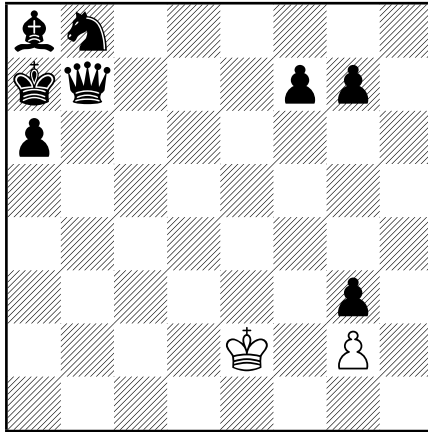


Christopher Jones

Selected Helpmates 1989–2021

C29



Helpmate in 8 moves
White to play

Nightrider Unlimited

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Preface

Born in 1952 in Newport-on-Tay (just across the Tay from Dundee), I learnt to play chess from my father (then a lecturer, subsequently professor, at Dundee University), and was fortunate to attend the High School of Dundee, which had a very active chess club run by the Scottish Ladies Champion, Nancy Elder. I captained the side that became the first Scottish team to win the national schools championships in 1969, and played (on bottom board!) for the Scottish junior team in 1969 and 1970.

Thereafter my chess career plateaued, though for one of my years at Oxford University (1971-72) I was captain of the University chess team. More importantly, matches in the Oxford League were often followed by a chess session in which Grandmaster-to-be John Nunn demonstrated endgame studies to us, sparking my interest in chess composition. After leaving University I qualified as a solicitor, practising in Bristol and then Cheltenham between 1978 and 1997. I was very fortunate to be able to retire at the outrageously early age of 45. Through nearly all my time since leaving University I have played chess at club and county level, and, though not hitting any great heights, one of my better spells of form allowed me to gain the English Chess Federation's Regional Master title. Eventually in 2018 I realized that the frustrations of a not very successful player were outweighing the enjoyment of playing, and I retired from the fray. I did however maintain (vicariously) the character-building benefits of experiencing defeat through my continued allegiance to Bristol Rovers.

My introduction to chess composition at University, subsequently nurtured by looking at helpmates in the Problem World section of the British Chess Magazine (BCM), led to an interest in trying to compose problems, and I was very pleased to have some of my first efforts accepted for publication in BCM in 1987 by another Grandmaster-to-be, Norman Macleod. In the same year I joined the British Chess Problem Society (BCPS), and became an active member, editing the helpmates section in *The Problemist* from 1997 onwards, and becoming its Secretary in 2002. At the time of writing I am its President. I have found great stimulation through the publications and meetings of the BCPS, and from the fellowship of other problemists, nationally and internationally (in many cases only through email contact!). I gained the Grandmaster title for chess composition in 2012. In recent years I have edited BCM's Problem World.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

There have been two main factors prompting me to review my ‘career’ in chess composition. One is that as I approach my 70th birthday I notice that as my first attempts at composition date back to 1987 my career as a composer now spans half my life! The other, more immediate prompt is that recently I was invited by Christer Jonsson to contribute a piece on 12 favourite problems to the Swedish chess problem magazine *Springaren*, which I found to be an enjoyable and heartening experience. By kind permission of the editors of *Springaren* that article is republished at the end of this chapter.

Producing the much fuller review of my career for this book required a correspondingly fuller delving through my ‘archives’. One surprising feature of this delving was that I realized how much I’d forgotten. And not just forgotten – in some cases I now can summon up no recollection of having composed problems. In some cases they were very characteristic and so they were easily accommodated; in a few cases, though, they were a complete surprise, and if I hadn’t seen them in my own handwriting in my own notebook I’d have disclaimed them. (One or two examples are in Chapter 2; and I also refer to this phenomenon in my *Springaren* article, below.)

The process of delving was for the most part enjoyable. I think that I’ve always been guided by the desire to compose problems that I’d like to solve, so the experience might have been expected to lead to this degree of self-satisfaction. Such smugness though was deflated by a realization of how remorselessly I had over the years over-worked certain ideas. At least at a subconscious level I probably thought that if I distributed my wares widely around all the international outlets for chess problems different readerships would have the dubious privilege of seeing my umpteenth rendering of some particular motif that took my fancy.

Staying within the parameters of the orthodox helpmate as I largely do there is of course by now little scope for great originality – only new permutations of the more appealing tropes of the last few decades’ compositions. I hope that in the selection in this book I have weeded out the profusion of problems that can be characterized as ‘vain repetition’ and left a rump of problems in which the reshuffling of the pack has produced syntheses of elements that have some merit. Appreciation of helpmates however is of course highly subjective and there may be readers who feel that I haven’t succeeded in this objective!

