

The Problemist Studies Award 2012- 2013, by Gady Costeff

Non-honoured Studies

I received 54 anonymous studies from director Yochanan Afek. This bountiful harvest has much to do with Yochanan's tireless promotion of our art, making *The Problemist* column one of the very best. I enjoyed trying to understand the studies and thank the director for his confidence. My main purpose in an award is to provide composers with feedback about their work. By its nature such commentary suffers from my personal biases but I hope it also illuminates and thus may be useful.

Although I comment individually on each study below, three general comments are worth articulating since they apply to quite a few studies. Firstly, thematic tries can add great artistic value to a study but they may require extra material or other concessions related to play. Whether the artistic benefits are worth the cost is up to the composer, but it is certainly his responsibility to find the best setting. In this tourney there are both exemplary specimens as well as examples where composers terminated their work too soon. Secondly, checks generally reduce move choice tenfold and so they are a simple way to force play. However, without providing artistic compensation for such forcing moves, the composer risks creating an execution rather than an interesting, double edged fight. Thirdly, and finally, the use of database positions and strong chess engines has improved our ability to produce analytically correct studies as well as make them longer. Beauty, however, may require more than accuracy or length.

The following studies were omitted from the award. They are all interesting and I enjoyed even the simplest among them. The line for the award has to be drawn somewhere but this is an arbitrary line, which inevitably excludes much beauty. Ultimately, such personal judgements are not to be taken too seriously.

E1074 – Martin Minski: The main attraction here is the threefold systematic movement with capture avoidance performed by the white king and black pawn. This effect has been accomplished previously in much more pristine settings including pawn studies. (Rabinovitch, HHdbIV.68173 – correction in *Israeli Chess Problem Art*).

E1075 - Michal Hlinka & Jaroslav Poláček: Double pin-stalemate but 7 captures over 8 moves is a lot even for this notoriously challenging theme.

E1073 – Valery Vlasenko: A straightforward logical study with 6 piece zugzwang. The value of such studies depends heavily on the thematic try, which here is less natural than the key, requires four units and does not add any interesting play.

E1077 – Jorden Van Foreest: 1.Bd5 closes the d-file in advance allowing White to pursue a mating attack. A good training study.

E1078 – Siegfried Hornecker: A real challenge to handle four black pawns on the third rank.

E1079 – John Nunn: 5.Rg4! is the star move after which White has just enough material to force mate.

E1080 – Daniel Keith: Two good white sacrifices lead to a pretty mate with two selfblocks, but seven of the eight moves are checks and the other is a forcing capture.

E1082 – Borislav Ilinčić- The key is a surprising sacrifice but with 11 checks in 13 moves it feels like a technical conversion.

E1084 – Alain Pallier: The final P-BS positional draw is known from Zalkind 1912. The author adds some preceding play but the introduction eliminates 4 units with no artistic contribution. There is at least one alternative setting that allows for a more artistic development.

E1086 – Anatoly Skripnik & Janos Mikitovics: The 3...Sxf3 line is of much greater interest and should become the only main line. For so much material one expects a little more.

E1090 – Mario Garcia & Iuri Akobia: Following 3.Kxg7 we are in Q-RRP database territory. White attacks the black rook and pawn so as to tie them down, and uses the resulting sub-optimal configuration to force a perpetual. The necessary supporting analysis of such a position is incomprehensible to me.

E1091 – Valery Vlasenko: The play revolves around arriving at the BP-SP mutual zugzwang with black to move. 5 units give their life to effect the thematic try. In the thematic try, 7...Kh8! is an attractive move to the corner.

E1092 – Edward Pallaszh: A “basic pawn endgame” I would no doubt lose.

E1093 – Ilham Aliev: An easy pawn breakthrough study with a Reti manoeuvre thrown in.

E1095 – Yochanan Afek- White uses a knight promotion trick to win a tempo which allows

him to reach a mutual zugzwang position on the right foot.

E1097(c) – Amos Gilboa: This does not add anything to Melnichenko, 3rd Commendation, 1976 Olympiad.

E1098 – Pavel Arestov- Forcing play with 9 captures leads to stalemate or positional draw. An enjoyable study despite the bloodbath.

E1099 – Wieland Bruch & Martin Minski: A study to challenge our aesthetics. Nowotny, Plachutta, reciprocal dual avoidance are all shown here, in addition to two variations with double and triple pin stalemates. On the other hand, two of the stalemate pins are set in the initial position and the majority of pieces do not move during the solution so their role is purely technical.

E1100 – Edward Pallasz- A pawn study with capture avoidance.

E1101 – Ilham Aliev- This pawn study extends the play of a well known position showing echo variations.

E1102 – Cedric C. Lytton: SP-BB is normally lost but here White can force a drawing simplification.

E1106 – Yochanan Afek: The key makes use of the same tempo-winning knight promotion of E1095. After move 3 this is anticipated (3rd Prize *Kommunizhmu*, 1977).

E1108 – Peter Krug: An elegant king hunt. The black queen must guard against mate until 6.Ra2!! creates the critical zugzwang.

E1109 – Jan Timman: In the final position the black bishop obstructs the rook on either the a-file or b-file, in each case enabling white promotion. An idea that shares something with the celebrated game Ortueta-Sanz. The study itself is perhaps a correction of Herbtzman, *De Schaakwereld*, 1937.

E1111 – Mark Thornton: A pawn study based on a game from 1905 with a good key and of theoretical importance.

E1112 – Vitaly Kovalenko†: Following a short introduction we reach a positional draw based on the caging of the black king which not even the rampant black queen can help. Completely anticipated by Kasparyan, 1st Prize *Revista de Romana de Sah* 1959.

E1114 – Caspar Bates: 7.Sg3! (7.Sf2?) is the main point of this study stopping black from occupying the a7-g1 diagonal with tempo. I am not sure that the introduction adds much to this.

E1117 – Alain Pallier: An undemanding monster.

E1119 – Geir Sune Tallaksen Østmoe: An attack culminates in a well known mating pattern. See Sindelar, 1st Commendation UV CSTV, 1973.

E1120 – Michal Hlinka & Lubos Kekely: A clear-cut mating attack that would make a good training exercise.

E1121 – Peter Krug: A tale of two corners. The white king, rook and two knights overcome the royal black couple at the northeast corner while the southwest black units are strictly bystanders.

E1123 – Steffen Slumstrup Nielsen: The mechanism is known from a win study by Simkhovich, HM *Shakhmaty v SSSR*, 1940. The author aimed lower here with a perpetual check and deserves credit for the economical setting.

E1124 – Andrej Jasik: A couple of Nowotnys but it is a major task to try and improve on Benko's classic 1st Prize, *Magyar Sakkelet*, 1977.

E1125 – John Nunn: Knight and bishop overcome a queen in early twentieth century style.