



THE PUZZLING SIDE OF CHESS

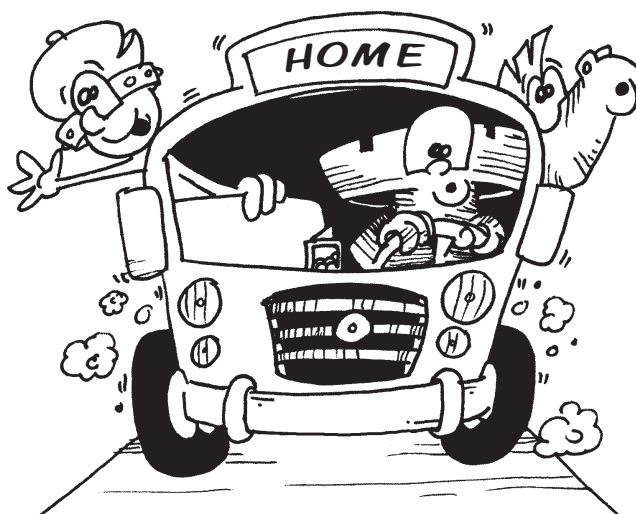
Jeff Coakley

PROOF GAMES Going Home

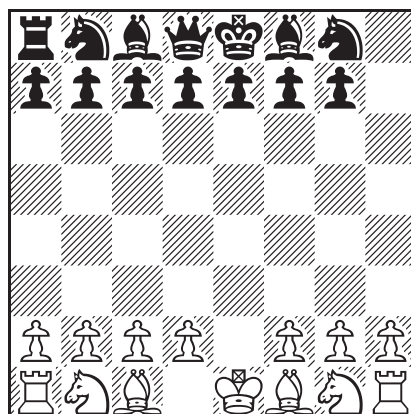
number 242

December 27, 2024

'Tis the season for travelling. So in the spirit of going home for the holidays, this column features eight *homebase* proof games. In these positions, all of the remaining pieces are on their original squares. Or at least they appear to be.



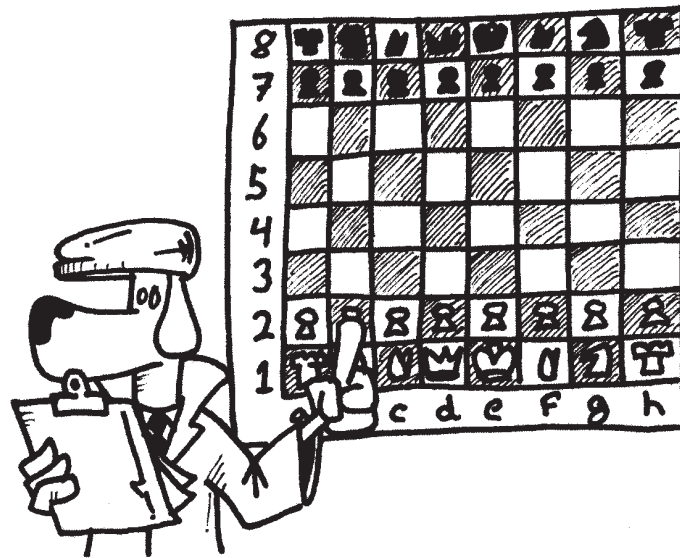
Longer Proof Game 134 (4.5 moves)



This position was reached after White's fifth turn. What were the moves?

The Chess Detective's Handbook

by Harmonius Hound



Appendix C: Notes on Homepage Proof Games

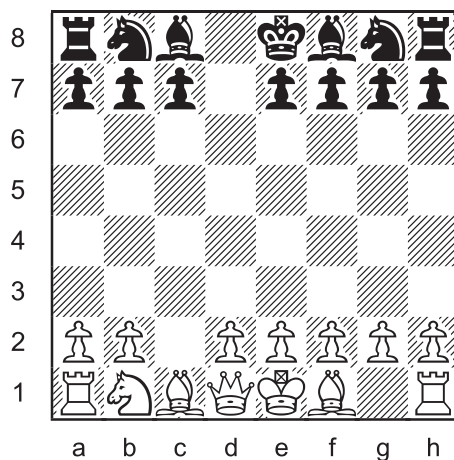
The last move is either a switchback of a piece returning to its original square or an impostor taking its place on the back rank.

