



[Chess Today](#) is happy to present an article on composition by one of our readers – IM Yochanan Afek (left, photo by Cathy Rogers). This article was first published in Chess Today No. 1069 and 1070 (October 2003).

Brilliant Mates in Moscow

by IM Yochanan Afek,

"Problems and games are two equal aspects of chess", wrote once Dr. Milan Vukceвич, the great American composer who passed away earlier this year and who was also a very strong over-the-board master. Obviously he did not refer by that to the number of people involved but rather to the injustice frequently done to this fine art, by too many players who tend to consider it as a waste of time for the purpose of improving one's playing skills. "Relative to the game", he explains, "a good chess problem activates more force per move, uses pieces more efficiently and stresses more their cooperation and interference with each other. A good problem may combine a dozen separate elements into one extraordinary event, in the same way in which a good novel may condense a dozen real lives into a single lifetime of its fictitious hero..." — food for the thought..

Not everyone knows that within the immense world of chess, a smaller, yet a highly motivated and constantly growing community of problems and studies fans has developed over the years, organizing a variety of composing and solving events, publishing dozens of books and magazines, awarding official FIDE titles and even holding an annual congress. All this worldwide intensive activity is done voluntarily and winning dozens of prestigious awards definitely will not make one any richer as the prize money, if any, is usually rather modest. Such was last month the annual congress held in hotel Ukraine in the heart of Moscow and attracted more than 200 participants from exactly 30 countries.

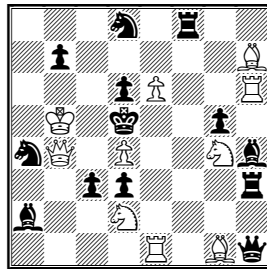
The highlights of the week were naturally the world team and individual championships in which quite a few strong over the board players usually take part. GMs Jonathan Mestel (England) and Ram Soffer (Israel) and IMs Arno Zude (Germany) and Piotr Murdzia (Poland) are of the excelling regulars in these contests holding FIDE grandmaster titles for solving too. For two intensive mornings the participants try to crack 18 tough nuts of 6 different types: two-movers, three-movers, more-movers, endgame-studies, helpmates and self-mates. Each country may participate with 2 or 3 solvers, but for each of the six rounds just the best 2 personal performances count. So it is in fact an individual and team championship at the same time.

23 countries competed this year in the famous central chess club on Gogolevsky Boulevard. In the last decade or so Israel, Finland and Germany were usually the heavy guns in this contest. However this year the hosting country dominated the field impressively, mainly thanks to the surprising winner of the individual contest — Andrey Selivanov. At the age of 36 he is best known as the former chairman of the Russian Chess Federation and as a member of the Duma (the Russian parliament), but as a matter of fact he is also one of the world's leading self-mate

composers and an editor and author of several magazines and books dealing with the art of chess composition. 'En passant' he was also acting as the chief organizer of this congress and as a judge in several of its composing tourneys!

Selivanov scored 82.5 points of the possible 90, ahead of his countryman Georgy Evseev (76 points) and (another pleasant surprise!), the Dutchman Dolf Wissman (75.5 points), Jorma Paavilainen (Finland, 73.5 points), Marjan Kovacevic (Serbia; 73 points) and the Japanese (!) Tadashi Wakashima (71.5 points). Quite crowded at the top! Marjan Kovacevic, who later won here the spectacular knockout solving show, is a chess journalist, running, for years, a whole-page daily chess column in 'Politika'. The German team took the silver medals ahead of Finland, Serbia, Poland, Japan, Netherlands, Ukraine, Israel and Great Britain. The readers are invited to try the following two-mover from the competition:

Herbert Ahues, 1981

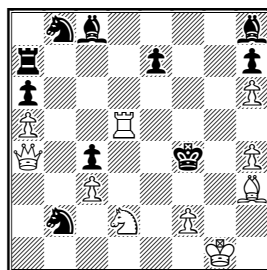


Mate in 2

Naturally this section is considered the easiest one, yet even some experienced solvers tend to drop here precious points; perhaps they take it a bit too easy. The full solution is explained in the end of this article.

The hard core of the congresses is the numerous thematic quick composing tourneys in which the participants were required to create a problem of a certain genre with a given theme in 5 days. You could see them everywhere staring at their pocket sets, ignoring the outside world, just like until not long ago players were concentrating on adjourned positions. The official theme-tourneys asked for black pawn play. Look how elegant was the theme demonstrated in this Russian 3-mover:

Alexander Bacharev, 1st Prize



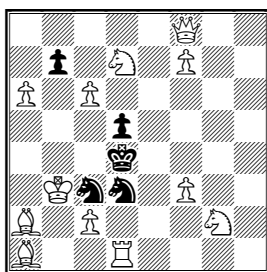
Mate in 3

The key first move is **1. ♖e8!**, which threatens **2. ♖h5**. The **1... ♗g4** defence does not help — **2. ♖h5 ♗xh5 3. ♖f5#**. Here the thematic defences are the e7-pawn moves paving the way for the black rook to check on g7. But at the same time such moves interfere with the black bishop pair:

1...e6 2. ♖f5+ exf5 3. ♖e3#; 1...e5 2. ♖d4+ exd4 3. ♖e4#.

