

Preliminary Award of PAL BENKO MEMORIAL TOURNEY 2020 (Section 1: H#3-n)

Judge: Christopher Jones

It was a great honour to be asked to judge the helpmate section of the tourney commemorating one of the greatest figures spanning the wide field of chess activity, both play and composition. I must express my gratitude to those, notably Janos Mikitovics, Zoltan Laborczi, and Andrew Kalotay, who envisioned a composing tourney appropriate to the memory of Pal Benko and painstakingly brought it to fruition. It is testimony to their efforts, and to composers' wish to play their part in the commemorating of his great Hungarian Grandmaster, that I received no fewer than 97 anonymized diagrams to judge, whose quality is evidenced by the length of this award.

The theme was a very specific one: a white Pawn in one solution mates at square x and in another (or others) promotes and then returns to give mate on square x. This requirement accounts already for quite a few of the moves in the solution – would composers be able to find enough good and interesting ideas to enliven the solutions, and also to achieve a sense of distinctiveness rather than following what become well-worn tracks to comply with the formal requirement of the tourney? As will become clear, the answer in many cases was “yes”. The problems that are not in this award were all worthy problems, but seemed to me to be ones that, lacking distinguishing qualities, shuffled black officers around in order to achieve increasingly familiar mating nests for the returning white ‘promotee’.

There were distinctions to be made, I thought, between the ways in which the thematic play could be realized. If, for instance, the wP starts at e6 and will mate by moving to e7, then, in the line(s) in which it promotes, is it good if its first move is ...e6>e7 (as opposed to ...exd7 or ...exf7)? Although normally I'd be inclined to follow the orthodox disapproval of the repetition of moves in the different solutions of a helpmate, in this case it seems to me that, all else being equal, it is preferable for the first move to be ...e6>e7. This underlines the theme: instead of waiting until the last move to go to e7 the Pawn goes there on (usually) the very first move.

On the other hand, there is also a more conventional appeal if there are 3 solutions, one with ...e6>e7, one with ...exd7 and one with ...exf7. What I did find myself deprecating was problems with an unbalanced division of wP routes: in a 3-solution problem I felt that it was a detraction if two had ...e6>e7, and one ...exd7 or ...exf7.

In most of the problems the mate by the wP on the 7th rank was supported by the wK, and this usually involved moves by the wK approaching the necessary square from which it supported the mate. What was pleasing in a number of the entries was when the wK also contributed to the other mates, in which the wP promoted, rather than being a mere bystander in those solutions.

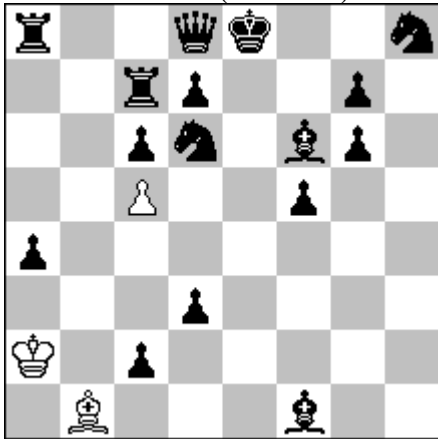
These (somewhat subjective) aesthetic guidelines were not applied in a regulatory way, but have had some influence in the selection of the following problems. Another factor was the length of the solutions. The required play limits the amount of interest that can be generated by the white moves: we are deprived of many of the appealing helpmate strategies involving line-play by white officers. In these circumstances, it is difficult for a H#3 not to appear rather thin by comparison with H#3s using varied white force. And there is a difficulty in that there can be a sense that White is merely playing the Pawn moves he has to play, Black is ‘doing his own thing’, and there is a lack of the interaction of White and Black that characterizes the best helpmates. To some extent this can be counteracted if there is interest in how the wP is enabled to get to the right promotion square and Black's moves have to be ordered so as to accommodate this; and also there is a greater chance in longer problems of achieving strategic richness. This underlies my being drawn more to the longer problems in this tourney. As will be clear from the number of Prizes in the award, I felt that composers did outstandingly well in surmounting the difficulties to which I've alluded!

1st Prize

Fadil Abdurahmanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Zlatko Mihajlovski (North Macedonia)

Marko Klasinc (Slovenia)



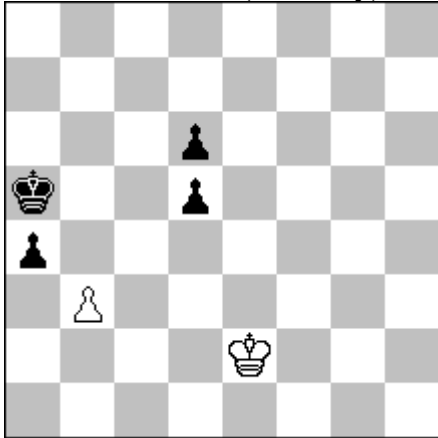
- a) 1.Kf7 Ka3 2.Qf8 Kb4! 3.Se8 Ba2+ 4.d5 cxd6 ep. #
b) 1.Qe7 cxd6 2.0-0-0 dxe7 3.cxb1=R e8=S 4.Rb8 Sd6 #

Among a clutch of impressive Prize-winning problems this one, to my mind, comes out just ahead of the others for its spectacular qualities: Valladao with a black minor promotion (after capturing the wB, an influential piece in the other solution) as well as promotion of the thematic wP; the play of the wP satisfies my 'return to d6' criterion alluded to above, and 1...cxd6 is a nice *non-en-passant* version of the move ('Benko-theme' and Valladao-theme characteristics nicely intertwined). The tempo move 2...Kb4 (and not yet ...Ba2?) is a nice enhancement.

H#4 2.1.1... 3+16

2nd Prize

Norbert Geissler (Germany)



- a) 1.d4 Kf3 2.d3 Ke4 3.d2 Kd5 4.d1=B Kxd6 5.Be2 Kc5 6.Ba6 b4 #
b) 1.a3 b4 2.Kc4 b5 3.a2 b6 4.a1=B b7 5.Be5 b8=Q 6.Kd4 Qb4 #

A minor readjustment of the position of the bK activates a very different sequence, in which ...b4 becomes the first move and is followed by a *Rundlauf* involving promotion to Queen. The especially delightful feature of this problem is the exchange of functions of bPa4 and bPd5. Each remains as a static self-block in one solution and promotes to an actively blocking Bishop in the other. One ideal mate, one model mate, and only six pieces used – very fine work!

