British Endgame Study News
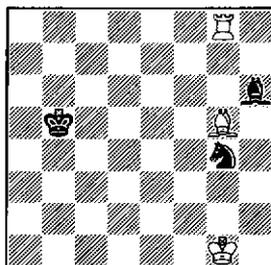
Contents of this issue

This issue. There are two British tourney successes to report, some thoughts prompted by readers' comments, and extracts from recent foreign material. For a gentle puzzle to solve, try the diagram. Most bK moves allow check, but how does White win after 1...Ka4/Kc4?

found by Ken Thompson
(noted by Noam Elkies)
Reciprocal zugzwang (!)

This month's special number is devoted to the studies of John Roycroft. John has devoted a great deal of time to presenting the work of others (see his books on Kasparyan, Blandford, Guy, Dawson, and most recently Pogosyants); I thought it was time somebody returned the compliment.

Composite index for 1996-2000. I am intending to mark the completion of our fifth year by publishing a composite index covering the whole of *BESN* to date. This will be generated from the existing annual indexes, so if any reader has spotted any error or serious omission in these please will he or she be so kind as to tell me?

Spotlight. John Coward points out that my analysis of Wallace Ellison's **2** in special number 19 (March) was defective: after 2...Kd2, my 3 Bc6 Bh5 4 e8Q fails against 4...Bxc8 5 Bxe8 Ke3! etc. Correct was a preliminary 3 Kf2 preventing ...Ke3, with Bc6 to follow. My apologies to the composer's memory.

Noam Elkies draws my attention to another analytical bodge. In discussing position **3a** on page 139 of the June issue, I remark that 3 Kf6 Nf2 4 Ng3+ Kh4 5 g6 Ng4+ 6 Kf5 seems promising "because the apparently obvious 6...Kxg3 will be met by 7 Kg5 putting Black in zugzwang", but while 7 Kg5 certainly leaves Black without a good move it isn't a win by zugzwang; White to play would win anyway (8 g7).

The last isn't really a *BESN* spotlight item, but Alain Pallier points out that position **11a** in Mike Bent's study **11** in special number 20 was subsequently rediscovered by Mario Matouš and sent to *Československý šach*, where it obtained a second prize and lashings of judicial praise (see *EG* 131 pp 441-2)! It can be argued that the Bent study as presented isn't a complete anticipation, since Mario correctly plays Ka1 before Na5, but I am sure that both composer and judge would have acknowledged it had they been aware of it.
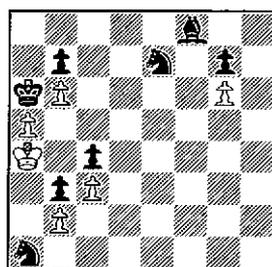
Recently published British originals
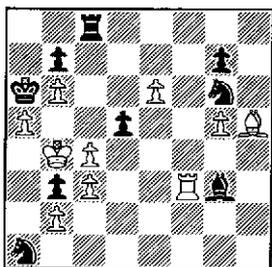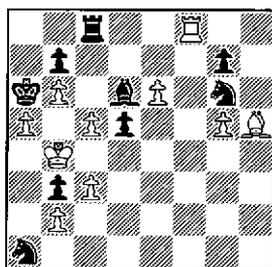
1 - draw   1a - after 2 Rf8   1b - after 7 g6

EG 137 carried the report of the Yehuda Hoch 50th birthday tourney of 1997, in which **1** gained Mike Bent and Timothy Whitworth 1st-2nd honourable mention. The exposition that follows is Timothy's.

"White is in danger of being mated, most immediately by 1...Rxc4+ and 2...Bd6. The move 1 cxd5? simply invites another mate in two by 1...Bd6+ and 2...Rc4. If White tries 1 Rxg3?, he still loses quickly: 1...Rxc4+ 2 Ka3 Kxa5 3 Rg4 Ne5 4 Rd4 (4 e7 Rxg4) Rxd4 5 cxd4 Nc4 mate. So White plays **1 c5**.