In each chapter I've given problems in the order in which they were composed (not necessarily the same as the order of publication). This may give the reader (including my amnesiac self revisiting the past) an idea of how certain ideas have from time to time cropped up and then later been developed, and to what extent progress – or deterioration! – can be charted.

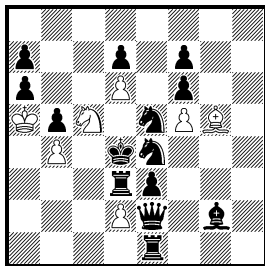
In Chapter 2 the spotlight is on what might be called the 'classical H#3', featuring the white Rook and white Bishop as the only white officers taking part (Readers more alert than the writer may however observe a 'rogue element' – a wS – in B1!). Some of these are attempts to show clearcut thematic play, such as may appeal most to the connoisseur. From quite early on, though, I have been attracted to complexity, trying to pack as many (hopefully harmonious) ingredients as possible into problems, and Chapter 4 includes problems that have this 'knotty' quality. Such problems are often suitable for solving competitions, and Chapter 6 collates most of my problems that have been used for this purpose. This arrangement of chapters, it is hoped, will mitigate the longeurs of Chapters 3 and 5, which assemble all the problems that I thought would merit inclusion (and which include many that could have been placed in Chapter 2 or Chapter 4). This is of course a personal selection, and one subconscious bias may have been to include problems that I like more than their tourney judges did, and possibly even to neglect (somewhat) problems that received more favourable attention. This neglect is addressed in Chapters 8 and 9. In Chapter 7, despite the title of this book I include a few helpselfmates.

But now, as promised, here is that *Springaren* article –

12 FAVOURITE PROBLEMS

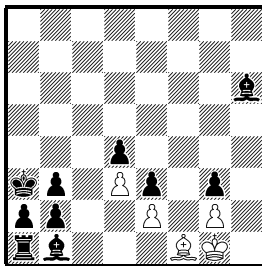
Browsing through old copies of British Chess Magazine I was surprised to find, in issues from 1999 and 2000, two of my originals that at first seemed unfamiliar to me. After some time I remembered the H#3, but to this day I have no recollection of composing the H#7, and if it had been set in a solving tourney I should have been in the same boat as everyone else, having no foreknowledge at all of it. (And when the solutions sheet was produced I should probably have told the Controller that he had made a mistake in attributing the problem to me!)

A1
British Chess Magazine 1999



H#3 2 solutions

A2
British Chess Magazine 2000



H#7

Coming to these two problems afresh I was pleasantly surprised to find out that I enjoyed them and thought well of them. (Probably I was predisposed to think that they would be inferior, perhaps rather naïve efforts, that I was now ‘20 years better’ than then, but of course composing doesn’t really work like that, does it? – though there may be ways in which a composer’s technical skills are sharpened over the years.)

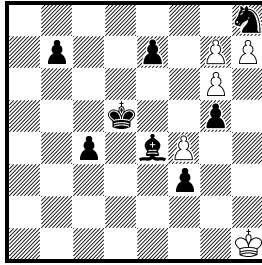
The solution of the H#3 is 1.Sf3 S×e4 2.S×d2 S×d2 3.Bd5 B×f6# and 1.Rb1 S×d3 2.R×b4 S×b4 3.Qc4 B×e3#. As David Friedgood put it in BCM, “in both lines, Black takes great pains to capture an important-looking pawn, so as to allow the wS to occupy that square. Not at all easy to solve!”. And the H#7 solution, with David’s comment: “1.B×d3 e×d3 2.b1B Be2 3.Kb2 Kf1 4.Kc1 Ke1 5.B×d3 Bf1 6.Kb1 Kd1 7.b2 B×d3#. Enjoyable but what does it show? The Bb1 is reborn, only to sacrifice itself a second time on the happy hunting ground of d3. There is also a nice piece of tempo play and the move-order is neatly forced.”

This encouraged me as I began to consider Christer’s kind invitation to contribute 12 of my favourite problems for this article. I think that in my output there have been many thoroughly worthwhile problems but comparatively few truly outstanding ones, and so it seems sensible to leaven problems that have received some recognition with some that haven’t but which I now find, with my perhaps senescent memory, create a favourable impression upon my reacquaintance with them.

