

## ARE 'CLASSIC' STUDIES STILL BEING COMPOSED?

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Is it possible nowadays to create classic studies, or were all the great basic ideas produced decades ago? Many contemporary studies win fully merited prizes for creativity and innovation, but few (other than those derived from computer tablebases) produce their effects by using a small number of men.

A truly classic study shows clarity and economy while incorporating a spine-tingling revelation. Its beauty does not depend on a connoisseur's knowledge of study history, but can be appreciated by any chess player. It is memorable not for its depth but for its powerful impact, hence the absence of an extraneous introductory phase or complex sub-variations. Every man plays its full part, and nothing is wasted.

Since major prizes are now regularly awarded for combining previous ideas, real novelty in simple settings may seem unachievable. I have, nevertheless, identified ten studies from 1983 to 2005, each containing between seven and eleven men, which can demonstrably be counted as classics in the traditional sense. Eight are first or second prize winners, so the judges undoubtedly found the ideas expressed to be unanticipated. All ten feature natural, game-like initial positions which would not frighten off non-experts and so would be ideal for demonstration purposes; and as a further incentive, many of them include a model mate (where each flight square is covered only once, and all White's men take part).

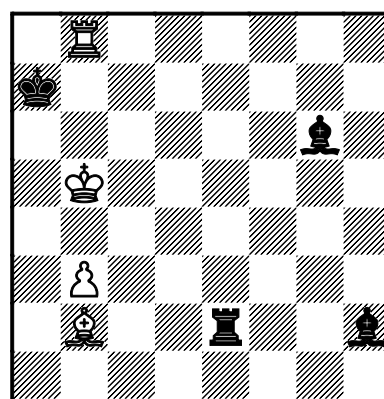
This is merely a personal selection but my conclusion is that while 'economic' classic studies are indeed (as expected) increasingly rare, the occasional such masterpiece can still be produced. Mario Matouš, whose efforts represent just under half the studies below,

emerges as the premier modern composer; a limpid clarity shines out from his most enduring work. There also remains the hope, even towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, of being pleasantly surprised by a late flowering of classics from newcomers such as Sergiy Didukh.

The ten selected studies follow, in date order.

### V.1 Yuri Bazlov

=1st/2nd prize Fizkultura i Sport;  
*Shakhmaty v SSSR 1983*



b5a7 0470.10 4/4 Draw

#### 1. Rg8

Both of White's pieces are en prise and he is behind on material so he has to act decisively.

#### 1...Bd3+ 2.Kb4 Bd6+

Not 2...Rxb2 3.Kc3 Bh7 4.Rg7+.

#### 3.Kc3 Bb1

With the strong threat of Rc2+.

#### 4.Ba1

Other moves lose at once.

#### 4...Ra2

If 4...Be5+ 5.Kb4 Bxa1 6.Rg1 Rb2 then 7.Rh1 (or elsewhere along the first rank) produces an amusing draw where Black is completely tied up.

### 5.Re8

5.Rg5? (the other way to stop Be5+) fails to 5...Bf4 6.Rd5 Be4 7.Rd7+ Bb7 8.Bb2 Be5+.

### 5...Rxa1 6.Re1

6.Kb2 Bg6 7.Re6 Ra6 8.Rxg6 allows the nasty surprise 8...Be5+. White now has to keep addressing this threat of a check on the dark diagonal.

### 6...Bf8 7.Rg1 Bd6 8.Re1 Ba2 9.Re4

The saving resource, preparing Rc4+ if Black abandons the a1-h8 diagonal checks. But not 9.Rxa1 Be5+; 9.Re2 Ba3 10.Rc2 Bb1; or 9.Re6 Ba3.

