

## Chess Blitz champions Luke McShane

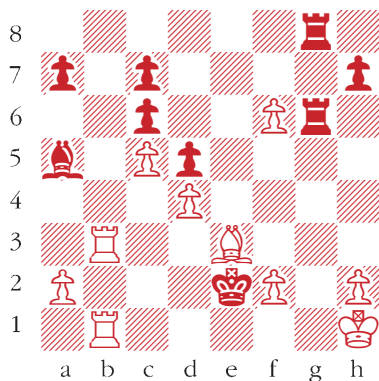
Besides the controversial anticlimax at the World Blitz Championships, in which Magnus Carlsen and Ian Nepomniachtchi agreed to share the title, there were several old-fashioned tournament winners to celebrate in New York. China's Ju Wenjun, the reigning women's world champion in classical chess, won her first women's world blitz championship. The women's world rapid championship, held in the days beforehand, was won by Humpy Koneru, who first won the title in 2019.

The winner of the open rapid section was more of an outlier. Eighteen-year-old Volodar Murzin from Russia was seeded just 59th at the start of the event but his undefeated 10/13 score earned him first place outright, ahead of the world's elite. It would have been foolish to underestimate him, as he had finished in fifth place the year before.

Murzin's most impressive game was his upset win against Fabiano Caruana in the second round. But he needed a little luck as Black in the penultimate round (see below): Praggnanandhaa has an extra passed pawn and the Ba5 is shut out of the game. One way to win was 32 f7! Rf8 33 R1b2+ Kf1 34 f4 Be1 (to prevent Rb2-f2+) 35 Rd3!, preparing Rd3-d1 and Rb2-f2#. Instead, he repeated moves and then erred catastrophically.

### R Praggnanandhaa-Volodar Murzin

White to play, position after 31...Rg2-g6



**32 R3b2+ Kf3 33 Rb3 Ke2 34 R1b2+?** 34 f7 still wins. **Kf1 35 Rb1+ Be1** What follows is

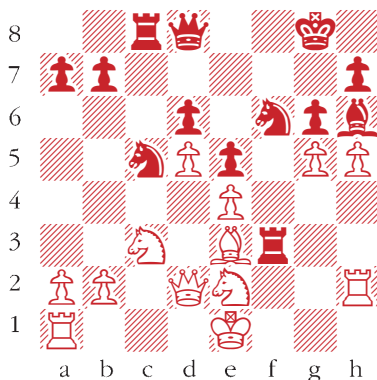
### PUZZLE NO. 833

White to play. Karthikeyan-Tabatabaei, Qatar Masters 2024. With his next move, Karthikeyan initiated a winning combination. What did he play? Email answers to [chess@spectator.co.uk](mailto:chess@spectator.co.uk) by Monday 20 January. There is a prize of a £20 John Lewis voucher for the first correct answer out of a hat. Please include a postal address.

**Last week's solution** : 1 Qb4! After 1...Kd6 or 1...Kd5 2 Qxc5# After 1...d6 or 1...Kf5 it's 2 Qe4#. Or 1...f5 2 Qd4#, or 1...d5 2 Qf4#

**Last week's winner** Alfred Shaw, Thornley, Lancashire

White to play, position after 19...Ne8-f6!!



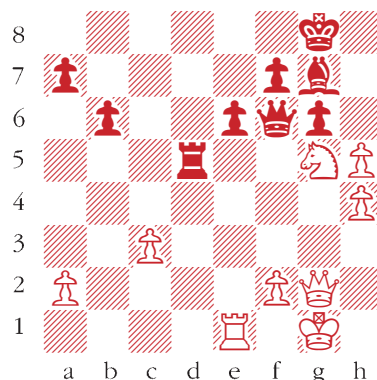
hopeless for White, but there is no good answer to the threat of mate on g1. **36 Rxe1+ Kxe1 37 Rb1+ Ke2 38 Bf4 Rxf6 39 Bg3 Kd3 40 Rb4 Rg4 41 Rb7 Rf7 42 f4 h5 43 Kg2 h4 44 Kf3 hxg3 45 Kxg4 g2 White resigns**

I admired Murzin's brilliance back in 2023, when he played a spectacular game to beat Shreyas Royal, who was then just 14 but is now England's youngest grandmaster.

