black to move) **Be3** (alternatives analysed to move 15) **8 Ke4 Bd2** (alternatives to move 11) **9 Rc2 Bh6** (alternatives to move 10) **10 Rh2 Bg7** (see **10b**, alternatives analysed to move 14) **11 Kf4 Bf8** (alternatives to move 15) **12 Kf3 Ba3** (alternatives to move 16) **13 Ra2 Be7** (alternatives to move 16) **14 Re2 Bd8** (alternatives to move 16) **15 Rd2** (see **10c**) and now the solution in Harold van der Heijden's "Endgame study database III" continues **15...Bc7** **16 Rd4 Bb8** **17 Kg2** while Chéron and the Russian edition of Averbakh prefer **15...Be7** (Chéron analyses alternatives to move 19) **16 Kf4 Bf6** (Chéron analyses 16...Bf4 to move 19) **17 Rd7 Bc3** **18 Kg3 Be1+** **19 Kh3** with Rd5+ etc to follow.



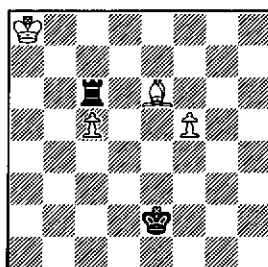
10c - after 15 Rd2



14 - win



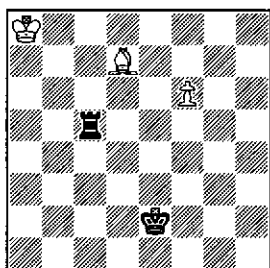
14a - after 2 Bg6+



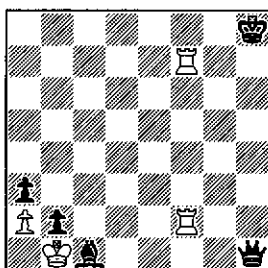
15 - win

14 and 15 both appeared in *České slovo* in 1922. In 14, **1 Bh7** is needed to release the stalemate, and after **1...Kxf7** Black cannot be prevented from capturing on f6. The second sacrifice **2 Bg6+** is therefore necessary (see 14a) so that White can meet the capture on f6 by **3 Be8/Bh5**. And if Black takes the bishop instead, **2...Kxg6**, we have **3 h7**, after which **3...Kxh7 4 Kd5 Kg8** (temporizing by **4...Kh8** doesn't help) **5 Ke6 Kf8 7 f7** gives a routine win.

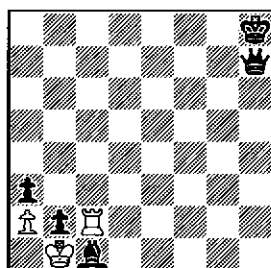
In 15, **1 Bd7 Rxc5 2 f6!** (see 15a below), and the Black rook is suddenly unable to stop the f-pawn. **1...Rh5** allows an immediate fork, **1...Rc4** an immediate pin; **1...Rc3** for **2...Rf3** will allow a pin next move, **1...Rc1** for **2...Rf1** a skewer next move.



15a - after 2...f6



16 - draw



16a - after 2 Rc2

Finally, **16** is the only one of Vančura's studies which appears to have received any kind of award (it was given 7th HM in *České slovo* in 1924). **1 Rh7+**, and if **1...Kxh7** then **2 Rh2+** with stalemate. Hence **1...Qxh7+**, but after **2 Rc2** Black must release the stalemate (see 16a), and how is he to do so? **2...Qg8** allows **3 Rc8** pinning, and the capture will restore the stalemate; a move along the rank will allow **3 Rc8+** with a fork or pin to follow (given as the main line is **2...Qf7 3 Rc8+ Kg7 4 Rc7**); and a move on the file will allow an immediate pin or fork by **3 Rh2**.

I do not know how these posthumous studies reached the public eye, but I can imagine what Duras (the chess columnist of *České slovo*) and Prokop must have thought when this archive became available to them.

My usual thanks to Harold van der Heijden's invaluable "Endgame study database III" and to the BCPS Library. - JDB