"This protects his own king and also creates potential threats against the black king, for it opens the e2-a6 diagonal. After 1...Ne5 2 Rxg3, or 1...Nc2+ 2 Kxb3, White has nothing to fear. But after **1...Bd6!** White is again threatened with mate in two, this time by 2...Rxc5 and 3...Rc4. The reply 2 cxd6? leads to 2...Rc4+ 3 Ka3 Kxa5, with mate to follow shortly. If White tries 2 Rf1?, then 2...Rxc5 3 Rxa1 Rxa5+ 4 Kxb3 Rxa1 wins. The only good move is **2 Rf8!** (see **1a**).

"Now Black cannot play 2...Rxc5? because of the reply 3 Ra8 mate, and any capture of the white rook allows 3 Be2 mate. Moreover, if Black plays 2...Nf4? to guard e2, White can still give mate in a few moves: 3 Be2+ Nxe2 4 Rxc8 Nc2+ (4...Bxc5+ 5 Kxc5) 5 Ka4 etc. So Black has no choice: **2...Bxc5+ 3 Ka4 Bxf8**.

"Now White avoids 4 e7? Rc4+ 5 Ka3 Bxe7 mate, and goes instead for **4 Be2+ Rc4+ 5 Bxc4+ dxc4 6 e7 Nxe7 7 g6 --- stalemate** (see **1b**)." The judge's comment, translated from *Shahmat* by Jarl Ulrichsen, reads "an amusing position; with an advantage of three (minor) pieces, without White threatening anything, Black is not able to avoid - stalemate!"

Paul Valois has sent me part of the award in the Chekhover-90 memorial tourney, in which 2nd-3rd prize in the section for "win" studies went to **2** by our own David Blundell and the St Peterburg composers L. and V. Katsnelson. All the analysis that follows is from the source, but the remarks about motivation are my own.
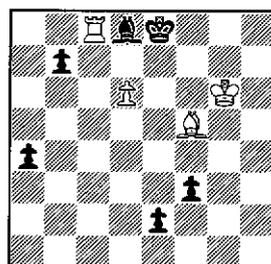
Black will draw at least if he can force the rook to give itself up, so White must play for mate. "1 Rh5 Kd7 draw," says the source, and play starts **1 Rc2!** Now 1...Kd7 can be met by 2 Kf5 f3 3 Ke5 (see **2a**) and either 3...e2 4 Bf5+ Ke8 5 d7+ Ke7 6 d8Q+ Kc8 7 Kf6 with mate in a few or 3...Bh2+ 4 Rxh2 e2 5 Bf5+ Kc6 6 Be4+ Kc6 (if White can promote, his Q + R + B will win easily against Q + 3P) 7 d7 Kc7 8 Ke6!
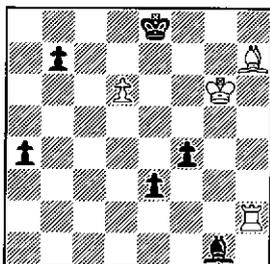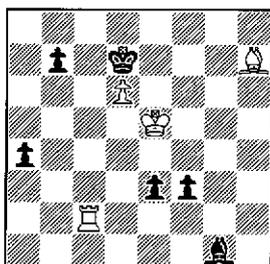
2 - win   2a - 1...Kd7, after 3 Ke5   2b - main line, after 5...Bd8

e1Q 9 Rc2+. Stronger is **1...f3**, when White attacks by **2 Kf6! e2** (threatening to promote and also letting bB come into play) **3 Bf5 Bd4+** (3...Bb6 4 d7+ leads to mate, so Black diverts wK first) **4 Kg6 Bb6 5 Rc8+ Bd8** (see **2b**).

