

British Endgame Study News

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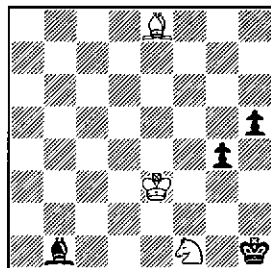
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by Mike Bent

White to play; what result?

This issue. John Nunn has been looking at Ken Thompson's six-man endgame data, and for once I find myself in disagreement with one of his conclusions. The special number continues our systematic survey of British studies from the past, this time covering the years from 1960 to 1967.

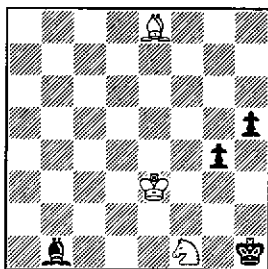
Early endgame studies were often presented in the form "X to play, what result?" and although this has long been unfashionable there are still times when it seems appropriate. With Mike's approval, I gave the study above to *BCM* readers in this form last year, and you may enjoy trying it before you look inside. $B \vee B+N$ would normally draw with ease, but 1 Kf2 threatens mate in two; can White clinch a win?

Get it right first time? *EG* 145 contains a strong editorial plea in favour of researching thoroughly before going into print, "even if it means leap-frogging an issue or two". Yes, but we all know about the scholar who writes and rewrites, and ends up never publishing at all. *BESN* is day-to-day journalism rather than definitive scholarship, and it proceeds differently; it believes that speedy publication is useful and it demands no more than reasonable checking, but any error worse than a simple misprint is promptly acknowledged and "Spotlight" appears on the front page. No doubt the errors that occur will not benefit my long-term reputation, but this is a price I am willing to pay when going into print early will help to take the subject forward.

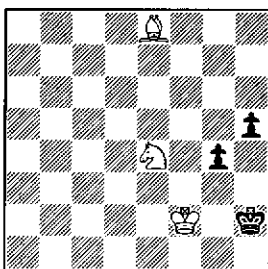
Spotlight. Timothy Whitworth points out that two of the Dedrlc studies which I quoted in special number 31 had been anticipated: **14** by K. A. L. Kubbel, *Bohemia* 1908, wKh8, Rc8 (2), bKe4, Bh7, Ph4/g3 (4), draw by $1 \text{ Rc4+ Kf3 2 Rxh4}$ etc, and **15** by an unknown author, *Chess Player's Chronicle* 1878, wKd6, Rh7, Pg7 (3), bKg5, Ra7 (2), BTM, $1...Ra6+ 2 \text{ Kd5}$ etc and White wins (this is the version in Harold van der Heijden's database). Dedrlc's lead-in to the latter is of course worth having.

Regarding $Q \vee 2N$ (June, pages 204-5), Noam Elkies sees no contradiction between his statements and John Nunn's, and on reflection I must agree; to say that a set can be divided into two classes does not conflict with saying that there is no reliable way (short of asking the computer) to tell in which class a given element falls. Sorry.

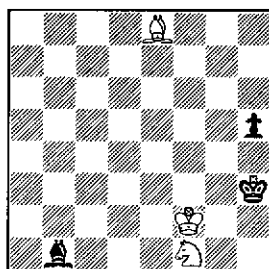
Recently published British originals



1 - White to play



1a - 1...Be4, after 3 Nxe4



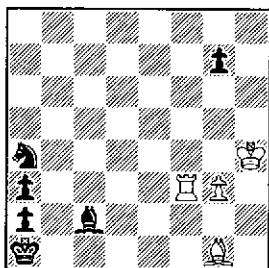
1b - 1...g3+, after 3...Kh3

Well, what was your verdict on Mike Bent's 1? Can White force a win by 1 Kf2, or can Black wriggle out?

