

British Endgame Study News

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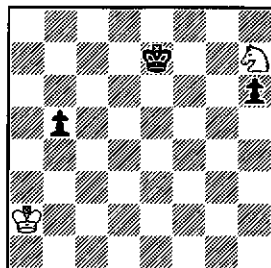
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As previously announced, this will be our **final issue**. To libraries and others wishing to have a complete run: please **check your holdings**, and report any gaps by **February 28**. I will make good any missing issues reported by that date, but cannot promise to do so later.

by David Gurgendize
(after Grigoriev)
White to play and draw

This issue. The special number recapitulates the best of the British studies which we have printed, and there is a composite index covering all fifteen years of *BESN*. And if you don't already know it, try the study above before looking inside.

My final **book list** is also enclosed. Orders again by **February 28** please.

World Chess Solving Championship. Congratulations once again to John Nunn. Great Britain came fourth in the team event.

EG for 2011. The 2011 sterling subscription to *EG* is unchanged at **£20**, and I am willing to receive subscriptions provided that they reach me by **February 28** (cheques payable to J. D. Beasley, please). I am also willing to receive advance subscriptions for 2012 at the same rate and by the same date. **From March onwards**, these subscriptions will be accepted by **Paul Valois**, 14 Newton Park Drive, Leeds LS7 4HH.

Spotlight. Timothy Whitworth points out that von Döben (September, page 467) should have an accent on the "u", and that his study is no more than the kernel of the Lauritzen study which was quoted in June. He also tells me that Paul Michelet's decoying of the Black king to within reach of a knight check from b5 was anticipated, with a slightly different layout, by G. L. Schouten, *Orgaan Discendo Discimis* 1926.

Jaroslav Polášek points out that in the Becker study on page 468, Grosz's 12 Kc1, although slower than the computer's Kb2, is the simpler move for a human analyst.

While checking through the index, I noticed that I had failed to report information from David Sedgwick that Stuart Rachels, the composer of study 8 in special number 10, although given as from "Oxford, England" in *EG* 112, was not a British national but an American temporarily here as a postgraduate student. My apologies.

And John Finch's cricket books (special number 15, page 6) were wrongly dated. *Game in season* appeared in 1984, and *Three men at the match* in 1989.

A philosophy of chess endgame studies

Two recent contributions in my post provide food for thought.

When renewing his *EG* subscription, David Blundell described himself as "a bit disillusioned" with recent developments. "My problem is with the use of computers and tablebases during composition. This is rendering the majority of honoured studies unsolvable and soulless. Reading *EG* has become a frustrating experience - time and again I've tried to solve studies only to find that the entire edifice is supported by a pile of unintelligible computer analysis. What's the point spending time trying to solve a study that requires a computer to demonstrate its soundness? The problem is, you don't know in advance whether a study is composed using a computer or not. My solution is not to bother with any of them in the first place."

David Friedgood has invited me to print a rejoinder to my June remarks on the Nunn/Cumbers study and its predecessor.

"In your discussion of the Nunn/Cumbers study, you point to a fundamental question of the aesthetics of studies. It is a question you have posed - explicitly or implicitly - in virtually every issue of *BESN*: Which is better, a piquant idea, expressed with purity, or a complex, heavy work, showing perhaps a melange of motifs or a ponderous theme? Whereas you are a passionate and forceful proponent of the former, I am eclectic by nature and often find the conundrum, when applied to specific cases, quite insoluble.

"In this particular instance, I am on the side of the prize-winning version of this study. Not without some discomfort, however, for I agree enough with your view to feel that such a gorgeous first move does deserve a study to itself.

"The basic reason I have for my preference is that the richness of the final version of this study outweighs the pristine encapsulation of the wonderful key in the original version. I believe that this is a modern trend - to combine ideas within a study so that they deliver a blend of delicacies, rather than to focus on a single motif, even if it is such a novel one as 1 Ra2!!

"To emphasise this point, we should count the virtues of the final version a little more exhaustively. Nunn's extension, albeit adding a black queen and a white knight, provides us with a very desirable feature of any study - black counterplay. 2...Kh6 is a clever bid for stalemate and enhances the former initial position by having Black actively pose the question of how White will drive home his advantage.

