Reto Aschwanden - 50 JT - 2024-2025

Final Award by Reto Aschwanden, August 2025

List of Participants

Added by the director after completion of the award; "*" behind diagram number: joint composition
Angelini, Eric: 2; Baier, Silvio: 4*; Beek, Justys van der: 10; Borst, Dirk: 14, 15; Caillaud, Michel: 3; Donati, Gianni: 16, 17, 18, 19; Fieberg, Christoph: 4*; Frolkin, Andriy: 11*, 12*; Hambros, Joachim: 5; Kirtley, Mark: 7, 8, 13; Lois, Jorge: 9*; Olin, Per: 6, 11*, 12*; Osorio, Roberto: 9*; Rãican, Paul: 1; Tognini, Diana: 20.

Introduction

First of all, I'd like to thank all the composers who took part and made this tourney a success. And thanks a lot to Thomas Brand for acting as a director. And sorry for the delayed judgement: It was basically ready in the middle of January 2025. The missing part was that I wanted Stelvio to verify No. 09, which was provided as HC+. A few months and lots of code-lines later, Stelvio found this problem to be C+. So here we are.

On January 1, 2025, at 00:04 (!), a full 4 minutes after the closing date, Thomas sent me 20 nameless entries that had been submitted. The theme of the tourney, that these entries were asked to show was:

Orthodox SPG showing some sort of "Grand finale"(whatever that means was up to the composer).

So I set out to find the solutions of these entries (Thomas sent me diagrams with and without solutions). One entry was quickly dismissed for formal reasons, because it did not show an orthodox SPG, not even an SPG full stop. I have a hard time understanding the thoughts of the respective composer. It is like showing up at an ice skating ring wanting to play basketball. What's the point?

Anyway, 19 SPGs remained to be solved. From a computer verification point of view, we have:

- C+: 18
- C?: 1 (Stelvio is far away currently, even more so Natch/Euclide).

I'm an average solver at best, but I nevertheless succeeded in finding the solution most of the time. In a few cases I gave up, but not before having invested enough time to understand the difficulties of the position at hand. On a side note, I think solving difficulty is, contrary to popular opinion, not a positive quality of an SPG. I think it's a negative. Because: In case solving is difficult due to surprising twists and turns in the solution, then these twists and turns make up the quality, the solving difficulty just comes along for the ride and does not contribute anything extra. And in case solving is difficult for some other reason, e.g. because of a lot of technical captures, then this is in my view a negative. If I need 20 minutes to solve a rather easy SPG and enjoy its solution, this makes more sense to me than solving the same style solution in a more difficult setting in four hours. I simply get more out of it, the solving time economy is better.

As is common in any tourney, the quality of the entries varied quite a bit. The same can be said for how intense the requested theme is shown. Some original ways of interpreting a Grand finale are displayed, but I'm convinced that many more can be found. Some jewels in this area remain to be unearthed.

I had a hard time coming up with a ranking. Especially the question, how absolute composition quality (disregarding the given theme) should be weighed against theme-intensity, was unclear to me. My cop-out solution to this is that I gave a special prize to the best problem in absolute terms, but which scores low on theme-intensity.

As a fun extra, I tried to guess the composer for each entry, at first without knowing the participating composers and a second time after Thomas had sent me the list of all composers. I was wrong most of the time, and some of the real author-names surprised me.

There was only one objection concerning No. 13 as reported at May 10.

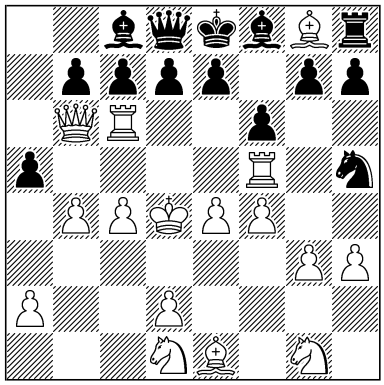
Ranking

First a few remarks on problems that did not make it into the award (without diagram, so that the composer can publish elsewhere if desired):

- **No. 01**: A nice problem, but I cannot really see a Grand finale.
- **No. 11**: Similar to Nr 12, but less concise.
- **No. 16**: A pawn captures 5 times in the final, but the move economy could be improved.
- **No. 17**: A pawn captures 6 times in the final, but many other captures unfortunately blur the content.
- **No. 18**: It is surprising that the [wRa1] is eventually captured on a8, but this pales in comparison with Nr 13.