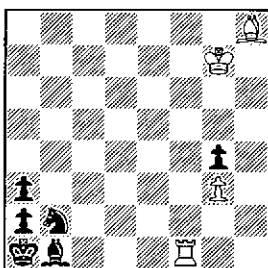
If Black plays 1...Be4 to stop the mate, White has 2 Ng3+ Kh2 3 Nxe4 (see 1a), and instinct says that he will win. Instinct is indeed correct: 3...h4 4 Nd2 (simplest) g3+ (else mate in a few) 5 Ke1! g2 (5...h3 6 Nf1+ Kg2 7 Bc6+ and 8 Nxe3) 6 Nf3+ Kg3 (else 7 Kf2) 7 Ng1 h3 (else 8 Kf2) 8 Ne2+ Kf3 9 Bd7 h2 10 Bc6+ and 11 Bxe2.

However, Black also has 1...g3+, and after 2 Nxe4 Kh2 3 Nf1+ Kh3 he seems to have escaped (see 1b). But 4 Bd7+ Kh4 5 Nd2 attacks b8 and threatens mate on f3, and if 5...Be4 the bishop will again be taken. A well-deserved White win?

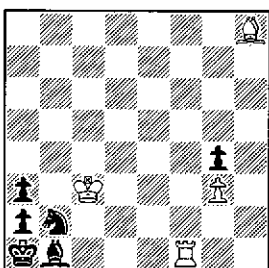
No, because after 5...Be4 the capture 6 Nxe4 gives stalemate!



2 - win



2a - after 6 Kg7



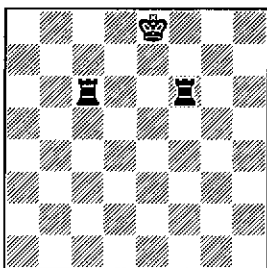
2b - after 14 Kc3

Paul Michelet's 2 appeared in *diagrammes* earlier this year, and gave the expected pleasure to solvers. White starts by tying Black up, 1 Bd4+ (not 1 Rf1+ Kb2 and he escapes) Nb2 2 Rf1+ Bb1, and now comes the key move: 3 Kg5! This restricts Black to 3...g6, and White just has time for 4 Kh6 g5 5 Bh8! g4 6 Kg7 relieving the stalemate (see 2a). There follows 6...N-- 7 Kf7+ Nb2 8 Kf6 and so on down to 14 Kc3 (see 2b), and only after Black's next move 14...N-- does White have a choice. 15 Kb3+ is the most systematic, but 15 Kd2+ is quicker (15...Nb2 16 Kc1 Bd3 17 Rf2 Bc2/Be2 18 wait B-- 19 Rxb2 and mate next move). One solver referred to Paul as a true "Doctor Subtilis".

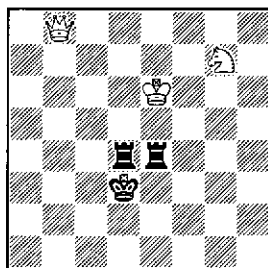
Secrets of pawnless endings (Mark 2)

John Nunn has reacted to Ken Thompson's six-man pawnless endgame data by producing a second edition of his book *Secrets of pawnless endings* (Gambit, ISBN 1-901983-65-X, £15.99 from your local bookshop). This includes what he carefully calls a "first attempt" to examine the most important of the six-man endings.

I addressed this topic in our special number 27, but I took a mere three pages and did little more than make superficial observations based on examination of the longest wins and the longest reciprocal zugzwangs. John takes 62 pages, and goes into much greater detail. I was therefore quietly relieved to find that in only one case did we appear to be in serious disagreement. This is the ending Q+N v 2R, which I initially classified as "generally won" and then revised to "unclear" in the light of some drawn positions sent to me by Enzo Minerva and John Roycroft. John Nunn goes further; he identifies a class of fortress positions, and gives the general result as a draw.



1 - a fortress against Q+N (wK shut off)



2 - White can force a win

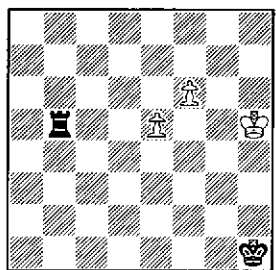
John reaches his verdict by considering positions such as **1**, where the rooks are on the third rank and the king is behind them and away from the corner. Q+B can break this down; Q+N cannot. But will Black be able to reach such a position? Readers who received the first edition of special number 27 will recall **2**, where Black starts in a commanding central position but still loses. If the ending were generally drawn, I would not expect him to lose from here. I don't lightly disagree with John, but I suspect that the truth may be nearer to that in Q v 2B and Q v B+N, where fortress positions exist but Black can exploit them only if he can reach them fairly quickly.

