



THE PUZZLING SIDE OF CHESS

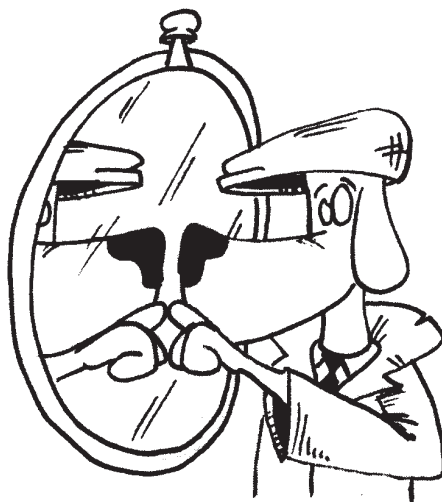
Jeff Coakley

PROOF OF EXISTENCE

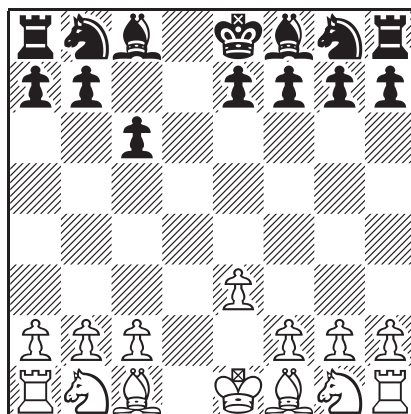
number 229

November 30, 2023

This column presents the usual assortment of proof game puzzles. Our side theme is René Descartes. In particular, his solution to the philosophical *mind-body problem* and his strange afterlife.



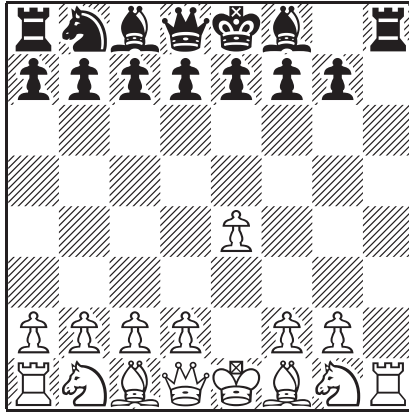
Proof Game 102



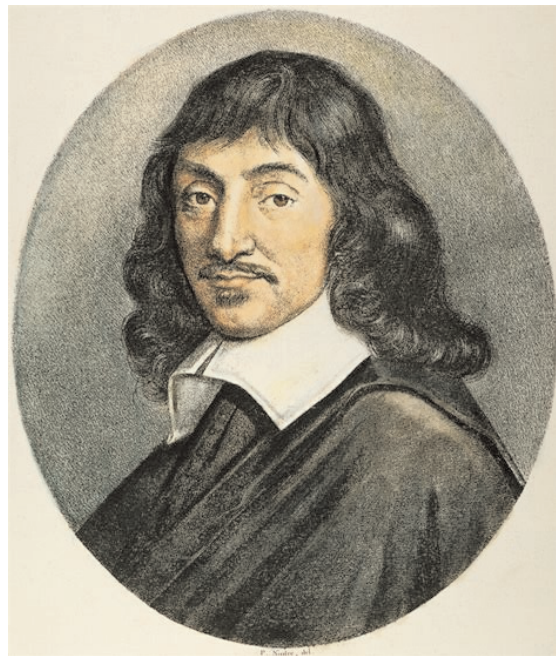
This position, with White to play, was reached in a game after each player made exactly four moves. What were the moves?

The general aim of a proof game is to *prove* that a position is legal by showing that it could happen in an actual game. In most puzzles of this type, the goal is to reach the given position in a precise number of moves. No sooner, no later. The positions may be senseless, and the strategy defenceless, but the moves are legal.

Longer Proof Game 113 (4.5 moves)



