

His life fulfilled, his play as well

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Three days after his 89th birthday Vasily Vasilievich Smyslov passed away. The funeral of the seventh world chess champion was more than modest: an inexpensive coffin, no noteworthy chessplayers, and no more than 30 at the funeral repast... Do the great champions at the end of their lives deserve no more witness than that of their wives and close relatives? Sadly this is so once more – just as it was in 2004 in Moscow on Tigran Petrosian's 75th, and on his 80th, just after the death of his wife Rona Yakovlena, practically ignored!... On this occasion there was no Nadezhda Andreevna because she was a patient in hospital and it was deemed inappropriate to mention her husband's death to her.

Over the last twelve years Vasily Vasilievich and I met quite often – in the *64* editorial office, in his flat on Uprising Square, or at his Razdory dacha. Our contact led inevitably to involvement in studies and was strengthened by mutual sympathy, the same outlook on life and on human relationships. The big surprise for me was a Smyslov trait quite uncharacteristic of a world champion: despite pronouncements by his rivals which caused him personal hurt, he never responded in the same coin, but always tried to smooth over abrasive corners, to act as peacemaker. He dictated his last articles for me for *64* onto tape, and I particularly remember the care he exercised in enunciating every word intended for the ears of his colleagues.

Though it may sound strange, Smyslov's death has not hit me hard. It was very different with Vysotsky's death in 1980, or the drowning of my old schoolfriend Aleksei in the Black Sea in 1987 in front of his wife and daughter and before my own eyes... "His life and play, both unfulfilled" – so true of Vysotsky, but not of Smyslov. If only we could all live as Smyslov did! To live and play right to the end, in harmony, best of all with oneself.

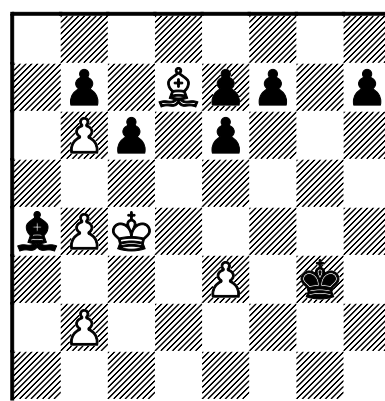
He left this life as he had lived it, eschewing confrontation. On March 11th he summoned a priest and made his confession. And just a few minutes before breathing his last he delivered his final piece of flawless analysis, but this time not chess: "Smyslov is dying...".

... With the new millennium Vasily Vasilievich's eyesight began to deteriorate. This did not prevent him from phoning me nearly every day, a salvo, as it were, of telephonic torpedoes. He would narrate some innocent everyday occurrence, often about their cat, and then move on to new ideas for studies. Vasily Vasilievich was *analyste extraordinaire*! He had no need of chessboard, no need of chess pieces, and no need of a computer... I recall chief *64* editor Aleksandr Roshal saying with envy in his voice, "How can anyone at such an advanced age stay so involved in his favourite activity? If only...!"

Here are my five favourite 21st century Smyslov studies.

P.1. V. Smyslov

My studies 2001

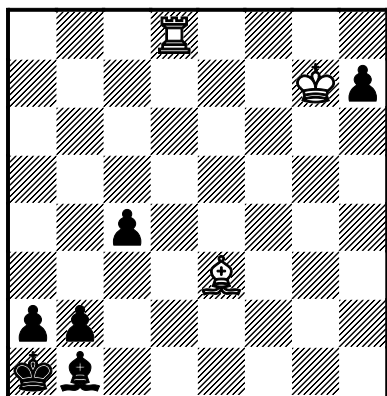


c4g3 0040.46 6/8 Draw

To all appearances this bishops ending is quite lost for White, who is not just two pawns to the bad but has to cope with the imminent advance of the black h-pawn. The pseudo-attack 1.Bc8 can be met by 1...Bb5+ and 2...Ba6. On the other hand, what else is there? Out of desperation, and for want of anything