Now comes **6 Rc1** (stopping ...e1Q, aiming for h1 and h8, and also threatening Bg4 mopping up the pawns) **Ba5** (6...Bh4 7 d7+ Ke7 8 d8Q+ Kxd8 9 Kf7 and mates) **7 Kf6!** (7 Rh1 Bc3 8 d7+ Kd8, 7 d7+ Ke7 8 d8Q+ Bxd8 9 Bd3 Ba5) **Bd8+ 8 Kg7! Ba5 9 Rc8+ Bd8 10 Rc7!** (see **2c**) **Bg5 11 Bd7+ Kd8 12 Be6** (12 Kf7? e1Q 13 Be6 Qc1 draw, 12 Bg4? Ke8 13 d7+ Ke7 14 Rc8 Kd6 15 Re8 a3!) **Ke8 13 Rf7!** (see **2d**) **Bh6+ 14 Kxh6 e1Q 15 d7+ Kd8 16 Rf8+** and White will promote and force mate.
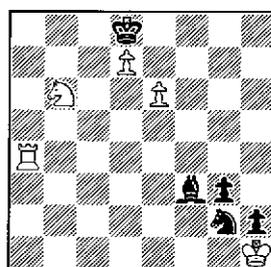
Judge's comment, translated by Paul: "The threats of Black's well advanced pawns are strong, but the pendulum of White's mating attack, swinging widely from side to side, slowly but surely descends on the Black king."
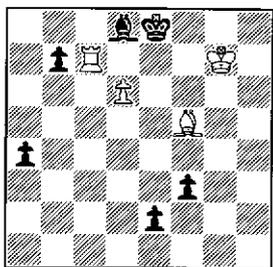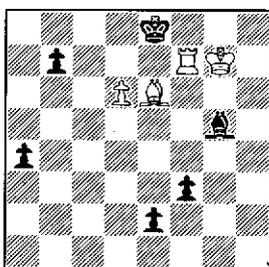
2c - after 10 Rc7   2d - after 13 Rf7   3 - draw

Christopher Jones makes an interesting point about my 1981 *Problemist* study (**8** in special number 20): why not use wRa4 instead of wPa7 (see **3**)? It would not normally occur to me to add material like this, but here it converts a mundane first move into a much more surprising one: well worth while. In case any reader does not have the special number to hand: **1 Ra8+!** (still the only good move) **Bxa8 2 Nd5 Bc6** (2...Bxd5/N-- 3 e7+ etc with stalemate) **3 e7+ Kxd7 4 e8Q+ Kxe8 5 Nf6+ K-- 6 Ne4** threatening 7 Nxg3 etc, and again either ...BxN or ...N-- will give stalemate.

Incidentally, I notice that the original appears as number 3172 of the Akobia stalemate collection attributed to one "D. Bizli": an amusing if somewhat extreme example of what can happen when a name is transcribed into Cyrillic and out again!

"Popular" and "artistic" criteria

Harold van der Heijden asked an interesting question after my talk to ARVES in May. I had made the point that a true reciprocal zugzwang study features a natural line of attack which fails only because Black can play to reach the critical position with White to move, and I had stressed the word "natural". Harold asked whether this was because such a study would be more popular, or because it would be artistically more satisfying. I made no note at the time and do not claim to be repeating his words verbatim, but I think this captures the essentials.

In fact it seems to me that with one exception the two are almost the same. "Popular" is often a term of abuse, implying low quality, empty sensationalism, and so on. But in chess, the need for the sensational has been fully satisfied by incidents from actual play, and the endgame study explores other aspects of the game; and the very features which make a study popular (a simple and natural position, play which is striking yet clear enough to be readily understood) are also artistically satisfying. Of course, some fine studies are simply too deep for popular appreciation, but with this important exception I would say that "popular" and "good" are effectively the same.
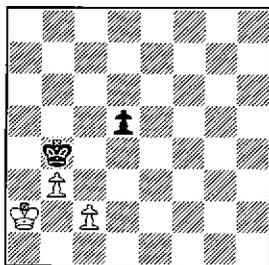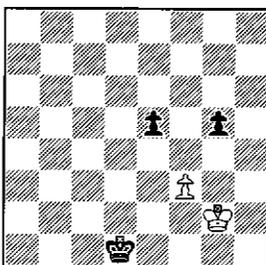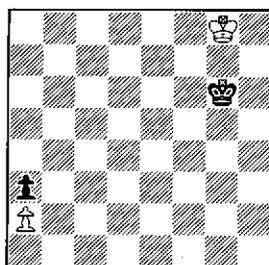

