



ENGLISH CHESS FEDERATION
CERTIFICATE of EXCELLENCE SCHEME

Revision Guide for the

GOLD LEVEL

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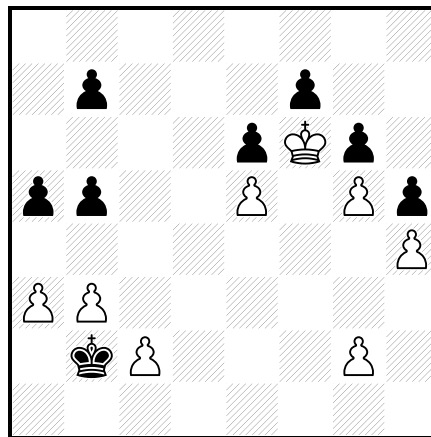
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Basic Endgame Concepts

The 'Monster' king

“King and pawn endings, minor piece endings, rook endings, queen endings; what do they all have in common?” I once recall asking a class of juniors. I was prepared for the sarcastic answer “They’re all endings!” but not by the particularly witty response “They’re all boring”! Regarding the latter, some may think that way but they are usually the individuals who throw away a lot of their hard opening and middlegame work by not making the most of the pieces that remain.

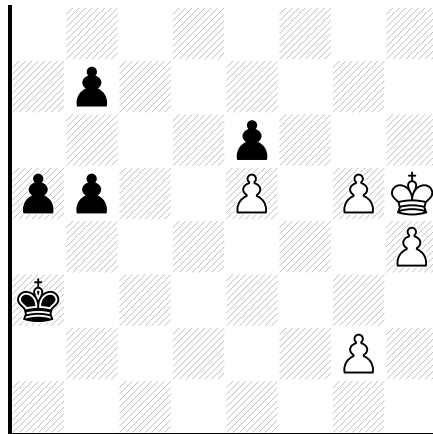
The point I was really hoping to make is that all endgames involve kings. Although we spend the early part of the game tucking away our king into safety and planning devious ways to attack the enemy monarch, there comes a stage in every game where one decides that checkmate is no longer a reality and it could be time for the king to start pulling its weight like every other piece.



Hungry kings in action!

Above note how both kings are ready to have a field day with the enemy pawns:

1 Kxf7 Kxc2 2 Kxg6 Kxb3 3 Kxh5 Kxa3



The pawns dropped like flies as the kings captured them on light squares and dark squares alike.

NOTE: In endgames in general it is usually deemed a good idea to try and create a passed pawn as soon as possible.

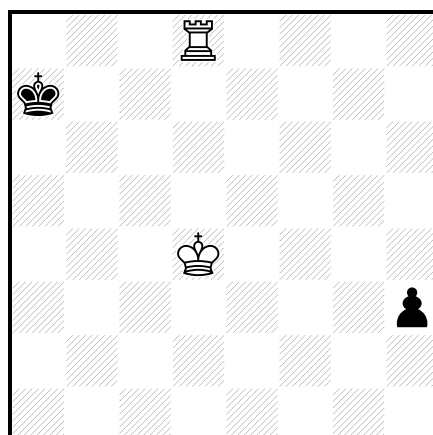
The outcome of this particular position depended on the **tempi** situation and specifically who it was to move. White started and was always favourite in the race to promote a pawn. Note that in accordance with the previous note, Black would have had a better (but still not good!) practical chance with 3...b4 4 axb4 a4 instead.

TIP: The king is a tremendous piece. Use it!

In all endgames it is advisable to get your king into the thick of the action rather than watching from the side lines.

WARNING: The king is a great piece, but it is also a slow one!

Regarding that warning, check out the situation below:

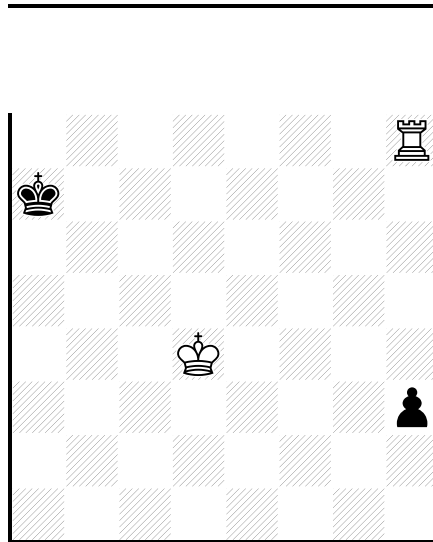


Kings really are awesome pieces. Only the queen can control every square within touching distance of itself (as a king does) and thus when it appears on the scene it has a massive impact. The problem invariably is getting it on the scene.

TIP: Centralise your king.

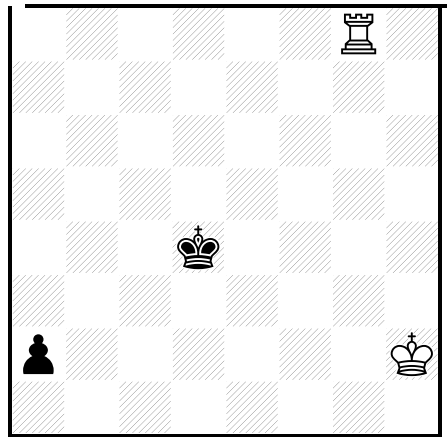
The above is universal advice to all endgames based on the premise that the king can access any part of the board in the quickest time when positioned there. Returning to our example above though, that is not going to be quick enough regards halting the runaway black pawn. Fortunately help is on hand!

1 Rh8!



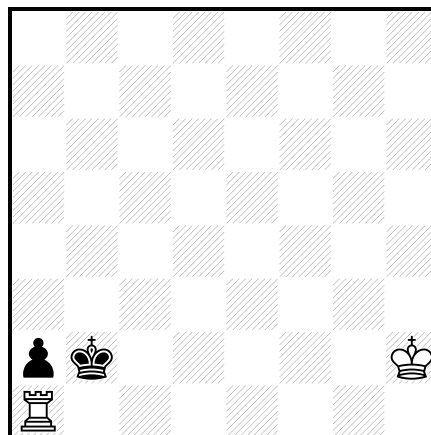
The rook attacks the pawn from behind. It is ready to guzzle the pawn where it stands or should it advance one square further.

Rooks belong behind passed pawns



Above there is a very dangerous black pawn which is ready to promote. Having spent a lot of time with juniors I notice that they place a lot of comfort value in blocking passed pawns. Here:

1 Rg1? Kc3 2 Ra1 Kb2 would have ensured that the rook was able to give itself up for the pawn before (or as soon as) it turns into a queen.



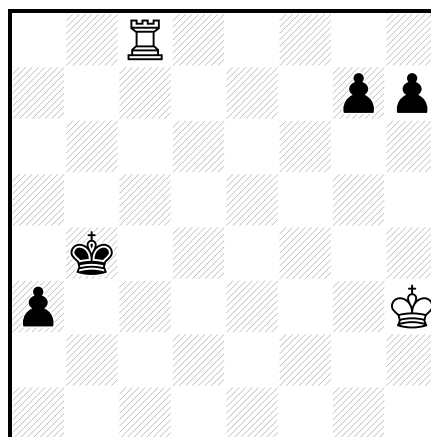
White will not lose but to say that:

1 Ra8!

is more effective is somewhat of an understatement. The rook is ready to take the pawn (or queen) on a2 or a1 and most important of all it has attacked the pawn before the black king is close enough to protect it.

NOTE: Really the underlying theme is that rooks like to be ACTIVE and they can do that best from behind passed pawns.

Below Black has two connected kingside pawns which are not troublesome yet but are there for the future. The passed kingside one on a3 is more of a concern and it is quite clear that the white king is too far away to offer any help in that department.



Although the rook is on hand to help, extremely poor play would be:

1 Rc1 a2 2 Ra1 Kb3 3 Kg4?

A rook blocking policy is rarely good but you will learn next why actually White still has a defensive resource available.

3...Kb2 4 Rd1 a1Q 5 Rxa1 Kxa1

The black king would eventually re-appear on the kingside in order to help escort his h- and g-pawns home.

NOTE: A draw is better than a loss!

Bearing in mind this rather obvious remark, in fact White has numerous ways in which to avoid defeat. Take for example:

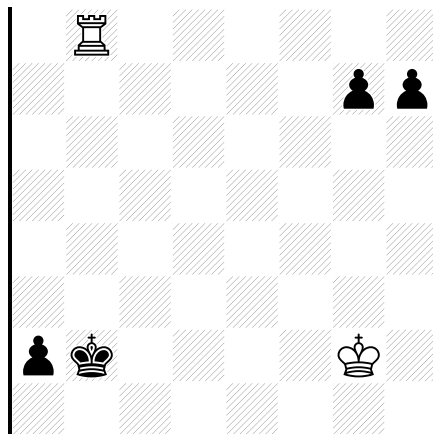
1 Ra8 Kb3 2 Kh2

This is not a productive move in itself but I am merely using this to show how the rook can be extremely effective all by itself.

2...a2 3 Kg2 Kb2 4 Rb8+ Kc2 5 Ra8 Kb1 6 Rb8+ Kc2 7 Ra8

The reader should see a pattern emerging. White attacks the pawn (from behind of course!) and as soon as it threatens to promote due to the support from its king, the white rook checks it away again. Black should accept a draw (either offered or by repetition) after

7...Kb2 8 Rb8+



and not walk into something like

8...Ka1? 9 Kf2 h5 10 Ke2 h4 11 Kd2 h3 12 Kc2 h2

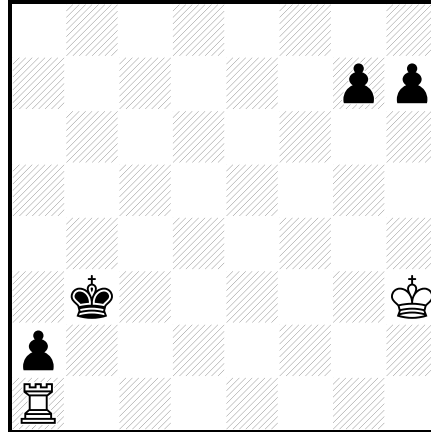
Or 12 ...g5 13 Re8 g4 14 Re1 mate.

13 Rh8

Black will lose his h-pawn and get mated.

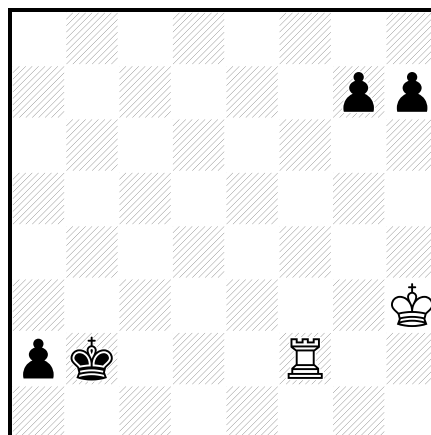
Checking from the Side

You should recall that 3 moves into our last example we reached the following position:



Having played passively and made the poor decision to block the pawn with the rook White continued playing like a wet lettuce and capitulated via 3 Kg4? Kb2. In fact though even here he could have saved the day via:

3 Rf1 Kb2 4 Rf2+ Kb1 5 Rf1+ Kb2 6 Rf2+



6...Kb3 7 Rf3+ Kb4

And not 7...Kc4?? when the rook will take up its rightful place behind the pawn via 8 Ra3 and then it will be bagged!

