



THE PUZZLING SIDE OF CHESS

Jeff Coakley

RETRACTORS: Plowing Fields

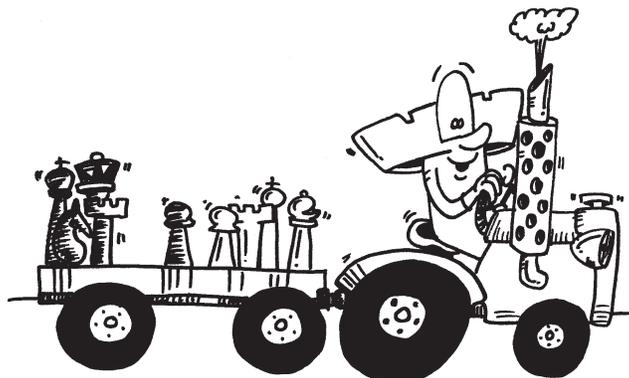
number 208

February 24, 2022

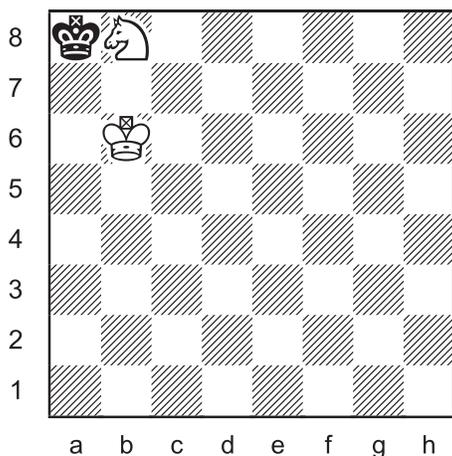
It's been eight years since the last column on retractors. Time to get back in the field and plow.

In a basic *retractor* problem, White takes back their last move, and then checkmates Black with a different move. If the retracted move is a capture, White decides which type of piece was taken.

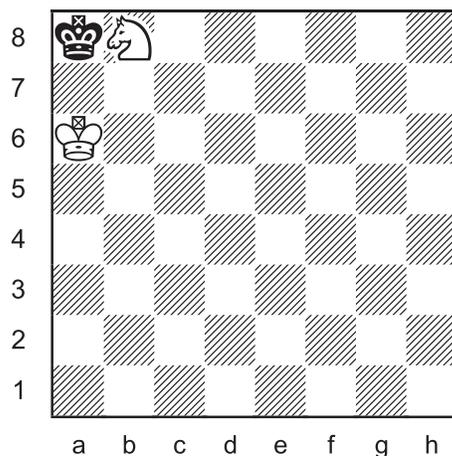
One step backward, one step forward. It's easy.



