



*Prizewinners
explained*

The Pawn Endings of Vitaly Kovalenko

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With the death of IM Vitaly Semenovitch Kovalenko (23v1947- 5iii2014) the art of the endgame study lost another fine composer of the old classical school. He lived in the remote city of Vladivostok thus it was for us a rare and pleasant opportunity to meet him during the 51st annual composition congress in Jurmala (Latvia) in 2008.

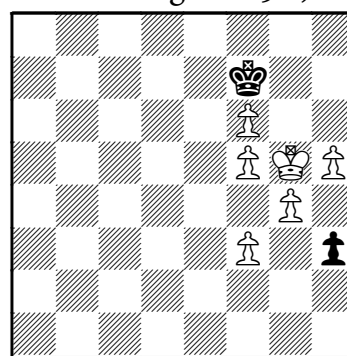
He composed more than 500 player friendly studies (he also composed direct mate problems) and these were published all over the world, starting from 1963 until his last days; he was awarded with a number of prizes and other distinctions. Occasionally he worked together with other composers and his life-long co-operation with his celebrated hometown mate Yuri Bazlov was particularly successful, resulting in some 50 quality co-productions. In 2007 he was awarded the title of International Master for Chess Composition, a well-deserved recognition for a rich 50-year career.

His studies display a wide range of attractive ideas employing a large number of themes and motifs. Nevertheless, during his long career he always had a soft spot for pawn endings. Vitaly Semenovitch used various motifs of the pawn ending, such as tempo-play, opposition, excelsior and under-promotion, to name just a few. Nevertheless, I have been personally more interested in those pawn studies that manage to double a basic element in two main variations on different files, ranks or diagonals. Even if they are sometimes not particularly beautiful, I still find them attractive when they create a kind of harmonious echo or, even better, as an echo chameleon. On top of their artistic

merits there are also more prosaic reasons to make them special: no matter how simple they are, they hardly ever appear in over the board practice. However, this is just healthy jealousy on the part of someone who fails to create such wonders himself.

Let us have a look at some examples. The stalemate is a natural and effective motif to start with:

A.1. V. Kovalenko
2nd comm. Magadan 50 JT 1988



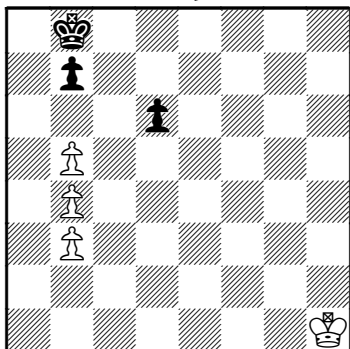
g5f7 0000.51 6/2 Draw

1.h6 h2 2.h7 h1Q 3.f4, and a): 3...Qxh7 stalemate!, or b) 3...Ke8 4.Kg6 Kf8 5.g5! (5.f7? Qc6+! 6.f6 Qe4+ wins) 5...Qh2 6.f7 Qb2 7.f6 Qb1+ 8.f5 Qh1 9.h8Q+ Qxh8 stalemate!

Even if not the most exciting play it is still a perfect Chameleon Echo: all pieces are “climbing” one rank up to create the new stalemate and doing so change their colour.

The centenary of Nicolay Dmitryevich Grigoriev (1895-1938), the legendary pawn ending specialist, was celebrated in 1995 by a composing tourney. Here is one favourite of mine:

