

Prizewinners explained

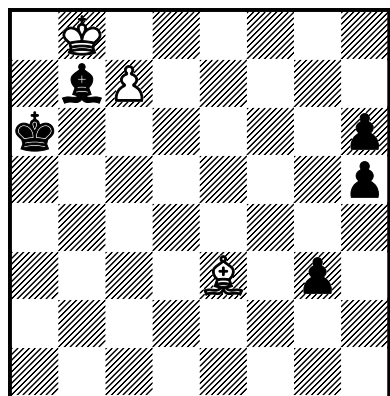
TOUGH NUTS

YOCHANAN AFEK

I would like to offer another look at two of the most prominent events of recent years, this time from a different angle. As long as the art of chess composition expresses various forms of chess struggle, difficulty should by definition be one of the criteria to assess the value of an endgame study. Certainly not a major one, as some judges-solvers might suggest, yet still of certain importance. That is not to advocate difficulty for the sake of difficulty alone as often demonstrated in some computer-generated senseless sequence of moves, but rather to intensify an artful piece of chess fight with an original idea that gradually strives to reach a dramatic climax.

What both selected studies have in common is that in addition to being awarded with special prizes in those mega tourneys they seem considerably tough nuts to crack. In the first tourney I acted as the judge and I was especially impressed by “the deliberate loss of two tempi and the sacrifice of the only white pawn to gain time”. Naturally I did not ignore the complexity and the difficulty of the solution which turn this harmonious piece of art into a decent challenge for keen solvers.

A.1 Nikolai Kralin & Oleg Pervakov
1st-2nd Special Prize Corus 70 JT, 2008



b8a6 0040.13 3/5 Draw

The opposite-coloured bishops might offer considerable survival prospects but great precision is called for in view of the massive pawn thrust threatening to roll down the king-side.

1.Bf4!

Winning the black bishop is the most serious try which would almost do the trick: 1.c8Q? Bxc8 2.Kxc8 Kb5 3.Kd7 Kc4 4.Ke6 Kd3 5.Bf4 g2 6.Bh2 Ke4 7.Kf6 Kf3 8.Kf5 h4! 9.Kg6 Kg4! but not 9...h3? 10.Kh5 g1Q 11.Bxg1 Kg2 12.Kg4! h5+ 13.Kh4 Reciprocal zugzwang with Black to move! 10.Kxh6 Kh3 11.Bg1 Kg3 where the pawns are unstoppable. 1.Bxh6? even proves to be worse after 1...h4 2.Bf4 Kb6! 3.c8Q Bxc8 4.Kxc8 Kc6 5.Bb8 Kd5 6.Kd7 Ke4 7.Ke6 Kf3.

1...g2!

1...h4 2.c8Q Bxc8 3.Kxc8 Kb5 4.Kd7 Kc4 5.Ke6 Kd3 6.Kf5.

2.Be3!

The only way to obtain full control of the running pawns by the bishop is, paradoxically, to lose a pair of vital tempi! Even when this concept is fully grasped, precision is still required: 2.Bh2? Kb6! 3.c8Q (Bg1+ Kc6;) 3...Bxc8 4.Kxc8 Kc6 5.Kd8 Kd5 6.Ke7 Ke4 7.Kf6 Kf3 8.Kg6 Kg4 9.Kxh6 h4 10.Kg6 Kh3 11.Bg1 Kg3 etc.

2...h4 3.Bg1!

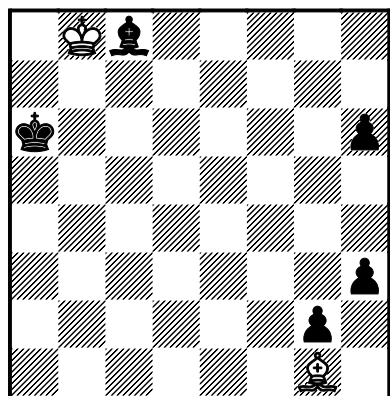
Again, the only move: 3.Bf2? h3 4.Bg1 h5 5.c8Q Bxc8 6.Kc7 Kb5 7.Kd6 Kc4 8.Ke5 Kd3 9.Kf4 h2! 10.Bxh2 Ke2 11.Kg3 Kf1 12.Kh4 Bg4!

