A short history of Proof Game stipulations

- And an attempt to end the confusion -

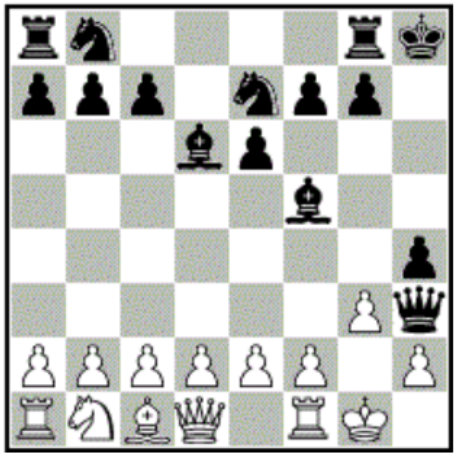
Dirk Borst

Proof Game lover since 1982

What should we write under a Proof Game diagram?

How to formulate the Proof Game stipulation?

(German: Forderung)



??????

I came across more than 10 different Proof Game stipulations.

In the FIDE Albums alone, I found 8 different stipulations.

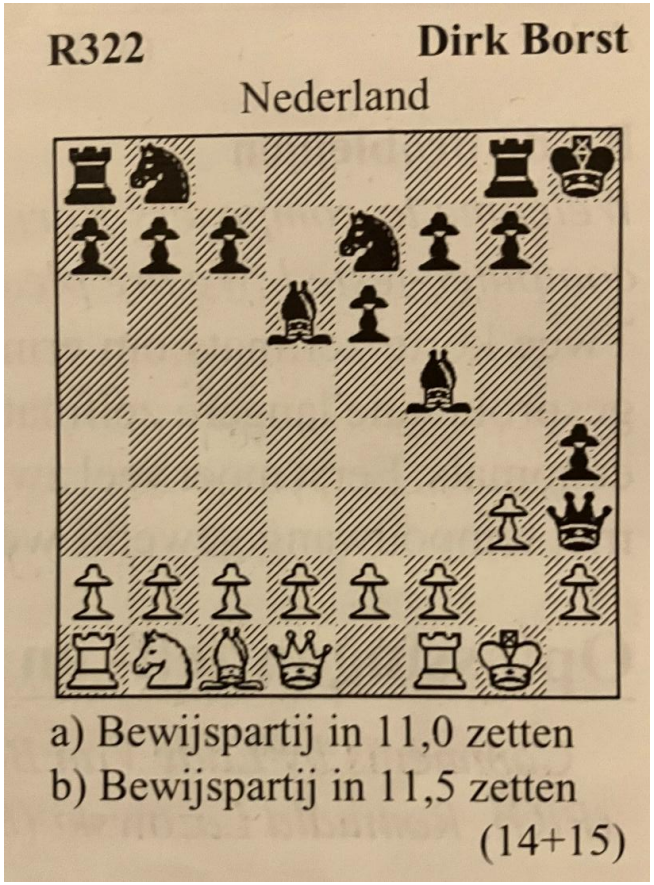
Clearly, people have been searching for the right words.

Chaos

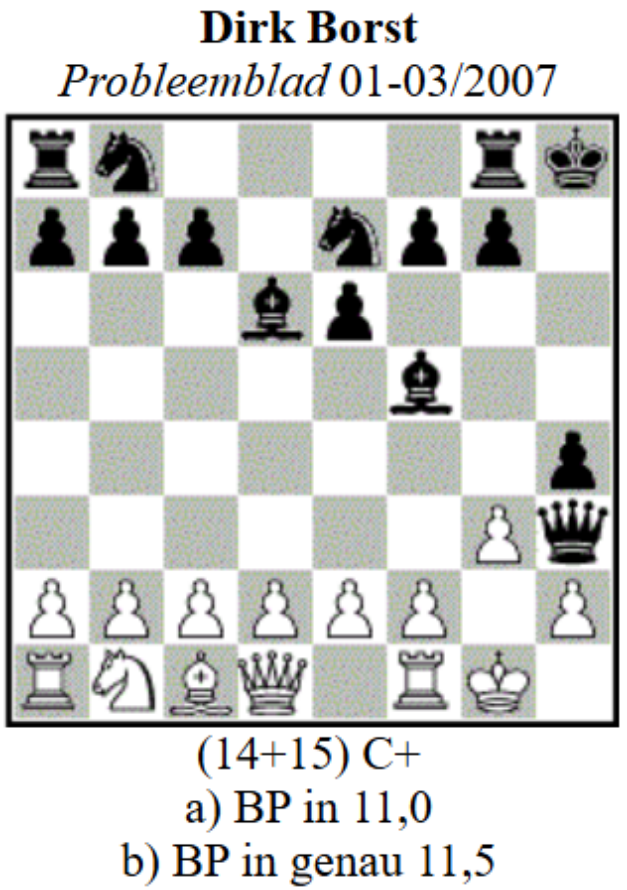

Kürzeste Beweispartie?
(Shortest Test-Game?)
Stellung nach d. 16. Zug von W.
Beweispartie?
Hg10
• Helpgame in 21.0 moves
Stellung nach dem 30. Zug
von Schwarz. Wie verlief
die Partie?
SPG
Matt im 25. Zug von Weiss.
Wie verlief die Partie?
Proof game
in exactly 29.5 moves
Plus courte partie (14+13)
justificative en 18 coups
Beweispartie in 18 Zügen
Beweispartie in 37
Einzelzügen!
Position après le 45°
coup noir : reconsti-
tuer la partie (10+14)

Confusion

Probleemblad 2007



PDB



Surely, the word “genau” (“exactly”) is completely unnecessary here (ugly too!)

