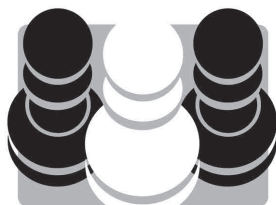


Practical Chess Beauty

By

Yochanan Afek



Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

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On the Search for Chess Beauty

Recently I was amazed by a video showing one of the world's youngest grandmasters, Indian prodigy GM Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa, solving an endgame study blindfold. His trainer, GM R.B. Ramesh, like many of his colleagues, claims that the best way to improve one's play is to solve endgame studies on a daily basis. Top grandmasters use studies as part of their training programs to improve their creativity and out-of-the-box thinking, to polish their calculating skills, to enrich their arsenal of tactical weaponry and to deepen their endgame understanding. And no less importantly: to keep sharp in general and intensify their joy in chess!

In my professional chess career of more than 50 years, as a player, writer and trainer (among various other chess interests), I have devoted a great deal of my time and energy to promoting the endgame study as an excellent educational tool to develop a sense of aesthetics and precision, as well as practising how to estimate accurately the power and qualities of each piece alone *and* in harmony with other pieces. All these virtues are essential in shaping a complete and original player; no less so than the knowledge of opening theory and middlegame strategy.

This book is an invitation to explore chess beauty through my lifetime experiences as a player and composer. I was persuaded years ago to write a book on my creative career, mainly by Jacob Aagaard on behalf of Quality Chess, but also by quite a few chess friends from both the over-the-board and chess composition communities. As much as I was flattered by these encouraging calls, I honestly thought that the time was not yet ripe for such an adventure, because my best, I believed, was yet to come. In fact I feel I was quite right, as I find the sixth decade of my life to have been the most fruitful and mature period in my entire composing career.

This book, summing up the first fifty years of my career, is structured according to the main themes of its contents, with each chapter displaying games and game fragments as an appetizer, my studies as the main dish, and a selection of exercises, aimed to suit a range of players, as a dessert.

Most studies in this book have game-like initial positions (as this is the terrain I was brought up on); however, from time to time the reader is allowed a peep into the fairyland of chess fantasy which is one of the treasures of chess, despite being somewhat different.

A number of people were instrumental in bringing this book to a happy ending; my good old friends Amatzia Avni and Gady Costeff were beside me with their good advice throughout the entire process. It is my privilege to have such a highly skilful editing team composed of GM John Shaw, GM Colin McNab and IM Andrew Greet.

I would like to dedicate this book to two people who were highly influential in shaping my way as a chess composer:

My chess mentor **Moshe Czerniak** (1910-1984), the Israeli Mr. Chess who first introduced me, and many other players of my generation, to the beauty of the game and the endgame study.

Hillel Aloni (1937-2017), the father of the Israeli endgame study, for leading my first steps with so much care and devotion through the minefield of chess composition.

Last but not least to mention is you, dear reader, whom I wish an enjoyable and instructive tour through the wonderland of chess composition. Make the best out of it to grow as a chess player and a chess lover!

Yochanan Afek
Amsterdam, October 2018



In Cafe Batavia in Amsterdam with GM Tal Baron & IMs Merijn van Delft & Manuel Bosboom

Foreword

by Emil Sutovsky

Dear reader,

You are holding a book written by a Maestro. Maestro stands here not for an official title, though Yochanan Afek is an International Master who still occasionally wins tournaments. Yochanan is a prolific chess composer whose studies have caused headaches and enormous pleasure for generations of top players – and I still can't believe he formally became a composing Grandmaster only three years ago. Yochanan is also an organizer, lecturer, author, journalist, trainer, solver, you name it – he covers all aspects of chess with his enormous passion for the game and his professionalism. A representative of the good old school, Yochanan also managed to adapt, and his works comprise human intellect and inspiration, but at the same time are augmented by the use of modern technologies.

This book is exceptional. Yochanan breaks down numerous important patterns and concepts, and offers examples that would be suitable for players in the Elo range 800-2800. In my view, there can be a lot of differences between a good and a very good player, and between a very good player and a Top-10 player. But what distinguishes any good chess player is immediate pattern recognition. And this book will help a lot to improve in this regard, while at the same time providing fine food for thought, even for a grandmaster.