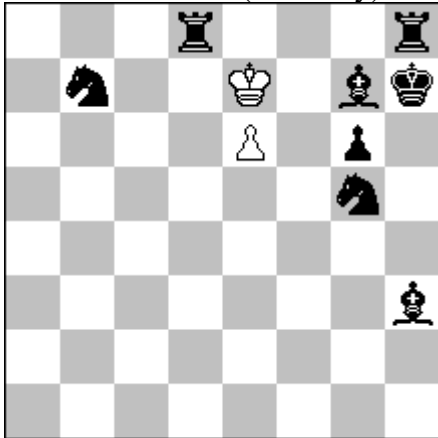
H#6 b) bKa5 to b5 2+4

3rd Prize

Dieter Werner (Switzerland)

Ralf Krätschmer (Germany)

Norbert Geissler (Germany)



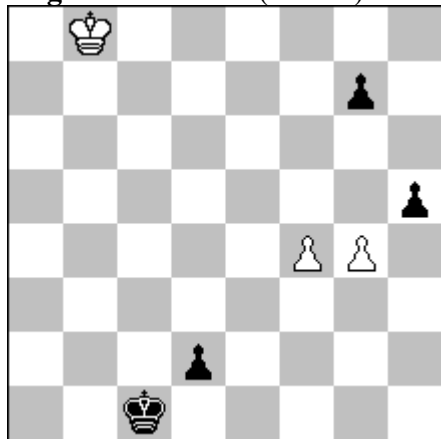
- a) 1.Bf8 + Kf6 2.Kg8 Kxg6 3.Sf7 exf7 #
b) 1.Rd7 + exd7 2.Kh6 d8=S 3.Rh7 Sf7 #
c) 1.Sf7 exf7 2.Bh6 f8=R 3.Kg7 Rf7 #
d) 1.Rd7 + exd7 2.Bh6 dxe8=Q 3.Kg7 Qf7 #
e) 1.Kg8 exd7 2.Re8 + dxe8=B 3.Sh7 Bf7 #

This seems to me to be much the best of the shorter problems, presenting AUW in a clearcut way (the stem position is the one with the Pawn mate, which is good) in a Meredith position with acceptable and thoroughly conventional twinning shifts and an acceptable level of repetition of moves.

H#3 a) Diagram 2+8
b) bSg5 to h5 c) bRd8 to g8
d) bSg5 to e8 e) bSb7 to d7

4th Prize

Eugene Fomichev (Russia)



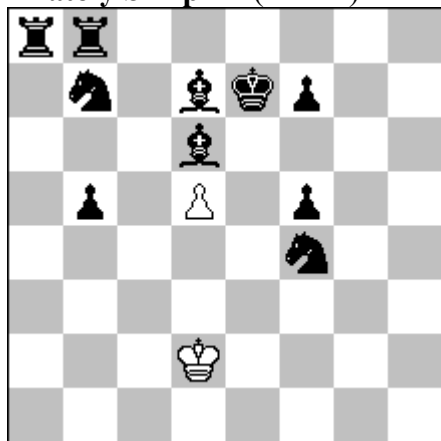
- a) 1.Kd1 gxh5 2.Ke2 h6 3.Kf3 hxg7 4.Kg4 g8=Q + 5.Kh5 Qg5 #
b) 1.Kd2 f5 2.Ke3 f6 3.Kf4 fxg7 4.Kg5 g8=Q + 5.Kh6 g5 #

An excellent problem that could also expect a very high placing in any informal tourney, in which solvers would be very aware that the mates occurred on the same square, but might then be surprised to reflect that it is the same piece inflicting both mates – this is because of a delightful change of functions between the two wPs, each promoting once (after captures at g7), and then once mating at g5 supported by the static unpromoted colleague and once supporting the unpromoted colleague's advance to g5 to give mate. The twinning, determining the bK's eastward route, cleverly differentiates the two lines of play.

H#5 b) bPd2 to f3 3+4

5th Prize

Anatoly Skripnik (Russia)



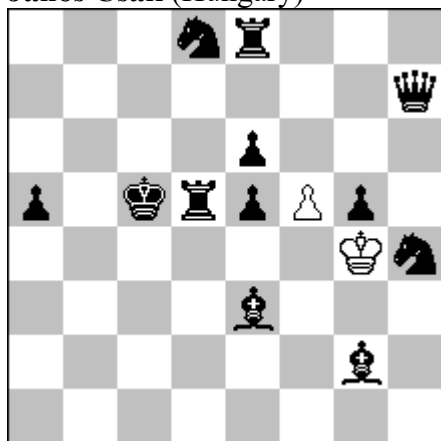
- a) 1... Kc2! 2.Rf8 Kc3 3.Re8 Kd4 4.Be5 + Kxe5 5.Sd8 d6 #
b) 1... Kd1! 2.Bc6 dxc6 3.Re8 cxb7 4.Rc8 b8=Q 5.Kd8 Qxd6 #

Another Meredith position in which, as well as showing neatly interlocking black play (as many entries did) in this case with two black Bristols, there is the distinguishing feature of two very fine introductory moves by the wK. In the first solution, it is not at all obvious that there is a need for the wK not to go immediately to c3. In the second solution it is clear that on W1 a temporizing wK move is required, but what is not at all obvious is the deep reasoning that determines the square (not again c2, for instance) to which the wK must move.

