

British Endgame Study News

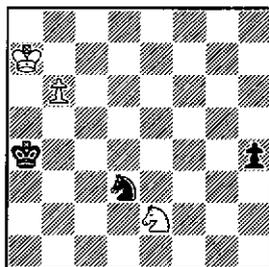
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by Paul Michelet
White to play and win

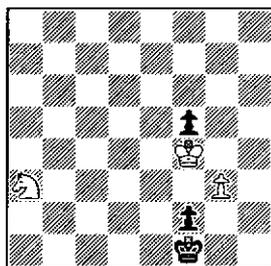
This issue. As promised in March, subscribers will find a copy of Emil Vlasák's recent booklet on Josef Moravec with this issue of *BESN*. I have long been an admirer of Moravec's studies and had intended to present a selection as one of our special numbers, but when I heard that Emil was producing a complete collection I thought it better to stand aside and leave the job to him. In the event the book has proved to be larger than I expected, so I am treating it as a returnable extra which will be charged at the equivalent of two "ordinary" special numbers (specifically £1.50 UK, £1.75 Europe, £2.25 elsewhere). No reader responded to my March invitation to say if he or she did not want to receive it, but if having seen it you do not wish to retain it (or if you already have a copy) please return it, and I will cancel the charge and credit you with the cost of your return postage.

This apart, there is some pleasant material in the main magazine, together with a special number which explores an undeservedly forgotten British backwater. And do try Paul Michelet's little gem above before looking inside. Play 1 b7 Ne5, meeting 2 b8Q with 2...Nc6+ and threatening 2...Nd7 shutting in wK; now what?

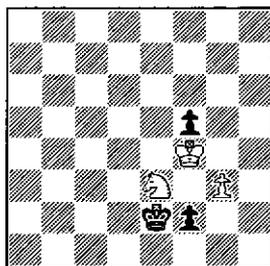
What is a "quiet" move? There seems to be no conventional "Spotlight" item this time (am I getting better, or are readers becoming blind?) which gives me space to report a point raised by Walter Veitch. Walter questions my use of the word "quiet" to describe moves such as 4 Nc3 in position **2b** on page 154 of our December issue: "it is in fact a crash-bang move, involving two massive threats". He goes further: "Every move by White must be a step towards the win; there can be no truly quiet move" (his emphasis).

All this is eminently fair comment, and Walter is by no means the first to make it (T. R. Dawson used to say very much the same in respect of problem keys). I have come to regard "quiet" as a short and convenient term for an unexpected non-checking move in a context where continuous checks appear necessary, but on balance perhaps "unexpected non-checking move" is better spelt out in full. Do other readers feel jarred when a move called "quiet" simultaneously threatens mate and capture of bQ?

Recently published British originals

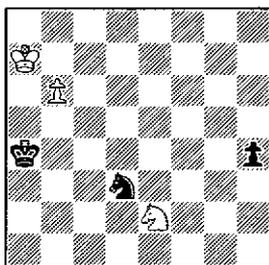


1 - win (or else!)

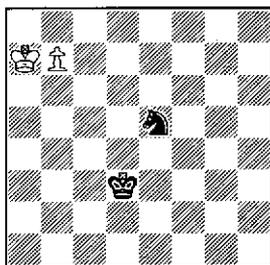


1a - whoever moves loses

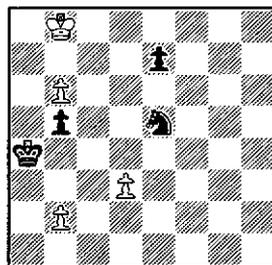
EG 140 contains a very welcome eleven-page article by David Blundell describing some of his researches into zugzwang-based studies with knight and pawn against pawns. Four of its twelve examples are originals, but they are best appreciated in context and I don't think I can afford to devote the whole of this section to them. However, I ought to quote **1** even in isolation, because David describes the central whoever-moves-loses zugzwang **1a** as "unusual, possibly unique with this material". Play goes **1 Nc2 Ke2 2 Ne3** giving **1a** with Black to move, which is simple enough, but if **1 Nc4** then **1...Ke1! 2 Ne3 Ke2** gives the same position with White to move and it is Black who will win. If White strays from the path, he won't just fail to win, he will actually lose.



