

# THE PUZZLING SIDE OF CHESS

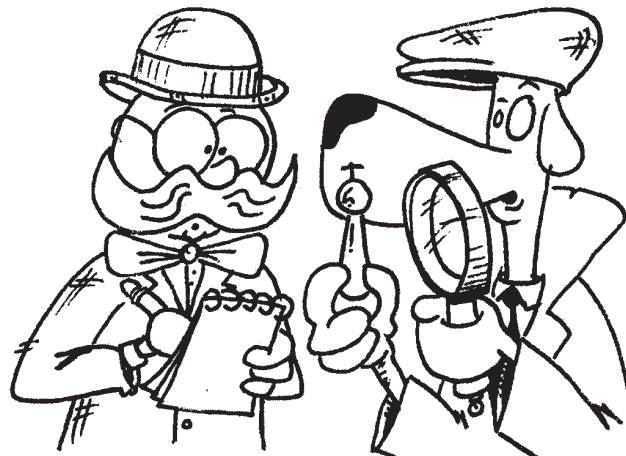
Jeff Coakley

## PROVING TO BE TRUE

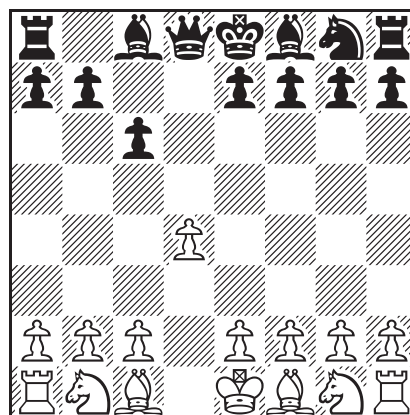
number 246

April 24, 2025

The original purpose of *proof games* was to prove that a position was legal, that it could be reached in a normal game following the standard rules. Eventually someone realised that they would make great puzzles! This column concludes with the first such problem, a classic from 1913.



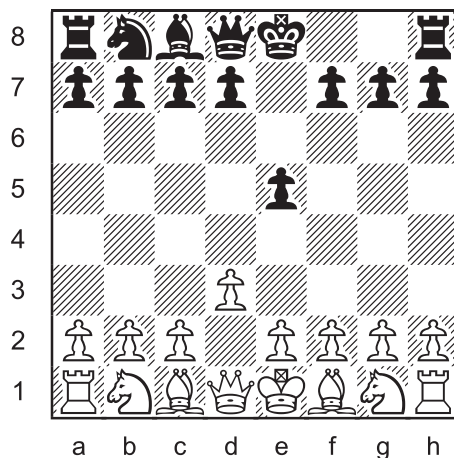
### Proof Game 105 (4.0 moves)



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

As every chess detective knows, proof game puzzles have a *move stipulation*. The given position must be reached in a precise number of turns, no more and no less. The games may be retarded, and the strategy disregarded, but the moves are legal.

**Longer Proof Game 143** (4.5 moves)



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

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***The Chess Detective's Handbook***

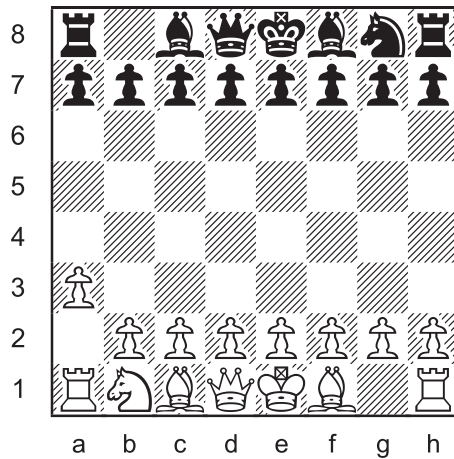
*by Harmonius Hound*



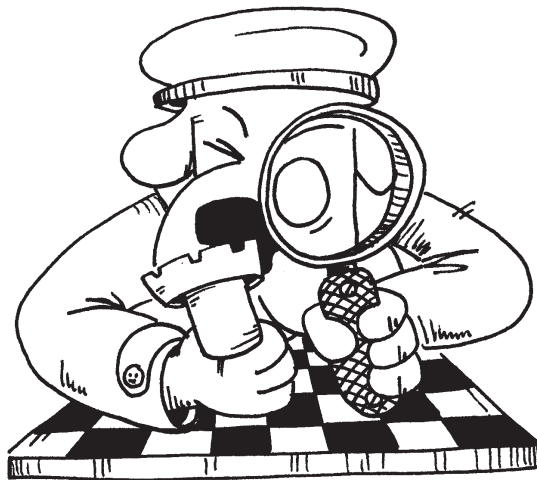
Chapter 4: Chessboard Forensics  
*Getting Down to the Nitty-Gritty*

