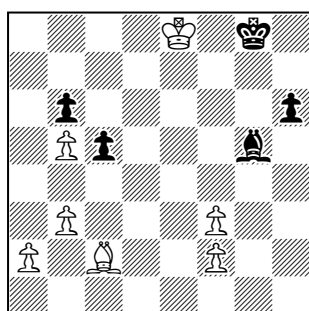


Two classic modern endgame studies

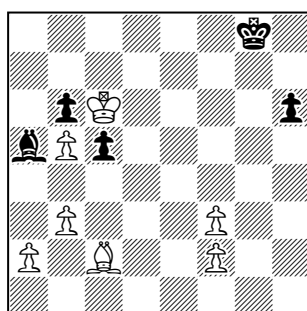
John Beasley, April 2015 (replacing “A classic modern endgame study”, March/May 2013)

Those who used to read *British Endgame Study News* will know that my enthusiasm for the contemporary chess “endgame study” has become very limited; all too often, it seems to me that we are presented with a starting position so artificial and complicated as to destroy any interest in what happens after it. It is therefore a great pleasure to record two recent prizewinning studies by Ladislav Salai Jr in which subtle and sparkling play arises from remarkably open and believable starting positions.

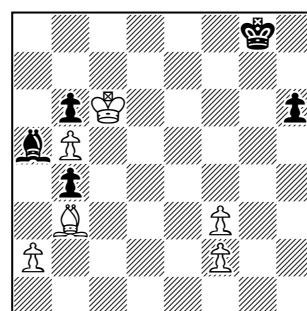
I took first prize for studies in *Šachová skladba* 2011-12. I have translated Emil Vlasák’s commentary in issue 118 of *Šachová skladba*, anything in square brackets [...] being my addition.



1 - White to play and win

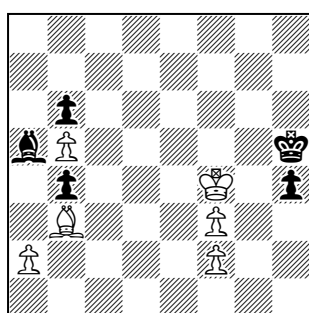


1a - 1 Kd7, after 2...Ba5

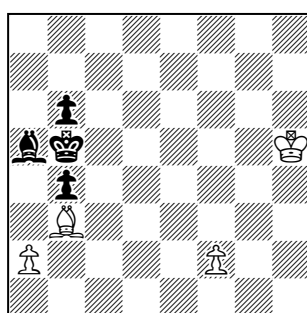


1b - after 4 Bb3+

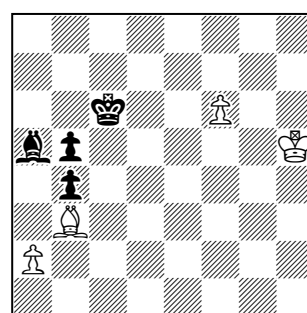
“A perfect *roman policier* for the player. In order to identify the villain, the solver-detective must see very, very far ahead. Let us analyse with him: **1 Kd7** [threat 2 Kc7 and 3 Kxb6, so the Black bishop must come round to a5] **Bd2 2 Kc6 Ba5** [see **1a**] **3 b4!** Already we have a striking piece of “corking”. The normal 3 a3 Kg7 4 b4 cxb4 5 axb4 Bxb4 6 Kxb6 Kf6 7 Kd6 Be1 8 b6 Bxf2 9 b3 Bg3 leads nowhere. **3...cxb4** [3...Bxb4 4 Kxb6 is soon seen to be hopeless for Black] **4 Bb3+** [see **1b**]. The point; now White will have “half a bishop” more. But while this exercises a beautiful influence along its long diagonal, it cannot move, which shows itself to be a fatal defect. After **4...Kg7 5 Kd5 Kf6 6 Ke4 h5! 7 Kf4 Kg6 8 Ke5 h4 9 Kf4 Kh5** [see **1c** below] White is in zugzwang, and the win escapes him.