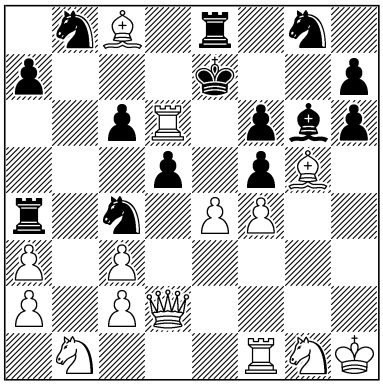
Now for the awarded problems.

14 **Dirk Borst**
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
1. Prize



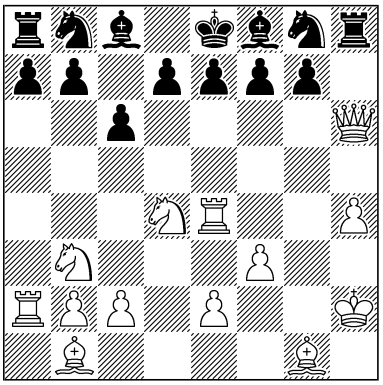
Proof game in 24.5 16+14

09 **Roberto Osorio**
Jorge Lois
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
Special Prize



Proof game in 28 14+14

15 **Dirk Borst**
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
2. Prize



Proof game in 20 13+14

1. Prize: No. 14 by Dirk Borst

Prize money: 250 Euros; first/second author guess: Andrey Frolkin; Stelvio solving time: 2s

1.e4 a5 2.♗c4 ♖a6 3.♔e2 ♖g6 4.♔d3 ♖g3+ 5.h×g3 ♘f6 6.♖h6 ♘h5 7.♖c6 f6 8.♗g8 ♘a6 9.c4 ♘b8 10.♕b3 ♘a6 11.♕b6 ♘b8 12.b4 ♘a6 13.♗b2 ♘b8 14.♗d4 ♘a6 15.♘c3 ♘b8 16.♖e1 ♘a6 17.♖e3 ♘b8 18.♖f3 ♘a6 19.♖f5 ♘b8 20.f4 ♘a6 21.♗f2 ♘c5+ 22.♔d4 ♘d3 23.♗e1 ♘f2 24.♘d1 ♘h3 25.g×h3.

It is obvious from the diagram that this SPG includes some sort of long trajectory for black. While solving, I was especially pleased by the way the white king keeps both black knights simultaneously in check during the midgame, forcing [♘b8] to perform numerous switchbacks, since no other moves are available. The king can only move to his final position pretty late in the game. This then unchains the black knight, which in turn travels to his final square. As a result, we count a grand total of 17 successive moves by the [♘b8] – an impressive achievement. The move economy is excellent, only a short introduction is needed before the main theme begins. And solving is pleasantly straight-forward, which I find to be a positive.

Special Prize: No. 09 by Roberto Osorio and Jorge Lois

Prize money: 150 Euros; first/second author guess: Osorio/Lois; Stelvio solving time: 1.5h

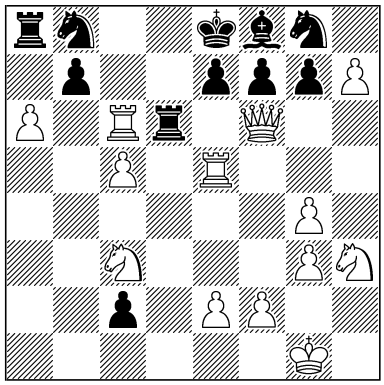
1. h4 ♘f6 2. h5 ♖g8 3. h6 g×h6 4. ♘c3 ♖g4 5. ♖b1 ♖a4 6. g4 d5 7. g5 ♗f5 8. g6 ♘fd7 9. g7 ♗g6 10. g8=♘ f5 11. ♘f6+ e×f6 12. e4 ♗a3 13. b×a3 ♘c6 14. ♖b6 ♘e7 15. ♖d6 c6 16. ♗a6 ♕a5 17. ♘ce2 ♕c3 18. d×c3 b5 19. ♗g5 b4 20. f4 b3 21. ♘f3 b2 22. 0-0 b1=♘ 23. ♔h1 ♘d2 24. ♘eg1 ♘c4 25. ♘d2 ♘g8 26. ♘b1 ♔e7 27. ♕d2 ♖e8 28. ♗c8 ♘b8.

