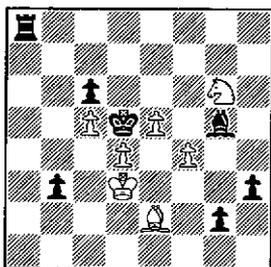
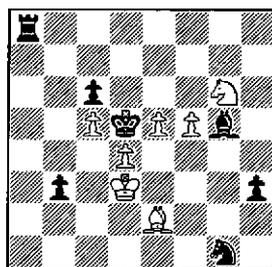


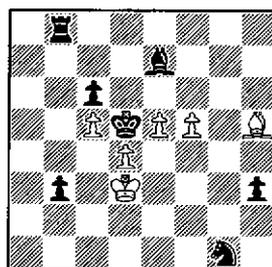
Recently published British originals



1 - draw

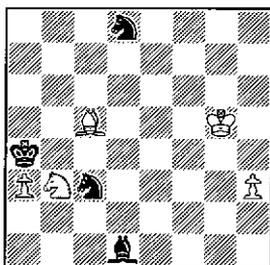


1a - after 1...g1N

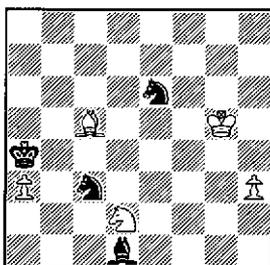


1b - after 5 Bh5

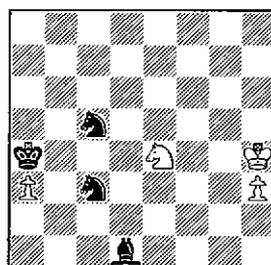
Mike Bent's 1 appeared in *The Problemist* in March last year. White cannot prevent the promotion of Black's g-pawn, but 1 f5 threatens 2 Bf3 mate and so forces 1...g1N (see 1a). But a further mate threat gets White nowhere (2 Bd1 Ra3 and ...b2+ will soon follow) and a second line of attack must be created: 2 Ne7+! This forces 2...Bxe7, and now we have 3 Bh5 (threat 4 Bf7 mate) Rf8 4 Bd1 (threat 5 Bxb3 mate) Rb8 5 Bh5 (see 1b) with a B/R pendulum draw. "A nice dessert" was a solver's comment. Note that 2 Nf4+ in 1a won't do; after 2...Bxf4 3 Bh5 Black will be able to play 3...Ra7, and 4...Rb7 will hold everything.



2 - draw

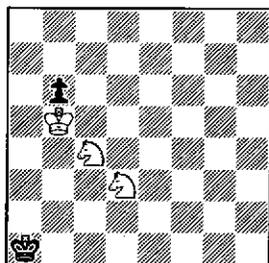


2a - after 1...Ne6+

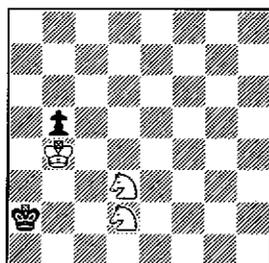


2b - after 3...Ne4

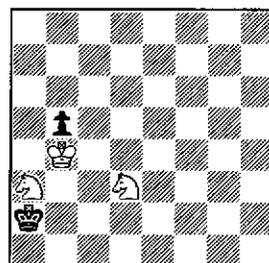
My solvers in *diagrammes* tend to prefer wins to draws, but one wrote that Mike's 2, from the July-September issue, was beginning to reconcile him. The White bishop is open to a fork, and White can rescue his knight only at the cost of leaving it undefended; even so, this is the way to save the game, and 1 Nd2 is the right square to choose. Black duly plays 1...Ne6+ to gain a second piece, but White carefully replies 2 Kh4! and after 2...Nxc5 he continues with 3 Ne4! (see 2b). Now either capture will give stalemate, and everything else loses material: Black's king prevents the knights from defending each other, and White's awkward little a-pawn stops the king from supporting both at once. "Voici une position typiquement bentienne" was a solver's comment. Mike was most amused when I told him that his name was beginning to enrich the French language!



