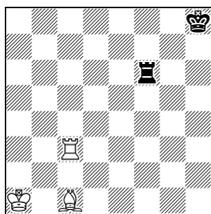


COMPOSING A STUDY

By John Nunn

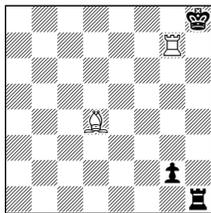
Over the past few issues, there have been a number of interesting articles about the process of composing various types of problem, and now it is the turn of studies to take the limelight. The vast majority of contemporary over-the-board chess literature aims to improve the reader's chess-playing ability, with just a few tournament books or games collections. It has long baffled me that in chess composition it's the other way around, with endless problem collections by composer, by country, by problem type, etc. There's hardly anything about actually composing or, for that matter, solving. Two exceptions are an old book by Comins Mansfield, *Adventures in Composition*, and a more recent book by Petko Petkov, *The Art of Composing Selfmates*. Some older problem books contain chapters on composition, but that's about it. Unfortunately, the two books mentioned don't deal with the trickiest part of composition, which is getting an idea in the first place. Mansfield just starts with an arrangement of pieces on the board, saying "Here's an idea for a problem", but he fails to explain how the idea came to him. Petkov is more concerned with the systematic exploration of various thematic ideas in the selfmate, and often just shows the finished product.

D1 R.Bianchetti
L' Italia Scacchistica 1924

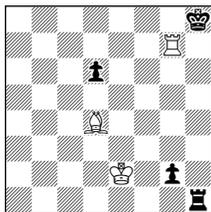


Win

D2
Sketch



D3
The reciprocal zugzwang



Therefore my main aim is to focus on the early stages of composing one particular study and I will slightly gloss over the later parts, which mainly consisted of fiddling around with the pieces until the computer confirmed correctness. The story starts when I was idly putting pieces on an empty board and put wBb2, wRg7 and bKh8. Batteries of this type have occurred many times in studies, and the following study, **D1**, popped into my mind.

1.Bb2! Rh6 (1...Rf8 2.Rc7+ Kg8 3.Rg7+ Kh8 4.Ka2 is a reflection of the main line) **2.Rg3+ Kh7 3.Rg7+ Kh8 4.Kb1** (not 4.Ka2? Ra6+ 5.Kb1 Ra1+ 6.Kc2 Rc1+ 7.Kb3 Rc3+) with a position of reciprocal zugzwang.

It's a simple but effective study, and has often been reproduced. I started to wonder if it would be possible to use the same battery to create a more interesting zugzwang position with the black rook further away from the king. If we place the rook on a distant square, there has to be something to prevent White winning the rook straight away with a discovered check, and I tried using a black pawn for this. I quickly came up with the following idea, **D2**.

It's Black to play, and the position of the white king is yet to be determined. This looks promising, because promoting the pawn loses to Rxf1+ and the black rook cannot move along the h-file (if 1...Rh6, then 2.Rxg2+ Kh7 3.Rg7+ Kh8 followed by a pass move, as in the Bianchetti). However, it's not zugzwang as Black can play either 1...Rf1 or 1...Rd1. The white king must be positioned so as to prevent these moves, and the simplest is to add it on e2. Then 1...Rf1 2.Rxg2+ wins the rook, while 1...Rd1 can just be taken. Black is indeed in zugzwang here, but a more interesting study could be constructed if the zugzwang could be made reciprocal. That's not currently the case, because White to play has the pass move 1.Be5. However, this is the only such move, and it's quite easy to rule it out – see **D3**.

This is now reciprocal zugzwang. If Black plays 1...d5, then 2.Be5 d4 3.Bxd4 puts Black in zugzwang again, while White to play has no waiting move. If he plays 1.Bc3, then 1...Rc1, while if the king moves then Black can reply 1...Rf1 (1.Kf2 Rd1). I did wonder if the pawn had to be as far advanced as g2, but I noticed that if it were on, say, g3 then Black would always have waiting moves by playing his rook between h1 and h2. While of little significance now, this observation was to prove important later. At this point I checked the van der Heijden database for anticipations of this zugzwang, but found nothing.

A reciprocal zugzwang is of little interest if there is no thematic try leading to the key position with the 'wrong' player to move, so the next task was to introduce such a try. One common mechanism is to use a king triangulation in response to a black check – see **D4**.

This was my first idea. Black is to play, and after **1...Rh3+ 2 Kd2 Rxh6 3 Bd4 Rh1** (the only safe square for the rook) **4 Ke2** we reach the previous diagram. However, I simply couldn't get this to work, since after 1...Rh3+ White can also

win by 2.Be3 defending the crucial white pawn. If the white king starts on e3, then 1...Rh3+ 2.Kf2 Rxb6 3.Bd4 wins at once. I wanted to keep the black rook switchback to h1, so I decided to move the white king to the first rank, and then suddenly everything worked – see **D5**.