8 Rf4+ Kb5 9 Rf5+ Kb6?

This is going too far. Black should accept that White can check forever and should acquiesce to a draw.

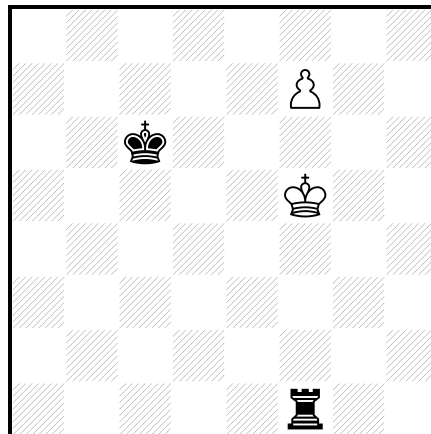
10 Rf1

Ironically now Ra1 and taking the pawn is unstoppable (and a good idea!) as the black king has gone too far away.

TIP: Whilst it is usually best to activate a rook from behind, occasionally consider sideways checks.

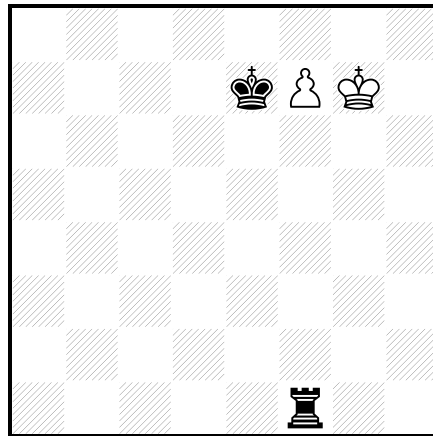
Shouldering off the enemy king

This is a very important concept in any endgame and essentially refers to the simple idea of maximizing your own king whilst if possible simultaneously reducing the scope of the enemy king. Take the following very simple example:



Above the white king is in check and first and foremost he will obviously want to escape it to a square which protects his 7th rank passer. When deciding between e6 and g6 though he shouldn't just toss a coin! Observe the failure of:

1 Kg6? Kd7 2 Kg7 Ke7



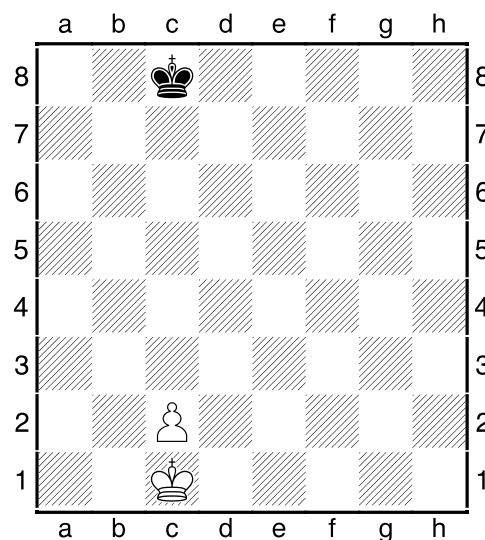
The black king has come back in time so as to combine forces with the rook to both stop and net the passed pawn. In contrast

1 Ke6!

‘shoulders’ off the black king. Now Black is unable to make progress because his king can’t get to where it wants to be i.e. e7. Hence

1...Re1+ 2 Kf6 Rf1+ and a draw could be agreed.

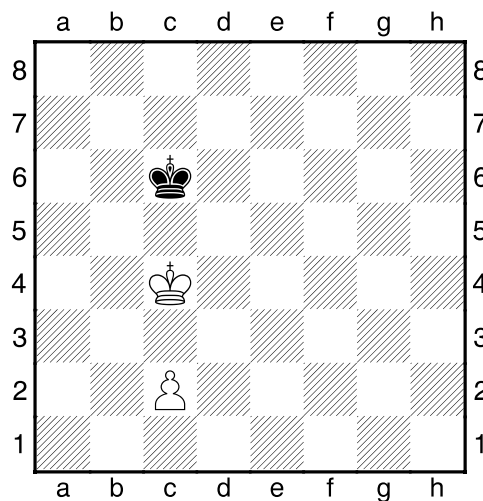
The Opposition



The ‘opposition’ is an important concept in endgames and is perfectly demonstrated in the seemingly simple king and pawn scenario above in which White is eager to promote his pawn to a queen and then deliver mate.

1.Kb2

If the pawn is going to promote then White is going to need to use his king to help advance it. A common error would be 1.c4 Kc7 2.Kc2 Kc6 3.Kc3 Kc5 4.Kd3 Kc6 5.Kd4 Kd6 6.c5+ Kc6 7.Kc4 when the attacking king has been unable to get ahead of the pawn to aid in its promotion. The black king should retreat straight back so that after 7...Kc7 8.Kb5 he can gain the 'opposition' i.e. 8...Kb7. Provided that he is consistent with this policy then he will get a draw e.g. 9.c6+ Kc7 10.Kc5 Kc8 11.Kd6 Kd8 12.c7+ Kc8 13.Kc6 and stalemate!

1...Kc7 2.Kc3 Kc6 3.Kc4

Now though White has the 'opposition'. The two kings are directly opposed but it is the black one that must now give ground.

3...Kb6 4.Kd5

Consequently the white king goes forward and to the side.

4...Kc7 5.Kc5

And the opposition is obtained again. **5...Kd7 6.Kb6**

Note here that 6.c3 would be perfectly acceptable as after 6...Kc7 7.c4 White would again have the opposition. However; 6.c4? would be a definite mistake as after 6...Kc7 Black would have the opposition with therefore 7.Kb5 Kb7 seeing White unable to achieve his aim: 8.c5 Kc7 9.c6 Kc8 10.Kb6 Kb8 11.c7+ Kc8 12.Kc6.

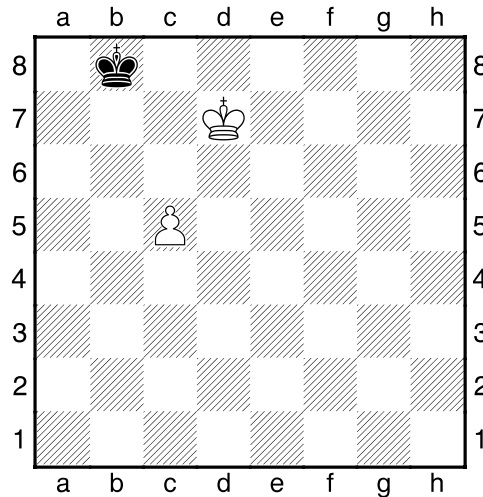
6...Kc8 7.Kc6

Once the attacking king makes it to the 6th rank ahead of the pawn then he should win whatever.

7...Kb8 8.c4 Kc8 9.c5

Of course again though as it is Black to move, White has the opposition and his king is poised to go forward and to the side.

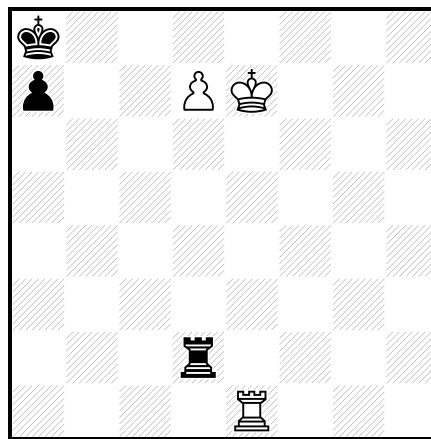
9...Kb8 10.Kd7



And Black is powerless to prevent c6-c7-c8.

Pushing Passed Pawns

So far we have seen passed pawns both succeeding and failing to make a nuisance of themselves. In order to compare passed pawns take a look at the following extreme example:



A dinky little move for White to play here would be 1 Re6 preparing the Rd6 that would drive the black rook away. Here though that is unnecessary in view of the simple

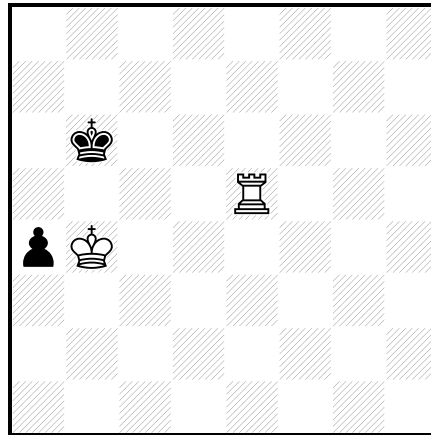
1 d8Q+ Rxd8 2 Kxd8 Kb7

Clearly 2 ...a5 3 Ra1 nets the pawn immediately.

3 Kd7 Kb6 4 Kd6 a5

Alternatively 4 ...Kb5 5 Kd5 a5 6 Rb1+ Ka4 7 Kc4 Ka3 8 Kb5 a4 9 Rb4 or 9 Ra1+, also bagging that pawn.

5 Kd5 a4 6 Kc4 Ka5 7 Re5+ Kb6 8 Kb4



Whilst White's d-pawn cost Black his rook, Black's own passed pawn never really got out of the traps.

NOTE: A famous adage runs 'Passed pawns are meant to be pushed'.

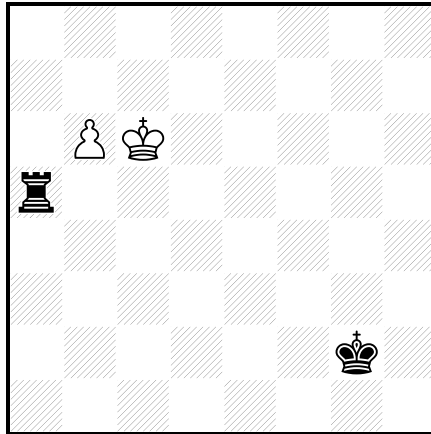
Clearly the closer pawns are to promotion the more dangerous and similarly the more valuable they become. As it would no doubt have to make your opponent take note, it does follow that you should get on with pushing passed pawns. However...

WARNING: Each plan should be taken on its own merits. Forgoing a sensible king centralisation for example in favour of pushing a doomed passed pawn would not be bright!

Keeping your distance

Rooks really are superb pieces and I always maintain that the most common mistake amongst weaker players is that they just assume that they will appear in the endgame and consequently make little provision for them to play a significant role in the middlegame.

