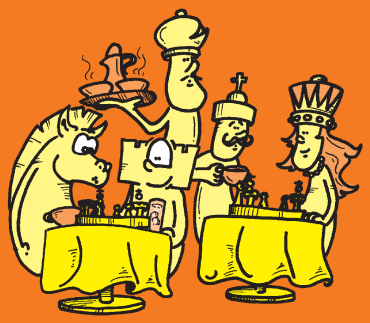


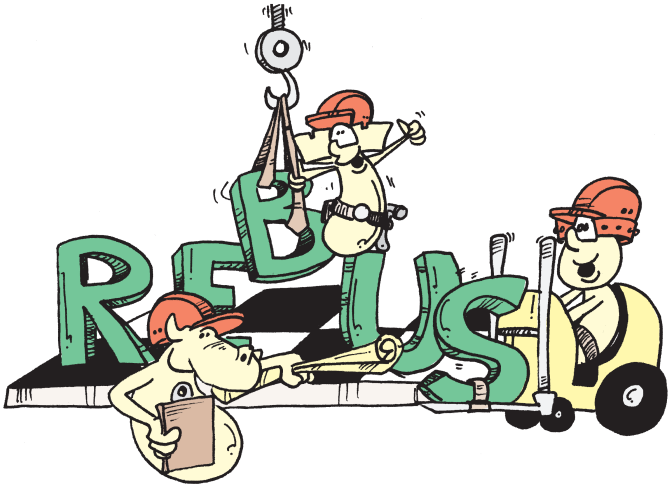
THE PUZZLING SIDE OF CHESS

Jeff Coakley

REBUS UPLOAD 08

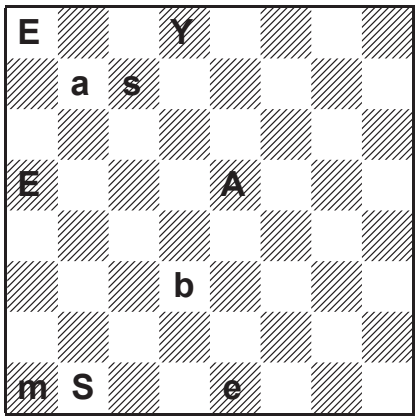
number 255 January 31, 2026

Time again to unload a few rebuses from the *Puzzling Side* stockpile.
Are you ready to dot your I's, cross your T's, and mind your P's and Q's?



Rebus 143

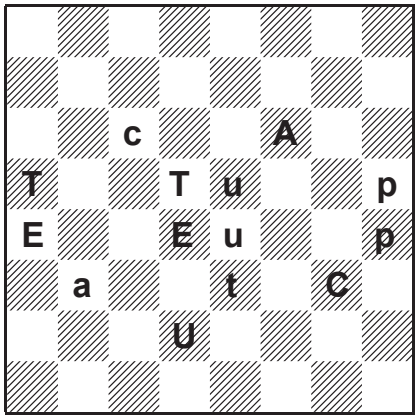
"*say maybe*"



Each letter represents a different type of piece.
Uppercase is one colour, lowercase is the other.
Determine the position and the last move.

Rebus 144

"*teacup*"



Each letter represents a different type of piece.
Uppercase is one colour, lowercase is the other.
Determine the position and, if possible, the last move.

Rebuses are puzzles in which symbols must be deciphered. In chess rebuses, we decode letters on a board into a legal position. In a picture rebus, we decode a row of images into a meaningful sentence.

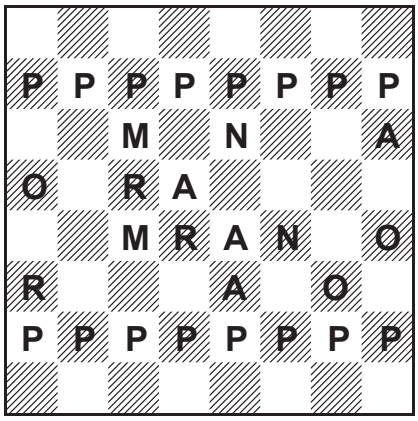
Riddle: "*What did the bad guy say when he was forced to give back all of the things that he took?*"

The next two problems are *colour-free* rebuses. With this format, each type of piece is represented by one letter, as usual. However, no indication is given for which instances of a letter are white and which are black. Normally, most letters represent pieces of both colours. But some letters may be all white, or others all black. See columns 188, 190, 200, 225 for more examples.

"Panorama" is a good warm-up for the more difficult "black" 146.