"Secondly, there is a very nice quiet move 6 Rg2 with a two-move threat, despite the presence of a rampant black queen.

"Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the study shows the battery reversal theme, implemented by 8 Rh6+ and 9 Bf7+ in a most pleasingly natural setting.

"Finally, the whole is characterised by excellent flow, with no elaborate variations and sub-variations being required to justify the main line. It has a good length yet the excitement does not flag.

"To put it in culinary terms, the first version, exquisite though it is, is the aperitif; the final version is the satisfying main course!"

I am sure David Blundell's remarks will strike a chord with many, and I would not now spend time trying to solve a study unless it had been put forward for solution by somebody whom I knew to be a setter of realistic challenges. However, as a presenter I am willing to enlist the computer on the side of Black, and when the interest lies wholly in White's winning play to say that the reader or audience need not consider such-and-such an alternative line because the computer has shown that Black can hold out. David appears unwilling to do even this, a viewpoint which is defensible. But we fully agree about enlisting the computer on the side of White, and if its help is necessary to prove that White wins (for example, in a task composition) then I feel that what we have is a curiosity rather than a true "endgame study".

David Friedgood has stated matters extremely fairly, though I have to say - it is a minor point - that to me, all the other "battery reversal" studies that I have seen are outclassed by the Ivanov study which Timothy Whitworth and I quote as **14.12** in *Endgame magic*. There, a rook-bishop battery is not merely reversed but re-reversed, and a king-bishop battery is formed and fired as well. But my lack of enthusiasm for the extended version is not just because a stunning move has been made less stunning but because the starting position has become relatively characterless and untidy. As with too many contemporary studies, I look at the diagram, and find I don't really care what happens next.

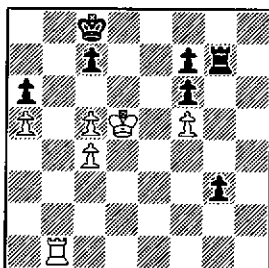
So what do I believe a good study *should* be? Some have practical value - they throw light on the nature of "book wins" and "book draws", or show how to play positions of certain kinds - but most come into the field of "chess for fun", not helping to put *A* five rating points ahead of *B* but illustrating the intrinsic beauty and sometimes the humour of chess. To achieve this, I think a study should have three properties:

- the starting position should be such as to invite attention;
- once found or explained, the solution should be easy to understand;
- there should be something in it which is worth understanding.

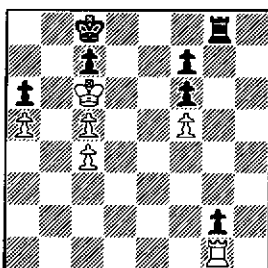
And I stress "or explained". Endgame studies lack the artificial simplification of "Mate within *n* moves", and may need commentary if the less expert reader is not to be bewildered. I normally present studies with multiple diagrams so that even a modest player can read and enjoy them without the need to get out board and men, and it was because the new editor of the *BCM* was unwilling to continue allowing more than one diagram per study that I asked him to place the column in other hands. Timothy and I originally wrote *Endgame magic* under the title *Chess endgame studies need not be difficult*, the eventual title being suggested by the publishers on commercial grounds, and while the resulting sales gave us no reason to question their judgement the original title did encapsulate what we were trying to do.

Of course, all things are relative, and the more striking the play, the more artificial the starting position that the reader may be willing to accept. But naturalness of position is an important virtue, and it is sad that so few natural positions now appear in prize lists. If tourney success goes to computer-assisted length and complexity, as increasingly seems to be happening, this is what composers who seek tourney success will provide; but all too often the results do not seem to be particularly entertaining, and I suspect that future generations will not look back on them with approval.