Dirk Borst

Probleemblad 01-03/2007

(14+15) C+

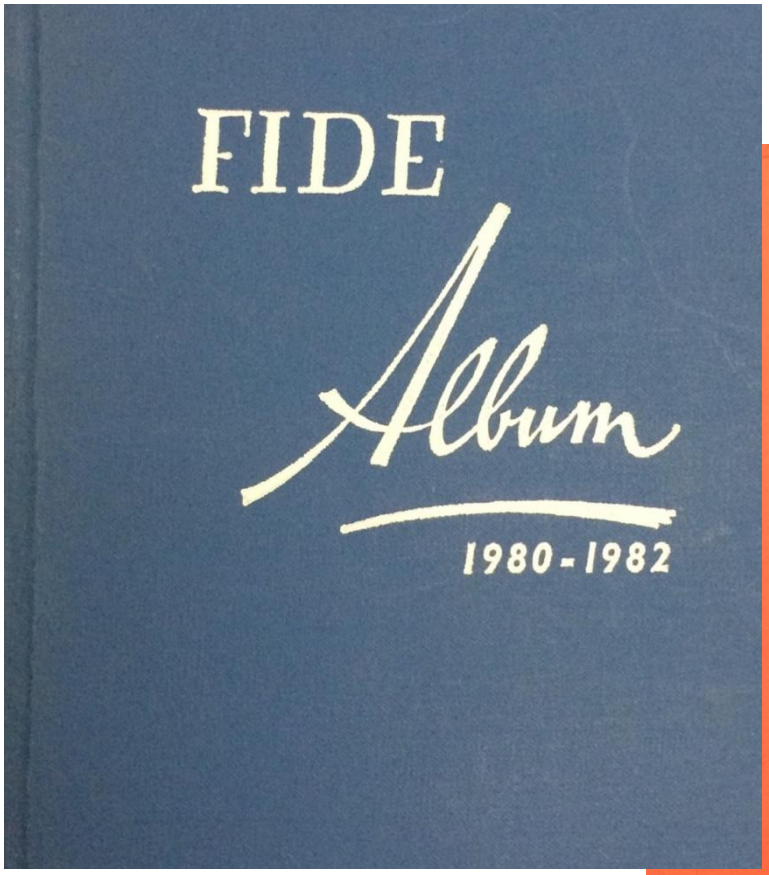
a) BP in 11,0

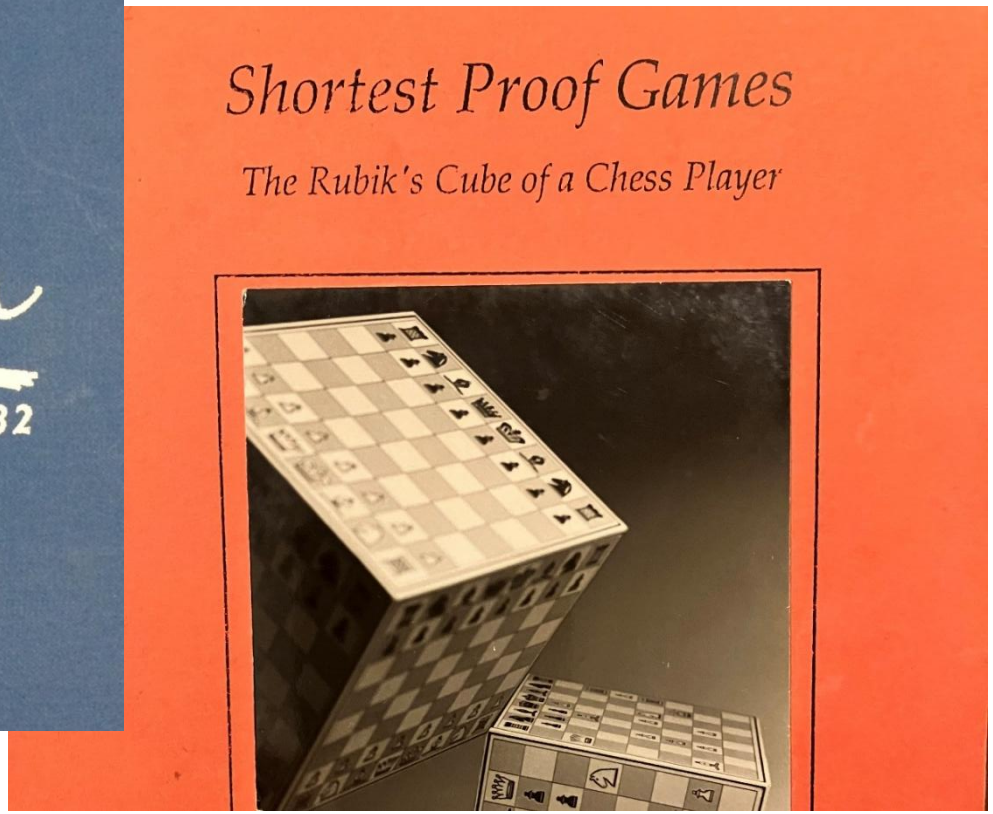
b) BP in ~~a2 and~~ 11,5

Without the word “genau”, nobody will seriously say that the solution of part (a) is a cook in part (b).

Where did this come from?

Let’s go back a bit…





Where does “Proof Game” come from?

A game to prove that a positon is legal.
The number of moves is irrelevant.

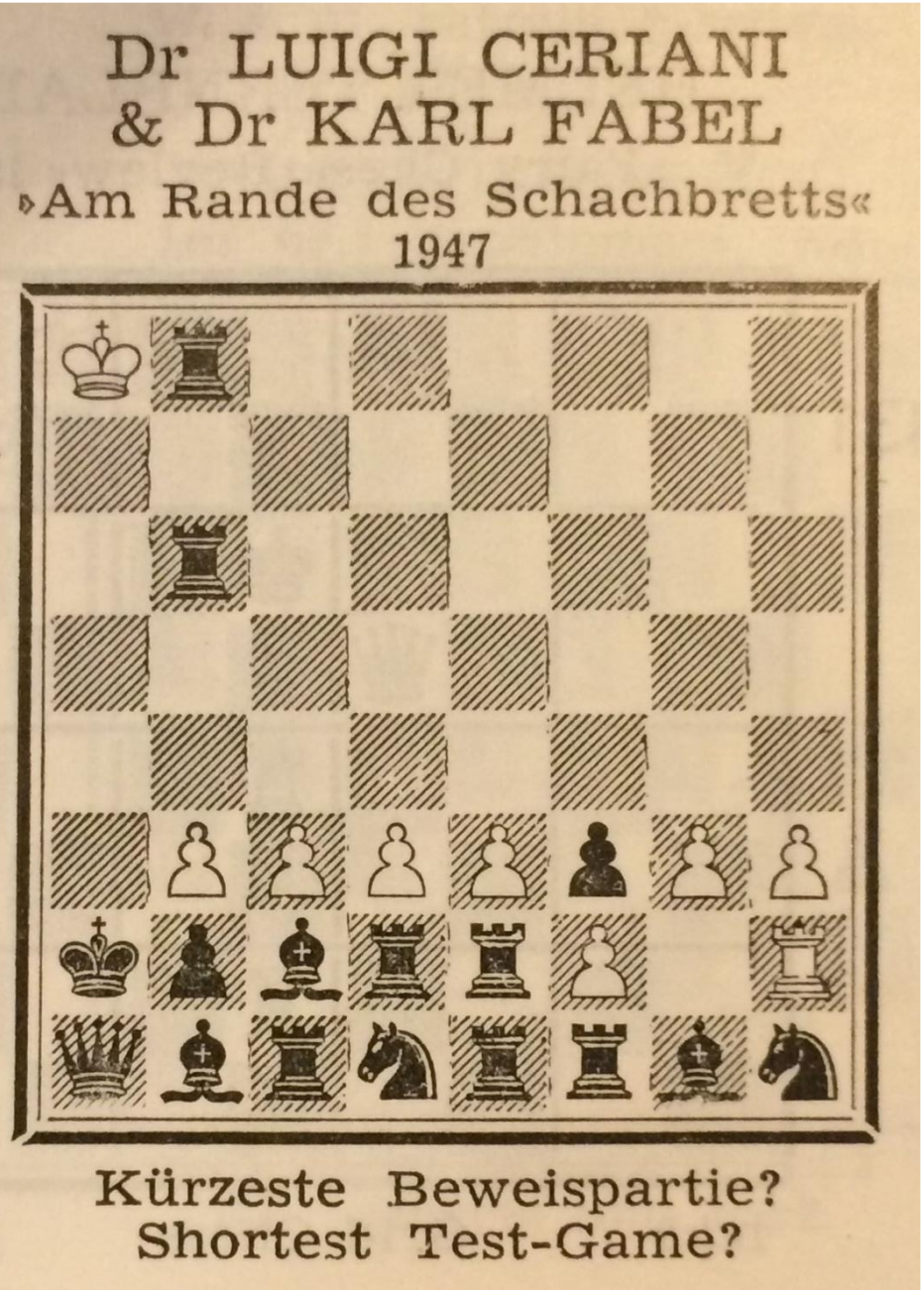
This is still in our Codex today:

Codex Article 14 – Legality of Positions:
A position is legal if it can be reached by a sequence of moves from the initial array. Such a sequence of moves is called a proof game.

