



# THE PUZZLING SIDE OF CHESS

**Jeff Coakley**

## **A HOLIDAY VISIT TO THE NORMAL SIDE**

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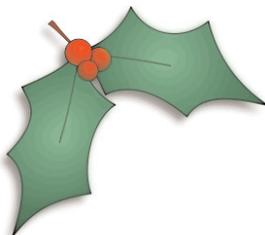
For many players, the end of the year is associated with unusual chess problems. This is primarily due to the popular annual series of puzzles at *ChessBase.com*, selected by grandmaster John Nunn.

In an attempt to maintain the cosmic balance, this edition of *The Puzzling Side of Chess* crosses over temporarily to “the normal side of chess”. For your holiday amusement, we present an assortment of eight standard problems.

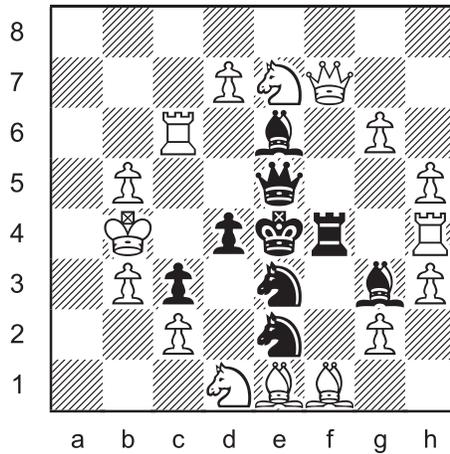
So what is normal anyhow? A tricky question, for sure, but perhaps we can agree on this explanation. A *normal* problem is one which uses the standard board and pieces, follows the rules of standard play, and has no special stipulations other than win, draw, or mate in a certain number of moves.

There are three types of normal chess problems: composed mates, endgame studies, and game positions. Anything else, like the usual fare in this *Chess Cafe* column, falls under the category of “puzzles”.

Our first position may look like a puzzle, but by definition, we are on the normal side of chess. Problems in which the pieces are placed to form letters or other shapes have been around since the nineteenth century. The most notable examples are by American composers Sam Loyd and Pal Benko.

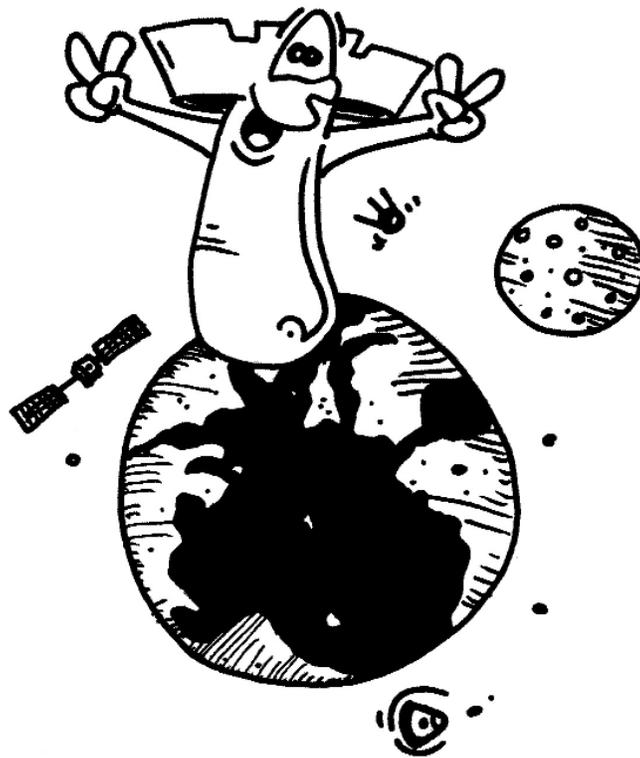


1



White to mate in 2

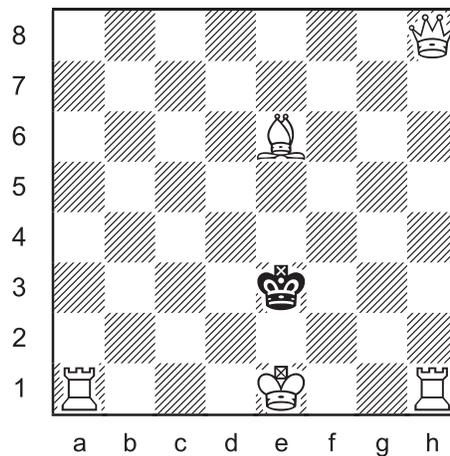
The problem itself is not very difficult, but I hope you like the sentiment of the design.