Retractor 30



Retractor 31

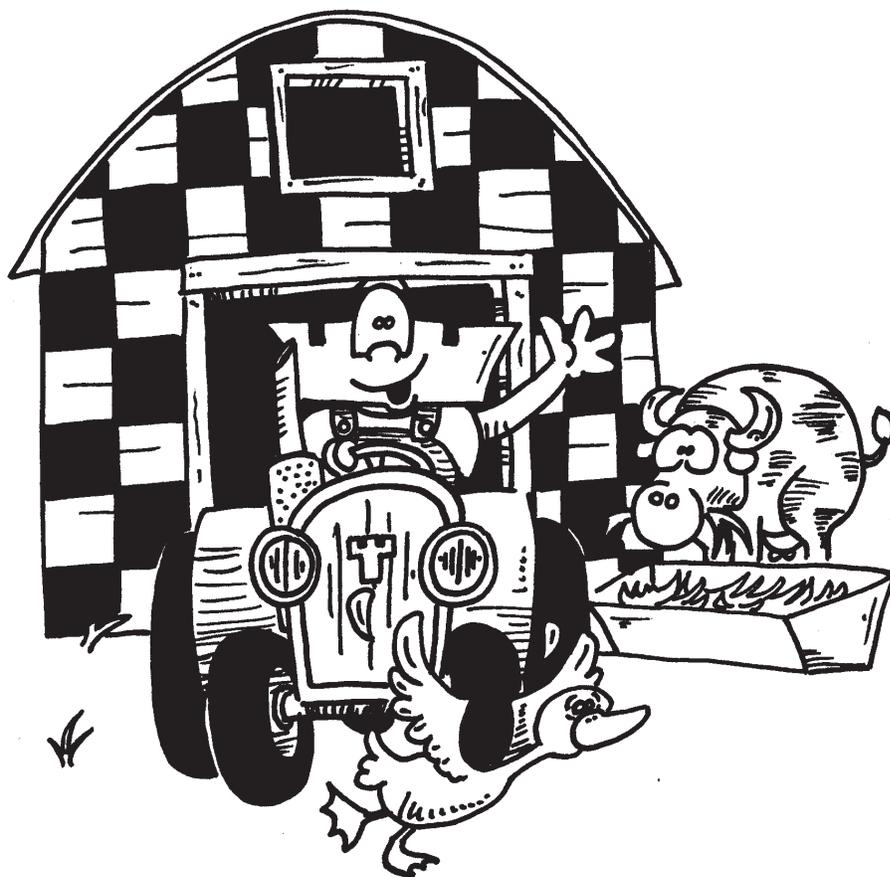


White takes back their last move, then mates in one.

RETRACTORS

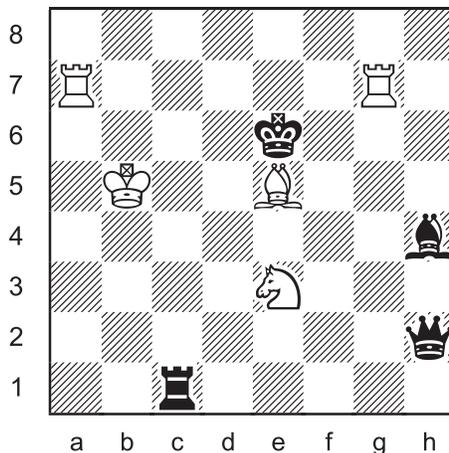
Here are the special rules for this type of puzzle.

- a) White may retract any move of their choice.
- b) The position after the retraction must be legal. Among other things, this implies that Black had a legal move on the previous turn. A position is legal if it can be reached in a normal game following the standard rules.
- c) If the retracted move is a capture, White decides which type of piece was taken.
- d) An *en passant* capture is allowed as the backward (retracted) move unless it can be proven illegal.
- e) An *en passant* capture is not allowed as the forward (mating) move unless it can be proven that Black moved their pawn two squares on the previous turn.
- f) Castling is allowed as a backward or forward move unless it can be proven illegal.



This column presents eight “missed mates”. As usual, the level of difficulty increases as the pages turn, or whatever pdf pages do.

Retractor 32

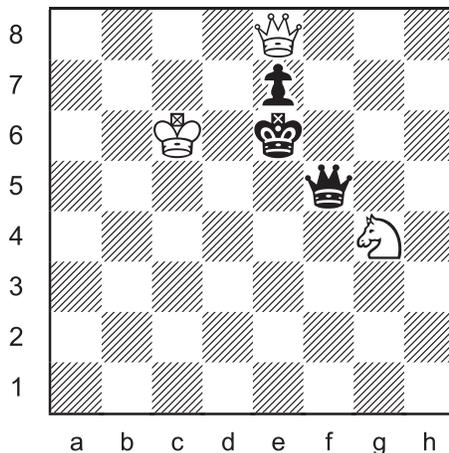


White takes back their last move,
then mates in one.



The following miniature is by the famous Russian endgame composer
Leonid Kubbel (1891-1942).

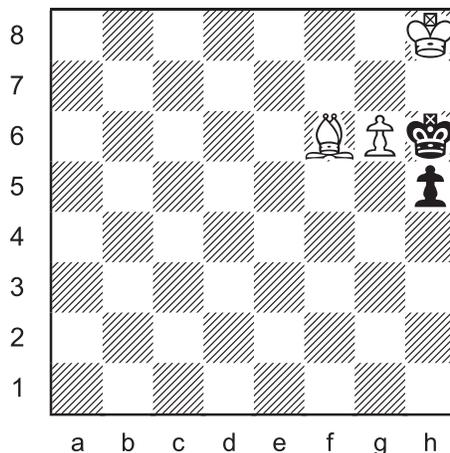
Retractor 33



White takes back their last move,
then mates in one.

The next row to plow is a straightforward masterpiece from the late great Günther Weeth (1935-2020). For another retractor by the German retro specialist, see problem 7c in *Takeback Granted* (column 33).

Retractor 34



White takes back their last move,
then mates in one.

