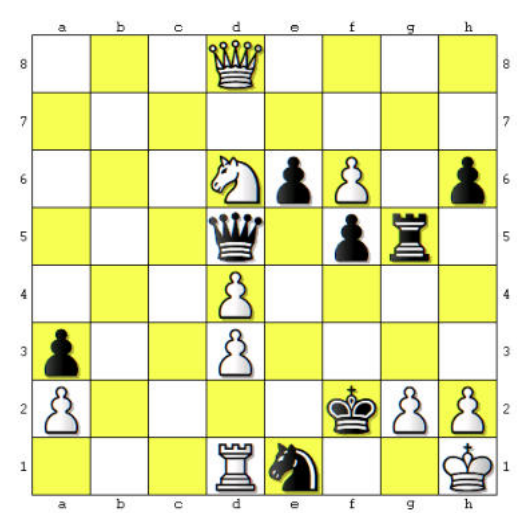




Steffen Slumstrup Nielsen & Martin Minski

White to move and win

> 5th Prize <

This study radiates the unmistakable atmosphere of “high-level madness” that only a few Authors in the world are capable of creating coherently. At first glance, the position seems almost unstable: Queens hanging everywhere, mating nets constantly appearing and disappearing, mutual tactical explosions at

every move. And yet, beneath this apparent chaos, there is extraordinary precision.

The entire play revolves around an astonishing dance of white and black Queens, both repeatedly exposed, repeatedly “offered”, and repeatedly untouchable.

Almost every natural capture loses immediately. This creates a rare psychological effect: the reader begins to distrust material logic entirely and is forced to navigate the study through geometry, timing, and latent mating threats alone. Human civilization spent centuries teaching chess players “*if you can take the Queen, take the Queen*”, only for studies like this to arrive and politely set the textbook on fire.

Particularly impressive and mesmerizing is the cyclic maneuvering of the white Queen: 3.Qa8!, 4.Qb8!, 5.Qb7!, 6.Qf7!, 7.Qh5!., a sequence that feels less like ordinary study play and more like an orchestral construction. Each move preserves hidden resources while avoiding immediate tactical catastrophes. The precision required is extreme: even a single tempo loss collapses the position.

Equally remarkable is Black’s defensive resistance. The repeated defensive Queen maneuvers (...Qf3, ...Qh3, ...Qg3) create an hypnotic equilibrium where both sides seem permanently one move away from disaster. The study achieves something very difficult: sustained tension without release for nearly the entire solution.

What impresses me most is that the complexity here does not feel artificial. The play never gives the sensation of random engine noise or analytical inflation. Everything seems driven by a coherent internal logic, even when that logic borders on delirium. This is the kind of study that reminds us why certain composers become legendary: they are not merely solving positions, but reshaping the psychological expectations of the solver himself.

A powerful and deeply modern work. Very high distinction is unavoidable. Only one small reservation prevented this study from reaching the absolute tops of the award: despite its extraordinary richness and sustained tension, it somehow misses that final decisive “explosion” capable of sealing the whole work with an unforgettable concluding image.

Solution: 1. Rd2+ Kf1 2. Nc4 ! Qf3 !
(2. .. f4 3. Qxd5 exd5 4. Ne5 Rf5 5. Ng4 h5 6. Rf2#)

3. Qa8 !
(3. gxf3 ?? Rg1#)

3. .. Qh3 !
(3. .. Qf4 4. g3 Rg8 ! 5. f7 ! Rxa8 6. gxf4 +-)
(3. .. Qg3 4. Qe8 Qf4 5. Qxe6 +-)

4. Qb8
(4. Rd1 ? Kf2 5. Rd2+ Kf1 {loss of time}) (4. f7 ?? f4 5. f8=Q
(5. g3 Rxc3 -) 5. .. Qxh2+ 6. Kxh2 Rh5#) (4. g3 ?? Rxc3 -)

4. .. Qf3 ! 5. Qb7 ! Qg3 !
(5. .. Qh3 ! 6. Qc7 Qf3 ! 7. Qc6 {! +-})

6. Qf7
(6. hxc3 ?? 6. .. Rh5#) (6. f7 ?? Rh5 -)

6. .. Qf3 ! 7. Qh5 !!
(7. Qxe6 ?? Nxc2 -)

7. .. Rxc5 8. gxf3 f4 9. Ne5 Rf5 10. Ng4 Nxf3
(10. .. h5 11. Rf2#)

11. Rf2+ Ke1 12. Rxf3 h5 13. Ne5 1-0

Judge's Appendix: On Endings and Artistic Priorities

While working on this award, I found myself repeatedly returning to the study by Nielsen and Minski. Not because of any doubt regarding its quality, but because it raised a question that has accompanied endgame studies for decades: what constitutes a truly satisfying conclusion?

The study contains a rich and highly precise battle in which White must navigate a dense network of threats and defensive resources. Yet, at a certain moment, an alternative possibility appears: 7. ... Qxc5 8. Ne3#!. One may imagine a presentation leading directly to a spectacular mating conclusion, a possibility which, from my own artistic perspective, possesses considerable appeal. As many readers will have noticed throughout this award, I am often attracted by positions where the logic of the play culminates in a striking conclusion, particularly when that conclusion takes the form of a paradoxical mate.

For a brief moment, I was even tempted to contact the Authors and discuss whether such a presentation might better highlight certain aspects of the study. In the end, however, I deliberately chose not to do so.

The reason is simple. The Authors are among the most talented and experienced study composers of our time. The study contains several opportunities to steer the play towards mating conclusions, and yet all of them have been consistently avoided. It would therefore be unreasonable to assume that this was accidental. On the contrary, the submitted version should be regarded as a conscious artistic statement.

And this leads to a broader observation.

Not every great study needs to end with a brilliant mate. Some composers seek a final picture. Others seek a final process. Some value the shock of an unexpected tactical resolution, while others prefer a longer demonstration in which the study continues to reveal new layers even after its central idea has become apparent.

Neither approach is inherently superior. They simply reflect different conceptions of what an endgame study should ultimately achieve.

My own preferences undoubtedly lean toward memorable final images, perhaps influenced by my long-standing involvement with chess problems of all genres, from directmates to fairies. Yet a judge must be careful not to confuse personal taste with universal truth. For this reason, I chose to evaluate the study exactly as it was submitted, respecting the Authors' artistic intention rather than the version I might personally have preferred.

If this appendix proves anything, it is perhaps that the best studies do not merely provide answers. They continue asking questions long after the solution has been found.