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

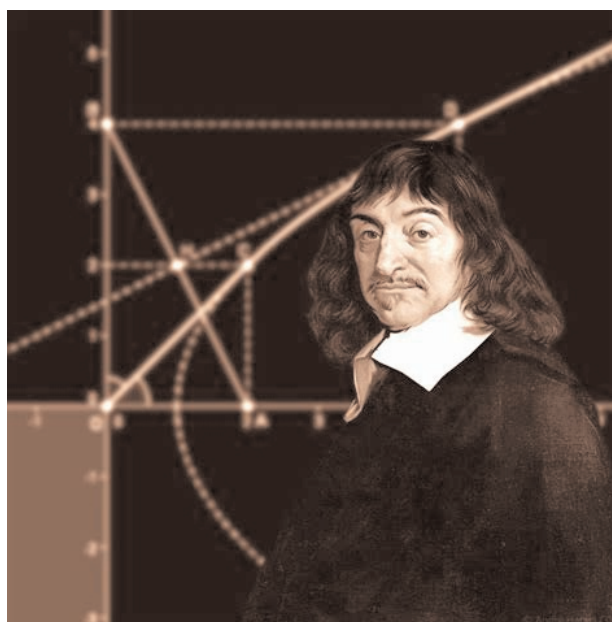


René Descartes

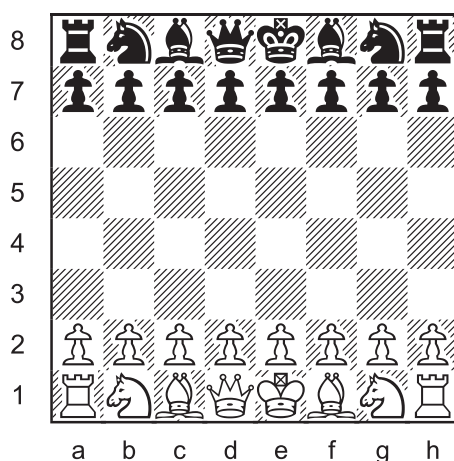
René Descartes (1596-1650) was a French mathematician, scientist, and philosopher. His book *Discourse on the Method* was the first to describe geometric lines as algebraic equations. His grid system, now called "Cartesian coordinates" is a cornerstone of analytic geometry.

Descartes is often referred to as the “Father of Modern Philosophy”. His search for absolute truths and the methodical doubt of all sensory knowledge led him to question even his own existence. He resolved this doubt with the now famous assertion: *I think, therefore I am*. Originally written in French, it is best known in its Latin translation: *Cogito ergo sum*.

Descartes’s philosophical investigations also raised the central issue of the *mind-body problem*. How is the mind related to the body? His answer was dualistic. Mind is non-physical, non-spatial. It is thinking and consciousness, completely separate from the body which is spatial matter extended in 3 dimensions. Not surprisingly, debates concerning the *philosophy of mind* continue to this day.



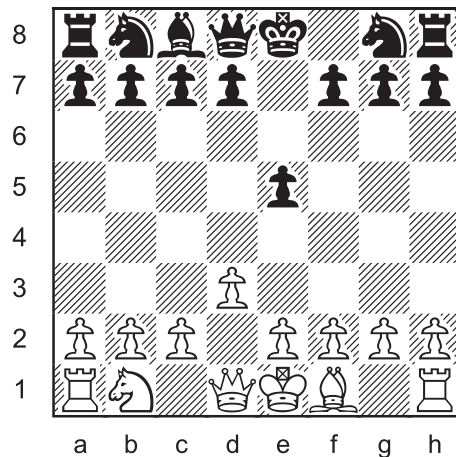
Synthetic Game 53



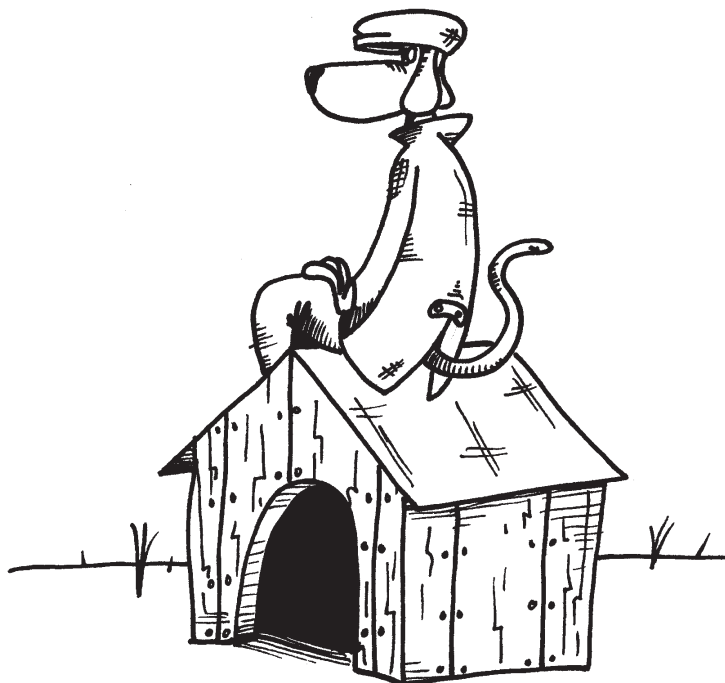
Compose a game that ends with 5.Qb3#.

