

The Royal Game: A Problemist's Version

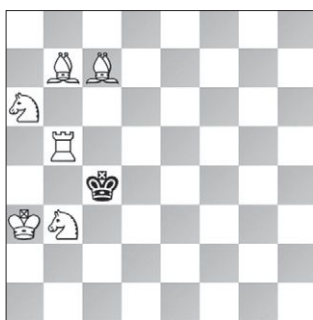
The Royal Game (aka *Chess Story*) is a novella by Austrian author Stefan Zweig first published in 1941. GM Pal Benko applies a compositional update to the classic work. Benko explains, “*Chess Story* remained with me for my one-and-a-half years in a communist concentration camp. I had a similar problem: I could not occupy my brain.”

By **STEFAN ZWEIG, ADAPTED BY GM PAL BENKO**

Stefan Zweig's (Problems 1A and 1B) novella, *The Royal Game*—also known as *Chess Story* (Problems 2A and 2B)—inspired several media adaptations, including the 1960 Gerd Oswald film, *Brainwashed*. Here Pal Benko (Problems 3A and 3B) offers his own spin on this tale.

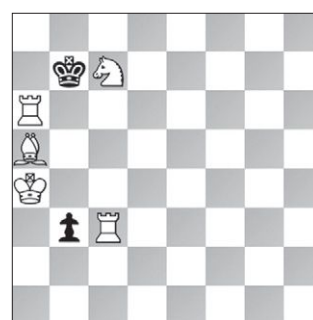
A bustling crowd gathered at New York harbor, where a large steamship bound for Buenos Aires was docked (Problem 4). We could see Czentovic, the world chess champion, in the cross-fire of reporters' camera flashes. Having completed his simultaneous chess games tour in the U.S., Czentovic was setting out for South America to continue there. His fame was comparable to Reshevsky's, who had played simultaneous games and had participated in international chess tournaments as a child prodigy.

PROBLEM 1A, STEFAN=S



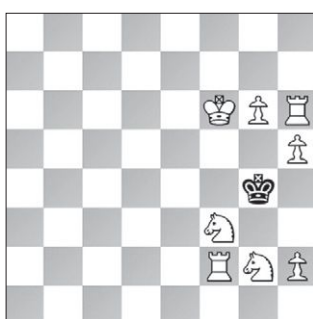
MATE IN 2

PROBLEM 2A, CHESS=C



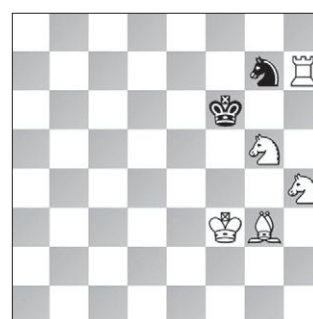
MATE IN 3

PROBLEM 1B, ZWEIG=Z



MATE IN 3

PROBLEM 2B, STORY=S

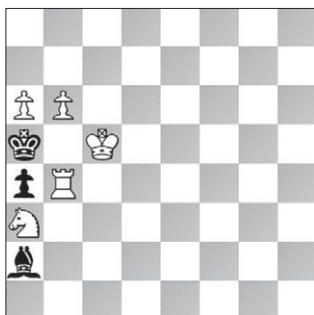


MATE IN 4



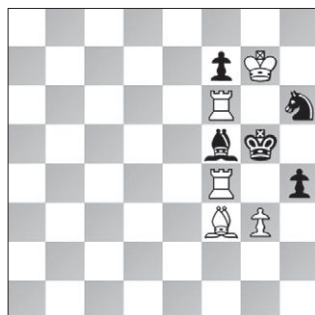
A STILL FROM THE 1960 MOVIE, *BRAINWASHED*, WHICH WAS BASED UPON THE STEFAN ZWEIG NOVELLA. FACE TO FACE FROM LEFT: MARIO ADORF, CURD JURGENS; SEATED CENTER FROM LEFT: ALAN GIFFORD, DIETMAR SCHOENHERR; STANDING FROM LEFT: KAREL STEPANEK, JAN HENDRIKS, ALBERT BESSLER. PHOTO FROM THE EVERETT COLLECTION.