“Proof Game” as a stipulation

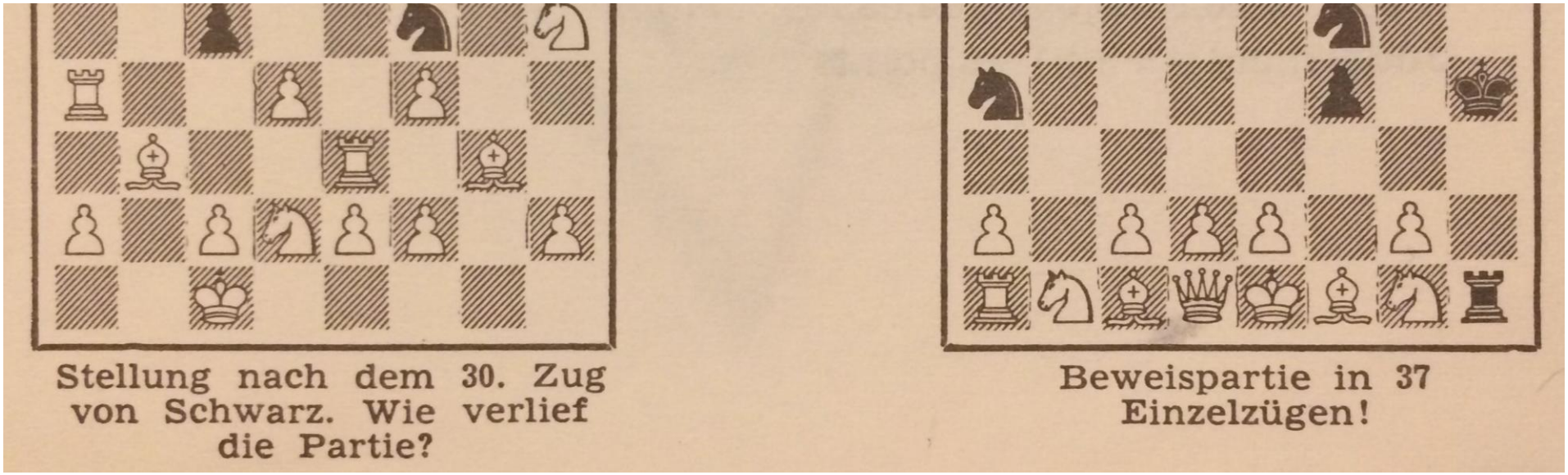
More than 100 years ago, composers started to use the concept of the **Shortest Proof Game** (or Test-Game) as a chess problem stipulation.

FIDE Album 1945-55



- Shortest Proof Game (SPG/KBP)
- *Number of moves is NOT given*
- Dualistic game
- Length record: 183.0 moves from the game array
- In 2016 Harry Goldsteen published an extended version with 185.0 moves

FIDE Album 1980-82



Stellung nach dem 30. Zug von Schwarz. Wie verlief die Partie?

Beweispartie in 37 Einzelzügen!

- Two unique, dual-free games
- The exact number of moves is given
- Why two different stipulations?

Shortest Proof Games

The Rubik's Cube of a Chess Player

A collection of more than 160 Shortest Proof Games compiled by

Gerd Wilts and Andrey Frolkin

A book about Proof Games

Shortest Proof Games

Gerd Wilts & Andrey Frolkin - 1991

Except for some colouring PGs, the book used only these 2 stipulations:

1. “Position after the 12th move of Black. How did the game go?”
   (for dual-free PGs)

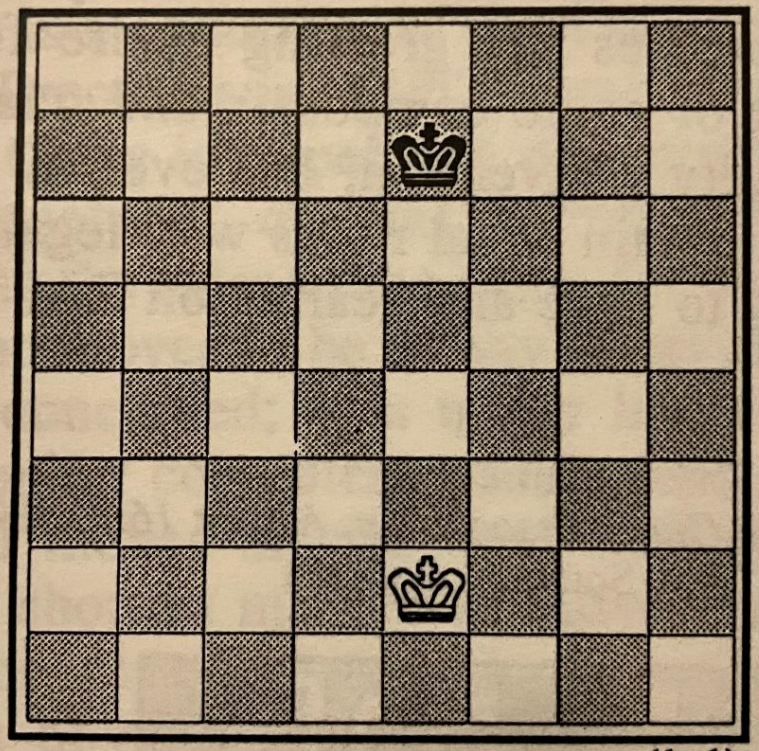
2. “Position after the 12th move of Black. What could have been the game?”
   (for dualistic PGs)

[of course, the number “12” is just an example]

Shortest Proof Games

Gerd Wilts & Andrey Frolkin - 1991

No. 2
Sam Loyd
New York Clipper, 1895



(1+1)

Position after the 17th move of Black. What could have been the game?

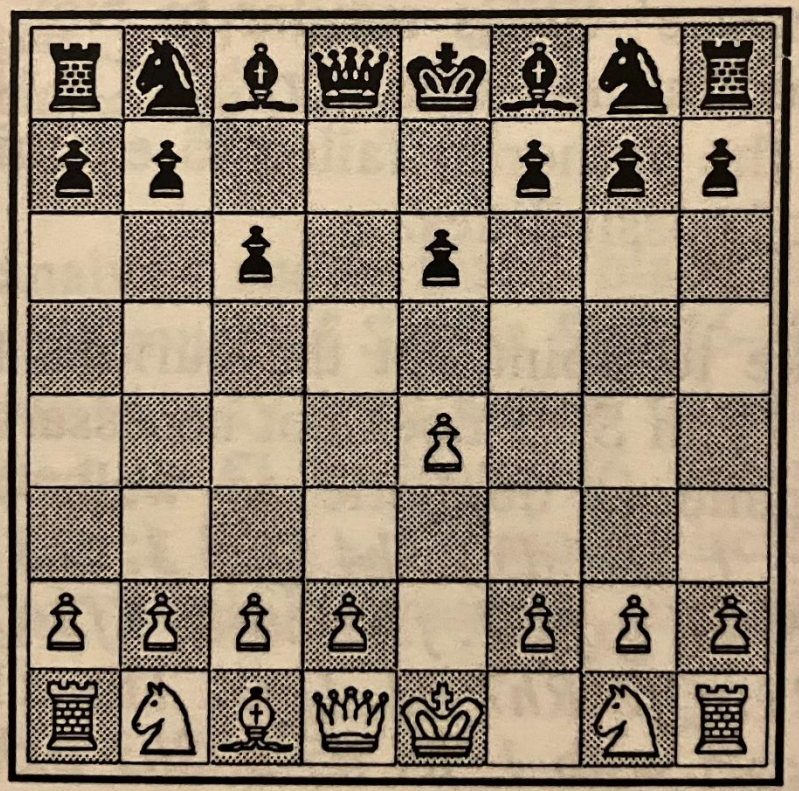
Shortest Proof Games

Gerd Wilts & Andrey Frolkin - 1991

Tibor Orbán

Die Schwalbe, 1976

commendation



(15+15)