better, we'll have to try it. Fingers crossed. **1.Bc8 Bb5+**. Where should the king go? There's no point in heading for the h-file, and there's nothing doing in the centre. So we're in a cul-de-sac, then? But what if? **2.Kb3! Ba6 3.Ka4 h5 4.Ka5! h4 5.b5! cxb5**. The better recapture of the two. After **5...Bxb5 6.Bxb7 h3 7.Ba8! h2 8.b7 h1Q 9. b8Q+ Kf2 10.Qxb5**, White has nothing to fear. **6.b4!** The contours of White's stalemate counterplay emerge. By hiding his king away in the compartment along with Black's bishop he hopes he can rid himself of his superfluous material. **6...h3 7.Bxe6! h2 8.Bd5 e5!** A sly resource! The instinctive **8...Kf2 9.Bh1 f5**, runs into **10.e4!** with a draw. Now we can come to grips with the positional draw, the essence of which is zugzwang: **bKf2** obstructs the f-pawn en route to promote, while Black lacks a tempo to administer checkmate. **9.Bh1 e4! 10.Bxe4**. It won't do to hesitate: **10.Bg2? f5 11.Bxe4 Kf2 12.Bh1 Kg1**, and Black wins. **10...f6!** A last trap. It is simpler for White after **10...f5 – 11.Bh1 Kf2 12.e4! 11.Bd5!** Disillusionment for Black: **11.Bh1? f5! 12.e4 f4 13.e5 f3 14.e6 f2 15.e7 f1Q 16.e8Q Qa1** mate. **11...Kf2**. Zugzwang, alas. **12.Bh1! Kg1 13.Bf3! f5 14.e4** draws.

P.2. V. Smyslov
My studies 2003



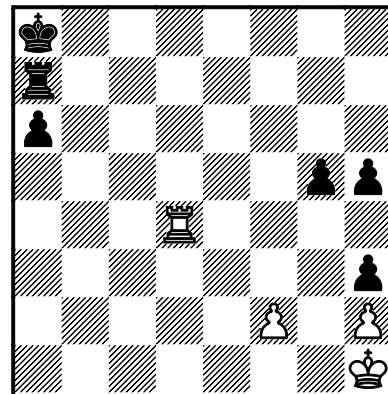
g7a1 0140.04 3/6 Win

One would think that **bPb2** is the vulnerable spot in **bK**'s defence. So **1.Bd4** is the tempter. But Black has the imaginative riposte: **1...Bc2! 2.Rb8 Bb3 3.Rf8 Kb1 4.Rf1+ Bd1! 5.Rxd1+ Kc2**. The true way is **1.Rd1! c3**. Otherwise White reaches Black's Achilles heel:

1...h5 2.Bd4 h4 3.Rd2. 2.Bh6! After **2.Bd4? c2 3.Rc1 h5 4.Kf6 h4 5.Ke5 h3** wK bumps into his own bishop, which he has no time to circumvent: **6.Kd5 h2 7.Kc4 h1Q 8.Rxh1 c1Q+ 9.Rxc1** stalemate. **2...2 3.Rc1! bxc1Q 4.Bxc1 h5**. The path to **c3** is now clear! **5.Kf6 h4 6.Ke5 h3 7.Kd4 h2 8.Kc3 h1Q 9.Bb2** mate!