2 - win



3 - win



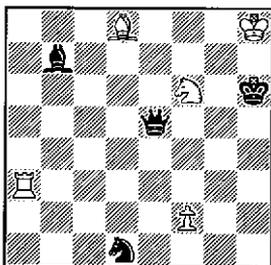
4 - win

Paul Michelet's **2** should have appeared in *diagrammes* by the time this is in print. **1 b7** forces **1...Nb4/Ne5** ready to meet **2 b8Q** by a fork on c6, but **1...Nb4** can be met by **2 Nd4** whereas **1...Ne5** threatens **2...Nd7** shutting in wK. So wK must set out on his travels: **2 Kb8!** (if **2 Kb6** then **2...Nd7+ 3 Kc7 Nc5 4 b8Q Na6+**) **Nc6+** (now **2...Nd7+** can be met by **3 Kc8 Nb6+ 4 Kd8/Kc7**) **3 Kc7** (if **3 Kc8** then **3...h3** etc) **Nb4** (playing for a fork on a6 instead) **4 Kb6 Nd5+ 5 Ka7!!** (**5 Ka6 Nb4+ 6 Ka7 Nc6**) and he is back where he started. But the effect of his round trip has been to decoy bN from e5 to d5, leaving Black with only **5...Nb4/Ne7** by which to threaten another fork on c6, and in each case **6 Nd4** clinches matters.

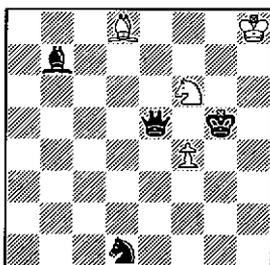
Very nice, you will say, a simple and elegant setting with only bPh4 needed to achieve soundness, but surely it has been done before? So thought Paul when sending it to me, but enquiry of Harold van der Heijden produced the surprising reply that so far as he could see it hadn't. There have been some three-quarter settings, from a7 round to b6, of which the first seems to be Vitaly Halberstadt's 3 (*La Stratégie* 1938): **1 Kb8 Nc6+ 2 Kc7 Nb4 3 Kb6**. A group composing exercise resulting in rediscovery and extension of this was reported in our special number 7 (September 1997). Harold also drew attention to the three-quarter setting 4 (A. Kovalenko and A. Kubryak, *3rd Prize Problem* 1976) where the king starts at b8 and goes round to a7: **1 b7 Nc6+ 2 Kc7 Nb4 3 Kb6 Nd5+ 4 Ka7 Nb4 5 b3+! Ka5** (5...Kxb3 6 Kb6) **6 b8N! e5 7 Kb7 N-- 8 Nc6 mate**. But the complete roundabout appeared not to have been done before.

Or hadn't it? Is not 4 still sound if we start with wKa7 and wPb7, playing 1 Kb8 instead of 1 b7? *According to the computer, it is!* So I checked the original source (courtesy of the BCPS Library) to see if this possibility had been mentioned. I don't read Croatian and I am willing to make copies of the relevant pages available to anyone who can, but the relevant vocabulary appears similar to Czech and as far as I can see neither the editor, the composers, the solvers, nor the tourney judge make any reference to it. 4 is a fine study even as it is, but what an opportunity missed.

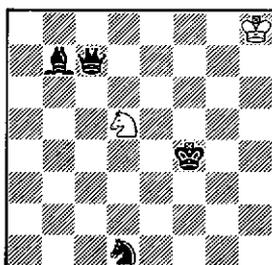
Paul himself reminded me of the famous study by Brieger (1st Prize *Chess Life* 1986) in which wK goes out and back in front of his pawn instead of round it: wKa7, Pb6/c4/b3 (4), bKa5, Nf7, Pc5 (3), 1 Kb7! Ne5 2 Kc7 Nd3 3 b7 Nb4 4 Kb8!! Na6+ 5 Ka7 Nb4 6 b8N! and 7 Nc6 mate. As he had feared, he was working in a well-tilled field; but his beautifully simple setting will deserve a place in the literature even if it does turn out that the possibility of modifying 4 had already been spotted.



