

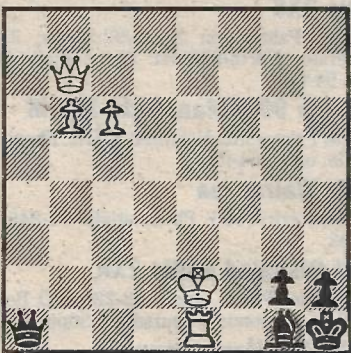
CHESS

Fairy problems

by Murray Chandler

NO SELF-RESPECTING grandmaster should write about fairy chess. This mutant form of problem-solving corrupts our noble game with themes such as cylindrical boards, reflecting bishops and kamikaze orphans. However, there are actually a couple of categories of fairy problems I particularly like: helpmates and retrograde analysis.

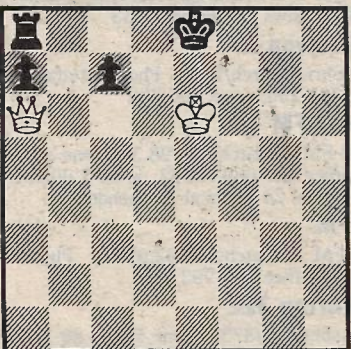
In a helpmate both sides co-operate to help White mate Black in a specified number of moves. You may be forgiven for thinking that sounds like what happened in the last game you lost! This time the battle is only between you and the composer of the problem, as you try to work out the intended solution.



Helpmate in two moves (two solutions)

Black moves first in a helpmate. One of the two answers is 1. Qh8 (this is a black move) Rf1 2. gxf1=N c7 disch and mate from the White queen. The underpromotion to a knight was necessary as any other piece would have been able to interpose on the a8-h1 diagonal. Likewise Black's queen could only hide on h8 in order not to do the same (which would have meant mate in three moves instead of the stipulated two). The second solution involves a similar idea, and is given at the end of this column. Have a try at solving it.

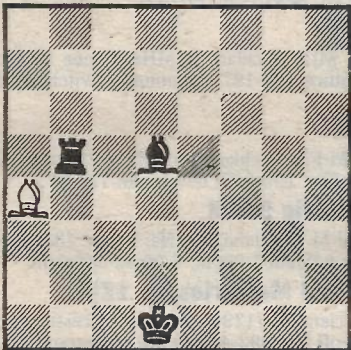
In retrograde or retro-analytical problems, it is the supposed play leading up to the problem position that is the important thing. Although studies and problems usually start from positions most unlikely to occur in an actual game, it is nevertheless assumed that the moves leading up to the diagram position were legal. Thus a position including, say, a Black bishop on h8 and a Black pawn on g7, would be unacceptable; there is no way such a situation could occur from the starting position of chess. Many retrograde puzzles revolve around whether it can be proved that castling is no longer legal, and the proof of such issues can be quite amazing. Here is a simple example:



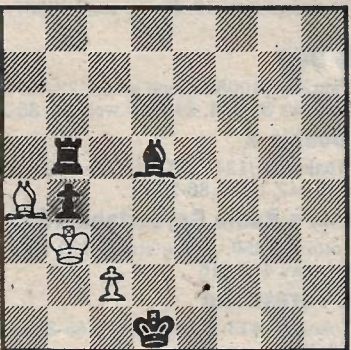
White to play and force mate in two moves.

If White is to play, then Black's last move must have been with the king or the rook — therefore castling is out! So 1. Qa1 forces mate next move, as 1. 0-0-0 is not a defence.

Here is a neat puzzle, composed by R Smullyan in 1957, that illustrates retro-analysis might not be useless in normal play! Imagine that White's king has accidentally fallen off the board, and you have to replace it on the correct square. Where should it go?



The first thing to note is that it must be Black to play, because of the check. If it were White to move, the king would have to be on b3, to block this diagonal. But then White would be in a double check that Black could not have legally administered the move before. Yet if White's king goes anywhere else, how is it that the bishop on a4 is giving check to Black's king? The only solution is that two moves ago the position looked like this:



White played 1. c4, Black captured en passant with 1. ... bxc3 and White played 2. Kxc3 — therefore White's king is on the c3 square. Perhaps tournament arbiters should have to sit retrograde analysis exams ...

And the second helpmate solution: 1. Qa8 Rxc3 ch 2. hxc3=R (again a necessary under-promotion) Qh7 mate. Composed by A Karpati, 1968. ■