The rest of the book is basically a reprint of the first edition and I have not examined it in detail, but I do notice that the key diagrams 65-69, 73, and 78-79 in the chapter Q v R continue to be attributed either to "Euwe, 1958" or not at all, with so far as I can see not even an added footnote to say that they had been published and the way to proceed expounded by "Euclid" (Alfred Crosskill) back in 1895. This is a pity, to put it no higher. John has done an excellent job in putting the great mass of data generated by the computer into digestible form, and his place in the history of chess endgame analysis is assured; he can afford to be generous in acknowledging the contribution of those who went before, and had to labour with none of the powerful aids which we now take for granted.

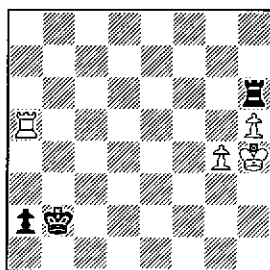
The occurrence of study positions in play

In March, we reported John Roycroft's exposure of the plagiarisms of Porterfield Rynd, who claimed to have reached positions with four and eleven men in play in exactly the same positions that they were later to occupy in composed studies. This has caused me to look into just how likely it is that a composed study position will occur in an actual game, and the results are perhaps a little surprising.

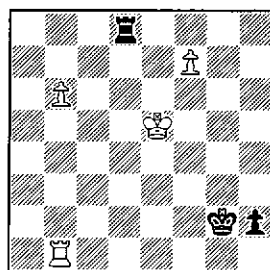
My method was to identify the essential features of the position and then to search the database of 1,111,429 games supplied with ChessBase 7.0 for examples (I don't have the larger database now available). Ken Whyld has pointed out (January *BCM*, page 50) that statistics compiled from databases should not be applied blindly, but even so I think the figures are instructive.



1 - White to play



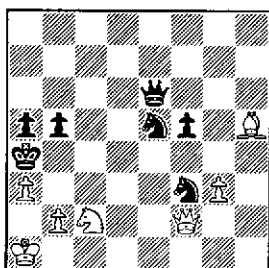
2 - Black to play



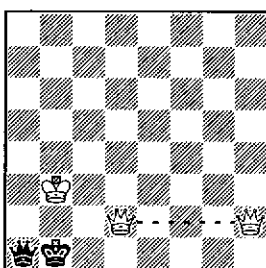
3 - Black to play

Rynd's first claim was that he and an opponent had reached 1, after which **1 f7 Rxe5+ 2 Kg6** gave the famous Saavedra position. To examine the likelihood of such a position's being genuine, I searched the database for positions with king, rook, and perhaps pawns against king and pawns with the king on R8 and no other man within three squares, and I found 157 of which the earliest arose in Szen-Newham, London 1851: from 2, **55...a1Q 56 Rxa1 Kxa1** and the king is splendidly isolated in the corner. However, examination showed that the great majority of the positions arose in just this way, one side's king shepherding a rook's pawn to promotion while the other king busied himself on the far side of the board, and if I added the further condition that *the two kings be on the same file* then the search found no positions at all. Even the less restrictive condition that the kings be on adjacent files produced only Bles-Kotronias, Hamia 1991: from 3, **64...h1Q 65 Rxh1 Kxh1** (bK in the corner) **66 Kf6 Rb8 67 Kg7** (and wK on the g-file). I don't say that a plausible game to a position like 1 cannot be constructed, but I do say that in over a million recorded games nothing containing its essential features seems actually to have occurred.

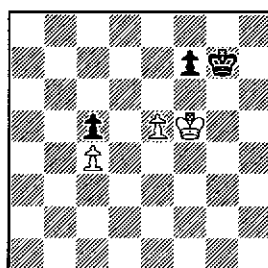
However, if 1 was deliberately composed as a lead-in to the Saavedra study, the White king *had* to be put on the unnatural square h5. Even on g5, 1 Kf5 would have provided a simpler win. If we had to rule on 1 without knowing its history, the internal evidence of the position itself and the external evidence of a million genuine games would suggest that it must be a composition and not a natural occurrence.