Note the perfect harmony between the two variations and the fact that the black pawn decides also where will the queen mate (it is called **dual-avoidance**). The economical construction (no peaces next to the black monarch) and the long – range queen moves (usually it is not that easy to control the lady's moves) leave a great aesthetic impression. Lively pawn play can be achieved in self-mates too:

Alexander Azhusin & Andrei Selivanov; 1st – 2nd Prize



Self-mate in 3

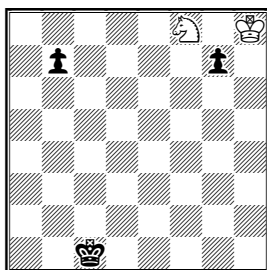
In this type of unorthodox problems white starts and forces black to mate him in the given number of moves. The key move **1. ♖h6!** puts Black in zugzwang and he is forced to play his only legal moves. **The Pickaniny theme** demonstrates all 4 possible moves of a black pawn:

1...bxc6 2. ♖c1! c5 3. ♖a3 c4; 1...b6 2. ♖a3! b5 3. ♗b3 b4#

1...bxa6 2. f8 ♗! a5 3. ♗a3 a4#; 1...b5 2. ♗e3! b4 3. ♗c4 dxc4#

I tried hard to enter the endgame studies section of the official tourney, however one hour before the deadline my head was still empty of any black pawns. At that stage I found no better than just moving some black pawns over the board and pray to Caissa. At exactly 6 PM closing time, I handed the following diagram to the tournament director:

Yochanan Afek, 2nd Prize



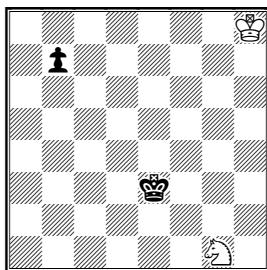
Black to play; White draws

1...g5 How can a sole knight cope with two pawns on the run? You simply take one at the time:

2.♠h7! g4 3.♠f6 g3 4.♠h5 g2 5.♠f4 g1♙!

This is better than both 5...g1♠ 6.♠d5= or 5...♙d2 6.♠xg2 b5 7.♠f4 b4 8.♠d5 b3 9.♠b6! =

6.♠e2+ ♙d2 7.♠xg1 ♙e3! (D)



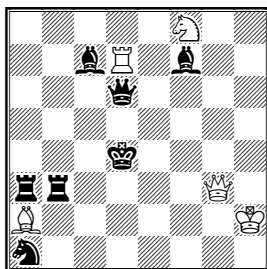
8.♠h3 b5 9.♠g5 b4 10.♠f7! b3 11.♠d6! (11.♠e5? ♙d4!) 11...♙d3 12.♠b5 b2 13.♠a3 and the breathless horse finally made it on time!

A problem/study with up to seven pieces is called **miniature**. An ultra-miniature with only 5 pieces is called in Russian **malutka**. The judges apparently liked it, mentioning the almost double full parade of the pawns (a pawn parade from its base up to the promotion is called **Excelsior**). Frankly, I even had no time to check the position properly, but there was no need, since Caissa had already done it! ☺

All prizes in the congress were in kind: trophies, medals, books and ... plenty of national drinks of all kind! The British delegation announced again the traditional Whisky tournament in memory of the late GM (for composing) Norman McLeod. A helpmate in two was required with twins showing a white piece pinned on two different lines.

Boris Ostrukh & Marko Klasinc

1st prize



Helpmate in 2

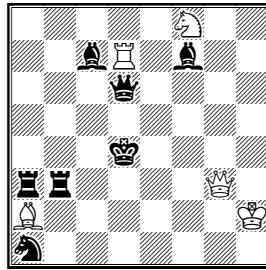
In helpmates Black starts and helps White to mate him in the given number of moves. Usually, and exceptionally more than one solution is required to emphasize the thematic content. There is one solution in the diagrammed position and another one (a similar yet rather different) in the twin position (after moving the white king to h3).

The Slovenian couple managed to realize the theme in an aristocratic pawnless construction. Please give it a try. It should not be too difficult as both sides simply cooperate to mate Black. If you fail to do so or you are too lazy this morning, you may find the brilliant harmonious solutions in the end of this article.

Solutions:

1. Solution to our helpmate problem:

Boris Ostrukh & Marko Klasinc



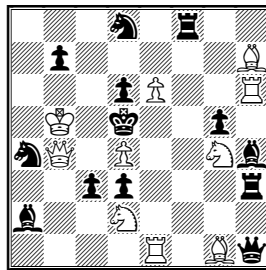
Helpmate in 2

In helpmates Black starts and helps White to mate him in the given number of moves. **1...♖d4 2.♘g6 ♜d3 3.♗e5#**

Solution with the white king on h3: 1...♖c4 2.♘e6 ♜b4 3.♗d3#

2. Solution to the 2-mover:

Herbert Ahues, 1981



Mate in 2

1.♘c4!

Another thematic try — 1.♘e4 — fails after 1...♗h2! (1...♘f7 2.♘ef6#; 1...♘c5 2.♘xc3#; 1...♙g3 2.♘e3#)

1...♗h2 Other defences lead to checkmate on the next move too: 1...♘f7 2.♘f6# or 1...♙g3 2.♘ce3# or 1...♘c5 2.♘b6#.

2.♙e4#