In absolute terms, this has to be the best problem. I'm honored that the authors chose to submit this masterpiece to this tourney. It would have received an almost certain 1. Prize in basically any other

tourney. It shows the most ambitious theme - by far. Both pairs of knights exchange places, without capturing of course. This is the infamous challenge number 24 in the 2014 article by Nicolas Dupont about open problems in the SPG field.
Sadly, I cannot give this the first prize, because the theme of this tourney is only marginally shown. It goes without saying, that it is worth it to study this problem in detail!
The authors provided this problem as HC+, with detailed reasoning. Actually, the reasoning has one loophole, but luckily, the strategy missed by the reasoning does not lead to cooks. I added some more collision detection logic around switchbacking knights, and now Stelvio in the current development version can fully verify this within 1.5 hours.
It is left as an exercise for the reader to eliminate the visible promoted piece in the diagram …

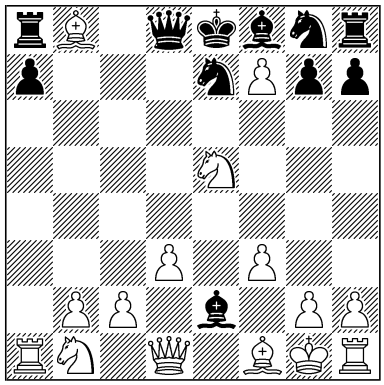
2. Prize: No. 15 by Dirk Borst
Prize money: 100 Euros; second author guess: Gianni Donati; Stelvio solving time: 8s
1.♘f3 c6 2.♘d4 ♕a5 3.f3 ♕×d2+ 4.♕×d2 h5 5.♕h6 h4 6.♗e3 h3 7.♘d2 h×g2 8.h4 g1=♗ 9.♗h3 ♗h2 10.♗e6 ♗c7! 11.0-0 ♗a5 12.♔h2 ♘a6 13.♖g1 ♘b4 14.♖g4 ♘×a2 15.♖e4 ♘b4 16.♗a2 ♘a6 17.♘2b3 ♗e1 18.♗b1 ♗f2 19.♖a2 ♗g1+ 20.♗×g1 ♘b8.
Starting with the 9th move, black only plays thematic moves: 6 moves by the [♞b8] and 6 moves with the promoted [♟h7]. In the knights case, a long switchback is performed, in the pawn case, we see a roundtrip, where the promoted bishop is eventually captured on its promotion square (a Donati/Prentos piece). I liked the esthetics of this problem a lot, it is not too complicated, but very enjoyable and clean.

