SERGIU THAN MT & *ŞAH-MAT* 80 JT
2016

Participants

Eugene Fomichev (RUS) – 1; Ladislav Packa (SVK) – 2, 8, 9; Stanislav Vasyliv (UKR) – 3, 4; Vlaicu Crişan (ROU) – 5, 6, 7; Ricardo de Mattos Vieira (BRA) – 10; Valeriu Petrovici (ROU) – 11; Pietro Pitton (ITA) – 12, 13, 14; Jakob Leck (GER) – 15.

Award
by Zoran Gavrilovski

This international (formal) composition tournament was announced in order to give homage to the well-known Romanian problemist, editor, writer and journalist Sergiu Than and to mark the 80th jubilee of *Şah-Mat*, the first and only Romanian newspaper entirely dedicated to chess.

The organizational committee involved in announcing the tournament includes Christian Thau (the son of Sergiu Than, whose original surname should have read "Thau" if it weren't for a bureaucratic error committed during the 1960s in the transcription of his identity document), who kindly sponsors the tourney with a prize fund in amount of 500 Euros; Valeriu Petrovici, the Central Committee for Chess Compositions of the Romanian Chess Federation; Dinu-Ioan Nicula, an International Judge for Chess Compositions; and Marian Stere (Director of the tournament), a founder of the web site www.stere.ro dedicated to the history of Romanian chess ("Istoria Şahului Românesc").

The tournament's announcement invited potential participants to show the ***Than theme***, which has been defined in the mid 1970s. *This theme requires a classical (non-fairy) h#2 with one solution of any kind in each twin, in whose first twin (preferably) or other twin(s) there is a virtual play (a wrong move or a whole new line of play not ending in a mate), whose failure is based on an apparently legal move which, in the light of the retro play, is illegal/irregular for a particular reason, such as impossibility/irregularity of castling or en passant capture, the principle of parity of moves ("odd moves" rule) etc., while in the other twin(s) the virtual play becomes actual, legal and unique.*

Owing to the thematic requirement, I had to adjust my usual judging criteria by focusing on the motivation and quality of retro play, in addition to evaluating the strategy, thematic harmony and economy/construction of 15 thematic entries.

The level of the tourney was moderately good. Most of the entries were well-constructed and it was not an easy task to choose candidates for the award and to rank them as well.

I did not include in the award problems with overall unbalanced play or problems whose content and/or construction is surpassed by older problems, or even by their rivals in this tourney. No. 11 (V. Petrovici) aims to correct and improve an older problem by using two black bishops, which is a non-standard choice of material and thus it is hardly acceptable. Several problems suffer from flaws which are inherent to the respective schemes, but these flaws still seem unpleasant, such as the same mate in the twins of no. 10 (R. M. Vieira) or the set play and solution of the twins of no. 4 (Vasyliv).

After careful analysis I decided to include in the award six problems. In the ranking I gave preference to problems with an intensive and/or appealing retro play and a well-unified actual play.

I thank the organizers for entrusting me with the task of judging this interesting tournament. I also thank the participants for their valuable contributions to this tournament and I congratulate the authors of the honoured problems.

31 December 2016
Zoran Gavrilovski, Skopje (Macedonia)
International Judge of FIDE for Chess Compositions

According to the tournament's rules, the award becomes final after 30 days from the day of its publication. Anticipation and/or related claims should be submitted to the Tournament Director by e-mail (marian_stere@yahoo.com, contact@stere.ro).

