

The Macedonian Problemist League, Selfmates in 2-10 moves, 2024

Award by Hans Gruber (Regensburg, Germany), International Judge of the FIDE

The Tournament Director, Zoran Gavrilovski, consigned 35 selfmates on anonymous diagrams to me. The list of participants and the author names in the award were added after completion of the judging. Strictly speaking, seven of the problems (nos. 16-22) did not meet the requirement, because they had more than 10 moves. Anyhow, none of these problems would have been ranked in the award. As usual with the tournaments in The Macedonian Problemist League, 10 problems plus 2 reserve problems were ranked. It was a pleasure to study the entries, as they provided a colourful mixture of different types and styles of problems. The genre of selfmates is a part of what Juraj Lörinc calls „Conflictio“ problems, so it is important that both White and Black should demonstrate strong (attacking versus defending) strategies and plans. Problems in which Black has no counterplay but just plays moves that are forced by checks or by zugzwang, usually give a much weaker impression even if the white play is good or if it is surprising that the problem is sound (however, this is a merit of computers rather than of imaginative composers). Such problems need some extra merits in order to enter the award.

One special mention is necessary concerning nos. 23-25. Each of these three problems shows a four-chain cycle of white moves AB-BC-CD-DA with some cross-check elements, an ambitious theme. However, as Manfred Rittirsch found, a multitude of such examples has already been published – Alexandr Pankratiev is the most prolific composer in this field, he published at least 40 (!) S#3 with such a four-chain cycle. More than a dozen of them utilises a battery with black bishop and black knight (as in no. 23). It is difficult to find any originality in the new settings, but the battery with black rook and black pawn (as in no. 24 and no. 25) seems to be a rarer case.

1st rank: No. 33

1.Se~ [2.Sc6+ b:c6 3.Dd5+ c:d5#] – 1.Sd6/Sd2? D:g8/g3!

1.Sf2! D:g8 2.Dd4+ K:e6 3.Dd7+ Ke5+ 4.Dd5+ D:d5#

1.– g3 2.Dd5+ K:f4 3.Dd2+ Ke5+ 4.Dd4+ T:d4#

Black can take away white guards of flight squares, either by capturing or by interfering. White's strategy is to make use of exactly this effect (motif inversion); White forces the black king to capture on the flight squares. As the defences created a pin, the king's annihilation capture creates a royal battery. White then forces the battery to fire with a black cross-check – then a final white cross-check forces Black to mate. This interesting pattern is shown in two variations with zig-zag play by the queen on the same vertical line, including an AB-BA exchange of the second and the fourth white moves. The zig-zag play is an intriguing feature, and it contributes a lot to the excellent and fresh impression. It is important that two thematic tries exist which are refuted by the moves that appear as defences in the solution after the option key. It may be deplored that the threat is short, but this is not a major weakness; interestingly, Black has only the thematic defences, although one extra move is available.

2nd rank: No. 6

1.Lf2! [2.T:d2+ D:d2#] Tb2 2.Lg1 [3.T:d2+ T:d2+ 4.D:d2+ D:d2#] Tb3 3.Dg3 Tb2 4.Tff2 Tb3 5.Tf1 Tb2 6.Df2 Tb3 7.Sc5+ Kc3 8.Df6+ g:f6 9.Sa4+ Kd3 10.T:d2+ D:d2#

Three different pieces support the white rook e2 threatening to capture on d2. Withdrawing a guard from d2 forces Black to play Tb3-b2, adding a guard forces Black to play Tb2-b3. The cage of the black queen is excellently constructed and open (please note that Da2-b3 mates, when the rook is on b2), although it requires a white bishop to pin the black pawn c4. The purpose of the solution is to find a way to sacrifice a guarding piece outside the pendulum. This is achieved by Df6+ – but the white rook f6 still prevents that. The rook has to switch exactly to f1 in order to enable the queen to play the move Df2-f6. Before doing so, however, the square e3 needs an additional guard (because the white rook e2 will move onto d2). Therefore, the white bishop first has to switch to g1. Thus, rook and bishop form a nice assembly of white pieces on the first rank. The final plan (Df6+) is well hidden, it is a surprise that the black king is activated by a pendulum of the knight. Although the scheme is well-known, the presentation is very original and makes excellent use of the Loyd's clearance mechanism. It is paradoxical, that first White

moves Lh4 onto the square g1 in order to guard square e3, but then the rook interferes the bishop on square f2 – thus White must play 3.Dg3 but not 3.Dh4.