H#4.5 0.2.1.1... 2+10

6th Prize

János Csák (Hungary)



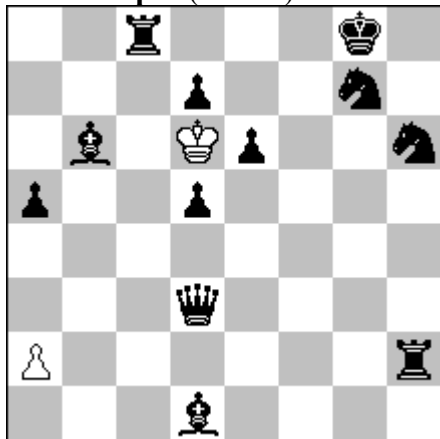
- a) 1.Qd7 Kh5 2.Kd6 Kh6 3.Ke7 Kg7 4.Rd6 f6 #
b) 1.Kd4 f6 2.Qd3 f7 3.Ke4 fxe8=S 4.Rd4 Sf6 #

Among the 2-solution problems not showing the achievement of tasks such as the Valladao theme or AUW this is indubitably one of the strongest and most enjoyable. It exemplifies the attractive value of having one move (...f5>f6) as both first and last move, and also of having the wK be a significant player in both solutions. There are many incidental pleasures. After the wide-ranging square-blocking moves by the bQ the bK each time moves on to the line the bQ has traversed (a critical effect). The bK makes two very different treks to wide-apart squares. In each solution the d5R makes the last, blocking move, to the square just vacated by the bK (an FML effect). An extremely well put together problem.

H#4 2.1.1... 2+12

7th Prize / 8th Prize

Ivan Antipin (Russia)



H#5.5 0.2.1.1... 2+12

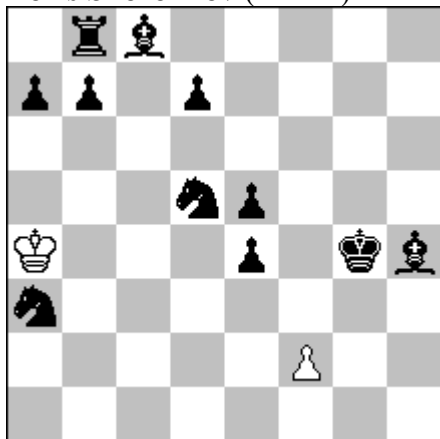
a) 1... Ke7 2.Bb3 axb3 3.Rc4 bxc4 4.Sf7 cxd5 5.Rh8 dxe6 6.Qh7 exf7#

b) 1... a4 2.Qb5 axb5 3.Rc6+ bxc6 4.Kh8 cxd7 5.Sg8 d8=S 6.Rh7 Sf7#

Alongside the other awarded problems this one has a very fresh look, and at first glance you would hardly expect f7 to be the thematic square! In this case there is no question of the usual appeal of play in which the wP starts off just one square away from the mating square. Quite the reverse – in this instance he is at the maximal distance! I very much enjoy the parallel diagonal routes taken by the voracious wP, and it is very neat that in the first solution White, obliged to wait for Black to play Bb3, fills the move with 1...Ke7. Something completely different from the other Prize winners!

7th Prize / 8th Prize

Boris Shorokhov (Russia)



H#5.5 0.2.1.1... 2+11

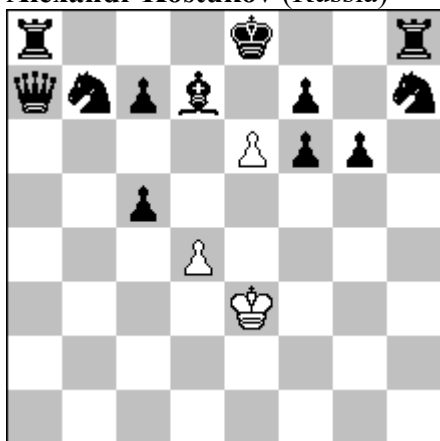
a) 1... f3+ 2.Kf5 fxe4+ 3.Ke6 exd5+ 4.Kd6 Kb4 5.Kc7 Kc5 6.Bd8 d6#

b) 1... f4 2.Kf3 f5 3.Ke3 f6 4.Kd4 f7 5.Kc5 f8=Q+ 6.Kb6 Qd6#

Another problem in which the wP starts a long way from the thematic square, which makes a refreshing contrast to other entries (albeit it does perhaps entail that the thematic element stands out less strongly). Again we have attractive parallel wP marches, enhanced in this case by similar marches of the bK.

1st Honourable Mention

Alexandr Kostukov (Russia)



H#3

3+12

a) 1.O-O-O exf7 2.Rhg8 fxg8=S 3.Qb8 Se7#

b) 1.Kd8 d5 2.Se8 d6 3.Rc8 e7#

c) 1.Ke7 exd7 2.Ke6 d8=Q 3.Kf5 Qd7#

d) 1.Kd8 dxc5 2.Kc8 c6 3.Sd8 exd7#

e) 1.O-O exd7 2.Kh8 d8=S 3.Rg8 Sf7#

f) 1.g5 Kf5 2.Sf8 Kxf6 3.Rd8 exf7#

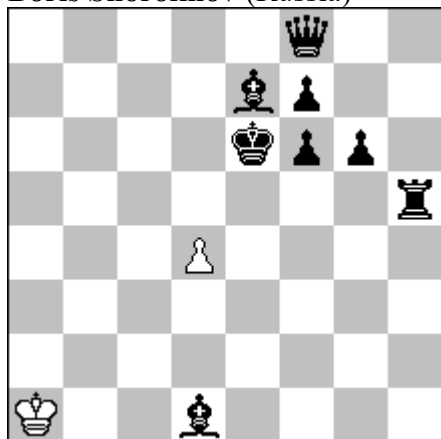
Arguably the most ambitious problem in the tourney, achieving, with rather wide-ranging but entirely acceptable twinning, three couplets – the theme is shown three times over, with incidental delights notably including castling on both sides of the board.

The variety of uses to which the d4P is put typifies the resourcefulness of the composing, though it remains the case that in some solutions it is a bystander, the price that has to be paid for so tremendous a task achievement.

a) Diagram b) Sb7 to d6
c) Pf7 to g5 d) Qa7 to b8
e) Pf7 to g7 f) Ke3 to g4

2nd Honourable Mention

Boris Shorokhov (Russia)



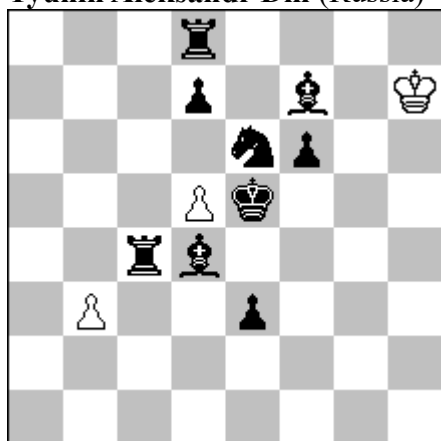
- a) 1... Kb2 2.Rd5 Kc3 3.Rd7 Kd3 4.Bd6 Ke4 5. Qe7 d5#
b) 1... d5+ 2.Kf5 d6 3.Rh4 d7 4.Rf4 d8=Q 5.Bg4 Qd5#

By contrast with the previous problem, this one scores highly for being an especially clearcut demonstration of the thematic play. There are no captures, the black play is neat, and in this limpid presentation it stands out that the mating move ...d4>d5 is replicated by a return to that square that is an attractive *Rundlauf*.