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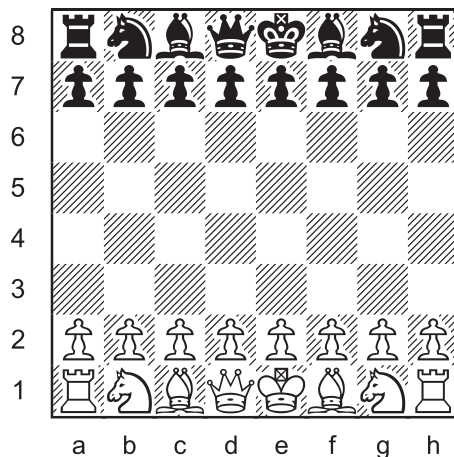
**Longer Proof Game 144** (4.5 moves)



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

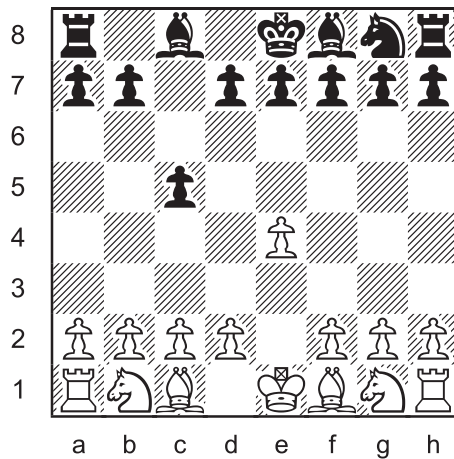


**Synthetic Game 59**

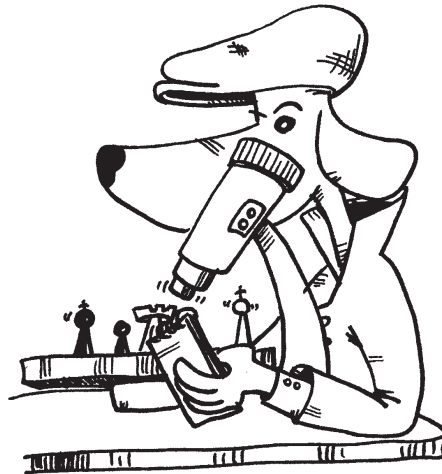


Compose a game that ends with 5...Rg4#.

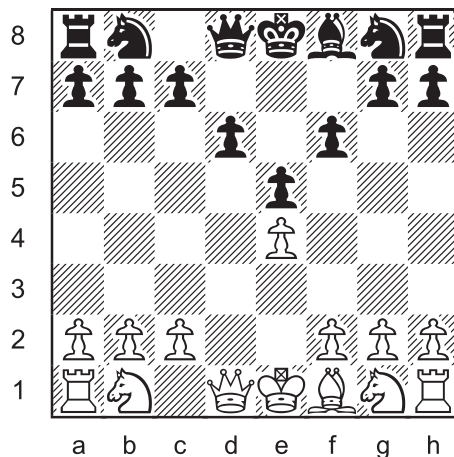
**Longer Proof Game 145** (5.0 moves)



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



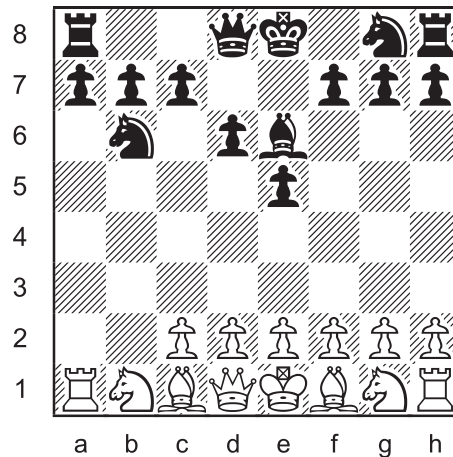
**Longer Proof Game 146** (5.5 moves)



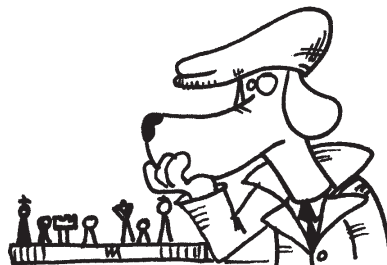
This position was reached after White's sixth turn. What were the moves?