PROBLEM 3A, PAL=P



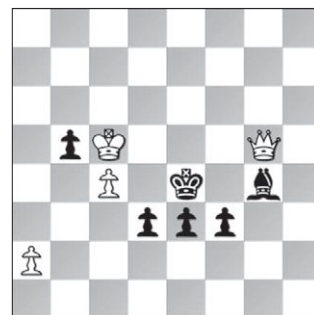
MATE IN 3

PROBLEM 3B, BENKO=B



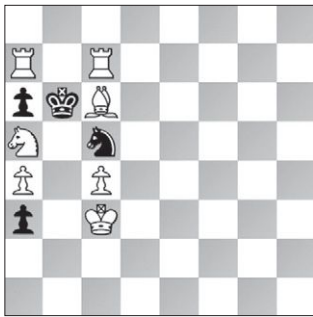
MATE IN 4

PROBLEM 4, STEAMSHIP



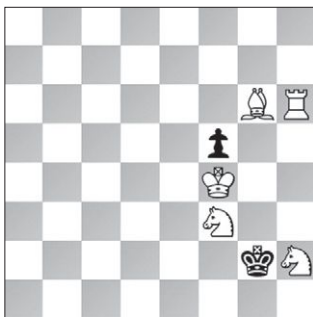
MATE IN 3

PROBLEM 5A, MIRKO=M



MATE IN 4

PROBLEM 5B, CZENTOVIC=C



MATE IN 3

Mirko Czentovic (Problems 5A and 5B) was born in a southern Slav village, where, tragically, he was orphaned at a young age. The local priest took him under his wing, but the boy showed little capacity for learning, even in the village school. In the evenings, the priest regularly played chess. Czentovic would sit quietly and watch the priest play. Once, when the priest had to leave before his game was over, his partner half-jokingly invited Czentovic to step in and finish the game. To his astonishment, the untutored boy beat him. After that, others were eager to challenge Czentovic and all suffered the same fate: It turned out that none of them had a chance against him.

One day the priest dressed Czentovic up and took him to the nearby town. There, in the coffee-house where a chess circle met regularly, the priest presented his discovery. Czentovic lost the first game because he had never seen the Sicilian Defense before. But then he won many games in a row. It created a big stir (Problem 6).

PROBLEM 6, BASIC POSITION WITH C7-C5



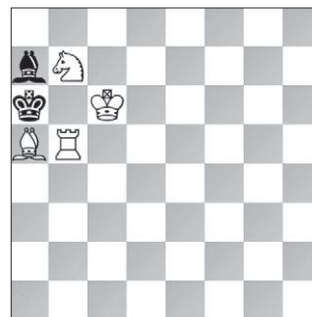
Construct a helpmate game in which White moves and mates in 6, including 0-0-0. There will be a strict move order and the pieces that move should be involved in the mating pattern.

Czentovic kept winning tournaments. His chess career rose meteorically, and he became a celebrity. Backers even put him up in a hotel, where he saw an English toilet first time. By the age of 18, Czentovic had won the Hungarian Championship and then, at 20, he became world champion.

During the voyage, my wife and I headed to the lounge to play chess with some of the other passengers. I started to play against Mr. McConnor, a wealthy mining engineer, as spectators gathered around. When McConnor learned that the World Champion was on the ship, he wanted to play against him at all costs. Through his agent, Czentovic asked for \$250 per game and McConnor accepted. We agreed that we would play a consultative game against Czentovic the next day.

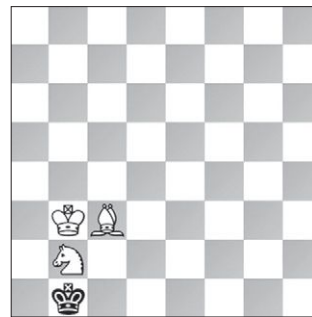
We lost the first one and could see the contempt on Czentovic's face. In the second game, it appeared we could win by promoting a pawn to a queen. But a pale-faced gentleman, Dr. B (Problems 7A, 7B, and 7C), who happened to be walking by, interrupted, "No, for God's sake! If you do that, you cannot prevent his attack." He immediately recommended six moves that eventually led to a draw. Excited by this, McConnor proposed to continue the fight, hoping to break our opponent's pride.

PROBLEM 7A, DR.B=D



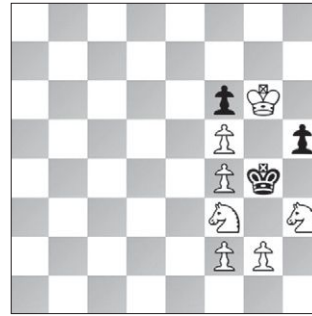
MATE IN 3

PROBLEM 7B, DR. B=R



MATE IN 4

PROBLEM 7C, DR. B=B

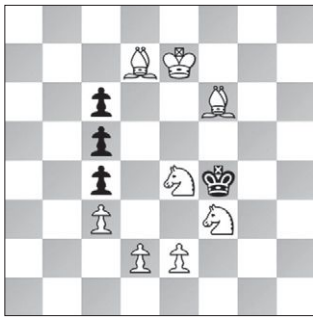


MATE IN 5

Later, I sat with Dr. B and asked how he came to play chess so well. He told me that he had been an average chess player in his school days and had not played for the next 20 years. But then political events turned his life upside down.