H#4.5 0.2.1.1... 2+8

3rd Honourable Mention

Tyunin Aleksandr Dm (Russia)



- a) 1... dxe6 2.Bc3 exf7 3.Re4 f8=Q 4.Kd4 Qd6 #
b) 1... b3xc4 2.Be8 Kg8 3.Kd6 c5 + 4.Ke7 d6 #

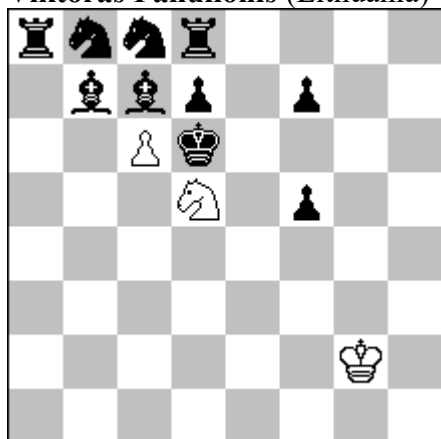
After the task achievement of the 1st Honourable Mention and the limpid elegance of the 2nd Honourable Mention this problem has virtues that are quite different again: an unusual richness in the play that would stand it in good stead in any informal tourney, twice putting the b3P to good use. The sinuousness of the play, to my mind, offsets the detractions that ...d5>d6 occurs only once and the wK is a bystander in one solution.

H#3.5 0.2.1.1... 3+9

4th / 5th Honourable Mention

Borissas Gelpernas (Lithuania)

Viktoras Paliulionis (Lithuania)



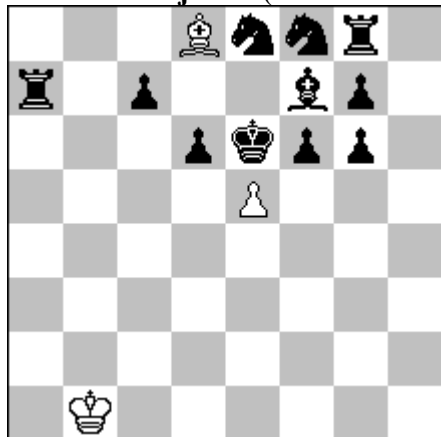
- a) 1.Re8 Sxc7 2.Ke7 Sd5 + 3.Kd8 c7 #
b) 1.Ke6 cxb7 2.Be5 bxa8=S 3.Sd6 Sc7 #
c) 1.Ba6 cxd7 2.Kc6 dxc8=R 3.Kb7 Rxc7 #

A very pleasant and economical realization of the theme pointedly demonstrating the attractiveness of showing the three possible routes of the wP from c6. The wS is cleverly employed in three nice model mates.

H#3 3.1.1... 3+10

4th / 5th Honourable Mention

Zlatko Mihajloski (North Macedonia)



- a) 1... exf6 2.Ra5 fxg7 3.Rf5!(d5?) gxf8=Q 4.d5 Qe7 #
 b) 1... exd6 2.Rh8(g5?) d7 3.Bg8(Bg6?) dxe8=R+ 4.Kf7 Re7 #
 2.c6? d7 3.Kd6 dxe8=Q 4.Bd5 Qe7 #?
 c) 1... Bxc7 2.Ke7 e6 3.Sd7!(Sh7?) Bd8+ 4.Kf8 e7(Be7?) #

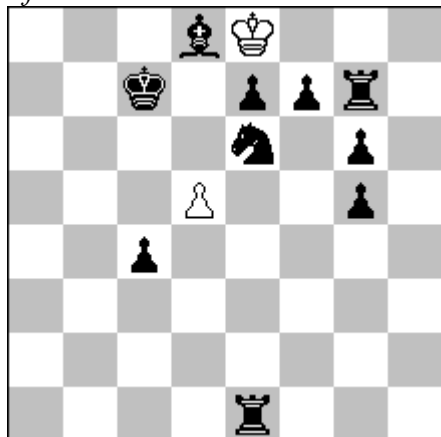
Similar to the previous problem in showing the three possible wP moves and in (unusually) using a minor piece rather than the King to support the wP. This has knottier solutions (it is nice that the solver would have to eschew g5 and Bg6 when setting up Re7# and there are also dual avoidances in the other two solutions), and I couldn't choose between the competing merits of this and the previous problem.

H#3.5 0.3.1.1... 3+11

6th Honourable Mention

Misha Shapiro (Israel)

After V.Bunka



- a1) 1.Re5 d6 + 2.Kc6 d7 3.Bb6 d8=Q 4.Rc5 Qd7 #
 a2) 1.Kb8 Kd7 2.Rb1 Kc6 3.Kc8 d6 4.Rb8 d7 #
 b1) 1.Kd6 h6 2.Ke5 hxg7 3.Kf6 g8=Q 4.Re5 Qxf7 #
 b2) 1.Sc5 Kf8 2.Kd7 Kxg7 3.Ke8 hxg6 4.Sd7 gxf7 #

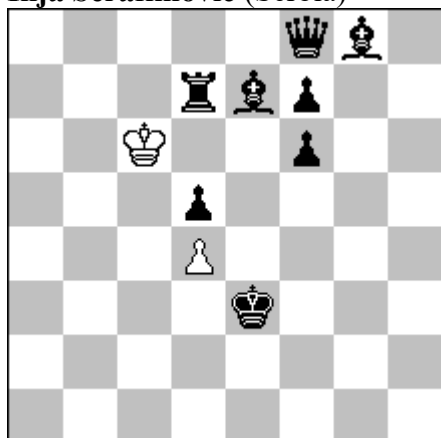
A good 2x2 demonstration of the theme (which I preferred to the related 3-solution 66), with interesting play (in one phase the bK moves in order to accommodate moves of the wK, in the other phase *vice versa*). Another very resourcefully-composed entry; it is perhaps slightly worrying in (a) that the first move in the repeated sequence ...d5>d6.>d7 is a non-thematic move repetition.