A capture on the last move by the switchbacking or impostor piece is called the Orbán effect.

If the last move is not a capture, then the preceding move by the other side is also by a switchbacking or impostor piece.

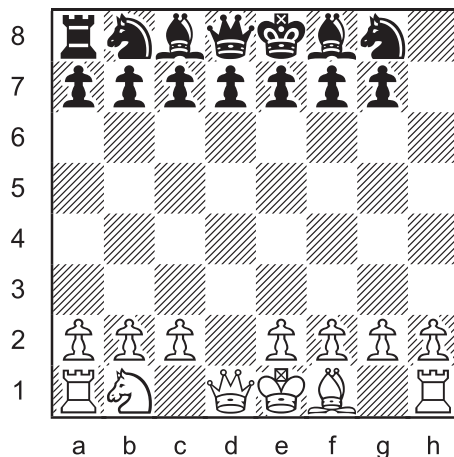
Identifying possible switchbacks is a good start to the investigation.

Longer Proof Game 135 (5.0 moves)

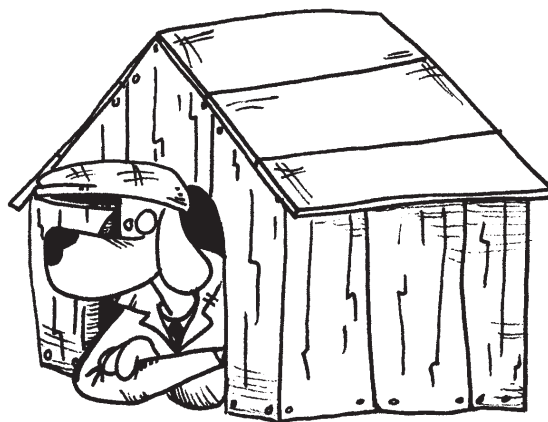


This position was reached after Black's fifth turn. What were the moves?

Longer Proof Game 136 (5.5 moves)

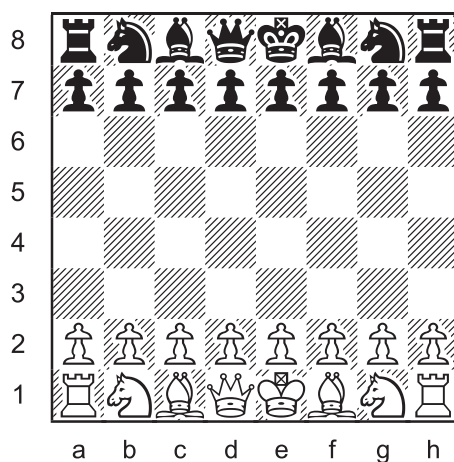


This position was reached after White's sixth turn. What were the moves?



Home Sweet Home

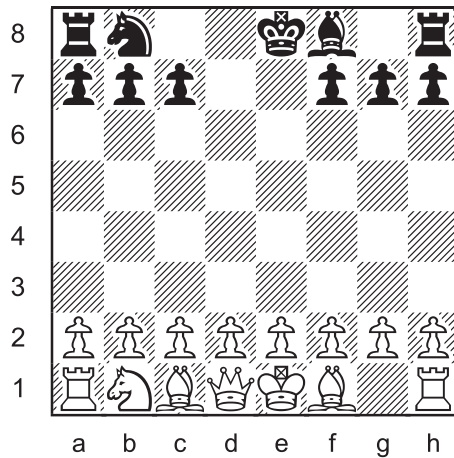
Synthetic Game 58



Compose a game that ends with the switchback 5...Qd8#.

Longer than what? As noted once or twice before, when the Puzzling Side began, all of the proof games were four moves in length. Later, when problems with more moves were included, I decided to label and number them separately. An unfortunate choice as proof games with fewer than 10.0 moves are commonly referred to as “shorties”.

