

Award of the 6th YCCC – Section B

First of all thank you to Julia Vysotska and Marjan Kovačević for again asking me to undertake the enjoyable task of evaluating studies from young composers in the YCCC.

The thematic condition in section B was as follows:

At some point during a mating study, Black's King is on square X. The King then moves at least twice and returns to square X, where it is mated.

The theme was quite difficult and may have been a factor in the tournament receiving only 10 studies. Not surprisingly, they were all win studies :-)

The theme (perhaps too) excellently illustrated the dilemma composers are put in when taking part in a thematic tournament. A difficult decision must be made: Should one A) compose a study showing the theme in the most comprehensive, ambitious way or B) should one create the best study that “accidentally” meets the theme? My view on this is that I want to experience the best studies overall. I believe other judges might have put more emphasis on the thematic elements, for instance rewarding studies which feature the longest king walks (like study no 7).

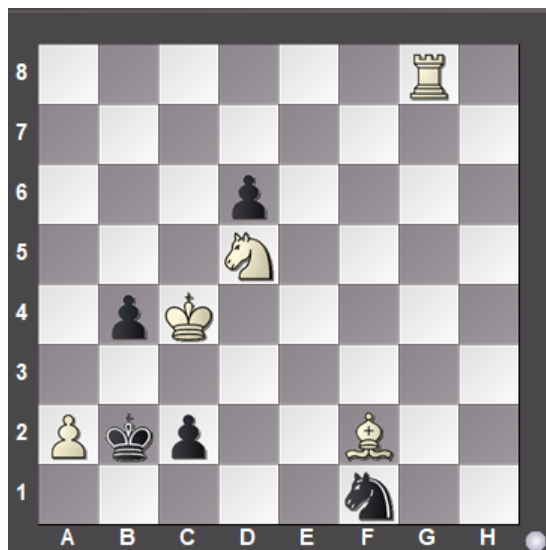
In hindsight, I am not too excited about the theme (which was suggested by myself!). In many of the studies the theme is hardly visible, unless one knows what one is looking for.

Overall, I experienced a big difference in quality between the best 4 studies (and best 3, in particular) and the rest of the field.

Unfortunately study no 2 (Ke7/Ke1) had the character of a moremover, with several alternative wins for White along the line. As a study it is cooked.

On to the placing of the nine remaining studies. The notation is by the composers themselves.

1st Place - No 9 - Ilija Serafimović



Win

1.Bd4+ Kb1 [1...Ka3 2.Ra8#]

2.Bb2 Kxb2 [The Initial position, only difference is that there is no Bf2.]

3.Rg2 b3 [3...Kb1 4.Rxc2 Kxc2 5.Kxb4 Nd2 6.a4 Nb3 7.Ne3+ Kb2 8.Nc4+ Kc2 9.Nxd6]

4.axb3 Nd2+! 5.Rxd2 Ka3! 6.Nc3 d5+ [6...c1Q 7.Ra2#]

7.Rxd5 c1Q 8.Ra5+ Kb2 [theme]

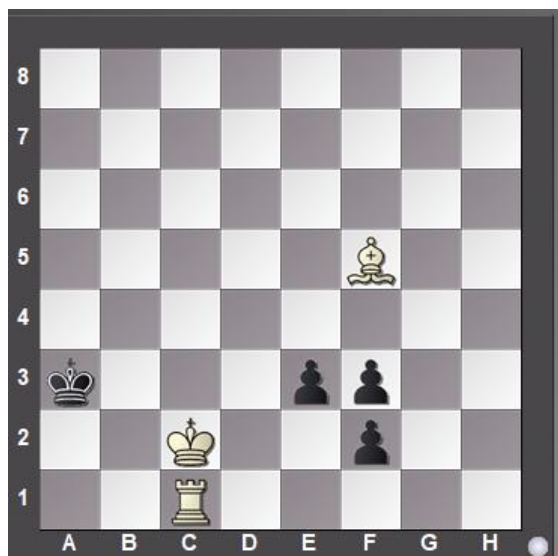
9.Ra2# [theme Black play on stalemate.]

1–0

The winning study sets off with a nice elimination of the bishop on f2 which turns out to be in the way on the second rank. Then, as White seems to have sufficiently halted Black's dangerous pawn, Black springs a major surprise with 3...b3 followed by 4...Nd2 aiming for a stalemate. But as it turns out the restricted position of the Black king on a3 is also suitable for mate (6. Nc3+!). The rook must be deflected to d5, but amusingly the mate falls on a2 anyway via the detour d2-d5-a5-a2. The Black king, beginning on b2, leaves for both b1 and a3, before returning to its destiny.

