

Birth pangs of a study

YOCHANAN AFEK

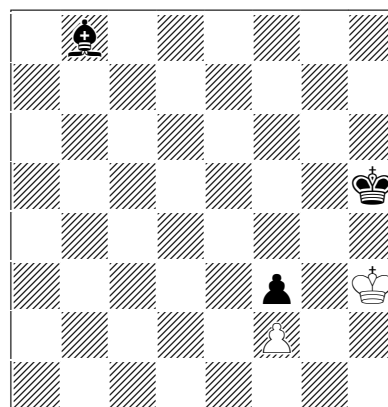
The active chess players among us study composers seem to benefit from their daily contacts with the large over-the-board community. To start with, this natural public to whom we can show our recent efforts, express such frank opinions as “Too many pieces!” or “Such fiction can never happen in a real game!” And on our side we enjoy an additional free checking service for the correctness of the newborn masterpiece. You can trust your best chess-friends, who are always on the look-out for new challenge and thrill, to derive pleasure from cruelly tearing to pieces your most precious studies. Behind their sympathising look, pretending to share your sorrow, they can barely hide the great excitement of achievement and satisfaction. On the other hand, now and then they pop up with some interesting position – “Look what I missed just last night!” – which gives you (rather rarely, though) a fresh idea for your next effort.

Some two years ago I took part in a master tournament organized by the Cultural Dutch Village of Wijk aan Zee. One of my opponents was the Australian master Alex Wohl. Having dinner together in *Café De Zon* following one of the rounds, he admitted to having no particular interest in the world of chess composition. However, during one of his numerous games he remembered rejecting a promising continuation after discovering that at the end of the lengthy line that he tried to calculate, the surprising position **A1** lay in wait for him:

“I was amazed by the fact that a piece up and with the move I could not escape an inevitable draw”, he said. “Perhaps you can use it somehow?”. I could easily understand his amazement. “If you were just a bit more interested in studies you would certainly have faced hundreds of such surprises”, I told him. I added that such a simple looking position was likely to have been used more than once in the long history of our art. Nevertheless, I promised

him to look it up in Harold van der Heijden’s database and to keep him informed.

[793] **A1** – schema “A”
Drawn WTM or BTM



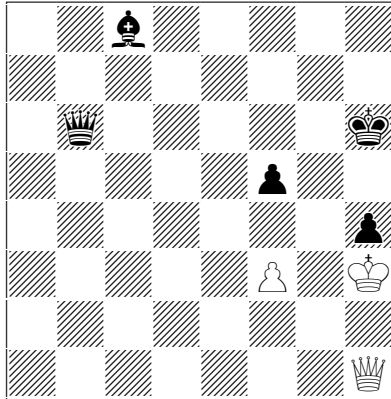
h3h5 0030.11 2/3 Draw

To my surprise I could not find in the database a single confirmation of my initial assumption. I rushed the news to Alex and promised him to give the idea a serious try and credit him above the diagram if I succeeded. The dark side of being a study composer and an active player at the same time is that once a new idea occurs to you it tends not to leave you in peace until after the tournament and might well affect your over-the-board performance. Years ago I heard about the great Richard Réti (another “victim” of this duality) who had this idea while playing, sped to his room to work it out and returned to the tournament hall only to find out he had lost his game on time. I don’t know how true the story is, but I am sure a real artist can scarcely inhibit the spontaneous process of creativity from demanding attention and brooking no delay.

So I spent the rest of the event staring at the above diagrammed position not really seeing the light. I tried to take advantage of the position’s inherent flexibility, lifting it one or two ranks higher, up and down time and again, but to no avail. Apart from a couple of banal sketches I made no real progress. I was about

to give up and keep it with other schemes for better times, when in a burst of sudden inspiration, it hit me, like a stroke of lightning! See **A2**.

[794] **A2** – schema “B”



h3h6 4030.12 3/5 Draw

A2: 1.Qc1+ Qe3!! 2.Qxe3+/i f4+ 3.Qe6+!! Bxe6+ 4.Kxh4 draw!

i) 2.Qxc8? Qxf3+ 3.Kh2 Qe2+ 4.Kh3 Qg4+ 5.Kh2 Qg3+ 6.Kh1 Qh3+ 7.Kg1 Qe3+ 8.Kh2 Kg5 wins.