### Shreyas Royal-Volodar Murzin

Fide Grand Swiss, Isle of Man 2023

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 O-O 5 Be3 d6 6 h3 e5 7 d5 Na6 8 g4 Nc5 9 f3 c6 10 Qd2 cxd5 11 cxd5 Ne8 12 h4 f5 13 g5 fxe4 14 fxe4 Bg4 15 Be2 Bxe2 16 Ngxe2 Rc8 17 h5 Rf3 18 Rh4 Bh6!** A neat move as 19 gxh6? allows Qxh4+. Moreover, the threat is Rf3xe3 followed by Bh6xg5. **19 Rh2 Nf6!!** (see diagram) An ingenious self-fork. Now 20 gxf6? Bxe3 wins, while 20 gxh6 Ng4 wins material, e.g. 21 Bg5 Nxh2 22 Bxd8? Rf1 mate. **20 Bxc5 Ng4!** Yet another powerful shot: h2, c5 and g5 are all hanging. **21 gxh6 Nxh2 22 O-O-O Nf1 23 Qc2 Rxc5** Black's material advantage is now decisive. **24 Qa4 a5 25 Kb1 g5 26 Nc1 b5 27 Nxb5 Qd7 28 Nc3 Rfxc3!** A final tactical flourish. **29 Qxd7 Nd2+ 30 Rxd2 Rxc1 Mate**



## Competition Blue Monday Victoria Lane

For Competition 3382 you were invited to write a poem to mark this day, officially the dreariest of the year. (This year, as a few pointed out, it doubles as Inauguration Day. Things can only get better!) Responses ranged from Tracy Davidson's 'It's just a Monday. You'll be fine' to Sylvia Fairley's despairing 'When will the End of Life bill become law?' The £25 prizes go to the following.

I never liked the Christmas crowd,  
Carolling all and sundry.  
A January man, and proud,  
My feast day is Blue Monday,  
Which I keep rather as a fast,  
Doing no holidaying,  
I work, like others of the past  
Whose debts required paying.  
No offices need I perform,  
I work all day. Come evening,  
I sit home, hopeless, far from warm,  
Devout yet unbelieving.  
Blue Monday shows life as a swizz,  
A doldrum without savour.  
I see you know that's how it is  
And keep it likewise, neighbour.  
*Adrian Fry*

The dreary weather, Christmas debt;  
those resolutions? – all regret.  
You've missed by miles each target set.  
That's why it's 'blue'.

Your plans for gym'n' jogging shot,  
likewise that early-rising slot  
to hone your novel's perfect plot –  
all failed by you.

Dry January's a real mistake –  
What's wrong with drink, for heaven's sake? –  
You need some solace for the ache  
from Auld Lang Syne.

This media hype of misery?  
Blue Monday's got no pedigree.  
Give it two fingers: we agree.  
Uncork some wine.  
*D.A. Prince*

My kingdom for a decent horse!  
My life has surely run its course.  
Remorse invades me: here's my soul,  
It's filing for a quick divorce.

The wrapping paper fills the bins,  
Soaked in the dregs of flavoured Gins –  
Begins to feel like asystole,  
Unsteady on post-Christmas pins.