They are of course long-range pieces, which means that they are very capable of fulfilling the same duty from a distance as they are close up. Indeed often being too near can be detrimental:

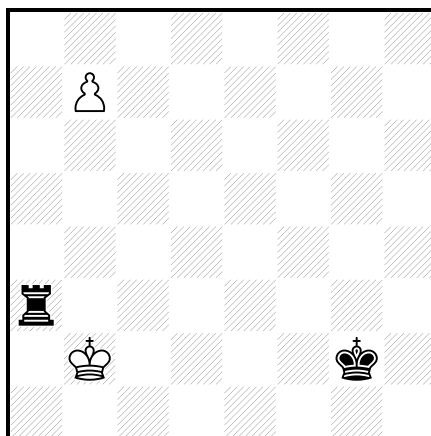


Above very obvious is **1 b7** as White is naturally very eager to increase his pawn's value from 1 pt to 9pts! It can now be noted that the black rook is on the worst possible square on the entire board. Placed on a7 at least it could give itself up for the pawn immediately and from anywhere else it could get behind the pawn or to the back rank. He can play on for a bit but with careful play White will successfully achieve his goal:

1...Ra6+ 2 Kc5!

Upon 2 Kb5? Black can get off the hook via Ra1. The rook will then be able to get behind the pawn and that is especially evident after 3 b8Q?? Rb1+. Note also that after 2 Kc7, the pin 2...Ra7 also saves the day.

2 ...Ra5+ 3 Kc4 Ra4+ 4 Kc3 Ra3+ 5 Kb2

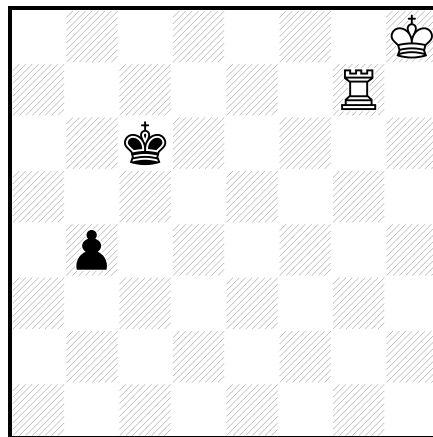


That's the end of the line regards checks for Black and there are no pins or skewers to help save the day either. Instead he can either resign or knuckle down to the unenviable task of trying to defend K+Q Vs K+R.

TIP: Unless the rook is required for a particular reason such as offering cover, it is a good habit to get into to move the rook as far away as possible from the enemy king.

Cutting off the king

In the position below with White to play his king is as poorly placed as it could possibly be and Black has a very obvious plan of using his king to help escort his pawn to the end of the board.



A very plausible continuation might be:

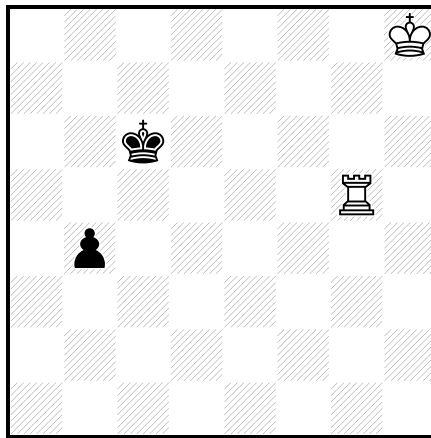
1 Kh7 Kd5

The white king is not around yet but this is still a good habit to get in to. The priority is to stay in touch with the pawn but if Black can engage in any 'shouldering' then all the better.

2 Rb7 Kc4 3 Kg6 b3 4 Kf5 Kc3 5 Ke4 b2 6 Ke3 Kc2

These sort of races are not untypical in rook endings. Kings do end up on opposite sides of the board. That could be because they've needed to travel a distance to eliminate enemy pawns to create a 'passer' of their own or it could be that the decision had been made to make the journey to help promote a passed pawn. That is often necessary with an enemy rook behind the pawn and the eventual outcome may be that the king forces the enemy rook to concede itself for the pawn. That though leaves the king offside and then the long trip back starts. The big question is whether it gets back in time to halt the opponents pawn without having to give his own rook up for it. Clearly in this example it proved a bridge too far.

However sometimes opportunities are missed and on move one the useful 'cut off' technique could have been employed in the form of **1 Rg5!!**



This move cuts off the king in that an attempt to go beyond the 3rd rank would be illegal! Specifically here White has prevented the king from getting close to its pawn.

1 ...Kb6

Hardly constructive but were the king and pawn any further apart then it would be the end of the road for the pawn. Observe both 1 ...Kd6 2 Rb5 and 1 ...b3 2 Rg3 b2 3 Rb3

.2 Kg7

The rook has everything under control but the white king is required to force the win of the pawn and secure victory.

2 ...Kc6 3 Rf5

Providing the white king with more room although here it could easily approach via the h-file.

3 ...Kb6 4 Kf6 Kc6 5 Kg5

Although 5 Ke5? is bringing the king back in the right direction, that is a bad move as it breaks the cut off and thus allows the black king to advance with its pawn. With Black still unable to do anything useful, White has plenty of time to retrieve his king but it just needs a bit of care.

5 ...Kb6 6 Kg4 Kc6 7 Kg3 Kb6 8 Kf2 b3

This is destined to fail but White's king was soon there anyway.

9 Rf3 b2 10 Rb3+

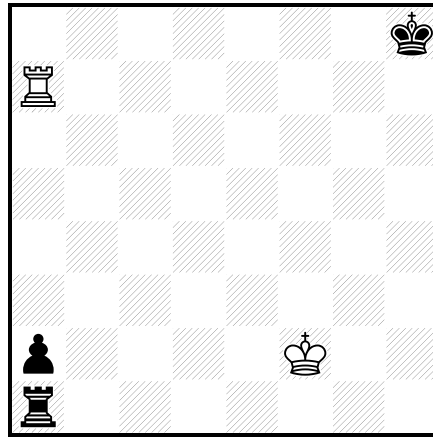
Even if this wasn't check the pawn would drop.

The Skewer Trick

TIP: Always look out for checks. That doesn't mean always make one but rather tenders the advice that less can go wrong and more right if you are always on the ball regards checks that you can make in a given position or your opponent can make after your intended move.

Below White seems to be defending well. He has his rook behind Black's passed pawn and whilst the enemy king resides in a far corner, the white king is much nearer the threat on a2.

Without due care and attention though he could be in for a rude awakening:



1 Ke2?

White probably noticed that moving his king to the 3rd rank enabled Black to check and promote his pawn. This though suffers a crueller fate!

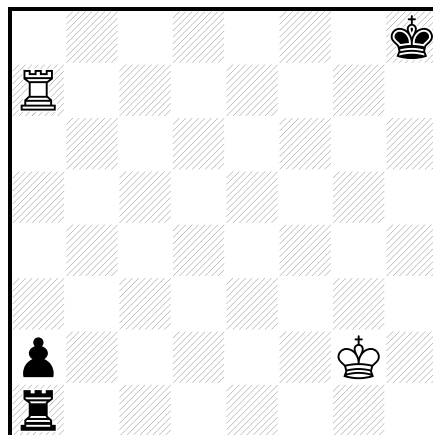
1...Rh1! 2 Rxa2

White may have seen what's coming now but it is too late. As is nearly always the case, the checks run out as the enemy king approaches the rook e.g. 2 Ra8+ Kg7 3 Ra7+ Kf8 4 Ra8+ Ke7 5 Ra7+ Kd8 6 Ra8+ Kc7 7 Ra7+ Kb6.

2 ...Rh2+

This cheeky skewer picks up the white rook on a2.

Instead White could have avoided this trap with **1 Kg2!**



Amazingly this odd looking move is the saviour as it becomes clear that unless the white king could make it to c2 (which it couldn't) then the only safe squares for it (i.e. that avoid immediate checks and the skewer) are g2 and h2.

Black didn't deserve to win because his own rook is completely passive and thus in direct opposition to my 'activate the rook' and 'rooks belong behind passed pawns' tips.

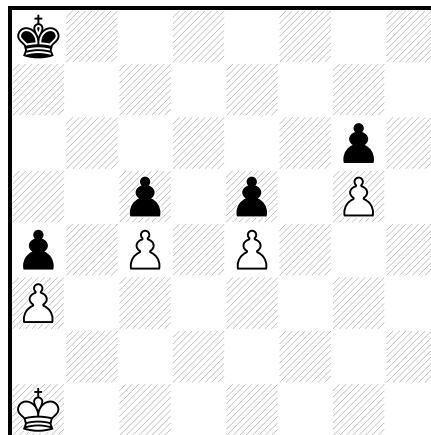
The white rook must stay on the a-file barring temporary excursions to give checks. Play might continue with:

1 ...Kg8 2 Ra8+ Kf7 3 Ra7+ Ke6 4 Ra6+ Kd5 5 Ra5+ Kc4 6 Ra8 Kb3 7 Rb8+ Kc2 8 Ra8

before Black realises that he can't realistically hope to make any progress.

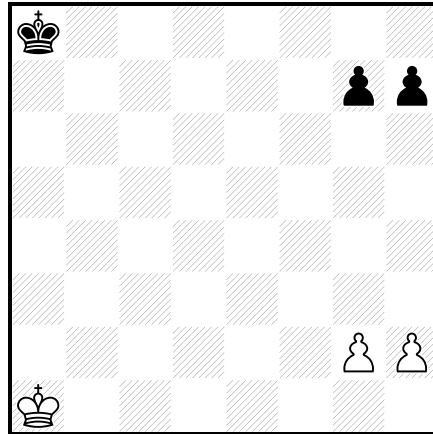
Tricks to aid in promotion

Everybody loves getting a pawn to the end of the board and obtaining a replacement queen or indeed a new one to compliment the one (or more!?) already in existence. Typically a plan of promoting a pawn becomes more relevant in the endgame stage of an encounter where there are fewer enemy pieces on hand to halt passed pawns.

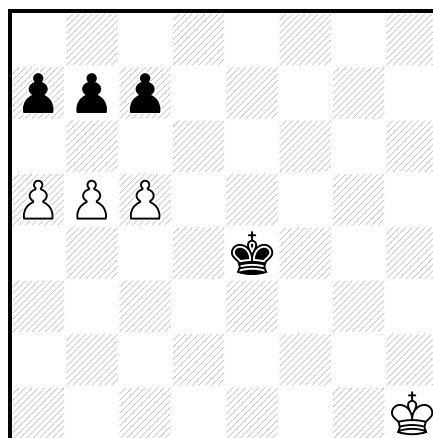


Above nothing is happening as the position is in fact completely blocked. The pawns can't move and a close inspection reveals that however much time either king has there is no way into the opponent's position to do some guzzling (i.e. capturing of opposing pawns) as each **entry square** is covered by the targeted enemy pawns.

Below there is a little more flexibility but if left to their own devices (and do try out a few moves for yourself), the pawns would eventually reach an impasse. However we know that the kings are very useful pieces in endgames and here they should definitely earn their corn. Both sides would be highly advised to employ their monarchs without delay but as they are currently equidistant, sensible play should lead to a draw.