3 - win



3a - see text



3b - main line, after 3 Kb4

In my experience, my little 3, which I published in *diagrammes* in 1999, goes particularly well when shown to a group. White can win this only because bK can be kept penned in the corner (as soon as wK moves, bP will advance, and a knight's pawn on its fourth rank normally draws against two knights), and I start by saying that if bK is allowed even once to set foot on the b-file he will save the game. At this point, somebody usually suggests the natural and obvious 1 Nd2, and I promptly play it on the board. Black has to reply 1...Ka2, and 2 Kb4 b5 (see 3a) is soon seen to leave White without a good move. All right, so we lose a move: 2 Ka4! b5+ 3 Kb4. Again we have 3a, and this time it is Black who has to play. His reply 3...Ka1 is forced, but 4 Kb3 b4 again leaves White without a good move and if we try the same trick as before (4 Ka3 b4+ 5 Kb3) we give stalemate. Can we perhaps manoeuvre a knight to the a-file, hoping to sacrifice it and mate with a single knight against the last pawn? It seems a good idea, but it cannot be made to work; a move like 5 Nc4 lets bK come to b1, and now the sacrifice on a3 will lead nowhere.

At this point somebody normally wonders if 1 Nd2 was the right move, and I come clean: no, it wasn't. The correct move is 1 Na3; we do indeed sacrifice a knight on the a-file, but we have to put it there at move 1. Play continues 1...Ka2 2 Ka4 (we still need the lose-a-move manoeuvre) b5+ (if 2...Ka1 then 3 Kb3 b5 4 Ne1 b4 5 Nc2 mate) 3 Kb4 (see 3b) and now it all hangs together: 3...Ka1 4 Kb3 b4 5 Nc1 bxa3 6 Kc2 a2 7 Nb3 mate. The sacrifice on a3 is well known (closest appear to be B. Bakay, *Magyar Sakkélet* 1958, wKb4, Nf5/c4, bKa1, Pb7/b3, 1 Kxb3 b5 2 Na3 b4 3 Nd4 etc, and E. L. Pogosyants, *Vneshnyaya Torgovlya* 1979, wKh3, Ne2/g1, bKh1, Pg7, BTM, 1...g5 2 Kg3 g4 3 Nh3) and the wK triangulation in itself is not new either, but I think the combination of the two had not been done before.

Both this and the Q v R + P study which I reprinted in the December *BESN* were derived from positions of reciprocal zugzwang published in *EG*, and could have been extracted *in toto* from the Thompson databases. Both go down very well when I show them to groups, much better in fact than most studies composed conventionally, and this seems a complete answer to those who say that play extractable from a database should not be allowed to form the main line of a study. The resulting studies should not be eligible for tourney awards, of course - we have a rule in *diagrammes* that studies which were or could have been extracted from databases are not eligible for normal honours, though the judge may reward them with "special" honours if he wishes - but to suggest that they should not be *published* is ludicrous.

Ken Thompson

No, not an obituary; but Ken Thompson's web site now starts with the line "As of December 1, 2000, I will be leaving Bell Labs to pursue flight instructing full time" and it would appear that Ken's involvement with the chess endgame has terminated. So this seems an appropriate moment for a note of appreciation.

The ability of computers to analyse chess endgames has always depended on the power of the machines available. The first essays were made by Ströhlein and Zagler in 1967-70. They analysed four-man endings such as R v B, R v N, and Q v R, and found at least one deep and difficult win with R v N which had escaped human discovery. But this merely dotted an i and crossed a t, the general result with this material having long been known, and the first hint of an upset to established theory came with the 1974 analysis of Q + Pb7 v Q by Komissarchik and Futer. This showed that some "surely drawn" endings with this material yielded to long and apparently patternless winning manoeuvres which only a computer could be expected to find.

Ken's first involvement with computer chess appears to have been in the invention of BELLE, which won the North American Computer Chess Championship in 1978. BELLE incorporated a database for Q v R, and after the championship a bet was laid that a three-times U. S. Champion could not win this ending against it within the 50-move limit. The ending had long been thought a routine win for the queen, but in practice the defender normally blunders and this makes things easier. The master lost, and only won a rematch on the last of his fifty moves (*BCM*, May 1979, pp 193-8).

Then came 1983, when Ken and Ofer Comay, working independently, showed that K + 2B had a forced win against K + N. Ken subsequently analysed a large number of five-man endings, producing the "Thompson five-man databases" which were our bible until the more extensive Nalimov tablebases appeared a year or two ago.

