

Foreword

Is chess an art, a science or a sport? This is one of the most commonly asked questions about chess, but it admits of no easy answer. Most chess activities involve a combination of all three components, but different areas of chess emphasize different aspects. The sporting element predominates in the over-the-board game, while the protracted battles of postal chess stress the scientific side. The third element, the artistic component, finds its best expression in the field of chess composition. Over-the-board players often ignore composed positions, or if they do pay attention, they concentrate on endgame compositions of direct relevance to practical play. In turning their backs on the world of chess problems, they are missing out on a great deal of enjoyment. It is true that studying chess problems will never improve anybody's play, but not everything has to have a strictly functional justification. The many fascinating examples which follow can give a great deal of pleasure to anyone interested in seeing the chess pieces stretched to their limits.

This book will conduct the reader on a detailed tour around one part of the world of chess composition. Curiously enough, this section is the one in which the other two chess elements play a significant part. Most chess composition is first and foremost about achieving an artistic effect. The puzzle element is important, because it leads the solver to discover the composer's hidden idea, and a hard-won fruit is more tasty than a windfall, but it is secondary. By contrast, in task or record problems the artistic element is secondary. The main point is to achieve a particular extreme effect and the means are subordinate to the end. To take one example, in a given position, what is the maximum number of queen moves which can deliver immediate mate? You may have to think for a few minutes to discover that the theoretical maximum is 12. To achieve this the white queen and the black king have to stand in a certain geometrical relationship to each other. If, for example, the white queen is on d2 and the black king is on e5, then it may be possible to mate by playing the queen to a5, b2, c3, d4, d5, d6, e1, e2, e3, f4, g5 and h2. The question then arises as to whether it is possible to compose a mate-in-two problem in which all these mates are necessary? The answer is yes (see Chapter 2). This is an example of a task which can only be improved upon in minor ways, for example by reducing the number of men in the problem. The

theoretical maximum is 12 and it can be achieved; that is the end of the matter. Here we can see the scientific, or at least mathematical, side of chess thrusting its (possibly unwelcome) way into the world of chess problems.

On the other hand, there are many open-ended tasks — for example, what is the longest possible direct-mate problem? The answer to this is not known, and probably never will be known (see Chapter 17). Composers can outdo each other to hold the current record, but each new record only stands until a new one is set. Here we have a sporting element, for what can typify a sporting contest better than the setting of a world record?

Some of these tasks have stories attached to them. The direct-mate Babson Task (four matched black and white promotions) is one such. This task was achieved for selfmates in the 1920s, but a direct-mate example eluded composers for more than half a century. Some composers spent decades working on it without success, and many believed it to be impossible in a conventional problem. But in 1983, right out of the blue, the unknown Soviet composer Yarosh succeeded where everyone else had failed, and gained instant fame as a result.

There is no one better qualified to take the reader on this journey into wonderland than Sir Jeremy Morse. His interest in problems was sparked in the 1950s, and he soon moved from solving to composing. Rather unusually, he was attracted to task problems almost from the beginning and over the years became one of the world's leading experts in this area. Not content with studying the works of others, he soon claimed some records for himself — for example, he was the first person to compose a serieshelpmate containing seven black promotions.

His enthusiasm for chess problems is illustrated by a small anecdote. When he was Chairman of Lloyds Bank, Sir Jeremy Morse invariably attended the closing ceremony of the Lloyds Bank tournament, held each year in London. On one occasion he astonished the assembled players by lecturing us, with obvious enthusiasm, about a selfmate in 342 moves. Some of the foreign participants appeared completely bemused; perhaps they had anticipated another of the dignitaries who so often start their speeches with 'Of course, I don't play chess myself, but...'

In this book Sir Jeremy Morse has produced an invaluable work which collects together a great deal of material which would otherwise be almost impossible to track down. As well as

providing an excellent introduction to the subject of task problems, the records listed in this book will stimulate other composers. Perhaps some budding composer, reading this book, will take on the implicit challenge and accomplish something no one else has ever achieved. If so, the chess world will be richer for it.

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