| 1 - win | 2 - draw | 3 - draw |

Consider **1-3**, which are quoted in Alain Pallier's "king to the corner" article in the latest issue of *EBUR*. Grigoriev's **1** (*64* 1933) is perhaps a little too deep for true popularity, but the position after 1 Kb2 d4! is reciprocal zugzwang (2 Kb1 d3! 3 cxd3 Kxb3 etc, or 2 Kc1 Kc3! 3 Kb1/Kd1 d3) and once this is realised all becomes clear: **1 Ka1! Kc3** (1...d4 2 Kb2) **2 Kb1 Kb4 3 Kc1 Kc3 4 Kd1 d4 5 Kc1 d3 6 cxd3 Kxd3 7 Kb2**. But **2** and **3** are very easy to appreciate. In **2** (H. Neustadtl, *International Chess Magazine* 1890), White must claim the opposition, but 1 Kf1 loses to 1...Kd2 2 Kf2 Kd3 etc; only **1 Kh1!** keeps Black at bay. In **3** (F. Sackmann, *Deutsche Schachblätter* 1923), 1 Kf8 loses to 1...Kf6 and 2-6...Kxa2, but **1 Kh8!** holds the draw; there follows **1...Kf6 2 Kh7**, and now White can meet **2-6...Kxa2** by **7 Kc2**. Do these not make the point that "popular" and "good" are largely the same?

A friend whose tastes are different from mine once gently chided me with "kowtowing to the party line" that studies should always be such as to appeal to the ordinary club player. In truth, it is not so much a matter of kowtowing to the party line as of helping to draft the manifesto. Perhaps these examples help to show why.
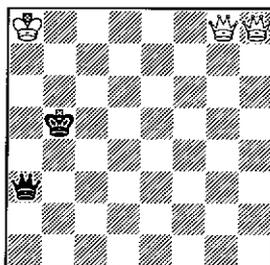
What do we mean by a "general win"?

In June, I said that I thought we should now regard Q + B or Q + N v 2R as a "general win". Noam Elkies is not so sure: "certainly this is harder for the 2R to hold than was realized before the computer era, but there are lots of positional draws with wK trapped by connected bRR, and this seems more like Q vs. N+N where the evaluation depends on the specific position, in ways not (yet?) fully comprehensible" (taken from an e-mail and slightly edited for publication). This has started me thinking: what do we really mean by a "general win", and how useful a concept is it?
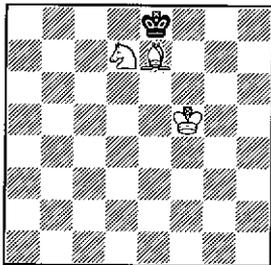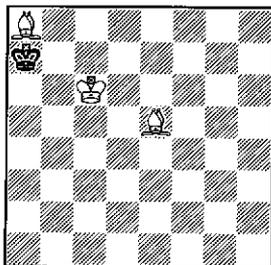

| 1 - draw only | 2 - draw only | 3 - draw only |

The matter used to be straightforward. Endings such as K + Q v K and K + R v K are always won with White to play. K + B + N v K is won except in positions where White cannot avoid immediate loss of material, or where he can avoid it only by giving stalemate (see **1**). K + 2B v K is likewise won except in positions such as **2**, where a retreat of the attacked bishop gives stalemate. K + 2Q v K + Q gives the defence an additional resource, that of perpetual check (see for instance **3**, a well-known example by Fontana and Roycroft). But I don't think anyone would question that these endings are "generally won" and that positions such as **1-3** are exceptional.