**PIECE ON EARTH**

Composed problems give us the means to demonstrate possibilities on a chessboard that would never occur in a regular game. Check out this position.

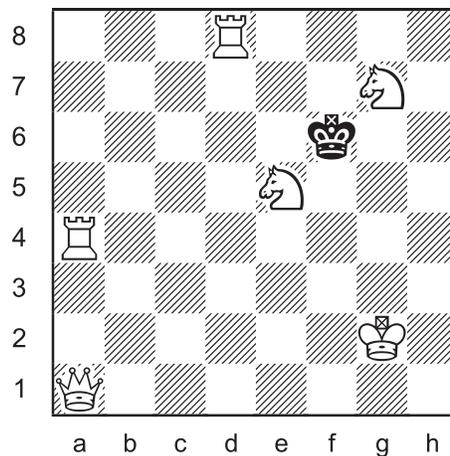
2



White to mate in 2

The next mate in two is the traditional sort that is often found in chess columns. A lone black king succumbs once again to an overwhelming superiority of white forces. Sometimes it doesn't seem fair.

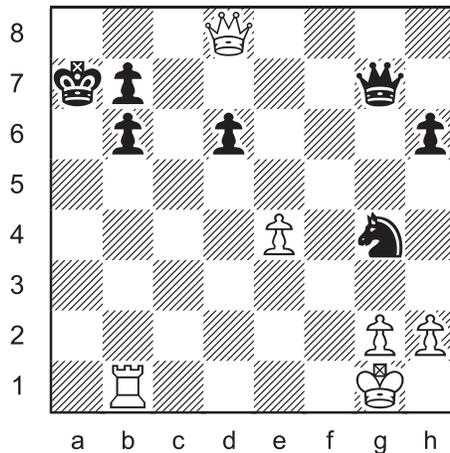
3



White to mate in 2

There is nothing puzzling about the following problem. It's a normal game position with White to mate in three. We are definitely on the practical side of chess. As a coach and teacher, that's where I generally hang out.

4

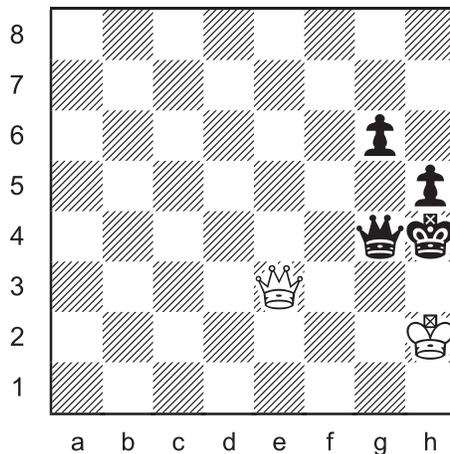


White to mate in 3

Now that we're in a serious mood, here is an intriguing endgame study that shows two paradoxical aspects of chess. It is a revision of a position first published by Dutch master and composer Nico Cortlever (1915-1995).

White is down two pawns in a queen ending. The usual hope in this situation is to draw by perpetual check. But in this case, White can set their sights higher.

5

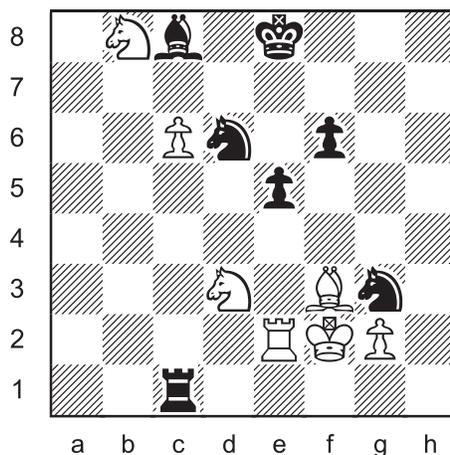


White to win

It's about time to begin our journey back towards the *Puzzling Side*. The next problem is what I call a "fun mate". It's a game-like position with a long but relatively easy forced mate.

Since we're having fun, let's make it Black to move.