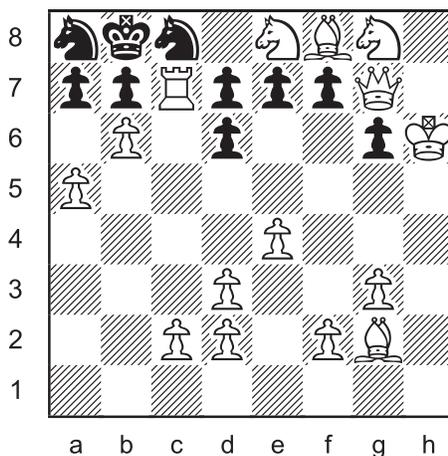


Get behind the mule and plow.

The retro content of the previous puzzles was quite basic. Hopefully fun, but probably not much of a challenge for many solvers. The remaining problems should change that. Are you ready for the tough stuff?

This one is by Hansjörg Schiegl, former editor of the German chess magazine *Die Schwalbe*.

Retractor 35



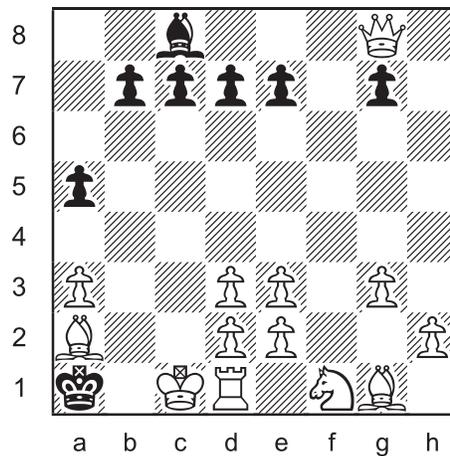
White takes back their last move,
then mates in one.



Fields of Files

Josef Haas (1922-2003) was chief police commissioner in Stuttgart, Germany. He was also a renowned composer of retro problems, which he likened to criminal cases that require the deductive skills of experienced detectives. Appropriately, his book of collected problems is called *Tatort Schachbrett* (Crime Scene Chessboard). Can you solve the following mystery?

Retractor 36



White takes back their last move,
then mates in one.

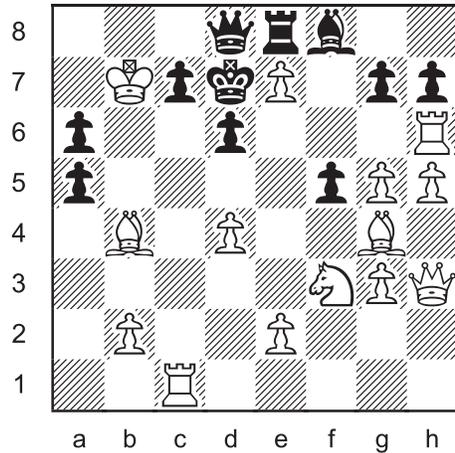


Tractor Chess

Guadalajara, Mexico 2016

Plowing through a field of retro puzzles can be a satisfying experience, but it takes its toll in toil and sweat. Fortunately, a well-deserved break is coming soon. One final furrow to go.

Retractor 37



White takes back their last move,
then mates in one.



Pre-tractor.

SOLUTIONS

Retractors 30, 32, 37 by J. Coakley, *Puzzling Side of Chess* (2022).
Others as indicated above solution diagrams.

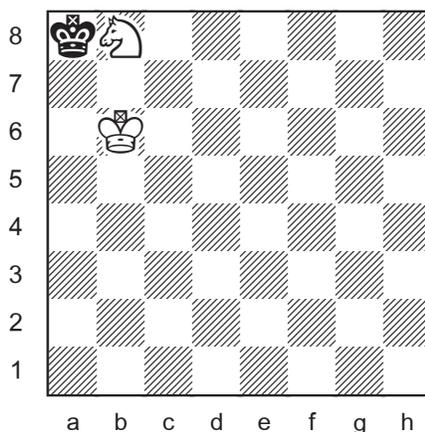
PDF hyperlinks. You can advance to the solution of any puzzle by clicking on the underlined title above the diagram. To return to the puzzle, click on the title above the solution diagram.

Archives. Past columns and an index of problem-types, composers, and side themes are available in the *Puzzling Side of Chess* archives. For retractors 1-29, see columns 33, 45, 54, 62, 66.

Retractor 30

J. Coakley 2022

Puzzling Side of Chess



-1.Na6xNb8
+1.Na6-c7#

The last move was by the white knight from a6 capturing a black knight on b8. After that move is taken back, White mates by 1.Nc7#.

The piece uncaptured on b8 must be a knight. A queen or rook would check the white king. A bishop would guard c7.

