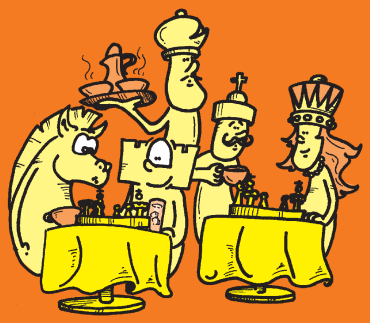


THE PUZZLING SIDE OF CHESS

Jeff Coakley

PROOF GAMES 4.0

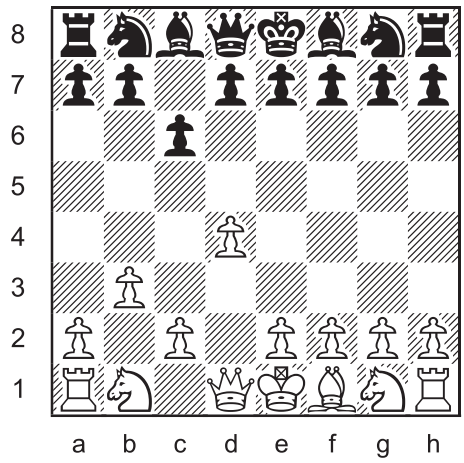
number 3 June 30, 2012

There are many chess puzzles that require us to “look backwards” from a given position to figure out which moves were played before. The general term for this process is *retrograde analysis.*

Proof games are probably the most basic kind of *retro puzzle*. The goal is to prove that a position could happen in a real game. Some of the moves might be strange, but that’s okay. Legality is important, strategy is not.

Most proof games have an additional stipulation that the position must be reached in a specific number of moves. The puzzles in this column are proof games in 4.0 which means four moves by each side.

Proof Game 01



The diagrammed position, with White to play, was reached in a game after each player made exactly four moves. Can you figure out how?

The position could easily be reached after Black's third move (3.0) or after white's fourth move (3.5).

1.d4 c6 2.Bh6 Nxh6 3.b3 Ng8

1.d3 c6 2.Bh6 Nxh6 3.b3 Ng8 4.d4

These are not valid solutions. It must be four moves by each side. But these lines do show some typical themes used in proof games.

A *switchback* occurs when a piece returns to a square where it stood earlier, such as the knight maneuvre Nxh6-g8. This deception is a very common theme.

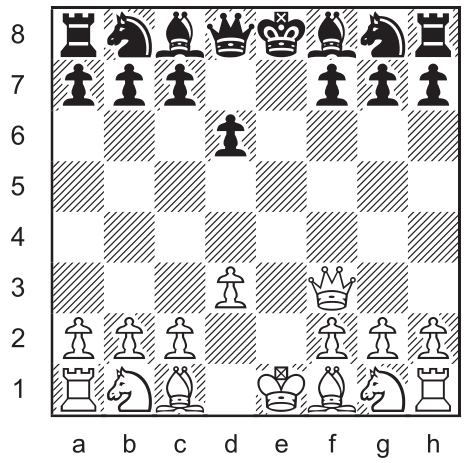
A *tempo move* is another standard ploy. For example, in the second line, the white d-pawn took two moves to reach d4 instead of one move.

Proof games have been popular with chess problemists since the 1970s. There are hundreds of compositions, in all lengths. The majority are ten moves (10.0) or more. Very few are less than six (6.0).

To me, 4.0 is the perfect length for a proof game. It's amazing how deceptive these positions can be. But they look simple and therefore appeal to a wide audience.

Some interesting ideas can only be shown in longer proof games. However, because of their length and obvious complexity, most players are not inclined to try solving them.

Proof Game 02



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

A well constructed proof game has a unique solution. There should only be one possible sequence of moves to get from Point A (the initial array) to Point B (the puzzle position).

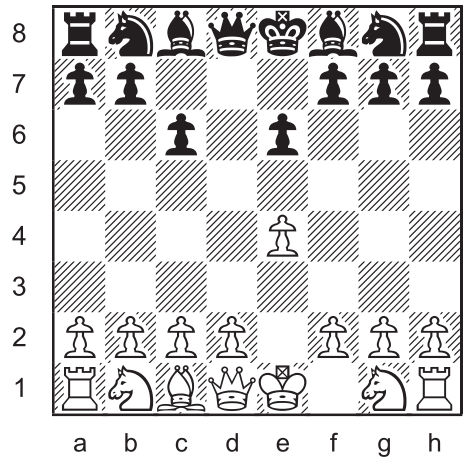
The instructional value of proof games is minimal. But they are a fun exercise in thinking, similar to "brain teasers". A perplexing situation must be explained. Good training for prospective detectives.

The next puzzle is without doubt the most famous proof game ever composed. If you only saw one proof game in your life, it would probably be this one. It is included in almost every book or article that has been written on this type of chess problem.

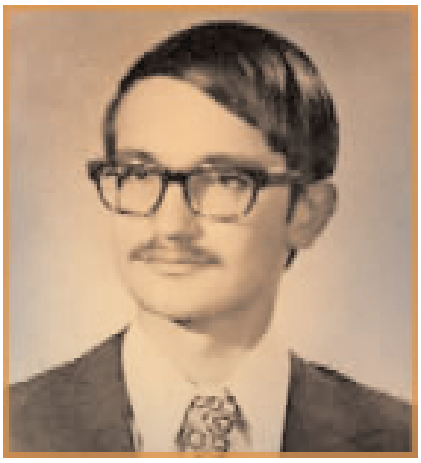
While planning the current column, I decided to be different and not include this position. I changed my mind for two reasons. Firstly, it's the puzzle that inspired me to try making proof games of my own. I can still remember being stumped by its apparent simplicity. Secondly, I thought it would be nice to provide some biographical information about the composer.