H#4 2+10

- a) Diagram 2.1.1...
 b) wPd5 to h5 2.1.1...

7th Honourable Mention

Ilija Serafimovic (Serbia)



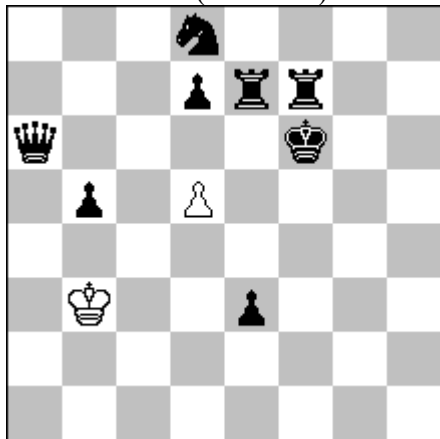
- a) 1.Bd6 Kxd5 2.Kf4 Kc4 3.Kf5 Kd3 4.Ke6 Ke4 5.Qe7 d5 #
 b) 1.Bc5 dxc5 2.Rd6+ cxd6 3.Ke4 d7 4.Qa3 d8=Q 5.Qe3 Qxd5 #

Neat, sinuous play in both solutions, with the wK actively involved in both cases, and all the pieces apart from the technical g8B playing (different) roles in the two phases.

H#5 b) bPf6 to f4 2+8

8th Honourable Mention

Klemen Sivic (Slovenia)



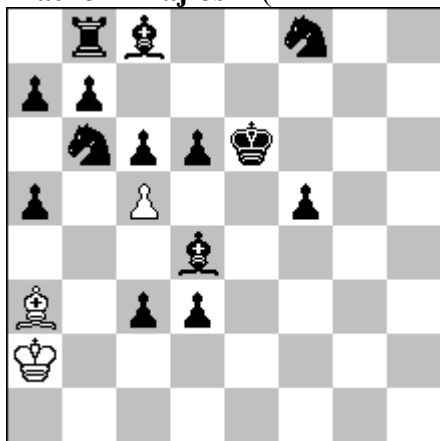
- a) 1.Re8 Kc3 2.Ke7 Kd4 3.Qh6 Ke5 4.Qf8 d6 #
- b) 1.Qe6 dxe6 2.Ke5 exf7 3.Kd4 f8=Q 4.Re4 Qd6 #
- c) 1.Qc6 dxc6 2.Rf8 c7 3.Kf7 c8=S 4.Ke8 Sd6 #

The pleasing trilogy of wP moves (to c6/d6/e6) is complemented by the matching active sacrifices at c6/e6 of the bQ, which also participates in the ...d6 line. The wK is significant in two (though not all three) mates. There are very fine margins between these Honourable Mentions, and another judge might have placed this one, with its nice model mates, higher in the list.

H#4 3.1.1... 2+8

9th Honourable Mention

Zlatko Mihajloski (North Macedonia)



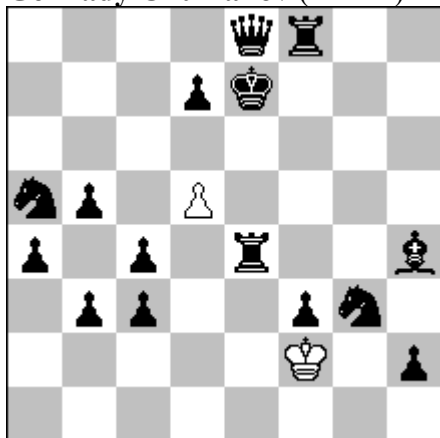
- a) 1... cxd6 2.Kd5 d7 3.Kc4 dxc8=S 4.Sd5 Sd6 #
- b) 1... cxb6 2.Bd7 bxa7 3.Be8 axb8=Q 4.Bf7 Qxd6 #
- c) 1... Bc1 2.Kd7 Bg5 3.Kc7 Be7 4.Sfd7 cxd6 #

The 2:1 split of wP moves to d6/b6 is, I feel, sub-optimal, but there is no denying the resourcefulness of the play. I do like the good, varied use of the wB, which in one solution makes a 3-move trek, a feature mirrored in another solution by the bBc8. And the varied uses to which the b6S is put gives pleasure.

H#3.5 0.3.1.1... 3+14

10th Honourable Mention

Gennady Chumakov (Russia)



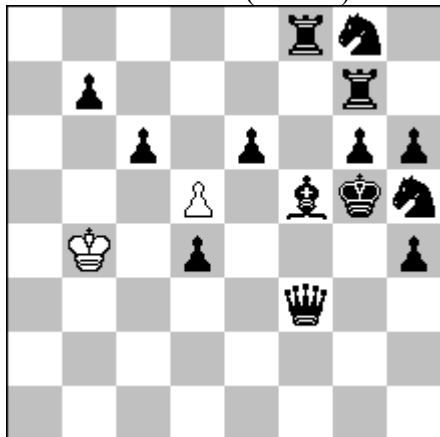
- a) 1.Rf4 Ke3 2.Rf7 Kd4 3.Sb7 Ke5 4.Sd8 d6#
- b) 1.Sc6 dxc6 2.Qd8 c7 3.Ke8 c8S 4.Re7 Sd6#
- c) 1.Re6 dxe6 2.Kd6 exd7 3.Kd5 d8Q 4.Kb4 Qd6#
- d) 1.Kf6 d6 2.Qe7 dxe7 3.Ke5 exf8Q 4.Kd4 Qd6

Good play by the wP: a 'c6/d6/e6 trilogy' complements the ...d6# line. Several valuable incidental features, notably the extensive use of the a5S; in three solutions there are active sacrifices. There is much to admire, though for some reason the four good solutions do not seem to me to come together as quite as convincing a whole as some of the other awarded problems.

