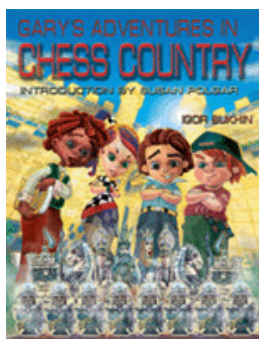




COLUMNISTS

Scholastic Chess

Steve Goldberg



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Alisa Melekhina

As this column goes to press, Alisa Melekhina is one of the ten participants in the 2009 U.S. Women's Championship, but she has been a rising star in the chess world for some time now. She shares her thoughts about a variety of topics this month, and we examine her two victories at the Women's World Team Championship that brought her a gold medal.

Everyman Quiz of the Month

Each month Everyman Chess sponsors our Everyman Quiz of the Month, offering a free chess book to three respondents with correct answers. This month, winners of our quiz will receive *Starting Out: Chess Tactics and Checkmates* (CD), by GM Chris Ward.



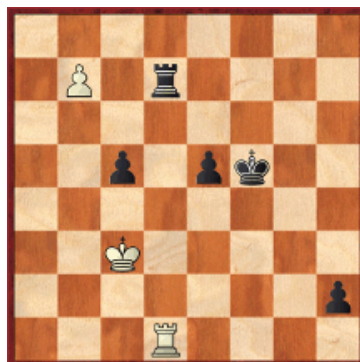
We will accept all contest answers for *two weeks* following the appearance of this column, then randomly select our three winners from this group. In order to meet the two-week deadline, please e-mail your responses to me by October 27, 2009. Send your answers to scholasticchess@chesscafe.com. Good luck!

Problem #1



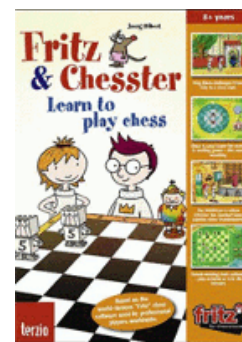
How can White force a win here?

Problem #2

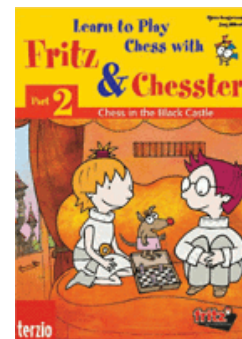


Black has just played 51...Rxd7. Both White and Black have pawns on

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the verge of queening. How can White put the game away?

Women's International Master Alisa Melekhina first attained a rating of 2200 following her appearance at the 2007 U.S. Women's Championship. She continued an upward trend, reaching a high (so far!) of 2322 after the Liberty Bell Open in January of this year.

From a ratings standpoint, 2009 has been difficult for Alisa, with her rating dropping to 2253 by the end of August. But the year has also seen a lot of activity and positive experiences for her, culminating in a gold medal performance at the recent Women's World Team Chess Championship (WWTCC) in China. Alisa entered the tournament with a FIDE rating of 2220, but with her two wins and four draws, achieved a performance rating of 2463, and was the only U.S. player to go undefeated.



Alisa Melekhina

"I have only played in international youth competitions before, such as the World Youths and Pan-Americans," Alisa said. "The conditions were significantly different at the Women's World Team Championships. The hotel was absolutely gorgeous; it felt like staying at a palace. The hotel had numerous amenities and the staff was always available to accommodate you in any way. It was also convenient that the playing hall was in the hotel, and that the tournament format was one-round a day. I had played in the Pan-Americans in Argentina only about two weeks prior, where three days had double rounds, with no rest day, so it was definitely a nice change and a more relaxed atmosphere. It was apparent that the organizers put a lot of effort and diligence into not only making the opening ceremony and free days a good experience for the players, but also into running a smooth tournament with proper conditions for the players. I definitely had a positive experience and would love to participate again."

Besides Alisa, the U.S. team consisted of IM Irina Krush, IM Anna Zatonskih, IM Rusudan Goletiani and WFM Tatev Abrahamyan, all of whom are participating in the 2009 U.S. Women's Championship.