### 9...Bf8 10.Rg4 Bb1 11.Rg1

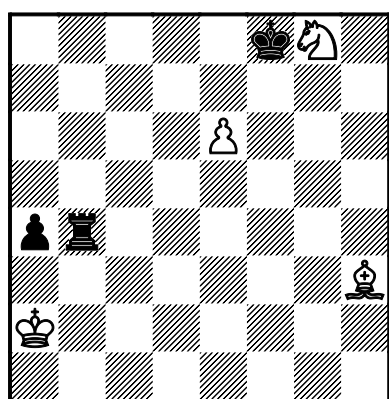
11.Kb2 Bf5 12.Rg8 Rb1+ forces the losing 13.Kc3.

### 11...Bd6 12.Re1 Bf8 13.Rg1 Ba2 14.Rg4

and draws as seen above. A well-oiled mechanism with minimal working parts.

V.2 Mario Matouš

2nd prize *Ceskoslovensky šach* 1984



a2f8 0311.11 4/3 Win

### 1.e7+

It is hard to believe that anything exceptional can arise from this wholly natural position. 1.Sf6? Rh4 2.Bf5 Rh2+ 3.Ka1 Rf2 4.Sd7+ Ke7 5.Bg4 Rf4 leaves White stalled.

### 1...Kf7

If 1...Ke8 then 2.Sf6+ Kxe7 3.Sd5+ wins outright.

### 2.Be6+ Ke8 3.Bf5

White strives to get in a diagonal check, but needs to choose the correct direction. 3.Bd5? Rb8 4.Bc6+ Kf7 5.Bd5+ Ke8 (but not

5...Kg7? 6.Ka3) 6.Bf3 Kd7 7.Bg4+ Kd6 only draws.

### 3...Rb6

3...Rb8 4.Bg6+ Kd7 5.e8Q+ Rxe8 6.Sf6+ reveals the key winning idea.

### 4.Bd3

4.Bc2? Re6 5.Bxa4+ Kf7 6.Bb3 Ke8 7.Bxe6 with a snappy stalemate; or 4.Bg4? Rb5 5.Bd1 Re5 sacrificing the rook for pawn and piece.

### 4...a3

4...Kf7 5.Bc4+ Ke8 6.Be2 Rb8 7.Bh5+; or 4...Kd7 5.Bc2 Ra6 6.Ka3 (a fine quiet move) Ra8 7.Bxa4+.

### 5.Ka1

5.Kxa3? Re6 6.Bb5+ Kf7 7.Bc4 Ke8 8.Bxe6 is stalemate again, and bishop moves do not help (e.g. 9.Be2 Rb2+).

### 5...Kd7

If 5...a2 then 6.Be2, of course.

### 6.Bc2

6.Be2? Rb8 7.Bg4+ Kd6; or 6.Bf5+? Ke8 7.Bc2 Kf7 8.Ba4 Rb8 are frustrating draws.

### 6...Ra6 7.Bf5+ Ke8 8.Bd3 Rb6 9.Be2

Black has now run out of useful moves, so we can move smoothly to the anticipated conclusion.

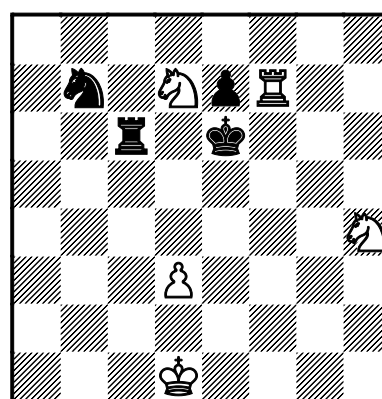
### 9...Rb8 10.Bh5+ Kd7 11.e8Q+ Rxe8 12.Sf6+

and wins. The moves trace a delicate arabesque across the board.

V.3 Yuri Bazlov & Vitaly Kovalenko

2nd prize Polish Chess Federation Tourney;

*Problemista* 1985



d1e6 0405.11 5/4 Win

## 1.Se5

White is a piece up but his forces are poorly co-ordinated. 1.Sb8? Rc8 2.Rf2 Rxb8 3.Rb2 Rd8 is insufficient to win.