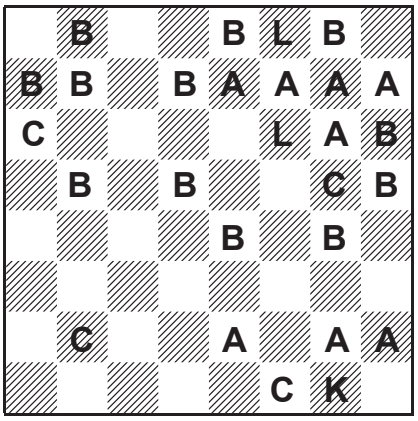
Rebus 145

"*panorama*"

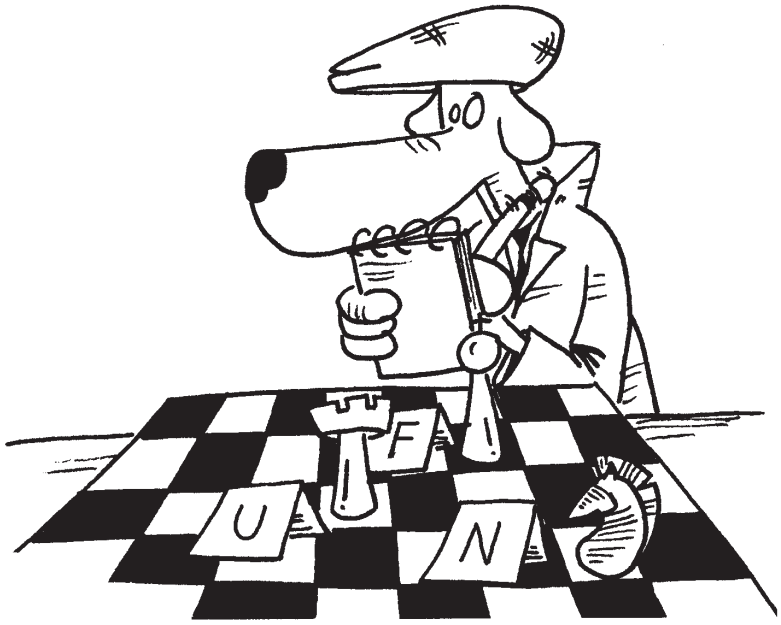


Rebus 146

"*black*"



Each letter represents a different type of piece.
No indication is given for colour.
Some instances of a letter can be white,
other instances of the same letter can be black.
Determine the position and the last move.

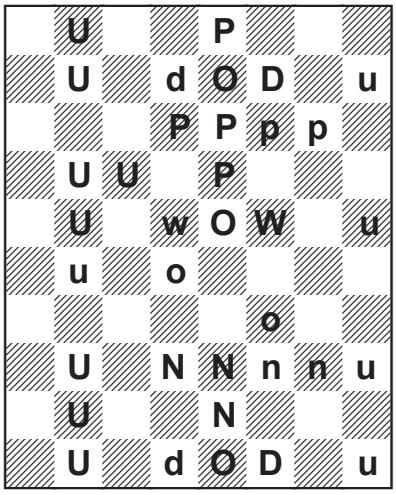


Our final problem is called an *elevator rebus* and requires a tall board with 10 ranks! It is actually three puzzles in one. The first position is on ranks 1-8, the second on ranks 2-9, and the third on ranks 3-10. The individual diagrams for each level are shown on the right.

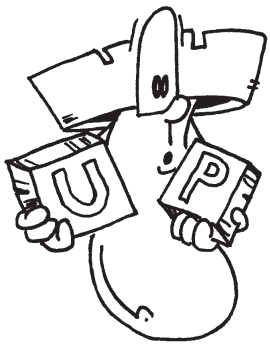
Solving the three rebuses presented in the full diagram is like riding an *elevator* up one floor at a time. After completing things on the ground level, you take a lift to the second storey. Then up to the top!

Rebus 147

"*Up Down*"



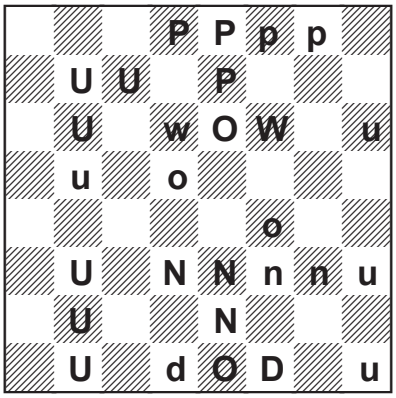
Each set of 8 ranks in the diagram is a separate problem. Begin with the 8 ranks on the bottom. Each letter represents a different type of piece. Uppercase is one colour, lowercase is the other. Determine the position at the different levels.



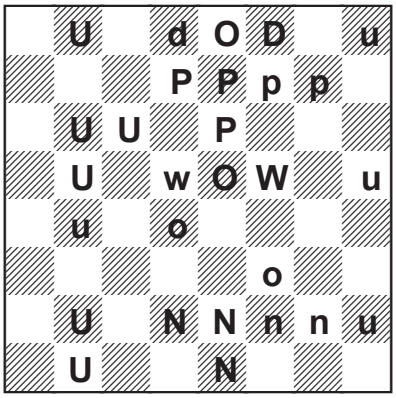
For more elaborate elevators, see the article "Ten Years in Rebusland" in issue 9 of online magazine *The Hopper.*

