

Puzzle contest: IT'S A SET UP!

**Created by Dr Tim Paulden for the
50th Anniversary of the East Devon Chess Congress**

HOW TO PLAY

In each of the 16 challenges shown on the other sheet, your goal is to construct a **legal chess position with White to move** that satisfies the given conditions, using the **fewest units (pieces and pawns) you can**. Prizes will be awarded for achieving the highest overall score, and for "winning" a specific challenge (by beating the scores of all the other entrants!)

PRIZES

Highest scores: The entrants achieving the highest overall scores will receive prizes: **£60 for 1st place** and **£30 for 2nd place**. In the event of a tie, the prize money will be split.

Challenge winners: A separate prize pot of **£60 will be split between "challenge winners"** – i.e. entrants who achieve a *uniquely high score* on a challenge, beating all other entrants. For example, if only three of the challenges have a unique "winner" (with the other challenges being tied for highest score), the £60 pot would be split three ways.

Best junior: The junior player achieving the highest score will receive a free hour of coaching or free chess MOT, courtesy of Dr Dave Regis.

All decisions made by the organiser regarding scoring and prizes are final.

ENTRY

Entry deadline: Submit your positions by **1pm on Friday 27 March 2026** via the Cognito Forms page here: <https://www.cognitoforms.com/EastDevon2026/ItsASetUp> (It is still worth submitting an incomplete set of solutions, as you may be a "challenge winner"!)

Submission tip: The Lichess board editor at <https://lichess.org/editor> may be helpful for setting up positions and copying the "position string" at the start of the FEN. (Note: The entry form will ask you to enter not only this "position string" but also the coordinates of the units, to reduce the chance of an error.)

Eligibility: Entry is free of charge. Congress participants can enter individually or pair up with someone else (either another participant or a chess friend). To be eligible for prizes, at least one of the players must be a Congress participant. Maximum of one entry per person.

Queries: Please email any queries or requests for clarification to timpaulden@gmail.com, or raise them in-person with the organiser during the Congress.

SCORING SYSTEM

Each submitted position must follow the basic placement rules of chess (e.g. both Kings on the board and not next to each other; no Pawns on the first or eighth ranks; Black cannot

already be in check because it is White to move). **Positions that violate these rules, or that do not meet the challenge conditions, will score zero points.**

The score awarded for a correctly solved challenge will be **50 points minus the total number of units used** (both White and Black), subject to the following penalties:

- **3-point penalty:** Deducted for each "promoted" piece that exceeds the material initially available at the start of a chess game (e.g. a second Queen, third Knight, etc.). You are advised to limit yourself to the initial material and avoid promoted pieces.
- **10-point penalty:** Deducted if the position you submit cannot be reached in a legally played chess game (see "**Legal positions**" section below).

Example score breakdown:

Challenge: "White has no legal moves, even though Black has only a King."

Solution: **White: Ka8, Pa7; Black: Kc8** (which has the position string **K1k5/P7/8/8/8/8/8/8**)

Score: **47 points** [50 points minus 3 units used – and no penalties apply].

LEGAL POSITIONS ("RETRO-LEGALITY") – READ CAREFULLY!

Each position you submit must be a legal position (i.e. **it could have arisen in a legally played game of chess**). It doesn't matter if the moves are strange or don't make sense – they just have to be legal! One consequence of this is that you must be able to "work backwards" from the position without getting stuck: Black must have had a feasible last move, White a feasible move before that, and so on.

- **Example 1 (Impossible King move):** Consider the position {White: Ka6, Pa7, Pb6; Black: Ka8} with White to move. Black must have just moved the King to a8, but from where? It cannot have moved from a7 (White has a pawn there), from b7 (Kings cannot be adjacent), or from b8 (the White a7 pawn would have had no valid way to deliver the check). Because Black doesn't have any feasible last move, this position could not have arisen in a game – it is "illegal" (or "retro-illegal") and would receive the 10-point penalty.
- **Example 2 (Impossible Pawn structure):** Consider the position {White: Ke1, Pa2, Pa3, Pb2; Black: Ke8} with White to move. This White pawn configuration could not have arisen in a legally played game: the a2 and b2 pawns have never moved, making it impossible for any other White pawn to end up on a3. Once again, the position is "illegal" and would receive the 10-point penalty. (*If the a3 pawn stood on a4 instead, the position would be legal: the a4 pawn could have come from c2 via the captures c2×b3 and b3×a4.*)

FINALLY, SOME IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGY

- **"Mate in one"** means placing Black in immediate checkmate.
- The term **"unit"** refers to any piece or pawn (of either colour).
- The term **"move"** includes captures, and the four different Pawn promotions (to Q, R, B, N) are regarded as different moves. For instance, if White has a pawn on a7 and Black a Knight on b8, White has exactly eight legal moves with the Pawn: a8=Q, a8=R, a8=B, a8=N, axb8=Q, axb8=R, axb8=B, and axb8=N.