

Comments on Petko's article "The Wonderful (new genre) Parry Series" in SG51

by Dan Meinking

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IGM Petko Petkov published part 1 of a 2-part article in SG51 (*StrateGems*, July-September 2010), titled "The Wonderful (new genre) Parry Series". This is a meticulously laid out treatise on the relatively new parry series-mover, and is extremely well-written. The article is unique in its no-stone-untuned approach towards the material presented, a great introduction for the uninitiated!

That said, Petko offers a number of "theoretical" (his word) points which are certainly worth examining more closely. The views expressed below are my own, and should be taken as "just my opinion". I arranged my comments so that they fit snugly on 2 pages.

"fairy invention"

Petko and I had an email exchange on this topic about 10 months ago. I do not consider Parry Series to be any more "fairy" than normal series. Petko argued that, according to the FIDE Album, normal series is considered "fairy". True, but then so are stalemate problems (=n, s=n, h=n, etc.), even though there is nothing inherently "fairy" about them. In fact, the *StrateGems* editors decided many years ago to initiate a new forum for (non-fairy) **Series-Movers & Stalemates**, for that very reason.

I've used the word 'invent' myself, but Parry Series is really a discovery. One invents an automobile, but one discovers electricity! Surely, the latter analogy more closely resembles how Parry Series came into being. As Cornel Pacurar opined on his excellent site, <http://www.chessproblems.ca/>: "[Dan is] probably not the first one to think about this, but the first one to make it public nevertheless!"

"Pser"

I can see this as a useful abbreviation in written text; eg. "That was a nice Pser problem." But, as Cornel points out, it can lead to anomalies such as "Pser series" (as used in the 3rd paragraph of the article). However, I do not see the need for using "P" (capital P) as part of the stipulation. To me, the "P" looks gawdy. I much prefer **pser-*** vs. **Pser-***.

"The availability of a minimum of one parry half-move from the idle-side is an obliged element of a Parry Series problem!"

I agree. However, even such an 'obvious' point is not absolute. Thomas Maeder opined:

"I'm not convinced of Petko's view that the solution of a pser problem needs at least 1 parrying move. I can imagine problems where there is a choice between a checking and a non-checking move within the series. In a traditional problem, that choice would be trivial, since the side playing the series must not give check. In a pser problem, though, the checking move could be ruled out because the forced parrying move could have a negative effect (e.g. it could be a critical move).

In such a situation, the solution would be the same as in the related ser stipulation, but it is more interesting in a pser stipulation."

"When composing Pser Reflex problems... reflex tries are obligatory."

Try-play is always a good thing to have. A very good thing, even. But one shouldn't view tries as an absolute necessity.

phser-s#/r# vs. pser-hs#/hr# / pserw-* / pserb-*

My personal opinion is: the simpler, the better. I'm content with using *Popeye* notation (phser-*) for less-common types with helpful parries, including hs#, hr#, etc. If the *Popeye* team decides to implement pserw-* & pserb-* forms, then we too should adapt.

"Pser requires a series of half-moves by black or white."

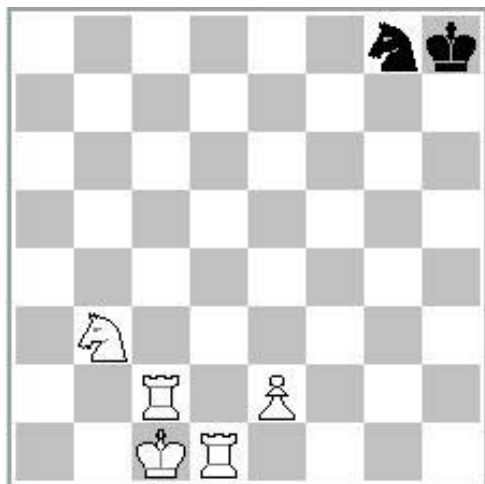
Petko goes on to state that $X > Y$ should be true (where X/Y = number of half-moves by the series-side / idle-side), and that if $X=Y$ is true, the problem should be stipulated as White/Black Must-Check, or UltraSchachZwang (USZ). Sounds logical, but it's incorrect.

(1) In the example **N2**, the solution ends: 6.Bf6+ Kf8 7.Bg7+ hxg7#. However, if we start with wKa3, -bBh3, =bSh7 for pser-h#6, then it ends with: 5.Bf6+ Kf7 6.Bg7 (not-check) hxg7#. So... if $X=Y$ (as here), is the composer compelled to make the last move (for the series-side) a *check*, just so the problem meets the "Must Check" condition? No.

(2) See Geoff's excellent **N8**, which has "2 solutions". Notice that $X=Y$ in the 2nd solution, a contradiction of Petko's own criteria.

(3) Consider this example:

DM, *MatPlus Forum* 2010



(= 5+2)

pser-s#12 (5+2) C-

The solutions runs: 1.Rh1+ Sh6 2.Rc8+ Kg7 3.Rg1+ Kf7! 4.Rf1+ Sf5 5.Rc7+ Ke6 6.Sc5+ Kd5
7.Rd1+ Sd4 8.e4+ Kc4 9.Sb7+ Kb3 10.Sa5+ Ka2 11.Rc2+ Ka1 12.Sb3+ Sxb3#

Originally, I had intended to start wKe1 wRa1 for 1.0-0-0! (pser-s#13), but that was cooked by Kostas Prentos. So I lopped off the first move and didn't give it a second thought. But... that just happens to make every white move a *check*.

According to Petko's assertion, this (revised) problem must be stipulated as "White Must Check". But doing so would trivialize the solving aspect of the problem (not that it is difficult to solve, mind you). Should I be obliged to add a non-checking intro move just so I can stipulate pser-* instead of "White Must Check"? Of course not.

(4) In an email to Petko, I stated that Parry Series virtually makes UltraSchachZwang (USZ) forms "obsolete". But... Arno Tüngler correctly points out that many USZ problems would be cooked if stipulated as pser-*. A more sensible approach is:

If a problem can be expressed as pser-, that is preferable to USZ from the solver's perspective.*

"Non-thematic parry moves, which exist only as mechanical instruments against opposing checks, are unacceptable."

Surely no composer worth his/her salt is going to purposely add "mechanical" parries. But... what if it's unavoidable in a particular matrix? Should the composer then be forced to abandon their idea? Clearly, no. Just like every other problem form, checks (and parries) must be evaluated in context.

I also believe that -- all things being equal -- a non-checking key is preferable to a checking key. Of course, that should not be taken to the extreme. Sometimes (as in the diagram above) it's impossible or impractical to add a non-checking intro. One might argue that, in this example, it would even be non-thematic to add a non-checking key as the (3) main white units 'return' to their diagram squares.

In short: every composer must decide for themselves what constitutes an 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' check / parry for a given problem.