Note on Notation

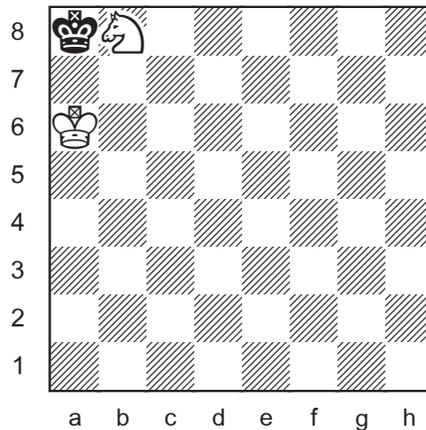
Solutions are written in long algebraic notation (departure and destination squares). In the case of captures, the type of piece taken is given after the 'x' prior to the destination square. A minus sign precedes the retracted move. A plus sign is shown before the forward move.

Retractor 31

J. Coakley 2022

Puzzling Side of Chess

version of Erich Bartel 1965



-1.Nd7xBb8
+1.Nd7-b6#

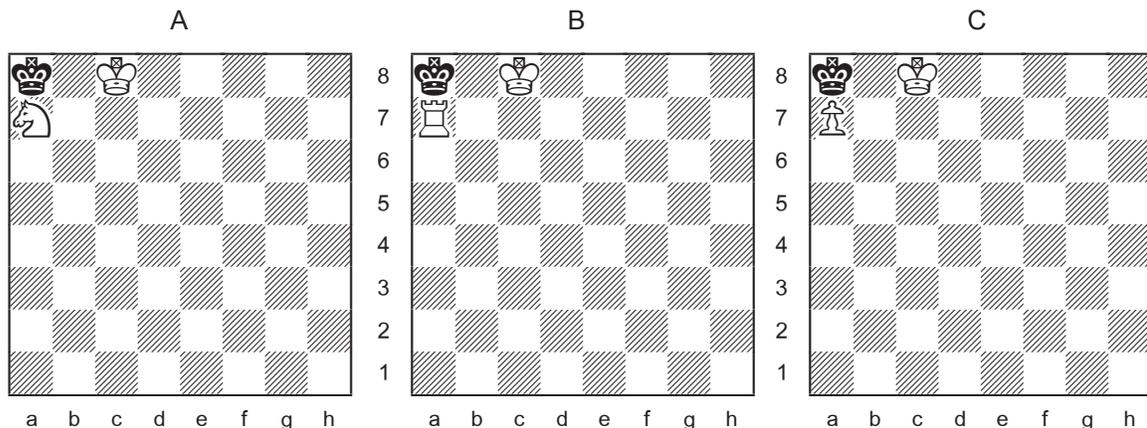
The piece uncaptured on b8 must be a bishop. A knight would check the white king. A queen or rook would guard b6.

Retractor 31 is a rotated and reflected version of part A from the following clever triplets by German composer Erich Bartel.

Retractor 31b

Erich Bartel 1965

Diagramme und Figuren



-1.Nb5xBa7
+1.Nb5-c7#

-1.Rb7xRa7
+1.Rb7-b8#

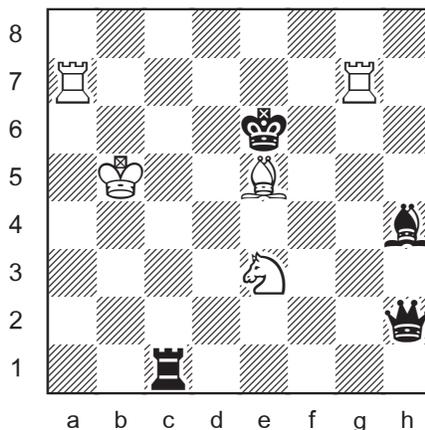
-1.b6xBa7
+1.b6-b7#

In part C, a black pawn cannot be uncaptured on a7 because Black would not have a legal move on the previous turn. "Retrostalemate."

Retractor 32

J. Coakley 2022

Puzzling Side of Chess



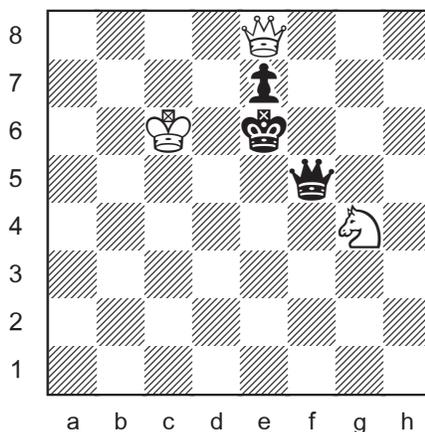
-1.Bc3xPe5
+1.Ra7-a6#

The bishop retracts to c3 to block the c-file. The piece uncaptured on e5, which blocks the b8-h2 diagonal, must be a pawn. A queen or rook would give check. A bishop or knight could block the rook check from a6.