But some endings are less clear-cut. In *Endgame magic*, Timothy Whitworth and I defined a "typical" position as one in which both sides had organized their forces to reasonable advantage and neither king was trapped against the side of the board, but while this was adequate to resolve the endings we needed to consider there it would certainly not suffice in general. The borderline between a "difficult win" and a "hard-to-hold draw" is usually tortuous and sometimes incomprehensible, and in some cases its meanderings take it deep into the region of our "typical" positions.

But are we still interested in a "general" result when the definitive result in any particular case can be found from a computer database? Well, the *composer* needs to know whether an ending is likely to be won or drawn, since he can see what *material* will be left at the end of side variations but may have little control over the exact positions that will occur. I do not deny that there are exceptions, but let me put it like this: I would now advise a composer needing a draw with 2R v Q + B or Q + N to test the specific position that will arise before doing anything else. There is little point in doing a lot of work if the computer is eventually going to say "No".
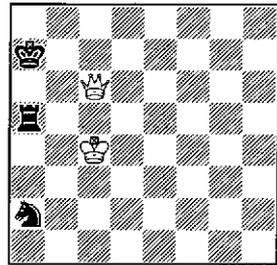
From the world at large
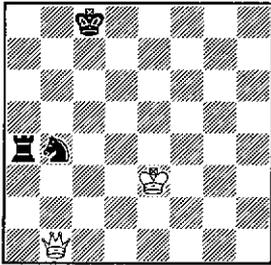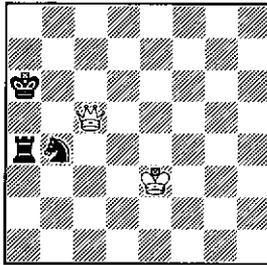

| 1 - win | 1a - after 2 Ka6 | 1b - after 9 Kc4 |

Not yet reviewed here is Virgil Nestorescu's recent book *Probleme şi studii alese*. This is a collection of the author's problems and studies, the latter numbering some 127. **1** (1-2 Pr "România-25" 1973) is a lovely thing. It can now be checked by computer, and it stands up well: **1 Qc1+ Kb7** (the composer analyses alternatives) **2 Qc5 Ka6** (see **1a**) **3 Ke2!** (now wK "quadrangulates" - the computer says that some other moves also win, but I suspect they merely waste time and come back to the main line) **Ra2+ 4 Kf3 Ra3+ 5 Ke4 Ra4 6 Ke3** (back to **1a** with Black to move) **Na2 7 Kd3 Ra5** (a logical Black move, though the computer says that 7...Nb4+ delays mate longer) **8 Qc6+ Ka7 9 Kc4!** (White is dominating bR + bN, see **1b**) **Ra6** (else material goes) **10 Qc7+ Ka8 11 Kb5/Kb3** (again domination) **Ra7 12 Qc8 mate**.

Superficially, the book has much in common with the Dobrescu book which I reviewed in March (diagram, main line, variations I, II, III, etc, brief thematic notes in English), but I think readers will find it much more accessible. Partly, this is because the studies themselves are more accessible; partly, it is because the text is pleasantly lightened by photographs of the author's friends and contemporaries instead of being laden with statistics and academic theorizing. I know of no general UK source of supply, but British Chess Problem Society members can obtain it from Peter Fayers.
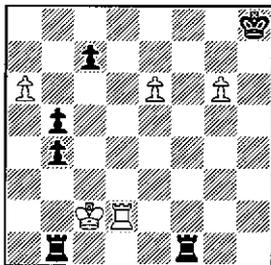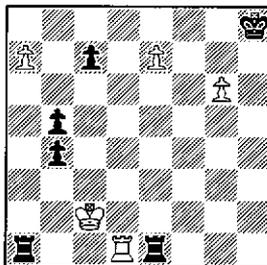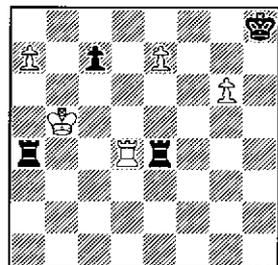