## 1...Rd6

If 1...Kxe5 then 2.Rxe7+ Kd4 3.Sf3+ Kc3 4.Rxb7 Rf6 5.Se1 holds everything together.

## 2.Kd2

Preserving the vital d-pawn, along with subtle threats. 2.Shf3? allows Rxd3+; 2.Kc2? fails to 2...Sd8 3.Rf5 Rd5; and 2.Shg6? Rxd3+ 3.Kc2 Rd7 4.Sf8+ Kxe5 5.Sxd7+ Ke6 6.Se5 Sd6 is a counter-attacking draw.

## 2...Sd8

Otherwise white remains a piece up in the ending, e.g. 2...Sc5 3.Rf3 Rd5 (3...Kxe5 4.Rf5+ Kd4 6.Sf3 mate) 4.Shg6.

## 3.Rf5 Rd5 4.Rf8 Kxe5 5.Sg6+ Kd4

5...Ke6 6.Sf4+ Ke5 7.Sxd5 Se6 8.Rf7 Kxd5 9.Rxe7.

## 6.Sxe7

6.Sf4? Sc6 7.Sxd5 Kxd5 and 6.Rf4+ Kc5 7.Sxe7 Rd7 are both, subject to modern computer verification, technical draws.

## 6...Se6

6...Rd7 7.Rxd8 Rxd8 permits the winning fork 8.Sc6+.

## 7.Rf6 Rd6

If 7...Rb5 8.Sc6+ (8.Rxe6 Rb2+ 9.Kc1 Rh2 10.Rd6+ Kc3 is a surprise draw) Kd5 9.Rxe6 Rb6 10.Re5+ (Rh6 Rxc6;) Kd6 (10...Kxc6 11.Re6+ now leads to a won pawn ending) 11.Sa5 finally triumphs.

## 8.Rf5 Sc5

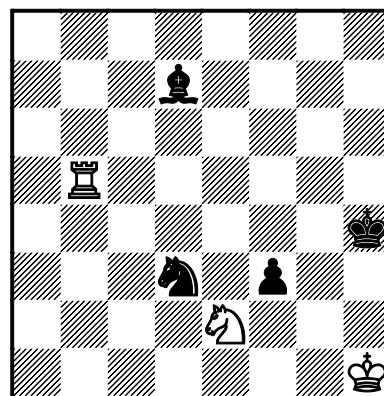
8...Rd7 9.Sc6 mate; or 8...Sc7 9. Ra5, when Black is curiously helpless against 10.Sf5+.

## 9.Rd5+ Rxd5 10.Sc6

when a mid-board model mate completes a thoroughbred creation.

## V.4 Mario Matouš

1st prize Bron MT 1990



h1h4 0134.01 3/4 Draw

## 1.Sd4

This normal-looking position is in fact full of tension. Both 1.Sc3? f2 2.Rb1 Se1 3.Rb4+ Kh3 4.Rf4 Bc6+; and 1.Sg1? Sf2+ 2.Kh2 Sg4+ 3.Kh1 f2 4.Sf3+ Kg3 see Black overcome White's defence.

## 1...f2

1...Bxb5 2.Sxb5 Kg3 3.Kg1 Sf4 4.Sd6 and the knight returns just in time.

## 2.Rb1

2.Rf5? Bxf5 3.Sxf5+ Kh3 4.Sg3 Sf4 5.Sf1 Sh5 and mate next move; or, more mundanely, 2.Sf3+? Kg3.

## 2...Se1

Not 2...Bc6+ 3.Kh2 Se1 4.Sf5+ stopping the pawn.

## 3.Sf3+ Kh3

3...Kg3 4.Rxe1 (Not 4.Sxe1 f1Q/R mate) Bc6 5.Rg1+ Kh3 (5...Kxf3 6.Kh2 is a saving resource) 6.Rg3+ Kxg3 stalemate.

## 4. Rxe1 Bc6

The position looks hopeless, but White has the ideal solution with...