In 1991 came news of Lewis Stiller's pioneering work on six-man positions. But this was a one-off using a unique machine, and not until Ken and others took up the baton a year or so ago did a six-man database become available in a convenient form. Thanks to Ken, a large number of six-man pawnless databases can now be consulted over the Internet, and I for one have been using them to very good effect.

Ken's association with this work has caused people to think it requires someone of unusual calibre. This is true only indirectly. I analysed my first game by computer as a 22-year-old student, and even "state-of-the-art" work, where the job is just possible on the latest equipment, normally requires little more than competent professionalism (I exclude Stiller's highly specialized multi-processing). But if you don't need to be Ken Thompson to program a state-of-the-art endgame analysis, you do need to be someone of similar standing to have use of a machine on which the job can be done.

The future of Ken's web site is unclear. Bell Labs are not funded for the benefit of chess endgame enthusiasts, and Ken warns that "the chess endgames could disappear at any time". But I am sure those nearer the action than myself will be taking steps. At worst, the data will be recreated from scratch. Machines are already more powerful and I could now buy one off the shelf for around £5,000 which could reconstruct any particular database in around a month, so if I had £50,000 to spare (which I haven't)

I could buy ten machines and reconstruct the lot in perhaps three to six months. This won't happen, because if the job is needed it will be done by someone who has access to university or other institutional equipment, but it does put things into perspective.

John Roycroft tells me that Ken appeared not to be particularly interested in chess *per se*; it was merely an interesting problem to be attacked. Be that as it may, the endgame databases that Ken has generated have been of inestimable value: to editors, in helping us to examine submitted originals; to composers, in aiding analysis and in providing lists of reciprocal zugzwangs and other interesting positions on which studies can be based; to enthusiasts in general, who have revelled in the results. Thank you, Ken, for all you have done for us; happy retirement.

An editor's duty to his composers

Recent issues of *The Problemist* (September 2000 p 443, November p 502) have contained statements that "unfortunately" and "regrettably" some editors are in the habit of holding on to a composer's work for two years or more without telling him whether it has been accepted for publication. I hardly think that "unfortunately" and "regrettably" are the adverbs I would have used myself; "deplorably", "disgracefully", and "indefensibly" are words which come more naturally to mind. No editor has ever treated my own work in such a fashion, either in *The Problemist* or anywhere else, and any who did would receive no further contribution from me.

My own practice as an editor of originals for publication is as follows.

1. Within a month of receipt at the latest, I examine the study in detail and send the composer a notification of whether it has been accepted. If this notification fails to arrive within the expected time, plus any customary postal delay in the case of material sent from abroad, something has gone wrong and enquiry is in order.
2. If I accept a study, I tell the composer for which issue of the magazine I have scheduled it.
3. If I cannot publish a study within six months of receipt, I consider the composer fully entitled to withdraw it from me and to seek quicker publication elsewhere.

I do not claim that this procedure shows any particular virtue, and I would expect a new editor at least to start by trying to do better. A composer puts time and effort into his work, and he is entitled to be told reasonably promptly whether it has been accepted and when it can be expected to appear. However, experience has shown that a full month does occasionally pass before I am able to sit down and examine a study properly, and it would not be realistic to promise a quicker response.

Editorial standards in the problem world are no concern of *BESN*, but I have heard (though I have not encountered it myself) that a similarly cavalier attitude is not unknown among study editors. If this is indeed so, it is tempting to suggest that composers should form a trade union and should send their work only to editors whose practice satisfies elementary union rules. But in truth this is hardly necessary. Once a composer discovers that certain editors treat him reasonably, these editors will get the compositions that he really cares about, while any others will find that the supply of good material rapidly dries up. Frankly, they will deserve no better.

Endgame study database 2000

Last autumn, ChessBase released a CD-ROM with the latest version of Harold van der Heijden's study database. It contains 58,796 studies including alternative versions, and deserves an extended review. Before I go further, let me make two points: (a) this appears to be a snapshot of work in progress, not a preconceived final product; (b) everything has been done on top of family commitments and a full-time job, and for all Harold's magnificent efforts he can have put only in a fraction of the work that I would advise a professional organization to assign when setting up an authoritative technical database of this size and complexity.