A case in point is one of my early forays into the helpselfmate field –

A3

Die Schwalbe 2015



HS#5 (b) +bBa7

Unusually, I set myself a task – the familiar one of AUW – as part of the strategy of this problem. But I do also like the way that the four h8 promotees then arrange themselves into epaulette formation for the ‘all-but mates’ on W5. There are incidental pleasures, for instance the choice of 3...Kg4 rather than 3...Kxf4, and the twinning (which at first glance doesn’t disallow [a]’s solution in [b], but does in fact do so for the genre-specific reason that in [b] 5.Be1+ can be met by 5...Bf2). The solutions run (a) 1.gxh8B Ke6 2.Bc3 Kf5 3.h8R Kg4 4.Rh4+ Kg3 5.Be1+ f2#; (b) 1.gxh8Q Bxg6 2.Qb2 Ke4 3.h8S Kxf4 4.Sxg6+ Kg3 5.Qg2+ fxg2#. That move ...Kxf4 does feature in (b) (though sadly there’s no other way for the bK to get to g3 from e4), and we see the 2-ways theme in the completely different routes to g3.

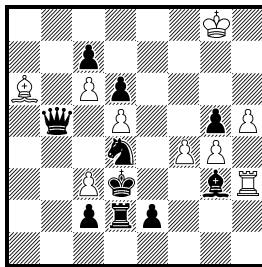
By contrast, the next problem received considerable recognition, gratifyingly to the extent of 10.5 WCCI points.

A4

1st Prize

British Chess

Magazine 2009-11

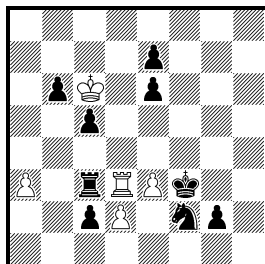


H#3 (b) c3=bP

Chapter 8 – Redressing the balance

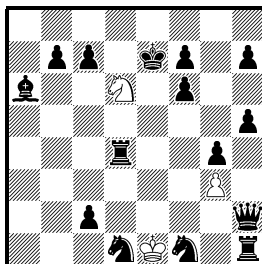
In the introductory chapter I observed that, at least subconsciously, I had tended to prefer to show problems of which I thought more highly than had their tourney judges. I now try to redress that balance by including problems thus far unjustly neglected which achieved publication in FIDE Albums.

H1
1st Prize
Buletin Problemistic
2000



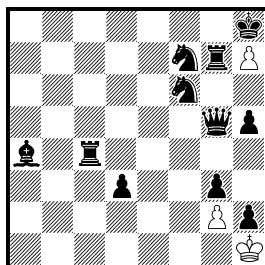
$H\#3^{1/2}$ 2 solutions

H2
2nd Prize
feenschach 2000



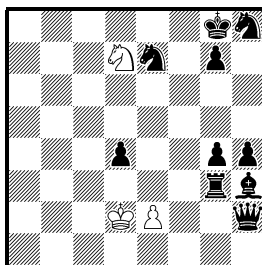
$H\#5^{1/2}$ (b) Rd4→d7

H3
1st-3rd Hon. Mention
British Chess
Magazine 2001-03



$H\#5$ (b) Sf6→f5

H4
2nd Hon. Mention
Schach 2002-03



$H\#4$ (b) Sh8→h6

H1 1...Rd4 2.Ke2 Rb4 3.Kd3 Rb3 4.Kc4 Rxc3#
1...Kd7 2.Rc4 Kxe6 3.Re4+ Kf5 4.Rxe3 Rxe3#

As the Album records, “Peri-critical manoeuvres of wR and bR, echoed play of bK and wK”. The journeys of the Kings, perfectly mirrored across both the central horizontal and the central vertical axes of the board, add an aesthetic geometric appeal to the reciprocal shufflings of the Rooks.

H2 (a) 1...Sc4 2.Rf4 gxf4 3.Bxc4 f5 4.Be6 fxe6 5.Kd8 e7+ 6.Kc8 e8Q#
(b) 1...Se8 2.h4 gxh4 3.Bd3 h5 4.Bg6 hxg6 5.Kxe8 gxf7+ 6.Kd8 f8Q#

A lot of time was spent finding a way to produce twins in which the first move had to be a waiting move (different in each solution) which chose the only one of eight available squares not to stymie the eventual mate. I was gratified that this problem received 10.5 Album points. There are imperfections – the wS is captured at different points in the two solutions and is captured in (a) by a move that Black would play anyway whereas its capture in (b) requires a one-move detour of the bK to clear it off the mating line – but still the achievement of the task was, I think, substantially successful.