6



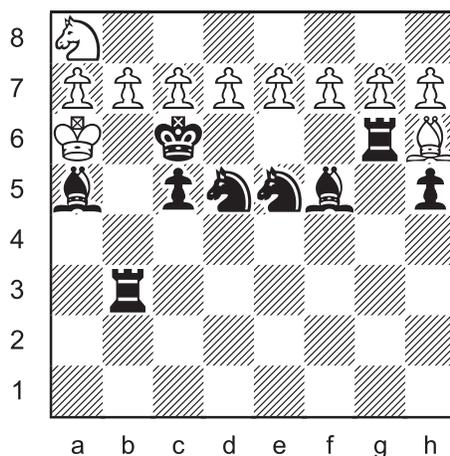
Black to mate in 7

I came across the following gem a few weeks ago, thanks to a tip and a link from Steven Dowd. It immediately became one of my favourites.

White mates in eight, and yes, the white pawns are all on the verge of promotion. The original problem was by William Shinkman (1847-1933), the “Wizard of Grand Rapids, Michigan”. This version is by the renowned French endgame theorist André Chéron (1895-1980).

Grab the reins and hold on tight. This ride might throw you for a loop.

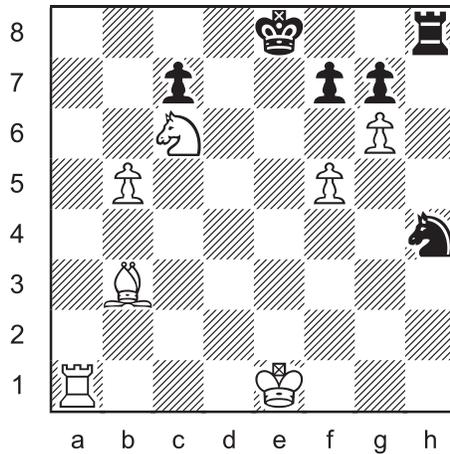
7



White to mate in 8

To mark the end of our holiday, here is one more mate in two. What could be easier, eh?

8



White to mate in 2

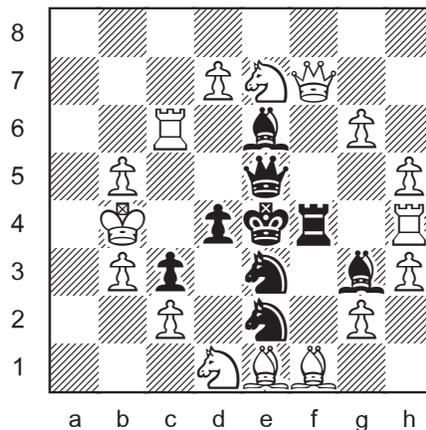
## SOLUTIONS

Problems 1, 3, 4, 6, 8 by J. Coakley. Number 1 from *Winning Chess Exercises For Kids* (2004), numbers 3 and 6 from *Winning Chess Puzzles For Kids Volume 2* (2010), and number 4 from *Scholar's Mate 46* (1999). Number 8 is a *ChessCafe.com* original (2012).

*PDF hyperlinks.* You can advance to the solution of any puzzle by clicking on the underlined title above the diagram. To return to the puzzle, click on the title above the solution diagram.

1

J. Coakley 2004 (version *ChessCafe.com* 2012)



1.Qxf4+

1...Qxf4 2.Rxe6#

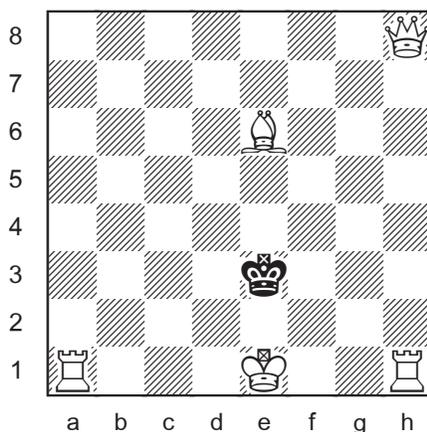
1...Nxf4 2.Bd3#

1...Bxf4 2.Nf2#

Give peace a chance.