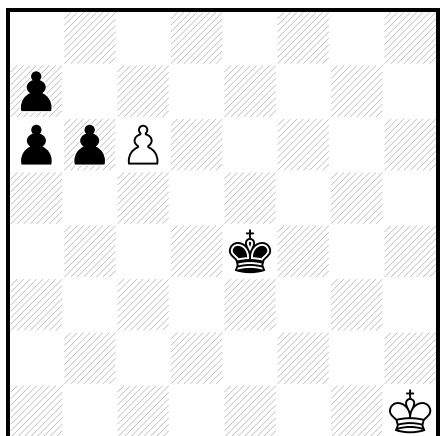


The position below however is about to provide us with a bit more excitement. The black monarch is undoubtedly the more dominant of the two and is about to descend on the white pawns.



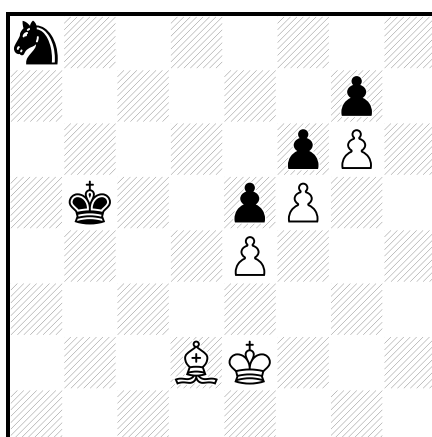
A simple analysis of the position uncovers that 1 a6 for example would achieve little. After 1...bxa6 2 bxa6 Kd5 or for that matter 1...b6, the white pawns would be sitting ducks for the hungry black king.

Instead amazingly White can force a pawn home through **1 b6!! cxb6** (or the symmetrical 1 ..axb6 2 c6!) **2 a6! bxa6 3 c6**. Outnumbered heavily at present the small white pawn will soon be a mighty queen and together with the king will clean up, no problem!



WARNING: Sometimes all is not as it seems. Open your mind up to different possibilities and you might just be surprised.

Regarding the above warning, take a look at the position below:



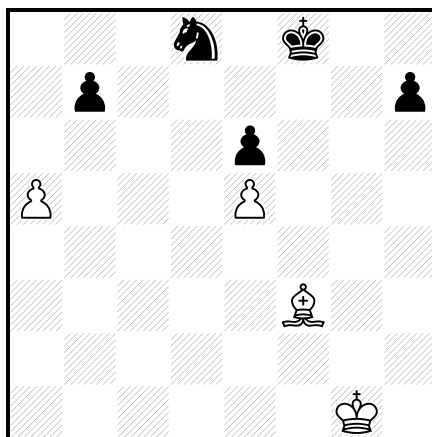
White has a bishop for a knight in an endgame and although more often than not that is a good thing, the focus here is on the pawn structure. One way in which White may

think is that he wants to net the black pawns and hence he needs to start by attacking the g7-pawn. With that in mind, many may only consider a plan involving manoeuvring the bishop to f8. However because of where the black king is situated, that in itself is not easy.

Steeds control less squares when on the edge and in fact even fewer (two to be precise!) when stuck in a corner. The black knight is poor on a8, but will soon be back in action and could always fulfil a useful defensive duty on e8.

Thinking if you like ‘outside of the box’ brings new ideas. First up the best move is **1 Bh6!** It is unusual to attack a pawn where the pawn can do taking, but upon **1...gxh6 2 g7** there is of course no preventing a promotion.

Were the white bishop on c3 instead then it could sacrifice itself with the justification that **1 Bxe5 fxe5 2 f6** would also force a g-pawn promotion. With a similar idea, from our starting position, also winning is **1 Bg5**. The idea is to take the f6-pawn and upon **1...fxg5 2 f6** again there is no way for Black to prevent a white pawn touchdown.

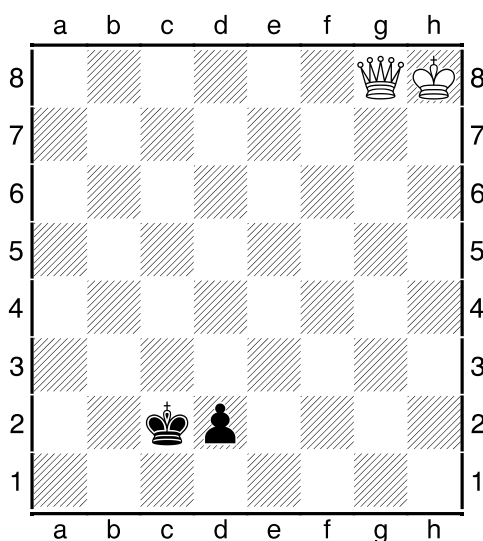


White is a pawn down in the endgame shown above and though passive, the black knight appears to be holding the fort. In particular it guards the b7-pawn which in turn is preventing the white a-pawn from promoting. However all is not as it seems and **1 Bxb7!!** cleverly highlights the deficiencies of a knight. Yes after **1...Nxb7 2 a6** the attacked knight simply can't manoeuvre itself in time to prevent White's a-pawn from succeeding in its quest. The black king is too far away to offer any help and to add insult to injury, ignoring the bishop on move 1 was of no use either. Obviously Black would prefer to concede his knight for the pawn rather than have it promote but the presence of a pawn on e6 left the manoeuvre **1...Ne6-c7** unplayable.

TIP: Pawns tend to become more of a threat when they are closer to promotion. Always keep an eye out for possible piece sacrifices that might aid in a safe passage through to the end.

King and Queen Vs King and Pawn on the 7th rank

Generally a queen should have little trouble dealing with a pawn but this topic refers to the most critical situation of a queen trying to prevent the promotion of an enemy pawn which is on the 7th rank and assisted by a king. With the attacking king so far away, technique is all important but well described in the example below:



1.Qc4+

Bringing the queen straight into the action is a good place to start.

1...Kb2 2.Qd3

Although most of the white queen moves are going to be check, this is the vital 'quiet move'.

2...Kc1

The black king needed to defend the pawn but now White can force Black to place his king in front of his pawn.

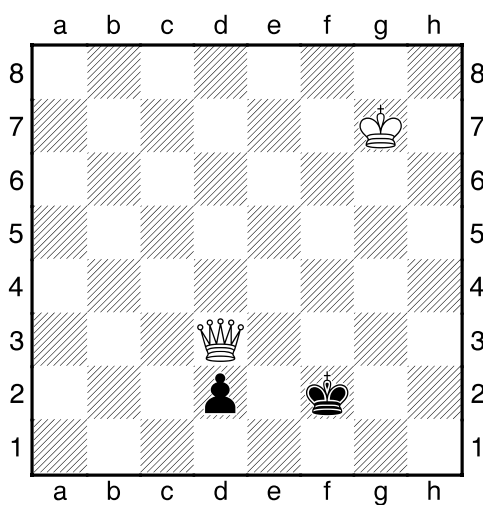
3.Qc3+ Kd1 4.Kg7

As the black pawn cannot promote now, the white king can begin the required journey back to help the queen win the pawn.

4...Ke2

Now promotion is threatened and so White must repeat the process again.

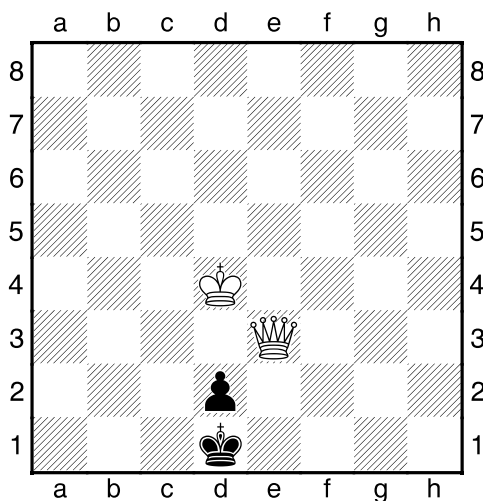
5.Qe5+ Kf2 6.Qd4+ Ke2 7.Qe4+ Kf2 8.Qd3



There it is again. Soon the black king will be forced to its least desirable post where it obstructs the pawn.

8...Ke1 9.Qe3+ Kd1 10.Kf6 Kc2 11.Qc5+

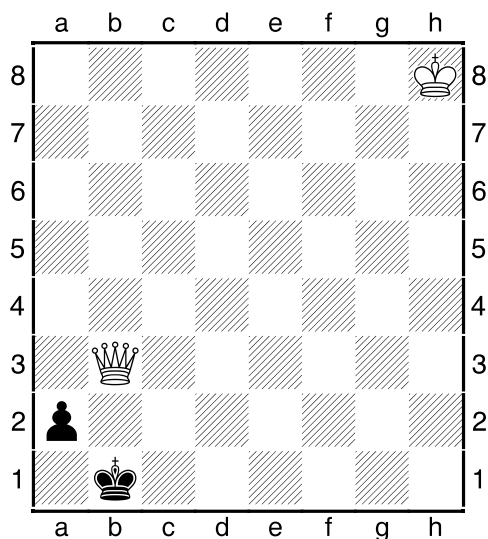
And the same process repeats until the attacking king is sufficiently returned to bag the pawn e.g. **11...Kb2 12.Qd4+ Kc2 13.Qc4+ Kb2 14.Qd3 Kc1 15.Qc3+ Kd1 16.Ke5 Ke2 17.Qc2 Ke1 18.Qe4+ Kf2 19.Qd3 Ke1 20.Qe3+ Kd1 21.Kd4**



The black pawn's days are numbered!:

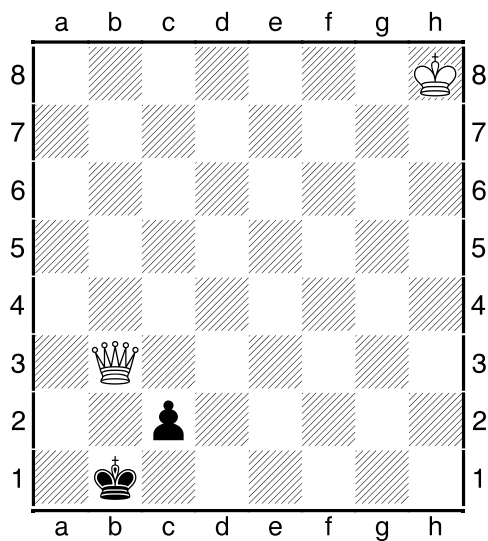
21...Kc2 22.Qc3+ Kd1 23.Ke3 Ke1 24.Qxd2+ Kf1 25.Qf2 mate.

If it is a rook's pawn or a bishop's pawn on the 7th rank then with his king so far away White is unable to win because the defender has stalemate tricks at his disposal.



Above the black king is forced into the corner to stay with his pawn but White doesn't then have time to bring his king back because it would be stalemate.