'You can't cover it all' – I hear you, dear reader. Indeed, it is a difficult task, but Yochanan's versatility makes him a wonderful guide. He supplies every position with a story, explanation or anecdote – making this not just another instructional or puzzle book, but a good read. You can study it and learn from it, trying to dig into every position, or just take it with you on a trip – to simply enjoy leafing through it. Simple forks and beautiful zugzwangs, club players and chess legends, history and stories – you will meet them all on these pages, and it all feels so natural. Probably because it repeats Yochanan's life in chess. As a boy, he visited a chess club in Tel Aviv where he was taught by the famous Moshe Czerniak, and one can still see this youthful spirit and enthusiasm in Afek's work. At least I can testify that his sense for chess beauty has not suffered any damage throughout our 27 years of friendship.

Afek's career as a competitive player was rather successful, but his *life* in chess is simply exceptional. One of the most popular figures in the chess world, Yochanan is always surrounded by colleagues, friends, spectators – always ready to share one of his latest gems or discoveries. And more than once I have witnessed Top-10 players puzzling with each other over Afek's studies. His lectures and masterclasses attract many bright junior talents, but also bring a lot of joy to club players, who are invited to immerse themselves in the wonders of chess.

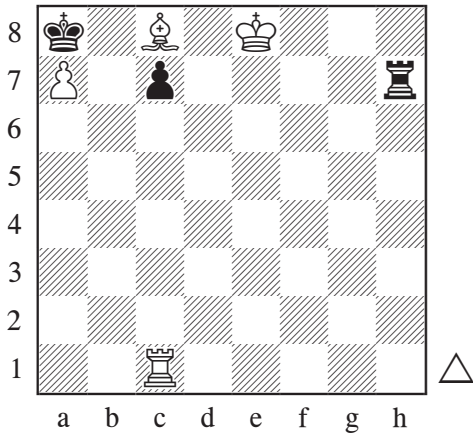
I had a chance to read and even review some of Yochanan's previous books, and I have to admit – he has got better and better. I never believed in the “old wine” concept – it usually becomes more like vinegar. But not in this case. The book you hold is full of energy; it is fresh and evidently written with a lot of love and passion for the game. Yochanan visibly enjoys sharing his knowledge and readily invites us into his magical world.

I took this journey and enjoyed it a lot, and I am sure you will share this feeling.

Grandmaster Emil Sutovsky
Holon, Israel
July 2018

Yochanan Afek

EG 2012



Can White convert his fragile material advantage? Paradoxically, he will have to give away his extra material to secure a win.

1. ♖a1!

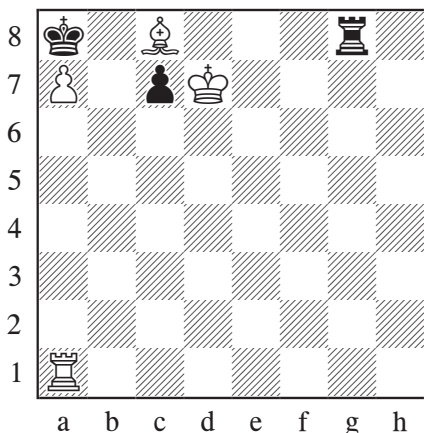
First of all, White defends his pawn and threatens to dislodge the black king, forcing the following sequence.

1... ♜h8†!

1...c5 makes things easier: 2. ♕d7+–

2. ♕d7 ♜g8!

This innocent-looking waiting move sets a devious trap.



3. ♕b7†!!

Avoiding a pair of stalemate pitfalls:

3. ♕xc7? ♜xc8†! 4. ♕xc8 is a relatively simple stalemate trap.

3. ♕a6? ♜g7†! (3... ♕xa7?? 4. ♕c4†) 4. ♕c6 ♜g6†! 5. ♕xc7 ♜xa6! 6. ♜xa6 is stalemate again.

3... ♕xb7 4. a8=♖†! ♜xa8

A well-known position has been reached, where Black is dominated by minimal means.

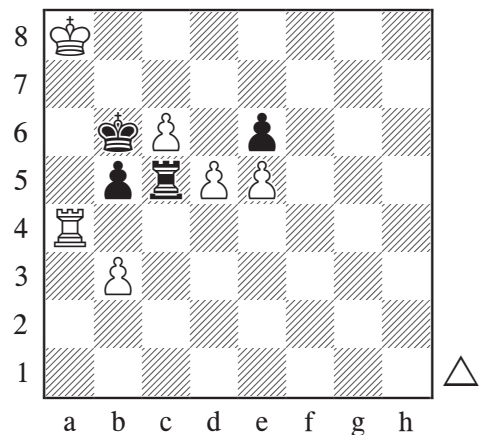
5. ♜b1† ♕a6 6. ♕c6! ♕a7 7. ♕xc7 ♕a6 8. ♜a1†

White is finally winning the rook by a skewer. The final sequence has been published before but the double sacrifice beforehand is original as far as I know.