www.thehoppermagazine.com

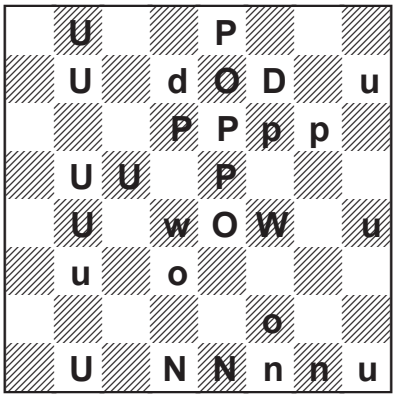
LEVEL 1



LEVEL 2



LEVEL 3



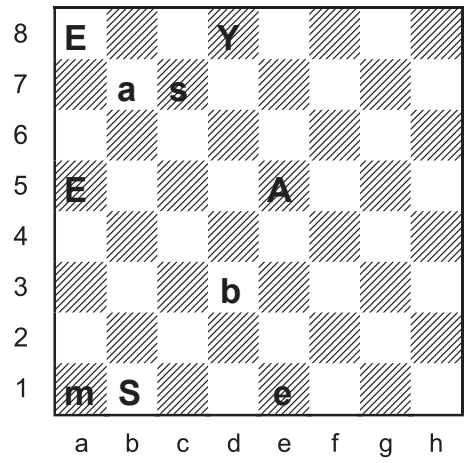
SOLUTIONS

All chess rebuses are joint compositions by Andriy Frolkin and Jeff Coakley, *Puzzling Side of Chess* (2026).

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.

Rebus 143

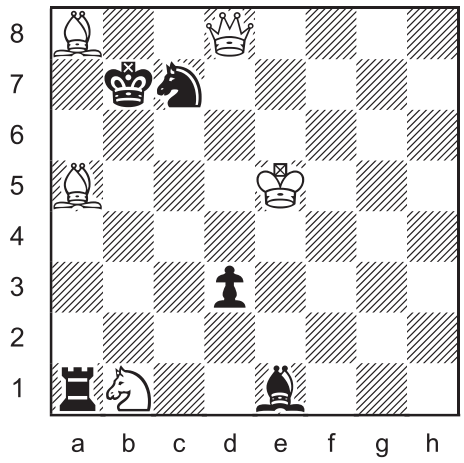


"*say maybe*"

S = knight
A = king
Y = queen
M = rook
B = pawn
E = bishop

caps = white

last move:
1.a7-a8=B+



(5 + 5)

♙ = (AB) Letters not on 1st or 8th rank.

♔ = (AS) Letters with one uppercase, one lowercase.

A = ♔ If S = ♔

E ≠ ♕ Both kings in check (a5 e1).

There is a <u>check</u> by letter E (♘a8, ♗a5, or ♖e1).

ABMY ≠ ♕ Impossible multiple checks.

♕ = Ø? No letter can be queen.

Therefore S ≠ ♔.

B = ♙

E ≠ ♕ Both kings in check (a8 e1).

There is a <u>check</u> by letter E (♘a5, ♗a8, or ♖e1).

Y = ♕ MS ≠ ♕ Impossible second check (a1 or b1).

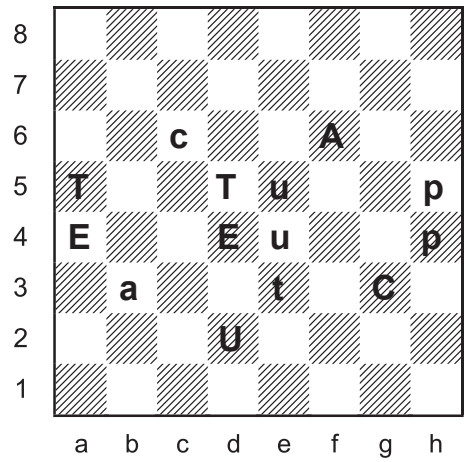
E = ♗ MS ≠ ♗ Impossible second check (a1 or c7).

<u>Check</u> (a8). last move: **1.a7-a8=B+** **caps = white**

S = ♘ S ≠ ♖ Impossible double check (b1).

M = ♖

Rebus 144

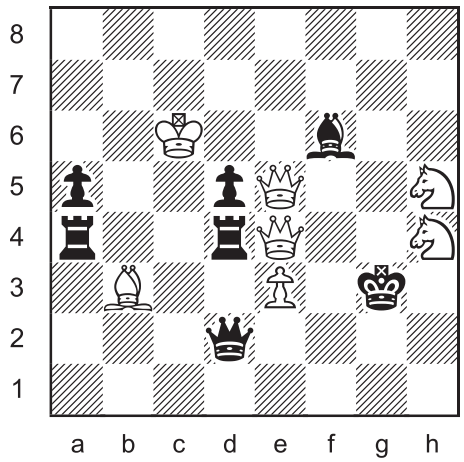


"*teacup*"

T = pawn
E = rook
A = bishop
C = king
U = queen
P = knight

caps = black

last move:
1.Nf4>h5++



(7 + 7)

♔ = (AC) Letters with one uppercase, one lowercase.