3rd rank: No. 7

1.Td7,Td8? [2.La6+ T:a6#] Tb6 2.Dc2+ K:d4 3.Dd2+ Kc4 4.Sd6+ T:d6 5.La6+ T:a6#, but 1.– Ta6+!
2.L:a6#

1.Dc2+! K:d4 2.Dd2+ Kc4 3.Tf6 [4.Tf4+ g:f4 5.La6+ T:a6#] g4 4.Tg6 [5.Tg4+ h:g4 6.La6+ T:a6#]
h:g6 5.Dc2+ Kd4 6.Sf5+ g:f5 7.Dd2+ Kc4 8.La6+ T:a6#
4.– c:b4 5.Sd6+ Kc5 6.Se4+ Kc4 7.Tc6+ T:c6 8.La6+ T:a6#

An attractive fight of both sides on the 6th rank – if White starts wrongly with the rook's departure from the rank (this would look even more plausible if there would be only one try move), then all the sudden Black is mate (a smell of the Berlin theme)! As the cage of the white king seems to be absolutely fixed by the black king, it is surprising that the black king several times is forced to leave the square c4 – white pendulums (twice consecutively by the queen, and once by the knight f7 in the by-play) are used for different purposes (annihilation, sacrifice of the knight g7 to open the 6th rank after it was closed by h:g6, better positioning of the knight f7 in order to guard the square c5). A clever concept in a witty setting.

4th rank: No. 31

Main plan: 1.D:f3+? S:f3+, but 2.T:f3!

1.Tg2! [2.D:f3+ S:f3#] Le4 2.Tf2 [3.Tf3+ L:f3 4.D:f3+ S:f3#] Lb1,Lc2,Ld3 3.Th2 Le4 4.Th3 Lb1,Lc2,Ld3
5.Dg6+ Kg4 6.Tg3+ Kh4 7.Tg4++ Kh3 (7.– K:g4 8.Dh5+ Kf5 9.D:f3+ S:f3#) 8.Dh6+ K:g4 9.Dh5+ Kf5
10.D:f3+ S:f3#

After 9.– Kf5, the diagram position without the rook is reached. The white rook on the one side is annoying, but on the other side it is the star actor of this problem, performing a cute roundabout (g3-g2-h2-h3-g3), before it can be sacrificed. (It is nice that the white queen also performs a small triangle h5-g6-h6-h5.) The final play is a bit lengthy and boring, but it is a good find that the black knight prevents the dual 8.Dh7+. (The black knight c8 assures black mobility – if it is removed, the problems solves in 4 moves by 1.Tg1 Le4 2.Lf2 e1=D 3.T:e1.) Not overly original, but well-done.

5th rank: No. 11

(*) 1.– L:h7 2.Dc2+ Ke5 3.Td5+ Ke6 4.D:f5+ L:f5#

(1.– f4 2.De2+ Kf5 3.T:f6+ D:f6#)

1.Sd3! [2.Sf2+ Kf3 3.Sh3+ Ke4 4.S(3)g5+ f:g5#]

1.– Sc5 2.S:c5+ Ke3 3.Se6+ Ke4 4.Sg5+ f:g5#

1.– L:h7 2.Ld5+ K:d3 3.Le6+ Ke4,D:d6 4.L:f5+ L:f5#

1.– Lh5 2.Te6+ D:e6,f:e6 3.De5+ D:e5,f:e5+ 4.S:f6+ D:f6/L:f6#

Rich play of three white batteries (and one black battery), and one might recognise an Adabashev complex: Threat and 1.– Sc5 form a pair as well as the bishop defences. There is an additional change of continuation between set and actual play after 1.– L:h7. One might argue that the position is overloaded and that 1.– Sc5 is only a slight variation of the threat. It is not a weakness that sometimes Black has several defences, but it is not a strength either.

