

ECSC Tourney 2010: Helpmates

Briefly, the theme was h#2s showing round trips. The original rather scant entry of 14 problems was reduced by the ineligibility of one and the withdrawal of five others by their composer. This left only five contributors (M.Barth, M.McDowell, A.&V. Semenenko and M.Witztum), all of whom I thank most warmly for their participation and especially for the quality and interest of their compositions, allowing me to sum up the tourney as “small but beautiful”. The rather unusual distribution of awards (no commendations) makes a pleasant change, at least for me, from the increasing tendency for helpmate tourneys to throw up nothing meriting more than a commendation!

Three entries have been omitted from the award:

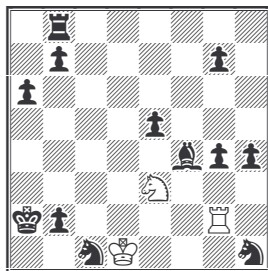
No.1 (Witztum, Kc5/Kg1). Here the twinning for c) does not work properly, as the pawn moved from d2 after part a) must additionally be restored to d2 in order to ensure soundness in part c).

No.2 (Witztum, Kg8/Kd5). The BS round trip is well shown, but I am disturbed by the fact that the mates (in parts a & b) use pawns which are idle in other parts of the problem. In general I am not happy with the idleness of *thematic* white pawns in some phases, although I realise that this view is not shared by all judges.

No.7 (V.Semenenko, Kh1/Kd1). This problem creates too mechanical an effect and is reminiscent of earlier works by Apró and Moser (respectively P0503833 & P0550508 in the PDB).

Now the award. Please note that the solutions are given in full algebraic notation so as to make the round trips easier to follow from the diagrams.

1st Prize: A. & V. Semenenko



h#2

a)

1.Sc1-b3 Se3-c4 2.Sb3-a1 Rg2xb2 #

b) #-position of a) & BK>c7

1.Rb8-a8 Sc4-d6 2.Kc7-b8 Rb2xb7 #

c) #-position of b) & BK>h8

1.Kh8-h7 Sd6-f5 2.Ra8-h8 Rb7xg7 #

d) #-position of c) & BK>g1

1.g4-g3 Sf5-e3 2.g3-g2 Rg7xg2 #

e) #-position of d) & BK>a3

1.a6-a5 Rg2-b2 2.a5-a4 Se3-c4 #

f) #-position of e) & BK>c8

1.Bf4-g5 Rb2-b7 2.Bg5-d8 Sc4-d6 #

g) #-position of f) & BK>h6

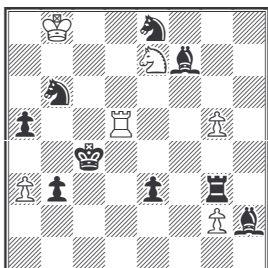
1.Sh1-g3 Rb7-g7 2.Sg3-h5 Sd6-f5 #

h) #-position of g) & BK>f3

1.Kf3-f2 Rg7-g2+ 2.Kf2-f1 Sf5-e3 #

A remarkable double (repeated) round trip by both white pieces, as though each of the talented twin composers had produced his own thematic example which they then commingled into a single problem! Although I am reluctant to reward quantity before quality, and although inevitably this work has some of the failings typical of extreme tasks (notably the uneventful black play), there can be no doubt that it is the outstanding work of the tourney. The well-chosen and thematically minimal white material enhances the general impression.

2nd Prize: M.McDowell



h#2

a)

1.Sb6-a4 Se7-c8 2.Sa4-c3 Sc8-b6 #

b) #-position of a) & BK>e4

1.Sc3-e2 Sb6-a4 2.Se2-f4 Sa4-c3 #

c) #-position of b) & BK>e6

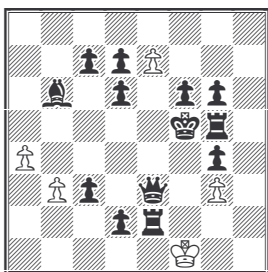
1.Sf4-g6 Sc3-e2 2.Sg6-e7 Se2-f4 #

d) #-position of c) & BK>c6

1.Se7-c8 Sf4-g6 2.Sc8-b6 Sg6-e7 #

Here another composer has been equally astute in his choice of material: there is no doubt that the combination WR+WS is highly appropriate for this theme! In this case the round trips occur only once, but the way in which the white knight chases the black one around is both visually and conceptually delightful, and this bi-coloured interpretation is very much in the spirit of the helpmate. Of course the mates require a number of fringe units, but these are cleverly disposed, in a fine piece of construction.