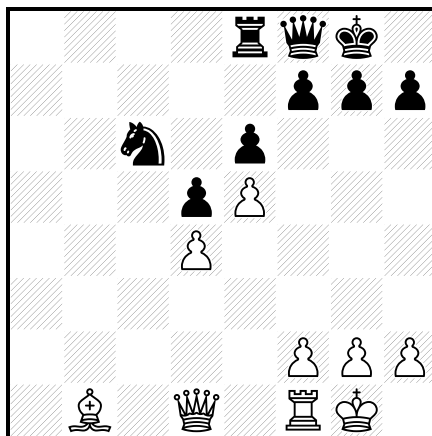
Below rather than escape the check by sheltering in front of his pawn the black king can craftily move to a1. The reason for this is that if the white queen then captures the pawn, the cornered black king is stalemated.



Combinations and Tactical Ideas

Simple Diagonal Alignment

If the queen is going to deliver checkmate by being directly next to the enemy king then it needs to have support. A very common way for this to occur is through the back up of a bishop. The following two examples are very interesting:



Above the bishop on b1 may be out of site but it is not out of mind. Together it and the queen can combine to threaten mate on h7. In this particular position there are three ways in which this can be done:

a) **1 Qh5**. Here the queen would threaten to advance down to h7 and Black should choose between **1...g6** or **1...h6** to keep that from happening.

b) **1 Qd3** would see the queen and bishop aligned along the same b1-h7 diagonal. Black's h7-pawn is under threat but **1...h6??** would merely avoid conceding the pawn. That is of little consequence though after **2 Qh7 mate**. It should be noted that **1...f5** would allow **2 exf6**.

WARNING: Never forget en passant! It is an important rule in the game and I have seen many a tear shed because a junior didn't know of its existence.

Upon **1 Qd3** then Black should block the diagonal with **1...g6**. We have already seen a plus side of such a move in that the king has an escape route making back rank mate less likely but you will shortly see the negative side to having holes around ones king position.

c) Instead a dual purpose move is **1 Qc2!**. This aligns the queen along the same diagonal towards h7 but also fulfils a useful role along the c-file.

TIP: Always keep an eye on unguarded pieces. There may be a way to exploit such a situation.

Yes you've guessed it! The knight on c6 is 'en prise'. Of course he doesn't want to lose it for nothing but Black's priority must be not getting mated on h7. Ideally he would like to solve both problems at once but there is no way to do that.

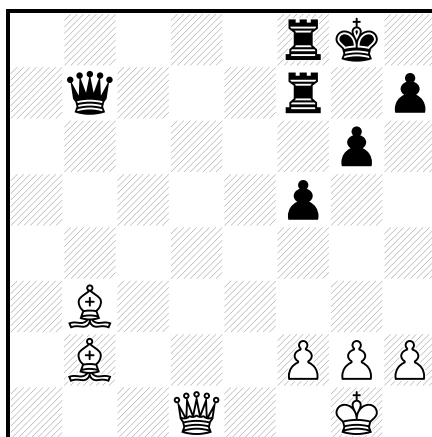
Our next position demonstrates just how good a pair of bishops can be on an open board.

NOTE: A board is more open, the fewer pawns there are (particularly in the middle) clogging up the situation.

White to play may be a double exchange down (two rooks for two bishops in this case) but he could regain one immediately with 1 Bxf7+.

TIP: Unless your opponent is preparing to break a pin, don't be in such a hurry to alleviate the situation for him.

Below the bishop on b3 pins the f7-rook to the king and as it is protected by the queen on d1, there is no rush. Moreover White has bigger fish to fry and **1 Qd4!** attacks the king along the neighbouring b2-h8 diagonal. In fact not only does this threaten checkmate via 2 Qh8 but also 2 Qg7 would be mate if the f7-rook were still pinned to its king. There is no remotely satisfactory way for Black to deal with this mating threat although strictly speaking it doesn't force mate in one because Black can give a kamikaze check on g2!

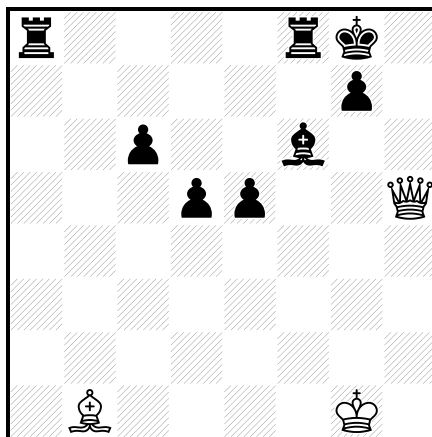


Eliminating an escape

Although this may seem like a big jump in terms of topic toughness, I feel it is important to bring to your attention the point that although it is always a good idea to keep an eye out for checks, sometimes a ‘quiet’ move may be even more effective.

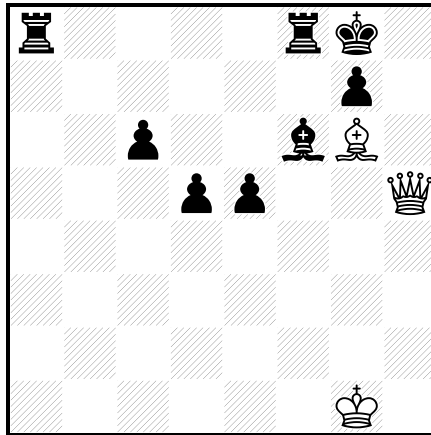
NOTE: A quiet move is one which isn't check but may help the overall cause of checkmate in a greater way.

In the position below I suspect that the vast amount of juniors would spot the queen check on h7 and bash it out straight away.



Actually White is quite a bit of material down and after **1 Qh7+ Kf7**, the black king will escape to the relative safety of e7. Note how Black's own bishop fulfils a good defensive role defending g7 and e5 and preventing an enemy queen check along the h4-e7 diagonal.

More subtle would be **1 Bg6** as that would prevent the black king from using the f7-square as an escape route.



Illustrated above, in that instance though leaving out the fact that Black may have time to do something attacking of his own (though admittedly not that much!), he can create a new escape route by simply moving his rook. Yes, **1...Rfb8** or **1...Ra1+ 2 Kg2 Rfa8** would both leave the black monarch with an f8-e7 path to safety.

TIP: Keeping rooks connected logically leaves them protecting each other and thus less vulnerable to enemy major pieces.

With regard to the above tip, note that the variation **1...Ra1+ 2 Kg2 Rfb8??** would allow White to win a rook via **3 Qh7+ Kf8** and then the skewer **4 Qh8+**.

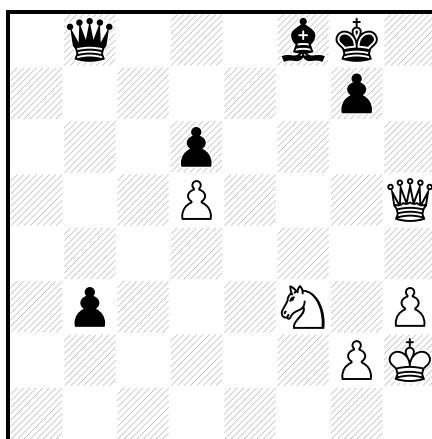
Correct play sees White gaining the useful Bg6 free of charge: **1 Bh7+ Kh8 2 Bg6+** (a discovered check) **2...Kg8**. This would lead us to position above but with White to play. He can then terminate the game with **3 Qh7 mate**.

The queen and knight pairing

NOTE: It is often said that a queen and knight are the most deadly attacking combination.

Of course if you were going for an attack, the ideal strike force would be two rooks, two bishops, two knights and at least one queen! In practice though that isn't usually possible and if there are just two main attacking pieces then it is often said that a queen and a knight work best together. The reason for this is that between them they can cover diagonals, ranks and files (i.e. the queen's role) and tricky 'L' shapes (i.e. the knight jumping involvement!).

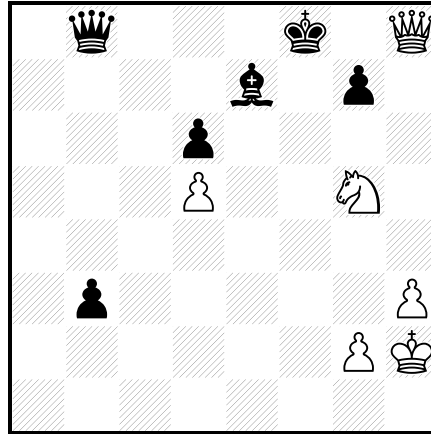
In the position below the material situation is level but a draw doesn't look on the cards!



Above Black has a passed pawn on b3 which is just two moves from promotion. White could try to prevent that from happening by manoeuvring his queen to block it on b1 (e.g. via f5 or g6) or even using his knight as a blocker through Nd2-b1. These comprise very passive plans though and here White would be far better off going on the attack with **1 Ng5**.

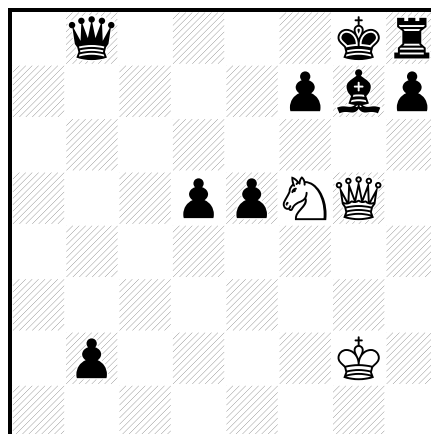
We have recently seen a bishop offer the required support for a queen to confront an enemy king but here it is the knight that allows White to threaten Qh7 mate. The beauty of a knight is that it controls different angles and specifically here provides the bonus of controlling the f7-square. Ideally Black would like to prevent the queen check on h7 and for that matter f7 too. As 1...Qf5 certainly isn't legal, to stay alive Black will have to create a different escape route for his king.

Alas **1...Be7** doesn't cut the mustard as **2 Qh7+ Kf8** is easily seen off by the **3 Qh8 mate** depicted below.



TIP: The presence of a white knight on f5 or c5 with the black king castled on that same side of the board or likewise a black knight on f4 or c4 and ditto with the white king, is usually worth at least a pawn.

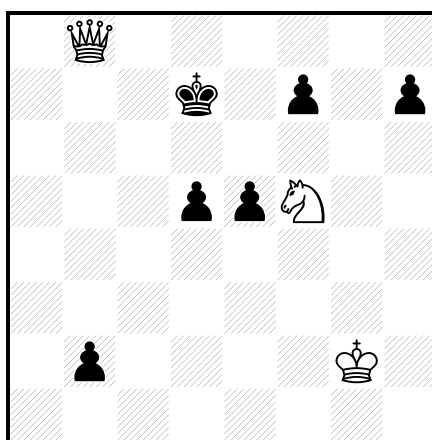
I often warn against generalisations but I can confirm that knights on such squares are fantastic pieces and in our example below, the presence of a white knight on f5 proves to be worth rather more than just one pawn.



