



BOOK
REVIEWS

Beware the Jub Jub Bird

Richard Roseborough

Outrageous Chess Problems by Burt Hochberg, 2005 Sterling Publishing, English Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 128pp., \$6.95

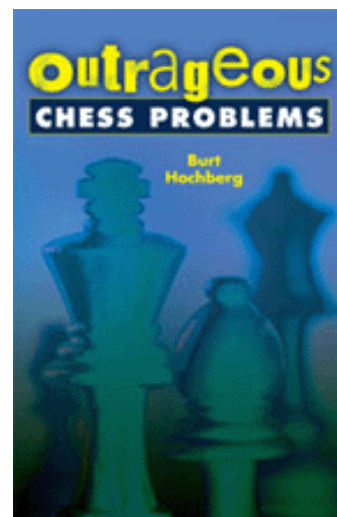
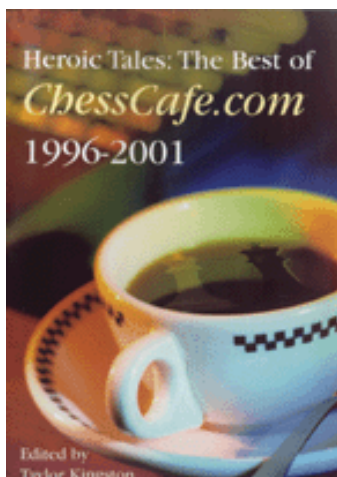
*Tw'as brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe.
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the momeraths outgrabe.*

The above lines, from C. S. Lewis' poem *Jabberwocky*, came to mind as I flipped through Burt Hochberg's new book *Outrageous Chess Problems*. Lewis' words look like English. They sound like English. Yet the poem has only a tenuous relationship at best to the English language as we normally think of it. The poem is playful. It is silly. It is nonsensical.

In *Outrageous Chess Problems*, the board looks like a chess board, and the pieces move like chess pieces. Yet this collection of 111 chess problems has only a tenuous relationship at best to the game of chess as we normally think of it. The compositions are playful. They are silly. They are nonsensical.

Admittedly, even traditional chess problems are fanciful by nature. They are not positions that will occur naturally in the course of a chess game. Yet it is important to note that they *could* occur. Though the positions are highly improbable, they still adhere to the Laws of Chess. You will never find a pawn on its own first rank. Kings cannot stand on adjacent squares. Pieces move and capture according to established rules, and they are limited in their movements by the dimensions of the board.

Outrageous Chess Problems goes beyond fanciful and into Bizarro World by gleefully thumbing its nose at the rules. It's quantum chess, where the laws of physics break down and traditional notions of time and space no longer apply, where the board warps and wraps around itself and the pieces carom about and pop into and out of existence. If chess is an art form, then this



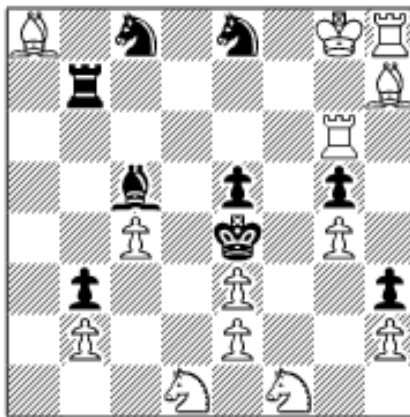
collection is the equivalent of Rod Serling's *Night Gallery*.

Outrageous Chess Problems begins with an introductory note by the author who is forthrightly unapologetic for his attraction to problems that "ignore, not to say flout, not to say stomp on, the Laws of Chess." Hochberg also includes a helpful glossary at the front of the book – when traveling in a new world, it's nice to have a pocket dictionary handy.

The first several chapters cover some of the better-known types of problems and chess variants, including construction puzzles (e.g., place x-number of queens on the board so that any move is mate), various forms of helpmates, and retrograde analysis. However, even here Hochberg has sought out problems that "[deviate] from the norm in a particular entertaining way."

1. Most problems ask you to find a checkmate or a win. In keeping with the perverse ideals of this book, we begin with a classic non-mate.

Karl Fabel, *Rätselstunde*, 1952

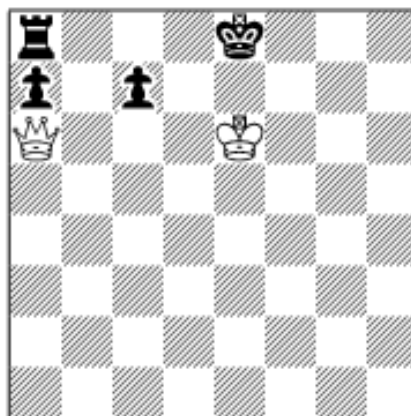


White to move and not mate

Answer: 1 Rc6+ is the only move that is not mate. Black shouldn't worry that by capturing the checking bishop on h7 he is exposing his king to checkmate by the other bishop on a8. White's rook, which allows the check from h7, at the same time blocks the check from a8.