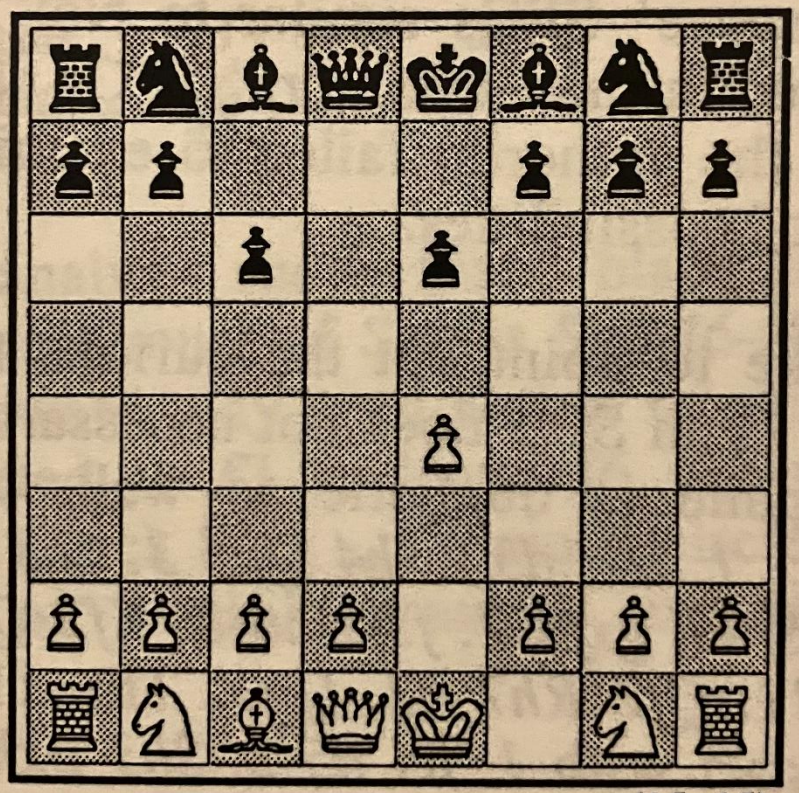
Position after the 4th move of Black. How did the game go?

Wait: Is this really a “Shortest” Proof Game?

Tibor Orbán

Die Schwalbe, 1976

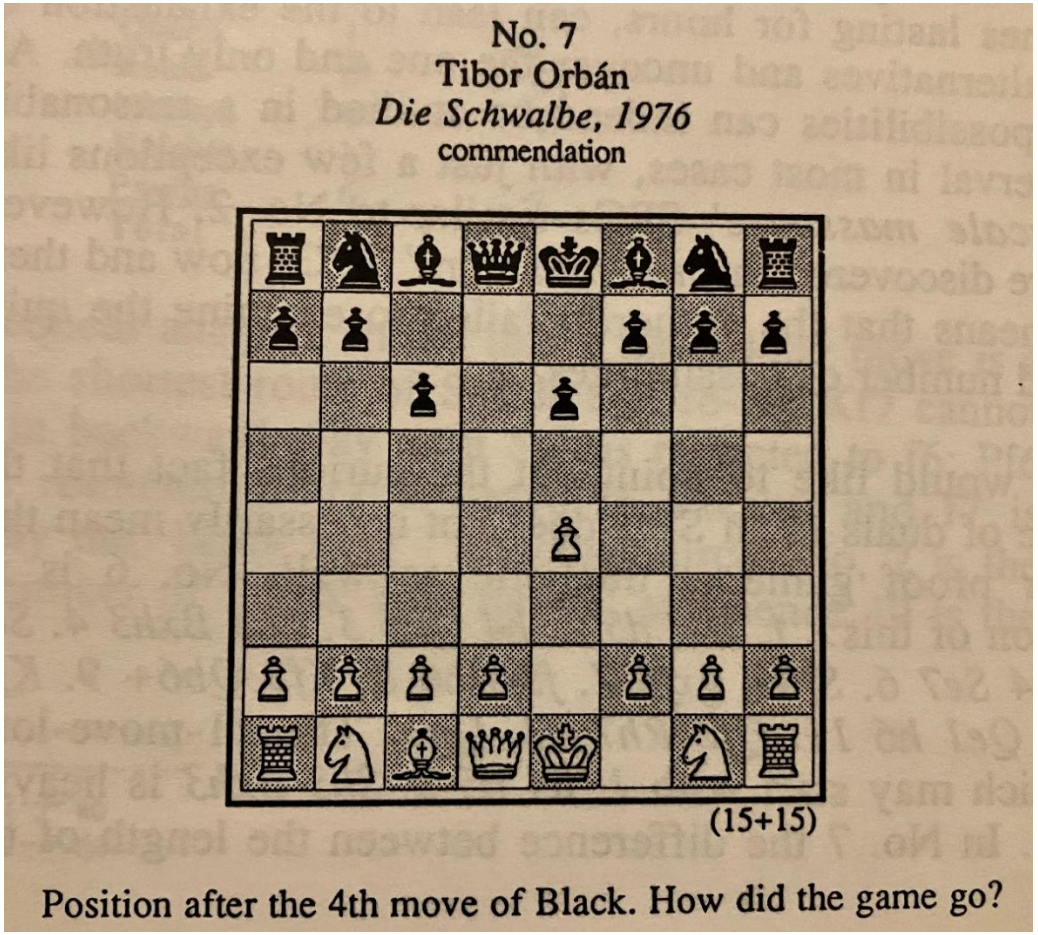
commendation



(15+15)

Position after the 4th move of Black. How did the game go?

Interesting ...



There is only 1 solution:
1.e4 e6
2.Bb5 Ke7!
3.Bxd7 c6
4.Be8 Kxe8

But the position can be reached in 3½ or 3 moves:

1.e3 c6
2.Bb5 e6
3.Bxc6 dxc6
4.e4

1.e4 e6
2.Bc4 c6
3.Bxe6 dxe6

Why are these NOT cooks? Because they DO NOT SOLVE the problem!
The exact number of moves is given: 4 white and 4 black moves.
This is NOT a "Shortest Proof Game" but an "Exact Proof Game"

A common misunderstanding

“A short solution is a cook”!

In a moremover? – Yes
In a selfmate? – Yes
In an SPG? – Yes
In an Exact PG? – No!

In an **exact PG**, a shorter game does NOT satisfy the stipulation,
so (by definition) it is NOT a solution
and therefore it cannot be a cook.

Let us not automatically apply principles from one problem genre to another problem genre. Each genre has its own characteristics and surely, PGs form a very specific set of chess problems, so they can (and do!) have their own laws and principles.

The 1991 book shows that :

"Position after the 4th move of Black. How did the game go?"

is identical to:

"Proof game in exactly 4.0 moves"

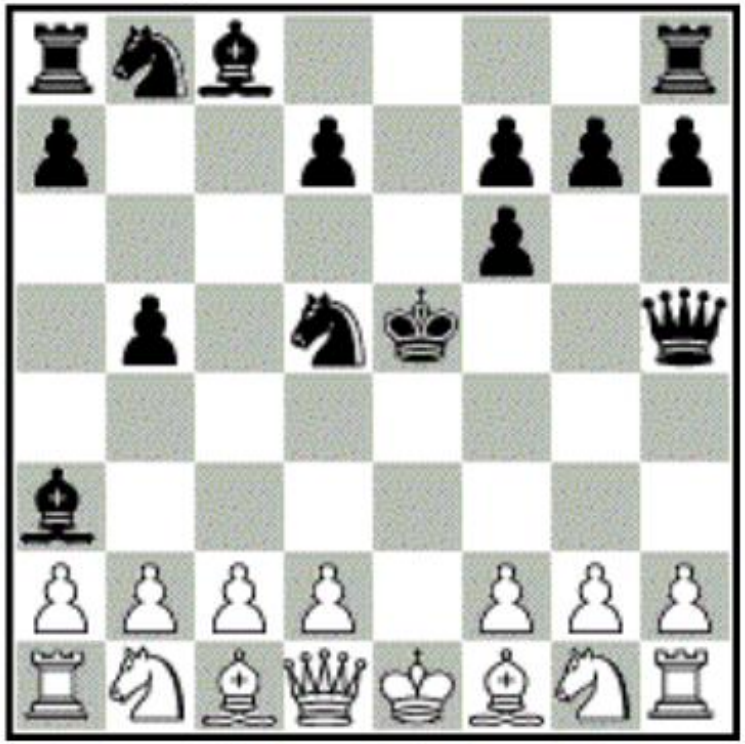
So the title was *Shortest Proof Games*
but not all problems in the book were SPGs