Retractor 33

Leonid Kubbel

Josef Haas Retro-Sammlung

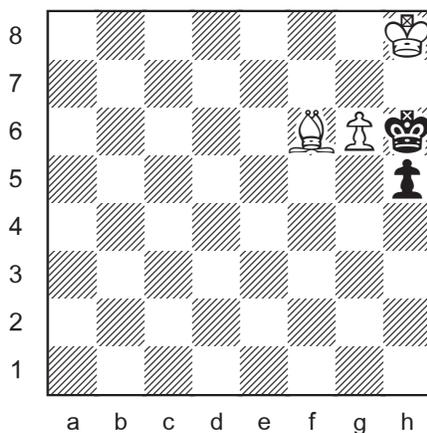


-1.d7xNe8=Q
+1.d7-d8=N#

White unqueens by uncapturing on e8, then knights on d8. The uncaptured piece must be a knight. A queen or rook would guard d8. A bishop would pin the pawn on d7.

Retractor 34

Günther Weeth 2002
Stuttgarter Zeitung



-1.f5xg6 e.p.
+1.Bf6-g7#

When the *en passant* capture is retracted, there is a white pawn on f5 (attacking g6) and a black pawn on g5 (blocking g5).

An *en passant* capture is allowed as a backward move unless it can be proven illegal.

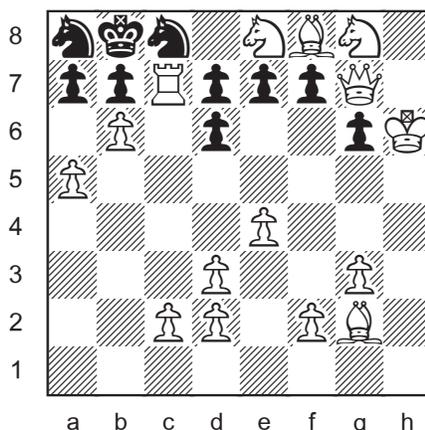


En passant?

Retractor 35

Hansjörg Schiegl 1971

Die Schwalbe



-1.Nf6xRe8
+1.Nf6xd7#

There are three retractions and mates to consider:

-1.Qc3xg7 +1.Rc7xc8#
-1.Nf6xg8 +1.Nf6xd7#
-1.Nf6xe8 +1.Nf6xd7#

In each case, the retracted move must be an uncapture. Otherwise Black had no move on the preceding turn.

The only black piece with any apparent reverse mobility is the pawn on g6. However, it did not make the previous move.

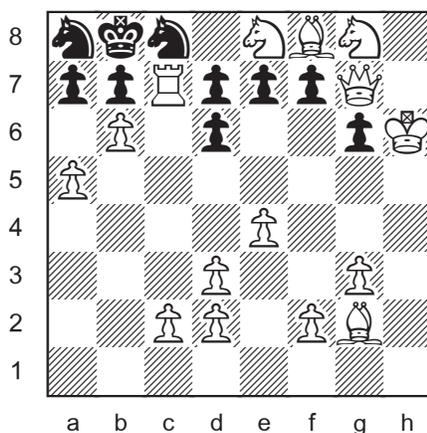
There are 15 white pieces on the board. The only missing white piece (rook) was captured on d6. So Black's last move was not a capture by ...hxg6. After the non-capturing retraction -1.Qc3-g7, the previous black move could not be ...g7-g6 because it would be impossible for a white bishop to be on f8.

Black has 10 pieces on the board. The light-square bishop was captured on c8 (unmoved pawns b7 d7). White pawns made four captures: e2xd3, g2xf3, f3xe4, h2xg3. That leaves one piece to uncapture by retraction.

In order to be captured, the missing black h-pawn promoted on h1. Because this occurred after White played hxg3, the pawn did not promote to knight because it would not have been able to exit the corner. The two original black knights are on the board, so White's retraction cannot be the uncapture of a knight.

continued next page

Retractor 35 *continued*



White cannot retract $-1.Qc3xQg7$ or $-1.Qc3xBg7$ because that would place the white king in check (with no time for $+1.Rxc8\#$). White cannot retract $-1.Qc3xRg7$ because Black would have no previous move. White would be in check before $\dots Rh7-g7$ (with Black to move). That eliminates a retraction by the white queen.