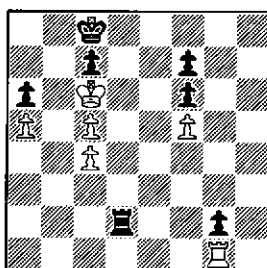
Recently published British originals



1 - draw



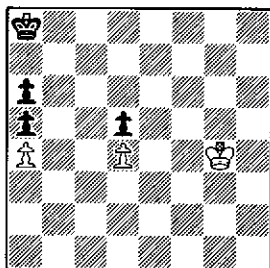
1a - 2 Rg1, after 2...Rg8



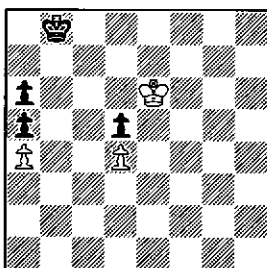
1b - main line, after 5...Rd2

1, a game-like reciprocal zugzwang study by Gordon Davies, was in the September *BCM*. 1 Kc6 g2, and now try 2 Rg1 Rg8 (see 1a): no, 3 Kd5 Kd7 4 c6+ Ke7, and after ...Rg5 Black's king will come down via g7 and support his g-pawn. But 2 Re1 threatens mate, and 2...Rg8 3 Rg1 gives 1a with Black to play. He can try 3...Rg3 4 Re1 Rd3 5 Rg1 Rd2 (see 1b), but 6 Rb1 (simplest) threatens 7 Rb8+ Kxb8 stalemate, and after 6...Re2 7 Rg1 he will not make progress.

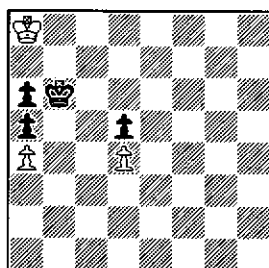
Studies for the *Braille Chess Magazine*



1 - win



1a - after 5 Ke6



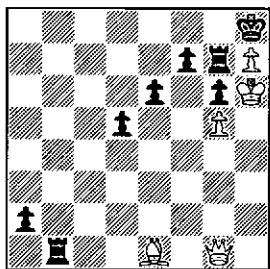
1b - after 10 Ka8

This feature has recently been absent because I have been using studies already quoted in *BESN*, but my September column included one that we have not yet seen here. 1 (Botvinnik, 4 Pr *Shakhmaty v SSSR* 1939, version by Moravec, *Revue FIDE* 1955) exploits the distant opposition (1 Kf5 Kb7 and draws, 2 Ke5 Kc7! 3 Kxd5 Kd7 4 Kc5 Kc7 and sacrificing the d-pawn won't help), but there is more to it than this. 1 Kg5 Ka7 2 Kg6 Ka8 3 Kf6 Kb7 4 Kf7 Kb8 (4...Kb6 5 Ke8 and much as main line) 5 Ke6 (see 1a) Kc7 (5...Kc8 6 Kd6! and 6...Kb7 7 Kxd5 now wins, or 6...Kd8 7 Kc6 and the a-pawns go) 6 Ke7! (6 Kxd5 fails as before) Kc6 7 Kd8 Kd6 8 Kc8 Kc6 9 Kb8 Kb6 10 Ka8! (see 1b), and the a-pawns will fall. Botvinnik had the kings on g5/b7, 1 Kf5! Kb6 2 Kf6! (drawn to my attention by Alain Villeneuve).

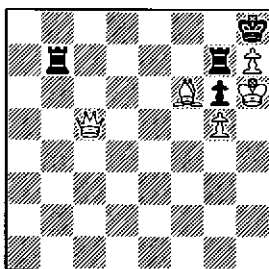
From the world at large

The Czech composition magazine *Šachová skladba* has been devoting a series of articles to the New Zealand composer Emil Melnichenko, with some notes on his life. His Ukranian grandfather emigrated from Rostov-on-Don in the face of Stalinism, and married and settled in pre-war Czechoslovakia. His father, although of socialist leanings, fled in his turn after the Communist take-over of 1948, and he himself was born in a displaced persons' camp at Hallein in Austria. The family was in due course forcibly relocated to New Zealand, where, after a long boat journey on which they were referred to by number rather than by name, they found themselves on a farm, speaking no English and with only the clothes they stood up in (their luggage having been stolen on the way). Initially, they worked for just board and lodging, but through intelligence and hard work they gradually made their way upwards.

