

AWARD ENDGAME STUDIES PROBLEEMBLAD 2019–2020

48 studies by 30 composers from 16 countries took part in the biannual tournament 2019–2020. It was an international competition in the true sense of the word, with participants from all over the world (Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Georgia, Germany, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and USA). There were 5 joint studies, three of them by composers from different countries (#E462 by Michal Hlinka and Mario G. García, #E464 by Steffen Slumstrup Nielsen and Martin Minski and #E477 by Peter Krug and Mario [G.] García), showing that the slogan “gens una sumus” is more than mere words.

Harold van der Heijden’s database (HHdbVI) makes it easier to find anticipations. The quest for anticipations has however become a straitjacket. Some judges seem to regard a composition as anticipated if the finale has been shown earlier. I do not focus solely on the finale, but take the setting and the play into consideration. The finale in e.g. #E453 by Steffen Slumstrup Nielsen, #E461 by Eddy Van Espen, #E469 by Geir Sune Tallaksen Østmoe, #E472 by Vladislav Tarasjuk and #E474 by Michal Hlinka and Ľuboš Kekely can be found in other studies, but the play deserves attention. Two studies by Marcel Doré are auto-anticipations. #E478 corrects his study in *The Problemist* 2002 (HHdbVI #18526) and should have been published in the British magazine. #E492 is a small improvement of his 5th commendation in *Israel Ring Tourney* 2018 (HHdbVI #2823).

There are some other studies that correct or improve old compositions. They belong to another category than real anticipations because the composers tell us about their origin. #E449 by Rainer Staudte adds an introduction to a study by Wouter Mees (HHdbVI #72906). #E460 by Vladimir Samilo adds another line to a study by Max Euwe (HHdbVI #72424). #E471 by Andrej Sergienko corrects a composition by Henri Weenink with colours reversed (HHdbVI #85857). #E476 by Marcel Van Herck improves on a study by Carl von Jaenisch from 1837! (HHdbVI #92563). #E479 by Rainer Staudte corrects a study by M. Schitz (HHdbVI #37673). I appreciate these attempts and there should perhaps have been tourneys for corrections and improvements.

When I act as judge I try to be as unbiased as possible. Some judges openly state that they prefer certain types of studies. I find that unfair. I try to evaluate the compositions on their

own merits and I try to avoid being guided by my own preferences. I look for an idea and the way it is presented. Important factors to be considered in addition to idea and originality are attractiveness of setting, economy, introductory play, difficulty, surprising moves, tries, black counter-play, number of captures and checks and length of the solution. I look for these aspects when I examine the studies, but I do not comment on all these aspects in my award. It would seem strange to find a list of relevant factors for every entry. They are however always a part of my grading.

The question of the use of databases is a recurring problem for judges. I do not disqualify studies that could have been found using a database, but I look at the solution to see if it looks “human”.

Nowadays chess programs have reduced the number of incorrect studies to a minimum. I have not found any cooks.

Many of the participants are outstanding composers and I expected to find many fine compositions. I was not disappointed. There are many memorable studies. I have decided to give 5 prizes, 5 honourable mentions and 11 commendations. I do not distinguish the commendations, but list them in order of publication. I am convinced that players would also enjoy other studies that are not included in the award.

1st prize: #E464 Steffen Slumstrup Nielsen and Martin Minski.

The position is open and airy and the play is attractive. We expect an old fashioned Nowotny on f4, but this turns out to be an illusion. A chess program finds the winning move 4.Sg1! in the twinkling of an eye, but to humans this move comes as a surprise. Unexpected moves seem to be the trademark of these composers. The finale is elegant: White repeats the manoeuvre Qh8+ with a disastrous effect.

2nd prize: #E462 Michael Hlinka and Mario M. García.

Two knights and pawn versus bishop could easily lead to a draw. After 4.Ke2! the black bishop is suddenly dominated. It cannot move without being forked by one of the knights. Black tries to save himself by sacrificing his last pawn. He hopes to win one of his opponent's knights in return. But his defence backfires as White can give up one of his knights and still

have a fork in reserve. This reminds me of the good old days when domination was the theme of many studies. Very nice!

3rd prize: #E453 Steffen Slumstrup Nielsen.

White must find a convincing way to *force* Black to take on d4. The white king goes to e1, and after 6.Kf1 the black rook must check on the wrong side of the white king, in the e-file instead of the g-file. 6.Kd1? does not function, but it enhances the quality of the study. The idea is attractive, but the introduction 1.Re8 and the threat 2.f7+ are rather brutal. It is probably difficult to find something better? The final skewer is of course a well-known trick.

4th prize: #E494 David Gurgenidze.

This contribution shows the phoenix theme. A white knight is captured on e3 and the white a-pawn is promoted to a knight. The new knight plays the leading part in an elegant little combination. And *mirabile dictu*, the phoenix knight delivers the deathblow on e3, the very same square on which the first knight was sacrificed. I cannot remember any other study ending this way.

5th prize: #E458 Michal Hlinka and Ľuboš Kekely.

There are two interesting variations. In the line 1...bxa2 White must play carefully to avoid zugzwang and prevent Black's bishop from reaching the diagonal h1-a8. In the line 1...g2 Black's bishop succeeds in reaching f3. White must sacrifice his queen, but a phoenix-queen appears on a8 just in time to save the draw. In this line 3.axb3? would have lost the newborn queen ten moves later. This is an original contribution and another fine study by the Slovak duo. It is curious that the 4th prize and the 5th prize both show the phoenix theme.