5 - draw



5a - after 4 f4+



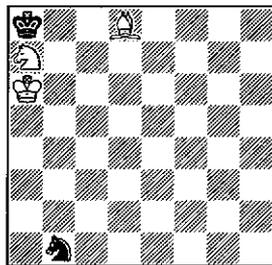
5b - after 6 Nd5+

Mike Bent's 5 graced the July 2000 issue of *The Problemist*. Solvers know what to look for when attacking a Bent study, but even so the exploration can be good fun. **1 Rh3+ Kg6 2 Rg3+** is simple enough, and if 2...Kf7 then 3 Rg7+ and either bK move will forfeit bQ. **2...Kf5**, therefore, and now perhaps **3 Rg5+ Kxg5 4 f4+** suggests itself (see 5a). But does it? **4...Qxf4 5 Nd5+**, yes, but what about **4...Kxf4** leaving wN still pinned? Ah... **5 Bc7+ Qxc7 6 Nd5+** (see 5b) and the capture **6...Bxd5** will give stalemate. It isn't a masterpiece on account of the idle bNd1, but I think it will have been enjoyed.

Should we resurrect “Win within n moves”?

Early chess compositions were often posed in the form “White to play and win in n moves”. Usually this meant “White to play and give mate in n moves”, but it also encompassed positions where White played to win material or where Black could delay mate by conceding material; if White had achieved a clearly won game within the number of moves specified, the solution was regarded as valid. As the problem became divorced from the parent game, the stipulation “Win in n moves” became frowned on, and for many years “Mate in n moves” has been regarded as the province of the problem and “Win” without restriction as that of the endgame study. Yet I wonder if this is really the right way to look at things.

These thoughts have been prompted by the computer researches of 1983 onwards, and in particular the discovery of obscure and to all intents and purposes incomprehensible wins in endings such as $B + N \checkmark N$ and $Q + P \checkmark Q$. Readers who have special number 17 will recall A. W. Daniel's 1 (*BCM* 1934), where White plays 1 **Nc8! Kb8** (1...N-- 2 **Nb6+ Kb8** transposes) 2 **Nb6 Na3** (other moves are little better) 3 **Be7** and mates or captures bN. I reprinted this elegant trifle in spite of the fact that it is now known to be technically unsound, and no reader has told me I was wrong.



1 - win

The reason for the unsoundness is that the computer has found other ways to win, but all take at least 38 moves to round up and capture bN and I doubt if many people would be able to demonstrate the winning process over a board. Conversely, the crispness of the author's original solution retains its charm.

But this composition is quite sound with the stipulation “win within 5 moves”, “win” here meaning “give mate or capture the knight”, and the same is true of many other compositions with $B + N \checkmark N$, $Q + P \checkmark Q$, and so on. As “wins”, they are now known to have alternative if incomprehensible computer-discovered solutions; make the stipulation “win within n moves”, “win” encompassing mate, capture, promotion, or whatever is relevant to the particular position, and the elegance of the author's intention remains while the unwanted and in human terms impossible-to-demonstrate alternatives vanish. Is this not (a) sensible and (b) desirable?

The genre “win within n moves” was promoted by Mandler and Moravec, but they gave it a new name “ult” and included at least one work which was merely an artificial problem (White had a comfortably won game, but it was stipulated that $50 - n$ moves had passed since the last pawn move or capture and the task was to make something happen before the fifty moves ran out). What I am talking about here is slightly different: the use within otherwise normal endgame studies of the restriction “within n moves” to exclude long and obscure alternative solutions which only a computer could be expected to find. Chess was invented as a game for people, not for computers, and I don't think it disparages the work of computer analysts to suggest that in some circumstances we should say, “Thank you, but not just now, please.”

Who *really* composes a database study?