As you probably haven't noticed yet, each proof game in this column is a half move longer than the previous problem. In general, that increases the level of difficulty, though not necessarily. The following five-mover looks simple enough, doesn't it?

Longer Proof Game 114 (5.0 moves)



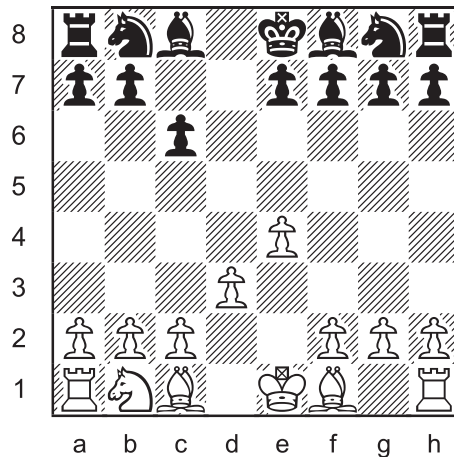
This position was reached after Black's fifth turn. What were the moves?



Descartes spent much of his adult life in the Netherlands, free from the persecution of free thinkers in France by the Catholic church. In 1649, he moved to Sweden to tutor the young Queen Christina. He died there the following year from pneumonia. His body was interred above ground in a churchyard tomb near Stockholm. And his mind?

The next puzzle extends things another half move to White's sixth turn. This one probably is tougher than it looks.

Longer Proof Game 115 (5.5 moves)



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

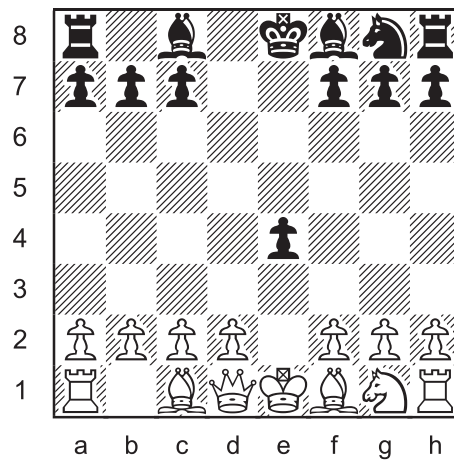


In 1667, seventeen years after his death, René Descartes's coffin was exhumed and taken to France where it was ceremoniously placed in the cemetery at Sainte-Geneviève-du-Mont in Paris. On the very same day, the Roman Catholic church banned his works by adding them to their *Index of Forbidden Books*. We can only surmise what Descartes must have thought!

Except briefly during the French Revolution when he was moved for security reasons, his remains remained there until 1818. At that time, before being reinterred yet again, his coffin was opened. Imagine their surprise. His skull was missing!

This six-mover may be the hardest proof of the bunch. Congratulations on your patience and persistence if you solve it. Please pardon the unsolicited hint, but not everyone is who they claim to be.

Longer Proof Game 116 (6.0 moves)



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

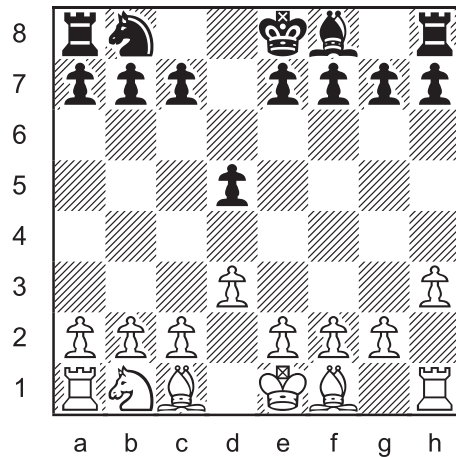


Three years later in 1821, it was discovered that Descartes's skull had been auctioned and sold numerous times since his death, beginning around 1667 when he was moved to France. Weirdly enough, it was a custom in those days for the upper class rich to include body parts of famous people in their collections of memorabilia.

Descartes's skull now resides at the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris, still separated from the rest of his body. It is covered with writing. Not only the original inscription identifying it as Descartes, but also signatures of various owners and even verses they had composed. Totally mindless.