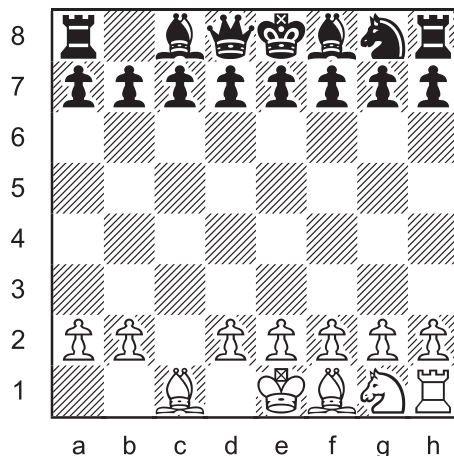
Longer Proof Game 137 (6.0 moves)



This position was reached after Black's sixth turn. What were the moves?



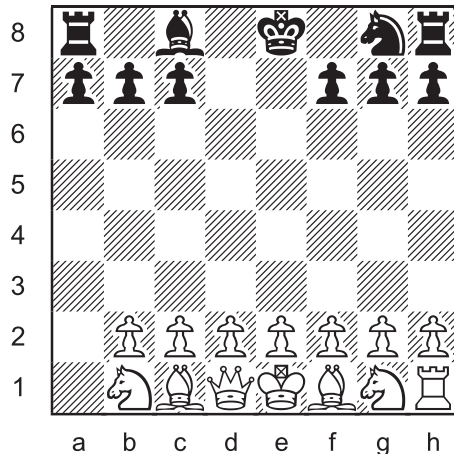
Longer Proof Game 138 (6.5 moves)



This position was reached after White's seventh turn. What were the moves?

So far, each proof game has been a half step longer than the previous. In general, that increases the level of difficulty. At some point, it also makes the “puzzle” less appealing to potential solvers. The remaining problems will challenge even the most seasoned chess detectives.

Longer Proof Game 139 (7.0 moves)

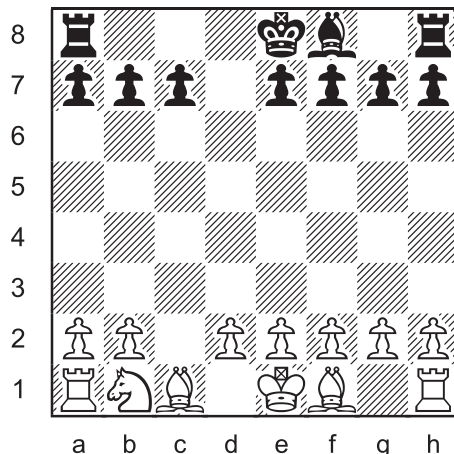


This position was reached after Black's seventh turn. What were the moves?

For anyone hesitant to try the following eight-mover, here is a hint. Half of the game shares the same opening as an earlier position.



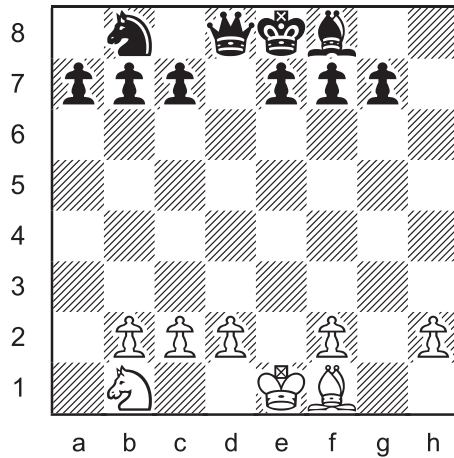
Longer Proof Game 140 (8.0 moves)



This position was reached after Black's eighth turn. What were the moves?

Solving our final proof game is arguably well beyond the horizon of human analytic skill. Twelve moves is a daunting task. Like many complicated problems, it is presented as an “artistic” composition rather than as a “puzzle”. For those who value such things, it incorporates the Pronkin theme in a rookless homebase position.

Longer Proof Game 141 (12.0 moves)



This position was reached after Black’s twelfth turn. What were the moves?