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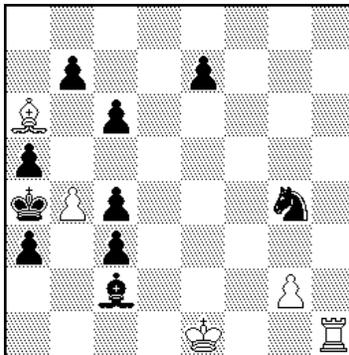
H#2   A posteriori   5+10

b) ♟c6 → d7

c) ♝c2 → b2

a) **1.c:b3 e.p. 0-0!** (the supposed possibility of castling legalizes *a posteriori* (by itself and subsequently) the e.p. capture, by presuming that, in the light of inactivity of the ♔ and ♖, the white last move before the diagram's creation was b2-b4; while *1...♖f1?* prevents legalization) **2.♝d1 ♖f4#**.

b) **1.♚:b4** (*1.c:b3 e.p.??* *etc.* − ♟d7 closes ♝'s potential exit route from c8, thus ♝c2 is a promoted piece which originated from the h♟'s promotion on f1 with a previous check to the ♔, so castling is not possible and e.p. capture cannot be subsequently legalized) **1…♖h5 2.a4 ♖b5#**.

c) **1.♚b3 ♔e2** (*1...0-0??* is impossible because now ♙b4 could not have made a double step, and the last white move before the position of the 3rd twin must have been made by the ♔ or ♖) **2.♚a2 ♝:c4#**.

This is the only three-phase problem in the tourney and one of the few entries with *a posteriori* condition, in which en passant capture of a white pawn by Black and/or white castling is prevented in the second or the third twin, respectively. In the light of the thematic character of this tournament, I decided to give preference to this multiple and quite original thematic rendering, even though I am aware that no. 2 by the same author would have perhaps prevailed in an informal tourney.

2nd Prize

Ladislav Packa

no. 2
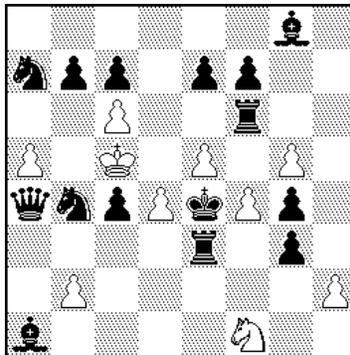


H#2   10+15

b) ♝a1 → g1

a) **1.g:f3 e.p.!** (*1.c:d3 e.p.??* fails because the last white move before the diagram position was f2-f4; not d2-d4?, given that six retro captures of white pieces are needed to allow black pawns to return to the 7ᵗʰ rank: the black a- & g-pawns needed two captures each to reach a1 (a1♝) or the g-file beneath ♙g5, the black h- & d-pawns needed one capture to leave their respective file, but with ♙d2 the missing white dark-squared bishop was trapped on c1 and could not have been captured by a ♟) **1…♔:c4 2.♖f4 ♘:g3#**.

b) **1.c:d3 e.p.!** (*1.g:f3 e.p.??* fails because the last white move must have been d2-d4; not f2-f4?, given that with ♙f2 there are not enough white pieces to be captured by bPs in order to allow a black pawn to promote to a bishop on g1) **1…h:g3 2.♖f5 ♘d2#**.

A highly unified play by both sides in each half-move (B1 – a self-blocking e.p. capture, W1 – guard of a square adjacent to the ♚, B2 – a self-block by ♖, W2 – a model mate by ♘) with exchanged functions of ♙d4 & ♙f4, plus a thematic exchange of *en passant* moves as actual or virtual moves.

**Jakob Leck**

no. 15
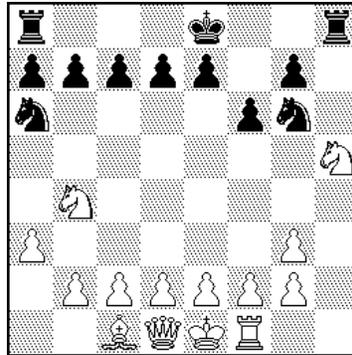
H#2   14+12

b) ♟b7 → b6

a) **1.0-0-0! ♘c6 2.♞b8 ♘:a7#**; *1.0-0??* (Black castling on the king's side is not possible because sacrifices of heavy pieces on g3 disrupt the possibility of castling (♛'s arrival on g3 through d8 would force the ♚ to move; ♜h8 could sacrifice on g3, but then ♜h8 on the diagram is a promoted piece); any of the ♝s could not arrive from c8 or f8 to g3; a ♞ could not be sacrificed on g3 because then one of the knights in the diagram position should be promoted on h1, but it could not exit from there because of ♙f2 and ♙g3; and the missing ♟h7 could not have captured a white piece on g3 because of the impossibility of the only two missing white pieces ♝f1 and ♖a1 to leap over the ♙s' wall in order to sacrifice on g3) *1...♜h1 2.♚h7 ♘:f6#?*