As advertised, the challenge dial is turned up another half notch for the following problem. Some captures are easier to find than others.

Longer Proof Game 117 (6.5 moves)



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

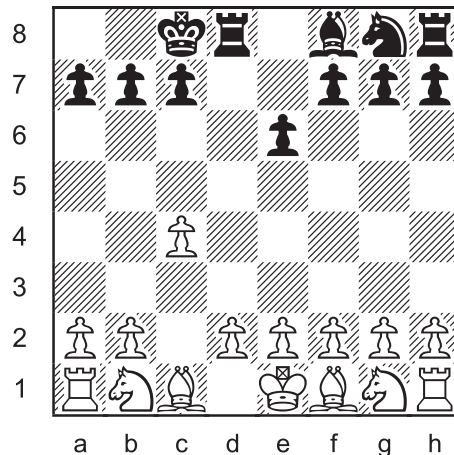
Perhaps Descartes will never rest in peace. In 2020, researchers at Lund University in Sweden claimed that the skull at *Musée de l'Homme* is a fake and that they possess part of Descartes's actual skull. Their theory is that the skull had been broken into six pieces which were sold separately. The piece shown below is inscribed in Swedish with "skull of Descartes, 1691, number 6".



At this point, the authenticity of their claims has not been verified by other scientists or accepted by the Musée. But one conclusion is certain. Some sort of *skulduggery* has taken place somewhere!?

A useful clue in solving some proof games is counting the number of captured pieces. In our final problem, White has taken four pieces in seven turns. The c-pawn has moved and probably the queen as well. If a knight captured anything, it would have to return to the 1st rank. The trickiest question is: *Who took the white queen when and where?*

Longer Proof Game 118 (7.0 moves)



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

Quotes from the great mind of René Descartes

All things in nature occur mathematically.

It is not enough to have a good mind; the main thing is to use it well.

Except our own thoughts, there is nothing absolutely in our power.

Each problem that I solved became a rule which served afterwards to solve other problems.

Conquer yourself rather than the world.

To attain the truth in life, we must discard all the ideas we were taught.

As soon as my age permitted me to pass from under the control of my instructors, I entirely abandoned the study of letters, and resolved no longer to seek any other science than the knowledge of myself, or of the great book of the world. I spent the remainder of my youth in traveling, in visiting courts and armies, in holding intercourse with men of different dispositions and ranks, in collecting varied experience, in proving myself in the different situations into which fortune threw me.

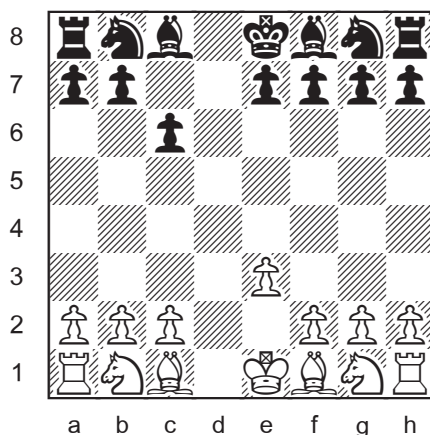
SOLUTIONS

All problems by J. Coakley. Proof games 117-118 are from tourneys in 2020 and 2023. Others are *Puzzling Side of Chess* (2023).

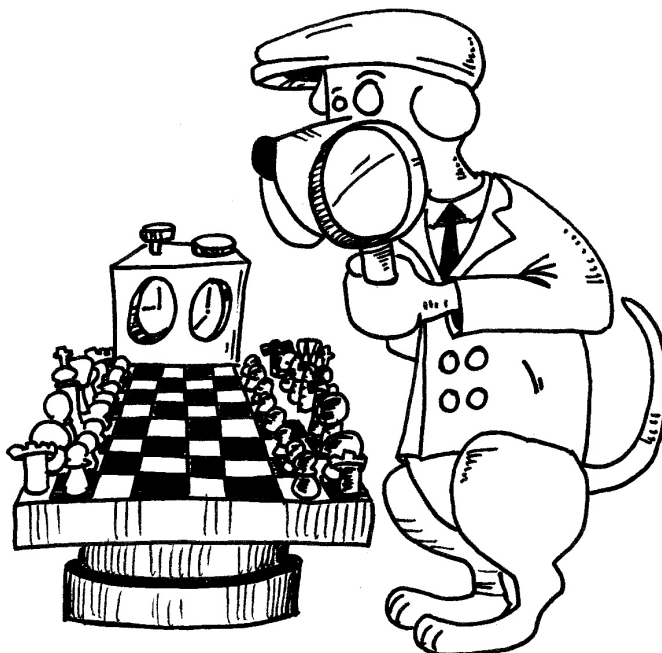
PDF hyperlinks. You can advance to the solution of any puzzle by clicking on the underlined title above the diagram. To return to the puzzle, click on the title above the solution diagram.