*“Hey, we’re going the wrong direction. Home is over that way!”
 “Yea, but how do we turn this thing around?”*

SOLUTIONS

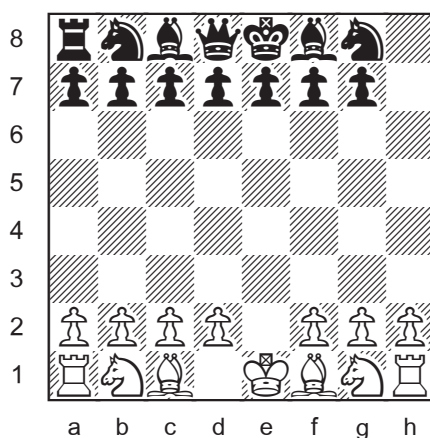
Proof games 134-135 are credited to François Labelle (2004). All other problems are by J. Coakley, *Puzzling Side of Chess* (2024).

PDF hyperlinks. You can advance to the solution of any puzzle by clicking on the underlined title above the diagram. To return to the puzzle, click on the title above the solution diagram.

Archives. Past columns are available in the *Puzzling Side* archives.

Longer Proof Game 134 (4.5 moves)

François Labelle 2004
retro mailing list



1.e4 h5 2.Qxh5 Rxh5 3.e5 Rxe5+ 4.Kd1 Re1+ 5.Kxe1

Switchback king with *Orbán effect*.

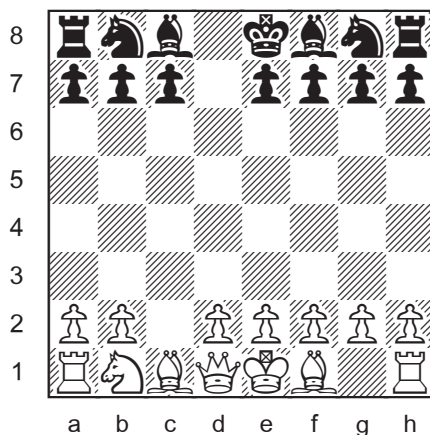
In some ways, a fairly easy problem to solve. The last move was necessarily by a white piece returning to its original square. Black's preceding move was either by a knight returning to the 8th rank or by the missing rook which was then captured on the 1st rank. Since the rook could not have played to b1, f1, or g1, the only possible capture would be by the white king.

It takes a bit more thought to rule out the black knight retreats and to determine the earlier moves by pawns and the white queen, but that is not too difficult once the final moves are surmised.

Orbán effect occurs when a piece returns to its original square by making a capture. It is named for Hungarian composer Tibor Orbán (1956-1981). See column 3 for more information about him and the world's most famous proof game.

Longer Proof Game 135 (5.0 moves)

François Labelle 2004
retro mailing list



1.c4 d5 2.cxd5 Qxd5 3.Nh3 Qb3 4.Qxb3 Bxh3 5.Qd1 Bc8
Double switchback, white queen and black bishop.

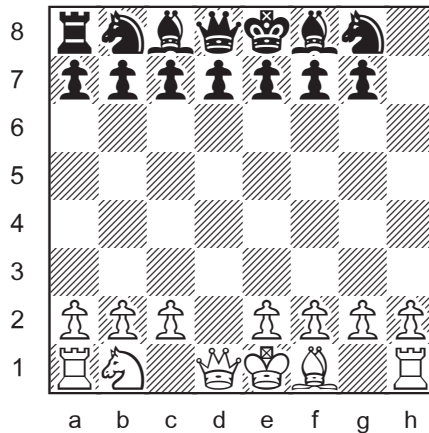
Black's last move was Nb8, Bc8, Ke8, or Ng8. If it was a capture, then the piece taken was the missing white knight. If it was not a capture, then White's last move was Nb1, Qd1, or Rh1. The possibility that one of the missing pawns captured the other is a likely line to investigate. Perhaps the main question is where the black queen was taken.

In 2004, Canadian computer expert François Labelle generated and published lists of all homebase proof games of length 4.0, 4.5, and 5.0 moves. There are 10, 41, and 116 games, respectively.

The ten homebase 4.0 proof games have all appeared previously on the *Puzzling Side*. They are listed here by column number with the puzzle number in parentheses. 8 (6b), 38 (22ab), 46 (25ab), 64 (35), 77 (39), 88 (44), 139 (70), 141 (72).