One small shame about this study is the fact that the b3-pawn is not necessary in the final mating picture. Another shame is the similarity of the study to a favorite of mine, Birnov's masterpiece from 1947 (Trud, 2nd prize, HHDBVI #68608). That study features the same mate, a queen promotion on c1 and even a pawn sacrifice on d5. On the other hand it has no stalemate and the present study shows many other creative aspects. Very pleasing throughout!

2nd Place - No 6 - **Ben Smolkin**



Win

This miniature study grew on me as I studied the motivation of the play and the excellent economy with only one pawn being captured. The king leaves and returns to its mating square A3 twice in two different directions, just as is the case in the first prize. The simple starting position suggested to me that the study might turn out to be anticipated, but luckily those fears turned out to be unfounded.

Studies almost without captures have a tendency to become a little boring, but I don't think this is the case here, because of the imminent danger to Black's king throughout the study. A subtle and mature work.

The two top studies both show thematic moves of the kings, which are not in response to a White check. 1...Ka4, 2...Ka3 and 5...Ka3 in this study and 5...Ka3 in the first place study. In other words, both studies show more subtlety than is the case in the remaining studies. Creative Black play is very important in studies!

1.Kc3 Ka4 2.Kc4 Ka3 [2...Ka5 3.Kc5]

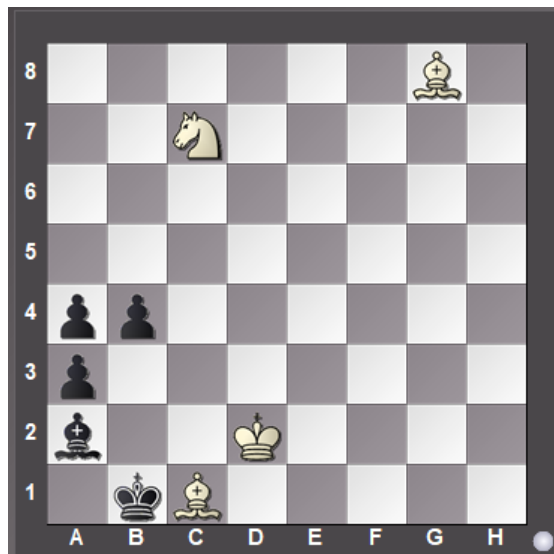
3.Ra1+ Kb2 4.Rb1+ [4.Rf1 e2 5.Rxf2 Kc1]

4...Ka2 5.Rf1 Ka3 [Main 5...e2 6.Rxf2 Ka1 7.Kb3 e1Q 8.Ra2#]

6.Bb1 [6.Kc3 waste of time; 6.Ra1+ waste of time]

6...e2 7.Rxf2 e1Q 8.Ra2#

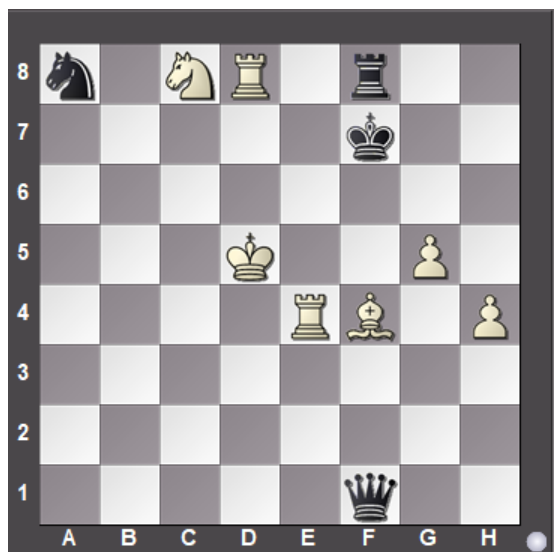
1-0

3rd Place - No 1 - Dylan Schenker

Win

This study mainly earned its high place due to the amusing repetition of sacrifices on a3. In general, the solution flows excellently. In fact, I would characterize this as a typical “flow study”, because the individual White moves are not that surprising, but as a whole, the study still leaves a pleasant impression.

Of course, the final win of knight vs pawn is well known.

