

The Chess Endgame Studies of Richard Réti : Casualties

John Beasley, 14 January 2012, latest revision 2 March

A couple of these demolitions are due to my own computer-assisted analysis while preparing this presentation, but I imagine that they have been reported before and I make no claim in respect of priority.

Pawn studies

No casualties, but one important reinstatement. It was widely reported some years ago that the famous pawn study which is **1.1** in this collection had been anticipated a few months previously by H. A. Adamson. This is quite false. The Adamson version did not appear until early in 1922 (in the January issue of the *Chess Amateur*, page 119), and the accompanying text made clear that it was derived from the Réti and was in no sense a forerunner of it.

Knights and pawns

C.1 (M 7, 6th Honourable Mention, *Shakhmaty*, 1929/I, dedicated to Dr Siegbert Tarrasch): White Kb7, Ne4, Pa6 (3), Black Ka5, Nb5 (2), White to play and win. Intention 1 Nc5 Kb4 2 Kb6 Nd6 3 Ne4 Nc8+ 4 Kc7 Kb5 5 Kb7 Ka5 6 Nc5 Nd6+ 7 Kc7 Nb5+ 8 Kc6 Na7+ 9 Kb7 Nb5 10 Ne4 (now we are back at the starting position but with Black to play) Kb4 11 Kb6 Kc4 12 Nc3 Nd6 13 Kc7 Kc5 14 a7 etc, but the definitive results for K + N + P v K + N now available show that the game can be won without the lengthy lose-a-move manoeuvre; indeed, 2 Nd7 forces the eventual mate two moves sooner. It has long been a wry joke among composers that to dedicate a composition to somebody is the best possible way of ensuring that it will eventually be proved to be unsound.

C.2 (M 9, composed 1929 and first published in Mandler's 1931 book): White Kg5, Ne3 (2), Black Kh2, Nf2, Ph3 (3), White to play and hold the draw. Intention 1 Kh4 Kg1 2 Ng4 Kg2 3 Ne3+ Kh2 4 Nc2 Nd3 (4...Kg1/Kh1 5 Ne1, 4...Kg2 5 Ne3+) 5 Kg4 (5 Ne3 Nf4 6 Ng4+ Kg2 and we have an equivalent position to that in **C.1** after 1 Nc5) Ne5+ 6 Kh4 Nf3+ 7 Kg4 Ng5 8 Ne1 (8 Kxg5 Kg1 9 Nd4 Kf2 leads to a Black win) Kg1 9 Nf3+ Kg2 10 Nh4+ Kf2 11 Nf3, the point being that the attacking side's knight is worse placed than in **C.1** and gets in the way of its own king. However, the definitive results for K + N + P v K + N show an elegant alternative by 5 Nd4 Kg2 6 Nf3 Ne5 7 Ne1+ Kh2 8 Nc2, returning to the position after 4 Nc2 with the unimportant difference that the Black knight is now on e5 instead of f2. Am I being harsh in relegating the study to the casualties on account of such an alternative? Perhaps, but to include it would invite comparison with the magnificently accurate **5.10** where White has to play exactly the correct move right through to the end.

Bishops and pawns

C.3 and **C.4** have been corrected (see **3.7** and **3.8**).