If A = ♔

U ≠ ♘ Both kings in check (d2 e4).

C ≠ ♕ If C = ♕ Check (c6).

EPT ≠ ♘ Impossible second check (d4, h5, or a5).

♘ = Ø? No letter can be knight. So C ≠ ♕.

♕ = (EPTU)

Letters EPTU attack a king diagonally (E/a4, p/h4, T/d5, u/e5).

So there is a check by a queen and perhaps also by a bishop.

C = ♗ If C ≠ ♗ Impossible two checks (queen and bishop).

EPT ≠ ♘ Impossible second check (d4, h5, or a5).

♘ = Ø? No letter can be knight. So A ≠ ♔.

C = ♔

Letters EPTU all attack a king diagonally (E/a4, p/h5, T/d5, u/e5).

So there is a check by a queen and/or a bishop.

P = ♘ TU ≠ ♘ Impossible second check (a5 or e4).

A ≠ ♘ If A = ♘ EPTU = (♕♖♗♙)?

Impossible two checks (queen and bishop).

E ≠ ♘ If E = ♘ Check (d4).

If A = ♗ Impossible two checks (queen, knight).

If A ≠ ♗ Three checks (queen, bishop, knight).

The king on g3 is in check by the knight on h5.

U = ♕ AET ≠ ♕ Both kings in check (f6, a4, or d5).

Check (e5) Last move: **Nf4>h5++** This may or may not be a capture.

T = ♙ T ≠ ♖♗ Third check (e3 or d5).

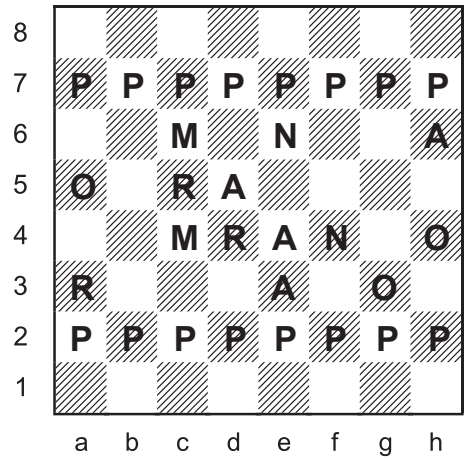
caps = black caps ≠ white Third check (pawn d5).

A = ♗ A ≠ ♖ Third check (f6).

E = ♖

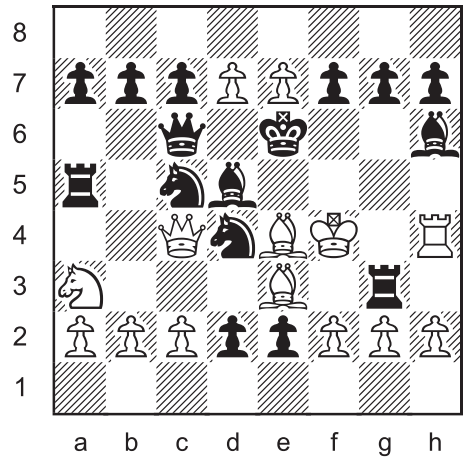
Rebus 145

"panorama"



P = pawn
A = bishop
N = king
O = rook
R = knight
M = queen

last move:
1...Rg5-g3+



(14 + 16)

Letter count: 16P, 4A, 3R, 3O, 2M, 2N = 30

P = ♙ Obviously.

Since all pawns are on the board, there are no promoted pieces.

♔♕ = (MN) Letters with 2 instances.

A = ♗ OR ≠ ♗ 3 instances of each letter are on dark squares.

♖♘ = (OR)

In order for the bishops and rooks to be on the 3rd-6th ranks, the centre pawns for both sides must have moved to let them out. Therefore the pawns on **d2 e2** are **black** and those on **d7 e7 white**. The other pawns are on their original squares. The current position resulted from a cross-capture by the pawns of one side (dxe exd). This accounts for the two missing pieces. No other captures were made. It also means that both missing pieces are the same colour.

N = ♔ M ≠ ♔ Impossible check by the bishop on d5.

N/e6 = black king If white, impossible check by black pawn f7.

N/f4 = white king

A/d5 = black bishop If white, impossible check on king e6.

A/e4 = white bishop The other bishop on a light square.

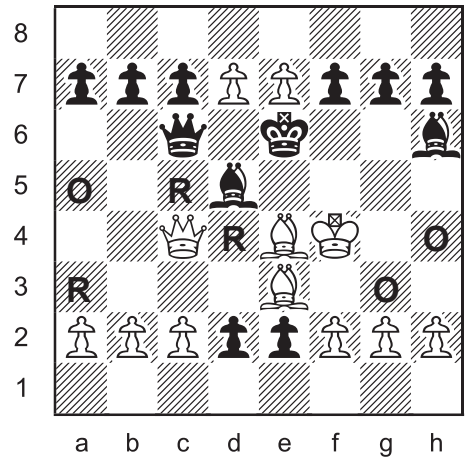
A/d3 = white bishop If black, impossible check on king f4.