3...h3

3...h5 4.Bf2 h3 5.Bg1 h4 6.c8Q Bxc8 7.Kxc8 Kb5 8.Kd7 Kc4 9.Ke6 Kd3 10.Kf5

Ke2 11.Kg4 Kf1 12.Bh2 g1Q+ 13.Bxg1 Kg2 14.Kxh4.

4.c8Q! Bxc8



5.Kc7!!

The cherry on the cake! 5.Kxc8? is the thematic try: 5...Kb5 6.Kd7 Kc4 7.Ke6 Kd3 8.Kf5 Ke2 9.Kg4 Kf1 10.Bh2 g1Q+ 11.Bxg1 Kg2! 12.Kh4 h5! again with an amazing position of reciprocal zugzwang. Instead White is ready to avoid recapturing the bishop for just a single tempo which he so desperately needs in order to get to the key square g3 in time.

5...Kb5 6.Kd6 Kc4 7.Ke5 Kd3 8.Kf4 h2!

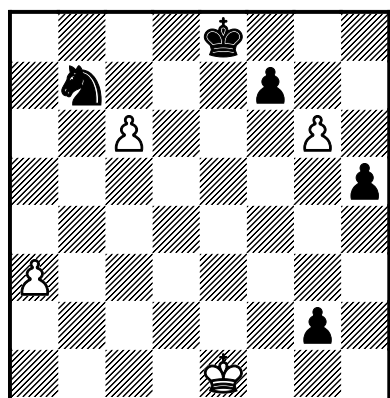
8...Ke2 9.Kg3 Kf1 10.Kh2

9.Bxh2 Ke2 10.Kg3 Kf1 11.Kh4!

Mission accomplished!

A.2 Yochanan Afek

2nd special prize Dvoretsky 60 JT 2007



e1e8 0003.33 4/5 Draw

In the second event I was one of the participants. I chose to give it a try with one of the most difficult studies (mainly for composing!) I have ever created. I kept it on standby for a couple of years awaiting an appropriate opportunity which indeed popped up when my

friend Mark Dvoretsky turned 60. I was asked by a couple of people to explain it with the help of some more digestible text so here it is:

1.Kf2

Not 1.gxf7+? Kxf7 2.Kf2 Sd6 3.Kxg2 Ke7 4.Kh3 Sf5 wins.

1...Sd6 2.g7 Se4+ 3.Kxg2 Sf6 4.Kh3!

The right way! The alternative plan, to advance the both passed pawns, would fail because of the lack of a single tempo: 4.a4? Kd8 5.Kg3 Kc7 6.Kh4 Kxc6 7.Kg5 Sg8 8.Kxh5 Kb6 9.Kg5 Ka5 10.Kf5 Kxa4 11.Ke5 Kb3! (But not 11...Kb4? 12.Kd4 Kb3 13.Kd3 Kb2 14.Kd2 Kb1 15.Kd1 Se7 16.Kd2 positional draw!) 12.Kd5 Kc3 13.Kc5 Kd3 14.Kd5 Ke3 15.Ke5 Kf3 16.Kf5 Kg3 17.Kg5 Kh2! 18.Kh4 f6! 19.Kg4 Se7 wins. In the long process of composing this study I used a couple of its by-products to create two smaller scaled miniatures which eventually won prizes in earlier tournaments. On this line, for example, my 2nd special prize in Gurgendize 50 JT 2004 was based. In fact we have here a study within a study! The question: why not 4.Kg3? will soon become clear following the fifth move.

4...Sg8!