I have been intending to address this question for some time, and its posing by John Roycroft in *EG* 139 has prompted me to do so now. John presents the position alongside, extracted from the Thompson six-man databases, in which the key line is **1...Kd6 2 Nc7** and now **2...Kd7 3 Ne4** forcing bR to move or **2...Rd7** (surely this pin will save Black?) **3 Ne4 mate!** He then asks:

"Who can say whether this was 'composed'? Ken Thompson's programming produced the position, concealed in a move-less list of like positions. Your editor pounced, analysed, and has now published here. Is any lucid volunteer out there ready to sort this out? Just one thing is beyond dispute: we can *all* enjoy it."

Well, "lucid" may be a matter of opinion, but let me have a go.

I identify three separate activities in the discovery of database studies.

1. Creating the database.
2. Extracting positions or groups of positions selected according to certain criteria.
3. Publishing specific positions not previously recorded in the chess literature.

Step 1 is an exercise in computer programming, normally not particularly difficult, and it requires no chess expertise beyond a bare knowledge of the rules. It produces a large and comprehensive set of data readable only by another computer.

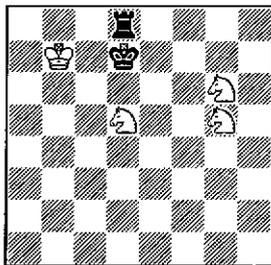
Step 2 is another exercise in computer programming, again not normally difficult, and only the setting of the selection criteria requires chess expertise. It produces a small and selective set of data readable by the human eye and brain.

Step 3 requires chess expertise, both in assessing and rationalizing the computer output and in selecting suitable positions for publication.

Let me give two examples. The first is John Nunn's trio of "Secrets" books based on Ken Thompson's five-man databases. Ken did step 1, and I think he and John both contributed to step 2 (Ken's programs listed longest wins and reciprocal zugzwangs, and I believe John did some *ad hoc* programming in the course of writing the books). John then magnificently did step 3, and he is fully entitled to put his name to the results. Positions from the books, unless specifically identified by Ken, should in my view be credited as "Nunn (computer-assisted)". I tend to omit "computer-assisted" from the diagram when setting my own simpler discoveries for solution, because it may deter solvers from attempting something that in fact is not difficult, but this is merely a question of tactics and the facts are always made clear with the solution.

The second is my own work on three-man pawnless endings in *Losing Chess*. Here, I did all three steps myself (with due acknowledgement of Gyorgy Evseev's prior work), including the writing of a modest equivalent of a John Nunn "Secrets" book. But if someone examines the data for himself and spots an interesting position that I have missed, I consider he is fully entitled to publish it with his name attached.

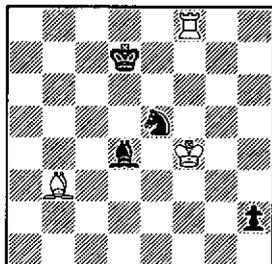
Does this help to clarify the matter?



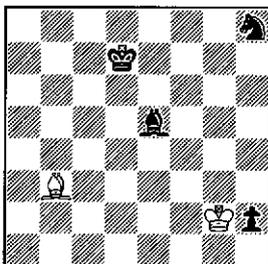
I - reciprocal zugzwang
(BTM soon loses, WTM
cannot maintain the bind)

From the world at large

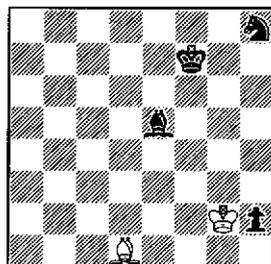
The Netherlands city of 's-Hertogenbosch held an over-the-board "Tournament for the Future" in 1999, and associated with it was an invitation study tourney to honour the 40th birthday of René Olthof. I received an invitation myself, but alas I had nothing remotely suitable on hand. The study tourney results have now appeared, handsomely presented as part of the main tournament book, and a particularly pleasing feature is a section containing photographs of the participants with their favourite studies.