H#4 4.1.1... 2+15

11th Honourable Mention

Boris Shorokhov (Russia)



- a) 1... d6 2.Bg4 d7 3.Rf5 d8=S 4.Sgf6 Sxe6#
- b) 1... dxc6 2.Bd3 c7 3.Kf5 c8=Q 4.Ke4 Qxe6#
- c) 1... Kc5 2.Kg6 Kd6 3.Kf7 Kd7 4.Bg6 dxe6#

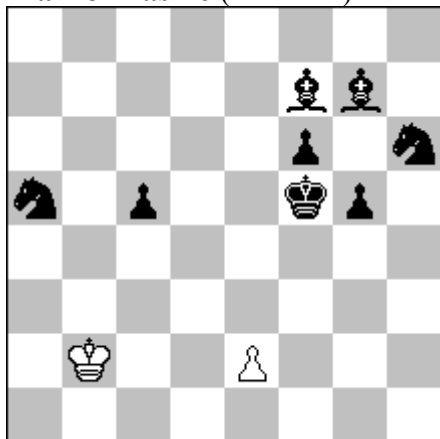
Again, the pleasant trilogy of wP moves. The three different blocking moves by the bB strengthen the unity of the problem. In this case twinning has been necessary, but of a very acceptable nature, making minor modifications to the bK's 'mating nests'.

H#3.5 2+14

- a) Diagram b) bPh4 to f4
- c) bPg6 to f6

12th Honourable Mention

Marko Klasinc (Slovenia)



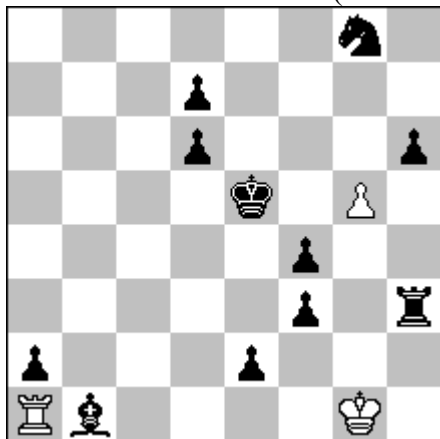
- a) 1... Ka3 2.Bf8 Ka4 3.Bd6 Kb5 4.Bf4! Kxc5 5.Bg6! Kd5 6.Sg4 e4#
- b) 1... e4+ 2.Ke6 e5 3.Kd5! e6 4.Be8 e7 5.Bb5! e8=Q 6.Kc4 Qe4#

Another entry that pleasingly shows ...e4 as mate once and as the start of an Excelsior march culminating in a return visit (*Rundlauf*) once. The wK is relevant in both phases, and the bBf7 is used imaginatively. Another judge might place this higher. The other three black officers are used less fully than the f7B. Weighing up such considerations involves a lot of subjectivity.

H#5.5 0.2.1.1... 2+8

1st Commendation

Fadil Abdurahmanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina)



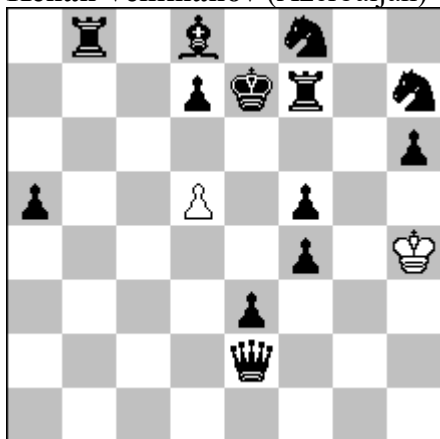
- a) 1.Bh7 g6 2.Kf6 Kf2 3.Kg7 Rg1 4.Kh8 g7 #
- b) 1.Kd4 gxh6 2.Kc3 h7 3.Kb2 hxg8=Q 4.Kxa1 Qg7 #

Model mates in opposite corners; the furthest possible distance between bK locations! Quirky and amusing.

H#4 2.1.1... 3+11

2nd Commendation

Kenan Velikhanov (Azerbaijan)



- a) 1.f3 Kg3 2.Bb6 Kf4 3.Re8 Ke5 4.Bd8 d6 #
- b) 1.Kf6 d6 2.Be7 dxe7 3.Qg2 exf8=Q 4.Qg7 Qd6 #
- c) 1.Bc7 d6 + 2.Ke8 dxc7 3.Rd8 c8=S 4.Re7 Sd6 #

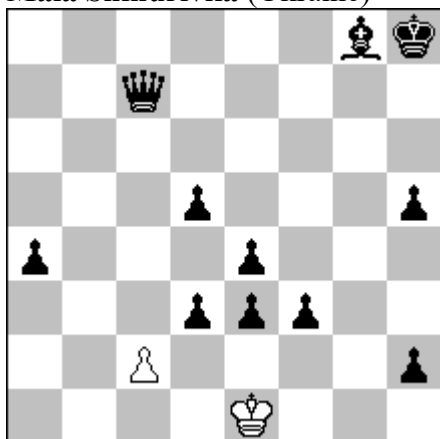
Three visits of the wP to d6, and nice sacrifices at e7/c7. Good, complex play in all three solutions, albeit the bQ participates actively in only one.

H#4 3.1.1... 2+13

3rd Commendation

Mykola Vasyuchko (Ukraine)

Mala Snihurivka (Ukraine)



- a) 1...Kd1 2.Kg7 Kc1 3.Kf6 Kb2 4.Ke5 Ka3
5.Kd4 Kb4 6.Qe5 c3#
- b) 1...c4 2.h1=B cxd5 3.Bg2 d6 4.Bh3 dxc7
5.Bf5 c8=Q 6.Bfh7 Qc3#

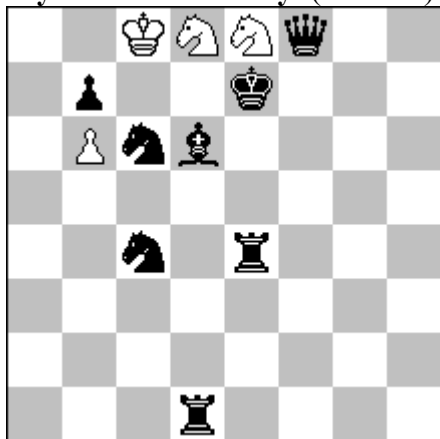
Two neatly orchestrated solutions, showing a pleasing contrast between the wP's 'minimalist' role in one solution (...c3#) and its sweeping (Excelsior) role in the other, as well as between the static bK in one line and the very active bK in the other.. Some incidental pleasures, notably the changed captured/blocking roles of the bQ (Chumakov theme).