P.3. V.Smyslov

3rd prize *New-voronezh atomic power station – 40 years 2004*

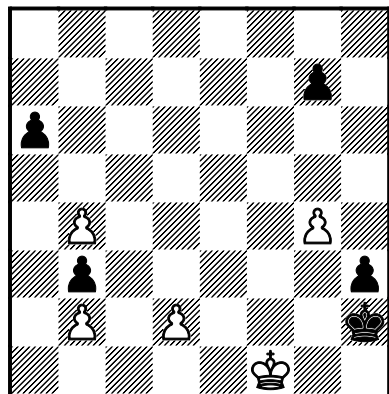


h1a8 0400.24 4/6 Draw

The first duty is to confine **bR**: **1.Rd8 + Kb7**. And now we invoke a pawn dagger's thrust: **2.f4!!** Chasing after the black pawns is fraught with unpleasantnesses after **2.Rh8? a5 3.Rxh5 a4 4.Rxh3 a3 5.Rb3+ Kc6 6.Rb1 a2 7.Ra1 Kd5 8.Kg2 Ra3 9.f3 Ke5! 10.Kg3 Kf5 11.Kf2 Kf4 12.Ke2 Ra4 13.Kf2 Ra5 14.Kg2 Ra3 15.h3 Ra5 16.Kf2 Ra4 17.Kg2 Ra3** or **2.Rg8? g4 3.f3!? a5! 4.fxg4 hxg4 5.Rxg4 a4 6.Rg7+ Kb6 7.Rg6+ Kc5 8.Rg7 Ra5! 9.Rg5+ Kb6 10.Rg6+ Kc7! 11.Rg5 Ra8! 12.Rg7+ Kd6! 13.Rg8 Ra7 14.Rg6+ Ke5 15.Rg7 Ra6 16.Rg5+ Kf4 17.Rg6 Ra5. 2...gxf4 3.Rg8!** (playing for stalemate) **3...a5 4.Rg7+ Kb6 5.Rg6+ Kc5 6.Rg7!** **bK** has momentarily dropped the defence of his rook, and White promptly takes advantage. At the same time a hasty check courts disaster: **6.Rg5+? Kd6! 7.Rg6+ (Rg7 Re7!;) Ke5 8.Rg7 Ra6! 9.Rg5+ Kf6 10.Rxh5 Rd6! 11.Kg1 Rd1+ 12.Kf2 a4 13.Rxh3 Ra1 14.Rh6+ Ke5 15.Ra6 a3 16.Ra5+ Kf6 17.Ra6+ Kf5 18.Ra5+ Kg4 19.h3+ Kxh3 20.Kf3 Kh4 21.Kxf4 a2. 6...Ra6 7.Rg5+! Kc4 8.Rg6!** (a familiar picture!) **8...Kb5 9.Rg5+ Kc6 10.Rg6+ Kb7 11.Rg7+ Kc8 12.Rg6!** (again not falling for **12.Rg8+?**

Kd7!) **12...Ra8 13.Rg8+ Kb7 14.Rg7+ Kc6 15.Rg8! Ra7 16.Rg6+! Kd5 17.Rg7 Ra6 18.Rg5+** with a positional draw.

P.4. V. Smyslov
My studies 2004



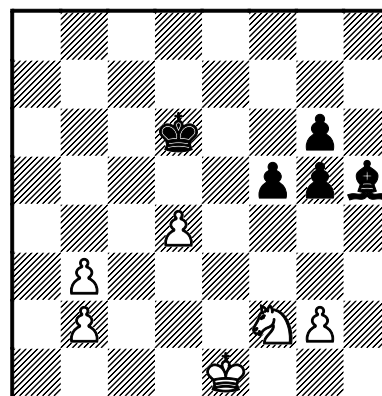
f1h2 0000.44 5/5 Win

After the evident **1.Kf2 Kh1** the move d2-d4 is the most natural continuation. But it lets the win slip away, as will appear after eleven (!) moves. A like error is 2.g5? a5! 3.b5 a4 4.b6 a3 5.b7 axb2 6.b8Q b1Q 7.Qg3 Qf5+! White has lost control of the f5 square. The victorious way is the shy **2.d3!!** Black's counterplay is linked to stalemate. OK, the direct 2...h2 is ruled out because of speedy checkmate. There remain the alternatives of two pawn moves:

A. 2...a5 3.b5 a4 4.b6 a3 5.b7 axb2 6.b8Q b1Q. And now wQ performs a "ladder" approach towards bK: **7.Qb7+ Kh2 8.Qc7+ Kh1 9.Qc6+ Kh2 10.Qd6+ Kh1 11.Qd5+ Kh2 12.Qe5+ Kh1 13.Qe4+!** this move is "on" thanks to the obstruction of the b1-h7 diagonal on move 2! **13...Kh2 14.Qf4+ Kh1 15.Qf3+ Kh2 16.Qg3+ Kh1 17.Qxh3** mate.