6th rank: No. 32

1.Ka3! Kc3 2.Ld2+ Kc2 3.Lb4 Kc1 4.Dc5+ Lc2 5.De3+ Kbl 6.De1+ Ld1 7.Lf7 Kc1 (7.– Kc2 8.Dc3+ Kbl 9.L:a2+ T:a2#) 8.Dc3+ Lc2 (8.– Kbl 9.L:a2+ T:a2#) 9.Dd2+ Kbl 10.L:a2+ T:a2#

1.Le8! (not 1.Lf7,Lg6?) Kbl 2.Dd4+ Kc2 3.Kc5 Kbl 4.Db4+ Kc2 5.Kd4 Kd1 6.Lh5+ Kc2 7.Ke3 Kc1 8.Ke2+ Kc2 9.Ke1 Kd3 10.Kd1 Lc2#

This is an exception from what was mentioned in the introduction. Black is absolutely helpless and does not contribute strategically, but the pattern of two very contrastive solutions provides entertainment, ending with mates on two far-distant squares. (A pity that the white pawn was needed to prevent the dual 8.Kf2+ in the second solution.)

7th rank: No. 27

1.h3! [2.Tg5+ Ke2 3.Te4+ d:e4 4.Tg2+ Kf3 5.Th2+ Kg3 6.De1+ Kf4 7.D:e4+ Kg3 8.D:e5+ T:e5#]

1.- Lb1 2.Tf4+ e:f4 3.Tg5+ Ke2 4.Te5+ Le4 5.Lf3+ K:f3 6.Df1+ Kg3 7.Df2+ K:h3 8.Df3+ L:f3#
1.- e4 2.Tf2++ Kg3 3.Lh2+ K:f2 4.Dd2+ Kf1 5.Dd1+ Kf2 6.Lg1+ Kg3 7.D:d5 ~ (7.- T:d5?#!) 8.De5+ T:e5#

(1.- d4 2.Td2+ Kg3 3.Lf2+ Kh2 4.L:d4+ Kg3 5.L:e5+ T:e5#)

Battery play and queen sacrifices. There is no strong unifying concept and the play is a bit boring, but the long threat is remarkable, and the two variations with 8-move play are a good achievement. The white pawn on a4 (instead of a black pawn) helps to subtly avoid a dual after 1.- Lb1.

8th rank: No. 9

* 1.- D:e8#

1.La7! Kc7 2.Db8+ Kc6 3.Da8+ Kc7 (3.- Db7 4.De8+ Dd7 5.Lb6 D:e8#) 4.Te7 D:e7 5.Lb6+ Kd7 6.Lc8+ Ke8 7.Lf5+ Dd8 8.Dc8 D:c8 9.f7+ Ke7+ 10.f8=D+ D:f8#

An entertaining change, in which the Phoenix queen finally is captured after black and white cross-checks. (I may have preferred white pawns g5 and g6 instead of the black pawn g5 (C+), but this is a matter of taste.)

9th rank: No. 15

1.Dg2! [2.Sf3+ Kf6 3.Sd4+ Ke5 4.Sc6+ b:c6 5.Dd5+ c:d5#]

1.- Da2 2.Lf4+ Kf6 3.Lc1+ Ke5 4.L:b2+ D:b2 5.d4+ D:d4#

1.- b6 2.Sg4+ Ke6 3.Sf6+ Ke5 4.Sd7+ T:d7 5.d4+ T:d4#

The key provides the knight h2 and the bishop h6 with plenty opportunities to create and fire batteries. The weaknesses of the black defences (1.- Da2 observes square b2, 1.- b6 opens the rook's line a7-d7) are explored by White. Although the three lines are harmonic, there are also repetitions that detract (twice 5.d4+, twice 2.- Kf6).

10th rank: No. 24

1.Se6! [2.Sd4+ e:d4+ 3.Dd5+ T:d5#]

1.- Td8 2.Dd5+ T:d5+ 3.Sc5+ T:c5#

1.- Lg1 2.Sc5+ L:c5 3.Db4+ L:b4#

1.- Sc2 2.Db4+ S:b4 3.Sd4+ e:d4#

The cycle AB-BC-CD-DA using a rook-pawn battery is shown in a kind of 2+2 pattern (two 2nd moves by queen, two by knight; vice versa 3rd moves). A good and quite economical presentation, but the key piece is far away. It is obvious the the rook-pawn battery must be activated, and 1.Se6 is the only possibility to achieve that.