So: work in progress. How complete is its coverage? Well, you tell me, but since mid-1999 Harold has held the card collection of František Macek, another collection of around 50,000 studies which he has been combining with his own, and my latest message from him said that he was around half-way through and had found only about 4.9% of new material. In recent years they had been collaborating, but their early work was independent and so large an overlap suggests that the combined collection contains most that is accessible in Western and Central Europe. It is all too possible that good studies remain buried in Russian sources (the CD-ROM contains only 1784 of a reputed 3000+ studies by Pogosyants and barely more than 200 by Zachodyakin), but it would seem that an imaginary objective "to include at least 90% of all studies published up to the end of 1999" is within sight of fulfilment.

Next, how authoritative is it? As a first step, I did a name search on "Beasley", and was presented with 31 studies. Not having kept a file of my compositions, I cannot say how complete this is, but I did notice that the 1995 Ellison-Beasley study from *Moravskoslezský šach* was not included. It is however listed if I search for "Ellison", and further investigation appears to confirm that a name search looks only at the first author of a study with joint authorship. This is a defect both major and surprising, and reflects the fact (to which I shall return) that the ChessBase 7.0 facilities on which the database relies are not really satisfactory for work of this kind.

As regards accuracy, a 1997 Beasley-Ellison study in *The Problemist Supplement* is given as a version of a Beasley study in *The Problemist* (which it is) without reference to Wallace's contribution, but in fairness to Harold I probably sent him a letter rather than a photocopy of the source and I may not have made myself clear. My 1990 *Problemist* study (wKf7, Bd1, Ng4, Pg3, bKh5, Bc6, Nc2, Ph7/h6) has the bare solution "1.Kf6 Bf3 2.Bxf3 Nd4 3.Bd1 Ne2 4.Nxh6 Kxh6 5.g4 Nf4 6.g5# 1-0" with no mention of the stalemates 4 Bxe2, 4 N--, 5 Bxe2 which are an integral part of the composition, but on checking the source I found they weren't mentioned there either; again, database not guilty. Sadly, however, my little "orthodox/losing" joke (wKh5, Pf7, bKh7, wins by 1 f8R and 1 Kh6 Kxh6 2 f8R) is given just as an orthodox study, with nothing to indicate the Losing Chess twin which is its reason for existence.

Two other defects of presentation: (a) sources are given only in coded form, and although lists of codes are provided there are some accompanying hieroglyphics for which I can find no explanation, and (b) everything appears to be presented as "main line and variations" even where a study has two main lines of equal standing.

All these were first impressions, and inevitably personal. To assess the accuracy of the database more objectively, I used the random numbers in Fisher and Yates's *Statistical tables* to select a sample of 50 studies. 16 of them proved to be from sources available to me in the BCPS Library, and I have examined each in detail.

Nine are faithful representations of the source material, and a tenth (Wotawa, 215 in *Problem* 1968) is in error only in being misdated by one year (in compensation, a move missing from the source is reinstated). Dawson, 311 in *BCM* 1938, has main line and variation reversed, and one line is truncated. Havasi, 729 in *1234 modern end-game studies* 1938, and Dobrescu, 1998 in *Tidskrift för Schaak* 1978, each have analysis not given in the source (one line and a subvariation in the Havasi, several lines in the Dobrescu) with nothing to say where it has come from. Farago, 1st Prize *Centenáris Nemzetközi Sakkfeladványverseny* 1948 with six associated positions, is arranged quite differently from the source, whose treatment seems easier to follow, and again there is nothing to say where the database formulation has come from.

This leaves Bahr, 85 in *Opposition und Kritische Felder im Bauernendspiel* 1936, and Nunn, 312 in *Secrets of rook endings* 1992, which appear to be seriously defective in that they are "either side to move" studies and only one case is given. Additionally, threat lines in the Nunn are omitted, and a line where Nunn refers to a continuation in another study is left in the air with no explanation.

So there are deficiencies. Partly, these appear to be due to the tool used (incredible though it might seem, it appears that ChessBase 7.0 has no provision to "pass" a move, so threats cannot be recorded as lines of play), partly to an apparent absence of commentary beyond occasional uses of "!" and "?". Additionally, the ChessBase search facilities permit only limited retrieval by pattern of play, and a thematic retrieval system such as that devised by Richard Harman in the 1960s (see *EG* 7 pp 180-7 and *EG* 16 pp 480-1) would appear to be a necessary adjunct.