Looking back on her busy summer (twelve tournaments in June, July and August), Alisa commented, "I definitely enjoyed the three foreign tournaments I played in – the Canadian Open, Pan-Americans, and WWTCC. The latter was my favorite not only because of the conditions, but it was by far my best result. I had lost about fifty USCF and FIDE rating points after the summer, but I feel like it still ended on a positive note with the gold medal. Also, I was never a big fan of team tournaments, but the friendly atmosphere that the U.S. women's team had, changed my mind about that attitude."

As a second-year undergraduate student at Drexel University, Alisa is quite occupied with a very heavy academic load, which limits the time she can devote to her chess. “There was a point two years ago where I did chess for nearly four hours a day, but lately that time has been subsiding with chess taking the backseat for school.” In fact, she says she hasn’t even had time to check out any of the extra-curricular activities at Drexel, including chess.

I asked Alisa how her college experience has been thus far, and if her professors understand her occasional time away for chess tournaments. “So far I love college and my classes,” she said. “Out of the seven classes I have, I am only missing one test, and unfortunately I’ll have to make up for it by taking a final that would have otherwise been optional. But overall, the professors have been very understanding. I find that college does not embrace compulsory education and attendance as much as grade schools do; if you miss class, then it’s your problem.”

As one of the elite female chess players in the country, Alisa is competing in her second U.S. Women’s Championship (her first was in 2007). She doesn’t, however, see this as a major factor. “I don’t feel that the experience from the previous U.S. Women’s Championships can help me any more than any other tournament I have played since then. It might impact the preparation a bit however, as I will be playing with many of the same players as last time,” she said.

Remarkably, Alisa does not now have, nor has she ever had, a professional chess coach. Her father has assisted her, but she is largely self-taught. Aside from chess, she says, “I have been dancing ballet for twelve years, and like chess, it is also fading into the background a bit for me.”

Asked to offer advice to other players, she modestly defers. “Considering all of the rating points I lost following a string of unsuccessful chess tournaments this summer, I probably would not be the best person to ask on how to improve chess.”

In fact, of course, she is a tremendous chess talent. Her two favorite games from the WWTCC were against Qian Huang and against Yixin Ding. She especially enjoyed the Huang game where she faced a Trompowsky Opening. “I played a line that a friend literally helped me learn in fifteen minutes. More importantly, we beat the ‘China 1’ team that round, and we were their only defeat of the tournament!”

That five-player China 1 team sported two grandmasters, and the lowest rated member of the team carried a 2424 FIDE rating coming into the tournament.

Here are Alisa’s two victories from the Women’s World Team Championship, both annotated by Fritz:

Huang, Qian (2424) - Melekhina, Alisa (2220)

World Women’s Team Championship China, 2009
Trompowsky Attack [A45]

1.d4 Nf6 2.Bg5 g6 3.Bxf6 exf6 4.e3 f5 5.Ne2 Bg7 6.g3 d6 7.Bg2 0-0 8.0-0 Nd7 9.c4 Nf6 10.Nbc3 h5 11.h4 (11.Qd3 c6+/-) **11...Ng4 12.Nf4 g5**

12...c6!? looks like a viable alternative.

13.hxg5± Qxg5 14.Qf3 c6 15.Rfe1 Re8 16.Rad1 h4 17.Nce2 Bf6 18.Nh3 Qg7 19.Qf4 Re6 20.Nc3 (20.b4!?!+/-) **20...hxg3**



21.fxg3

21.Qxg3!? would keep White in the game: 21...Be7 22.b4+/-.

21...Bd7 22.Rd3

22.d5 Re7 23.dxc6 Bxc6=+.

22...Rae8 23.Nd1 Bc8

23...c5 24.Bd5 cxd4 25.Bxe6 Rxe6 26.Ra3 dxe3 27.Re2—.