Note. The author's diagram had a white pawn a6 (no solution).

Reserve 1: No. 25

1.Sb4? [2.Sd5+ c:d5+ 3.Dd6+ T:d6#] L:c4!

1.Sc7! [2.Sd5+ c:d5+ 3.Dd6+ T:d6#]

1.- c5+ 2.Dd6+ T:d6+ 3.Se6+ T:e6#

1.- L:c4 2.Se6+ L:e6 3.Dd4+ D:d4#

1.- Sf3 2.Dd4+ S:d4 3.Sd5+ c:d5#

The cycle AB-BC-CD-DA using a rook-pawn battery is shown in an elegant position. It is good that White has two possibilities to activate the rook-pawn battery by aiming to play 2.Sd5+.

Reserve 2: No. 23

1.Sc4! [2.Sb6+ S:b6+ 3.De6+ L:e6#]

1.- Sf8+! 2.De6+ S:e6 3.Td4+ S:d4#

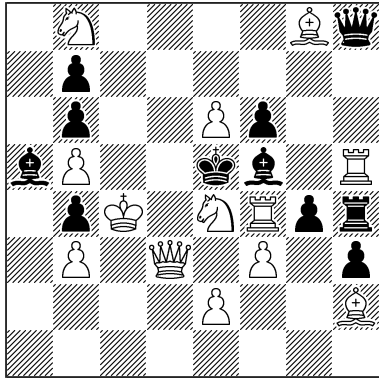
1.- D:c4 2.Td4+ D:d4 3.De4+ D:e4#

1.- Te1 2.De4+ T:e4 3.Sb6+ S:b6#

(1.- Sf4 2.D:d3+ S:d3 3.Sb6+ S:b6#)

The cycle AB-BC-CD-DA using a bishop-knight battery is shown with a cross-check in the second move after black correction (1.- S~+? 2.De6+ L:e6#). The variations are not fully harmonic, and it is a pity that there is a non-thematic variation in which a thematic move reappears. The key piece is far away, and it is obvious that only 1.Sc4 can activate the bishop-knight battery.

