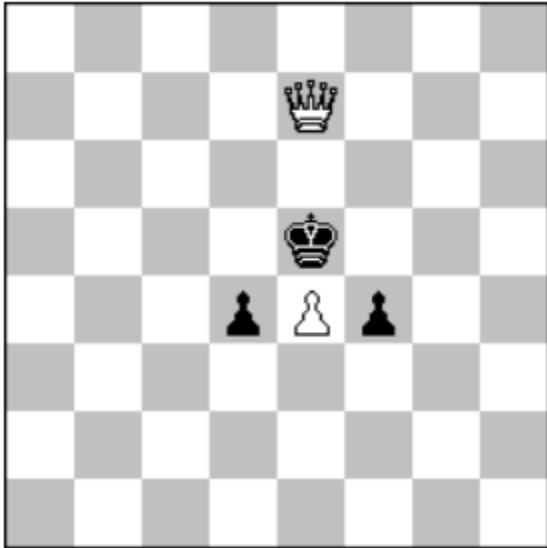


Vlaicu Crișan: How we can start composing: The double epaulette mate!

When composing a chess problem, we often start with an exciting idea. Here, the goal was to showcase an epaulette mate—a checkmate where the king is blocked on both sides, like wearing shoulder pads!

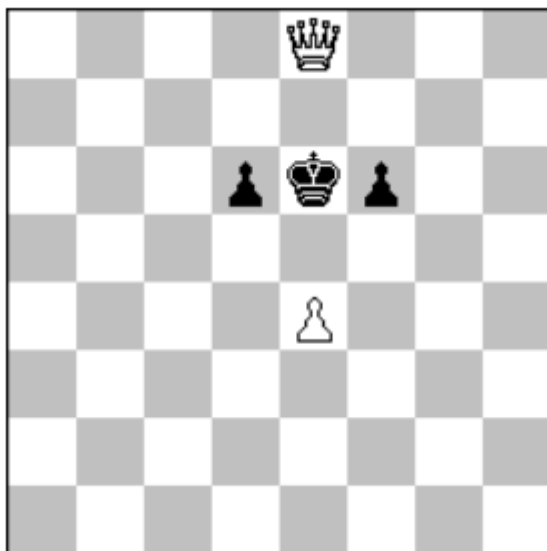
Step 1: Designing the Final Position

Let's design the mating position first:



But why stop at just one?

Let's double the idea, creating two different epaulette mates.



The easiest way to obtain both these positions in one problem is to use a stipulation that Black helps White to checkmate. This type of problem is called helpmate, and it allows having two or more solutions, but only those intended by the composer.

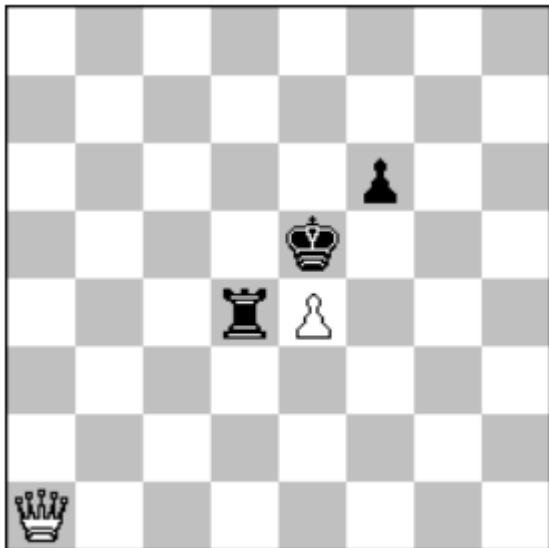
Step 2: Counting the Moves

We must find a starting position and ensure both epaulette mates can be reached in the same number of moves. But wait: the white Queen can reach e7 and e8 in maximum two moves, wherever we place it on an empty board. Assuming we have the black Pawn on f6 initially, then it will need to move twice to get on f4 when the black King is on e5 and the other pawn is on d4.

Step 3: Creating the Initial Schema

However, the problem is that the black pawn d4 is unable to go backwards. We need to replace it with another piece which can reach d6 from d4 in one move, while the black King can get from e5 to e6 in the second move. But wait – we’ve run into another problem: how to ensure the order of Black moves?

We can solve this dilemma by initially pinning the black Rook with the white Queen! Now the black Rook can’t play the first move, because the black King will remain under attack. Let’s put the pieces on the board:



Step 4: Polishing the Mechanism

We deferred the decision where to place the white King until the last moment. The problem to solve is that white Queen’s route to the mating squares is not unique:

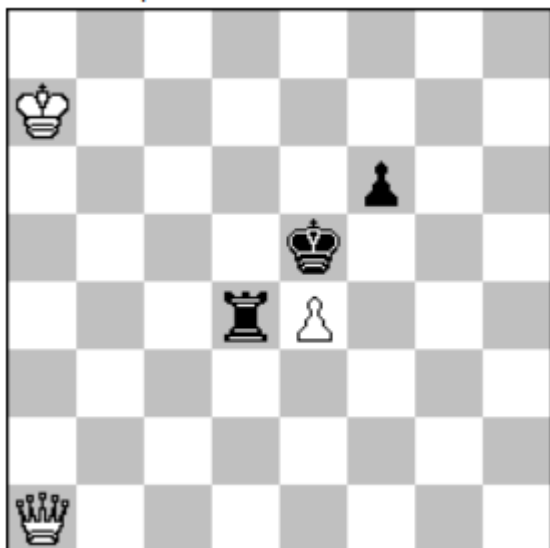
1.f5 Qa3/Qa7 2.f4 Qe7#

1.Ke6 Qa4/Qa8 2.Rd6 Qe8#

We have to ensure we have a single path for the white Queen from a1 to the mating square. And here the white King becomes handy: we have to place it somewhere on the ‘a’ file, preventing Qa7 and Qa8, while allowing Qa3 and Qa4. We can’t place it on a6, because it will be in check from the black Rook in the second solution. There are two convenient squares: a5 or a7. This choice is a matter of taste, but the final position looks better with the white King on a7.

Step 5: Checking the Correctness

The final position is:



h#2 2 solutions (3+3)

1.Ke6 Qa4 2.Rd6 Qe8#

1.f5 Qa3 2.f4 Qe7#

Would you like to try creating your own helpmate? Start with a simple idea and have fun experimenting!



Vlaicu Crişan