A number of well-known composers are represented, including Sam Loyd, T. R. Dawson, Pal Benko, John Beasley, and Noam Elkies. The following is a retrograde analysis problem by the well-known problemist Sam Loyd. In a retrograde analysis problem, it is incumbent upon the solver to determine how the position in the diagram was reached, therefore proving (or disproving) the legality of castling or capturing en passant as part of the solution. By convention, it is understood that castling is legal unless proven otherwise, and capturing en passant is illegal unless proven otherwise.

39. Sam Loyd, *Musical World*, 1859 (?)

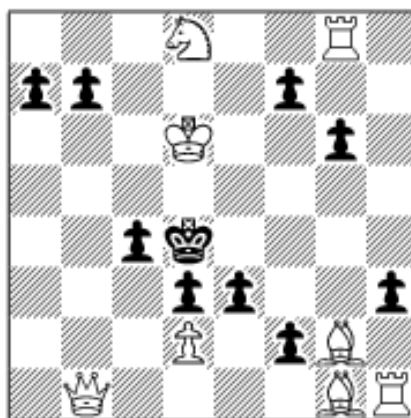


White mates in 2

Answer: 1 Qa1 and 2 Qh8 mate. Black cannot defend by castling because his last move must have been with his rook or king.

The problems get weirder as the book progresses. Hochberg quotes *The Encyclopedia of Chess Variants* as describing “about 1,450 variants.” While *Outrageous Chess Problems* only showcases maybe a couple dozen of these variants, this is more than enough to introduce the reader to the fertile landscape of chess composition. Among the examples included in the chapter “Various Variants”: optional replacement chess, where a player has the option of placing a captured piece on any vacant square; or cylinder chess, where the a-file and h-file are contiguous, as if the board were wrapped around itself like a cylinder; or billiards chess, where “pieces carom off the sides of the board like billiard balls.” As strange as these variants may seem, they do have the admirable characteristic of being governed by a set of rules, albeit a very much contorted set of rules from those most of us are familiar with. A clever and persistent reader at least has a fighting chance. By the last two chapters, however, the inmates have taken over the asylum, and the result is sheer anarchy.

84. H. Fischer, 1910



White mates in 1

If you have trouble solving this puzzle by studying the diagram, set up the position on an actual board and the solution

will reveal itself.

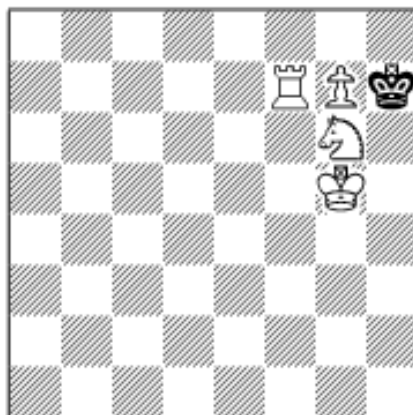
Answer: If you try to set up the position on the board you will run out of Black pawns, since you need nine of them! To solve the problem, remove any Black pawn. For each one you remove, there's a different mate:

a-pawn: Qb6 mate
 b-pawn: Nc6 mate
 c-pawn: Qb4 mate
 d-pawn: Qe4 mate
 e-pawn: Bxf2 mate
 f2-pawn: Bxe3 mate
 f7-pawn: Ne6 mate
 g-pawn: Rg4 mate
 h-pawn: Rh4 mate

Ha ha, very funny. The joke's on me, I guess. But you know what? In chess problem solving, there is something known as a "cook," which means that there is a solution that the composer did not consider, and therefore the composition is flawed. This is very bad form, and very embarrassing to the composer. With this in mind, I'd like to suggest another possible solution. How about 1 Qf6!! mate. Why not? I figure if I'm allowed to remove pieces at my discretion, then I ought to be able to add them, too. Or how about 1 Be5!! mate. Or the subtle 1 c3!! mate. Or the witty 1 Qc5 & Qd5 & Qe5 & Qe4 mate mate mate mate. Who's laughing now, Mr. H. Fischer? Looks like you've been cooked!

I apologize for the preceding tirade. It's just a little maddening to have the rug pulled out from under you like that. But once I realized what I was up against, and once I let go of all preconceived notions of fair play, I found it satisfying to solve one or two of these little devils on my own.

99. J. H. Zukertort



White mates in 1

Yes, this is the Zukertort, the 19th-century master who won the great London tournament in 1883 ahead of Steinitz but lost a

match to him three years later, after which Steinitz declared himself the first official world champion.

Answer: the only possibility is 1 g8 = Black knight!

Yet even this solution has a flaw. After 1 g8 = Black knight, what if Black captures his own piece with 1...Kxg8! After wrestling with this dilemma for a few minutes, I realized that I missed the sane, orderly world of traditional chess. I confess that I did find *Outrageous Chess Problems* to be a creative, entertaining, thought-provoking and often infuriating collection of chess problems, but if I want to get exotic I think I'll stick to bughouse. However, if you enjoyed the examples given above, rest assured are plenty more in this collection to keep you occupied while you pass time in your padded cell.

[Order](#) *Outrageous Chess Problems*
by Burt Hochberg



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