

On the drawbacks concerning the current FIDE-Album submission practice

TLDR: The FIDE-Album is at risk, because composers are not following the quality guidelines for submissions. Changes are required asap.

I'm currently judging the SPGs for the FIDE-Album 2022–2024. It's a monumental task, as there are hundreds of problems to evaluate. And that's exactly where the problem lies. There are far too many entries. Unfortunately, the total global output of SPGs over these three years does not in any way warrant this large number of submissions. Rather, it's the case that some authors deliberately ignore the quality guidelines and submit whatever junk they want. Easily half of all the entries should never have been submitted in the first place. I'm also fairly certain that similar issues exist in the other categories (#2, #3, h#, etc.). In fact, it may be even worse in some.

To start off, I'd like to look at a problem from the 2016–2018 Album. **1)** 1.c4 Na6 2.Qa4 Rb8 3.Qc6 bxc6 4.a4 Rb3 5.a5 Rc3 6.dxc3 Nb8 7.Be3 Ba6 8.Nd2 Bb5 9.O-O-O Ba4 10.Ngf3 Bc2 11.Nb3 Bf5 12. Rd6 Bh3 13.Re6 dxe6 14.Kc2 Qd3+ 15.exd3 f5 16.Be2 Kf7 17.Ne5+ Kf6 18.Bh5 Bg4 19.Be8 Bh5 20. Bd7 Be8 21.Bc8 Bd7 22.Bb7 Bc8. A brilliantly executed 11-move capture-free round trip with no repeated squares, finely motivated by the need to get the white bishop from f1 to its target square. This problem received 8.5 points, placing it just above the minimum of 8 points. What I'm trying to say is: Here you can see the (very high) level required. Submissions should measure up to existing FIDE-Album problems like this one. The author should ask himself: Does the problem I intend to submit really meet the same standards as the current FIDE-Album problems? If not, then the problem should not be submitted (I admit that I haven't always followed this guideline 100% of the time, but on the other hand, I've also had a 100% acceptance rate twice).

We see a glaring negative example in **2)**. This completely inadequate sequence of moves was actually deemed worthy of submission by the author — no shit, Sherlock. 1.c3 e6 2.Qa4 Ke7 3.Qxd7+ Kf6 4.Qxc8 Ke7 5.Qxb8 Kd7 6.Qxd8+ Rxd8 7.c4 Kc8. What on Earth was the author thinking? Something like this should never have been published, much less sent to the Album.

The current submission practice has severe drawbacks. Here are some:

1. A significant additional workload for the judges, as well as for the director. Easily a factor of 2. As a result, fewer and fewer people are willing to take on this massive amount of work.
2. Serving as a FIDE-Album judge is currently not fun. And the entries similar to 2) are exactly the reason for it. Studying masterpieces and attributing 3-4 points to them is very enjoyable. On the other hand, wading through the morass of hundreds of low-end entries is not: It is an enormous waste of time.

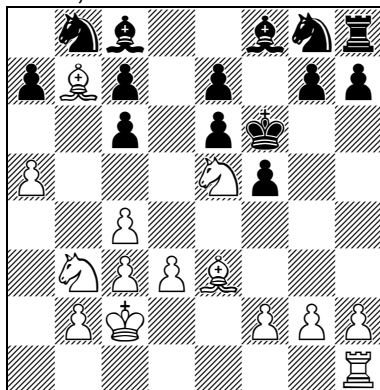
In a typical informal tourney, one is used to half the problems being barely fit for publication. But since the number of problems is usually low, this is generally acceptable. Moreover, an informal tourney may include beginner-level problems — after all, everyone has to start somewhere. In contrast, weak problems have no place in the FIDE-Album — the hall of fame of chess problems. As a FIDE-Album judge, you do not want to have to deal with zeros like 2).

In **3)**, we see an example of an author who got it perfectly right. He submitted only one SPG, but what a gem! Best-case. For the first time, a king round trip is shown in the form of a large square, with the sides running diagonally. With some analysis, you'll find that the white king

on e1 must leave toward the northeast but can only return via the northwest. And it only works this way: 1.h4 Nc6 2.h5 Nd4 3.h6 c6 4.hxg7 h5 5.Rh4 Nh6 6.Re4 h4 7.g8=Q h3 8.Qg5 h2 9.Qa5 d5 10.a4 Bh3 11. Ra3 e6 12.Rg3 Qg5 13.Rgg4 Qe3 14.fxe3 b5 15.Kf2 bxa4 16.Kg3 Bd6+ 17.Kh4 Bg3+ 18.Kg5 OO 19.Kf6+ Kh7 20. Ke7 f5 21.Na3 f4 22.Kd6 f3+ 23.Kc5 f2 24.Nf3 Rad8 25.Ne1 fxe1=N 26.Kb4 Nd3+ 27.Kc3 Nf2 28.d3 Rf3 29.Kd2 Nf7 20.Ke1. Highly original and very difficult to accomplish — this has to be included in the Album! Everyone is invited to try to get rid of the visible promoted pieces...