b) **1.0-0** (Black can castle on the king's side because ♛ could have exited from d8 through b7 in order to sacrifice on g3) **1...♜h1 2.♚h7 ♘:f6#**.

A clumsy setting in which many pieces are idle in the actual play, but are needed to exclude castling on the king's side in a). In spite of the usual composing standards relating to the need of use of all white pieces in the solution, the richness of the retro play merits awarding a special recognition.

1st Honourable Mention

Stas Vasyliv

no. 3
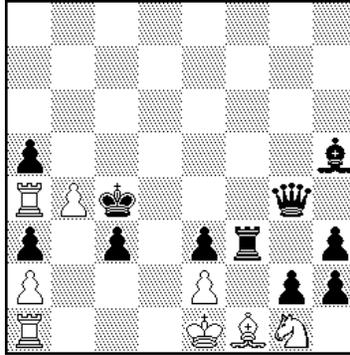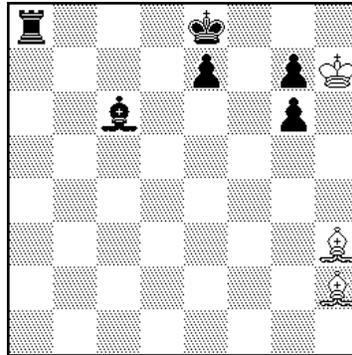

H#2   8+11

b) ♚c4 ↔ ♟c3

a) **1.h:g1♘ ♖d1!** (*1...0-0-0??* fails because the ♔ or ♖a1 must have moved just before the diagram position has been created) **2.♞:e2 ♗:e2#**.

b) **1.g:f1♗ 0-0-0** (White can castle because his last move before the diagram position could have been b3-b4) **2.♝:e2 ♘:e2#**.

Zilahi theme including minor promotions with capture of a white piece and mate by the remaining white piece. The retro proof of movement of the ♔ or ♖a1 before the diagram position of a) is apparent because of unavailability of free squares for immediate retro play by other white pieces.

2nd Honourable Mention

Vlaicu Crişan

no. 7

H#2   6+4

b) ♙g2 → c4

a) **1.♚:a1 ♘c4 2.♜a2 ♖c1#**; *1.♚:c3? 0-0-0??* (♝f1 originates from a pawn which gave a check to the ♔: f3-f2+ or e3/g3:f2+) *2.♛b4 ♖d3#?*

b) **1.♚:c3 0-0-0** (♝f1 could have arrived from g2 or h3 and the ♔ is free from a compulsory check in the retro play) **2.♛b4 ♖d3#**.

Obvious retro play and matching actual play which is unified in all half-moves, including Zilahi theme (exchange of the rooks' functions of being captured and mating) and self-block on a2 or b4.

Commendation

Pietro Pitton

no. 13

H#2   3+6

b) ♟g7 → a7

a) **1.♜d8 ♗g1 2.♝e8 ♗b6#**; *1.♝d7 ♗f1 2.0-0-0??* (♟g7 guards h6 and thus the ♔ have
   came to h7 from g8-f7 etc., hereby disturbing the ♜ and forcing him to move) *2...♗a6#?*

b) **1.♝d7 ♗f1 2.0-0-0** (now there is no proof that the ♜ has moved in the retro play)
   2...♗a6#.

A charming lightweight Meredith ("gravure"), which edged out few entries with a similar
method of preventing the castling. In addition to its economy, I particularly like exchanged
functions of white bishops (mating/square-guarding and *vice versa*) and model chameleon
echo-like mates.