4th Place - No 4 - Ural Khasanov

Win

This study ends just out of the medals. The main point of the study (9. Nd5!) is nice and clear, and leads up to the same mating position as we have already seen in the first prize study.

1.Bh7+ Ka1 2.Nb5 [2.Na6 b3 3.Bxa3 b2]
2...Bb1 3.Bg8 Ba2 [3...a2 4.Ba3 bxa3 5.Kc1; 3...Bg6
 4.Bxa3 bxa3 5.Kc1]

4.Bxa2 Kxa2 5.Bxa3 Kb3 [5...bxa3 6.Kc2 Ka1 7.Nd4
 Ka2 8.Nc6 Ka1 9.Nb4 a2 10.Kc1 a3 11.Nc2#]

6.Bc1 a3 7.Kd3 Ka2 [7...a2 8.Nd4+]

8.Bxa3 bxa3 [8...Kb3 9.Bc1]

9.Kc2 Ka1 10.Nd4 Ka2 11.Ne2 Ka1 12.Nc1 a2

13.Nb3#

1-0

1.g6+ [1.Nd6+ Kg8 2.Rxf8+ Kxf8 3.h5 Qd3+ 4.Ke6 Nb6
 5.g6 Nc8=]

1...Kxg6 2.h5+ [2.Rxf8 Qb5+=]

2...Kg7 [2...Kxh5 3.Re5+ Kg4 4.Rg5+ Kh4 5.Rxf8; 2...Kf7
 3.Nd6+ Kg8 4.Rxf8+ Kxf8 5.Re8+ Kg7 6.h6+ Kg6 7.Rg8+
 Kh5 8.h7+–]

3.h6+ Kg8 [3...Kg6 4.Re6+ Rf6 5.Rg8+ Kh5 6.Rg5+ Kh4
 7.Rxf6]

4.h7+ Kxh7 5.Rxf8 Nb6+ [5...Qb5+ 6.Ke6 Qc6+ 7.Nd6;
 5...Nc7+ 6.Ke5 Qb5+ 7.Kf6 Nd5+ 8.Kf7 Qb3 9.Rh8+ Kxh8
 10.Be5+ Nf6+ 11.Kxf6 Kg8 12.Ne7+ Kf8 13.Nf5 Ke8
 14.Bc7+ Kd7 15.Re7+ Kc8 16.Nd6#]

6.Nxb6 Qb5+ 7.Ke6 Qc6+ [7...Qxb6+ 8.Bd6]

8.Kf5 Qc5+ 9.Nd5 Qxf8+ [9...Qxd5+ 10.Be5 Qd7+ 11.Kg5
 Qe7+ 12.Rf6]

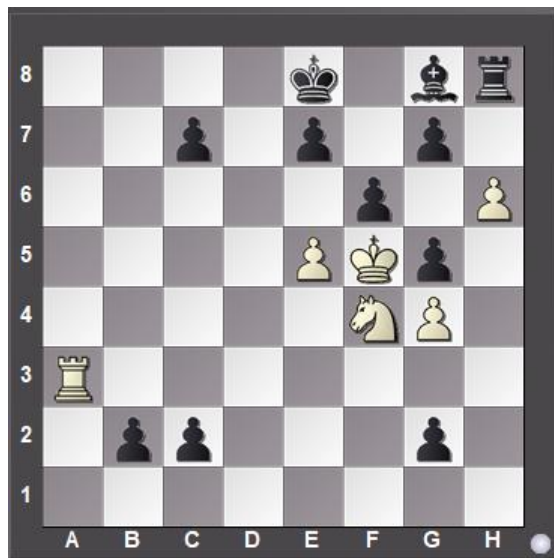
10.Nf6+ Kg7 11.Bh6+ Kxh6 12.Rh4+ Kg7 13.Rh7#

1-0

Some good technique is used throughout, for instance the march of the h-pawn to take the Black king out on a walk.

My main issue with the study is the capture of rook-f8 without it having moved. Also the starting position appears a little messy, especially with the two rooks facing each other on the 8th rank. Also, compared to the first placed study, the starting position bears no real resemblance to a game.