03 Michel Caillaud
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
3. Prize



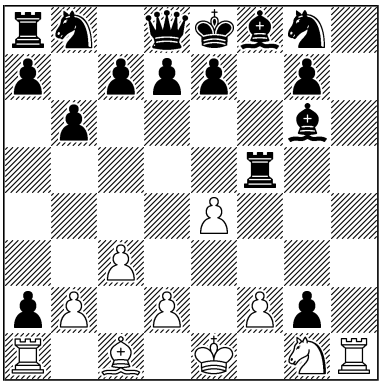
Proof game in 27 13+11

05 Joachim Hambros
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
1. Honorable mention



Proof game in 12.5 15+11

04 Silvio Baier
Christoph Fieberg
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
2. Honorable mention



Proof game in 15 10+16

3. Prize: No. 03 by Michel Caillaud
First/second author guess: Silvio; Stelvio solving time: 15s
1.g4 c5 2.♗g2 ♕c7 3.♔f1 ♕g3 4.h×g3 c4 5.♖h6 c3 6.♖c6 c×b2 7.c4 a5 8.♕b3 a4 9.♕f3 a3 10.♘c3 b1=♗ 11.♗b2 a×b2 12.a4 h5 13.a5 ♖h6 14.a6 ♗h7 15.♖a5 b1=♗ 16.♖e5 d5 17.c5 Rd6 18.♕f6 ♗bg6 19.♗e4 h4 20.♗c2 h3 21.d3 h2 22.♘h3 h1=♗ 23.♔g1 ♗he4 24.d×e4! ♗cf5 25.e×f5! d4 26.f×g6! d3 27.g×h7! d×c2(!)
Four bishops, the original one plus 3 promoted ones are captured in diagonal fashion by a pawn in the last few moves. As a dessert, an opposite color bishop is also captured on this diagonal. A skillfully executed plan. This is the best problem in the category of "diagonal pawn captures at the end"', which was the idea in several problems. I guessed this content pretty quickly, but finding the solution was far from easy.

1. Honorable mention: No. 05 by Joachim Hambros
Second author guess: Dirk Borst; Stelvio solving time: 3s
1.d3 c5 2.♗f4 ♘c6 3.♗b8 d6 4.♘f3 ♗g4 5.♘e5 ♗×e2 6.f3 b5 7.♔f2 b4 8.♔g1 b3 9. a×b3 c4 10. b×c4 d5 11. c×d5 e6 12. d×e6 ♘ce7 13. e×f7#.
Apart from No. 03, I liked this diagonal pawn capturing finale the most. Not only are the captured pieces

also all pawns, but they all move to their capture square just before being captured. So both sides partake in the finale, not only the capturing side, which is a big thematic plus. As a bonus, black plays a tempo move with one of its pawns beforehand. Nice.

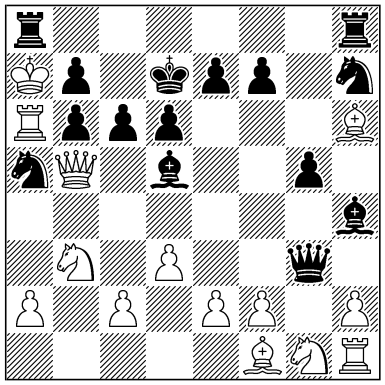
2. Honorable mention: No. 04 by Silvio Baier and Christoph Fieberg

Second author guess: Joachim Hambros; Stelvio solving time: 1s

1.♘c3 h5 2.♘d5 h4 3.c3 h3 4.♕b3 h×g2 5.h4 b6 6.♖h3 ♗a6 7.♖e3 ♗d3 8.♖e6 ♗g6 9.e4 ♖h5 10.♗c4 ♖f5 11.h5 f×e6 12.h6 e×d5 13.h7 d×c4 14.h8=♖ c×b3 15.♖h1 b×a2.

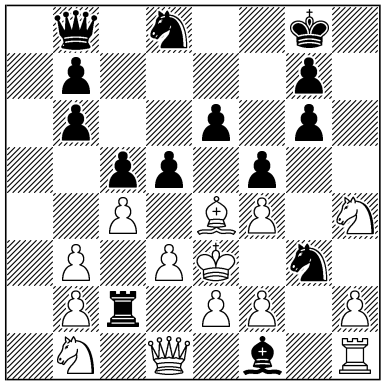
An enjoyable problem, where the common diagonal pawn-capturing finale (capturing each piece type once!), is enriched by a pawn moving straight for Pronkin purposes. Very nice.

07 **Mark Kirtley**
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
3. Honorable mention



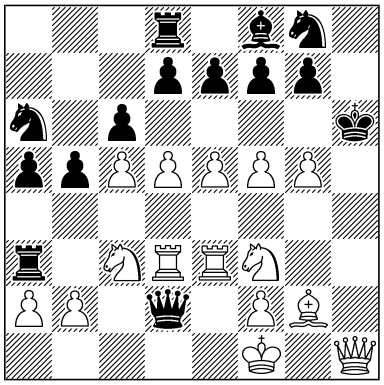
Proof game in 29 14+15

08 **Mark Kirtley**
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
4. Honorable mention



Proof game in 23.5 14+14

06 **Per Olin**
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
Commendation



Proof game in 20.5 15+14

3. Honorable mention: No. 07 by Mark Kirtley

Second author guess: Paul Raican Stelvio solving time: Impossible currently.