B. 2...g5 3.Kg3! a5 4.b5 a4. If bK flees the h1 corner **4...Kg1 5.Kxh3 a4 6.b6 a3 7.b7 axb2 8.b8Q** Black loses his newly promoted queen: **9.Qh2+ Kf1 10.Qh1+.** **5.b6 a3 6.b7 axb2 7.b8Q b1Q.** And now the queen is lost after another "ladder": **8.Qb7+ Kg1 9.Qb6+ Kh1 10.Qc6+ Kg1 11.Qc5+ Kh1 12.Qd5+ Kg1 13.Qd4+ Kh1 14.Qe4+! Kg1 15.Qe2** (15.Qe3+ only postpones the inevitable end) with a win.

P.5. V. Smyslov
My studies 2005



e1d6 0031.43 6/5 Win

1.g4! bK must be shut out of play. It would be over-eager to choose instead 1.b4?: 1...g4 2.Sd1 (2.b5 g5 3.Sd3 Be8) 2...g3 3.Sc3 g5 4.b5 Bg6! 5.b6 Kc6 6.Sd5 Kb7! 7.Se7 Bh7 8.d5 Kxb6 9.d6 Kb7 10.d7 (10.Sd5 Kc8 11.Sf6 Bg6 12.b4 f4 13.Ke2 Bd3+ 14.Kxd3 f3 15.b5 fxg2) 10...Kc7 11.Sd5+ Kd8 12.Sf6 Bg6 13.b4 f4 14.b5 Bd3 15.b6 Ba6. **1...fxg4.** To bet on his pawns would be to back losers: 1...Kd5 2.gxh5 gxh5 3.Sh3 g4 4.Sf4+ Kxd4 5.Sxh5. **2.Se4+ Kd5 3.Sg3 Kxd4 4.Kd2 (Ke2) Kd5!** Even with wKd2, chasing after wS fails: 4...Ke5 5.b4 Kf4 6.b5 Kxg3 7.b6 Kf2 (7...Kh3 8.b7 g3 9.Ke3) 8.b7 g3 9.b8Q g2 10.Qb6+ Kf1 11.Qf6+. **5.Ke3!** And now, after the mistaken 5.Kd3? to embark on a king's wing raid: 5...Ke5! 6.b4 Kf4 7.b5 Kxg3 8.b6 Kf2 9.b7 g3 10.b8Q g2 11.Qb6+ Kf1 12.Qf6+ Ke1! (reaching the key square!) 13.Qxg5 Kf1 14.Qf4+ Ke1 with draw. **5...Kc5** (oh, dear, it's zugzwang: 5...Ke5 6.b4 Kd5 7.Kd3 Ke5 8.b5) **6.Kd3 Kb4 7.Kc2 Kc5 8.Kc3 Kb5 9.b4 Ka4! 10.b5 Kxb5 11.b4 Kc6 12.Kc4 Kb6 (Kd6; Kb5) 13.b5 Kc7 14.Kc5 Kb7 15.b6 Kb8 16.Kb5!** Having side-lined his opposite number to the board's edge, wK now heads for a6. **16...Kb7 17.Ka5 Kb8 18.Ka6 Ka8 19.b7+ Kb8 20.Se2!** But not 20.Se4? g3 21.Sc5 Be2+ 22.Kb6 on account of 22...Bb5! 23.Kxb5 Kc7 24.Ka6 g2 25.Ka7 g1Q draw. **20...g3 21.Sd4** draw.