4 - Black to play



5 - Black to play



6 - White to play

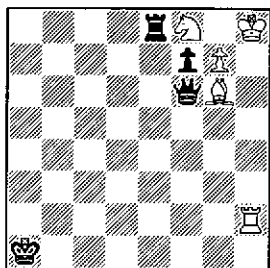
Rynd's second claim concerned 4, with alleged play 1...Nd3 2 Qxf3 Qb3 3 Qxd3 Qxd3 and we have a famous study by Cordes. Such a position of the Black king in what is still virtually the middle game is of course extremely unlikely, particularly when the White men that presumably pushed him there seem either to have vanished from the board or to have migrated far away, and I was very surprised when a search for "king on R5 in front of pawns on R4/N4, queens still on the board" produced no fewer than 72 examples. However, all but three occurred in pure queen endings, where the stronger side's king tends to get driven all over the board, and in only one of them were there as many as three other pieces. None featured four.

There *are* of course study positions that have occurred in play, for example the Polorio win with Q v Qa1 illustrated in 5 (wQ is anywhere along the line d2-h2). I found seven examples of this, the earliest being in a game Lasker-Bobrov played in a Moscow simul in 1899. But this is essentially a didactic position, part of whose interest lies in the fact that something like it does frequently turn up either in play or in the analysis of side variations. The occurrence of a self-consciously "artistic" study position is very much less common, and a little thought suggests the reason: once there is a fashion or requirement for introductory play, if a natural lead-in to a study position is possible then the composer lengthens the solution so as to incorporate it. In other words, the starting position of a study featuring introductory play *must* be unnatural, or at least be reachable only as the result of a blunder or of a sequence of exchanges which the composer is not willing to accept as part of his introduction.

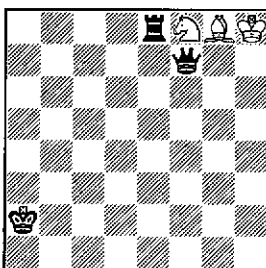
Even some apparently simple king-and-pawn study positions seem not actually to have occurred in play. Take the little reciprocal zugzwang trifle 6 that I published in *diagrammes* a few years ago (1 Ke4 Kg6z 2 Kd5 Kf5 and Black draws, 1 Kf4! Kg6 2 Ke4z Kg5 3 e6 fxe6 4 Ke5 and White wins). At first sight, it could hardly be more natural. Each king is in contact with a pawn of his own, the other pawns are naturally blocked, no pawn is doubled, nothing is on the edge, nothing is in an isolated or artificial position. *Surely* something like this must have occurred at least once in the course of a million and more games? Yet apparently it hasn't, and closer examination shows why: to reach this position other than by a series of exchanges appears to be impossible, because one side will have had a better move somewhere along the way.

It's an amusing paradox. We all like studies to feature natural starting positions, yet the fashionable requirement of incorporating as much introductory play as possible automatically means that they cannot.

