



The 11th FIDE World Cup in Composing

Section H – Retros

Preliminary award by

Thomas Brand

MMXXIII

From tournament director Aleksey Oganessian I received (only) twelve anonymised diagrams with complete solutions and the authors' comments.

Even though only orthodox proof games were permitted as in 2022, yet questions arose during the submission period as to whether Chess960 proof games or even A-to-B problems were appropriate for this tournament. Of course, I left the decision to the tournament director, but nevertheless gave my opinion on these questions: Chess960 is completely defined by the FIDE Chess Laws (in the new rules valid since 1.1.2023 in "Guidelines II. Chess960 Rules"), which clearly describe for instance the 960 possible starting positions, but also the rules for castling. Since this is done in the official rules, in my opinion Chess960 is orthodox, thus I recommended to allow possible Chess960 problems. All this does not apply to A-to-B, so I recommended not to allow such entries for this tournament.

Eventually with **H7** there is indeed a problem according to the Chess960 rules among the participants.

In a first step, I checked all entries with the computer (H7 with Jacobi 0.75, the other problems with Stelvio 1.4, the new checking program of Reto Aschwanden). To

my surprise, one problem turned out to be unsound, so that **H6** had to be eliminated.

Regarding the general evaluation, I can quote almost verbatim last year's judge Kostas Prentos: "The quality of the submitted problems was rather average - lower than I expected for this prestigious competition. Although none of the entries can be called a masterpiece, four of the remaining ten were good enough to find a place in the award."

With so few entries, I would like also to comment on the ones that did not make it into the award, but before I do, I would like to briefly summarise my decision criteria: I prefer proof games with surprising, strategic and original content, which is well hidden in the diagram, but becomes clearly evident in the course of the solution. Economy in proof games e.g. means as few unthematic moves and captures as possible, and I also usually take a critical view of glued-on moves after the actual theme presentation.

H1 (PG 19, ♘d2-♘h5, 13+14). Not nearly as original as the author suspected: PDB contains four proof games with the very same thematic position on the h-file. Published between 1994 and 2000, [P0000393](#) is even very similar from the black pawn structure, [P1000650](#) most

economical (14+8 pieces, with all black Pawns captured, which makes the position quite attractive, in 17 moves).

H2: See below.

H3 (PG 15, ♖d2-♖b8, 10+12):
Purely optical theme, which is quite obvious on the 8th row. Commendable the fivefold setting, unfortunately (only) three of the four not visible Visitor are captured, b♖ remains on the board, but still has the small strategic effect that the capture on h1 is used as a clearance for [w♗f1].

H4: See below.

H5 (PG 22.5, ♖g3-♖b4, 13+15):
For me not very impressive, since it is a purely formal theme, which can only be recognised as such by counting – the accumulation of captures instead of just visits on one specific square could rather be seen as a theme. There is no deep or special strategy recognisable for me in the course of the solution.

H6 (PG 15, ♖g2-♖e8, 12+11):
Another leftover from the 266th Superproblem TT? Cooked; the director has already informed the author of this.

H7: See below.

H8 (PG 24, ♖g3-♖c8, 12+11):
Accumulation of various individual

themes, but they do not form a coherent whole for me. I do not agree with the author that the b♖ switchback serves to make the e.p. capture possible: The Queen must leave d8 to let the black King pass to c8; on c7 it would prevent 19.♖g3, on b6 it would close the b-line for the w♗ – so only a5 remains, where it "accidentally" makes the e.p. capture work (7...♖b6?? 8.b3 c:b3).

H9: See below.

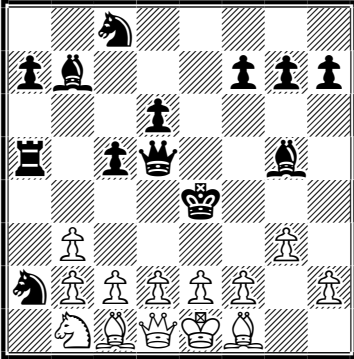
H10 (PG 13, ♖f1-♖g8, 10+12):
Originality of content is necessary – but not sufficient – for a distinction. Here the diagram already fully reveals the intended content, and then it's only a matter of working out the sequence of moves leading to the diagram.

H11 (PG 16, ♖f3-♖g7, 14+14):
As before, unfortunately no strategic content is recognisable here, and the cyclic platzwechsel seem to occur rather accidentally and do not catch the eye and the heart of the solver.

H12 (PG 7, ♖g1-♖e8, 16+15):
(Much) too small for such a tournament.