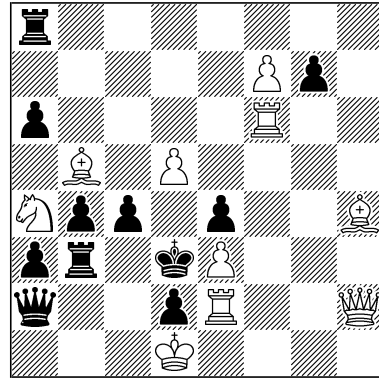
1st rank: No. 33



S#4vv

C+ 13+11

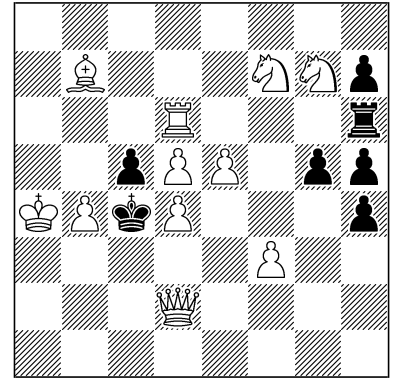
2nd rank: No. 6



S#10

C+ 10+11

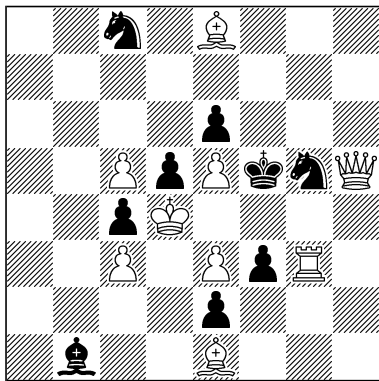
3rd rank: No. 7



S#8v

C+ 11+7

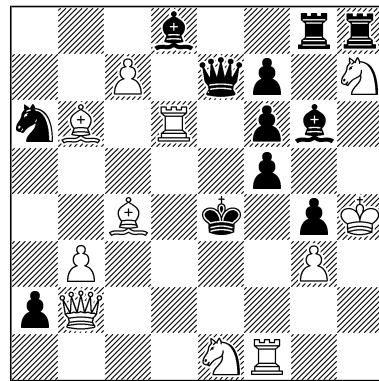
4th rank: No. 31



S#10

C+ 9+9

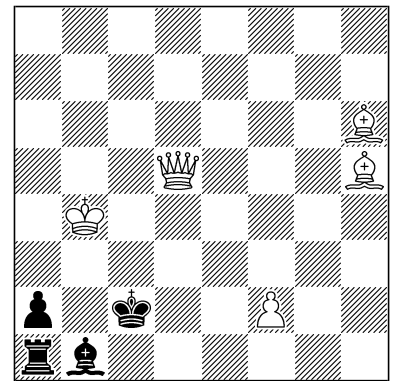
5th rank: No. 11



S#4(*)

C+ 11+12

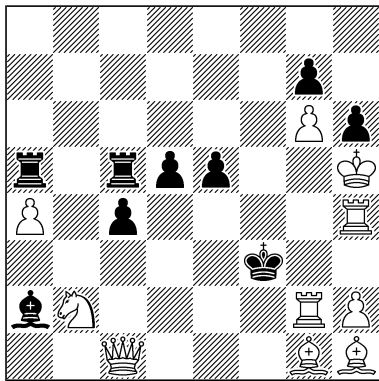
6th rank: No. 32



S#10 2 solutions

C+ 5+4

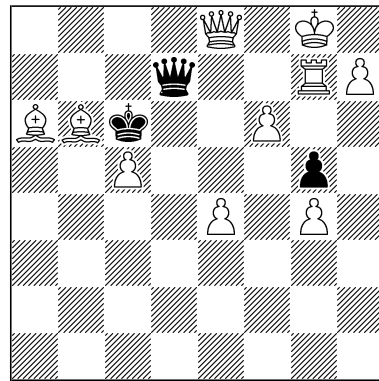
7th rank: No. 27



S#8

C+ 10+9

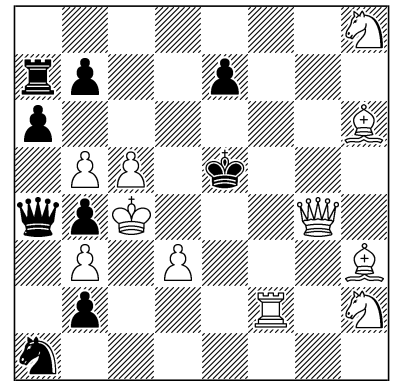
8th rank: No. 9



S#10*

C+ 10+3

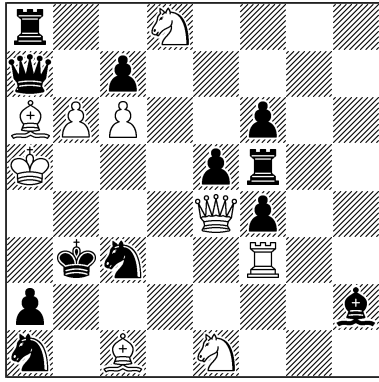
9th rank: No. 15



S#5

C+ 11+9

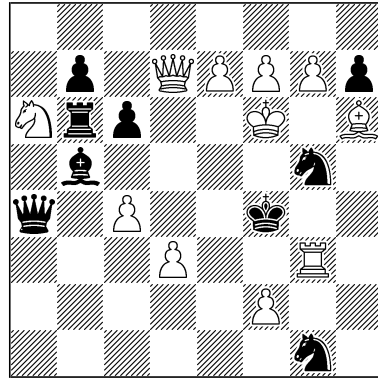
10th rank: No. 24



S#3

C+ 9+12

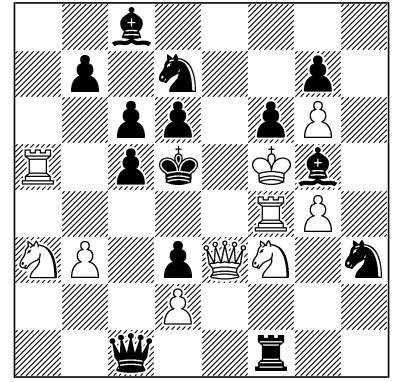
Reserve 1: No. 25



S#3v

C+ 11+9

Reserve 2: No. 23



S#3

C+ 10+14