

Award of the studies published in „Magyar Sakkvilág“ in 2024

By Jan Sprenger (Turin, Italy)

For this tournament, I received 19 studies from the editor. I would like to thank Péter Gyarmati for inviting me to judge this tourney. There was a high number of pleasant studies. In the end, I awarded a single prize and two special prizes, and identified a large number of honorable mentions and commendable studies. In total, 11 studies made it into the award, for a percentage close to two-thirds. I edited some of the studies in order to make them easier to understand for the readers.

With the WCCI judging on my desk and a lot of work at the university, I might have been (even) more superficial than usual. I apologize to the composers and the readers in advance.

Prize: Vladislav Tarasiuk (g8/h3, no. 9)

Certainly the themes in this logical study are not new. The knight has to choose a route for stopping the pawn and sacrificing itself. If he chooses the right route, then in the end White has a stalemate trick.

This simple story is implemented in a very notable way. Both knight sacrifices (on e2 and d3) force the black rook to a square where it is vulnerable to queen checks (Qf3+ and Qf5+), and so Black must give a check on the g-file before promoting the c-pawn. To enable the stalemate finale, it is necessary that the black rook stands on g2, not on g3, and so the white knight must be sacrificed on e2. And to get there, he must take the „outer route“ via c5, b3 and c1. (Going via e5 to d3 may be more tempting due to the possibility of checks against the black king, but fails to Rd2.) A very intriguing justification of White's play!

There is also a second thematic try (3. Kg7?), which varies the king position instead of the knight route. Notably, the white king moves on the white squares only in order to reach the stalemate nest on h5. Black's rook is a worthy opponent to the combined effort of White's pieces. All this content is achieved with only six men on the board!

A slight drawback is that the logical try occurs twice, in the first and the fourth move. This diminishes the foresight effect of 1. f6! because White can choose between the knight routes at a later stage (and indeed, the most natural thing is to push the pawn first and to worry later about Nc5 vs. Ne5). There is also a bit of by-play in some lines. But the overall impression is strong enough to grant this study a prize and the tournament victory. Congratulations, Vladislav!

Special Prize: Pavel Arestov and Michal Hlinka (no. 5, b7/b1)

This study would have been a great miniature starting with 7. g4 or 8. Rh5. I do not understand why the authors decided to spoil part of the impression with a completely superfluous introduction. That said, it is interesting that the white king has to move away from the center with 9. Ka7 in order to parry black Re7+ with Rb7 later on. At that point, it is not yet over: Black promotes his pawn, but White counters with a pointed final that features the sacrifice 17. Be4+! and the double switchback 19. Kb8! and 20. Rb7!.

Special Prize: Árpád Rusz (no. 3, d5/c8)

An entertaining and solver-friendly study, with good black counterplay and a spectacular resolution. Unfortunately, the mutual zugzwang is not really evident because there is no line where White is in

zugzwang. But even as a single zugzwang, it is a memorable position, and Qg1!! is clearly the move of the tournament.

1st Honorable Mention: Ivan Malyi (no. 18, f7/h8)

A well-crafted miniature where the rook moves first along the back rank and then along the a-file before making the decisive final lift to g4. It is surprising that so much precision is required by White, whose pawns look unstoppable. The try 3. b7? meets an interesting refutation.

2nd Honorable Mention: Steffen Nielsen and Martin Minski (no. 19, c7/f8)

Two tactical magicians entertain themselves and their audience. The finale with the double queen sacrifice preceded by the lady's „Rundlauf“ commands my approval, but is not really connected to the preceding play. The neat sacrifices in the introduction come at the price of a chaotic position and of some complex lines due to the presence of major pieces and the lack of protection for the two kings. Moreover, the black Ba2 and the newborn queen on b1 remain immobile. But even so, the vivid and original play leave a favorable impression.

3rd Honorable Mention: Sarah (Siegfried) Hornecker and Martin Minski (no. 8, g2/h4)

A study for solvers in the old style, centered around the surprising sacrifice 4. Bd3!! to limit the diagonal range of the black queen. Such ideas are well-known, but the elegance of the play and the clarity of the lines are flawless.

4th Honorable Mention: Michael Pasman and Amatzia Avni (no. 12, e6/g8)

An entertaining tactical struggle witnessing Avni's tactical inventiveness and Pasman's elegance and sense of economy. No particularly original motifs are shown, but the play is pleasant and natural.

Commendation: Evgeny Egorov (no. 17, h1/h6)

The idea of this uncommon foresight study is deep and clear once you get it. But it is obscured by the sheer number of possible pawn configurations, and the variations which they generate.

Commendation: David Gurgenidze (no. 14, f6/a1)

4. Kd8!! is a nice and instructive move: only on the back rank is the only place which White is safe from Black's plan to force the a-pawn to advance, and to win it with a skewer. This idea is clear and interesting, also from a practical point of view. But the introduction spoils the impression, and moreover, 4. Kd6? does not meet a unique refutation; Black has no hurry to attack the pawn. I would have published the study as a malyutka: Kf6, Rb8, pawn a4 – Ka1, Rd1. Solution: 1. Ke7! Rh1 2. Kd8!!

Commendation: Beat Neuenschwander (no. 6, f2/f5)

Precise and logical play, and instructive for practical players, but I do not discern enough of a really artistic idea to merit more than a commendation.

Commendation: Steffen Nielsen (no. 4, h8/h6)

The Danish composer has a unique skill of constructing studies with sequences of pins and unpins.

But most of his works on that theme look fresher and more exciting. This study climaxes around move 4-8, but without a really spectacular point and with a long Nachspiel.

Comments on the non-awarded studies:

In **Hlinka & Kekely's** two co-productions I missed a clear idea and the role of the engine in composing these studies is too obvious. **Gatti's** study is too long and unfocused although there are interesting elements and the material is used in an economic way. **Krug's** study fell out of the award due to its lack of economy and the lack of general interest. In **Zamanov & Pasman's** co-production, the first and the second phase of the study do not really hang together and the idea of constructing a mating net against the king while Black is busy promoting his pawns is known from countless studies. The tempo win with R1b7+ and Rb2 in **Gurgenidze's** second study is instructive, but not original and surprising enough to merit inclusion into the award. Finally, I find the play in **Tikka's** study too rough and the final is well-known.