And now – this is my ranking:

H2 – Prize



PG 22

13+13

1. ♖f3 ♖a6 2. ♖e5 ♜b8 3. ♖:d7
 ♜:d7 4. g3 ♜e6 5. ♗g2 ♜f5 6. ♗:b7
 ♚d5 7. ♗a8 ♜b3 8. a:b3 ♖b4
 9. ♜a6 ♖a2 10. ♜d6 e:d6 11. ♖a3
 ♗e7 12. ♖c4 ♗g5 13. ♖e5 ♖e7
 14. ♖f3 ♜e8 15. ♖g1 ♚:h1 16. ♗g2
 ♗b7 17. ♗f1 ♖c8 18. ♖h3 ♜e5
 19. ♖f4 ♜a5 20. ♖d5 c5 21. ♖c3
 ♚d5 22. ♖b1 ♜e4

In the diagram, 18 black moves are directly visible (4 ♜ + 1 ♚ + 3 ♜ + 3 ♗ + 5 ♖ + 2 ♠), and two more moves are required by queen or bishop to capture [w♜h1] in the southeast corner. This leaves two moves open for [b♜a8] to get captured on b3. It is thus clear that the missing black pawns had to be captured at home – and that b♠d6 comes from e7 to make ♚d8-d5 possible.

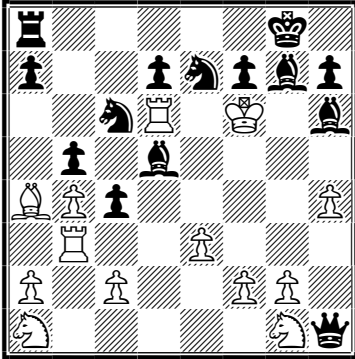
In order for Black to develop sufficiently quickly, White must play ♖:d7 as early as move 3 and then capture b7 with his bishop as quickly

as possible. On the other hand, since Black must play ♚d5 immediately, the bishop's way back is initially cut off, and it must even hide on a8. If now the queen captures the white rook, the bishop must use the opportunity to come home again. This, however, forces the rook capture on h1 as a clearance for w♗g2 – this, however, requires a check protection for the white king.

And this brings the harmless-looking w♖b1 into the play: it must now in five moves visit the initial square of its colleague already captured on d7 (it must not block f1 for the bishop, otherwise Black will be in zugzwang), and then return home.

A completely pure-of-aim, capture free knight rundlauf in 10 moves as impostor with return, i. e. a "virtual double impostor". This is very harmoniously combined with the black-white clearance play on the long diagonal a8-h1. Clearly worked out and strategically demanding theme with splendid interlocking of the white and black play – for me by far the best problem of this tournament. This is in no way spoiled by [P1007348](#) with the same "knight theme" (and eight-move rundlauf) given by the author, since there the play and also the motivation for the knight maneuver is completely different: pure "hiding" of the knight.

H4 – 1st Honorable Mention



PG 22

13+14

1.h4 e5 2.♞h3 ♜a3 3.b4 e4
 4.♞b2 e3 5.♞c1 e:d2+ 6.♞d1
 d:c1♞ 7.♞d2 ♞e7 8.♞b3 0-0
 9.♞:g7 ♞h6 10.♞:f8 ♞:f8 11.♞d2
 c5 12.♞d1 ♞c7 13.♞a1 ♞h2
 14.♞b3 ♞c1+ 15.♞c3 ♞ch6 16.e3
 ♞h1 17.♞b5 c4 18.♞a4 b5 19.♞d6
 ♞b7 20.♞d4 ♞d5 21.♞e5 ♞bc6+
 22.♞f6 ♞fg7#

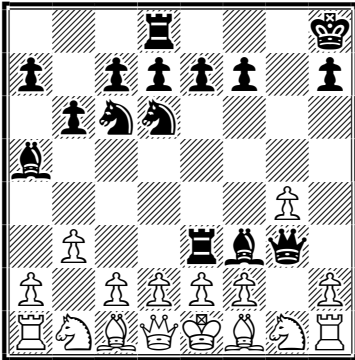
Usually, obviously promoted pieces (like here a second black-squared black bishop) are frowned upon in diagram positions of proof games, because in most cases they reveal a lot about the solution. Of course, this does not apply if this promoted piece is thematic, as it is in the present problem.

The problem is difficult to solve despite the 'telltale' promoted piece, because there are several moves free on both sides, so when counting the visible moves, there is still quite a large number left,

which cannot be explained immediately either. Also, the captures are well hidden: not a single double pawn is an indicator for obvious ones.