This maybe added to the confusion

Let’s look at some SPG (German: KBP)

Michel Caillaud

2933 *diagrammes 106* 07-09/1993



(15+15) C+

KBP?

b) sDh5 nach h3

a) 1.e4 c6 2.Df3 Da5 3.Df6 exf6 4.e5 Ke7 5.e6 Kd6 6.e7 Dh5 7.e8=D b5 8.De4 Se7 9.Dxc6+ Ke5 10.Df3 Sd5 11.Dd1 La3
= 11,0 moves (dual-free)

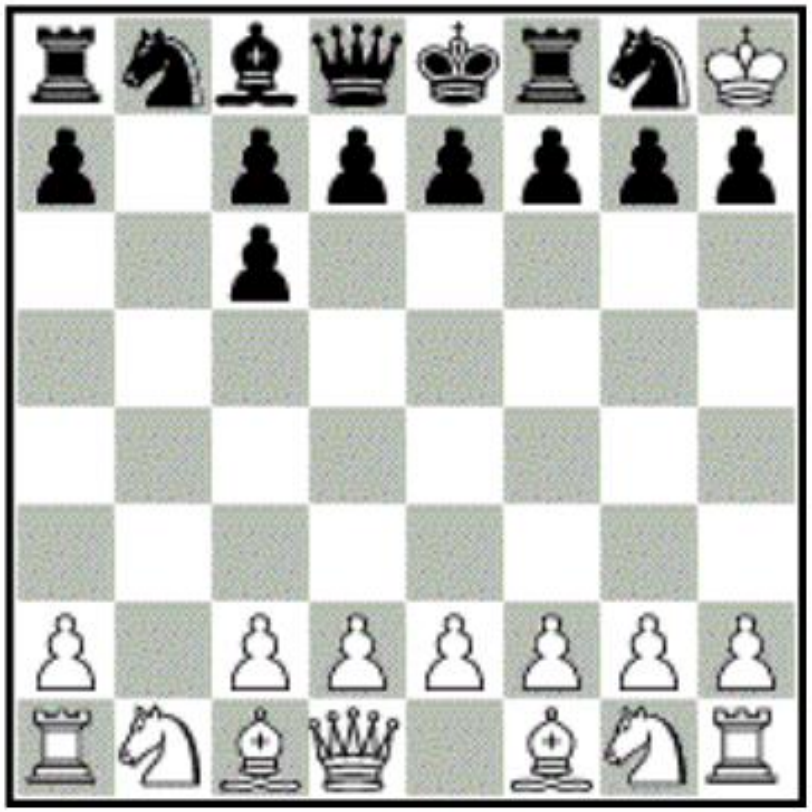
b) 1.Sc3 Sf6 2.Se4 Sd5 3.Sf6 exf6 4.e4 La3 5.e5 Ke7 6.e6 Kd6 7.e7 Ke5 8.e8=S De7 9.Sxc7 De6 10.Sb5 Dh3 11.Sc3 b5 12.Sb1
= 11,5 moves (dual-free)

Number of moves NOT given

A dualistic SPG (KBP)

Wolfgang Dittmann

1465 *Die Schwalbe 31* 02/1975



(15+15)
KBP?

Solution:
42,0 moves

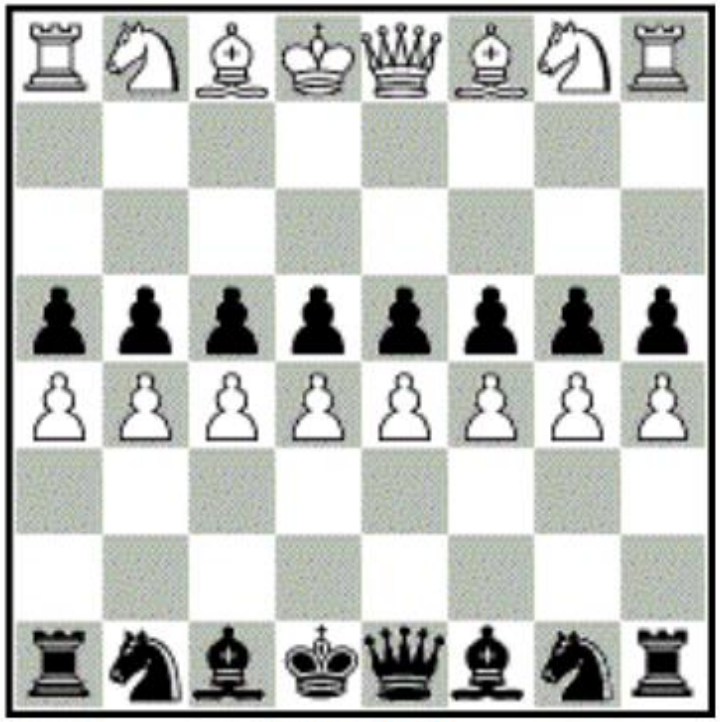
(dualistic)

Number of moves NOT given

Another dualistic SPG (KBP)

Henri Nouguier

2085 *Die Schwalbe 44* 04/1977



(16+16)

Wieviele Züge hat die KBP?

(Lösung: 39,0)

Note: The number of moves is given, but only to help the solver, it seems.

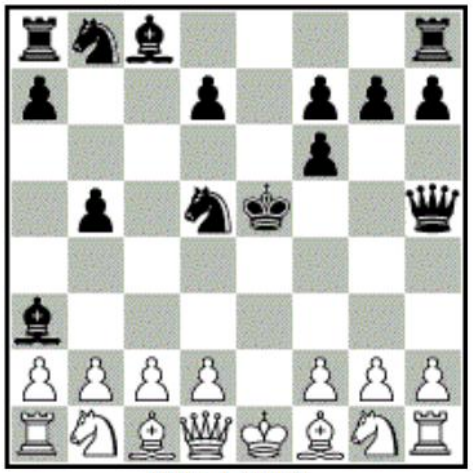
The number of moves is NOT a necessary part of the stipulation SPG!

Often in an SPG, the number of moves is part of the puzzle!

So we have 2 kinds of PG problems

1. Shortest Proof Game (SPG)

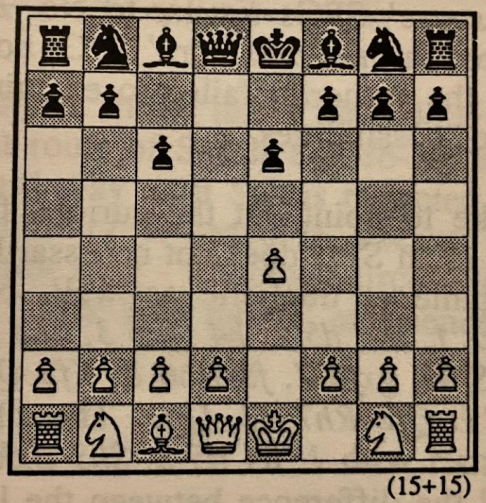
Michel Caillaud
2933 *diagrammes 106* 07-09/1993



(15+15) C+
KBP?
b) sDh5 nach h3

2. Exact Proof Game (EPG*)

No. 7
Tibor Orbán
Die Schwalbe, 1976
commendation



(15+15)

Position after the 4th move of Black. How did the game go?

**) The term "EPG" is not perfect and could cause confusion by itself. It means: a Proof Game for which the exact number of moves is given under the diagram (the solution itself might contain duals, but this is not accepted nowadays).*

Two stipulations for two kinds of PG problems

1. Shortest Proof Game? (SPG)

- Number of moves is NOT required, but CAN be given
- A shorter game is a cook

2. Proof Game in exactly n moves (EPG)

- The exact number of moves is given
- A shorter game is NOT a cook

We need just 2 stipulations, not 10!