5th Place - No 3 - Taras Rudenko



Win

1.e6! [1...Ra8+? Kd7!→ (1...Kf7? 2.e6#)]

1...Bxe6+ [1...Bh7+ 2.Ng6 Bxg6+ 3.Kxg6 0-0 4.hxg7! Rb8 5.Rh3 b1Q 6.Rh8#]

2.Kxe6 0-0! 3.h7+! Kh8 [3...Kxh7 4.Rh3+ Kg8 5.Ng6+→]

4.Ng6+ Kxh7 5.Nxf8+ Kg8 6.Ng6 g1N! [6...c1Q 7.Nxe7+ Kh8 (7...Kf8 8.Ra8#) 8.Rh3#]

7.Ra8+ Kh7 8.Kf7 [8.Kf5? e6+!→]

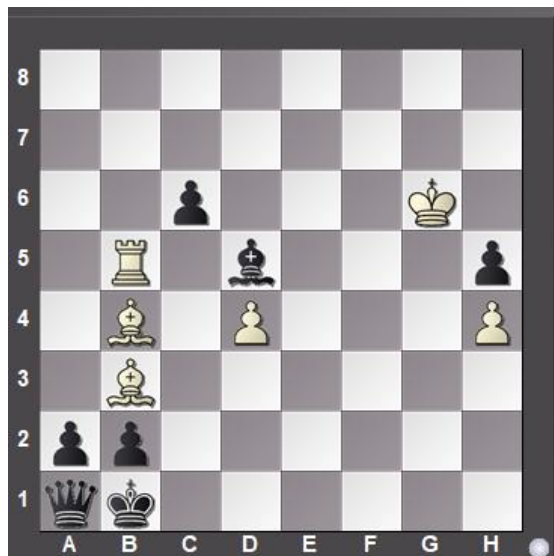
8...Nf3 9.Rh8# [Thematic mate to the black king which in option returns on three squares (g8, h7 or h8) in a different way.]

1-0

Here we have another study with good flow, including Black's castling, which one can almost always guess coming when seeing the starting diagram. Thematically the study is quite strong, with the king starting on e8, coming to h7, leaving that square again, only to be mated there anyway.

My main critique concerns the pawns on b2,c2 and g2. Especially the pair on the queen-side, which never move, are only on the board for correctness and that is very unfortunate.

6th Place - No 8 - Anirudh Daga



Win

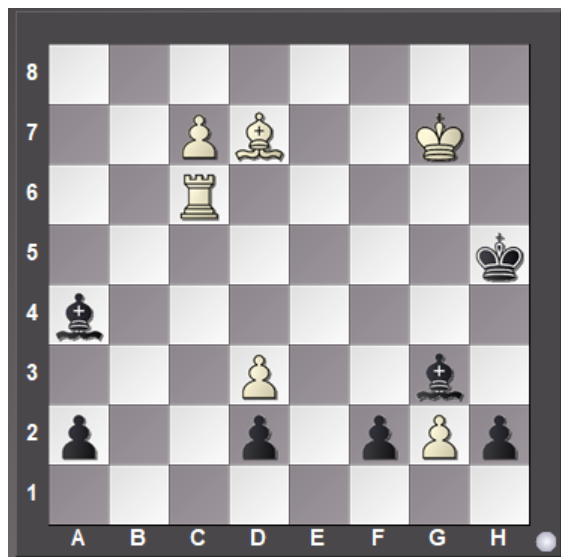
1.Rxd5 cxd5 2.Bf8 Kc1 3.Bh6+ Kb1 4.Kg5 Kc1 5.Kf5+ Kb1 6.Kf4 Kc1 7.Kf3+ Kb1 8.Ke3 Kc1 9.Kd3+ Kb1 10.Bc2#

1-0

We see an amusing diagonal travel of a king giving discovered checks from two bishops in turn. The theme is not new, but done in a good, economical way. The Black king returns to b1 four times before being mated there, which makes the study thematically very strong.

In reality we are dealing with a mate-in-10-moves-problem without many study-like qualities. For instance, Black has no counterplay, which is a shame. Also, the Black queen is locked up on a1 from the start, which takes away some of the pleasure.

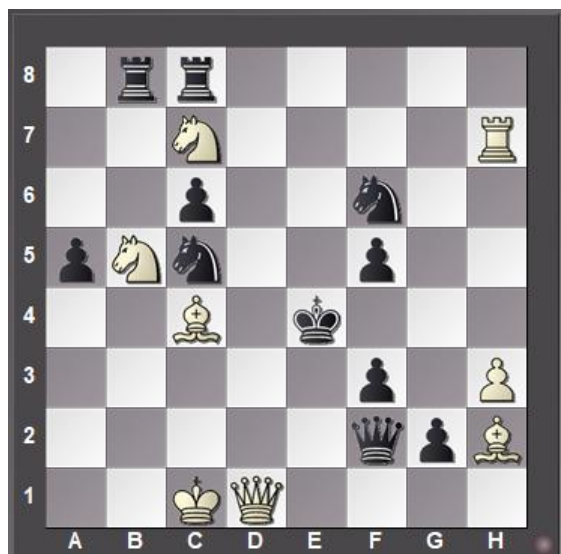
7th Place - No 10 - **Sergiienko Andrii**