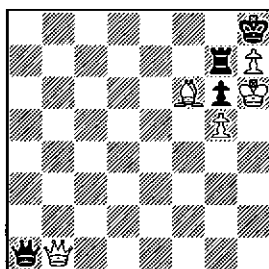
His family used to join with some other Czech families to celebrate Christmas and the New Year in the Czech style, but a Russian-sounding name was not an asset in the days of the Cold War and his parents decided to use the name "Bures". He discovered the truth by accident at the age of 23 from a letter written to his mother, and chose to revert to the original family name, converting the Czech "č" to the equivalent English "ch" in the interests of correct pronunciation. "He felt himself to be a Czech, his interests, outlook, and values were European" (my translation). *Šachová skladba* naturally gives his name in its Czech form, apparently greatly to his pleasure.



1 - win

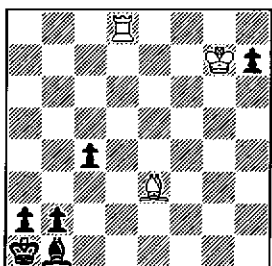


1a - 1...a1Q, after 6 Qc5

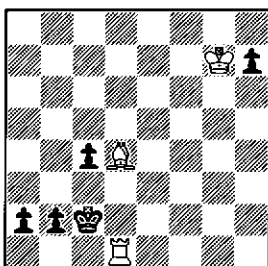


1b - main line, after 5 Qxb1

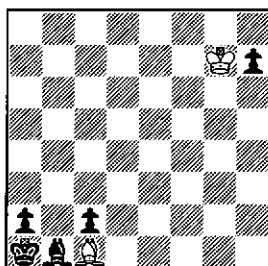
Melnichenko's studies tend towards the mildly exotic end of the spectrum, and 1 appeared in *Szachy* in 1976. Try 1 Qd4 for mate on g7: no, 1...a1Q 2 Bc3 Rh1+, and it is Black who will win. 1 Bc3 leaves the queen blocking the bottom rank, and if again 1...a1Q then 2 Bxa1 d4 3 Bxd4 e5 4 Bxe5 f6 5 Bxf6 Rb7 6 Qc5 (simplest) and soon mates (see 1a). But Black can sacrifice his pawns first, 1...d4 2 Bxd4 e5 3 Bxe5 f6 4 Bxf6 a1Q, and 5 Bxa1 Rxa1 6 Qxa1 will be stalemate. Hence 5 Qxb1 giving 1b, and the dance starts: 5...Qb2 (White threatened mate on b8) 6 Qc2 (Black threatened it on h2) Qc3 7 Qd3 Qd4 8 Qe4 and White's additional attack on a8 is decisive. Kotov discovered 1b in 1960 but he didn't publish this finale until 1977 (see 15.5 in *Endgame magic*), so by the normal criterion of publication date Melnichenko has the priority, quite apart from his version's having the worthwhile extension back to 1.



2 - win



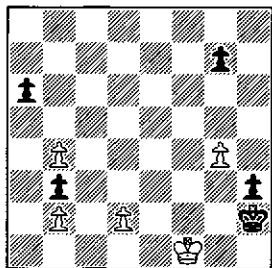
2a - 1 Bd4, after 5...Kc2



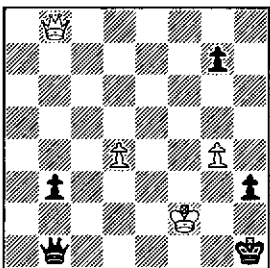
2b - main line, after 4 Bxc1

It has been suggested that my quotation of a single uncharacteristically simple study last time did Vasily Smyslov considerably less than justice, so here are a couple more. They appeared in a charming memoir by Oleg Pervakov in *EG* 181.

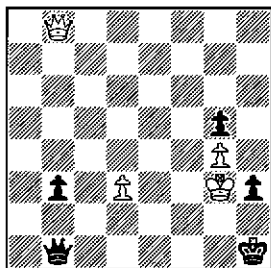
Black's weak spot in 2 (2003, from a collection *My studies*) is clearly b2, but the obvious 1 Bd4 fails: 1...Bc2! 2 Rb8 Bb3 3 Rf8 Kb1 4 Rf1+ Bd1! 5 Rxd1+ Kc2, and Black will even win (see 2a). Instead, 1 Rd1 c3 (1...h5 2 Bd4 h4 3 Rd2 and soon wins) 2 Bh6! (2 Bd4 blocks the king's direct route towards b2 and so costs a crucial tempo, 2...c2 3 Rcl h5 4-5 Kc5 h3 6 Kd5 h2 7 Kc4 h1Q 8 Rxh1 c1Q+ 9 Rxc1 stalemate) c2 3 Rc1! bxc1Q 4 Bxc1 (see 2b) h5 5-8 Kc3 h1Q 9 Bb2 mate.