## 5.Re4 f1Q/R+

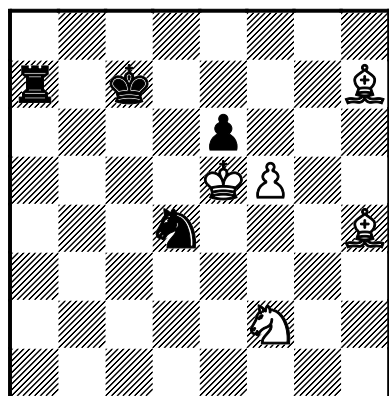
5...Bxe4 stalemate, or 5...Kg3 6.Rg4+ Kxf3 7.Rg1 Ba8 8.Kh2, drawing.

## 6.Sg1+ Kg3

with a memorable stalemate featuring two pinned pieces. A great study which required only seven pieces and six moves.

### V.5 Marc Lavaud

1st prize *Phénix* 1994-1996



e5c7 0324.11 5/4 Win

#### 1.f6

White's hopes reside in advance of the f-pawn, since 1.Kxd4? Ra4+ is no use.

#### 1...Sf3+ 2.Kxe6 Ra6+

If 2...Sxh4 then 3.f7 Ra8 4.Be4, corralling the knight and eventually winning. There are many variations to prove this, but they do not form an integral part of the study; for example, after 4...Rd8 White can win with (a) 5.Sg4 Rd6+ 6.Ke5 Rd8 7.Sf6 Rf8 8.Ke6 Rxf7 9.Kxf7 Kd6 10.Sg4 Kc5 11.Kf6 Kd4 12.Bh1; (b) 5.Sh3 Rd6+ 6.Ke5 Rd8 7.Sg5 Kb6 8.Se6 Rh8 9.Kf6; or even (c) 5.Sd3 Rh8 6.Sf4 Rf8 7.Ke7.

#### 3.Ke7 Ra7 4.f7

4.Be4? Kb6+ 5.Ke6 Sxh4 6.f7 Rxf7 7.Kxf7 Kc5 8.Kf6 Kd4 9.Kg5 Ke3 and Black's extra tempo proves crucial.

#### 4...Kc6+

4...Kb6+ turns out to be an inferior square after 5.Ke6 Rxf7 6.Bd8+ Rc7 7.Kd6.

#### 5.Ke6 Rxf7 6.Be4+ Kc5

Now White needs fresh inspiration.

#### 7.Bd8 Rf4

7...Se5 8.Sd3+ Kd4 (8...Sxd3 9.Kxf7 with a computer-verified win) 9.Sxe5 wins.

#### 8.Sd3+ Kd4 9.Bb6+ Kxe4

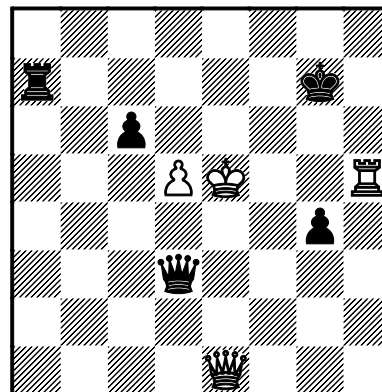
9...Kc4 loses simply to 10.Sxf4.

#### 10.Sf2

with a model mate as the Black's king's flight squares have suddenly evaporated. This artistic study merits inclusion despite the theoretical variations.

### V.6 Pal Benko

=1st/2nd prize MSSZ 2000 AT; M  
Magyar Sakkélet 2000



e5g7 4400.12 4/5 Win

#### 1.Rg5+

White needs to marshal his forces without allowing counterplay from Black's menacing major pieces. (The position would hardly raise suspicion if given as a snapshot from a rapid-play game.)

#### 1...Kf8

1...Kh8 2.Qh1+ Rh7 3.Qa1 Rg7 4.Rh5+ Kg8 5.Qa8+ (yet another corner) Kf7 6.Rf5+ Kg6 7.Qxc6+ Kh7 8.Rh5+ Kg8 9.Qe8 mate.