White cannot retract $-1.Nf6xQg8$ or $-1.Nf6xRg8$ because Black would have no previous move. White would be in check before any move by the queen or rook. It is much trickier to show that White cannot retract $-1.Nf6xBg8$. The original black light-square bishop was captured on c8. But perhaps the black h-pawn promoted to bishop and made its way back to g8. As it turns out, this is impossible because the bishop would have to be on g8 or h7 before Black played $\dots g7-g6$. In that case, the black dark-square bishop was still on f8, so it was not the piece captured on g3 by the white h-pawn (that allowed the black h-pawn to pass). But all other captures by White were on light squares (d3 e4 f3) which is impossible since one missing black piece is the dark bishop. That eliminates a retraction by the knight on g8.

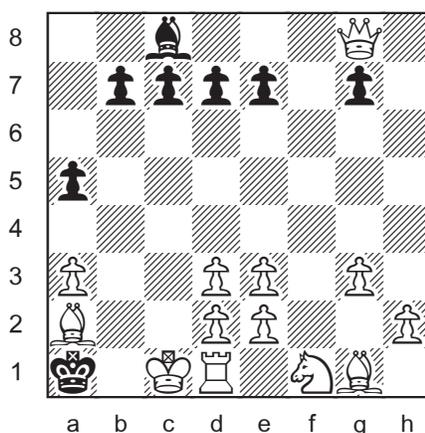
White cannot retract $-1.Nf6xQe8$ because the black queen would guard d7. Therefore the only possible retraction is $-1.Nf6xRe8$. Black's previous move was $\dots Rd8-e8$. White mates by $1.Nf6xd7\#$.



Retractor 36

Josef Haas 1973

Die Schwalbe



-1.Bf7-a2
+1.Kc1-c2#

The mate is easy to see. White retracts the bishop from a2 and plays +1.Kc1-c2#. The challenge here, as so often in complicated retractors, is to avoid retrostalemate. The move taken back must result in a position where Black had a legal move on the previous turn.

The white minor pieces are the first important clues to investigate. The dark-square bishop necessarily reached g1 or f2 before White played g2-g3 and after White played f2xe3. At that point, the white bishop that started on f1 had not moved from f1. But with a pawn on e3, the white knight could only get to f1 from g3, before White played g2-g3. Thus, the original white light-square bishop was captured on f1.

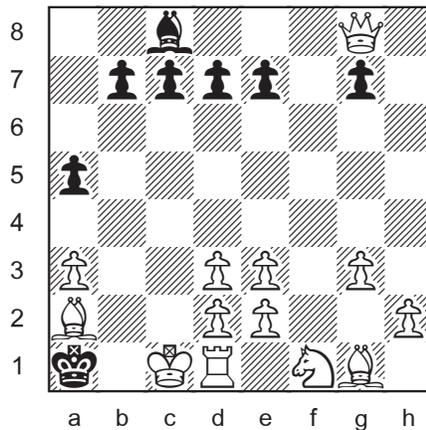
Therefore the bishop on a2 is the former white b-pawn which required 5 captures to promote on e8 or g8. Black is missing 8 pieces. The dark-square bishop was captured on f8. And two pieces were captured by white pawns on d3 and e3. That accounts for all missing black pieces. White cannot retract a capture on a2.

This also shows that Black's previous move was not ...a6-a5 or ...a7-a5 because the rook from a8 could never have escaped his corner to be captured by a white pawn.

White is missing 3 pieces (RBN). The bishop was captured on f1. Another piece was captured on g2 by the black h-pawn so that it could promote and be captured elsewhere on the board. That leaves one white piece unaccounted for.

continued next page

Retractor 36 *continued*

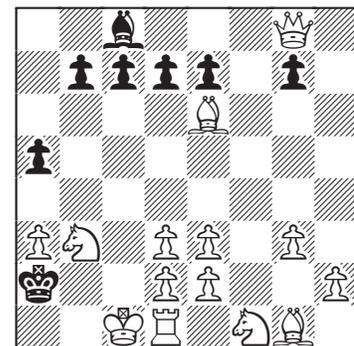


Regardless of which square the white bishop retreats to, Black's previous move had to be by the king from a2 to a1. Which means that the king was in check by the bishop. But what was White preceding move? It was not a capture by the bishop because all missing black pieces were captured by pawns. It was not a non-capturing move by the bishop because the black king would already be in check by the queen or bishop. The explanation is the *old disappearing knight trick*. White's preceding move was Nb3-a1+ discovered check! To which Black replied ...Ka2xNa1.