| 2 - win | 2a - after 3 Rd1 | 2b - after 9 Rd2 |

I have already drawn attention to the latest *EBUR* on page 148; let's have a look at some other magazines. The latest issue of the Romanian *Buletin Problemistic* carries

an obituary for Paul Joiţa (1937-2000), and one of the studies cited is **2** (1 Pr *Revista Română de Şah* 1956, version 1975). This is in the romantic style. **1 e7** (1 a7 Rbc1+ 2 Kd3 Rf8 is good for Black) **Rfe1 2 a7 Ra1** (2...Rbc1+ 3 Kb3 Ra1 4 Ra2 Re3+ 5 Kb2 Rae1 6 a8Q+ Kg7 7 Qf8+ Kxg6 8 Ra6+) **3 Rd1!** gives **2a**, and there follows a systematic movement upwards: **3...Ra2+ 4 Kb3 Ree2 5 Rd2! Ra3+ 6 Kxb4 Ree3 7 Rd3! Ra4+ 8 Kxb5 Ree4 9 Rd4!** (see **2b**). Black now has no more checks, and he is helpless.
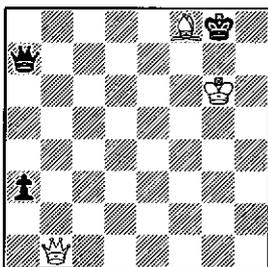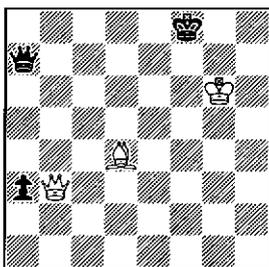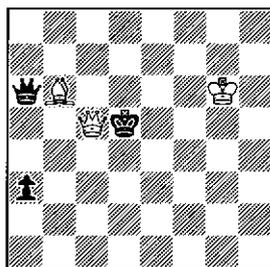

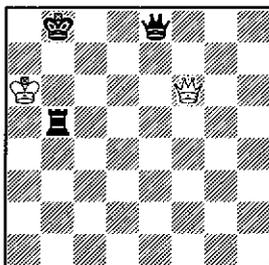| 3 - win | 3a - after 4 Bd4 | 3b - after 8 Qc5+ |

The March issue of the Argentine *Finales... y Temas* has Julien Vandiest's original **3** on the front page. Q + B v Q is not to everyone's tastes, but this will win friends for the genre. Play starts **1 Be7!** and 1...Qxe7 will allow mate (2 Qb8+ Qf8 3 Qb3+ etc), hence **1...Qa6+**, and after **2 Bf6 Qa7 3 Qb3+ Kf8** we have another unexpected non-check: **4 Bd4!** (see **3a**). There follows **4...Qa6+** (if 4...Qc7 then 5 Bc5+ Ke8 6 Qe6+ Kd8 7 Bb6, but if bP were on a2 Black would draw and the author draws attention to 4 Qb4+ Ke8 5 Qb5+ Kf8 6 Qb3 a2 highlighting the fact) **5 Bb6** (four non-checks out of five) **Ke7** (and we even allow bK away from the edge) **6 Qf7+ Kd6 7 Qc7+ Kd5 8 Qc5+** (see **3b**) and either **8...Ke4 9 Qf5 mate** or 8...Ke6 9 Qc6+ and bQ will go.
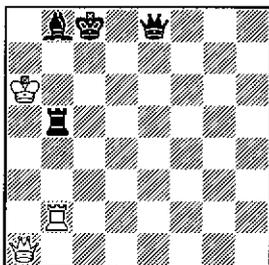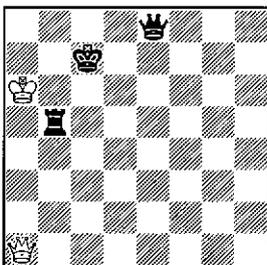
| 4 - draw | 4a - after 2...Kxc7 | 4b - reciprocal zugzwang |