To make the database properly definitive, the first essentials would appear to be to obtain a more suitable tool (or to procure the necessary improvements to ChessBase) and to include at least some basic and stylized commentary. This is needed *inter alia* (a) to highlight "variations" which are in truth alternative main lines, (b) to identify lines and moves which do not come from the stated source (do they come from some other published source, or from private communication, or from analysis by the database compiler, or what?), (c) to indicate alternative moves (in particular, "any" or "same piece any") which are given in the source as leading to the same play, (d) to reproduce notes in the source saying why the position reached is won or drawn, and (e) to record cross-references to other studies. As a separate exercise, the question of indexing and retrieval by theme needs to be addressed, and a useful first step would be to dump the entire database as a PGN file (it occupies about 30Mb) and to see how far the Harman or some equivalent criteria can be identified by program. I estimate this as two months of full-time work by a competent programmer, which might make it a suitable thesis project for an MSc in computer science.

Yet even as it stands the database is a great asset, worth far more than the £37.99 or so that it costs (you need ChessBase 7.0 as well, plus a suitable machine). I presume it is available from all ChessBase outlets. Buy it, and use it. It is not yet a definitive work of reference, but it is much more likely to help than to mislead.

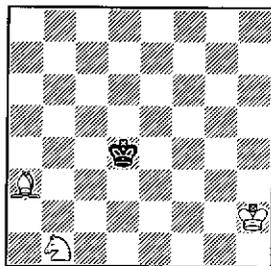
News and notices

Other magazines. The international endgame study magazine *EG* (four issues a year) can be obtained for 2001 by paying £12 to Walter Veitch, 13 Roffes Lane, Caterham, Surrey CR3 5PU (cheques payable to W. Veitch, please). The British Chess Problem Society is primarily concerned with problems, but endgame studies are within its remit and its bookselling service normally has a number of study books among its stock. The UK subscription for 2001 is £18 (new members £15, under 21 £7.50); write to R. T. Lewis, 16 Cranford Close, Woodmancote, Cheltenham, Glos GL52 9QA.

Outlets for original composition. I do not normally publish originals in *BESN*, but I am always glad to receive new discoveries, whether conventionally composed or computer-generated, for the *British Chess Magazine*. Additionally, Alain Pallier (La Mouzinière, 85190 La Genétouze, France) accepts originals for *The Problemist*, and I myself accept them for the French composition magazine *diagrammes*. There are other outlets abroad, and I will send details to composers on request.

Meetings. The next *EG* readers' meeting will be at 17 New Way Road, London NW9 6PL, on **Friday April 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!

Books. Jeremy Morse has produced a new edition of his book *Chess problems: tasks and records* (Faber, ISBN 0-571-20454-6). More than three-quarters of the book's 855 examples are two-movers and most of the longer problems feature suicidal, help, or series play, but a few have an end-game flavour. The computer-generated position alongside (B. Walter, *Die Schwalbe* 1990) is an elementary book win, but the shortest mate against best play takes 31 moves and White must pick the right move at every stage: **1 Kg3 Kd3 2 Bc5 Ke4 3 Bf2 Kf5 4 Nc3 Ke5 5 Nb5 Kd5 6 Kf4 Kc6 7 Na7+**



Shortest win?

Kc7 8 Ke5 Kb7 9 Kd6 Ka6 10 Kc6 Ka5 11 Nb5 Kb4 12 Nd4 Kc3 13 Ne2+ Kc4 14 Nf4 Kb4 15 Kb6 Kc4 16 Ka5 Kb3 17 Kb5 Kc3 18 Kc5 Kc2 19 Be1 Kd1 20 Bc3 Kc1 21 Kc4 Kc2 22 Nd5 Kd1 23 Kd3 Kc1 24 Nb6 Kd1 25 Nc4 Kc1 26 Bd2+ Kb1 27 Kc3 Ka2 28 Kc2 Ka1 29 Kb3 Kb1 30 Na3+ Ka1 31 Bc3 mate. As Jeremy says, some of the logic is by no means obvious to the human eye. The shop price is £35, but I believe BCPS members (see above) can obtain it at a substantial discount.

And this being the March issue, my own annual **book list** is enclosed.

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.