Next we will see a rook being dominated by... the initial diagram suggests by a rook; the course of events, however, suggests otherwise...

Yochanan Afek

Prize, Shahmat 1998



The position looks like a rook ending, but this will only be true for one more move.

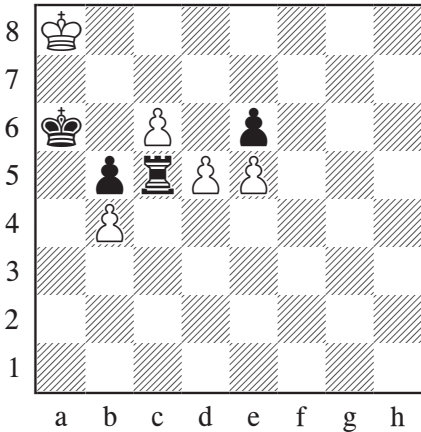
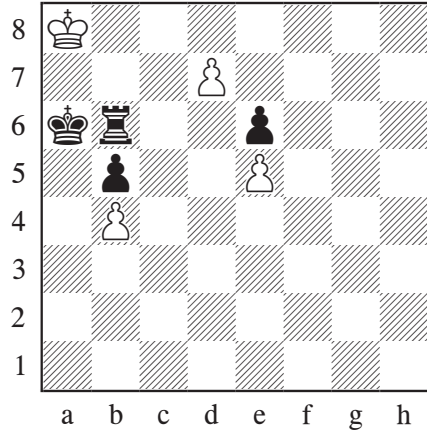
1. ♖a6†!! ♔xa6

It's either the rook or the pawns, and the pawns prove stronger!

2.b4!!

A powerful intermediate move.

The natural 2.d6? proves insufficient to win after 2...♔b6! 3.c7 ♖xc7! 4.dxc7 ♔xc7 5.b4 ♔c6 6.♔a7 ♔d5 7.♔b6 ♔xe5 8.♔xb5 with both pawns promoting (or neither after 8...♔d6). In either event, the extra b3-b4 tempo would have made the difference between a win and a draw.



5.d8=♔!!+–

Other promotions fail: 5.d8=♖? ♖b8†! leads to stalemate after either capture; while 5.d8=♗? ♖c6 6.♔b8 ♔b6 is just a draw.

Following the knight promotion we have reached a reciprocal zugzwang with Black to play. His rook is now dominated, with any move leading to its immediate fall.

2...♖c1 3.d6 ♖xc6!

A cunning defence.

After 3...♔b6 4.c7 ♖xc7 5.dxc7 ♔xc7 6.♔a7 ♔c6 7.♔a6 ♔d5 8.♔xb5+– Black is a tempo down on the previous variation and thus loses.

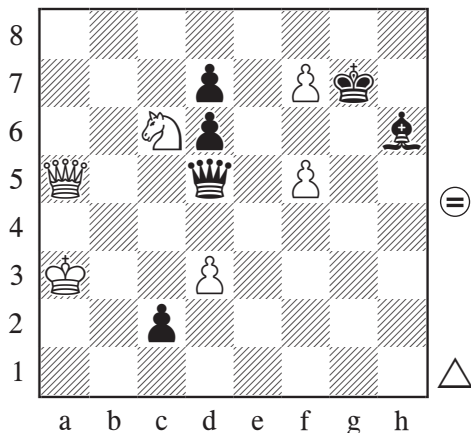
4.d7 ♖b6!

4...♖c7!? 5.d8=♖ ♖a7† 6.♔b8 ♖b7† 7.♔c8 ♖b8†! is not a bad try (hoping for 8.♔xb8? stalemate!) but 8.♔c7! ♖xd8 9.♔xd8 leaves Black in a hopeless pawn ending.

Now White will promote, but to which piece?

Amatzia Avni & Yochanan Afek

2nd HM, Magyar Sakkelet 2017

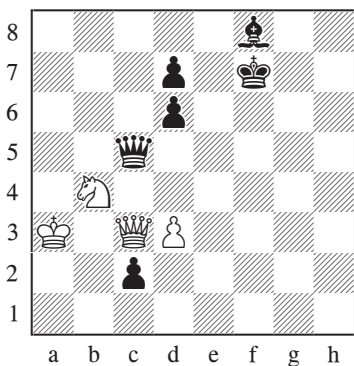


1.f6†! ♔xf6 2.f8=♚†!

Contrary to expectations, the far-advanced f-pawn is sacrificed.

2...♙xf8 3.♚c3† ♔f5!

Black's chances lie in creating a battery along the a3-f8 diagonal, and liquidating into a winning pawn ending. However, after: 3...♔f7 4.♘b4! ♚c5!