A.2. N. Grigoriev
2nd *Shakhmatny Listok* 1929

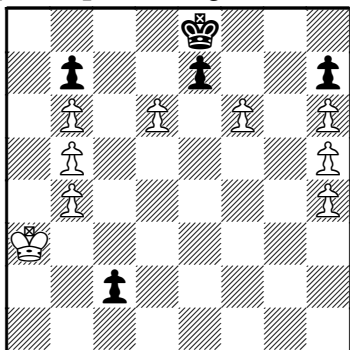


h1b8 0000.32 4/3 Draw

1.Kg2! (1.b6? Kc8 2.Kg2 Kd7 3.b5 Ke6 wins)
1...Kc7 2.Kf3! Kd7 (Kb6; Ke4) **3.Kf4!** (3.Ke4?
Ke6 4.Kd4 d5! 5.Ke3 Ke5 wins) **3...Ke6 4.Ke4!**,
and now: a) **4...b6 5.Kd4! d5 6.Ke3 (Kc3) Ke5**
7.Kd3 d4 8.Kc4! Ke4 stalemate, or b) **4...d5+**
5.Kd4! Kd6! 6.b6! Ke6 (6...Kc6 7.Ke5 Kxb6
8.Kxd5 Kb5 9.Kd6 Kxb4 10.Kc7 b5 11.Kb6 draws)
7.b5! Kd6 8.b4! Ke6 9.Kc5! Ke5 stalemate!

Kovalenko was probably inspired to commemorate the occasion with this entry:

A.3. V. Kovalenko
1st/2nd special prize Grigoriev 100 MT 1995



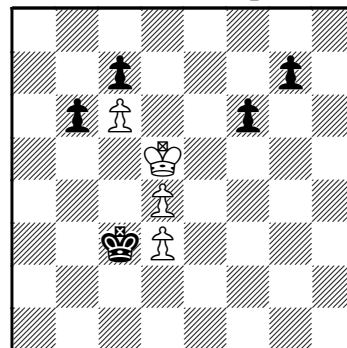
a3e8 0000.84 9/5 Draw

Following the obvious key **1.Kb2** the solution splits into two symmetrical variations: a) **1...exd6 2.Kxc2 Kf7 3.Kd3 Kxf6 4.Ke4** (4.Kc4? Ke5 5.Kd3 Kd5 or 4.Kd4? Ke6 5.Ke4 d5+ 6.Kd4 Kd6 win) **4...Ke6 5.Kd4 d5 6.Kc5 Ke5** stalemate, or b) **1...exf6 2.Kxc2 Kd7 3.Kd3 Kxd6 4.Ke4 Ke6 5.Kf4 f5 6.Kg5 Ke5** stalemate.

It is extremely rare to show an echo built up by just using pawns as the raw material. That is why the rest of the examples already include the promoted queens. Next is the well-trodden

skewer shown by Kovalenko (and others) in a pair of symmetrical echoing thematic lines:

A.4. V. Kovalenko
1st hon. ment. Mikhoap 35 JT 2006

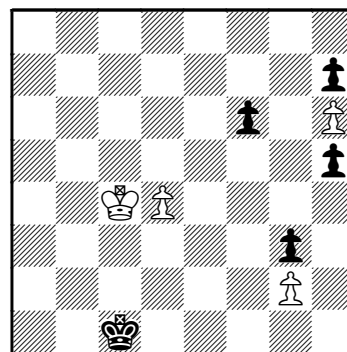


d5c3 0000.34 4/5 Wi

1.Ke6 Kxd4 2.Kd7 with two echo lines:
a) **2...b5 3.Kxc7 b4 4.Kd6 b3 5.c7 b2 6.c8Q b1Q 7.Qc5+ Kxd3 8.Qf5+ and 9.Qxb1** wins, or
b) **2...f5 3.Kxc7 f4 4.Kxb6 f3 5.c7 f2 6.c8Q f1Q 7.Qc5+ Kxd3 8.Qb5+ and 9.Qxf1** wins.

We conclude with the ultimate chess motif: mate! The highlight of this selection is this co-authored gem:

A.5. Y. Bazlov & V. Kovalenko
1st hon. ment. Mkhedruli 1975



c4c1 0000.34 4/5 Win

1.Kd3 Kd1 2.d5 h4 3.d6 h3 4.d7, and: a) **4...h2 5.d8Q h1Q 6.Qd4** (avoiding the beautiful trap: 6.Qxf6? Ke1 7.Qa1+ Kf2 8.Qxh1 stalemate!) **6...Qf1+ 7.Kc3+ Ke2 8.Qd2** mate, or: b) **4...h2 5.d8Q g1Q 6.Qxf6 Ke1 7.Qe5+ Kf2 8.Qe2** mate.

Even if pawn endings were not as prominent in Kovalenko's works as they have been for Grigoriev or Zinar, he still made a significant contribution to this sub-genre. Rest in Peace, Vitaly Semenovich!