Above the knight on f5 controls several potentially valuable squares, the most important one at present appearing to be g7. Black may currently be a lot of material

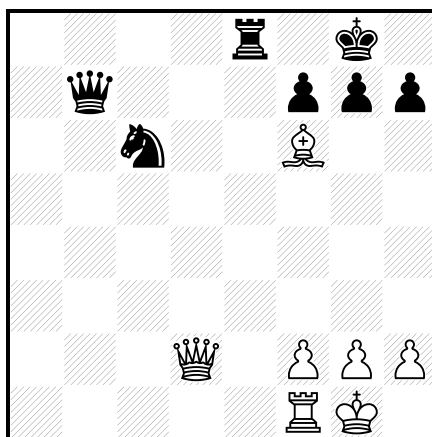
up but he must now somehow deal with the threat of Qxg7 mate. He has no checks of his own and the only way to guard his g7-bishop is with **1...Qf8**. You will notice then though that the black king is completely blocked in by friendly pieces. White could force Black to part company with his queen via **2 Ne7+** but given that Black will have plenty of pieces remaining and is on the verge of promoting his b-pawn, that wouldn't be a disaster. Considerably more impressive would be **2 Nh6 mate**. Yes the g7-bishop is pinned to the king and it is checkmate of the smothered variety!

With that in mind, the only way that Black can try to make things last is by running with his king. However after **1 ..Kf8 2 Qxg7+ Ke8 3 Qxh8+** (taking a rook and skewering the black king and rook) **3...Kd7 4 Qxb8** seen below his army will have been reduced to ashes and to add insult to injury to white queen prevents the passed black b-pawn from successfully promoting too!

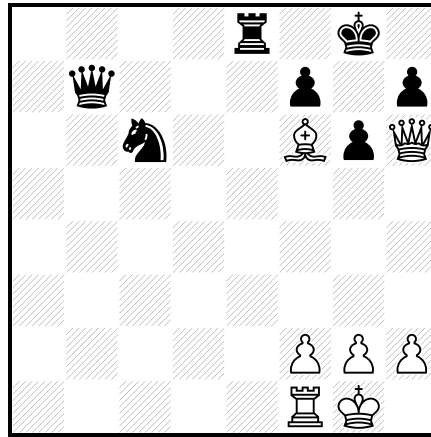


Plugging the gaps

In the position below the bishop on f6 is attacked. However instead of retreating it, he can focus his attention on g7.



After **1 Qg5**, the g-pawn is now pinned and mate is threatened. There is no way to defend this square and **1...g6** is the only way to avoid mate next turn. However where there was a pawn before would now exist a big hole and with the huge influence that White's dark-squared has, this is easily exploited by **2 Qh6**.

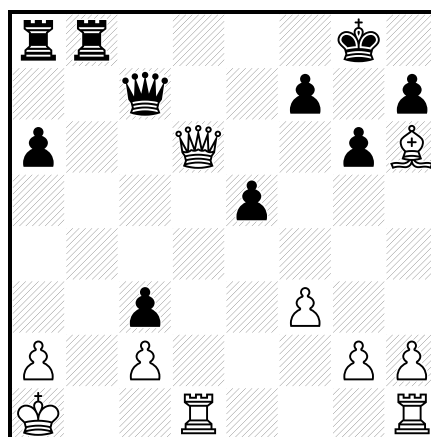


Above there is nothing that Black can do about **3 Qg7** mate. Yes, the hole will be plugged by the white queen to devastating effect.

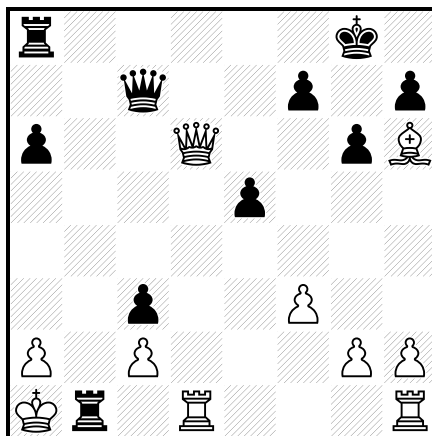
Revisiting The overloaded piece

An overloaded piece is one which is being asked to do more tasks than it is capable of fulfilling. Depending on the position, 'too many' may be just two.

A fairly complicated example comes from one of my own games which 23 moves into the game could have reached position below in which as Black I would actually have been a piece down.



However I did actually have everything under control and actually intended the rook sacrifice **23 ..Rb1+!** as illustrated below:



The white rook is overloaded

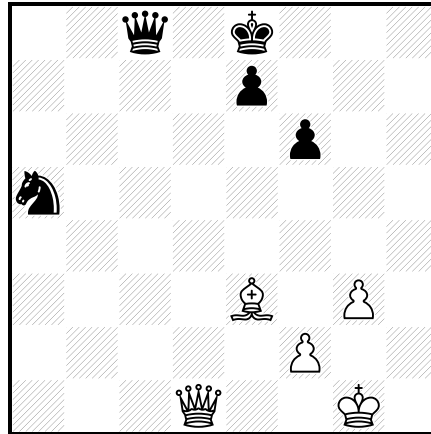
My point was that after **24 Kxb1**, I could deliver checkmate along the b-file via **Qb7+** **25 Ka1** (okay White could delay matters a move longer by a kamikaze queen block on the b-file first but obviously it wouldn't help in the slightly more long run!) **25...Qb2**.

Rather than get checkmated, White should take on b1 with his rook instead. However, officially the d1-rook to do the taking is overloaded as its main role was protecting the white queen on d6. After **24 Rxb1 Qxd6** Black would be material up.

WARNING: Beware overworking any of your own pieces and always be on the look out to exploit any overloaded pieces of your opponents.

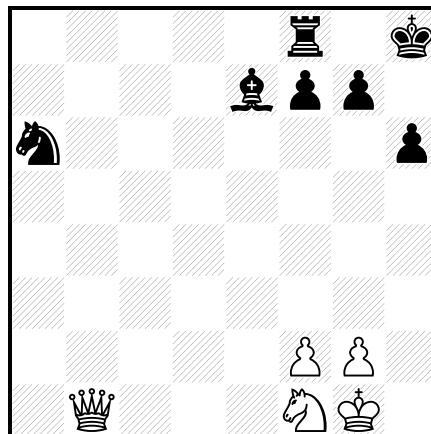
Exploiting unprotected pieces

I have already touched upon why it is very important to keep an eye on unprotected pieces. Look after your own to ensure that you don't lose them and your opponents in case you can turn that situation to your own advantage. Reminding ourselves of the topic, let's take a look at two relatively simple examples.

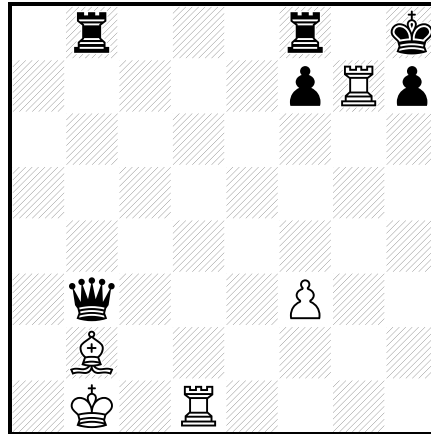


Above the black knight on a5 is unguarded. To attack it and something else at the same time could easily result in a material gain and doing just the job is **1 Qh5+**. Black must escape the check after which the white queen will be ready to snap up the offside knight. Note that **1 Qa4+** would not be as effective because Black could kill two birds with one stone. He could rescue the knight and simultaneously block the check with **1...Nc6**.

Below again we see an unprotected black knight languishing on the a-file. Another Black piece which is unguarded is the bishop on e7. White can exploit this situation with the simple fork **1 Qb7!** after which Black will have to say 'farewell' to one of those two minor pieces.

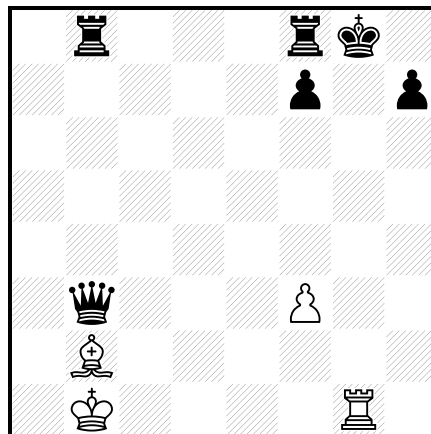


The wonderful discovered check



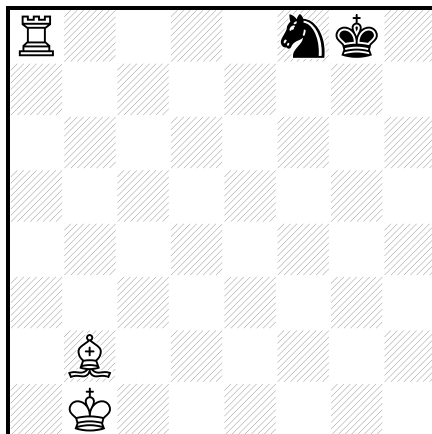
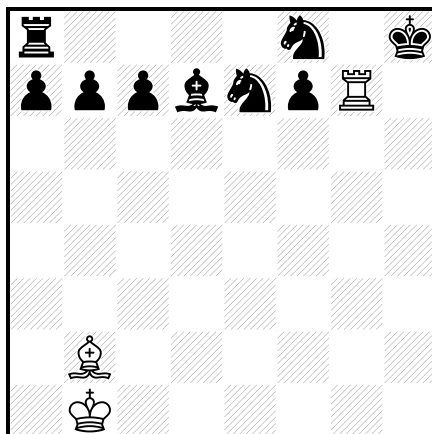
Above White is a queen for a bishop down and is in danger of losing his bishop with mate. However it is amazing what can be salvaged with the help of a discovered attack and that is exactly the case here. Check out **1 Rg8+!! Kxg8 2 Rg1 mate**. What a transformation from the starting position to the one below and what a cool way to end the game!

Even though the bishop was attacked, the b2-h8 diagonal proved vital and the double check rook sacrifice was a killer.



TIP: Often it is better to retain the option of a discovered check than to give the check itself.

In our last example the black king was boxed in on h8 and there is a similar scenario below in the position below. The black king is sort of trapped in the corner but there seems little prospect of checkmate when you consider that a white rook retreat along the g-file would allow the monarch to escape his cage via h7 and h6. Black is plenty of material up but you are about to witness a radical turnaround.

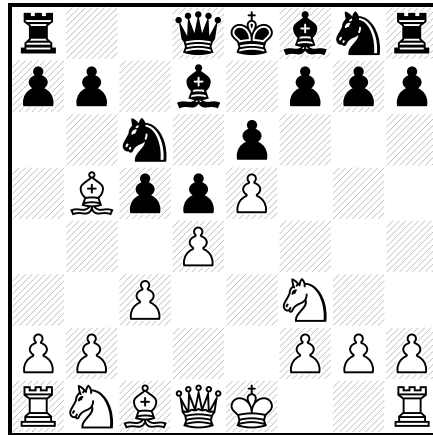


At first it seems inconceivable that the above two positions are related but play through the following continuation and you will soon start to get the picture.