But the confusion grew ...
as we began to **abbreviate** the stipulations

SPG

Shortest proof game?
Shortest test game?
SPG?
SPG

EPG

Position after the 12th move of Black. How did the game go?
Position after the 12th move of Black. Proof game?
Proof Game in 12,0 moves
PG in 12,0 moves
PG in 12,0
PG 12

And because in most PGs, the solution ***is*** the shortest possible game, people began to think that ***every*** PG should be an SPG. Not true!

We began to **mix** SPG with EPG

SPG

Shortest proof game?
Shortest test game?
SPG?
SPG

“SPG in 12,0 moves”

Position after the 12th move of Black. How did the game go?
Position after the 12th move of Black. Proof game?
Proof Game in 12,0 moves

EPG

PG in 12,0 moves
PG in exactly 12,0
PG 12

And the word “exact” (“genau”) began to appear

The current situation:
Two kinds of PG problems - Three stipulations:

1. "**Shortest Proof Game?"** (SPG)
- Number of moves is NOT required, but CAN be given
- A shorter game is a cook

2. "**Proof Game in Exactly n moves"** (EPG)
- The exact number of moves is given
- A shorter game is NOT a cook

3. "**Proof Game in n moves"** (the most common stipulation nowadays!)
- The exact number of moves is given
- But: is a shorter game a cook or not??

In other words: ***Are we dealing with an SPG or an EPG?***

"Proof Game in 12 moves"

What does it mean?

What do we ***want*** it to mean?

Should it mean:
"Position after the 12th move of Black. How did the game go?" (EPG)

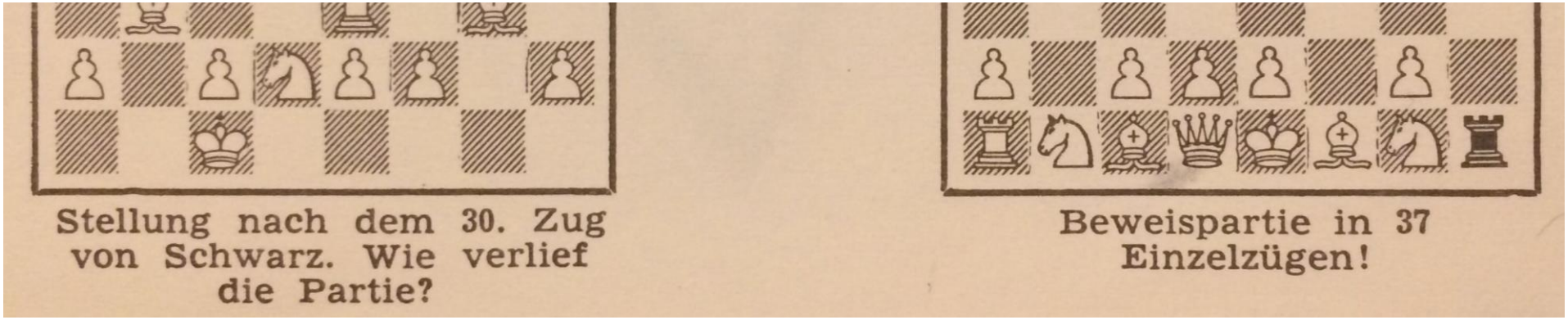
Or should it mean:
"Find the shortest Proof Game! (the composer says it takes 12 moves)" (SPG)

In other words: **What should be the DEFAULT (the standard) for PGs?**

I want to approach this issue **historically** and **logically**

A historical approach

FIDE Album 1980-82



Stellung nach dem 30. Zug von Schwarz. Wie verlief die Partie?

Beweispartie in 37 Einzelzügen!

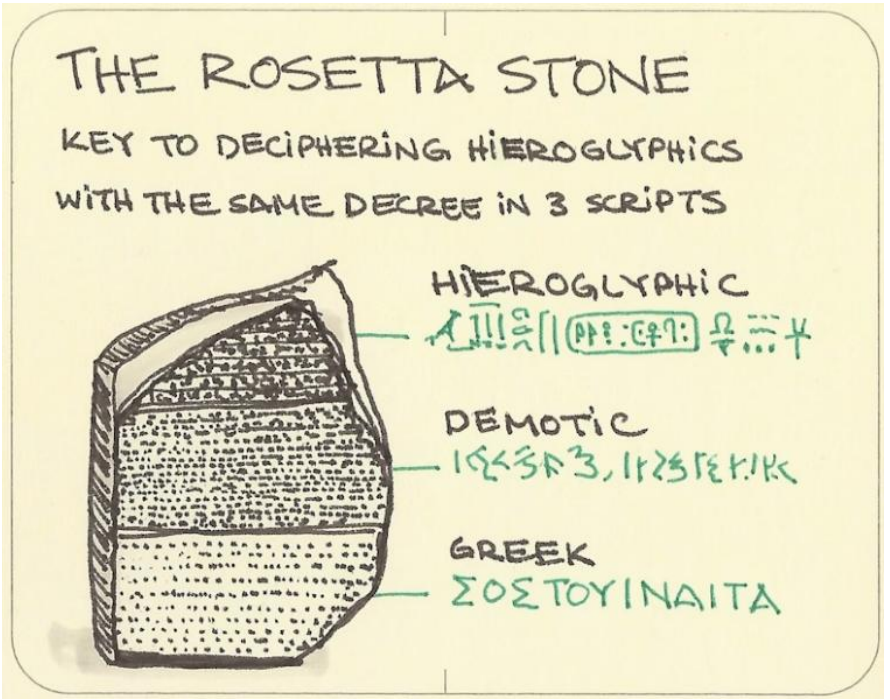
- Two unique, dual-free games
- For both, the exact number of moves is given
- For both, no shorter game exists
- So the stipulations must have meant the same
- It seems: “BP in 37 Einzelzügen” = “BP in genau 37 Einzelzügen”

A historical approach (2)