3 - win



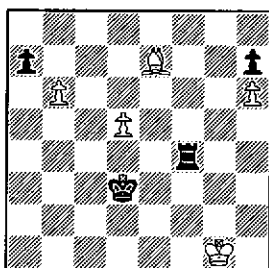
3a - 2 d4, after 6...b1Q



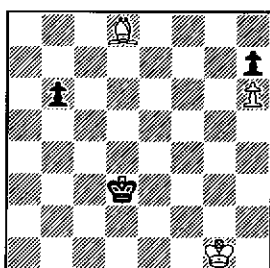
3b - 2 d3 g5, after 7...b1Q

Play in 3 (2004, from *My studies*) starts with the obvious 1 Kf2 Kh1, but the natural continuation 2 d4 leads nowhere: 2...a5 3 b5 (3 d5 is no better) a4 4 b6 a3 5 b7 axb2 6 b8Q b1Q (see 3a), and White cannot hope for more than a draw. Can we play 2 g5 a5 3 b5 etc and come down to 3a with the d-pawn still at d2, playing 7 Qg3 since Black now has no check on the second rank? No, the move of the g-pawn to g5 has offered him 7...Qf5+ instead. The winning move is 2 d3! blocking the line from b1 to e4. Now 2...a5 3-4 b6 a3 5 b7 axb2 6 b8Q b1Q gives 3a with the d-pawn on d3, and White can staircase in: 7 Qb7+ Kh2 8 Qc7+ Kh1 9 Qc6+ Kh2 10 Qd6+ Kh1 11 Qd5+ Kh2 12 Qe5+ Kh1 13 Qe4+ (ah!) and the rest is easy.

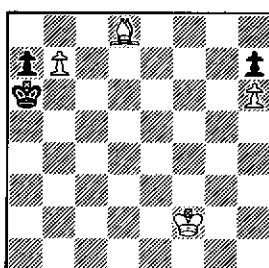
Most Black alternatives at move 2 can be met easily enough, but 2...g5 leads to a second line exploiting the cutting of the line b1-e4: 3 Kg3! a5 (3...h2 is clearly hopeless) 4 b5 a4 (4...Kg1 5 Kxh3 a4 6-7 b7 axb2 8 b8Q b1Q 9 Qh2+ and Black's new queen will fall) 5 b6 a3 6-7 b8Q b1Q (see 3b), and again White will staircase in.



4 - win



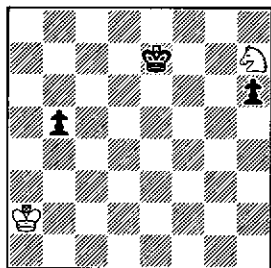
4a - 1 d6, after 4 Bxd8



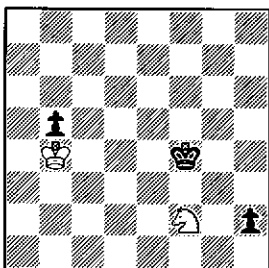
4b - main line, after 6...Ka6

Last time, we saw some studies with stalemate by promotion on b1, and a position where two dark bishops would win though one could not. Jaroslav Polášek has drawn my attention to Troitzky's 4 (*Shakmatny listok* 1925), which combines the two ideas.

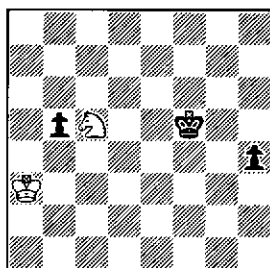
Try 1 d6: no, 1...axb6 2 d7 Rd4 3 d8Q Rxd8 4 Bxd8 gives 4a, and Black would draw even without the b-pawn. The winning line is 1 b7 Rg4+ 2 Kf2 (the most natural, though any king move appears to win) Rg8 3 d6 Kc4 (Black plays for stalemate on a6) 4 d7 Kb5 5 d8Q Rxd8 6 Bxd8 Ka6 giving 4b. It is soon seen that 7 b8N+ Kb7 8 Nd7 Kc8 is only drawn whichever piece White rescues, but White has 7 b8B! with the win we saw on page 471 last time (the a-pawn won't help Black).