1 - draw



1a - 1 Rh8, after 3...Nxh8



1b - main line, after 6 Bd1

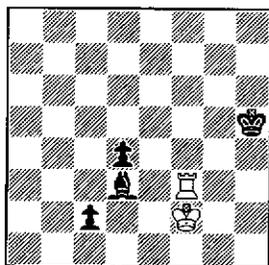
One that particularly took my fancy was **1** (Oscar Carlsson and Carlos Peronace, 3rd Prize *Magyar Sakkélet* 1986). If we try the obvious **1 Rh8** we get **1...Ng6+ 2 Kg3 Be5+ 3 Kg2 Nxh8** (see **1a**) and Black will win despite having the "wrong" bishop: wB will be unable to prevent bN from adding its decisive weight to the attack.

So White plays **1 Ba4+**, with the idea that if Black plays a nondescript move such as **1...Kc7** White will be able to continue **2 Rh8** etc and we shall reach **1a** with wB/bK on a4/c7 instead of b3/d7. Now White can play **Be8** shutting in bN, and the game will be drawn. So Black replies **1...Ke7** to prevent White's eventual **Be8**, and after **2 Re8+** he plays **2...Kf7** for the same reason. But White plays **3 Rh8!** anyway, because after **3...Ng6+ 4 Kg3 Be5+ 5 Kg2 Nxh8** he has **6 Bd1!** (see **1b**). This stops bN's immediate escape (**6...Ng6 7 Bh5** pinning) and threatens **Bh5** shutting him in for good, so **6...Kg6**, and now White plays **7 Ba4!** to set up the echo pin **7...Nf7 8 Be8**. Black has only **7...Kf7**, and White replies **8 Bd1**: draw by repetition.

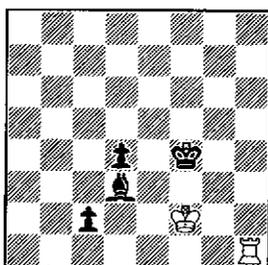
"Charming and original," was David Hooper's comment when this was reprinted in *EG*, and I agree entirely. We pay far too little attention to compositions from South America. Carlsson, in particular, has become one of the names I look out for.

My favourite from the tournament itself is Jarl Ulrichsen's second prizewinner **2** (I do so prefer it when an "endgame study" actually *looks* like a chess endgame). Play starts **1 Rh3+ Kg4 2 Rh1+ Kf4** (see **2a**), and now let us try the natural **3 Re1** shutting off bK. Black naturally plays **3...Bc4** to release bPd4, but play continues **4 Rc1 d3** (other moves are no better) **5 Ke1 Ke3 6 Rxc2!** (see **2b**) and **6...dxc2** is stalemate.

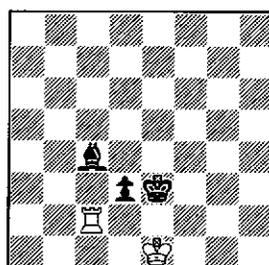
This looks good enough; what is wrong? The answer is that Black can win by playing **3...Bf1!** The advance **...d3** is still threatened, and now there is no stalemate; Black wins in all lines.



2 - draw



2a - after 2...Kf4

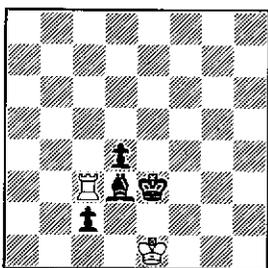


2b - 3 Re1, 3...Bc4, 6 Rxe2

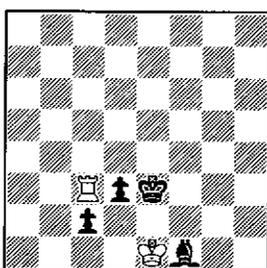
So we try 3 Rc1, which is White's next most natural move, but play continues 3...Kc4 4 Ra1 (4 Re1+ Kd5 etc) Bc4 5 Ke1 (5 Rc1 d3) Ke3 6 Ra3+ (6 Rc1 d3) d3 7 Rc3 c1Q+ 8 Rxc1 d2+ 9 Kd1 Bb3+ and again Black wins.