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

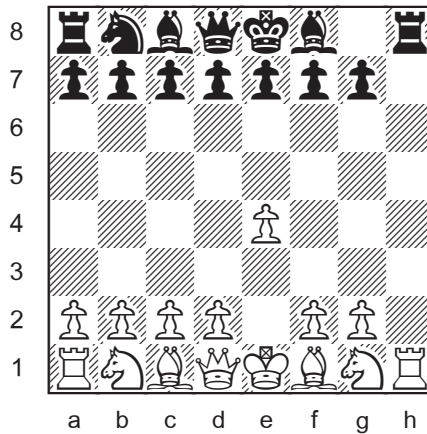
Proof Game 102



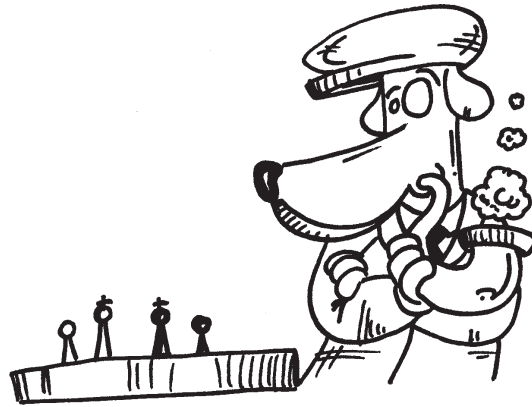
1.e3 c6 2.Qf3 Qb6 3.Qxc6 Qxe3+ 4.dxe3 dxc6
Vanishing queens. Shifty d-pawns.



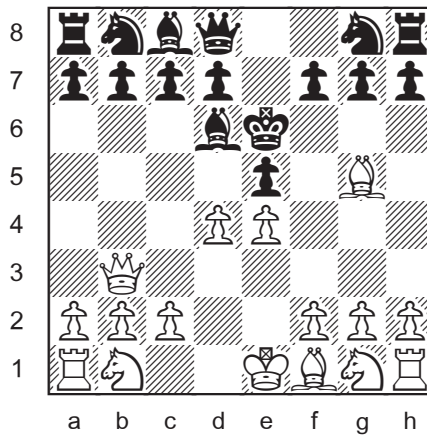
Longer Proof Game 113 (4.5 moves)



1.h4 Nf6 2.h5 Nxh5 3.e4 Ng3 4.Rxh7 Nh1 5.Rxh1
Action on the h-file.



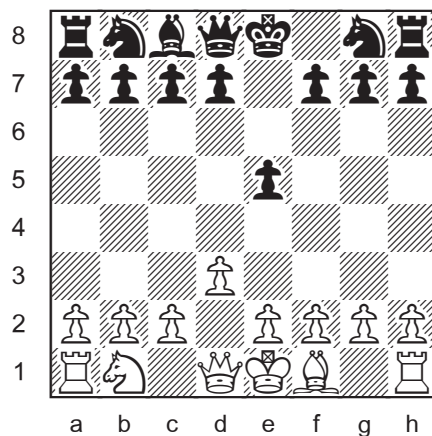
Synthetic Game 53



1.e4 e5 2.d4 Bd6 3.Qd3 Ke7 4.Bg5 Ke6 5.Qb3#

The moves can be played in different orders. White could also play 3.Qf3. Can anyone find a different mating pattern?

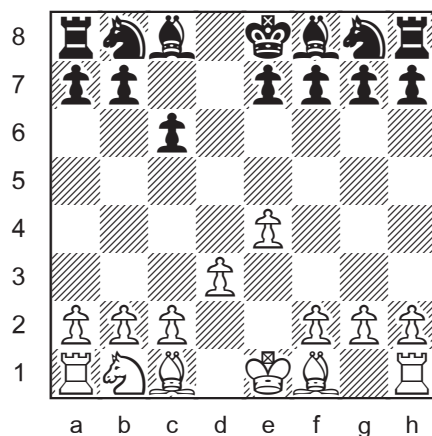
Longer Proof Game 114 (5.0 moves)



1.Nf3 e5 2.Nh4 Qxh4 3.d3 Be7 4.Bg5 Bd8 5.Bxd8 Qxd8
Bishops on the queen square. Black queen switchback with *Orbán effect*.