Win

6. Bf3 is a very good move, which opens c8-h3 and closes f1-f7! But it deserves a better setting, with fewer extra pieces. It is a good exercise to try to find the “cleanest” position (with as few pieces as possible) where Bg4-f3 is still the only winning move. Having found that, one can try to build an even better introduction, for instance without four Black pawns already on the second rank, which is too unnatural (although they are nicely used in the sidelines).

8th Place - No 5 - **Nikita Ushakov**



Black to move, Win

1.Bg4+

[1.Rc5+? Kh4 2.c8Q a1Q+ 3.Kg6 Qf6+ 4.Kxf6 f1Q+ 5.Rf5 Be5+ 6.Kxe5 Qa1+ 7.d4 (7.Ke4 Qe1+ 8.Kd5 Bb3+ 9.Kd6 Qg3+ 10.Kc5 Qe3+) 7...Qxd4+ 8.Kxd4 d1Q+ 9.Ke5 Qa1+ 10.Ke6 Bb3+ 11.Kd6 Qd4+ 12.Ke7 Qg7+=; 1.c8Q? a1Q+ 2.Kh7 Bxc6 3.Qxc6 Qh8+ 4.Kxh8 h1Q 5.Kg7 Be5+ 6.Kh7 Kg5+ 7.Bh3 Qxh3+ 8.gxh3 d1Q=]

1...Kh4 2.Rh6+ Kg5 3.Rg6+ Kh4 4.c8Q a1Q+ 5.Kh7 f1Q 6.Bf3 Qxf3 7.Qh3#

1-0

1...Qe3+ 2.Kc2 [2.Kb2? Rxc7 3.Rxc7 Rxb5+ 4.Bxb5 Nd5 (4...Qd4+)]

2...Qf2+ 3.Kc3 Na4+ 4.Qxa4 Ke3 [4...Qe1+ 5.Kc2 Ke3 6.Qa3+ Kf2 7.Qc5+ Qe3]

5.Re7+ Ne4+ 6.Rxe4+ fxe4 7.Qd1 Rd8 8.Nd5+ Rxd5 9.Bxd5 cxd5 10.Bxb8 [10.Bg1 Rc8+ 11.Kb3 Qxg1 12.Qxg1+ Kf4=]

10...g1Q 11.Ba7+ [11.Qxg1 d4+]

11...Kf4 12.Qxg1 Qxg1 13.Bxg1 e3 14.Bh2+ [14.Kd3 f2]

14...Ke4 15.Nd6#

1-0

The best thing about this study is the mating finale, with a pleasing mating picture. The introduction is too wild, however. By “wild” I mean that there are too many captures/exchanges and too many checks. Often introductions become better when they consist of fewer, more pointed moves. Here I had the feeling that the composer tried to make the study as long as possible, and that is no quality in itself. In addition, I believe the Black-to-move-stipulation ought only be used as an absolute last resort.

9th Place - No 7 - **Andrew Vodinh-Ho**



Win

1.Qxd8+! [1.Nxe7+? Kb8 2.N7c6+ Bxc6 3.Nxc6+ dxc6 4.Rxd8+ Ka7 5.Rxa8+ Nxa8 Black is still up 4 points of material and is winning.]

1...Kxd8 [(theme)]

2.Rxd7+ Ke8 [2...Kc8? 3.Rd8#]

3.Rxe7+ Kf8 4.Rxf7+ Kg8 [4...Ke8? 5.Ng7#]

5.Rg7+ Kf8 [5...Kh8? 6.Nf7#]

6.Nd7+ Ke8 7.Nd6+ Kd8 [(theme)]

8.Bh4+ Rg5 9.Bxg5+ Bf6 Bxf6#

1-0

The Black king travels from d8 to g8 and back to d8. Well done! The play is too forced, however, as all White moves are checks. Furthermore, a lot of Black pieces function only as spectators (they are there for correctness only)

Steffen Slumstrup Nielsen, Copenhagen, October 10th, 2022