The tree's been tipped, I've packed the decs,  
And Doom is Emperor Rex –  
My specs are rosy-tintless. Bowl  
Me no more googlies. It's a hex,

The New Year letdown, scourge or curse,  
That lets the Christmas cheer disperse,  
And worse, plays dirty whack-a-mole  
With hope. Send me round the hearse!  
*Bill Greenwell*

For I will consider the cat Monday,  
 For he is a mixture of grumpiness and buggery  
 After a hairball-hacking big weekend.  
 For firstly, he knocks over the office coffee pot,  
 For secondly he pounces upon his mouselike prey,  
 And nobody escapes his brutishness.  
 And he sharpens his claws against me,  
 Using my desk as a litter tray.  
 For he is an associate of printers and other evils,  
 Fond of hissing and flea-spreading works,  
 For he is hated by the overworked and hag-ridden,  
 And by snarking at him I have found out he spits.  
 For he is justly maligned.  
 For the British Mondays are the worst in Europe,  
 Unless he is a public holiday  
 In which case I purr in thankfulness.

Janine Beacham

Blue Monday always signalled back-to-school  
 After the weekend's free regime of play  
 What did they teach at school? 'You will obey' –  
 The prison-house of learning's brutal rule.  
 One dinnertime I broke out, a rash fool  
 At large, and found my epiphanic way  
 To a tabooed half-world jukebox café.  
 Fats Domino sang 'Blue Monday'. Fats was 'cool'.  
 Now Fats can be revived on global screens:  
 A charismatic virtual omnipresence  
 Whose Creole voice, the sound of New Orleans,  
 Once mellowed the mad hell of adolescence.  
 Remembering that big black angel means  
 A reborn touch of youth in my senescence.  
 Basil Ransome-Davies

A cold coming we had of it,  
 Through charcoal skies and slush-black nights,  
 The very dead of winter;  
 We three wise men – Starmer, Mandelson, Farage –  
 Travelling from a land of frost and silvery haze  
 To Washington, where gold adorns the johns  
 And flags fly blood-red, white and blue.  
 To honour Him, the orange Lord, Misrule,  
 To hear his Word, a blur of yellow lies  
 On this third Monday of this inaugural year.  
 The faithful cheer – a choir of violet noise –  
 And wave cerulean banners.  
 Clamouring in a crush of purple pomp,  
 Craning for a glimpse of saffron halo.  
 The day bleeds out in hues of every kind –  
 And yet they call this Monday blue.  
 Ralph Goldswain

Shall I compare this to a rotten day?  
 It is more awful and more terrible.  
 The sky, the food, my face, my soul – all grey;  
 The accidie is near unbearable.  
 Reminders of excess come thick and fast –  
 An Amex bill lands thudding on the mat;  
 I stand upon the scales and gaze, aghast,  
 As numbers merge to say 'By God you're FAT.'  
 'Blue Monday' is the third that comes in Jan;  
 It sees our spirits reach their lowest ebb.  
 Fight hard, and tell your inner man  
 'We've only got to make it through to Feb' –  
 For Tuesday brings a snowdrop's brilliant white,  
 The first great portent of the life, the light.  
 Tom Adam

### NO. 3385: IT'S A MATCH

You are invited to submit a passage in which one well-known character from literature goes on a date with another (150 words maximum). Please email entries to [competition@spectator.co.uk](mailto:competition@spectator.co.uk) by midday on 29 January.