Rooks and pawns

C.5 (M 23, 28. *řijen*, 1 August 1925): White Kb4, Rh8, Ph7/c3 (4), Black Ke3, Re7, Pb6/f5 (4), White to play and win. Intention 1 Kb5 f4 2 Kc6 (2 Kxb6 f3 3 Kc6 f2 4 Rf8 Rxh7) Kf2 3 Kxb6 f3 4 Kc6 Rf7 5 Kd6 Rf6+ 6 Kd5 Rf5+ 7 Ke6 Rh5 8 Kd6 Rh6+ 9 Kc5 Rh5+ 10 Kb4, with a note that 6 Ke5 is met by 6...Rf7 7 Ke6 Rc7 8 Kd6 Rf7 9 c4 Rf6+ 10 Ke5 Rf7 11 Ke6 Rc7 12 Kd6 Rxc4. However, 12 Kd6 in this line merely throws away a pawn to no purpose, and my computer wants to play 12 Kd5 instead with a quick win (its best-play line starts 12...Rd7+ 13 Kc6 Rf7 14 c5 Kf1 15 Kb6 f2 16 c6 Ke2 17 Re8+ Kd3 18 Rd8+ Kc2 19 c7). Yakov Konoval, having checked the position in his and Marc Bourzutschky's preliminary results for K + R + 2P v K + R + P for me, confirms this with a note that 18 h8Q also wins, and draws attention to many further alternative winning moves for White along the intended main line, most of them winning as quickly as or even more quickly than the intended solution (having played to 10 Kb4, White still has to clinch the win with K + R + P v K + R after 10...Kf1 11 Rf8 Rxh7 12 Rxf3+, though it won't be difficult because the rook will cut the Black king off from the pawn). Yakov and Marc's preliminary results for K + R + 2P v K + R + P were calculated under the simplifying assumption that promotion was possible only to queen or knight, but this isn't a situation in which the defender will be able to save himself by underpromoting to a rook or bishop.

Knights and bishops

C.6 (M 30, composed in 1929 and first published in Mandler's 1931 book): White Kh7, Bd7, Pg6/g2 (4), Black Kf8, Bg7, Nc4 (3), White to play and hold the draw. Intention 1 g3 Ne5 2 Bg4 and 2...Nxc4 will be stalemate, but Harold van der Heijden's "Endgame study database IV" reports busts by 1...Nd6 and mate by move 7 at the latest (attributed to AF) and by 2...Nc6 and mate by move 11 at the latest (attributed to RK). The latter, at least, seems irreparable, assuming that the stalemate by 2...Ng4 is a primary objective of the study; if the knight is placed on any other square giving access to g4, Black has a much quicker mate.

C.7 (M 39, *Shakhmaty*, 1927, correction): White Ke5, Bf8, Pc7/e6 (4), Black Kc8, Bh5, Nh4 (3), Black to play but White to hold the draw. Intention 1...Ng6+ and not 2 Kf6 Nxf8, when White is in zugzwang, but 2 Kf5 Nxf8 3 Kf6 and now it is Black who is in zugzwang: 3...Kxc7 4 Ke7 Nh7 stalemate. However, while this is sound enough, it is rather static and clumsy, and the finale had been anticipated by Kubbel a few years earlier (*Shakhmaty* 1923): White Kd7, Pb5/d5 (3), Black Kf7, Bc7, Na8 (3), draw by 1 d6 Ba5 2 b6 Nxb6 3 Kc6 Nc8 4 Kd7 Na7 stalemate. So only the reciprocal zugzwang after 3 Kf6 was Réti's, and given the rather crude way in which this is achieved (the capture of an unmoved White bishop to force the knight to f8, and the use of the pawn on c7, also captured unmoved, to prevent a Black waiting move by ...Kb7 or ...Kb8) I don't think he would have wanted the study to stand in the collection. According to Kalendovský, the anticipation was first noted by Vladimirov and Fokin. Réti's original setting, much richer in content, had White Ke8, Be7, Pc7/f7/e6 (5), Black Kc8, Bg4, Ng6/e5, Pf6 (5), draw intended by 1 f8N Nxf8 2 Bxf8 Bh5+ 3 Ke7 Ng6+ etc, but 1...f5 and 3...Ng4 both led to Black wins.

Rooks and minor pieces

C.8 (M 32, *Tagesbote*, 1928): White Kf6, Nf8, Pe6/d3 (4), Black Kc8, Rd6 (2), White to play and win. Intention 1 d4 Rxd4 2 e7 Rd6+ and not 3 Kf7 Rd8 drawing but 3 Kg7 Rd8 4 Kf7 winning. However, the position after 1...Rxd4 had been previously shown by M. F. Palmer, *Iowa News*, 1917 (Kalendovský reports this anticipation as first having been reported by Walter Korn), and the move 1...Rxd4 is unexpectedly but greatly inferior to 1...Kc7. Harold van der Heijden's "Endgame study database IV" even gives 1...Kc7 2 d5 Ra6, which it credits to "Z", as a cook; it isn't quite that, but it makes the win very much more difficult than the main line move 1...Rxd4 does, and a subsidiary Black move requiring a disproportionately difficult refutation destroys a study's aesthetic effect. So the first move must come off, and everything thereafter is anticipated.