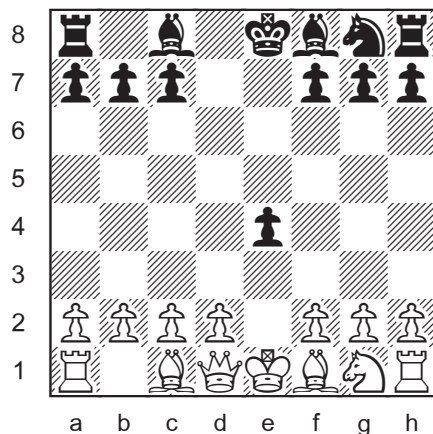


Longer Proof Game 115 (5.5 moves)

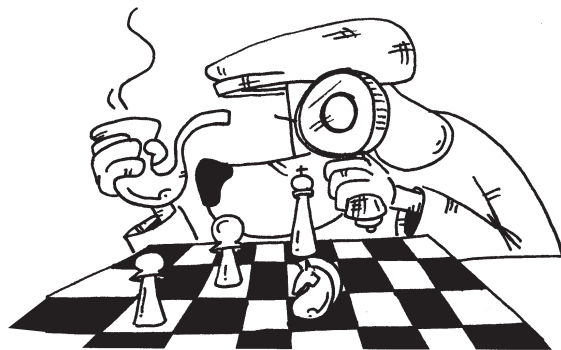


1.Nf3 d6 2.Ne5 dxe5 3.d3 e4 4.dxe4 c6 5.Qd3 Qxd3 6.exd3
Unnatural pawn play conceals the capture of both queens on d3.

Longer Proof Game 116 (6.0 moves)

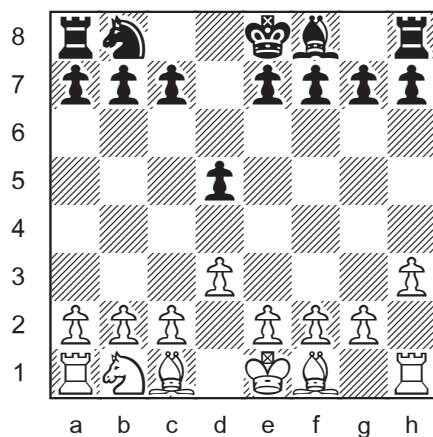


1.e3 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.Nc3 Qd5
 4.Nxd5 Nd7 5.Nxe7 Ndf6 6.Nxg8 Nxg8
 White pawn tempo. Impostor black knight.



Longer Proof Game 117 (6.5 moves)

J. Coakley 2020
Champagne Tourney



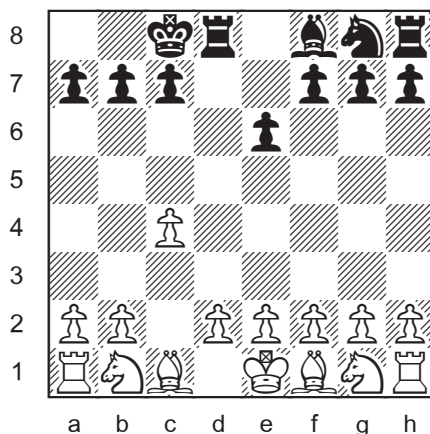
1.d3 Nh6 2.Bxh6 d5 3.Qc1 Bh3 4.Nxh3 Qd6
 5.Nf4 Qxf4 6.h3 Qxc1 7.Bxc1

Switchback white bishop with *Orbán effect*. See column 3.

Longer Proof Game 118 (7.0 moves)

J. Coakley 2023

Champagne Tourney Batumi



1.c3 e6 2.Qa4 Ke7 3.Qxd7+ Kf6 4.Qxc8 Ke7
5.Qxb8 Kd7 6.Qxd8+ Rxd8 7.c4 Kc8

Artificial castling. Black king roundabout. White pawn tempo.

A final quote from René Descartes:

From the fact alone that I know that I exist and that, at the same time, I notice absolutely nothing else that belongs to my nature apart from the single fact that I am a thinking thing, I correctly conclude that my essence consists in this alone, that I am a thinking thing.



Until next time!

© Jeff Coakley 2023. Drawings by Antoine Duff. All rights reserved.