As usual, the problems get longer and tougher as the column goes on. And the number of solvers attempting them naturally becomes smaller. It's similar to doing sudokus. Some people stop at the *medium* level and never try the *hard* or *very hard* puzzles. Have we reached your "proof game threshold" yet?

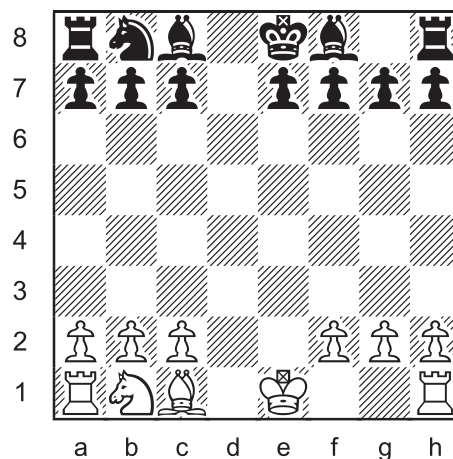
**Longer Proof Game 147** (6.0 moves)



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



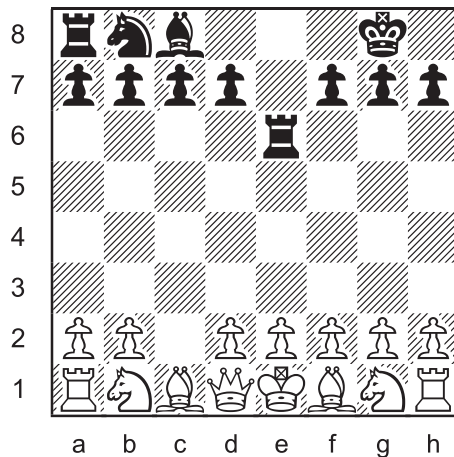
**Longer Proof Game 148** (6.5 moves)



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

The remaining puzzles are certainly at the *very hard* level. Perhaps the nearly intact initial array of white pieces in the following position will entice you to give it go.

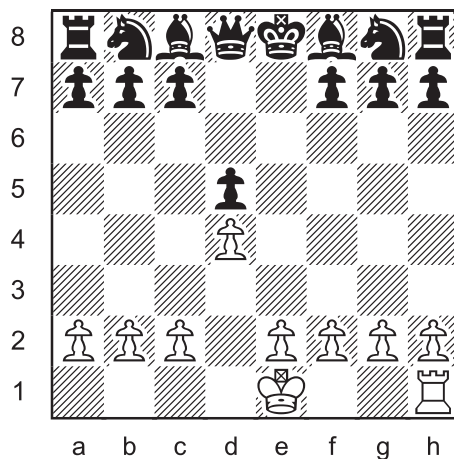
**Longer Proof Game 149** (7.0 moves)



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



**Longer Proof Game 150** (9.0 moves)

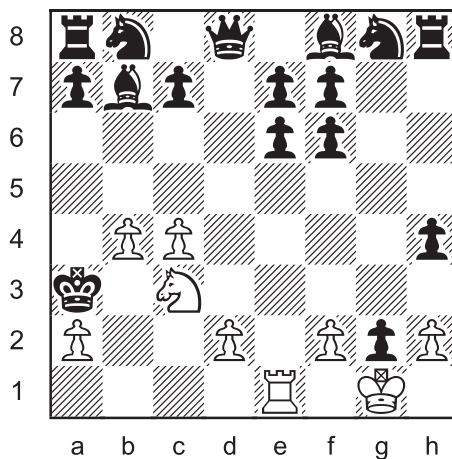


This position was reached after Black's ninth turn. What were the moves?

The earliest known proof game ever published as a puzzle was by British composer Thomas R. Dawson (1889-1951), a pioneer of retrograde analysis. It appeared in the *Reading Observer* in 1913.