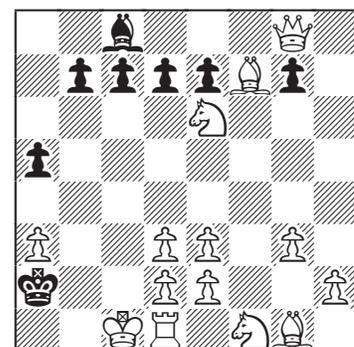
However, the question remains. To which square should the bishop retract? The answer is far from obvious, but it can only be f7!

Consider the position with the bishop on e6 prior to -1.Be6-a2 Ka2xNa1 -2.Nb3-a1+ (diagram). Black's preceding move was -2...Ka1-a2 and White's before that was either -3.Nd4-b3+ or -3.Nc5-b3+. But White must still find a way to avoid retrostalemate. In this situation, after a further retraction by -3...Ka2-a1, Black is again in check by the bishop. The only explanation is -4.Nb3-d4+ or -4.Nb3-c5+ which is ultimately impossible as the position must keep repeating itself over and over! Retrostalemate. The same argument eliminates retractions to c4 and d5.

By retracting the bishop to f7, White avoids the reverse repetition by bringing the knight back to e6, closing the a2-g8 diagonal, allowing the black king to shuffle between a1 and a2 while White untangles the position. See diagram for the position before -4.Ne6-d4!



try with -1.Be6-a2



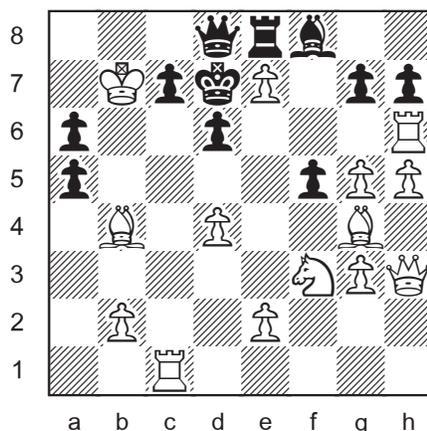
solution after -4.Ne6-d4

Forward play: 1.Nd4+ Ka1 2.Nb3+ Ka2 3.Na1+ Kxa1 (4.Ba2 or 4.Kc2#).

Retractor 37

J. Coakley 2022

Puzzling Side of Chess



-1.d2-d4
+1.g5xf6 e.p.#

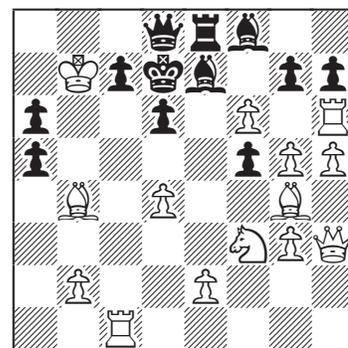
1.Bg4xf5+ would be mate if 1...Kxe7 were not possible. So the first retraction to *try* and reject is -1.f6xBe7 +1.Bg4xf5#. See diagram at right. The piece uncaptured on e7 must be a bishop. A pawn, queen, or rook could block the check. A knight could capture the bishop on f5.

The position is illegal because Black has two dark-square bishops and there are not enough missing white pieces to explain a promotion on a dark square.

White is missing 2 pieces (knight and a-pawn). One of them was captured by a black pawn on the a-file. Assume that was the missing a-pawn. That leaves only the missing white knight available for capture elsewhere. However, with an unmoved white pawn on e2, and black pawns on the df-files, Black would require two captures to promote on a dark square (c1, e1, g1). Thus, the try -1.f6xBe7 does not work.