Michel Caillaud

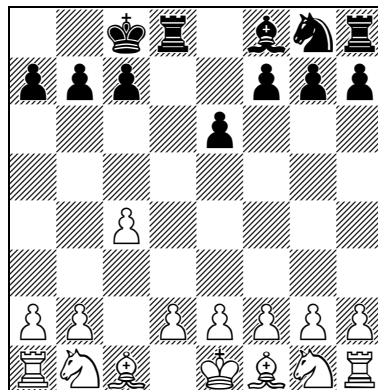
Dedicated to T. Brand & B. Gräfrath, Die Schwalbe 2018, 2. Prize



1) SPG in 22.0

Undisclosed author

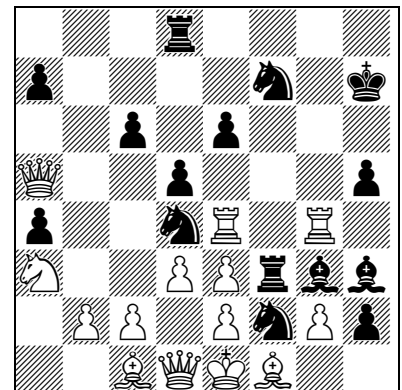
Some tourney 2024, 5. Commendation



2) SPG in 7.0

Alexandre Leroux

Dedicated to Thierry Le Gleuher, Phénix 2023 2. Prize



3) SPG in 29.5

The current behavior of some composers can be rationally explained to some extent. From a game-theoretic perspective, “submitting everything” is the dominant strategy. From the composer’s point of view, there is currently no reason against it — no disadvantages (except maybe a guilty conscience toward the judges, but that is obviously not always the case). This unfavorable situation should be addressed in order to reduce the immense workload of everyone involved in the FIDE-Album.

Here is my preliminary proposal to improve the current situation; feel free to discuss it, adapt it, and add further points:

1. Authors are required to rank the problems they submit by quality, based on their personal assessment. In other words, no scores — just a ranking from 1 to n.
2. A judge should go through a composers’ problems in sequence, starting out with the problem the composer personally ranked the highest. When a judge reaches 2 problems that receive a score of less than 2 points, the judge may/should ignore the author’s remaining problems and assign them a default score of 1.
3. Judges are encouraged to evaluate more strictly the more problems an author has submitted. From a game-theoretic perspective, this means the “submit everything” strategy is no longer dominant. Submitting garbage then carries a noticeable disadvantage for the author and could lead to a reduction in submissions.

Point 1 has an additional advantage: If the author is an expert in the type of problems he submits, his ranking would be another useful data point available to the judges.

To anyone who is opposed to any changes concerning the FIDE-Album submission rules:

- Have you ever been a judge for the FIDE-Album? If not, you did not experience the severe downsides of the current practice, and therefore you should likely not vote against it.
- If nothing changes, are you qualified and will you carry the burden for the next FIDE-Albums and act as a judge? If no changes are made, I predict that we run out of judges in the near future. This cannot be in anyone's interest. So please reconsider your position for the sake of the FIDE-Album.
- What are the downsides of my proposal? Personally, I cannot see any.

All of this might sound elitist to some people, but that is not what this is about. I'm not saying that every published problem needs to be a masterpiece. There is a time and place for entry level problems or thematically simple problems. E.g. maybe they are used for a solving tournament. But what I am saying is that these sorts of problems should never be submitted to the hall of fame, i.e. the FIDE-Album.

In other endeavors, say playing tennis, you do not expect in your first year of playing to be invited to Wimbledon. Replace Wimbledon with FIDE-Album, and you get the idea.

It is unfortunate that these extra measures are even necessary - in an ideal world in which everyone complied with the FIDE-Album guidelines, this would not be required at all. But if you take a closer look at the heap of album submissions, it quickly becomes obvious that serious changes must be made.

The chess problem community only functions because a lot of people devote their spare free time to this common enterprise. No one is paid, and that is a good thing. No one gains if we fail to remedy this unfortunate situation. So let's do it.