The stipulation given by him was “*White here mated in two and noticed on examining his score that the mate was administered on his 17th move. What was the game?*”

**Longer Proof Game 151** (15.0 moves)



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

White to play. Mate in 2.



*Thomas R. Dawson*

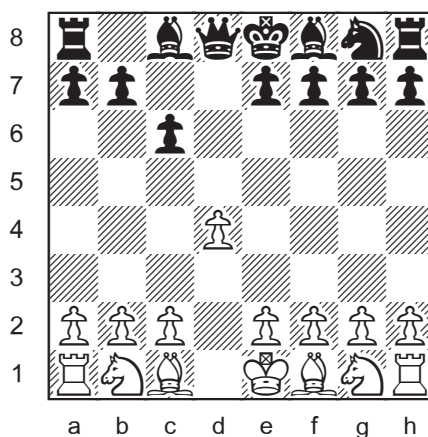
## SOLUTIONS

All problems, except for longer proof game 151, are by J. Coakley, *Puzzling Side of Chess* (2025).

**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.

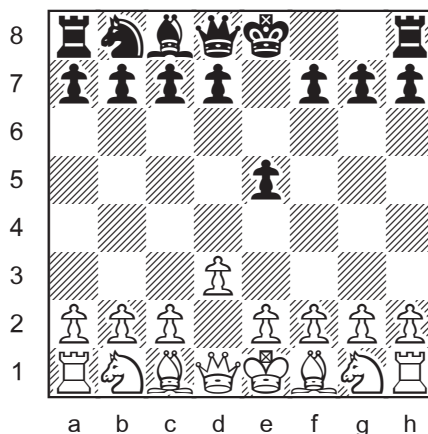
### Proof Game 105 (4.0 moves)



1.d4 c5 2.Qd3 c4 3.Qxc4 Nc6 4.Qxc6 dxc6

Two moves by the missing original black c-pawn.

### Longer Proof Game 143 (4.5 moves)



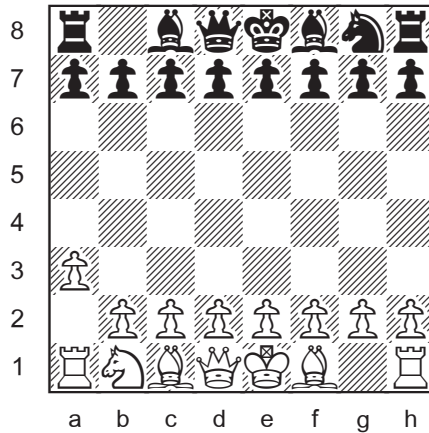
1.d3 Nh6 2.Bxh6 e6 3.Bc1 Ba3 4.Nxa3 e5 5.Nb1

Switchback by white bishop and knight.

Tempo by black e-pawn.



**Longer Proof Game 144** (4.5 moves)

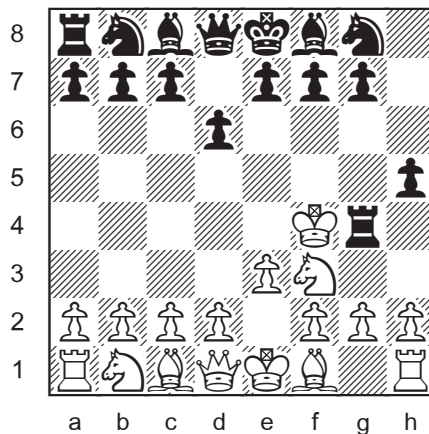


1.Nf3 Nc6 2.Nd4 Nxd4 3.a3 Nb3 4.Ra2 Na1 5.Rxa1

Switchback capture by white rook: the *Orbán effect*. See chapter 3.



**Synthetic Game 59**

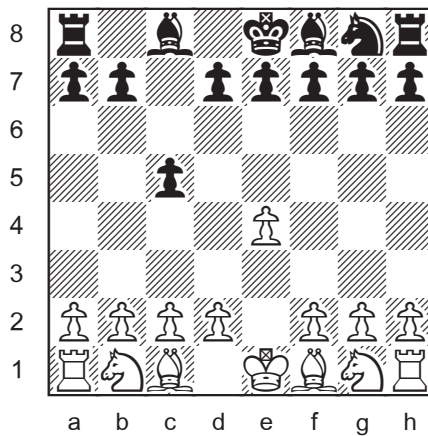


1.e3 d6 2.Ke2 h5 3.Kf3 Rh6 4.Kf4 Rg6 5.Nf3 Rg4#

Black's moves can be played in different orders.