H#5.5 0.2.1.1... 2+11

4th Commendation

Mykola Vasyuchko (Ukraine)

Mykola Cherniavskiy (Ukraine)



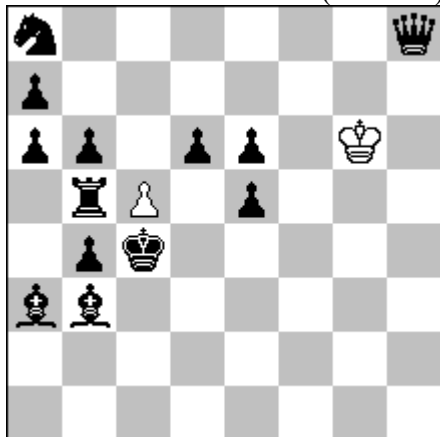
- a) 1.Bc7 Kxb7 2.Kxd8 Sf6 3.Se7 bxc7 #
- b) 1.Sa7 + bxa7 2.Kxe8 a8=S 3.Be7 Sc7 #

One of the most successful 3-movers, unusually using 2 wSs, each of which is captured in one solution, influential in the other. The bB and bSc6 are also captured in one solution, influential in the other (Chumakov theme).

H#3 2.1.1... 4+8

5th Commendation

Aleksandr Semenenko (Ukraine)



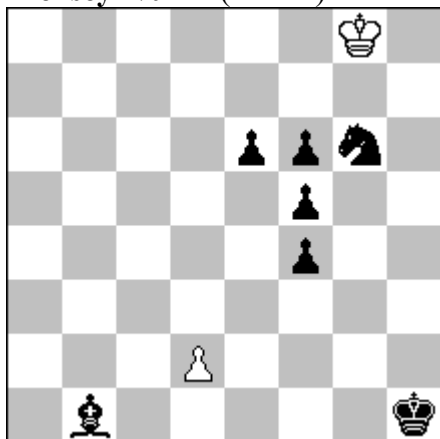
- a) 1.Kd5 Kf7 2.Kc6 Ke7 3.Kb7 Kd7 4.Qb8 c6 #
- b) 1.a5 cxb6 2.Rd5 b7 3.Kb5 bxa8=Q 4.Ka6 Qc6 #
- c) 1.Ba4 cxd6 2.b3 d7 3.Kb4 d8=S 4.Ka5 Sc6 #

The desirable trilogy of wP moves, and a pleasant diversity in the solutions, notably the three treks by the bK. It has been necessary to add rather a lot of bPs to the board.

H#4 3.1.1... 2+13

6th / 7th Commendation

Aleksey Ivunin (Russia)



- a) 1... Kf7 2.Kg2 Ke8 3.Kf3 Kd7 4.Ke4 Kc6 5.Ke5 Kc5 6.Be4 d4 #
- b) 1... d4 2.f3 d5 3.f2 d6 4.f1=B d7 5.Bc4 d8=Q 6.Bc4-a2 Qd4 #

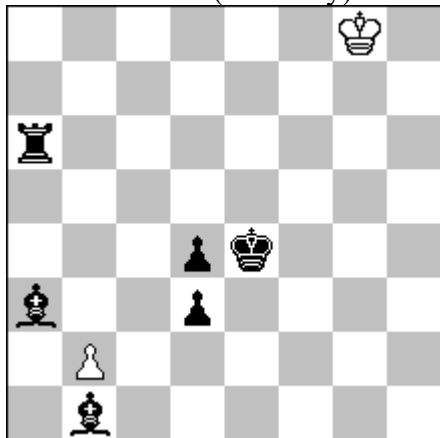
Another problem showing the charms of the Excelsior + *Rundlauf* strategy, enhanced by good changes of function of the bBb1 and bPf4, but the twinning, while quite stylish, is rather radical.

H#5.5 b) bKh1 to a1 2+7

6th / 7th Commendation

Swen Trommler (Germany)

Michael Barth (Germany)



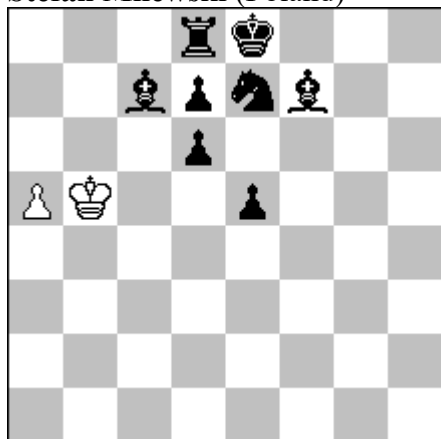
- a) 1... Kg7 2.Kd5 Kf7 3.Kc6 Ke6 4.Kb5 + Kd5 5.Ka4 Kc4 6.Ra5 b3 #
- b) 1... b4 2.d2 b5 3.Bd3 b6 4.Be2 b7 5.Kd3 b8=Q 6.Re4 Qb3 #

A similar comment applies to this as to the preceding problem. In this case, the composer must have been frustrated by the tantalising possibility of an untwinned setting, just out of reach.

H#5.5 b) bRa6 to e6 2+6

8th Commendation

Stefan Milewski (Poland)



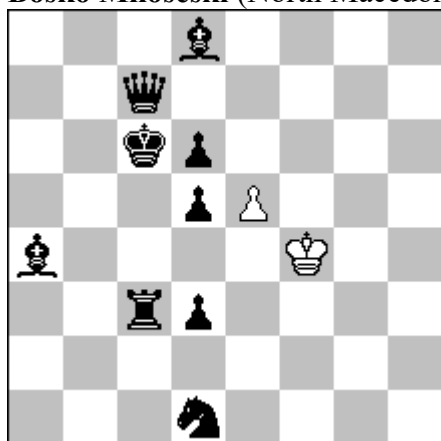
- a) 1.Rb8 + Ka6 2.Rb6 + axb6 3.Kd8 Kb7 4.Be8 bxc7 #
b) 1.Bb6 a6 2.Be3 a7 3.Bh6 a8=S 4.Bf8 Sc7 #

A prominent feature here is the Chumakov theme in respect of the bR and bBc7, which in one line makes an attractive 4-move trek, having started at the thematic square, c7 (a valuable feature, introducing a long-deferred Umnov motif).