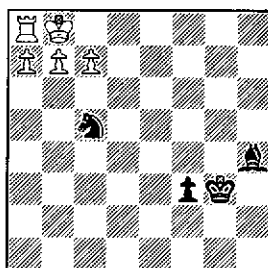
From the world at large



1 - draw

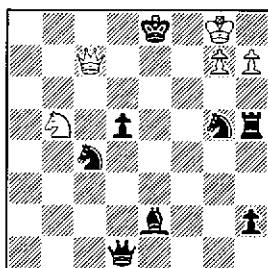


1a - after 3 g8B

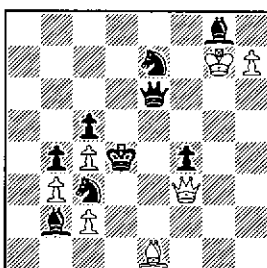


2 - draw

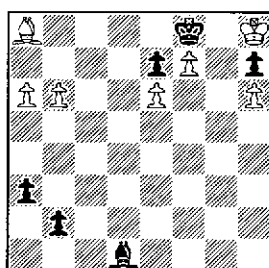
Noam Elkies was surprised that our Dedrle special number did not include the underpromotion study **1**, a joint composition with the problemist Karel Traxler which appeared in *Časopis českých šachistů* in 1909: **1 Ra2+ Kxa2 2 Bxf7+ Qxf7 3 g8B!** (see **1a**) and Black can save bQ only by **3...Rxf8** giving stalemate. I considered it, of course, but I discarded it as being atypically crude and artificial, and the compilers of the 1994 SNZZ booklet appear to have agreed: "such a study could of course have originated only in Dedrle's youth" (my translation). Noam takes a different view: "crude and artificial, sure, but also daring and pioneering, and much more naturalistic than previous ways of achieving a drawing B-promotion" (from an e-mail).



3 - draw



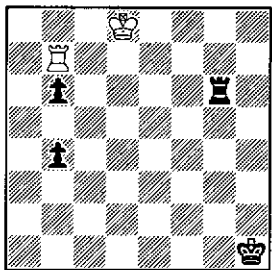
4 - draw



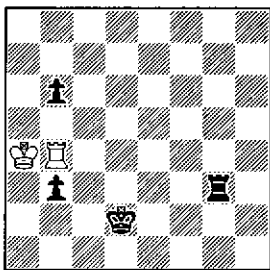
5 - WTM, Black draws

This caused me to look in Harold van der Heijden's "Endgame study database 2000" for earlier bishop promotions to draw, and to my surprise I found only four. The earliest was **2** (L. Lowy, *Wiener Schachzeitung* 1905), **1 Kc8 f2 2 h8B**; then **3** (W. Greenwood, *Bradford Observer* 1907), **1 h8B** with **1...h1Q 2 Nd6+ Nxd6 3 Qe7+ Kxe7** stalemate; then **4** (O. Dehler, *Deutsches Wochenschach* 1908), **1 Bxc3+ Bxc3 2 Qxf4+ Qe4 3 h8B**, and **5** (A. A. Troitzky, *Deutsche Schachzeitung* 1908), **1 Be4 Bc2! 2 Bxc2 a2 3 Bb1! a1B!!**, this last being a real piece of cut and thrust where the crucial drawing promotion is Black's. If these were the only predecessors, Noam's enthusiasm is understandable; the Dedrle/Traxler study clearly broke new ground, even if later composers were to surpass it.

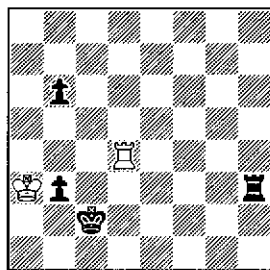
A name for which I look out is that of the excellent Swedish composer Axel Ornstein, a study of whose was quoted in *EG* 145. But the solution contained a curious feature, and thanks to the BCPS Library I was able to consult the original publication. This was in an article "J'adoube" in the Swedish composition magazine *Springaren* in 1999, and though I cannot read the text the outline seems clear enough.