The right move is 3 Ra1! It may now seem that Black's best try is 3...Ke4, keeping ready to meet 4 Ke1 with 4...Ke3, but White has 4 Rc1 and Black has to go back (4...Kf4 5 Ra1 repeating the position). Alternatively, Black can try 3...Bc4, but 4 Rc1 transposes into the line ending in 2b. But what about the move 3...Bf1! which defeated 3 Re1? Capturing still loses, but now White has 4 Ke1 Ke3 5 Ra3+. If 5...Bd3 then 6 Rc3 (see 2c) and 6...dxc3 will be stalemate, so 5...d3, and 6 Rc3 gives 2d. This time the stalemates are unavoidable: 6...B-- 7 Rxc2 again, or 6...c1Q+ 7 Rxc1 d2+ 8 Kd1 Kd3 (for 9...Be2 mate) 9 Rc3+!

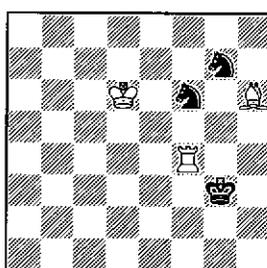
It is a remarkable collection of stalemates. There are some reciprocal zugzwangs here, but for once I will leave the pleasure of sorting them out to the reader.



2c - 3 Ra1, 5...Bd3 6 Rc3



2d - 5...d3 6 Rc3



3 - reciprocal zugzwang

Room for a lollipop. EG 140 prints the complete list of reciprocal zugzwangs with R + B v 2N, and among them is 3. White will win if he can disentangle his men (R + B v 2N is now known to be won unless the attacker is inconvenienced in some way), but we see that wB is tied to the defence of wR, wR is tied to the f-file to prevent ...Nf5+, and Rxf6 allows ...Ne8+. Why not 1 Rf1? Ah: 1...Kg2 (only move to draw) 2 Rf4 Kg3 (only) repeating the position. All right, what about 1 Bg5? Ken Thompson's web site (still there on April 22) gives 1...Nh7 (only) 2 Bh6 Nf6! (only) repeating; Black, with bNg7 under attack, does not rescue it but puts bNh7 en prise as well! Finally, 1 Kc6 loses touch with e6 and allows 1...Ng4/Ng8 2 Bg5 Ne6 (only).

News and notices

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

Nalimov 5-man tablebases. The complete set of 5-man Nalimov tablebases can be obtained on 12 CD-ROMs for DM 169 plus DM 15 for postage to the UK from Steinwender EDV-Beratung GbR, Entenweg 34, D-22549 Hamburg, Germany, e-mail sterzenbach@steinwender.de (which I actually used) or steinwender@t-online.de (which is printed on the discs). This is a significantly better buy than the 4 CD-ROM subset offered by ChessBase which I mentioned in September (which itself was a great improvement on the single CD-ROM that was previously available, but which still lacked several important endings including $Q + B \vee Q$, $Q + N \vee Q$, and $B + N \vee N$). You need 7.5 Gb of hard disc to mount the complete set, but at least if you have the lot you can choose for yourself what to instal.

Are "informal" composition tourneys doing more harm than good? I am prompted to ask this question by reading in another magazine that originals from a certain composer will no longer be accepted because he is in the habit of sending different settings of the same idea to several journals simultaneously.

This presents the composer with a difficulty, because the natural course of composition very often *does* lead to different settings of an idea, each with its pluses and minuses, and the natural thing to do is to send them to magazines sufficiently far apart for the solvers in one to be unlikely to be solvers in another. In the great inter-war years of Central European study composition, composers did exactly this, publishing different settings of their ideas in different newspapers and thereby giving pleasure right across the chess readership. Not only did this benefit a wider audience, it helped to develop the art of composition, with results which are still perceptible: the versions that now grace the endgame textbooks and the study anthologies are by no means always the ones that first appeared in print.

Yet some editors now frown on this natural procedure, and the reason is not far to seek: compositions published in their magazines automatically take part in "informal" composition tourneys, and nobody wants to see a composer gaining two separate prizes for what apart from detail is only one composition.

Which is why I ask the question: are "informal" composition tourneys doing more harm than good?

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.