H#4 2.1.1... 2+8

9th Commendation

Bosko Miloseski (North Macedonia)



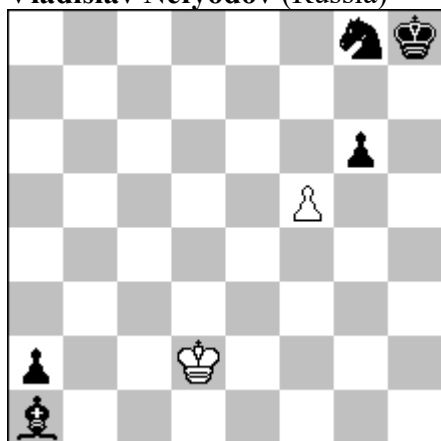
- a) 1... e6 2.Kc5 e7 3.Kd4 exd8=S 4.Qc4 Se6#
b) 1... Kf5 2.Qc8 Kg6 3.Rc7 Kf7 4.Bc6 e6#

Another of the entries in which we see the thematic ...e6 as both first and last move; and the wK in this case is very fully used in both mating positions. I again have to comment that a different judge might well have placed this one higher. It was perhaps a slight shame that an untwinned setting wasn't possible.

H#3.5 b) bKc6 to d7 2+9

10th Commendation

Vladislav Nefyodov (Russia)



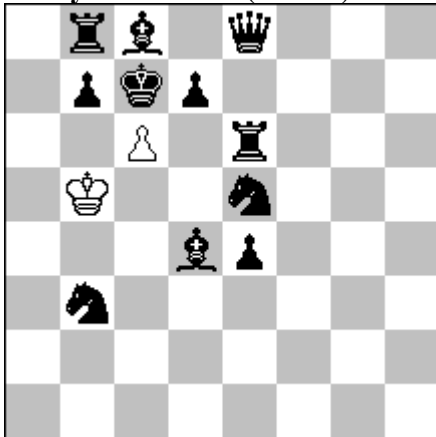
- a) 1.Bg7 f6 2.a1=R f7 3.Rh1 f8=S 4.Rh7 Sxg6 #
b) 1.Kh7 Ke3 2.Bh8 Kf4 3.a1=B Kg5 4.Bg7 fxg6 #

Perhaps this setting of the theme is imperfect (the wP doesn't make a return visit to the thematic square g6, and the wK is in one solution a bystander) but to achieve this excellent play, with two minor promotions, in an untwinned miniature with model mates, is highly commendable (and would have been much more highly commended in a less strong tourney!)

H#4 2.1.1... 2+5

11th Commendation

Vitaly Medintsev (Russia)



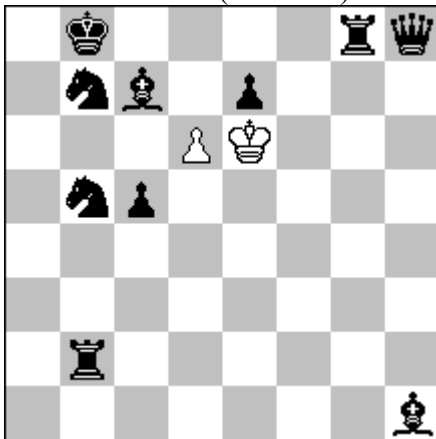
- a) 1.Sc5 Ka5 (tempo) 2.Kd8 Kb6 3.Re7 c7#
- b) 1.Kd6 cxd7 2.Kd5 dxe8=S 3.Rd6 Sc7#
- c) 1.Ra8 cxb7 2.Kb8 bxc8=Q+ 3.Ka7 Qc7#

A nice example, with the trilogy of wP moves leading to mate on the bK's starting square.

H#3 3.1.1... 2+11

12th Commendation

Marko Klasinc (Slovenia)



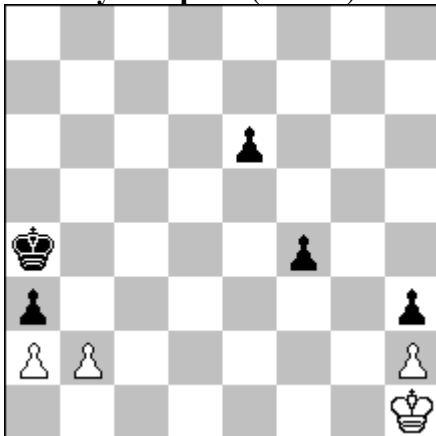
- a) 1.Kc8 Kf7 2.Bb8 Kxe7 3.Sc7 d7 #
- b) 1.Bb6 d7 2.Kc7 d8=Q+ 3.Kc6 Qd7 #
- c) 1.Ra2 Kxe7 2.Ra8 Kd7 3.Sa7 dxc7 #
- d) 1.Ka8 dxe7 2.Rb8 e8=S 3.Sa7 Sxc7

A good 2x2 rendering, where the only defect, it seems to me, is that the move ...d7 appears twice but the move ...dxc7 only once. (I do like the recurrence of '...Kxe7' because there are different departure squares for these moves.)

H#3 4.1.1... 2+10

13th Commendation

Anatoly Skripnik (Russia)



Set play

1... Kg1 2.f3 Kf1 3.f2 Ke2 4.f1=R Kd3 5.Rf5 Kc4 6.Ra5 b3 #

Solution

1.e5 b4 2.e4 b5 3.e3 b6 4.e2 b7 5.e1=B b8=Q 6.Ba5 Qb3 #

Very nice play, but I feel that the redundant wPa2 in the set play is a serious detraction.

H#6* 4+5

As can be seen, I was greatly impressed by the ingenuity and technical skill shown by composers in demonstrating the scope for varied and rich play within the confines of a thematic requirement that prescribed what much of the white play must be. My congratulations to the composers, including those whose works are not included in this award (but many of them could have been – I had to draw the line somewhere!); and apologies too to composers whose works received lower placings in this unavoidably rather subjective judgement than they might have. And finally repeated thanks to the organizers of this fine tourney, a worthy memorial to the great Pal Benko, for the privilege (and pleasure) of being Judge.

Christopher Jones

Bristol, New Year's Eve 2020