After 1...Rh1+ 2.Kd2 (2.Ke2? Rxb6 3.Bd4 Rh1 results in the ‘wrong’ player being to move) 2...Rxb6 3.Bd4 Rh1 4.Ke2 we have the target position.

So far, so good, but now some introductory play was needed. It soon became apparent that playing the bishop to the long diagonal was so strong that it would have to be buried out of the way, moving to a7 only when needed to counter the threat of promoting on g1. Also, I wanted the black king to move to h8 during the play, because to have it already stuck in the corner in the starting position would look artificial. Finally, I wanted to have the black pawn advance to g2 in the solution – see **D6**.

This step was one of the easiest. Without adding any extra material, we have the king forced into the corner by 1.Rg7+ Kh8 (1...Kf8 2.Bxd6+) 2.Ba7. The black rook had to be transferred from h5 to the vulnerable square h2 or else Black could meet 1.Rg7+ by 1...Kf8.

However, to go back further appeared difficult, the problem being that instead of Black’s last move, he could generally have played ...Rxb6, drawing at once. It would have been nice to have the black king play from f7 to g8, but not surprisingly any move apart from ...Kg8 would then draw. The only recourse was to have Black’s last move a capture, and I quickly settled on ...Kf7xSg8 or ...Kh7xSg8 as being the most likely candidates. I decided to start with the king on f7, as it is further away from its eventual destination on h8 – see **D7**.

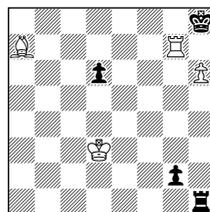
This is sound, starting 1.Rb7+ Kxg8 2.Rg7+, etc., but the first move is rather brutal and I would still like the black pawn to start on g3. This proved the most difficult moment, and I spent a long time trying different piece placings before I hit on the idea of starting the knight on e7 and playing it to g8 with discovered check. The computer quickly informed me that for this to work, the white rook had to be on a7 rather than b7, otherwise 1.Ba7 wins – see **D8**.

So we start with a neat sacrifice 1.Sg8+ Kxg8 2.Rg7+, which works well as it’s not instantly obvious why other knight checks fail. Then we can push the pawn back to g3 and Black has nothing better for his last move than to play 1...g2, since all other moves leave him too far behind on material. At this point I had one of those strokes of luck which lifts an HM or Commendation to a Prize. With the pawn on g3, I suddenly remembered that this would give a draw at the end, and it struck me how neat it would be to have a try in which the pawn stayed on g3. Then the solution would involve forcing Black to push his pawn to g2, which paradoxically helps White by removing one of the two safe squares for the black rook.

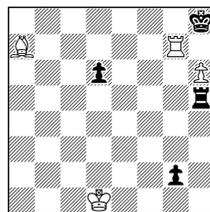
In a flash I saw this was already more or less built into the position, since by starting the knight on g8 and having it take a pawn on e7 (see **D9**), the try 1.Rxe7+ Kxg8 2.Rg7+ Kh8 3.Ba7 Rxb6 4.Bd4 Rh2 (or 4...Rh1+) would lead to the drawn line.

Additionally (and quite by accident) the solution 1.Sxe7 g2 2.Sg8+ now involves an attractive switchback by the knight. The capture on move one would have been unfortunate, but it proved possible to add an extra move at the start without using any more material – see **D10**.