1c - after 9...Kh5



1d - 1 f4, 5...Kf8, 10...Kxb5

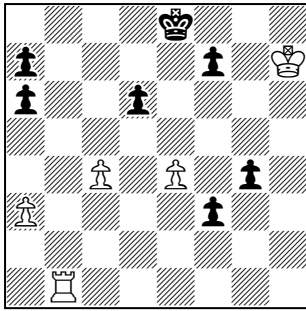


1e - after 13 f6

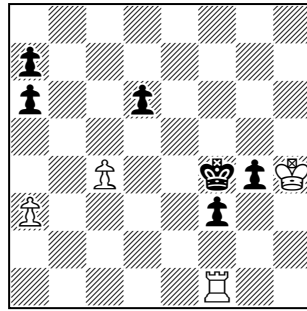
“The villain is the pawn on f3, which deprives White of a crucial tempo. Once this has been discovered, everything unfolds relatively smoothly: **1 f4!! Bxf4 2 Kd7 Bd2 3 Kc6 Ba5** [1a without the pawn on f3] **4 b4 cxb4 5 Bb3+** [1b without the pawn on f3] **Kg7 6 Kd5 Kf6 7 Ke4 h5 8 Kf4 Kg6 9 Ke5 h4 10 Kf4 Kh5** [1c without the pawn on f3] **11 f3!** The point, White wins.”

Emil also gives a line where Black leaves his h-pawn to its fate and goes for the pawn on b5, thereby extricating his bishop in the hope that it will be in time to stop White’s f-pawn. This defence is perhaps most easily explored by playing it after 5 Bb3+ (**1b** without the pawn on f3): 5...Kf8 6 Kd6 h5 (the direct move ...Ke7 being temporarily unavailable, Black might as well advance his h-pawn and drag White’s king further from the potential queening square f8) 7 Ke5 Ke7 8-10 Kxh5 Kxb5 (see **1d**) 11 f4 Kc6 12 f5 b5 13 f6 (see **1e**) Bd8 (nothing else is better) 14 Kg6 Kd7 15 f7 Be7 16 Kg7 and wins. Much the same happens if Black switches to this defence later in the play; however and whenever he does it, he will end up at least one tempo short.