A/h6 = black bishop Check.

M/c6 = black queen If white, both kings in check.

M/c4 = white queen

Rebus 145 *continued*



O/g3 = black rook The only way to explain the bishop check is a discovery by the rook.

Last move:

1...Rg5-g3+ This move was not a capture since both missing pieces were captured by pawns.

O/h4 = white rook If black, impossible double check.

R/c5 = black knight If white, both kings in check.

R/d4 = black knight If white, both kings in check.

R/a3 = white knight

R/a5 = black rook Both missing pieces must be the same colour to explain the pawn formation. The missing knight is white so the missing rook must also be white.

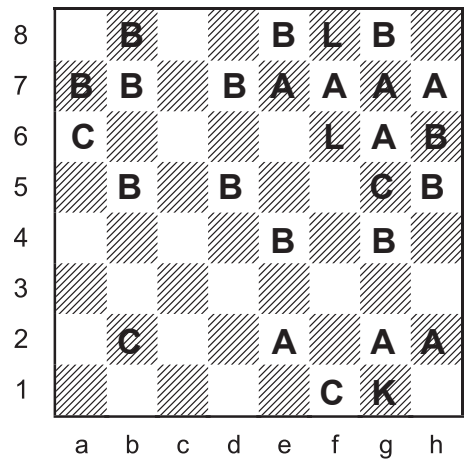
REBUS page 2

"*What did the bad guy say when he was forced to give back all of the things that he took?*"

"But why can't I keep any for myself?"

butt-y-can-tie-key-penny-form-ice-elf

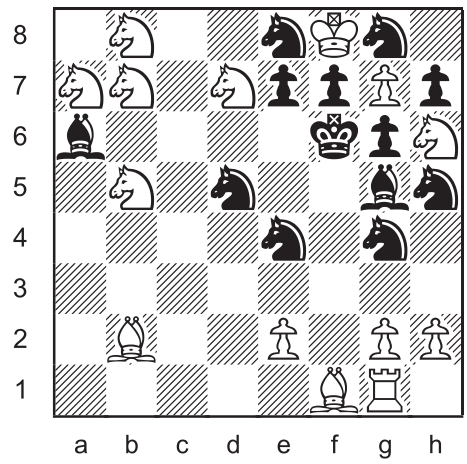
Rebus 146



"black"

B = knight
L = king
A = pawn
C = bishop
K = rook

last move:
1.Ne5-d7++



(14 + 13)

Letter count: 12B, 8A, 4C, 2L, 1K = 27

L = ♔ Letter with two instances.

A = ♙ A ≠ ♕ Regardless of colours, at least 3 checks (e7 f7 g7).
A ≠ ♖ Impossible check (f7).
A ≠ ♗ Regardless of colours, impossible 2 checks (e7 g7).
A ≠ ♘ Impossible check (h7).

There are 8 pawns on the board and 8 promoted pieces (letter B).

The 5 missing pieces are all officers (not pawns).

The promotion of all 8 queenside pawns (abcd-files), white and black, required 4 'pawn x officer' captures.

The other capture was by a pawn from the f-file to the g-file. That accounts for all missing pieces.

A/e7,h7 = black pawn

A/e2,h2 = white pawn

A/g7 = white pawn Black pawns on e7 g7 would mean that the black bishop from f8 never moved and was captured on f8, which is impossible.

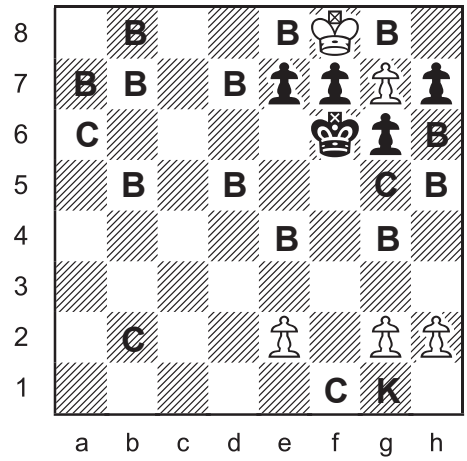
A/f7,g6 = black pawn The pawn capture on the kingside was necessarily f6xg7 by White.

A/g2 = white pawn

L/f8 = white king If black, impossible pawn check (g7).

L/f6 = black king

Rebus 146 *continued*



C/f1 = white bishop With white pawns e2 g2, the white bishop on f1 never moved and was not captured.

C/a6 = black bishop The other light-square bishop.

K/g1 = white rook With white pawns e2 g2 h2, and bishop f1, the white rook from h1 never left its corner cage and was not captured.

B = ♘ B ≠ ♕ There cannot be 10 promoted queens.
C = ♗
K = ♖

The black king is in <u>check</u> from a bishop on b2 or g5.
One of the kings is in <u>check</u> by the knight on d7.

B/d7 = white knight

C/b2 = white bishop The only way to explain the double check.

Last move: **1.Ne5-d7++** This move was not a capture.

C/g5 = black bishop The other dark-square bishop.