## 2

Werner Keym 1972  
*Allgemeine Zeitung Mainz*  
version J. Coakley  
*Winning Chess Puzzles For Kids Volume 2 (2010)*



1.Qe5+

1...Kd3 2.O-O-O#

1...Kf3 2.O-O#

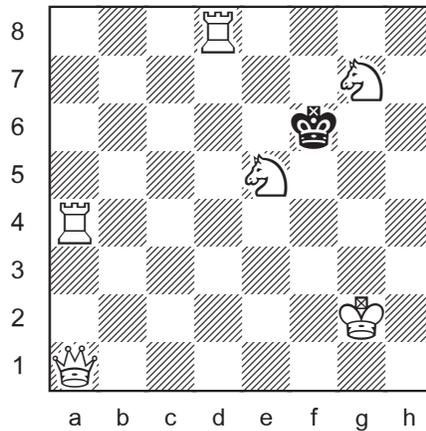
Castle left, castle right. The white king's mobility stretches five files in this problem.

A checking keymove, such as 1.Qe5+, is uncommon in a composed mate in two, but it does not constitute a flaw. In this case, from a compositional point of view, a checking key is the only way to achieve the goal of mate by castling on either side. The black king has to start on e3 or e4, and those squares must be attacked after the first move.

In case you didn't know, one of the conventions in chess problems is that castling is allowed unless it can be proven that it is impossible. That could be done by showing that the king or rook has already moved.

[In the original position by Werner Keym, the white queen started on b8 instead of h8. I was unaware of his problem when the column was first published. Anticipation is such a letdown.]

### 3



1.Qh1

1...Kxe5 2.Qa1#

1...Kxg7 2.Qh8#

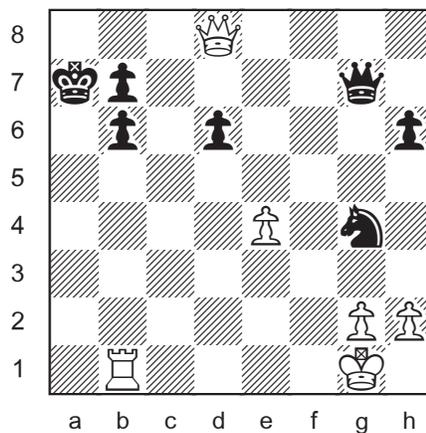
1...Ke7 2.Qh4#

1...Kg5 2.Qh4#

The white queen visits three corners of the board, including a switchback to her starting point on a1.

There is something naturally attractive about *miniature* chess problems (seven pieces or less). Would you agree?

### 4



The black queen is overloaded. Her defensive duties include guarding b7 and stopping Ra1+.

1.e5 The white pawn obstructs the long diagonal.

1...Nxe5 2.Ra1#

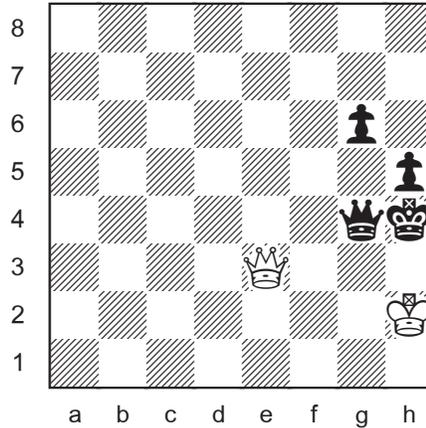
1...Qxe5 2.Qxb6+ Kb8 3.Qxb7#

1...Ka6 2.Qxb6#

1...others 2.Ra1+ and mate.

## 5

Nicolaas Cortlever 1941  
*Spirit*  
 version J. Coakley 2004  
*Winning Chess Exercises For Kids* (2004)