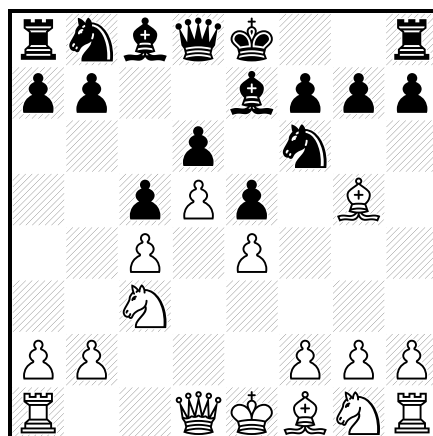
1 Rxf7+ (a check of the discovered type) **1...Kg8** **2 Rg7+** (cleverly loading up another discovered check) **2...Kh8** **3 Rxe7+** (and then using it to bag more material) **3...Kg8** **4 Rg7+** (White is getting a taste for this 'see saw' style action!) **4...Kh8** (whilst Black is compelled to move his king!) **5 Rxd7+** (White is enjoying himself) **5...Kg8** (and Black is not!) **6 Rg7+ Kh8** **7 Rxc7+** (Thanks!) **Kg8** **8 Rg7+ Kh8** **9 Rxb7+** (Thanks!) **Kg8** **10 Rg7+ Kh8** **11 Rxa7+** (and Thanks again!) **Kg8** **12 Rxa8** and incredibly White emerges a rook up. Such a checking sequence is often referred to as 'rocker checks' and as you've just seen is a very useful weapon.

Escaping pins

A ‘bad’ bishop is one which has its view hindered by friendly pawns fixed on the same colour as the one to which it operates. It is the potential for good and bad bishops coming into confrontation that often form the basis of nifty tactics:



Above, White's last move 6 Bb5 hasn't pinned the c6-knight to the black king but rather to the 'bad' bishop on d7. As White should be looking to preserve his good bishop (particularly for anything less than a queen or a rook!), just in general terms, it should go down as a poor idea.



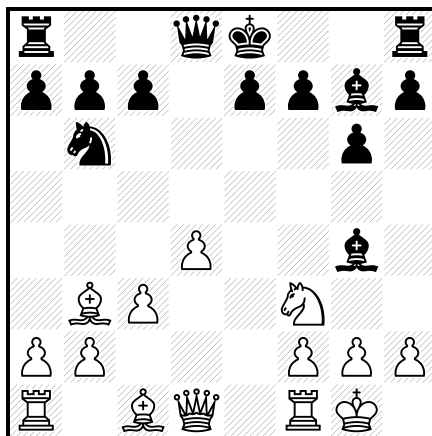
TIP: When in possession of a space advantage, one should avoid fair swaps.

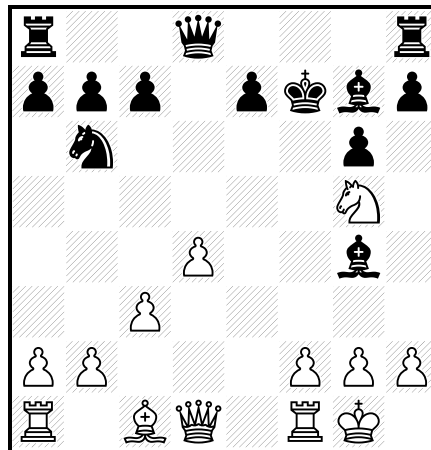
So to clarify, especially with the space advantage afforded to him by his pawns on d4 and particularly e5, White shouldn't desire swapping off his light-squared bishop for either a knight or a bishop. To make matters worse 6 Bb5? walks into the tactic **6...Nxe5!** The white pawn on e5 was defended by the d-pawn and the f3-knight but the text puts the bishops into direct confrontation. After **7 Bxd7+**, Black can retrieve his endangered knight via **7...Nxd7**. That little combination will have netted him a free pawn and gotten him his bad bishop swapped off into the bargain.

The 2nd example is a similar scenario. White's last poor move of 6 Bg5? pins the knight, not to the black queen but rather to the bad bishop on e7. Not much of a pin and in fact well punished by **6...Nxd5!** As White's good bishop on g5 isn't even defended once and is effectively attacked twice (by the black bishop and the queen behind it), White finds himself in a similar predicament to our last example. Once more the bishop swap **7 Bxe7** is met by the escape from the cauldron **7...Nxe7**.

WARNING: Beware pinning a knight to a bad bishop. The previous two examples more than adequately demonstrate why.

In the position below the black bishop is pinning the white knight to the queen. Nevertheless it is White who is going to make the most of the d1-g4 diagonal and specifically the fact that the black bishop is unprotected. Yes White would very much like to take the bishop with his queen immediately but it is of course knights and not queens that do jumping! The only way that the queen is going to get the opportunity to take the enemy bishop before the bishop can take her majesty is if the white knight moves away with check.

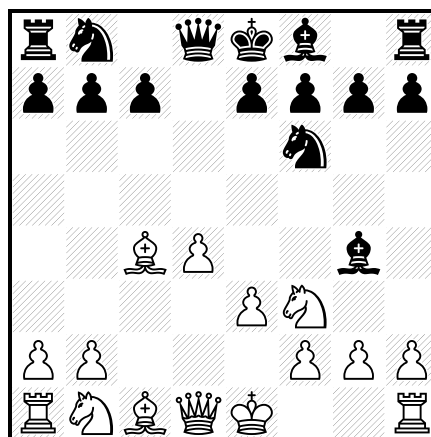




As it happens that is exactly the case after the standard combination **1 Bxf7+! Kxf7 2 Ng5+**. Yes above as Black is in check, the g4-bishop doesn't get the chance to take the queen and in fact it is the bishop that will perish next. The outcome will be that White will win a free pawn and a very useful one at that. There will be a big hole on e6 and of course Black will no longer be able to castle.

Clearly Black suffered because his bishop was unprotected but in fact a pinning piece can also be punished even if it does have a guardian. Take for example (and there are many positions of this type) a standard position in the Queen's Gambit Accepted (shortly to be explained) after the moves 1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 Bg4 5 Bxc4.

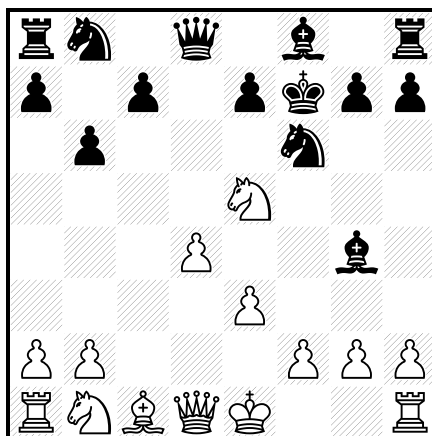
It is Black's move below and already we can pin-point a couple of weaknesses in his camp.



We know that one should seek to exploit the opponent's undefended pieces and here the b7-pawn comes into that category. White for example is currently threatening to win a pawn via the mundane fork 6 Qb3. In that instance the white queen would hit b7 whilst its partnership with the c4-bishop would attack f7.

It is Black to play in our starting position and I would definitely recommend 5...e6 blunting the c4-f7 diagonal and preparing to develop the dark-squared bishop. This would also bring Black one step nearer to castling.

Supposing instead Black deals with his b-pawn problem via 5 ..b6? I don't like that move anyway because the light-squared bishop has already moved to the kingside and this simply creates light-squared holes. More to the point though, observe the cool combination 6 Bxf7+ Kxf7 7 Ne5+.

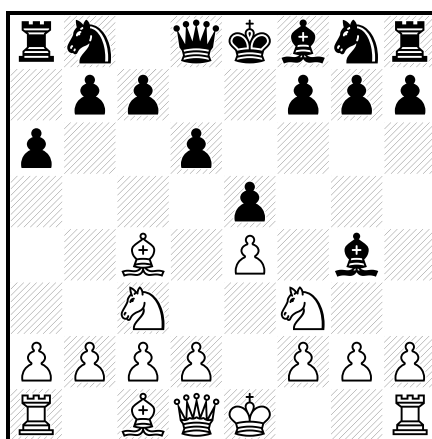


The knight on f6 is guarding the bishop on g4 but as the white knight was able to check on e5 instead of g5, another piece is attacking it. Just as before, White will emerge a pawn to the good, with the black king position looking decidedly shaky!

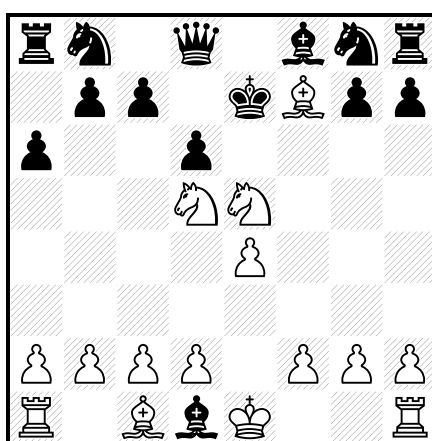
Legall's Mate

Closely related to the previous topic, let me show you a famous checkmate:

The moves 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Nc3 Bg4 4 Bc4 a6 lead us to the position below and to be honest, Black's play has been rather poor. Sure, he put a pawn in the centre on his first move but since then he has made an unnecessary pawn move on the edge of the board and ignored the 'knights before bishops' rule that recommends that usually at least one knight should be brought into play before a bishop. Ironically it is the bishop pin that he is now about to be punished for although it should be noted that White's forthcoming play would not be successful had Black now got a knight on f6 or c6.



Extremely visual is **5 Nxe5!** This knight can be taken but then the white queen will zap the bishop. Hence **5...Bxd1** Netting the queen, but allowing the three developed white minor pieces to combine to devastating effect: **6 Bxf7+ Ke7 7 Nd5 mate.**



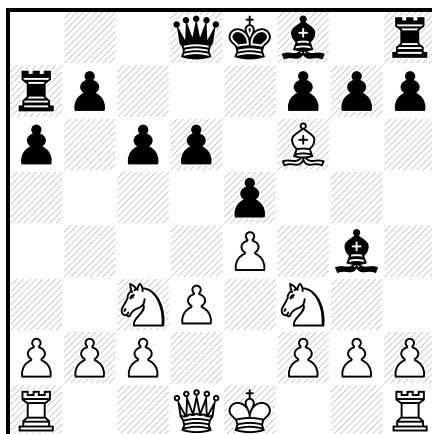
WARNING: Remember to adhere to opening principles, especially developing pieces. One can't do battle without an army!

Copying errors and miscalculations

To play reasonable chess, one needs to take ones time and think things through carefully. An extremely common mistake that I see occur, particularly at junior level is the good old ‘copying error’.

In position below, let’s just say that White’s dark-squared bishop has just taken a knight on f6. Most likely having come from g5, it seems like a completely unnecessary exchange. After all, being pinned to the queen, the knight wasn’t going anywhere and had the black queen strayed off the d8-g5 diagonal then a trade of f6 would have resulted in Black having to compromise his pawn structure. Okay it’s fair to say that ...Be7 to ‘unpin’ was probably up soon anyway but my argument stands all the same.

