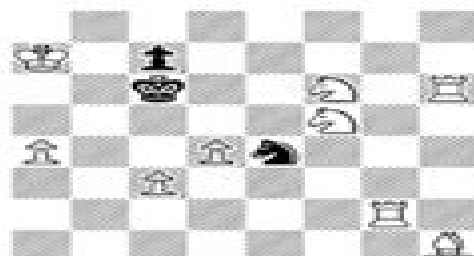


How to Solve Chess Problems

Part 1



1 - White to play and mate in two moves

Where would you start when faced with this diagram?

If you're a player, rather than a problemist, you'll probably look first at the checks. If you're a problemist, the checks will probably be the last thing you'll look at! Why? Because composed positions are supposed to be difficult and to be elegant, and the **key** move – white's first move – is usually an unexpected one.

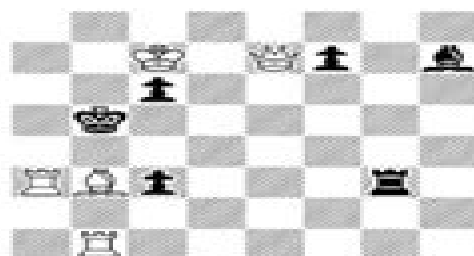
A problem-habitue would notice first of all that bishop in the corner, blocked by the rook. So he'd think of moving the g2 rook, but of course that gives stalemate. So he says to himself that the problem must be based on Black moving the knight and then the white rook giving a discovered mate. That doesn't solve it, but it's major progress. Suppose the black knight moves, what mates have I got? There's a mate for every one. OK, so that means that if it were Black to move, I know what to do. All I need is to begin with a **waiting move** by White – one that doesn't disturb anything. The solver looks at every possible move – how about 1.Ka6? Oops! Black goes 1...Sc5! and that's check to the white king, so White can't play the 2.d5 he wanted to. 1.c4? Nope – 1...Sc3. I need that pawn to stay on c3 so if black captures it I can play 2.Re2 pinning. Must be 1.Rhg6?, then. That seems to do the job. Just check it one last time... dammit, if he goes 1...Sxf6! I can't play the rook from g2 to g7 to guard d7. Wait... I could've guarded d7 with the other rook. Ah-hah! 1.Rh7 does it. I didn't need that rook and knight **battery** pointing at the black king after all – it fooled me into not trying the right key move earlier. So it's solved.

By the way, a top solver would have noticed that 1.Rhg6 Sxf6 would let White have multiple mating moves (here as many as 11 of them) – if he overlooked that d7 wouldn't be guarded – and that is considered really inelegant, so he would have automatically rejected 1.Rhg6 as a candidate solution.

That problem was composed by Comins Mansfield, Britain's first ever Grandmaster (he got his title for his composing), it was published in the *Evening Post* in 1933.

Another aspect of the problem is that it shows a complete **knight wheel** – Black's knight moves to the maximum possible number of squares (8) in the solution, and each one is met by a different white reply. This problem is a splendidly efficient demonstration of a mate in two with a knight wheel – there are lots of such problems, but it's very hard to compose one with as few pieces as Mansfield managed here.

Part 2



In Part 1, I showed you a problem by Mansfield which was what's called a **'complete block'** – there's a mate set up for every black move if Black moves first. More common are problems in which there isn't a mate already set for every black move, and in that case you need to find a **'threat'** – a white first move that threatens a mate if Black were not to reply. Here's one:

2 - White to play and mate in two moves

This time you've learnt that the checks are unlikely to solve it! (Although just occasionally a composer will make a two-mover that does have a checking solution – it keeps skilled solvers on their toes!) It's not a complete block, not least because Black has lots of neutral moves with his rook or bishop. So what could the threat be? What about 1.Rb1, intending 2.Ra5? Black has 1...c5!, 1.Ra4 perhaps, intending 2.Qb4 or 2.Bc2? Looks too crude, and indeed black has

Sit And Solve Chess Problems

L Reisser



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