[April 2025. Two other solutions by Yakov Konoval are 1.f4 h5 2.Kf2 Rh6 3.Kg3 Rg6 4.Kh4 Nf6 5.Nh3 Rg4# and 1.f4 g5 2.Kf2 Nf6 3.Kg3 gxf4 4.Kh4 Rg8 5.Nh3 Rg4#.]

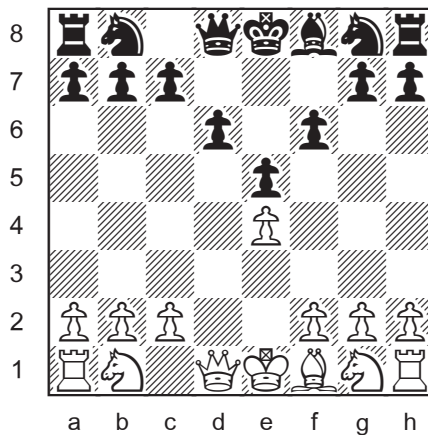
**Longer Proof Game 145** (5.0 moves)



1.e3 Nc6 2.Qh5 Na5 3.Qxa5 c5 4.Qxd8 Kxd8 5.e4 Ke8  
Switchback by black king. Tempo by white e-pawn. Typical tricks.

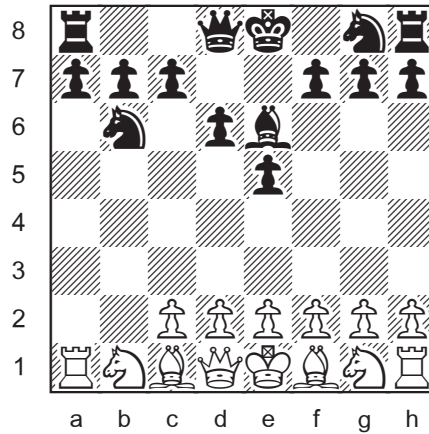


**Longer Proof Game 146** (5.5 moves)



1.d4 d6 2.d5 Be6 3.dxe6 fxe6 4.Bg5 e5 5.Bf6 exf6 6.e4  
Cross-captures by black pawns.

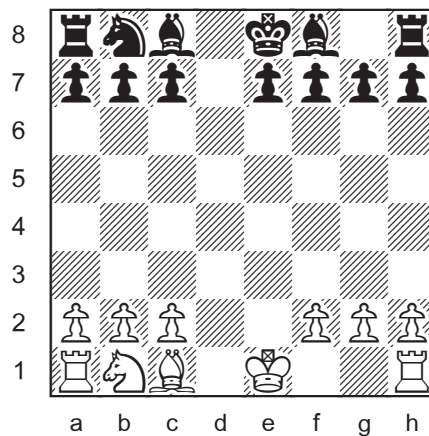
**Longer Proof Game 147** (6.0 moves)



1.b3 e5 2.b4 Bxb4 3.a3 d6 4.axb4 Be6 5.b5 Nd7 6.b6 Nxb6  
Surprising play by white ab-pawns.

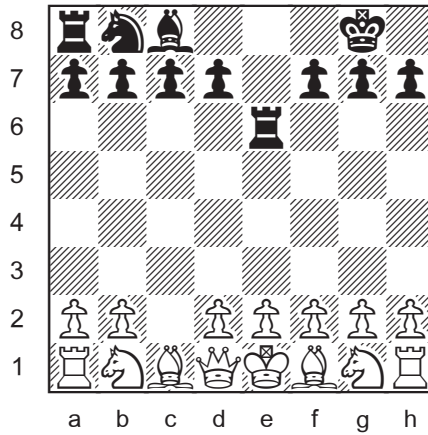


**Longer Proof Game 148** (6.5 moves)



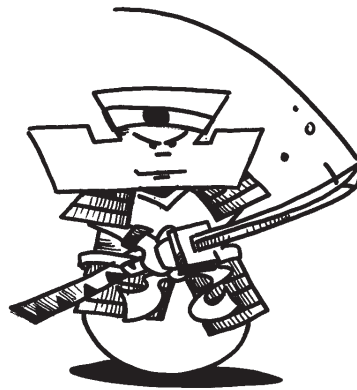
1.e4 Nf6 2.Bb5 Nxe4 3.Bxd7+ Qxd7 4.Ne2 Qxd2+  
5.Qxd2 Nxd2 6.Nec3 Nxb1 7.Nxb1  
Homebase with impostor white knight.