5 - draw



5a - 2 Kb4, after 7...Kf4



5b - main line, after 4...h4

For *BESN*'s final study, let us turn to the always popular David Gurgendize. 5 (64 1970), which he composed as a schoolboy, was his contribution to *A study apiece*, the book we looked at in June. It is a development of a famous study by Grigoriev.

Black to play would win (1...Kf7 2-3 Kb4 Kxh7 4 Kxb5 h5 etc), so White must go for the pawn: 1 Ka3! Why not Kb3? We shall see. Now 1...Kf7 leads to 2-3 Kxb5 Kxh7 4 Kc4 and White will get back to f1 and draw, but Black has 1...Ke6, and after 2 Kb4 Kf5 3 Nf8 h5 4 Nd7 h4 5 Nc5 h3 6 Nd3 h2 7 Nf2 Kf4 he will win (see 5a). White must bring the knight into action at once, 2 Nf8+, and after 2...Kf5 3 Nd7 h5 4 Nc5 h4 we have 5b. Now White has time for 5 Nb3! aiming for f1, and after 5...h3 6 Nd2 h2 (else Nf1 stops the pawn) 7 Nf1 (anyway) h1Q 8 Ng3+ he has his draw.

Botvinnik and Spassky both thought very highly of this. Grigoriev (6.4 in *Endgame magic*, and in numerous other books) had set the knight journey via b3; Gurgendize beautifully added the need for the White king to leave this square free.

News and notices

Readers are asked to note that I rely wholly on the representations of notice givers, except where I make a personal endorsement, and that no personal liability is accepted either by myself or by any other person involved in the production and distribution of this magazine.

Meetings. John Roycroft tells me that the next **Pushkin House** meeting will be on **Friday January 14** at 6.00 pm (offers of talks to roycroft@btinternet.com please). 5A Bloomsbury Square (Holborn tube, Bloomsbury Way, SW corner of the square). Further meetings have been provisionally arranged for April 1, July 1, and October 7. For confirmation of these dates nearer the time, please register your interest with John (e-mail address above) or visit the Pushkin House web site (www.pushkinhouse.org).

Mattison's Chess Endgame Studies. Timothy Whitworth reports that the computer has shed new light on several analytical points, and he has produced a brief Postscript to his 1997 revised edition. Copies are available from him free of charge (8 Sedley Taylor Road, Cambridge CB2 8PW, timothy.whitworth@techademic.net).

And Harold van der Heijden's **Endgame study database IV** is now available, at a price of 50 euros (which, for 75,000+ endgame studies, is incredibly good value for money). Visit www.hhdbiv.nl for download and payment instructions.

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To future anthologists thinking of rummaging through *BESN* for material: I shall be very pleased for this to happen, but please note that while my coverage of British studies has tried to be representative, that of foreign studies has been unashamedly personal, and many composers have been under-represented because collections of their work are available elsewhere. Please note also that *BESN* has always been an exercise in journalism rather than scholarship. I have relied on secondary sources (in particular, on Harold van der Heijden's databases and on *EG*), and have checked the primary sources only in the cases of the *BCM*, the *Chess Amateur*, and a few others readily available to me. Those of a truly scholarly bent will wish to do better.

Envoi. I have been attracted to endgame studies ever since I became seriously interested in chess. To produce a new and truly first-class endgame study is given to few - I certainly would not claim to have done so myself - but anyone with a modicum of chess talent can become a *presenter* of studies, and as more and more of the ultimately finite number of sound studies are uncovered the role of the presenter will become ever more important. There will always be new enthusiasts to be shown the delights of our world, and there are fewer more satisfying ways of spending time on chess, even if only informally among friends, than in introducing them to it.

If you want to honour the memory of *BESN*, become a study presenter yourself.