#### 2.Qb4+

Not 2.Qf2+? Rf7 3.Qc5+ Re7+ 4.Kf6 Qh7 when Black has found a defence.

#### 2...Re7+ 3.Kf6 Qe4

3...Qh7 now fails to 4.Rg8+ Kxg8 5.Qb8+. After 3...Qe4, however, it is not immediately obvious how White can make progress.

#### 4.Rh5 Qf3+ 5.Rf5 Qe4 6.Qb8+

Or 6.Kg6+? Ke8 7.Qb8+ Kd7 8.Qb7+ Kd8 9.Qxc6 Rg7+, when Black has survived.

#### 6...Re8 7.Qc7 Re7

7...Qe7+ 8.Kg6+ Kg8 9.Re5 – a startling cross-pin.

#### 8.Qc8+ Re8 9.Kg6+ Kg8 10.Qc7 Re7

If 10...Qe7 then 11. Re5 wins as before.

#### 11.Qd8+ Re8 12.Qh4

Making use of a new diagonal to threaten mate.

#### 12...Qe7

12.Re7 13.Qf6 is unanswerable. Black seems to have everything covered, but now comes the decisive coup.

### 13.Rf8+ Kxf8

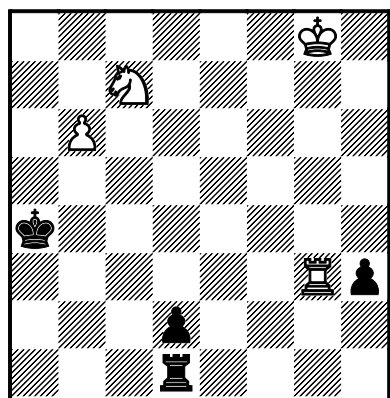
13...Qxf8 14. Qh7 mate; or 13...Rxf8 14.Qxe7 with mate to follow shortly.

### 14.Qh8 mate.

The white queen's orbits around the essential, albeit static, pawns are mesmeric.

V.7 Mario Matouš

2nd prize *Ceskoslovensky šach* 2001



g8a4 0401.12 4/4 Win

### 1.Rg4+

1.b7? Rb1 2.Rg4+ Ka3 is not the correct path to victory.

### 1...Ka5

1...Ka3 2.Sb5+, followed by queening the pawn, is straightforward enough.

### 2.b7 Rb1 3.Rg5+ Ka4 4.Sb5

Not 4.Rb5? d1Q 5.b8Q, when Black has too many checks.

### 4...Rxb5

4...d1Q 5.Sc3+ Ka3 6.Sxb1+ Qxb1 7.Ra5+ is a neat finish.

### 5.Rxb5 d1Q

5...Kxb5 6.b8Q+ Kc4 7.Qc8+ Kd4 8.Qc2 Ke3 9.Qd1 h2 and 10.Qh1 mops up.

### 6.b8Q Qg1+

Black has various reasonable tries, but they all just fail; e.g. 6...h2 7.Qe8 h1Q 8.Rb7+ Ka3 9.Qa8+ Qa4 10.Qf8+ Ka2 11.Qf2+; or 6...Qg4+ 7 Kf8 Qf3+ (7...Qh4 8.Rb6 and the white king flees to the queenside) 8.Ke7 h2 (8...Qa3+ 9.Ke8 h2 10.Qb6; or 8...Qe4+ 9.Re5) 9. Qe8 h1Q 10.Rb7+ Qc6 11.Qa8+.

### 7.Kh7 h2

White now has a forced, but not obvious, mate.

### 8.Rb4+ Ka3 9.Rb3+ Ka2 10.Rb2+ Ka1

### 11.Qh8

The final key move.