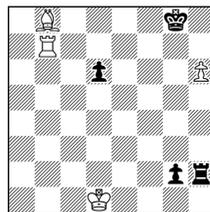
D4
First difficulty



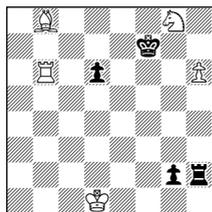
D5
The try is added



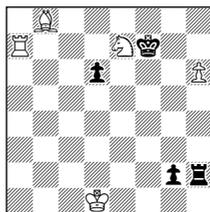
D6
Black's king gets a move



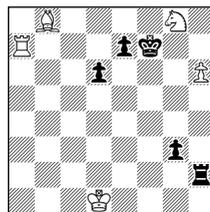
D7
A knight sacrifice



D8
Refining the introductory play



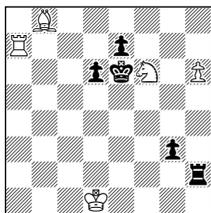
D9
A lucky break



Win

D10 John Nunn

3 Pr Timman-65 JT 2017
Section 1



Win

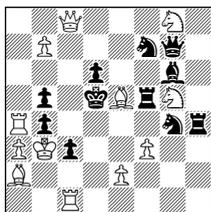
The finished product. **1.Sg8** (otherwise 1...Rh1+ followed by 2...g2 draws) **1...Kf7** (1...g2 2.Rxe7+ Kd5 3.Ba7 wins) **2.Sxe7** (try 2.Rxe7+? Kxg8 3.Rg7+ Kh8 4.Ba7 Rxh6 5.Bd4 Rh2) **2...g2** (2...Rh1+ 3.Ke2 g2 4.Sd5+ wins) **3.Sg8+!** (3.Sd5+? Kg6 and 3.Sf5+? Kf6 are draws) **3...Kxg8** **4.Rg7+ Kh8** **5.Ba7 Rh1+ 6.Kd2!** (6.Ke2? Rxh6 7.Bd4 Rh1 reaches the reciprocal zugzwang with White to play) **6...Rxb6** **7.Bd4 Rh1** (after 7...g1Q 8.Rxg1+ Kh7 9.Rg7+ Kh8 White only needs to pass twice to win; for example, 10.Kd3 d5 11.Kd2) **8.Ke2** (it is now Black to move in the reciprocal zugzwang) **8...d5** **9.Be5!** (the only move; 9.Bf6? Rh6, 9.Bb2? Rb1! and 9.Bc3? Rc1! are all drawn) **9...d4** **10.Bxd4** with another switchback and putting Black in a final zugzwang.

The Genesis of an ACR Threemover

By David Shire

A Christopher Reeves

1 HM BCPS Ring Ty 1965
(*Busmen's Chess Review*)



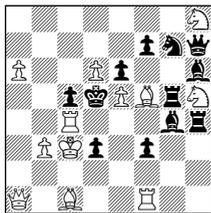
#2

Some years ago in *The Original Christopher Reeves* I recalled how Chris was anxious to produce a worthy #2 for the Stocchi MT. At the time there were only a handful of quintuple Stochis extant and so Chris tried to create one with a distinct difference. He decided that a wK battery should deliver some of the thematic mates; a typically ambitious project! In reality he found he could not meet the standard he had set himself for this important tourney and so he published the problem A in the *Busmen's Chess Review*.

If the reader feels that he is familiar with this diagram then he would be correct. It featured as V in Michael McDowell's selection from the BCPS Ring Tourneys that appeared in the recent September magazine! It also gives me the opportunity to give the *correct* diagram, for V lacked wPa3, the omission of which results in duals that the composer would have hated. Not only is wRa4 out of play but it can also be captured with unanswerable check. Michael rightly observes that the key is the only possible one... but it is positively dreadful. **1.Rxb4!** (>2.Rxb5) The threat claims the unprovided e5 flight and 1...Kxe5 is met by 2.Qe6. Now captures of wBe5 will allow the bK to escape to d4 if White enacts his threat. However, such moves block e5 thus permitting mates that are differentiated by dual avoidance. This constitutes the Stocchi theme. 1...Qxe5 2.Kc2; 1...Rxe5 2.Kxc3; 1...Sfx5 2.e4; 1...Sgx5 2.Se7 and 1...dxe5 2.Rd1. Post-key all indeed is perfect!

B Christopher Reeves

C *The Problemist* 2000



#3

Chris was acutely aware of the shortcomings of this #2; he was also wont to revisit his early works, endlessly seeking improvement. In these pursuits 35 years would have been "an evening gone" as far as Chris was concerned and so we had to wait until 2000 for the rebirth of his twomover as a threemover B. ACR was never completely comfortable as an author of #3s but he appreciated that one method to justify the extra length was to ensure that the self-blocks were anticipatory.

When one compares the two diagrams, the similarity of the disposition of force on the RHS of the board is striking. However, here the wBf5 that is to be captured lies in the *extended* bK field. Two flights are unprovided; key and threat deal with both: **1.d7!** (>2.d8Q+) **2...Kc6** **3.Qa4** and **2...Kxe5** **3.Rxc5**. This last mate is identical with the threat of the #2, so clearly captures of wBf5 will allow the escape of the bK to e4. 1...Qxf5 2.d8Q+ Kxe5 3.Kd2; 1...Rxf5 2.d8Q+ Kxe5 3.Kxd3; 1...Sxf5 2.d8Q+ Kxe5 3.Bf4; 1...Bxf5 2.d8Q+ Kxe5 3.Sxf7 and 1...exf5 2.d8Q+ Kxe5 3.Re1 (2...Ke6 3.Qd6). If 1...Kxe5 2.d8Q (>2.Rxc5) Kxf5 2.Qf6 – yes, this is precisely the same mate as in the #2 just shifted one file eastwards.

I can only imagine that Chris must have delighted in the recapitulation 1...Kxe5 2.d8Q with 2...Qxf5/Rxf5/Sxf5/Bxf5/exf5 3.Kd2/Kxd3/Bf4/Sxf7/Re1. The *aficionados* of the threemover may not warm to this work with its repeated second white move, but that is missing the point. Genesis is about creation. Here we can at least appreciate the journey the composer has made from the germ of his idea to the final product; it is what makes our activity so rewarding. The result may betray the struggle the author has faced but for Chris the realisation of a difficult task was everything.