1.g4 ♘c6 2.g5 ♘a5 3.g6 c6 4.g×h7 g6 5.d3 ♗g7 6.♔d2 ♗×b2 7.♔e3 ♘f6 8.♔f4 ♕c7+ 9.♔g5 ♕g3+ 10.♔h6 d6 11.♔g7 ♗e6 12.♗h6 ♔d7 13.♘d2 ♖hb8 14.h8=♖ ♗d5 15.♖c8 ♔e6 16.♔f8 ♘h7+ 17.♔e8 ♗f6 18.♔d8 ♗h4 19.♔c7 g5 20.♖h8 ♖g8 21.♖b1 ♖g6 22.♖b6 ♖ag8 23.♕b1 ♖8g7 24.♖a8 a×b6 25.♔b8 ♔d7 26.♖a6 ♖g8! 27.♔a7 ♖h8! 28.♕b5 ♖gg8! 29.♘b3 ♖a8+.

The presented theme is evident when looking at the diagram: A long white king trajectory and some skillful maneuvering by the rooks to make it possible. The content is well presented and most of it happens at the end, nonetheless the finale is not as clear-cut as in some other entries.

This SPG reminds me a bit of the monumental 1. Prize from the Ben-Zvi MT by Michel. But of course, any problem pales in comparison to the latter unreal masterpiece.

I hope this entry is in fact correct – at the moment it is impossible to verify it by a solving program, due to the many seemingly free moves.

4. Honorable mention: No. 08 by Mark Kirtley

Stelvio solving time: 1min

1.g3 d5 2.♗g2 ♗h3 3.♗e4 e6 4.♘f3 ♗d6 5.♖g1 ♗f4 6.g×f4 ♗f1 7.♖g6 h×g6 8.c4 ♖h3 9.♘h4 ♖c3 10.d3 f5 11.♗e3 ♘f6 12.♗b6 a×b6 13.♔d2 ♖aa3 14.♔e3 ♖ab3 15.a×b3 c5 16.♖a8 ♘c6 17.♖c8 ♖c2 18.♖c7 ♕b8 19.♖c8+ ♔f7 20.♖h8 ♘d8 21.♖h5 ♔g8 22.♖g5 ♘h5 23.♖g1 ♘g3 24.♖h1.

I guessed the theme of this problem quickly, what else but a long white rook journey could it be? Black has no free moves, but white has many. Since we need a victim on g6 quickly, which can only be [♖h1], that means the [♖a1] needs to travel to h1. With the traffic jam installed beforehand, the journey is eventful, the rook travelling to all four corners. This problem suffered from competition: Long rook journeys are not new, see for instance P0001716, which even has a more subtle motivation (tempo loss).

Commendations without order

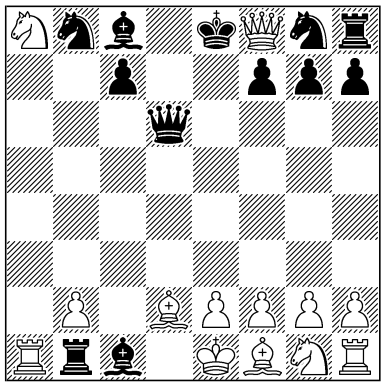
Commendation: No. 06 by Per Olin

Stelvio solving time: 1s

1.d4 h6 2.♗g5 h×g5 3.g4 ♖h3 4.♗g2 ♖a3 5.h4 b5 6.♖h3 ♗b7 7.♖d3 ♗e4 8.♘f3 ♗f5 9.e4 c6 10.♔e2 ♕a5 11.♕h1 ♕d2+ 12.♔f1 a5 13.c4 ♘a6 14.♘c3 0-0-0 15.♖e1 ♔c7 16.♖ee3 ♔d6 17.c5+ ♔e6 18.d5+ ♔f6 19.e5+ ♔g6 20.g×f5+ ♔h6 21.h×g5#.