"I was a well-off lawyer in Vienna, handling the properties of the former ruling family and the clergy. After the occupation of Austria by Adolf Hitler, the SS broke down my door. The Gestapo arrested me because they wanted to confiscate the properties abroad as well, but by then I had secured the most important papers in a safe place (Problem 8).

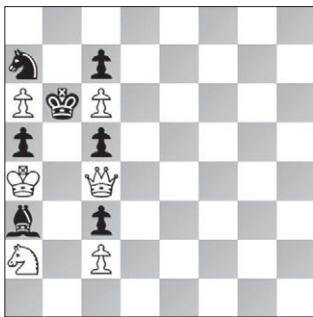
PROBLEM 8, GESTAPO =G



MATE IN 3

“They did not take me to a concentration camp, but used a ‘finer’ method to break me down. I was completely isolated and interrogated repeatedly. They bombarded me with questions, which were difficult to answer, because I had no idea what they already knew. I realized that one of my assistants had been an informer (Problem 9).

PROBLEM 9, JAIL

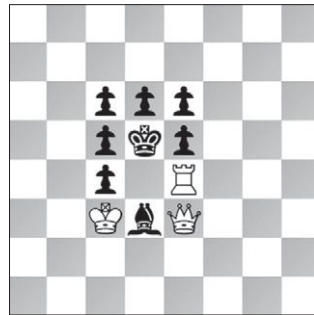


MATE IN 5

“After two months with absolutely nothing to exercise my brain, my mind began to deteriorate. One day, when my interrogator was called away, I noticed a book in the pocket of a cloak hanging on the wall. Avoiding the attention of the guard, I took the book and hid it in my clothes.

“Back in my cell I saw that my find was a chess book containing 150 master games. I made chess pieces from bread and used the checkered bedcover as a chess board. At first, I just played out the games but later I started to enjoy them. Alekhine Alekhine, Efim Bogoljubow ... became my friends. This happy state lasted for two months. My mind and memory were getting sharper. But the novelty wore off after a while. I already knew all the games by heart (Problem 10).

PROBLEM 10, CELL



MATE IN 4

“Out of desperation, I began to play against myself. I know this sounds nonsensical. For in chess, as in love, a partner is indispensable. The essence of a chess game is that each player doesn’t know what the other is thinking. I played about a thousand games in this artificial schizophrenia, not only in the daytime, but in my dreams as well. Back in the interrogation sessions, my questioner found my answers incomprehensible. In my cell I would rush back and forth, screaming with rage at my captivity.

“One day, half asleep, I heard pleasant sounds around me. Opening my eyes, I saw a bandage on my hand and found myself in a sunny room. A doctor was standing at my bedside. He was friendly and explained how I ended up at the hospital (Problem 11).

PROBLEM 11, GUARD, BED, DOCTOR’S VISIT



MATE IN 3

“Apparently, my shouting had caused the guard to come into my cell. I had pushed past him, run out to the corridor, and shoved my fist through a window pane. That was how my hand was injured.

“The doctor was benevolent and promised to try to free me. But he warned that I should

avoid chess. Perhaps he had declared me crazy.

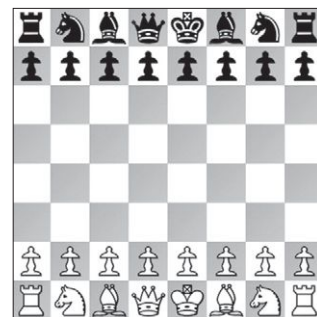
“It was during the time when Czechoslovakia was next to be looted that I was somehow freed, but I had to leave the country within 10 days ...”

Yet Dr. B was willing to play one game, as a test, so the next day two contrasting characters met over the board. The world champion played slowly, careful to defend. Dr. B played quickly and nervously to attack. Then a miracle happened: Czentovic knocked the pieces over, indicating that he had resigned.

“Do you want another game?” asked Czentovic. “Of course,” replied Dr. B.

Czentovic, playing white, thought for a deliberately long time before making his opening move, seeing that this annoyed his opponent. Then he played a “most conventional move and so did Black.” (Problem 12)

PROBLEM 12, BASIC POSITION



What were the first 2 moves? After these moves, White can helpmate in 2 moves.

By the nineteenth move, a crisis broke out when Dr. B exclaimed, “Check!” The world champion relished the situation. “Gentlemen, can you see check here? Because I do not.”

Dr. B, confused, tried to explain that the king was in the wrong place. Then he said, “Of course the game is yours,” and started feverishly setting up for a new game. At this point, I stepped in to remind Dr. B of his doctor’s advice and pointed to his scar. As if awakening from a daze, Dr. B stood up, apologized, and stated, “I’ve played my last chess game.” He bowed and left.

We sat, silent. Then Czentovic commented, “The attack was not so bad. I have never seen such a special chess talent among amateurs.” ♠