3rd Prize: M.Barth



h#2

a)

1.Qe3-e5 e7-e8S 2.Re2-e4 Se8-g7 #

b) #-position of a) & BK>c6

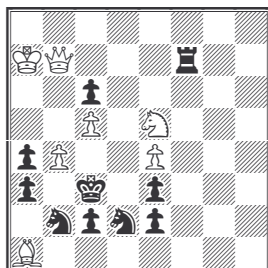
1.Qe5-c5 Sg7-e6 2.Rg5-d5 Se6-d8 #

c) #-position of b) & BK>d3

1.Qc5-e3 Sd8-c6 2.Bb6-d4 Sc6-b4 #

In this case we have a round trip by the black queen, with “magnet” blocking effects in which she leads the way for a colleague in three different directions, a most pleasing concept which unifies the black play. Among the tourney problems, this is the one which I should most like to have composed, but that is a matter of personal taste. The setting requires a great deal of fringe material, and while the underpromotion is amusing, I cannot help wondering whether a chance to include an additional white knight round trip has perhaps been missed as a result of including it?

1st Honourable Mention: A.Semenenko



h#2

a)

1.Kc3-b3 Se5-d3 2.Sb2-c4 Sd3-c1 #

b) Se5>c1

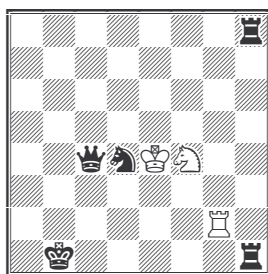
1.Kc3-c4 Sc1-b3 2.Sb2-d3 Sb3-a5 #

c) Se5>a5

1.Kc3-d3 Sa5xc6 2.Sb2-d1 Sc6-e5 #

The only problem using normal (simple) twinning, and most amusingly paradoxical it is too! There is only a single round trip (by the white knight) but this twinning almost suggests that it is doubled. As in the previous problem, the black play laudably aims at strategic unity, but it is a pity that the motivation of the move 2.Sb2-d1 is different from that of the other second black moves. Nevertheless a very enjoyable interpretation of the set theme.

2nd Honourable Mention: A.Semenenko



h#2

a)

1.Rh8-a8 Sf4-d3 2.Ra8-a1 Rg2-b2 #

b) #-position of a) & BK>a7

1.Rh1-h8 Sd3-c5 2.Rh8-a8 Rb2-b7 #

c) #-position of b) & BK>g8

1.Ra1-h1 Sc5-e6 2.Rh1-h8 Rb7-g7 #

d) #-position of c) & BK>h2

1.Ra8-a1 Se6-f4 2.Ra1-h1 Rg7-g2 #

Despite being pawnless and much neater, this inevitably stands somewhat in the shadow of the 1st Prize problem. Looking at it quantitatively, we have round trips by both white pieces and by the black rooks, a notable achievement. However it is very much a case of “seen one, seen all”, and the overall impression is thus inescapably mechanical. Nevertheless this problem is surely worth more than a commendation; after all it is one thing to point out how simple it is, but quite another to devise such simplicity. My sympathies to the composer for the no doubt infuriating need to add black material simply to restrain the useless white king!

As a postscript I would point out to readers that the quality and interest of the works in this award strongly suggest that this theme has further possibilities, yet to be explored. As an encouragement to further exploration, would editors or reviewers quoting this award perhaps be kind enough to refer to that point in their texts?

Finally, along with my congratulations to the successful composers, my thanks to the BCPS for the invitation to judge this tourney and for the efficiency with which it was organised.

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Stamford
March 2010