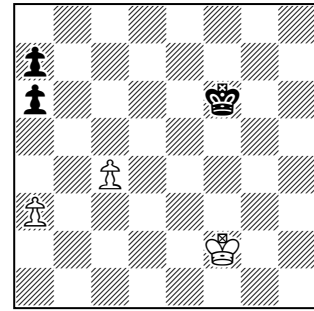
- Two classic modern endgame studies -



2 - White to play and win

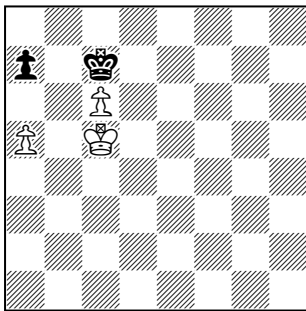


2a - after 5...Kf4

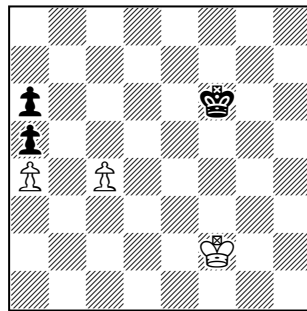


2b - after 10 Kxf2

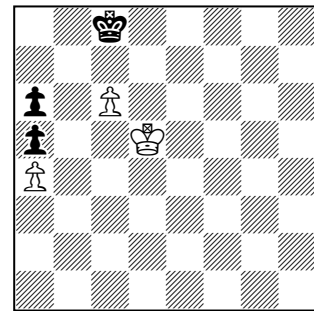
2 took first prize in *The Problemist* 2012-13. 1 Rf1 stops the Black pawns from advancing, and after 1...Ke7 2 Kh6 Ke6 (or 2...Kf6 3 Kh5) 3 Kg5 won't White mop up? Indeed he will, but Black can do better: 1...f5! This releases f7 for the Black king, and after 2 exf5 Kf7 3 Kh6 Kf6 4 Kh5 Kxf5 5 Kh4 Kf4 we have 2a. White can now go for the d-pawn, 6 Rd1 (and indeed he has nothing better, since a king move is hopeless and interpolating 6 a4 a5 won't help), and after 6...f2 he can play 7 Rxd6 because 7...f1Q will be met by 8 Rf6+. However, Black also has 7...g3, and after 8 Rf6+ he has 8...Ke5! Now 9 Kxg3 Kxf6 10 Kxf2 gives 2b, where White has lost his rook advantage but in return is effectively a passed c-pawn ahead; is this enough for a win?



2c - draw



2d - 3 f6, after 12 Kxf2



2e - after 18...Kc8

In fact it has been known since the 19th century that positions like this are only drawn; all the defender has to do is to put his king in front of White's c-pawn and keep his own a7 pawn firmly at home. The key position is shown in 2c. Here Black plays 1...Kd8! (the more natural move, though 1...Kb8 also draws), and after 2 Kd6 Kc8 3 c7 a6 White must either abandon the c-pawn or give stalemate. But if the Black pawn is on a6 White will have an easy win, and moving the White pawn back to a4 and adding a second Black pawn on a5 won't make any difference.

So White must persuade Black to advance his a-pawns. He can't do it from 2b, so he must manoeuvre to reach 2b with them already advanced, and the way, after 1 Rf1 f5 2 exf5 Kf7, is to play 3 f6!! Now 3...Kxf6 4 Kh6 Kf5 5 Kh5 Kf4 6 Kh4 gives 2a with Black to play, and what is he to do? A king move lets White mop up at once, and 6...g3 isn't a great deal better (7 Kh3 g2 8 Ra1 Ke3 9 Kg3 Ke2 10 Rb1 Ke3 11 Re1+ Kd2 12 Kf2 K~ 13 Kxf3). This leaves 6...a5 7 a4 a6, and after 8 Rd1 f2 9 Rxd6 g3 10 Rf6+ Ke5 11 Kxg3 Kxf6 12 Kxf2 we have 2b with the Black pawns duly advanced (see 2d).

The win from 2d is book, but it's non-trivial book so let's play it out. 12...Ke6 13 Ke3 Ke5 14 Kd3 Kd6 15 Kd4 (according to Harold van der Heijden's invaluable "Endgame study database IV", we now have a position reached in analysis published by W. Schelfhout in 1920) Kc6 16 c5 Kd7 17 Kd5 Kc7 18 c6 Kc8! (see 2e) 19 Kc4/Kd4 (19 Kd6 Kd8 20 c7+ Kc8 throws away the win, but White can triangulate) Kd8 20 Kd4/Kc4 Kc8 21 Kd5 (2e with Black to play) Kc7 (21...Kd8 22 Kd6 Kc8 23 c7 etc) 22 Kc5 Kc8 23 Kb6 Kb8 24 Kxa6 Kc7 25 Kb5 Kc8 26 Kxa5 Kc7 27 Kb5 and wins.

I hope these little gems will be widely quoted and anthologized; they deserve better than to be left to languish in the obscurity of composition magazines. The play is not wholly new - the finish to 2, although an integral part of the study, is book, while the bottling-up manoeuvre in 1 had already been shown by A. P. Grin (1 HM *Chervony Girnik* 1988) - but nowadays such partial anticipations are to be expected. It will be noticed that although the spectacular sacrifices 1 f4!! and 3 f6!! are superficially similar, their motivations are quite different; in 2, the object is to lose a move straight away, while in 1 it is to free a square allowing White to lose a move later on.