B/d5,e4,e8,g4,g8,h5 = black knight If any white, three checks.

These 6 black knights account for the 4 black promotions.

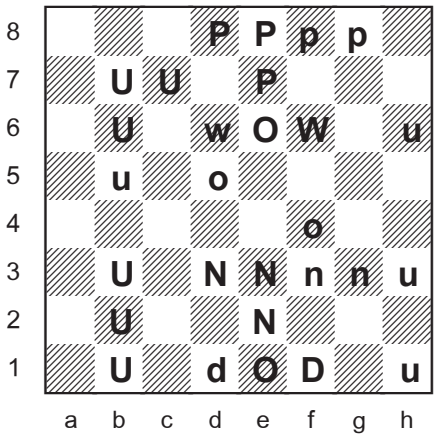
B/a7,b4,b7,b8,h6 = white knight

Did you notice that the placement of the pieces is symmetrical along the long dark diagonal?

Rebus 147

"Up Down"

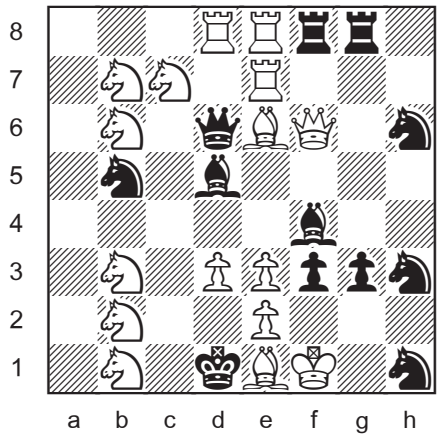
Level 1



U = knight
P = rook
D = king
O = bishop
W = queen
N = pawn

caps = white

last move:
1.N>b2+



(16 + 12)

The elevator format is based on an idea by Nina Omelchuk, wife and muse of Andriy Frolkin. Her lovely artwork, like that on the last page of this column, adorns many rebus articles.

Letter count: D W 6U 3N 3P 2O = 16
d w 4u 2n 2p 2o = 12

(DW) = ♔♕ Because all 16 uppercase pieces are on the board, the king and queen are necessarily represented by letters DW as they are the only letters with a single uppercase instance. Other piece types necessarily have at least two instances.

N = ♙ Other remaining letters (OPU) on 1st or 8th rank.

(OPU) = ♖♗♘

D = ♔ W ≠ ♔

If W = ♔ P ≠ ♖ Both kings in check (d8 f8).
P ≠ ♗ Impossible check (e7).
P ≠ ♘ Both kings in check (e8 g8).

P = Ø? No piece can be assigned to letter P.

W = ♕

caps = white If caps = black Impossible check (pawn e2).

U = ♘ U ≠ ♖ Both kings in check (b1 h1).
U ≠ ♗ Both kings in check (b3 h3).

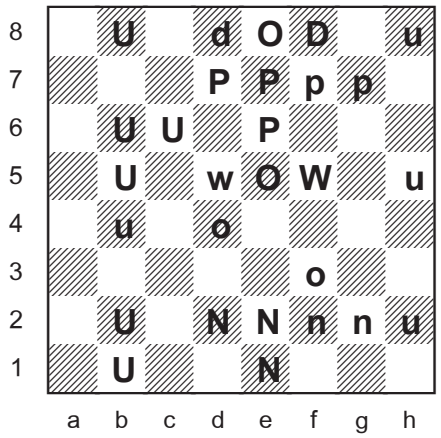
O = ♗ O ≠ ♖ Impossible check by white rook (e1).

P = ♖

Rebus 147

"*Up Down*"

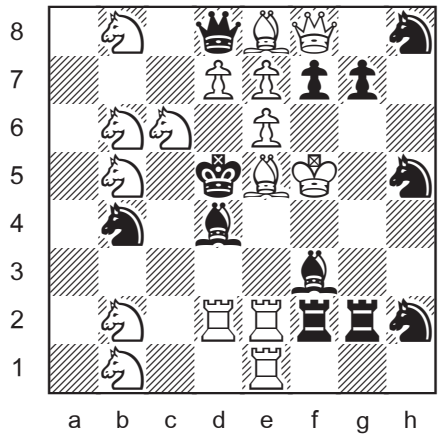
Level 2



U = knight
P = pawn
D = queen
O = bishop
W = king
N = rook

caps = white

last move:
1.N>b6+



(16 + 12)

(DW) = ♔♕ Same letter count and argument as level 1.

P = ♙ Other remaining letters (NOU) on 1st or 8th rank.

(NOU) = ♖♗♘

W = ♔ D ≠ ♔ If D = ♔ <u>Check</u> by P (♙ e7 or g7).
<u>Check</u> by U (♖b8, ♗b6, or ♘c6).
Impossible multiple checks.

D = ♕

caps = white If caps = black Impossible check (pawn e6).