6 - draw

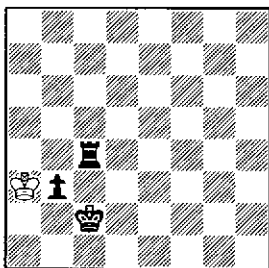


6a - after 7 Ka4

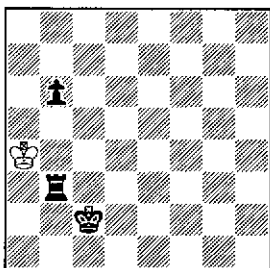


7 - draw

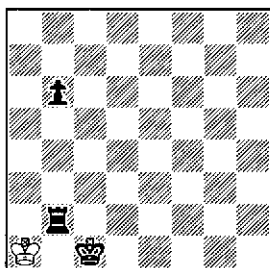
The story starts with **6** by Gurgenzidze and Kalandadze (1 Pr Neidze-60 Ty 1997). **1 Rh7+ Kg2 2 Rh4 b3 3 Rb4 Rg3 4 Kc7 Kf2 5 Kc6! Ke2 6 Kb5 Kd2 7 Ka4** gives **6a**, and White threatens **8 Rxb3**. Try **7...Kc2**: no, **8 Rxb3** anyway (**8...Rxb3** is stalemate), but also **8 Ka3** (**8...Rc3 9 Rb5!** and either **9...Rc5 10 Rxb3 Rc3 11 Ka4!** **Rxb3** with the same stalemate or **9...b2+ 10 Ka2 Kc1 11 Rxb2 Rc2 12 Ka1!** **Rxb2** with a new one). Try **7...b5+**: no, **8 Ka3 Kc2 9 Rxb5 Rc3 10 Rb4!** **Rc8 11 Rc4+ Rxc4**, a classic stalemate due to Grigoriev, but also **8 Rxb5** at once. Neither line is clean.



7a - stalemate 1



7b - stalemate 2



7c - stalemate 3

Axel's version **7** brings in all the stalemates, and does so with complete accuracy. **1 Rb4** threatens **2 Rxb6**, and if say **1...Rg3** then **2 Rxb6 Rc3 3 Rb4! Rc7/8 4 Rc4+ Rxc4** and we have the Grigoriev stalemate **7a**. But if Black plays **1...Rc3** he can meet **2 Rxb6** with **2...Rc7/8** (threatening **3...Ra7+** and **4...b2**), and White must substitute **2 Rb5**. Black can shift wR by playing **2...Rc5**, hoping for **3 Rxb6 Rc7** etc, but White replies **3 Rxb3**, and the pin **3...Rc3** leads to the second stalemate **4 Ka4! Rxb3** (see **7b**); alternatively, **2...b2+ 3 Ka2 Kc1 4 Rxb2 Rc2 5 Ka1! Rxb2** and the third (**7c**).

And the curious feature? All the sources give **2...Rc8** in the line to stalemate **2**, allowing alternative draws by **3 Rf/g/h5**. Thus do misprints become part of history...

News and notices

Subscribing to EG. It is no longer possible to subscribe to *EG* via Walter Veitch, but UK readers wishing to subscribe for 2002 may do so by sending £15 to myself.

Meetings. The next *EG* readers' meeting will be at 17 New Way Road, London NW9 6PL, on **Friday October **11**** (not the usual "first Friday of the quarter") 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!

Another outlet for authors? I received a message out of the blue earlier in the year from Aristophanes Press, expressing an interest in publishing books in English in the UK and US in the field of chess endgame studies, "an area which does not get its fair share of new books". Enquiry elicited the information that this was a US-based start-up company run by people with publishing experience concentrating on books on business and computing, one of whom is a strong player who sees commercial possibilities in developing a chess side to the business (my summary of an e-mail which I am willing to forward as received). I know no more than this, and readers wanting more detailed information should send an e-mail directly to Paul Connors (chesspubs@aristophanes.com).

What do you do in your other existences? One of the unexpected pleasures of editing *BESN* has been to discover what some of our readers get up to in their spare time. Ronald Turnbull's books and articles on long-distance walking are of course well known to everyone whose fitness is greater than mine, and another author among our ranks is Jean Monsour. Jean writes adventure novels, the most recent of which, *Le renard de la Forêt-Noire*, revolves around the attempts of various thieves to outwit a wealthy art collector. This character also composes chess problems while gazing at a nude painting of Cleopatra, which is an experiment I must try sometime.

And when I visited Zdeněk Závodný in Brno this summer and apologized for having spent more time recently on music than on chess, he immediately replied that his father used to be a pianist, violinist, and composer... He showed me some newspaper cuttings and some very attractive songs that his father had published, and I have already translated one of them and arranged it for an unaccompanied group.

World Chess Composition Tournament (see March page 200 and June page 208). David Sedgwick reports that he has now received two submissions, but would very much appreciate some more in order to enable the full quota of three entries to be made. He would like to receive them by September 20 if possible, and by December 20 at the latest. 23 Tierney Court, Canning Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6QA.

Anybody wishing to give notice in BESN 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.