Nevertheless, the problem is clearly much more than a simple-but-hard-to-solve puzzle, because the actual content is hinted at in the diagram, but is then very well hidden: at first you would think that the mate-setting bishops get by with two moves (♞c1-h6, ♞f8-g7#) – the well-hidden punchline of this problem is now that indeed ♞f8-g7# is the expected mate move, but this move happens by the promoted bishop. Thus the original one has moved around g7 pericritically, and this via the promotion square c1 of his comrade, who on the other hand had to critically cross g7 to then occupy this critical square in the mating move. Very surprising, very fine!

H7 – 2nd Honorable Mention



PG 15 Chess 960 16+15

In presenting the solution (finding the initial game position AND the move sequence), I closely follow the author's indications:

"Starting from the traditional initial position ♖♘♙♚♛♜♝♞♟ Black needs 19 moves to get to his diagram position (2♘ + 3♙ + 4♖ + 5♗ + 4♘ + 1♚ when counting castling as a move by the king and neglecting collisions between pieces). The number of moves can be decreased by placing the Queen and/or Bishop(s) in the corners, by b♗d6 making one or two moves instead of three and by having d8 as initial square for the ♖. On White's side it is essential that the ♛ starts on the left side of the ♘ and that the ♖a1, if it moves, starts on the left side of the ♛; otherwise, there will be time consuming maneuvers needed. The optimal initial squares for the knights ending up on g1 and d6 are e1 and e8. In the try from

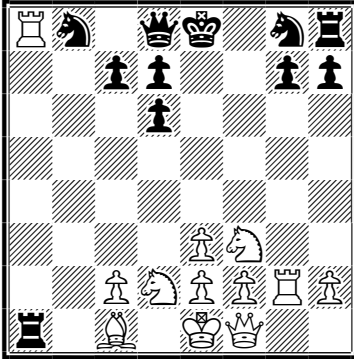
♗♘♙♚♛♜♝♞♟ Black has 14 visible moves in the diagram position (2+3+3+2+1). But two additional moves, taking the number of moves up to 16, are needed: one move because Black is forced to castle in his first move to allow 2.♗a1:g7 and one move as ♛d8-a8-f3-g3 is not possible because the ♗ starting on b8 blocks the route for the ♛; this either when placed on b8 or after moving to c6. By moving the ♖c1/8 + ♛d1/8 one step to the left and transferring ♗b1/8 to d1/8 the additional queen move is avoided as the ♛ moves ♛c8-b7-f3-g3. The sought initial position is ♗♖♙♘♚♛♜♝♞♟".

Play from here: 1.b3 0-0 2.♗:g7 b6 3.♗b2 ♗c3 4.♖a1 ♗a5 5.♗c3 ♘h8 6.♛d1 ♖g8 7.♗c1 ♖g3 8.♗b1 ♖d3 9.g4 ♛b7 10.♗g2 ♛f3 11.♖h1 ♛h3 12.♗f3 ♖c8 13.♗g1 ♗f3 14.♘e1 ♗c6 15.♗f1 ♖d8

Original idea to show the standard initial game array in the diagram and then look for the real 960 position from which the diagram position can be played in the given number of moves. This can be deduced logically, as it should always be in Chess960 problems; this kind of deduction is a reminiscent of classical retroanalysis. Here, the four pieces on the left and the four pieces on the right half of the board are cyclically exchanged by White, which further unifies the game.

H9 – Commendation

(pseudo) platzwechsel of the rooks (Belfort theme), is quite nice.



Thomas Brand,
July 6, 2023

PG 15

12+11

1.a4 f5 2.a5 f4 3.a6 f3 4.a:b7 fg2
5.b:c8 ♖ g:f1 ♜ 6.♜d6+ e:d6 7.♜f3
♜e7 8.♞g1 ♜g5 9.♞g2 ♜e3
10.d:e3 a5 11.♜d2 a4 12.♞:f1 a3
13.♜e1 a:b2 14.♜bd2 b1 ♞
15.♞:a8 ♞a1

Very pleasant problem: short, but concentrated strategy. The two pawns already promoted on move 5 disappear again: the white knight traditionally a la Ceriani-Frolkin, the black bishop more unusually as Schnoebelen-man, which thus (unambiguously) promotes to be captured without moving on the promotion square. The motive for the choice of this kind of promotion is always interesting: queen and rook would check, and the king has to move to a square in knight distance before the capture – so only a bishop remains not to disturb. Also the rook play on the a-file with the black evasion to the b-file, which then leads to the