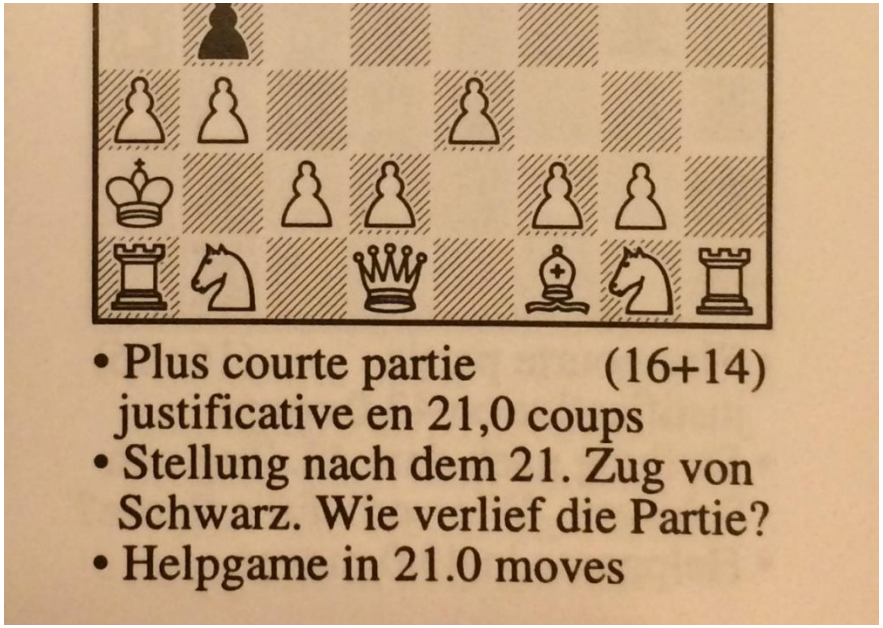
Rosetta stone

found 1799 in Egypt

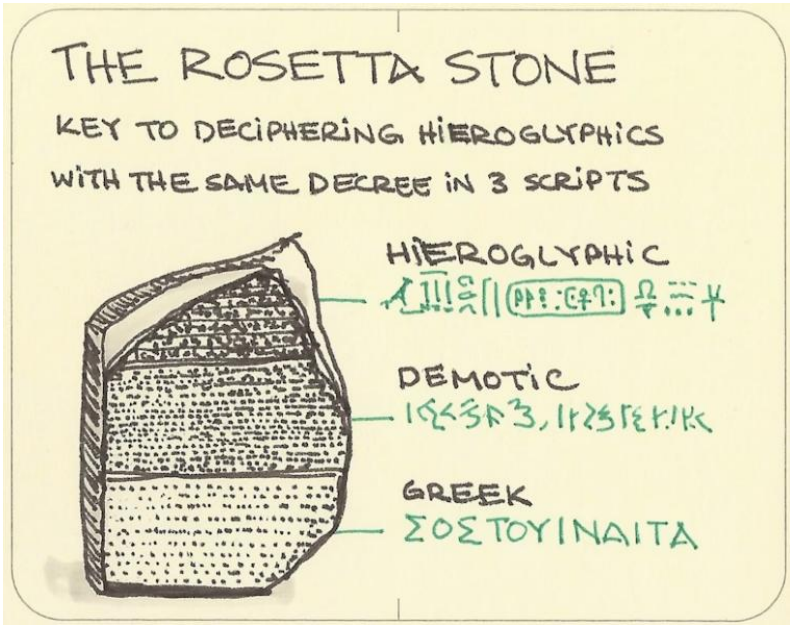
It contained the same text in 3 languages and helped decipher the hieroglyphics



A Rosetta stone in the FIDE Album 1989-91



• Plus courte partie (16+14)
justificative en 21,0 coups
• Stellung nach dem 21. Zug von Schwarz. Wie verlief die Partie?
• Helpgame in 21.0 moves



- **For French solvers**: Find the shortest game (it is 21.0 moves)
- **For German solvers**: Find a game in exactly 21.0 moves
- **For English solvers**: Find a game in 21.0 moves

- Of course the stipulations were meant to be identical in meaning.
- So: Helpgame in 21.0 = SPG? (like the French)? or EPG? (like the German)?
- In fact, only the German text is completely unambigious, and it clearly describes an **EPG**

Let's have another look at the book:

Shortest Proof Games

Gerd Wilts & Andrey Frolkin - 1991

This book uses only 2 stipulations:

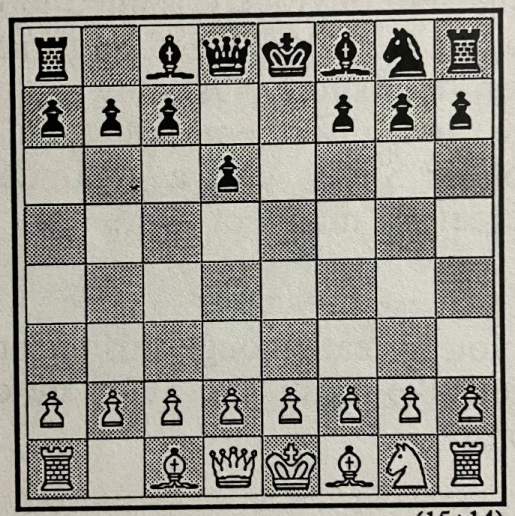
For a few dualistic PGs:
"*Position after the 12th move by White.*
How could the game have gone?"

For all other PGs:
"*Position after the 12th move by White.*
How did the game go?"

So for them, the **default** (standard) situation was an **Exact PG**

Two PGs in the Wilts/Frolkin book

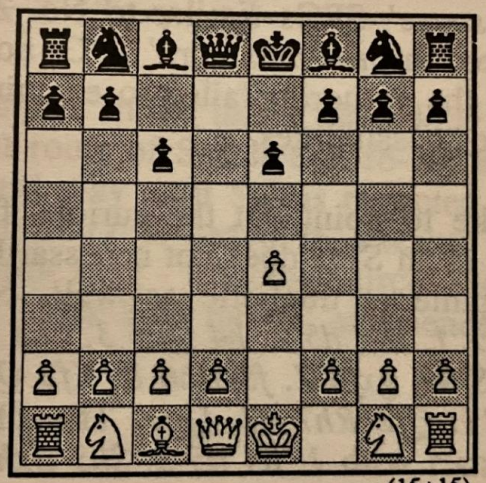
Géza Schweig
Tukon, 1938



(15+14)

Position after the 4th move of Black. How did the game go?

No. 7
Tibor Orbán
Die Schwalbe, 1976
commendation



(15+15)

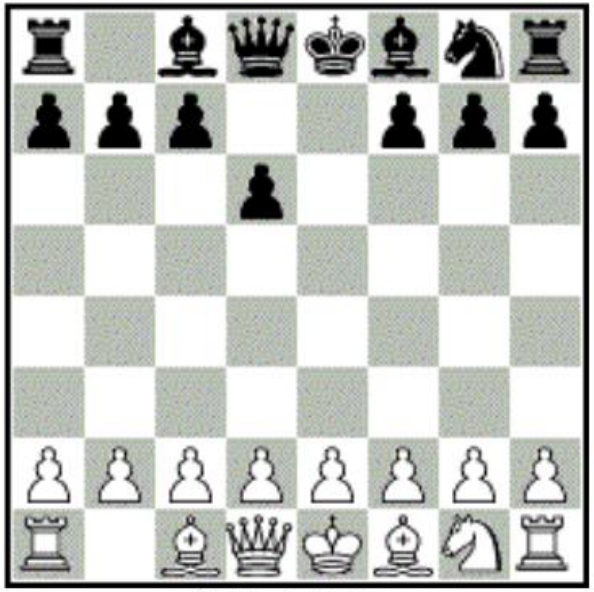
Position after the 4th move of Black. How did the game go?

The stipulations are 100% identical.
(As we saw, this was later abbreviated to PG in 4.0 moves)
We **know** the right one is an EPG, so the left one is an EPG as well!

*In other words, the authors did not distinguish between an PG **without** a shorter game (on the left) and an PG **with** a shorter game (on the right).*

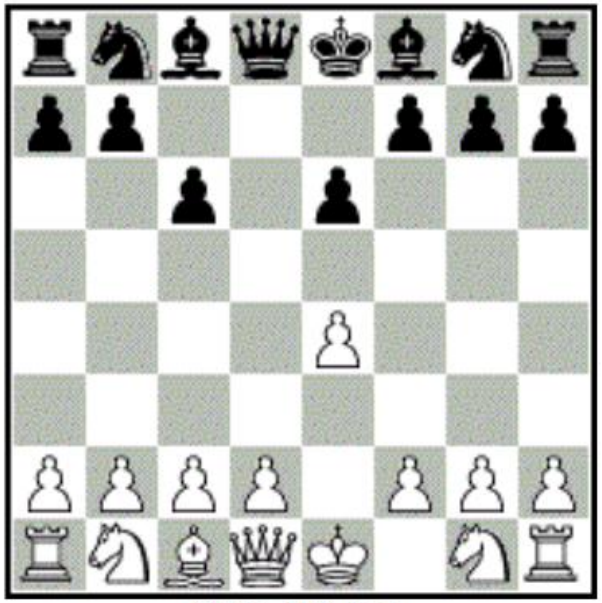
The same two PGs in the PDB

Geza Schweig
Tükör 1938



(15+14) C+
BP in 4,0

Tibor Orban
1791 *Die Schwalbe 38* 04/1976
Lob



(15+15) C+
BP in genau 4,0

Why “genau”?? – because BP in 4,0 was ***perceived*** as KBP in 4,0.

But that is not based on the historical situation in the Albums or the 1991 book!

A logical approach

The composer has 2 options to challenge the solver:

1. The solver must **find** the number of moves;
this number of moves is *part of the puzzle*.

2. The solver is **told** the number of moves;
the number of moves is *NOT part of the puzzle*.

"Shortest Proof Game in 12 moves" is thus not very logical,
because "in 12 moves" is in fact unnecessary information.