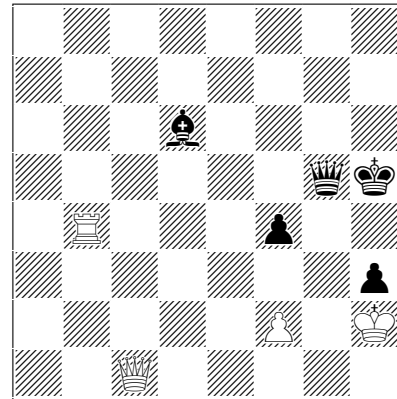
Mutual queen sacrifices! Adding a queen is usually a tricky business. Amazingly, here a pair of queens is sacrificed deliberately and captured with check right in the open! When I finally managed to digest this miraculous vision, and having made sure it was not a mirage, I tried to create decent introductory play. I was in the course of checking various versions when I was invited to give a lecture on “De Feijter Day” in the Dutch city of Deventer. In trying to demonstrate a possible composing process it seemed appropriate to tell the unfinished story of the “Wohl position”. At least one of my young listeners was deeply impressed. This was brought home to me the very next day when I received a message from the rising young Dutch star Martin van Essen. He was not only impressed but on returning home he even managed to give it the finishing touch I was aiming for **A3**.

A3: Yochanan Afek (Israel) & Martin van Essen (Netherlands). 1.Rb5! Qxb5/i 2.Qd1+ Qe2!! 3.Qxe2+ f3+ 4.Qe5+!! Bxe5+ 5.Kxh3, an original draw following mutual neat queen sacrifices captured with check!

i) f3+ 2.Kxh3 Qxb5 3.Qg5+ stalemate!

[795] **A3** – version “A”

Y.Afek & M.van Essen
entered for Avni-50JT 2004



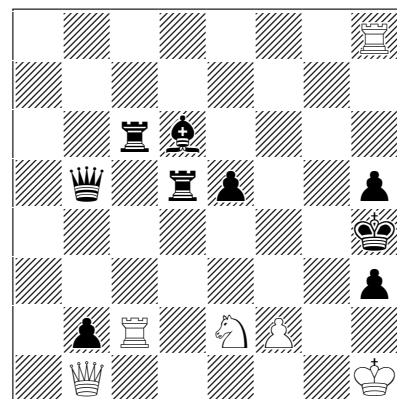
h2h5 4130.12 4/5 Draw

Hurray! It’s done! I cheered, dashing off to praise what Martin had done and offer him partnership in what was a joint composition. However, Martin is a motivated young man full of energy who apparently looked upon this version just as a modest starting point for something bigger and bolder. A mutual queen sacrifice? Well, why not add a mutual rook sacrifice, for example?

He spent the next couple of passionate evenings gradually building up to the fairytale **A4**.

[796] **A4** – version “B”

M.van Essen, Y.Afek & A.Wohl
1st prize, Avni-50JT (cf. EG/55.14244)



h1h4 4831.14 6/9 Draw

A4: Yochanan Afek (Israel), Martin van Essen (Netherlands) & Alex Wohl (Australia). 1.Rxb2 Rc1+! 2.Qxc1 Rd1+! 3.Kh2! Qd5!/i 4.Rxh5+! Kxh5 5.Sf4+!/ii exf4 6.Rb5! Qxb5 7.Qxd1+ Qe2!! 8.Qxe2+ f3 9.Qe5+!! Bxe5 10.Kxh3 Kg5 draw.

i) Qd3 4.Qxd1 Qxd1 5.Sg3, and White holds.
ii) 5.Sg3+? Kg6 6.Qc2+ Rd3! and White is helpless.

Judge's comment: "Brilliant play. Good introduction, interesting try (5.Sg3+?), active black counterplay, with thunder and lightning on each turn. The composers' decision to send this particular study to this judge is hardly accidental: mutual queen sacrifices appear in many of my own works."

We now had two versions of the study. We agreed to enter for the Amatzia Avni-50JT. Amatzia is himself fond of bloody battles where mutual blows are exchanged so we thought it would be a perfect birthday present

for him. We just did not see eye to eye on which version to send. Martin was in favour of the bloodier one while I, though admiring its boldness and extravaganza, thought the minimal version so pure and natural that additional fireworks might dim the clarity and sharpness of the pivotal motive. Instead of exchanging mutual blows ourselves, we decided simply to send both versions to the party allowing the host himself to choose his present. Judging from the tourney's award Martin was right again, and I am no longer going to argue with success.

Amsterdam, 2005