U = ♘ U ≠ ♖ Both kings in check (b5 h5).
U ≠ ♗ Impossible check (c6). The last move could not be the capture 1.Bxc6+. There are 12 pro-passers (5 passed pawns and 7 promoted pieces) which required 4 'pawn x pawn' captures. That accounts for all four missing pieces.

O = ♗ O ≠ ♖ Both kings in check (e5 f3).

N = ♖

Pro-passer theory is an analytic tool for determining the legality of a position based on the number of passed pawns, promoted pieces, and missing pieces. A pro-passer is a promoted piece or a passed pawn. In this theory, they count as the same thing.

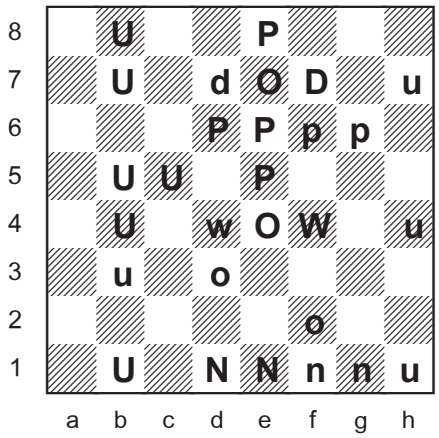
Missing pieces are divided into two categories: pawns and officers.
'Pawn x officer' captures can create 2 pro-passers (one per side).
'Pawn x pawn' captures can create 3 pro-passers (two for capturing side).

For a position to be legal, there must be a sufficient number of missing officers and pawns to create the required number of pro-passers. If calculation shows insufficient missing pieces, the position is illegal. However, a favourable count, with an apparently sufficient number of missing pieces, does not prove that the number of pro-passers is legal. There are many situations that can still make the position illegal: doubled pawns, inverted pawns, the colour of promotion squares for promoted bishops, or the need for additional captures. In these cases, deeper analysis is required.

Rebus 147

"*Up Down*"

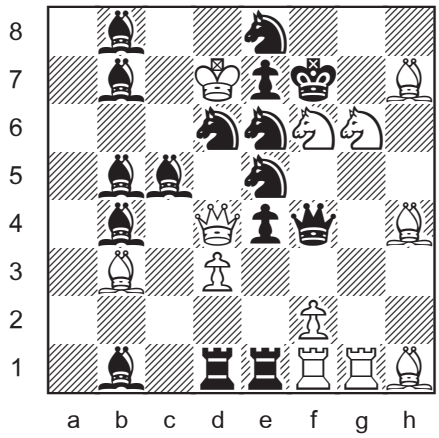
Level 3



U = bishop
P = knight
D = king
O = pawn
W = queen
N = rook

caps = black

last move:
1...N>e5+



(12 + 16)

(DW) = ♔♕ The only change in the letter count for this level is +C and -P which does not affect the analysis.

O = ♙ Other remaining letters (NPU) on 1st or 8th rank.

(NOU) = ♖♗♘

D = ♔ W ≠ ♔

If W = ♔ P ≠ ♖ Both kings in check (d6 f6).

P ≠ ♗ Impossible check (e5).

P ≠ ♘ Both kings in check (e6 g6).

P = Ø? No piece can be assigned to letter P.

W = ♕

U = ♗ U ≠ ♖ Both kings in check (b7 h7).

U ≠ ♘ Impossible double check (b8 c5).

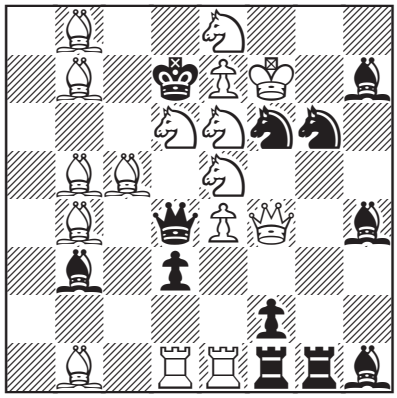
P = ♘ P ≠ ♖ Both kings in check (d6 f6).

N = ♖

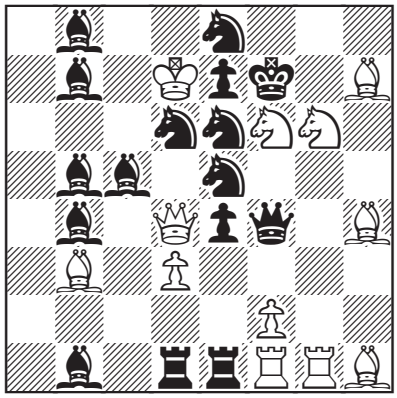
caps = black If caps = white, the bishop ratio (a comparison of the number of light-square and dark-square bishops for each side) is impossible. See diagrams next page.

Rebus 147- Level 3

continued



try: caps = white



solution: caps = black

In both positions, there are 4 passed pawns and 8 promoted pieces. Uppercase promoted pieces 2 light bishops, 2 dark bishops, 2 knights. Lowercase promoted 2 light bishops. The 4 missing pieces are lowercase pawns.