Black for his part must also choose the right plan. Rushing to the running passed pawns would prove hasty and premature: 4...Kd8 5.Kh4 Kc7 6.Kg5 Sg8 7.Kxh5 Kxc6 8.Kg5 Kb5 9.Kf5 Ka4 10.Ke5 Kxa3 11.Kd6 Kb4 12.Kd7 f5 13.Ke6 f4 14.Kf7 Sh6+ 15.Kg6 Sg8 16.Kf7 =; Or 4...Ke7 5.Kh4 Kd6 6.Kg5 Sg8 7.Kxh5 Kxc6 8.Kg5 =. Instead Black should patiently build up a fortress. The term "fortress" usually refers to a positional draw where the other player is deprived of any further progress. Here, however, the fortress is simply aimed at stopping the white king from penetrating the promoting area.

5.a4!

Time for action on the other wing! 5.Kh4? f6! 6.Kxh5 Se7! 7.a4 Kf7! 8.Kh6 Ke6! Wins.

5...Kd8

If White had played earlier 4.Kg3? then now 5...Se7! 6.a5 Sf5+! 7.Kf4 Sxg7 8.a6 Se6! wins!

6.Kh4 f6!

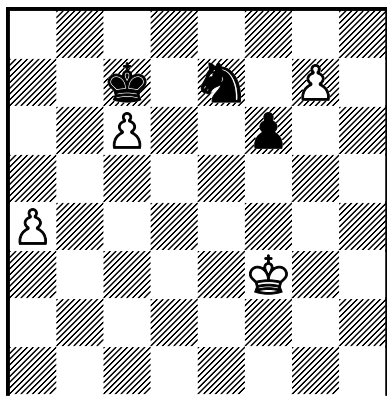
Patience is still required in view of 6...Kc7 7.Kxh5 Kxc6 8.Kg5 Kc5 9.Kf5 Kb4 10.Ke5 Kxa4 11.Kd6 Kb5 12.Kd7 f5 13.Ke6 f4 14.Kf7 Sh6+ 15.Kg6 Sg8 16.Kf7 and Black is again late by just one tempo.

7.Kxh5 Se7!

The "No Entry" manoeuvre has been successfully completed forcing the white king to seek his luck on the other side of the board.

8.Kg4 Kc7 9.Kf3!

The natural choice 9.Kf4? is met by Kxc6 10.Ke4 Kc5 11.Kd3 Kb4.



The key reciprocal zugzwang position with White to play!

9...Kxc6 10.Ke2!

There are (hopefully) no minor duals in this study. Even a waiting move is unique 10.Kf2!? allows 10...Kb6! 11.Ke2 Ka5 12.Kd3 Kb4 and we have again reached the critical position with White to play... and lose!

10...Kc5

The alternative 10...Kd5 11.Kd3 Ke6 12.Kc4 Kf7 13.a5 Kxg7 14.a6 Sc8 15.Kc5 ends up in a prosaic draw.

11.Kd2! Kb4 12.Kd3!

Here we are again in the key position this time with Black to play!

12...Kxa4 13.Kc4 Ka5 14.Kc5 Ka6 15.Kd6

The white king has finally managed to get behind the enemy lines to secure the draw.

The judges found it "a study with strategic depth constructed on opposing plans and mutual counterplay". At the same time they considered its complexity as a relative drawback, "As just a few GMs will be able to fathom the variations while at the board, threading their way through the artful stratagems conjured up by the study composer ". Usually I try to avoid arguing with judges, as our art is to a large extent a matter of personal taste. I am not even unhappy with my ranking in this important event. I just feel that this argument against over-complexity is at least in this particular case wrong and misleading. Had the solution been piled up with mountains of supporting computer output that has very little to do with the main idea and making it impossible to solve or grasp, then I would be the first one to join the judges' critics. Here, however, that is definitely not the case. All tries and side-lines are comprehensive and essential thematic steps in building up the solution towards its peak. That was the task I was trying so hard to achieve! Dvoretsky's excellent *Endgame Manual* is full of highly instructive tragic-comic episodes where GMs failed to find over the board basic as well as complex ideas. What does it have to do with evaluating a piece of art? Thematic complexity should be welcomed and not condemned!