1st honourable mention: #E470 Yochanan Afek.

The composer has created a classical composition with a minimum of material and a picturesque finale. Black is forced to block g1 with his knight, and after 4.h4! gxh3 he is also forced to block h3. These two active blocks lead to a beautiful mate. Short, but attractive. This is something for future anthologies.

2nd honourable mention: #E489 Steffen Slumstrup-Nielsen. This is an elegant rook endgame with only 8 men and interesting play. The crucial position arises after 5...Kd7. The white rook must return to the first rank as quickly as possible to stop the black pawn. 6.Rg8? and

6.Rf8? lose as the white king will later block the way of the white rook. 6.Ra8? loses as Black can defend his pawn from d4. The correct move is 6.Rh8! Rxc5 7.Kg3. Now 7... Rxd5 is met by 8.Rh4! and 7...c3 by 8.Rh1. Very instructive.

3rd honourable mention: #E466 Daniel Keith. Bishop, two knights and pawn versus queen is usually a win. White's men are however scattered all over the board and he must first of all bring them home. This gives Black's queen the chance to capture the pawn and the position seems to be equal. But now the united force of the minor pieces weaves a mate in the middle of the board.

4th honourable mention: #E474 Michal Hlinka and Ľuboš Kekely.

Both sides play aggressively with their kings and both sides sacrifice material to thwart the opponent's plans. The stalemate with a pinned knight after 7...Kf2 is of course known (e.g. Vladimir Bron, 1970, HHdbVI #51385). But the composers add a second finale. After the alternative 7...Kg4 White sets up an impregnable fortress.

5th honourable mention: E#475 Peter Krug.

Rook and two knights versus queen is usually a draw, and White must play cautiously to prevent Black from exchanging his queen for the white rook. The manoeuvre 4.Ra3! and 5.Rd3! creates a position of mutual zugzwang, leaving the move to Black. The black queen is dominated and lost in a few moves.

Commendation: #E454 Pavel Arestov.

The clue is 3.c3! that leads to a won pawn endgame after exchange of the rooks. It is a small idea and I doubt that it justifies the use of heavy artillery. I would have considered publishing a pawn endgame.

Commendation: #E461 Eddy Van Espen.

White finds the correct defence 5.Sf3! that draws and avoids the tempting 5.Sd3? The point is that the black king on f3 prevents a check on g4. In the line 5.Sd3? the black king is too close to the battlefield. The position after 5.Sf3! can be found in a study by Zakhodyakin (HHdbVI #41324), but the play is different and the try Sd3? is missing in Zakhodyakin's study.

Commendation: #E463 Amatzia Avni.

The position of the white rook on b7 is unnatural and the play to open the seventh rank for it is forced. The sacrifice 6.Sg5! diverts the black queen to an unfavourable square and allows 7.e2-e4! These finesses and the decisive move 8.Rd4! justify an inclusion in the award.

Commendation: #E465 Peter Krug and Mario [M.] García.

This features a minor promotion to avoid stalemate, but the promotion is not of the usual kind. A typical example of underpromotion to a bishop is HHdbVI #39773 by R. Cambi. The bishop in Krug's and García's study needs to capture a black queen on b1. The play that leads to this position is however rather rough.

Commendation: #E468 Vladislav Tarasjuk.

White cannot prevent Black from getting a new queen, but he cleverly lures the black king into a future fork. Studies with rook and knight versus queen seem to have regained some of its former popularity.

Commendation: #E469 Geir Sune Tallaksen Østmoe.

Black fights to conquer the white pawn on e6 and succeeds in capturing it. Meanwhile White prepares a stalemate. The most interesting moment is 7.Rh7! The alternative 7.Rh6? looks more natural as it defends the white pawn. The final stalemate was shown more than 250 years ago by Ercole del Rio (HHdbVI #93140).

Commendation: #E472 Vladislav Tarasjuk.

White plays his king to a8 and Black is not able to prevent the stalemate. The solution is not difficult, but White must avoid some traps. Henri Rinck found the idea in 1938, but his presentation is rather primitive (HHdbVI #73543). Tarasjuk's contribution is an improvement.

Commendation: #E483 Peter Kiryakov and Pavel Arestov.

The introduction 1.Kb1 is rather obvious as White must guard against a check by the black bishop and also needs a2 to give perpetual check. The solution is first and foremost an exercise in checking spiced with some silent moves. Players can learn a lot from practical studies.

Commendation: #E484 Yochanan Afek.

After an introduction we reach a rook endgame. The rook endgame is relevant for the practical player and demands an accurate defence. This contribution is interesting but not of the same quality as the other rook endgame in this award; cf. #E489 by Steffen Slumstrup Nielsen supra.

Commendation: #E485 by Amatzia Avni.

After 1.Kc8 Black can play 1...Re5 that leads to a familiar stalemate or 1...Rg2 that leads to a positional draw. The play is not very exciting and there are no surprises.

Commendation: #E488 Richard Becker.

There are hundreds of endgames with queen and knight versus queen. The play is usually rather forcing with several checks and a rather passive black queen. Two echo model mates are nice, but the play looks as if it could have been mined from a database.

Finally I would like to thank Probleemblad and the column director Marcel Van Herck for inviting me to act as judge.

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Jarl Henning Ulrichsen