### 11...h1Q+

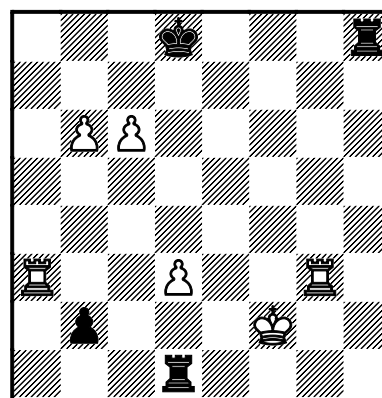
After 11...Qc1 both 12.Rb7+ Ka2 13.Qg8+ and 12.Rxh2+ win.

### 12.Rh2+ Kb1 13.Qb2 mate.

Great precision and harmony with so few pieces.

V.8 Mario Matouš

5th prize *Ceskoslovensky šach* 2001



f2d8 0800.31 6/4 Win

### 1.Rg7

With a transparent mate threat.

### 1...Rf8+

1...Rf1+ 2.Ke3 Rh3+ 3.Kd4 Rh4+ 4.Kc3 b1S+ 5.Kb3 Sxa3 6.b7; or 1. ..Rd2+ (or 1...Rh2+ 2.Kg3 Rg1+ 3.Kxh2 similarly) 2.Kf3 Rh3+ 3.Kg4 Rg2+ 4.Kxh3 Rxg7 5.Rb3 both win for White.

### 2.Ke3

2.Ke2? Re8+ 3.Kf2 Rf1+.

### 2...Re8+ 3.Kd4 Rxd3+ 4.Rxd3

4.Kxd3? b1Q+ is simple enough. White's immediate mate threat has now been removed, so black can queen his pawn.

### 4...b1Q 5.Kc4+

For the implications of 5.Kc3+? see the final note.

### 5...Kc8 6.b7+ Kb8 7.Rd8+ Rxd8 8.c7+ Ka7 9.b8Q+

9.cxd8Q? Qc2+ 10.Kb5 Qb3+ 11.Kc6 Qc3+ 12.Kd6 Qd4+ and Black surprisingly draws either by perpetual check or by capturing the rook with check.

### 9...Rxb8

9...Ka6 is met by 10.c8Q+.

### 10.c8S++

A move to savour.

### 10...Ka6

10...Ka8 11.Ra7 mate.

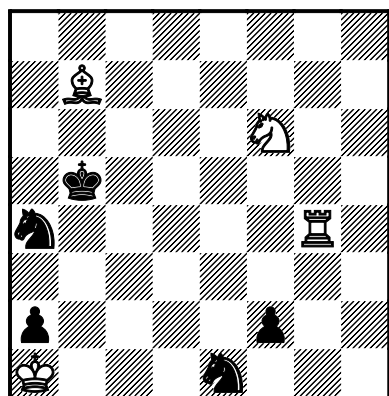
### 11.Ra7

A model mate, which explains why the king must be on c4, not c3. The forcing sequence is more than compensated for by the neat finish.

The final two examples give hope for the future. Sergiy Didukh began composing in 2003, and his philosophy chimes with that of this article. He writes of the great composers that "their studies are full of combinative subtleties, often in the simplest positions; the introduction is in harmony with the finale, and the solution's thread isn't complicated with knots of annoying analytic variations. I hope that the same can be said of my own studies." [quoted in EG155 (2005), p. 401]

### V.9 Sergiy Didukh

64-Shakmatnoe Obozrenie 2004



a1b5 0117.02 4/5 Draw

### 1.Ba6+

If 1.Rf4? then 1...Sc2+ 2.Kxa2 Sc3+ 3.Kb3 Sd4+ 4.Kb2 Sd1+ is a clever drawing line.

### 1...Ka5

1...Kxa6 2.Rxa4+ K~ 3.Rf4 is hopeless for Black.

### 2.Sd5

2.Rf4? Sc3 3.Rxf2 Kxa6, and 2.Se4? Kxa6 both lead to a theoretical draw of rook and knight versus two knights.

### 2...Sc2+ 3.Kxa2 Sb6 4.Sc7

4.Sxb6? is met by 4...Kxa6.