24.Re2 c5 25.Bd5 R6e7 26.dxc5 dxc5



27.Qf3??

The position is going down the drain. Better would be 27.Ra3-/+.

27...Ne5—+ 0–1

Ding, Yixin (2321) - Melekhina, Alisa (2220)

World Women's Team Championship China, 2009

Open Ruy Lopez [C83]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0–0 Nxe4 6.d4 b5 7.Bb3 d5 8.dxe5 Be6 9.c3 Be7 10.Re1 Nc5 11.Bc2 Qd7 12.Nd4 Nxd4 (12...Bg4 13.Qd2+/-) 13.cxd4+/-



13.Qxd4?! Bf5 14.e6 Bxe6 15.Qxg7 0-0-0=.

13...Nb7 14.Nd2 c5 15.Nf3 c4 16.Ng5 Bxg5 17.Bxg5

The bishop intends Bg5-d2-b4-c5.

17...Bf5 18.Bd2

18.e6 Bxe6 19.Qh5 Kf8+/-.

18...Bxc2 19.Qxc2± Nd8 20.Rad1

20.Bb4 Qg4 21.h3 Qf4+/-.

20...0-0 21.Bb4 Re8 22.Re3 Nc6 23.Bc5 Qe6

23...a5 24.Rh3 h6 25.Rg3+/-.

24.Rde1 (24.f4!?+/-) 24...a5= 25.Rh3 h6 26.f4 f5

White has a new protected passed pawn: e5. Fritz prefers 26...Nb4.

27.Rh5

Better is 27.a3!?, which would allow White to play on.

27...Nb4 28.Qxf5 Qxf5 29.Rxf5 Nd3 30.Re2 Nxc5

Better is 30...Ra6!? 31.Re3 Nxb2—+.

31.dxc5= d4 32.e6

Don't underestimate that pawn. 32.Kf1!? Ra6 33.Rh5=+/-.

32...d3-/+



33.Re1 Rad8 34.Rfe5?

Better is 34.Kf2 and White could well hope to play on. 34...d2 35.Rd1 Rxe6 36.c6 Rxc6 37.Rxb5=+/-.

34...b4—+ 35.c6

35.e7 Rd4 36.c6 c3 37.bxc3 bxc3—+.

35...c3 36.bxc3

36.Rf1 d2 37.bxc3 d1Q 38.Rxd1 Rxd1+ 39.Kf2 bxc3—+.

36...bxc3 37.c7

37.Rc5 hardly improves anything: 37...c2 38.Rc1 d2 39.R5xc2 dxc1R+ 40.Rxc1 Rxe6—+.

37...Rc8 38.Rc5 c2 39.Rd5 Rxc7 40.Rc1

40.Rxd3 the only chance to get some counterplay: 40...c1Q 41.Rxc1 Rxc1 + 42.Kf2 Rxe6 43.Ra3—+.

40...Rb7 0–1



41.Kf2 Rb1 42.Rxd3 Rxc1—+.

Answers to Last Month's Quiz

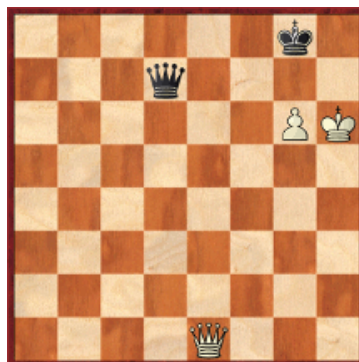
Problem #1

It is White to move. What do you suggest?



Answer: 1.b5 axb5 2.Bxb7 Nxb7 3.a6 Nd6 4.a7 followed by 5.a8(Q).

Problem #2



It is White to move. How can he make progress?

Answer: 1.Qc3 (preventing checks to the white king as well as

threatening possible mate on g7 and c8) 1...Qb7 2.Qa1. Zugwang! Black cannot now protect both g7 and a8. Both problems are from Just the Facts!, by GM Lev Alburt & GM Nikolay Krogius.

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