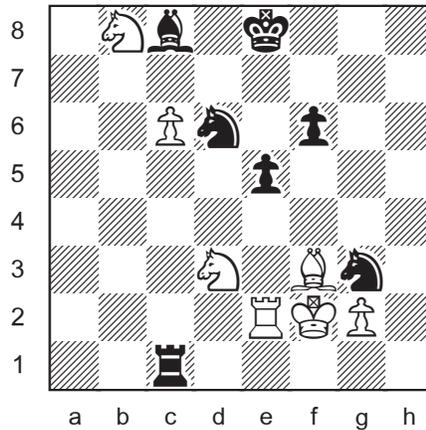


- 1.Qe7+ White can draw by perpetual check with 1.Qe1+ Kg5 2.Qe7+.
- 1...Qg5 Black is mated after 1...g5? 2.Qe1+ Qg3 3.Qxg3#.
- 2.Qe4+ After 2.Qe1+? Kg4, White must settle for a draw by “perpetual skewer”. 3.Qd1+! Kf4 4.Qd2+ Kf5 5.Qd5+ Kf6 6.Qd8+ Kf5 7.Qd5+ Kg4 8.Qd1+ (or 8.Qg2+)
- 2...Qg4
- 3.Qe3! Returning to the diagram position, but with Black to move.  
*Paradox #1.* White wins by losing a turn.  
 Black is now in zugzwang. Any move they make results in defeat.  
*Paradox #2.* Black loses because it is their turn.
- 3...g5 4.Qf2+ Qg3+ 5.Qxg3#  
 3...Qf5 4.Qg3#  
 3...Qg5 4.Qh3#  
 3...Qe2+ 4.Qxe2
- Black can avoid a quick mate in several ways by giving up the queen.

In the original position by Nico Cortlever, the white queen started on h7 (instead of e3). This revision improves the study by adding the theme of “losing the move”. It also gives White more options on the first turn.

The counterintuitive nature of this endgame study does not faze a computer in the least. Programs spit out the correct solution in less than a split second!?

## 6

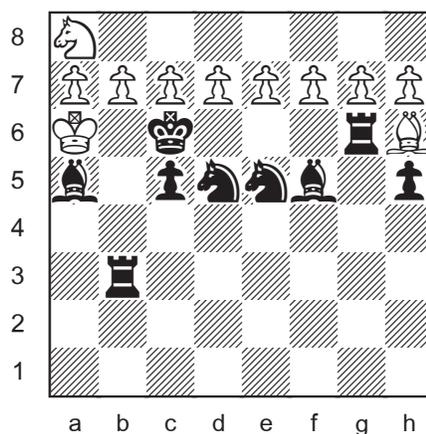


1...Nh1+ 2.Ke3 Nc4+ 3.Ke4 Ng3+ 4.Kd5 Nb6+  
5.Kd6 Nf5+ 6.Kc7 Na8+ 7.Kxc8 Nd6#

Crazy knights. Both black knights go to a corner and the one from g3 ends up on d6 where the other started.

## 7

William Shinkman 1908  
*Deutsche Schachzeitung*  
version André Chéron 1964  
*Journal de Genève*



1.b8=N+ Rxb8 (1...Kd6 2.c8=N+ mates a move sooner.)  
2.axb8=N+ Kd6  
3.c8=N+ Ke6  
4.d8=N+ Bxd8 (4...Kf6 5.e8=N#)  
5.exd8=N+ Kf6

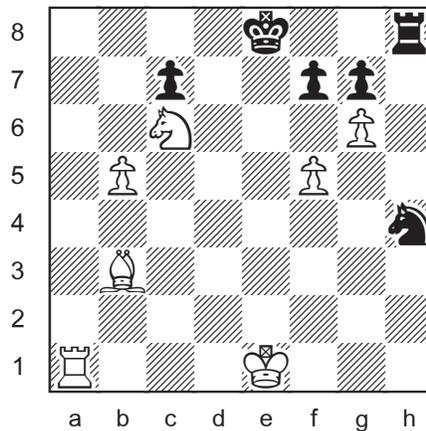
6.g8=N+ Rxc8  
 7.hxc8=N+ Kg6  
 8.f8=N#

Wow! It's surprising how far out you can go and still be on the normal side of chess.

For the original Shinkman problem: remove white Nh4; remove black Rb3 Bf5 Rg6 h5; add black Rb5 Rg3 Qg6 Bh3.

The solution then is the same until 6.g8=N+ when it varies with 6...Qxc8 7.fxc8=N+ Rxc8 8.hxc8=N#. The problem is considered cooked because the last two white moves may be interchanged.

8



1.O-O-O Black cannot stop 2.Rd8#.

If you considered 1...O-O an adequate defence, it's not. That move is illegal. A little retrograde analysis will show that Black's previous move must have been with the king or rook.

The black pawns are still on their original squares. The black knight could only have moved to h4 from f3 or g2. On those squares it would have been checking the white king. (It cannot be Black's turn if White is in check.)

That only leaves the king and rook. The last move had to be either ...Ke8 or ...Rh8, so castling is illegal.

We don't normally expect retrograde analysis in a standard problem. Perhaps we've already crossed back to *The Puzzling Side of Chess*.

Until next year!

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