The Spring issue of the new Italian magazine *Studistica* contains 15 originals, including **4** by Pietro Rossi. 1 Rxb5 loses wQ (1...Qc6+ etc), but then I had to ask the computer. It gave **1 Rc2+ Bc7 2 Rxc7+ Kxc7** (see **4a**), and now **3 Qg7+ Kb8 4 Qf6!** exploiting the unique reciprocal zugzwang **4b**. There is no natural try giving **4b** with Black to move, but this appears impossible to arrange without using extra material.

News and notices

Meetings. The next *EG* readers' meeting will be at 17 New Way Road, London NW9 6PL, on **Friday October 6** at 6.00 pm; non-subscribers welcome, but please bring £5 towards the buffet (except on a first visit). Bring the latest *EG* with you!

Computers. ChessBase now offers an extensive selection of "Nalimov" five-man tablebases for use with Hiarcs 7.32, Fritz 6, etc. I am already finding them invaluable.

But not everything computer-produced is difficult. In our **front page study**, BTM, 1...Ka4/Kc4 2 Bf4! Bxf4 3 Rxg4 and bB is pinned; WTM, 1 Kg2 Kc4 2 Bf4 Ne3+!

Creating reciprocal zugzwang studies. My English-language talk on this subject in Delft on May 27 has now been reprinted in *EBUR* (see below). It is also available as a separate paper from myself, and if any *BESN* reader who does not see *EBUR* would like a copy I shall be very pleased to send one.

Other magazines. Several magazines have been referred to in this issue; perhaps their administrative details may be of interest.

The Dutch quarterly *EBUR* (Harm Benak, Kamperfoeliezoom 50, NL - 2353 RS Leiderdorp, Nederland, NLG 55 per year) has now been appearing for ten years. It provides a steady stream of good articles, around half of which seem to be in English.

Finales... y Temas (José A. Copić, San Nicolas 3938, 1665 José C. Paz, Buenos Aires, Argentina) describes itself as "una publicación de circulación gratuita", like *STES Journal* used to be. It is sent every few months to interested parties, and is now in its fourth year. It covers mainly studies, with some problems.

The new Italian magazine *Studistica* (Enzo Minerva, via Diaz 6, I - 28040 Lesa (NO), Italia, L 20,000 for four issues) carries articles and an impressive number of originals. It is a most welcome addition to the fold, and we wish it well.

The Romanian *Buletin Problemistic* (ing. Valeriu Petrovici, Căsuţa poştală 77-09, 73400 - Bucureşti - 77, RO - România) is primarily a problem magazine, but it devotes more space to studies than most. My Romanian is inadequate to discover the subscription rate if any (I receive an exchange copy as BCPS Librarian), but most places in Eastern Europe are willing to field reasonable sums in US $ or DM.

Tourneys. *Buletin Problemistic* announces a study tourney (no set theme) to mark the 60th birthday of Nicolae Micu. Send to Valeriu Petrescu (address above) by **September 30**.

Wallace Ellison's endgame books. The June auction of Wallace's books raised enough to take 50p off my charges to readers for this year, and one reader has expressed particular pleasure in the book that I was able to send him.

Anybody wishing to give notice here of any event, product, or service should contact the Editor. There is no charge and no account is taken of whether the activity is being pursued for commercial profit, but notices are printed only if they seem likely to be of particular interest to study enthusiasts. Readers are asked to note that the Editor relies wholly on the representations of the notice giver (except where he makes a personal endorsement) and that no personal liability is accepted either by him or by any other person involved in the production and distribution of this magazine.