



BOOK REVIEWS



The Ultimate Tactics Book for Kids

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Winning Chess Puzzles for Kids, by Jeff Coakley, 2006 Chess'n Math Association, Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 300pp., \$29.95

Immediately upon opening Jeff Coakley's *Winning Chess Puzzles for Kids*, the reader will be struck with the feeling that this is a *fun* book, not just another chess puzzle book to challenge the mind. The illustrations by Antoine Duff are first class and entertaining and the table of contents shows a varied approach to keep even the most hyperactive kid interested. In fact, the one word that describes how this book differs from the many others which are available is *variety*.

An interesting insight into the book comes from looking at the table of contents. It's more of an index, dividing the book into its various subjects and showing the applicable pages, which are not in any particular order. The primary subjects include:

- Kiril's Klass
- Exercises
- Tactics 101
- Other Stuff
- Lily's Puzzles
- Combo Mombo



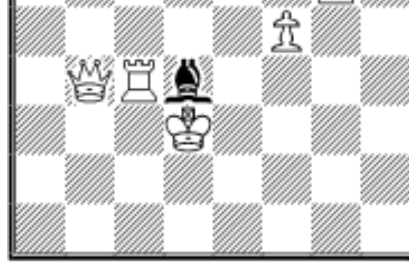
Each subject is then further subdivided. For example, the Tactics 101 category is broken down into the topics of "traps," "knight fork," "stalemate," "x-ray," and "discovered attack," among others. Nearly the entire book is a tactics workbook, but presented in a variety of formats.

The first 15 pages explain how to record and read the score from a chess game, and define a number of basic chess terms. Then the puzzles begin.



White to move and mate in two

Right off the bat there's a challenging mate-in-two problem. In the position shown above, there are several good moves for White, but

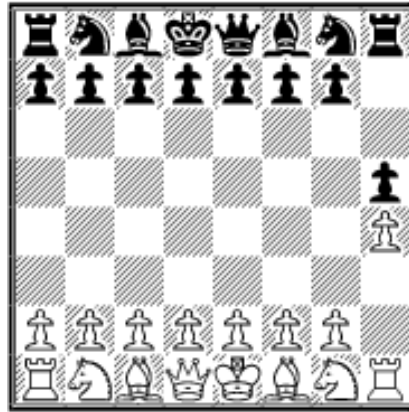


there's only one solution that yields checkmate in two moves regardless of Black's response.

Beginning players will likely be hard-pressed to find the strange-looking solution, 1.Qb2!, but that's also the beauty of the book. Readers

will immediately be exposed to the classic chess teaching that instructs: "If you see a good move, stop and look for an even better one!"

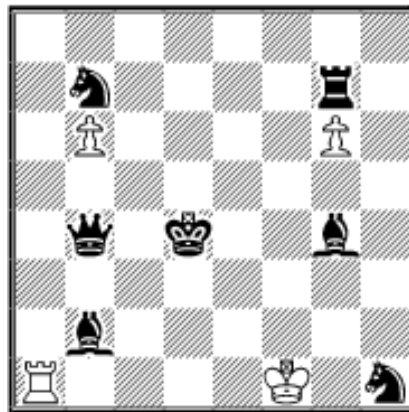
Included within the "Other Stuff" category are the "Who's the Goof?" puzzles, in which the reader must find why the given position is illegal. An example is the following:



Here, of course, the black king and queen have switched positions.

There are also forty pages of Kiril's Kontest, in which four positions are shown per page.

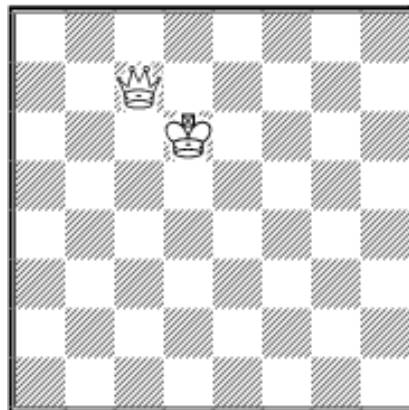
Position 1 is White to move and mate in one move and position 2 is White to move and mate in two moves. Position 3 is a chess maze and position 4 is a "triple Loyd." The following is the first chess maze problem from the book:



The instructions state: "Only the White rook moves. Capture the Black king in eight moves or less, without taking any pieces or moving where the rook can be taken."

With some effort the solution is found: Ra1-a8-h8-h2-c2-c6-f6-f4xd4.

Here is the first triple Loyd problem:



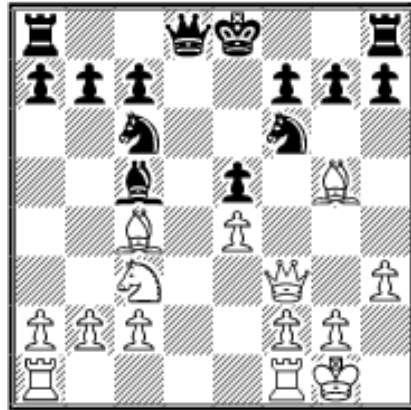
With the triple Loyd problems, there are three parts. Part A is to place the black king so he is in checkmate, Part B is to place the black king so he is in stalemate, and Part C is to place the black king so that White can mate in one move.

Hence, the solutions to this triple Loyd are: Part A: place the black king at c8; Part B: Ka8; Part C: Ke8 (White mates with Qe7).

Lily's Puzzlers offer a variety of offbeat problems, such as "Find a move that is NOT checkmate," a rook tour, math questions (i.e. "What percent of chess pieces

are pawns?”), “Find a move that is NOT a fork” and the like. A number of helpmate problems are presented and a delightful diversion entitled “Switcheroos” also appears regularly.

In these problems, a position is shown and the reader is asked to switch any two pieces (of either color) such that when the pieces are placed on each other’s square, the black king is in checkmate. For example:



In this position, if the white queen at f3 and the black pawn at f7 exchange places, the black king is in checkmate.

The Tactics 101 pages each present nine positions, all of which represent a common theme, such as “Find the knight forks,” “Find the pins,” etc. There are also forty pages of Mate in One problems, nine problems per page, and twenty pages of Mate in Two problems, also with nine puzzles per page.

The Combo Mombo pages generally present positions that are “White to move and win” or “Black to move and win” although a number of problems are also White or Black to move and mate in “x” moves. Each page highlights a common theme, such as knight forks, pins, discovered checks, etc.

Word search puzzles are always popular, and thirty-six such puzzles are included in this text. A variety of creative cartoons also appear from time to time, including the one showing a crowd at a barbecue, with the question “Anyone for a *chessburger?*”

There are 245 of these pages to keep any child (or adult!) entertained for weeks or months. The next thirty-five pages provide the answers to the wide variety of problems. If this is not enough, an additional sixty “maze” problems and additional twenty-seven “Loyd” problems follow. There are also eight extra problems (titled “Darth Pawn’s Revenge) in which it is Black to move and mate, varying from mate in one to mate in twelve!

A nice touch at the end of the book is the list of chess openings, explaining which moves comprise many of the most popular openings, and the glossary of chess terms.

At the start of the book, the author writes, “If you like chess, you came to the right place. This workbook is full of fun puzzles and challenging problems that will help you become a better player.”

In my opinion, *Winning Chess Puzzles for Kids* meets this goal and then some. Not only will readers improve, they’ll do so without the drudgery of page after page of textual explanations and endless variations. If our schools could teach science and math as effectively as this text teaches chess, our kids would be excelling beyond belief.

I wholeheartedly recommend this book as probably the most kid-friendly I have come across. There is so much variety here that even children who are not great chess fans will have fun!

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by Jeff Coakley

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