### 4...Sb4+

4...Sa8 5 Rg5+ (5.Sxa8? Kxa6 6.Rf4 Kb7 7.Rxf2 transposes) Kb6 6.Sxa8+ Kxa6 7.Rf5 Kb7 8.Rxf2 wins.

### 5.Ka3 Sxa6

White now produces a punchy finish.

### 6.Rg5+ Sd5 7.Sxd5

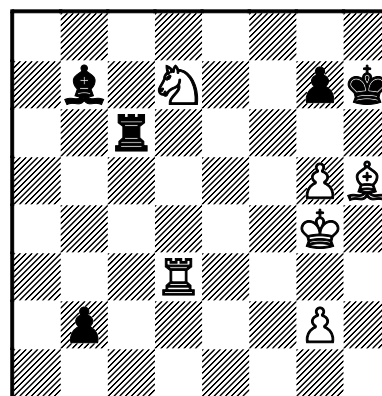
Not 7.Rxd5+? Kb6 8.Sa8+ Kb7, drawing.

### 7...f1Q 8.Se3+ Qb5 9.Sc4

with a sparkling model mate.

### V.10 Sergiy Didukh

EG155.14241 2005



g4h7 0441.22 6/5 Win

### 1. Bf7

After 1.Rb3? Rc4+ 2.Kg3 Rc3+, or 1.g6+? Kh6 2.Se5 Rc4+ 3.Sxc4 b1Q 4.Se5 Qb4+ White's attack is thwarted.

### 1...b1Q

Both 1...g6 2.Sf6+ Kg7 3.Ba2 Bc8+ 4.Kf3 Ra6 5.Rc3 Rxa2 6.Rc7+, and 1...Bc8 2.Rh3+ Rh6 3.g6+ Kh8 4.Rb3 showcase the white rook's agility.

### 2.Sf8+

Starting a forced line of six moves leading to capture of the queen.

### 2...Kh8 3.Sg6+ Rxc6 4.Rd8+ Kh7 5.Bg8+ Kh8 6.Ba2+ Kh7 7.Bxb1 Be4

White seems stymied, as 8.Bxe4 is stalemate.

### 8.Rd3 Kg8

8...Bxd3 9.Bxd3, or 8...Re6 9.Re3 Bxb1 10.Rxe6 are simple endgame wins.

**9.Ba2+ Kf8 10.Rd2**

A fine, unexpected move, embarrassing the free-ranging black bishop.

**10...Ra6**

Everything loses: 10...Ba8 11.Rd8+, or 10...Bb7 11.Rf2+ Ke7 12.Rf7+, or 10...Bc6 11.Kf5 Be8 12.Be6 Ke7 13.Re2 Kf8 (13...Bf7 14.Bxf7+ Kxf7 15.Re7+ produces a won pawn ending) 14.Rb2 (other moves also win here, but that is a minor matter at this stage) Rxe6 (Ke7; Rb6) 15.Kxe6. The g2 pawn not only prevents the drawing possibility Bh1 but guarantees a R+P v. B+P win in various lines.

**11.Rf2+ Ke7 12. Re2 K~ 13.Bc4**

and wins by pure geometry. This is a prize winner in all but name, and qualifies alongside the other examples as a modern classic.

**Sources**

- V1) Yu. Bazlov (1983): **EG79.5532**
- V2) M. Matouš (1984): **EG82.5832**
- V3) Y. Bazlov & V. Kovalenko (1985): **HHdbIII**
- V4) M. Matouš (1990): **EG104.8351**
- V5) M. Lavaud (1998): **EG156.14391**
- V6) P. Benko (2000): **EG158.14521**
- V7) M. Matouš (2001): **EG152.13966**
- V8) M. Matouš (2001): **EG152.13970**
- V9) S. Didukh (2004): **HHdbIII**
- V10) S. Didukh (2005): **EG155.14241**



*Mario Matous*