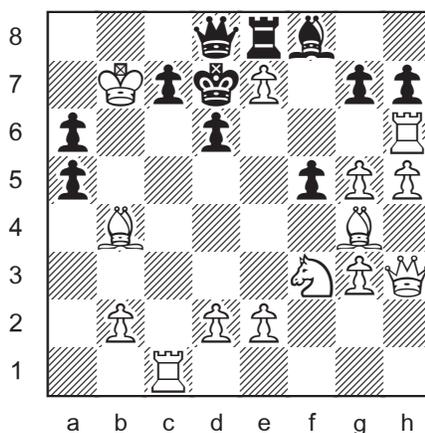
The solution is to mate with the *en passant* capture +1.g5xf6 e.p.#! However, *en passant* is not allowed as the forward (mating) move unless it can be proven that Black just moved their pawn two squares. So the task is to retract a move which “forces” -1...f7-f5 by eliminating other possibilities such as -1...a7-a6, 1...b6xa5, 1...f6-f5 and -1...e6xf5.

The answer is -1.d2-d4. See diagram next page.



try: -1.f6xBe7 (14+12)

Retractor 37 *continued*



solution: -1.d2-d4 (14+11)

The main consequence of retracting $-1.d2-d4$ is that the white bishop on b4 becomes a promoted pawn. With unmoved pawns on b2 d2, the original dark-square bishop was captured on c1.

White is missing two pieces (BN). The bishop was captured on c1 and the knight on a5 or a6. No other captures were made by Black. So the last move by Black was not the capture $\dots e6xf5$ (nor $\dots g6xf5$).

Black is missing 5 pieces (RBNNp). White pawns made 4 captures: $cxdxe$, gxf , and bxa (so the a-pawn could promote on b8). That leaves one missing black piece available for capture elsewhere.

The last move was not $\dots a7-a6$ because the white bishop had to go through a7 to get from b8 to b4.

The last move was not $\dots b6xNa5$ because the white bishop had to go through b6 to get from b8 to b4 and $\dots b7-b6$ had to be played before White promoted to allow $a6xb7$ and $b7-b8=B$.

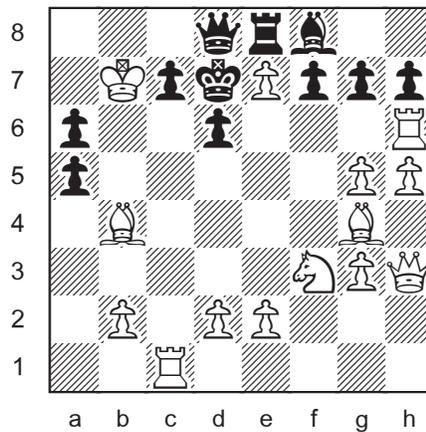
The last move was not by the black queen because the white king would be in check from any square she could retract to.

The last move was not $\dots Ke6-d7$ because the king would be in an impossible check from the white rook on h6. Also impossible was $1\dots Ke6xNd7$ (after the discovered check $Nf6-d7+$) because all missing white pieces were taken elsewhere.

Lastly, the last move was not $\dots f6-f5$ because the black king would be in an impossible check by the bishop on g4.

That leaves only one possibility: the advance $\dots f7-f5$. The diagram on the next page shows the position before that move.

Retractor 37 *continued*



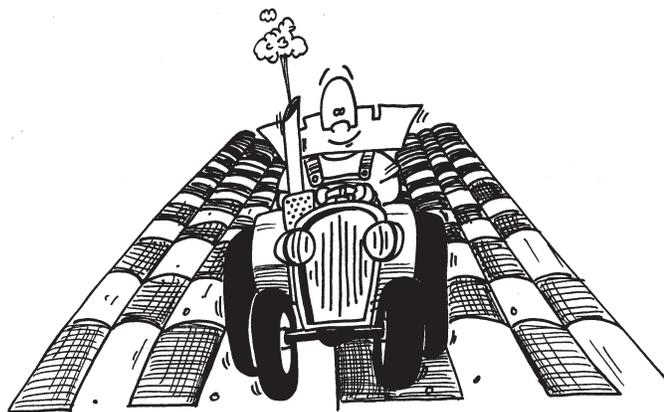
before ...f7-f5

The position before ...f7-f5 is legal. The preceding move by White was the discovered check Re6xh6+. In order to avoid retrostalemate, this move had to be a capture. (If it were not a capture, Black would have no move on the previous turn.) The black piece captured on h6 could be a knight or rook so that Black's previous move was ...Nh6 or ...Rh6.

Therefore, after the retraction -1.d2-d4, Black's last move was ...f7-f5. White can mate by +1.g5xf6 e.p.#.

For the sake of completeness, the try -1.g2-g3 fails for multiple reasons. For one thing, Black's last move could be ...a7-a6.

[February 25, 2022. Thanks to Mario Richter for his timely e-mail pointing out a mistake in this problem as originally posted yesterday.]



Until next time!

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