**Longer Proof Game 149** (7.0 moves)

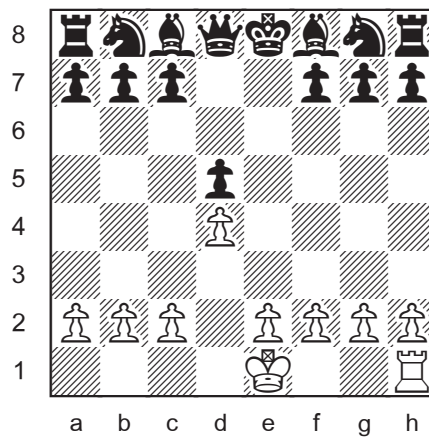


1.c3 e6 2.c4 Bd6 3.c5 Ne7 4.cxd6 0-0  
 5.dxe7 Re8 6.cxd8=N Re7 7.Nxe6 Rxe6

Excelsior white pawn with tempo and underpromotion.  
 Tempo by black rook.



**Longer Proof Game 150** (9.0 moves)



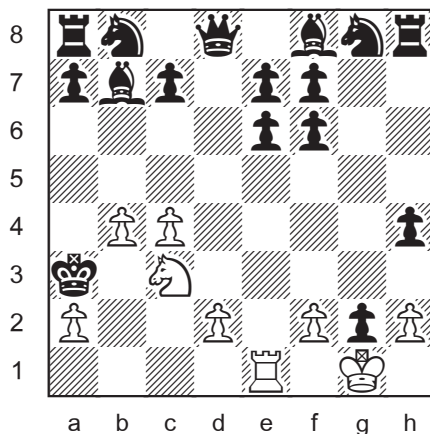
1.Nf3 e5 2.Nd4 exd4 3.Nc3 dxc3 4.d4 d6 5.Qd2 cxd2+  
 6.Kd1 dxc1=R+ 7.Kd2 Rxf1 8.Re1 Rxe1 9.Kxe1 d5

Switchback black king with *Orbán effect*. Tempo by black d-pawn.

## Longer Proof Game 151 (15.0 moves)

Thomas R. Dawson 1913

*Reading Observer*

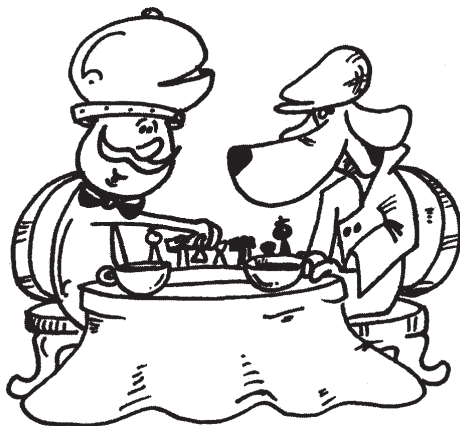


(9+16)

1. e4 h5 2. Bb5 h4 3. Bc6 bxc6 4. Qh5 Bb7 5. Qd5 cxd5 6. Nf3 dxe4
7. 0-0 exf3 8. Re1 fxg2 9. Re6 dxe6 10. b4 Kd7 11. Bb2 Kc6
12. Bf6 Kb5 13. c4+ Ka4 14. Nc3+ Ka3 15. Re1 gxf6

White mates in 2 by 16.Rb1. There is no defence to 17.Rb3#.

The black pawn formation required 7 captures, accounting for all 7 missing white pieces. The black king needed 5 moves to reach a3. Black's other three moves had to be ...Bb7, ...h5, ...h4. The black king cannot start his journey until after ...d7xe6. White's dark-square bishop was captured on f6, the only capture by Black on a dark square. Even after deducing all these things, it is still a difficult task to determine the exact sequence of moves.



Until next time!

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