

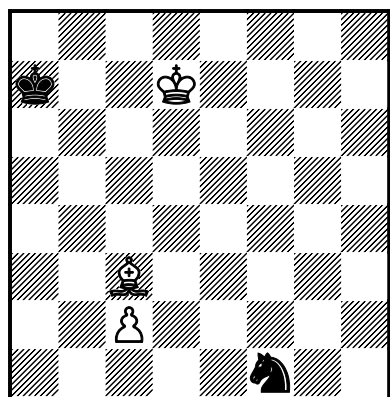
Prizewinners explained

Ever higher: Excelsior Plus

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Back in the late sixties and early seventies, when I made my first steps in the minefield of chess composition, one of my favourite books was *FIDE Album 1945-55* where I first got acquainted, among many classics, with the following 'malyutka':

A.1. Hugh Blandford
1st prize *Springaren* 1949



d7a7 0013.10 3/2 Win

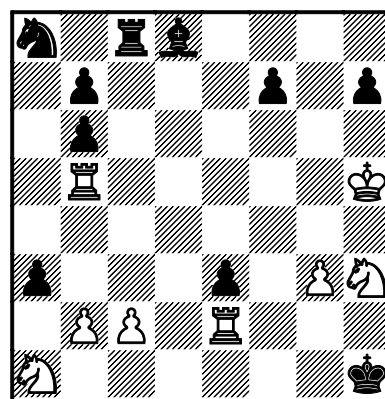
1.Bd4+ Ka8! 2.c4 Sd2 3.c5 Sb3 4.c6 Sa5 5.c7 Sc6! 6.c8R+! (6.Kxc6? stalemate, or 6.c8Q+? Sb8+ and stalemate).

This series of obvious (in fact forced) moves shows in the purest form the old theme known also from other genres as the Excelsior: A pawn moves all the way from its initial square to promotion.

The first excelsior belongs to the one and only Sam Loyd (1841-1911), the American wizard who was just 20 when he published this moreover:

According to the Wikipedia, Loyd had a friend who was willing to wager that he could always find the piece which delivered the principal mate of a chess problem. Loyd composed this problem as a joke and bet his friend that he could not pick a piece that *doesn't* give

A.2. Samuel Loyd
London Era 1861



Mate in five moves

mate in the main line (his friend immediately identified the pawn on b2 as being the least likely to deliver mate), and when the problem was published it was with the stipulation that White mates with "the least likely piece or pawn".

The solution: **1.b4!** (Threatening 2.Rf5 and 3.Rf1 mate, or 2.Rd5 and 3.Rd1 mate) **1...Rc5+ 2.bxc5!** (Threatening 3.Rb1 mate) **2...a2 3.c6!** (Resuming the threats as on move one) **3...Bc7 4.cxb7** and **5.bxa8Q** (bxa8B) mate. The mate is delivered with the pawn which starts on b2.

The theme was named after the poem "Excelsior" by the famous American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The word means in Latin and in archaic English "ever higher".

The Excelsior alone is not too exciting any more. After all as over the board players we happened to demonstrate it more than once running a single pawn or more all the way to the eighth rank.

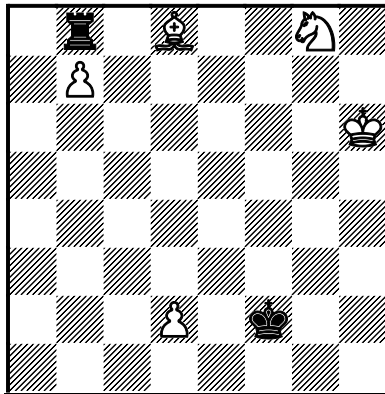
However, combined with other motifs it might intensify the impression and contribute

to the study's thematic unity. This is best displayed in two recent prize winners.

The prolific Hungarian composer won the studies section in the big and successful tourney that celebrated (a couple of years too late but who cares?) the first jubilee of the Permanent Commission for Chess Composition.

A.3. János Mikitovics

1st prize PCCC 50 AT 2010



h6f2 0311.20 5/2 Win

1.Ba5! Rxb7 2.Sf6 Ke2 3.d4 Ra7 (Kd3 4.d5 Kc4 5.d6 Kb5 6.Bd8 Kc6 7.Be7 Rb1 8.d7 Rd1 9.d8Q wins, Excelsior) **4.Bd8!** (Thematic try 4.Bb6!? Ra6 5.Sd5 (5.Sd7 Kd2 6.Kg5 Kc3 7.Bc5 Ra4 8.d5 Kc4) Kf3 6.Kg6 Ke4 7.Sf6+ Kd3 8.Bc5 Kc4 9.Kf5 Ra5 10.Sd7 Kd5 11.Sf6+ Kc4 12.Sd7 Kd5 positional draw) **Ke3 5.d5 Ra6! Pin 6.Be7! Kf4 7.d6 Ke5 8.d7!** (8.Se8? Rb6 (Rc6)! 9.Kg6 Ke6!) **Ke6 9.d8Q** wins.

The formal theme in all sections of the event required pins and here indeed we witness a festival of pinning, unpinning, halfpinning and selfpinning. Quite a lot of them indeed are indicated in the course of the solution either in the main line or in thematic tries. Nevertheless, my personal view is that most of it is in fact just a matter of formality since, in particular, the unpinning and half-pinning are barely exploited to create real effect on the

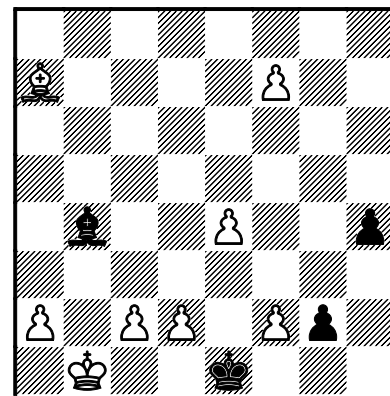
events. On the other hand, I was more impressed by the surprisingly natural and precise Excelsior as well as by the beautiful switchback, despite the absence of any tactics:

A special tourney commemorated the centenary of the late Russian grandmaster Alexander Tolush. The St. Petersburg duo realized the Excelsior in a bishop ending. The advanced black pawns look pretty dangerous while their white counterpart is under control. Which of the other white pawns is going to give it a try?

A.4. Leonard Katsnelson

& Alexei Sochnev

1st prize Tolush 100 MT 2011



b1e1 0040.62 7/4 Draw

1.f3! (Thematic try 1.f4? Ke2 2.Bg1 Kf1 3.Bh2 h3 4.a4 g1Q 5.Bxg1 Kxg1 6.c3 Bc5 7.a5 h2 8.a6 h1Q 9.f8Q Qxe4+) **Ke2 2.Bg1! Kf1 3.Bh2 h3 4.a4! g1Q 5.Bxg1 Kxg1 6.c3!** (Thematic try 6.a5? h2 7.a6 h1Q 8.f8Q Bxf8 9.a7 Kf2+ 10.Ka2 Qc1 11.a8Q Qxc2+ 12.Ka1 Bg7+) **Bc5 7.a5!** (7.d4? Be7 8.a5 h2 9.a6 h1Q 10.f8Q Bxf8 11.a7 Kf2+ 12.Ka2 Qc1 13.a8Q Qc2+ 14.Ka1 Qxc3+ 15.Ka2 Qc2+ 16.Ka1 Bb4) **h2 8.a6 h1Q 9.f8Q Bxf8 10.a7 Kf2+ 11.Ka2! Qc1 12.a8Q** Draw!

Similar to Loyd's problem here also the "unlikely pawn" did it at last.