Proof Game 03

Tibor Orbán 1976



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



Tibor Orbán was born in Kaposvár, Hungary on July 5, 1956. After attending university, he joined the military. Tragically, on September 4, 1981, one day after completing his service, he was found dead at a railway station. Just 25 years old.

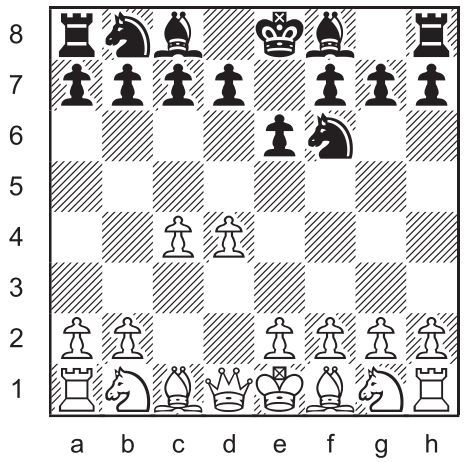
At least twenty of his chess problems were published in various journals during his lifetime. All but one were standard mates and helpmates. His classic proof game appeared in *Die Schwalbe*, a German magazine dedicated to chess compositions, now in its 88th year.

If you have not solved the puzzle yet, then be warned that the next paragraph will give away the solution.

The remarkable feature of this proof game is the *switchback of a piece making a capture on its original square*, in this case the black king. In honour of Tibor, I suggest that this theme be called the "Orbán effect".

The Puzzling Side of Chess usually has three puzzles per column. Since many of you have seen proof game 03 before, here is a fourth. It's an opening novelty from the Nimzo-Indian Defence!?

Proof Game 04



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

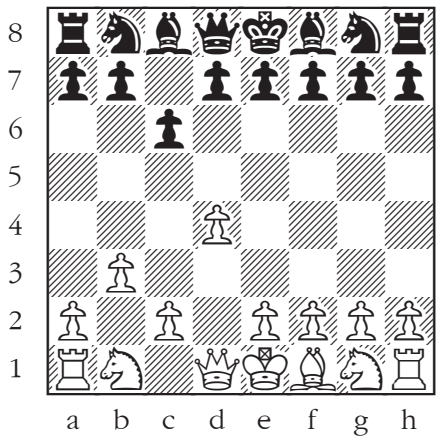
By the way, in January 2011, there was an instructive article on *Proof Games* by GM John Nunn in the Chess Cafe *Skittles Room*. [Unfortunately, the cafe archives are no longer online.]

SOLUTIONS

Proof games 1, 2, and 4 by J. Coakley. Problems 1 and 4 are from *Winning Chess Puzzles For Kids Volume 2* (2010). Problem 2 is a *ChessCafe.com* original (2012).

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.

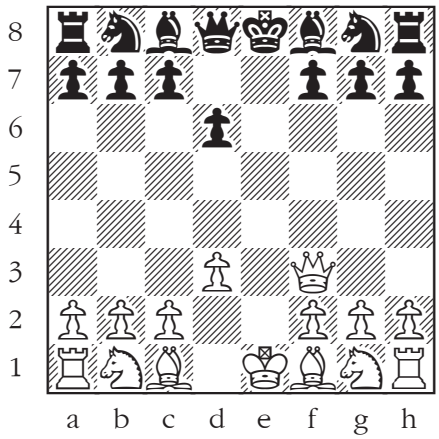
Proof Game 01



1.d4 c6 2.Bf4 Qb6 3.Bc7 Qxc7 4.b3 Qd8

The black queen performs a switchback and a tempo move, taking three turns to return to d8 instead of two.

Proof Game 02



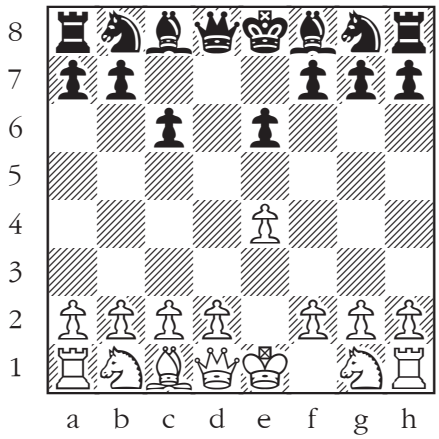
1.d4 e5 2.Qd3 exd4 3.Qf3 d3 4.exd3 d6

The tempo move by the queen is the main deception.

Proof Game 03

Tibor Orbán 1976

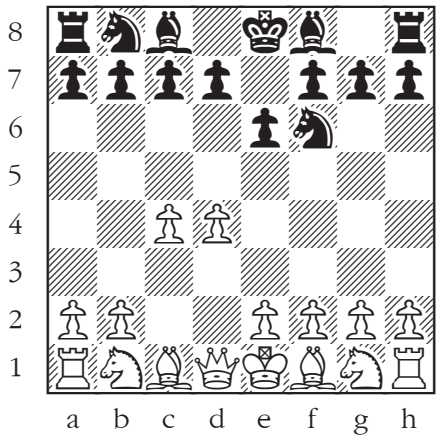
Die Schwalbe



1.e4 e6 2.Bb5 Ke7 3.Bxd7 c6 4.Be8 Kxe8

This puzzle has surely boggled millions of minds.

Proof Game 04



1.d4 e6 2.Bh6 Qg5 3.c4 Qc1 4.Bxc1 Nf6

The Orbán Effect in action.

Until next time!