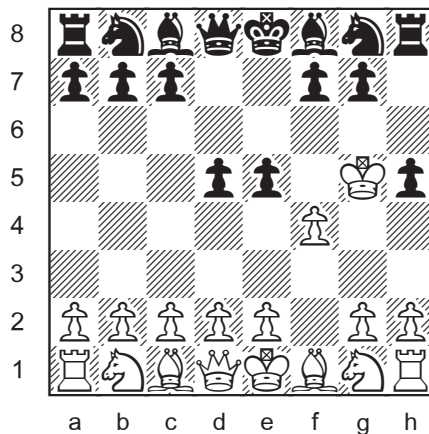
Longer Proof Game 136 (5.5 moves)



1.d3 h6 2.Bxh6 Rxh6 3.Nh3 Rxh3 4.Qd2 Rxd3 5.Qc1 Rd1+ 6.Qxd1
 White queen tempo triangulation and switchback with *Orbán effect*.



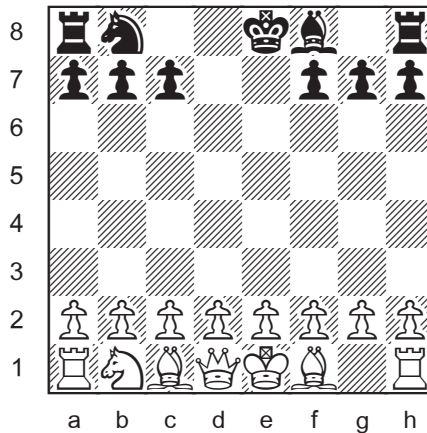
Synthetic Game 58



1.f4 e5 2.Kf2 d5 3.Kg3 Qd6 4.Kh4 h5 5.Kg5 Qd8#

White can also play 1.f3 or 5.g3 (getting mated on h4). Black can substitute 2...d6, 3...Qd7, or 4...g6. The black moves can be played in different orders.

Longer Proof Game 137 (6.0 moves)



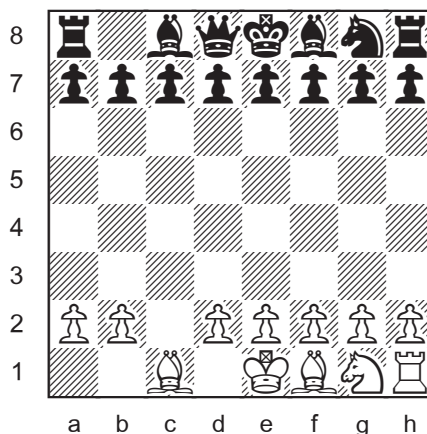
1.Nf3 e5 2.Nxe5 Ne7 3.Nxd7 Nec6 4.Nxb8 Bd7
5.Nxd7 Qb8 6.Nxb8 Nxb8

Impostor black knight. White knight captures twice on b8.

Same opening as Mortimer-Frolkin 1991 (column 8, proof game 06b), varying with 4...Bd7 (instead of the immediate 4...Nxb8).



Longer Proof Game 138 (6.5 moves)

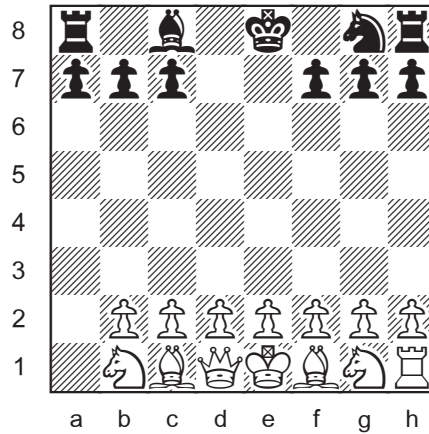


1.c4 Na6 2.c5 Nxc5 3.Qb3 Nxb3 4.Na3 Nxa1
5.Nc2 Nxc2+ 6.Kd1 Ne1 7.Kxe1

Unusual knight play. Yet another switchback king with *Orbán effect*.

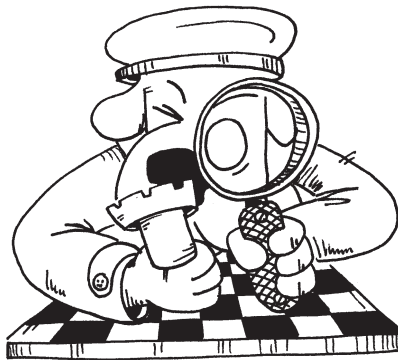
Fairly straightforward to predict that the missing black knight captures the white c-pawn and rook. And was captured by the king!?