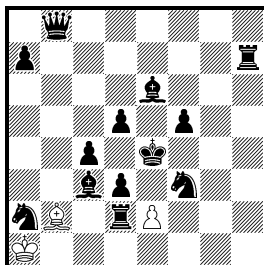
H3 (a) 1.Sg8 hxg8=R+ 2.Kh7 Rd8 3.Bc2 Rxd3 4.Kg8 Re3 5.Bh7 Re8#
(b) 1.Rg8 hxg8=S 2.Rh4 Sf6 3.Qg8 Sxh5 4.Sg7 Sf4 5.Rh7 Sg6#

The Album notes a deferred Umnov at h7, and in each solution Black’s route to that square has to be facilitated by the annihilation of a Pawn on move W3, which determines the route of the white ‘promotee’.

H4 (a) 1.Kh7 Kc1 2.Sg8 e4 3.Qd2+ Kb1 4.Qh6 Sf8#
(b) 1.Kh8 Ke1 2.Shg8 e3 3.Qc2 Se5 4.Qh7 Sf7#

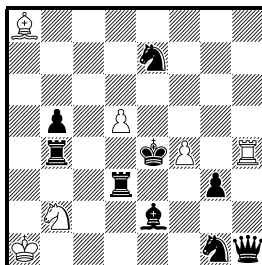
The bQ will have to block a flight square in both solutions, and the only routes are via d2 and c2. This necessitates White moving his King and Pawn to accommodate this. In order to evade the wK must choose the only first move that will supply a second-move refuge and the wP must choose the square that will not impede the bQ’s second move.

H5
 2nd Prize
Buletin Problemistic
 2002-03



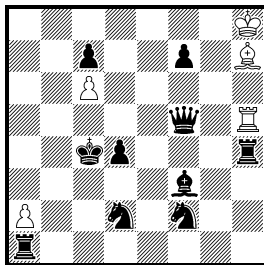
H#4 2 solutions

H6
Mistetski shakhy 2003



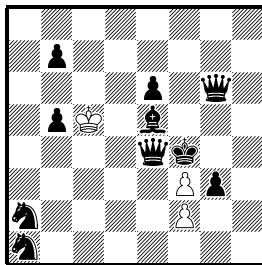
H#3 2 solutions

H7
Šachová Skladba 2003



H#3 (b) Pa2↔Sd2

H8
 after F. van Wardener
harmonie 2003



H#5 (b) Kf4→f5

H5 1.Be5 Bd4 2.Sc3 B×a7 3.Qb6 e×f3+ 4.Kd4 B×b6#
1.Bf6 Be5 2.Sd4 B×b8 3.Rc7 e×d3+ 4.Ke5 B×c7#

Bristol and Maslar themes, and two different unpinnings of the wB. I'm not quite so sure now that I like the way in which the bQ and bSf3, which move in one solution, are each captured without moving in the other.

H6 1.Kf3 Sd1 2.R×f4 d6+ 3.Re4 B×e4#
1.Kd4 Sa4 2.Q×d5 f5+ 3.Qe4 R×e4#

Comparable (probably, I now think, favourably) with C46 (another Album problem), in which the same configuration is used and the same (initially masked) routes to capture at f4 and d5 are deployed, albeit with two preparatory guarding moves by White (as opposed to one guarding move and one opening of a battery) and mates at d5 and f4 instead of at e4.

H7 (a) 1.Qa5 Rb5 2.Kc3 Rb2 3.Qb4 Rc2#
(b) 1.Qb1 Bc2 2.Sb4 Ba4 3.Qb3 Bb5#.

I think that I've tended to downgrade this problem because of its using a merely 'technical' bR at a1, but that price seems well worth paying for the dovetailed strategy in the two solutions: wR/wB tracking the bQ on move 1, and the bQ then having to wait until move 3 to block b4/b3, after the wR/wB have traversed those squares on move 2.

H8 (a) 1.Qg5 K×b5 2.Qb1+ Kc4 3.Sc2 Kd3 4.Se3+ Ke2 5.Qf5 f×e3#
(b) 1.Qeg4 f4 2.Bb2 f3 3.Sc3 Kd4 4.Se4+ Ke3 5.Bf6 f×e4#

As the Album notes, "black Indians, chameleon echo model mates". In grafting on to van Wardener's original single-line problem a second solution analogous both in mating position and, more importantly, in the attractive strategy (and with the further enhancement that we can now have exchanged functions of the two key black players, the e4Q and the e5B, which each, in the solution in which they play only a supporting part, serve to block a flight square) I spent a long time trying to avoid having (for merely trivial, cook-stopping reasons) to use a 2nd Queen (and not a Pawn, or even a Rook) at g6. My failure in the attempt has coloured my outlook on this problem and may have caused me to under-value it (cf. H7, with its technical Ra1).