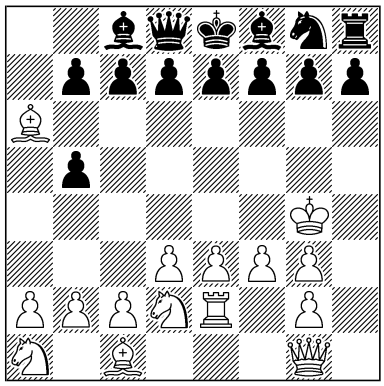
The fun theme can be seen within seconds, and I like the fact that both sides take part in the finale. This was very quick to solve, even for me.

12 **Per Olin**
Andriy Frolkin
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
Commendation



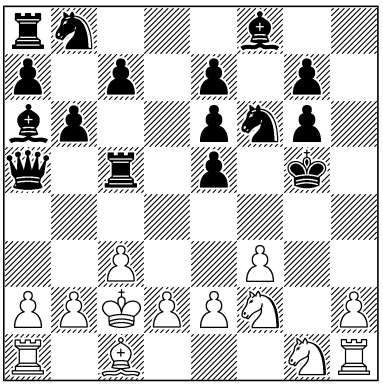
Proof game in 11.5 13+12

13 **Mark Kirtley**
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
Commendation



Proof game in 19.5 15+14

20 **Diana Tognini**
***R**andomly **A**rranged*
RA-50 JT 2024-2025
Commendation



Proof game in 14 13+16

Commendation: No. 12 by Per Olin and Andrjy Frolkin

Second author guess: Christoph Fieberg; Stelvio solving time: 1s

1.a4 d5 2.a5 d4 3.a6 d3 4.a×b7 d×c2 5.d4 a5 6.d5 a4 7.d6 a3 8.d×e7 a2 9.♕d6 ♕×d6 10.♗d2 c1=♗ 11.b×a8=♘ a×b1=♖ 12.e×f8=♕+.

A short and very economical presentation of Phenix-AUW at the very end. Well done.

Commendation: No. 13 by Mark Kirtley

First author guess: Michel; second author guess: Michel or Mark Kirtley or Dirk Borst or Gianni Donati; Stelvio solving time: 1s

1.e3 ♘a6 2.♔e2 ♘c5 3.♔f3 ♘e4 4.♔g4 ♘g3 5.h×g3 ♖b8 6.♖h6 ♖a8 7.♖b6 a×b6 8.♘f3 ♖a5 9.♗a6 ♖h5 10.d3 ♖h1 11.♘bd2 ♖e1 12.♘b3 ♖e2 13.♕g1 ♖e1 14.♗d2 ♖f1 15.♖e1 b5 16.♖e2 ♖b1 17.♗c1 ♖a1 18.♘fd2 ♖b1 19.f3 ♖a1 20.♘×a1.

What an esthetic and elegant problem! After a short and concise intro, the only thing for black left to do is to keep the [♜a8] alive long enough and have him eventually captured. That these very weak requirements are sufficient for such a long, unique rook path is miraculous. The rook moves start with a switchback on a/b columns on the eighth row. This switchback is beautifully mirrored geometrically and in time in the last rook moves, also a switchback on a/b columns, but this time on the first row. And there is even an additional third switchback in between plus a fourth one by white. This SPG is not a tour-de-force problem, like many top-notch contemporary SPGs are – this SPG shines with its fabulous purity.

Sadly, this great problem is mostly anticipated by PDB P1100805. But it is slightly better than its anticipation and therefore deserves to be mentioned in the award.

Commendation: No. 20 by Diana Tognini

Stelvio solving time: 1s

1.g4 b6 2.g5 ♗a6 3.g6 h×g6 4.♗h3 ♖h5 5.♗e6 d×e6 6.♘c3 ♕d5 7.♘e4 ♕a5 8.c3 ♖c5 9.♕b3 e5 10.♕e6 f×e6 11.f3 ♔f7 12.♘f2 ♔f6 13.♔d1 ♔g5 14.♔c2 ♘f6.

At first glance, I had no clue what this was about. But I was blind. My initials are on display here, so this is not really thematic, but a fun take for this kind of tourney I guess.