Longer Proof Game 139 (7.0 moves)

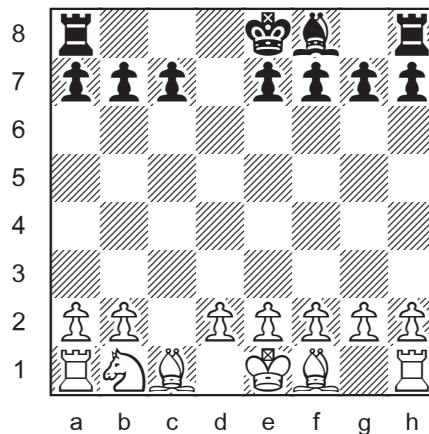


1.a3 e6 2.Ra2 Bxa3 3.Rxa3 Na6 4.Rxa6 d6
5.Rxd6 Kf8 6.Rxe6 Qe8 7.Rxe8 Kxe8

White rook tempo and a no longer surprising black king switchback.



Longer Proof Game 140 (8.0 moves)

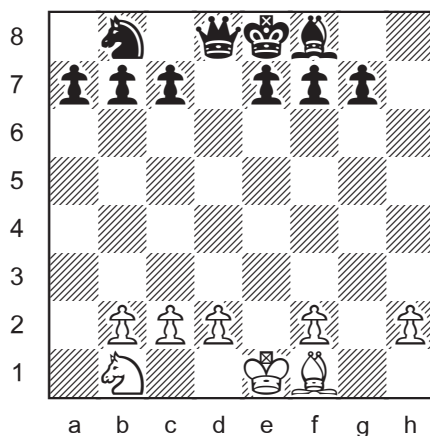


1.c4 d5 2.cxd5 Qxd5 3.Nh3 Qb3 4.Qxb3 Bxh3
5.Qxh3 Nh6 6.Qxh6 Nc6 7.Qxc6+ Kd8 8.Qe8+ Kxe8

Yet another switchback king with *Orbán effect*.

This problem expands on the opening moves of longer proof game 135, varying with 5.Qxh3 (instead of 5.Qd1 Bc8).

Longer Proof Game 141 (12.0 moves)

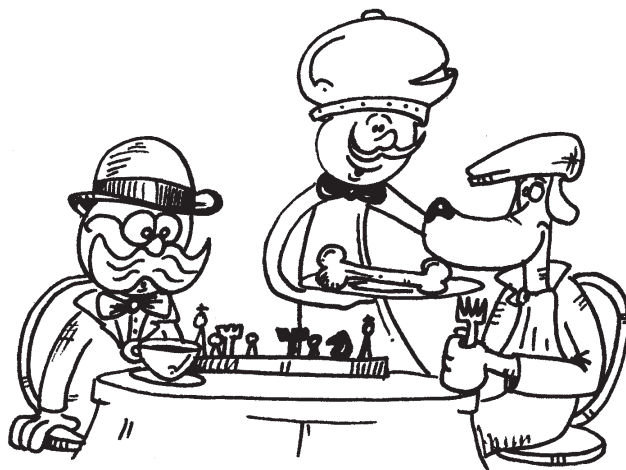


1.e4 d5 2.Qh5 dxe4 3.Nf3 exf3 4.Qxh7 fxg2
5.Qxg8 gxh1=N 6.Qxh8 Ng3 7.Qh3 Ne2 8.Qxc8 Nxc1
9.Qxb8 Nxa2 10.Qxa8 Nb4 11.Ra6 Nxa6 12.Qb8 Nxb8

Pronkin knight in a rookless homebase position.

The piece on b8 appears to be on its starting square, but it is actually a promoted pawn. This kind of impostor is called a *pronkin* knight, after Ukrainian composer Dmitry Pronkin. For more examples of the theme, see columns 62, 68, 141, 197, 203, 233.

Perhaps it is noteworthy that the only black piece that moves in this problem is the d-pawn, morphing into a knight along its way.



"Just like your mom used to make at home."

Until next year!

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