5.♚xc5! (not 5.♚xc2? d5! and the subsequent exchange on b4 wins the battle) 5...dxc5 6.♘xc2 c4† 7.♔b2 cxd3 8.♘e3 White succeeds in building a fortress and draws, as the tablebase confirms.

4.♘b4! ♚c5!

4...♚a5†? is easily met by: 5.♔b3! d5 6.♘xc2=

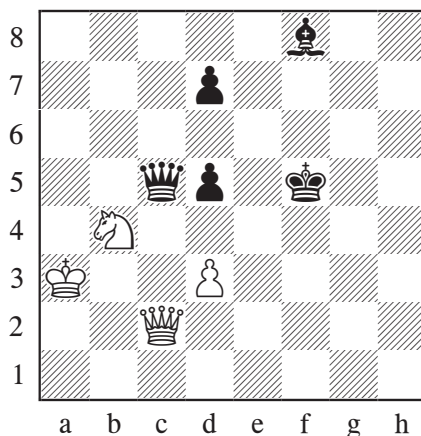
5.♚xc2!

The black king's current position enables a surprising save.

After 5.♚xc5†? dxc5 6.♘xc2 c4† 7.♔b2 cxd3 the tablebase confirms that White loses, as the black king is too close.

5...d5!

Preparing to liquidate into a won pawn ending. However...



6.d4†! ♚xc2

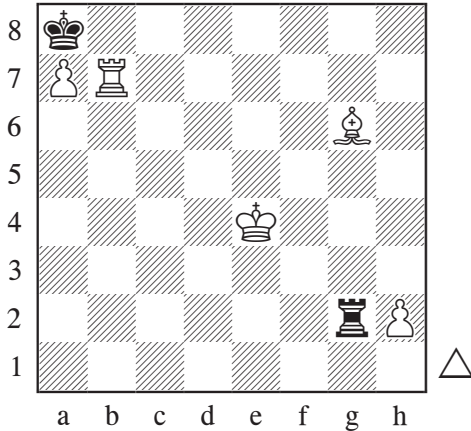
Pin stalemate! All the pieces have moved into position.

Anti-stalemate play

Playing *against* stalemate is not an easy task. Below is a mined battlefield with one well-hidden way out. The attacked rook should pick a flight square; surprisingly there is just one such refuge!

Yochanan Afek

6th Prize, Zakhodyakin-100MT 2013



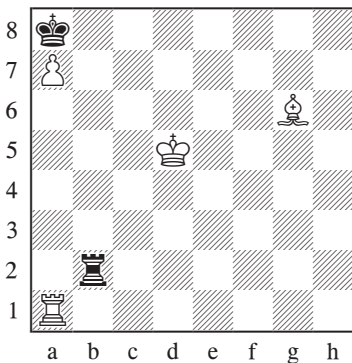
1. ♖b5!!

The one and only winner!

1. ♖b8†? ♜xa7 2. ♖h8 ♜xg6 is a draw.

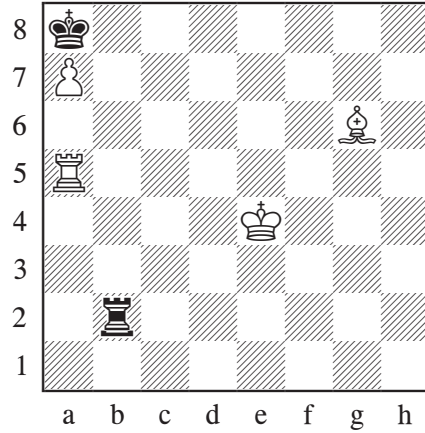
1. ♖h7? ♜g4† 2. ♜f5 ♜g5†! draws via stalemate motif. (2... ♜xg6!? is also drawing, but only because of the continuing stalemate possibility.)

We are left with rook moves along the b-file. Let's try a random one: 1. ♖b1? ♜xh2 2. ♖a1 ♜b2! 3. ♜d5!



3... ♜b5†!! (3... ♜b7? 4. ♜e4!+- is similar to the main line) 4. ♜c4 ♜b7! 5. ♜e4 Pin stalemate!

1... ♜xh2 2. ♖a5 ♜b2!



3. ♜d5!!

This is the only move that avoids the pin stalemate, while the white rook, thanks to the right choice of the key (first) move, prevents the in-between check on b5.

3... ♜b7 4. ♜e4! ♜xa7 5. ♜d6†! ♜b8

It's a winning position, with the fastest way being:

6. ♜b5† ♜c8 7. ♜f5†+-