## Crossword

### 2686:

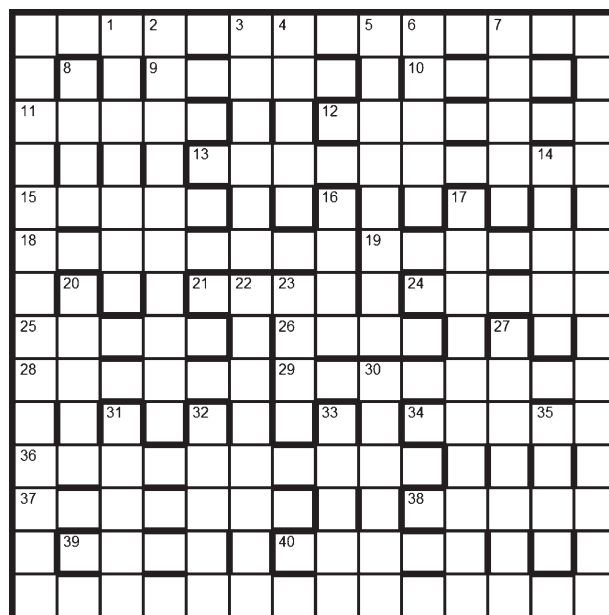
### Poem VIII

by Pabulum

Clockwise round the grid from 1 run the final words (3,6,4,3,6,3,8,4,3,4,2,6) of a poem. Two unclued lights (one of two words) are also taken from the poem, whose author's surname appears as a clued light which must be shaded.

#### Across

- 9 Canon meeting King and Queen? (5)
- 10 Harrow produces playboy (4)
- 11 One's less than large feet (5)
- 12 Coarse note in *Brief Encounter* (7)
- 13 Florence's good day in burn swimming with group of three ducks (4,6)
- 15 River Wye crossed by Nick (5)
- 18 Cicero's forte: clear soup with melted cheese (8)
- 19 Bunk is eclipsing enormous beds (6)
- 21 Uproar as I start to sing (4)
- 24 Bone from Roman villa (5)
- 26 Small child's ability when speaking (4)
- 28 We, the French, sniff with the nose (6)
- 29 Naughty pics of Miss Saigon possibly start appearing in the West (8)
- 34 Trick succeeded? Incredible! (5)
- 36 Poor Alicia Knight unruly youth slashed (10)
- 37 Divorcee playing lute with duke was very joyful (7)
- 38 Name of church next to twisted thorny tree (5)
- 39 Heroic songs edited by simpleton exuding whiskey (4)
- 40 Lustre of county close to famous (5)



#### Down

- 1 Dog in books grandchild had (7)
- 2 Elegance of Pope with refined sense (10)
- 3 See lake in valley (6)
- 4 Fish lover with love for allie primarily (5)
- 5 Nice station amid market inspires woman (8)
- 6 Makin' ale we hear? It could be brown (5)
- 7 Go around in Mini? (5)
- 8 Leader of starvelings gone for food (4)
- 14 Merry clown upset girl (5)
- 16 GDR citizen lives well to the north (4)
- 17 Three notes worry soprano? (10)
- 20 Sorted out academy following quality cut (5)
- 23 Warriors lacking respect, ignoring men from Africa (4)
- 27 Soft snow (7)
- 30 Divorce capital splits partners previously (6)
- 31 Swift runner wins old silver coin (5)
- 32 Saint Alfred's inhaled drug (5)
- 33 Upright lady (only one left) (5)
- 35 Customer stripped antique organ (4)

A first prize of a £30 John Lewis voucher and two runners-up prizes of £20 vouchers for the first correct solutions opened on 3 February. Please scan or photograph entries and email them (including the crossword number in the subject field) to [crosswords@spectator.co.uk](mailto:crosswords@spectator.co.uk), or post to: Crossword 2686, The Spectator, 22 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP. Please allow six weeks for prize delivery.

Name .....

Address .....

### CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD: THE WINNERS

The first prize of £100, three prizes of £25 and six further prizes of Adrian Bliss's *The Greatest Nobodies of History: Minor Characters from Major Moments* (Century) go to the following. The first four winners will each also receive a bottle of champagne. The solution is on page 39.

**First prize** Keith Williamson, Cambridge

**Runners-up** Wendy Meredith, Exeter, Devon; Henry Machin, Gateford, Nottinghamshire; Lin Barrett-West, Billericay, Essex

**Further runners-up** Kevin Ward, Quorn, Leicestershire; Kenneth Mills, Londonderry; Sarah Darlington, Acton Trussell, Stafford; J.J. Morris, Upper Nash, Pembrokeshire; Pam Bealby, Stockton-on-Tees; Jason James, Cambridge