C.9 has been corrected (see **6.8**).

C.10 (M 34, *Shakhmaty*, 1929): White Kg5, Nf4/b2, Ph7 (4), Black Kc3, Rd8, Pc7 (3), White to play and win. Intention 1 Na4+ Kb4 2 Ng6 Kxa4 (2...c5 3 Kf6 c4 4 Ke7 Rc8 5 Nb6) 3 Kf6 c5 4 Ke7 followed by 4...Ra8/Rc8 5 Nf8 Ra7+/Rc7+ 6 Nd7 Ra8/Rc8 7 Nb6+ or 4...Rb8 5 Nf8 Rb7+ 6 Nd7. But my computer plays 3...Rb8 in the line 2...c5, and after 4 Nb2 Kc3 5 Nd1+ (5 Na4+ Kb4 repeating) Kd4 it appears impossible for White to make progress. 6 Kf7 makes no immediate threat (7 Nf8 will be met by 7...Rb7+ etc), and allows Black to push forward with his c-pawn; 6 Ke7 and 6 Kg7 allow 7 Rb7+ etc at once; and 6 Ne7 (for 7 Ng8) allows 6...Rh8. In most cases, White can answer Black's eventual ...Rhx7 by taking the rook, but it doesn't help; K + 2N win against K + cP only if the knights can securely blockade the pawn on a square no further forward than c4, and here the pawn will quickly advance to c3.

C.11 (M 51, *Tijdschrift v. d. NSB*, 1924, version): White Kg2, Rf1, Nd4, Pe6 (4), Black Ka5, Re4, Bh2, Pa7/h7/g4/g3 (7), White to play and win. A more complicated essay on the theme of **6.5** and **6.6**, with intention 1 e7 h5 (1...Re3 2 Ra1+ Kb6 3 Nf5 Re2+ 4 Kf1 Re6 5 Nd6 etc, 1...Kb4 2 Re1 Rxe1 3 Nc2+) 2 Rf5+ Kb6 (2...Ka4 3 Rf4 with 3...Rxf4 4 e8Q+ or 3...R~ 4 N+, 2...Kb4 3 Nc6+ with 3...Kc4 4 Re5 Rf4 5 Re1 h4 6 Ne5+ and 7 Nxc4 or 3...K~3 4 Re5 Rf4 5 Re3+ K~ 6 Rxc3 Ke4 7 Kxh2 etc) 3 Rf6+ Kc7 4 Ne6+ with 4...Kb6/Kd6 5 Ng5+ or 4...Kb7/Kd7 5 Nc5+. However, the given answer to 1...Re3 can be met by 5...g2+ and 6...Bxd6, and nothing better is apparent. I have no idea whether this can be rescued, but its clumsy setting seems so much inferior to that of its fellows that I see little reason to regret its loss.

Queens

C.12 (M 53, Commendation, *Magyar Sakkvilág*, 1929): White Kc7, Rg1, Na3, Pe6/a5 (5), Black Kc3, Qb2, Ph6 (3), White to play and win. Intention 1 e7 Qh2+ 2 Kc6 with 2...Qe2 3 Nb5+ or 2...Qe5 3 Rg3+ Kb4 4 Nc2+ Kc4 5 Ne3+ followed by 6 Nd5+ or Nf5+ and 7 Re3. However, Harold van der Heijden's "Endgame study database IV" gives a bust, credited to MG, in which Black plays 5...Kd4 in the 2...Qe5 line, with sequel 6 Nf5+ Qxf5 7 e8Q Qd5+ 8 Kb6 Qd6+ 9 Qc6 Qb8+ 10 Ka6/Qb7 Qxg3. No further details are given, but the point would appear to be that Black can either force a perpetual check or pick up the unguarded rook and come down to a drawn ending with a queen and a pawn on each side.