From this point of view, "PG in 12 moves" sounds like an EPG to me.

Logically, should the **default** be EPG or SPG?

If we say: The default is **EPG**, we are effectively saying:
"PG in 12 moves" means:
Find a Proof Game in **exactly** 12,0 moves

If we say: The default is **SPG**, we are effectively saying:
"PG in 12 moves" means:
"Find the **Shortest** Proof Game (it takes 12,0 moves)"

In the first case, we need **2 stipulations**:
"SPG?" (possibly with the number of moves)
"PG in 12 moves"

In the second case, we need an extra stipulation!
"PG in exactly 12 moves"
*I believe that is not necessary, so I am in favour of the **first** option.*

SPG

EPG

Number of moves NOT given
No shorter game exists

Number of moves is given
A shorter game exists

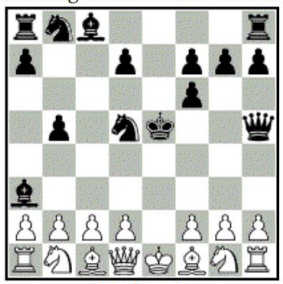
Number of moves is given
No shorter game exists

SPG (in n moves)

=

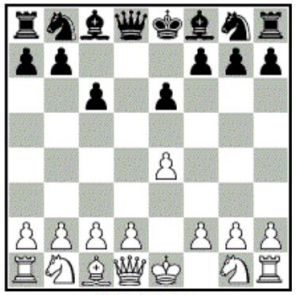
PG in n moves

Michel Caillaud
2933 *diagrammes 106* 07-09/1993



(15+15) C+
KBP?
b) sDh5 nach h3

Tibor Orban
1791 *Die Schwalbe 38* 04/1976
Lob



(15+15) C+
BP in genau 4,0

"SPG?" Stipulations

"PG in exactly n moves"

Most PGs (by far) are in the middle: it does not matter whether we interpret them as SPG or EPG. But it DOES matter for the ones on the left and on the right.
As you can see, we need just TWO stipulations to describe them all.

Conclusion

Logically,
"Proof Game in n moves"
can be read as
"Proof Game in exactly n moves"

Historically, it seems to have been like that for a while
(e.g. in the Album and the Wilts/Frolkin book)

Only later, the perception shifted to **SPG as default**
(among some people, not everyone!)

*But that perception has led to **THREE** stipulations where only **TWO** are actually required*

The way forward

Let us agree on **two** stipulations:

1. “Shortest Proof Game?”

Number of moves is NOT given

(although it may be given to help the solver)

2. “Proof Game in exactly n moves”

The exact number of moves is given

(so a shorter game is NOT a cook)

And then let us skip the word “exactly”

If it is the default, we don’t need it anymore!

The way forward

Let us agree on **two** stipulations:

1. "Shortest Proof Game?"

Number of moves is NOT given

(although it may be given to help the solver)

2. "Proof Game in ~~exactly~~ n moves"

The exact number of moves is given

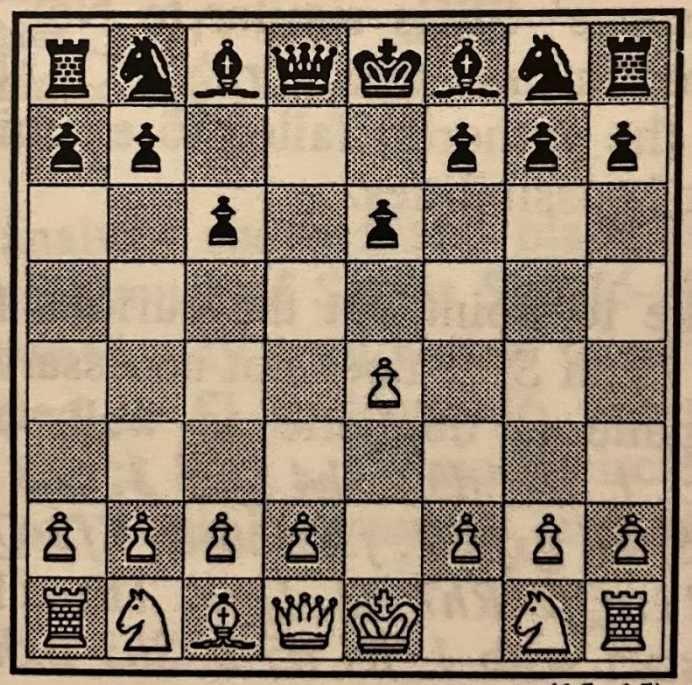
(so a shorter game is NOT a cook)

And then let us skip the word "exactly"

If it is the default, we don't need it anymore!

If we skip the word “exactly”, do we lose anything?

Tibor Orbán
Die Schwalbe, 1976
commendation



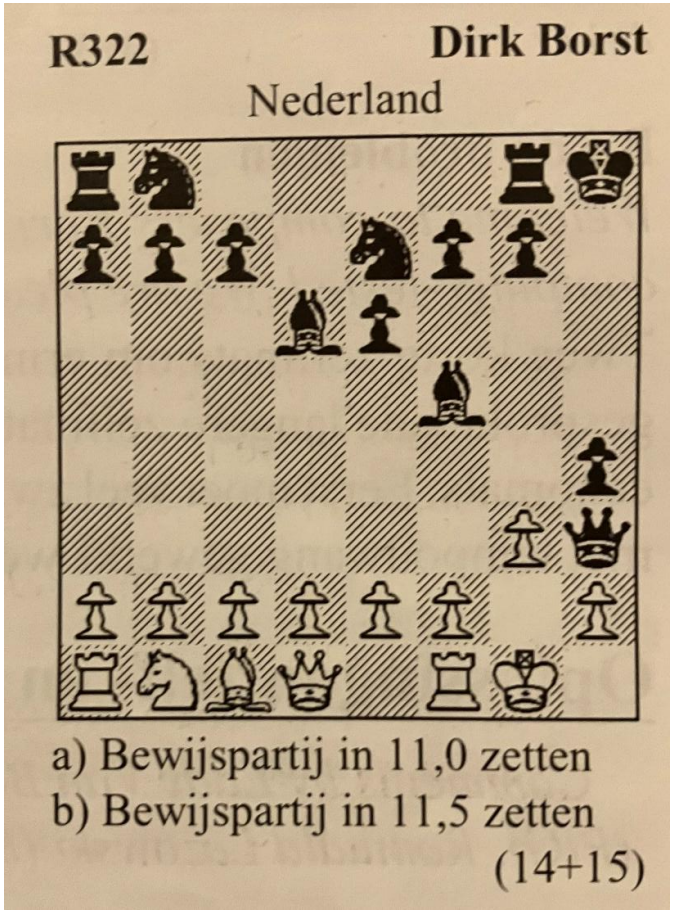
(15+15)

Position after the 4th move of Black. How did the game go?

Here nobody will miss the “tries”

But sometimes a composer wants to draw attention to the existence of a shorter game

I can think of a few possibilities to do that:



Dirk Borst

Probleemblad 01-03/2007

(14+15) C+

Or we might use: PG 11,5*

Or maybe PG 11,5 (try)

And sometimes a composer wants to draw attention to his own birthday tournament ;-)

Dirk Borst-64 Jubilee Tourney 2027

The *Nederlandse Bond van Schaakprobleemvrienden* announces a composing tourney to celebrate the 64th birthday of Dirk Borst in 2027 (b. 24 May 1963).

Theme: An inexact* (non-unique) proof game with free theme.

The stipulation should start "Position after White's/Black's n^{th} move." Additional stipulations are allowed, but the exact number of moves played must be stated. An example proof game should be given, but neither the move order nor the moves themselves need to be unique.
Fairy conditions are allowed, but no fairy pieces.

* Here, of course, inexact means dualistic

Further details on:

www.thbrand.de/retroblog/

and soon on the WFCC Composition Calender


THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
ATTENTION