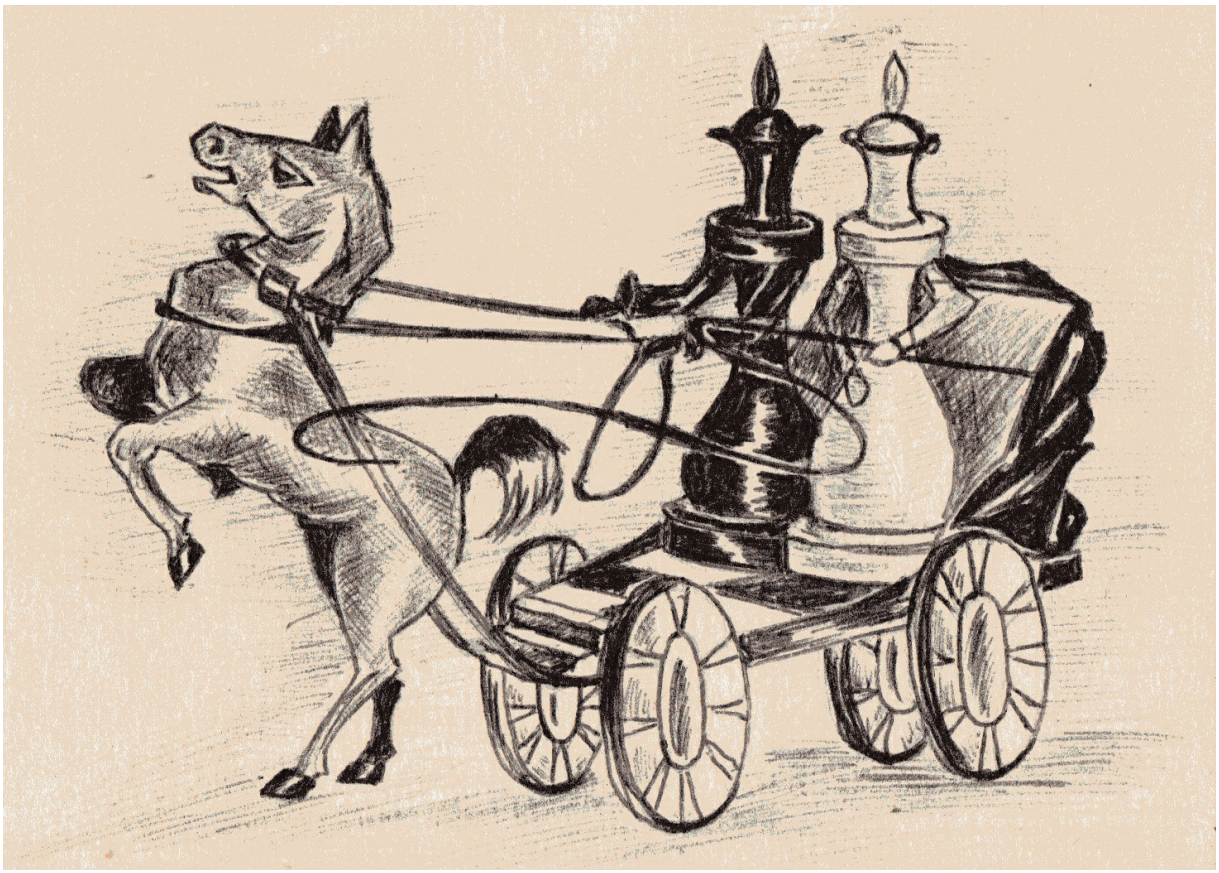
12 pro-passers (4 passed pawns + 8 promoted pieces) could only arise if the 4 missing lowercase pawns are each captured by an uppercase pawn in separate sectors. A sector is two adjacent files. In this case, one 'pawn x pawn' capture must be made in each of the ab, cd, ef, gh files.

Each 'pawn x pawn' capture creates 2 passers for the capturing side and 1 passer for the captured side. All three passers necessarily promote on the same colour squares, unless an additional capture is made, which is not possible in this case.

In the try with caps = white, White captured fxe in the ef-sector with no promotions. In the cd-sector, White captured dxc and promoted twice on the light square c8, with no promotions for Black. In order to promote 2 dark bishops, White must either capture axb in the ab-sector or gxh in the gh-sector. In either case, Black cannot promote on a light square in that sector. Therefore Black cannot promote 2 light bishops and the position is illegal.

In the solution with caps = black, Black captured ...dxc in the cd-sector and promoted twice on the dark square c1. Black can then capture axb and gxh in the other two sectors, allowing White to promote 2 light bishops on a8 and g8.

Level 1	D =	♔	caps = white	U =	♘	P =	♖	O =	♗	N = ♙
Level 2	W =	♔	caps = white	U =	♘	P =	♙	O =	♗	N = ♖
Level 3	D =	♔	caps = black	U =	♗	P =	♘	O =	♙	N = ♖



Knight of the Queens

If you are looking for more chess rebuses, check out the *rebus index* in the appendix to column 188. It lists numerous articles and over 300 problems, most of which are readily available online.

Until next time!