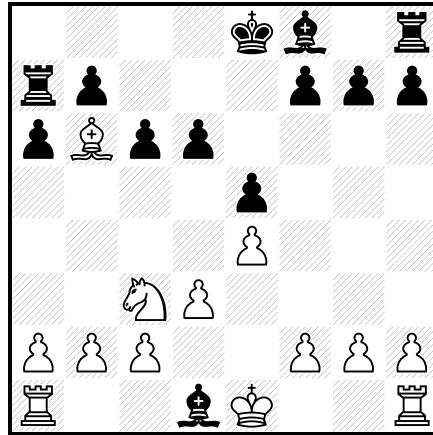
TIP: Don’t be so eager to release pins. Remember that (barring tricks!) a pinned piece doesn’t do the job it might otherwise do and you may be able to turn the situation even more to your advantage later.



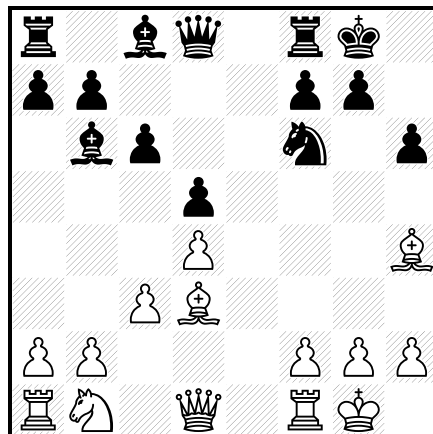
Surely the most natural looking and best Black reply then is 1...Qxf6, re-establishing material equality and adding further pressure to the pinned white knight on f3.

I have however lost track of the amount of times in which I have seen a response such as **1...Bxf3?** adopting a kind of ‘Well if it’s good for you, then it’s good for me!’ type attitude. If in a different scenario all has been calculated and it’s been decided that this is the best move for the job, then fair play. However too often this sort of thing occurs when its exponent is blissfully unaware of any complications ahead. Ironically the chances are that play would continue 2 Qxf3 Qxf6 and after a queen swap, Black would escape with just a compromised kingside pawn structure. A little vision though would uncover the variation **2 Bxd8 Bxd1** and now not just both sides taking the bishops located on the queen home squares which would again leave the piece count even but rather **3 Bb6!**

Below White saves his bishop, at the same time attacking the rook on a7. When Black opts to preserve his rook, he will find himself 3 pts down after White takes on d1.



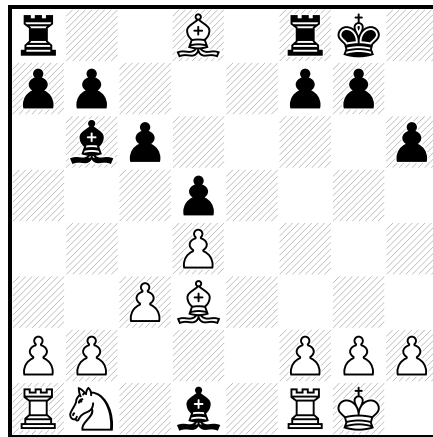
Incorporating something along similar lines, take a look at the position below in which it is Black to move. I would suggest that White holds a very small advantage because the pin on the f6-knight is a little awkward to escape. Certainly he is unlikely to ever want to meet $Bxf6$ with $\dots gxf6$ as with a shattered defensive shell, his king will then be exposed and vulnerable to attack. $1\dots Qd6$ would unpin the knight and even facilitate a future cheeky $\dots Bc7$ to threaten mate on h2 (though this can easily be prevented by $Bg3$). Also sensible is $1\dots Re8$ but again I want to focus my attention on a common mistake that surprisingly often goes unpunished.



The casual **1 ..Bg4** attacks the white queen but opens up a whole new can of worms! More often than not at lower level I would witness the almost instantaneous reaction of the white queen being moved out of danger or perhaps the f2-pawn being advanced to block the attack.

The reality of the situation though is that there is much to consider. Sure, the black queen attacks the bishop but in that respect feelings are mutual! Indeed the black bishop is only defended by the knight on f6 which is in turn pinned to the black queen. Yes, suddenly the plot thickens! Certainly **2 Qxg4** should even be considered although upon **2...Nxd4 3 Bxd8 Raxd8**, not a lot has been achieved.

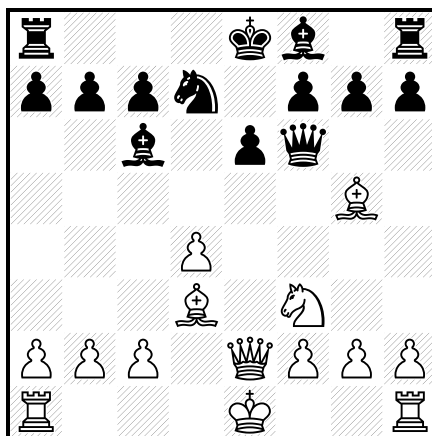
In contrast **2 Bxf6!** exposes Black's careless last move. Obviously the simple recapture on f6 drops the bishop on g4 but in fact ultimately **2...Bxd1 3 Bxd8** (seen below) fares little better. Black emerges from the complications a piece down and having to decide whether to take on d8 or to preserve his own light-squared bishop.



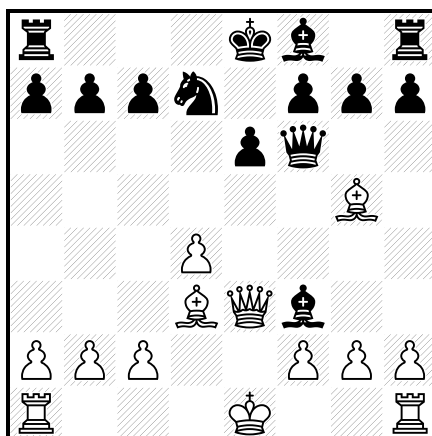
TIP: Don't forget it pays to be careful at all times.

The basic mistake of the previous example can be easily avoided once a bit of analysis is done but the following opening trap shows that sometimes there can be a sting in the tail.

Below White has just played 9 Bg5 attacking the black queen.

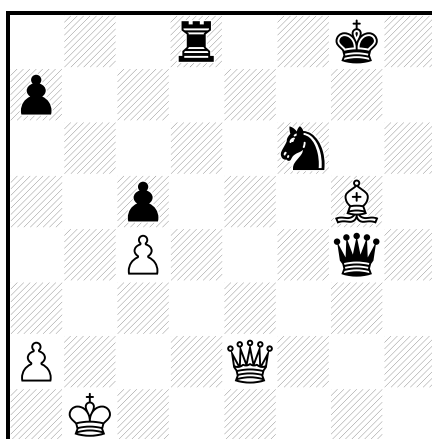


Her majesty is exceedingly short of squares but **9 ..Bxf3** eliminates the white dark-squared bishop's guardian whilst simultaneously counter-attacking White's own queen. To recapture on f3 would allow the black queen the chance to safely take on g5 and emerge a piece up. However incredibly crafty is **10 Qe3!** As illustrated below. Yes White eschews the black bishop on f3 because he has bigger fish to fry. As this also cuts out the escape route on d4, this time the black queen is trapped for good!

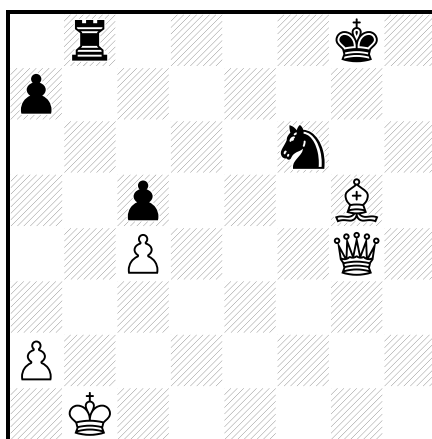


More on pins

I just wanted to take a little time out to remind everyone that a pinned piece either doesn't do the job that it originally does or else fulfilling its role may now come at a price. Often basic mathematics comes into play. Take the situation depicted in diagram below. As it stands the black knight on f6 is pinned to the rook by the white bishop on g5. If the knight were to move away then Black may lose the rook for nothing. Upon **1 Qxg4** though, were the b-file not open then it would obviously still make sense for Black to recapture the queen immediately as gaining 9 pts but losing 5 pts is still a gain.

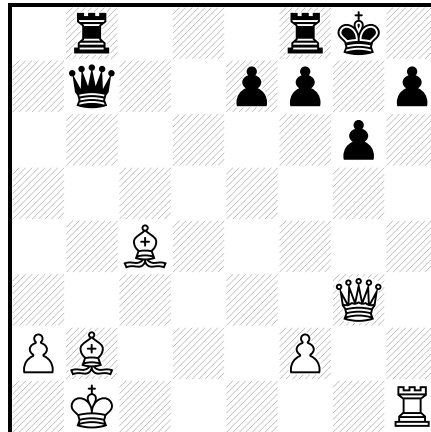


As the b-file is open though, before Black recaptures on g4, there is a 'zwischenzug' or 'intermezzo' on offer. That sounds complicated but basically all it means is that a clever and beneficial in between move can be employed in the middle of a sequence. Specifically here that move is **1...Rb8+**. Essentially then this intermezzo sees Black escape the pin via a free check.



After White moves his king out of check, the knight can then recapture the queen on g4 and as the rook is no longer on d8 White will remain a rook down.

Please now take time to take in the next position:

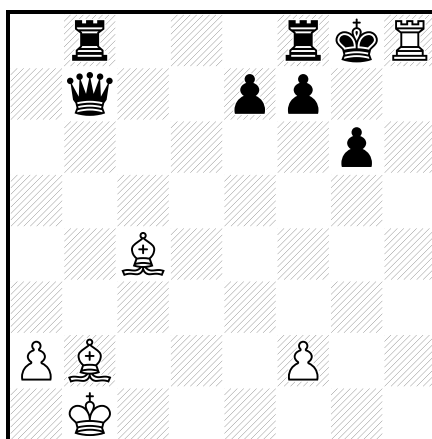


Points to note are:

- 1) Black is threatening mate by taking the bishop on b2.
- 2) Black is effectively forking the bishop on b2 and the undefended rook on h1.
- 3) In a slightly different situation, if White did have more time then he could consider employing any of the following attacking ideas:
 - a) Align the queen and rook on the h-file with the intention of delivering mate on h7.
 - b) Manoeuvre the queen to h6 where it could slide in to plug a gap on g7. Backed up by the bishop on b2, that would of course be mate.
 - c) Align the queen and bishop along the b2-h8 diagonal. Then both Qg7 and Qh8 would be mate.
 - d) Try to destroy the shield around the black king, possibly by advancing the f-pawn to challenge Black's pawn structure.

If you have now sneaked a look at the next diagram then you will know that although observation ‘3d’ had a certain amount of logic to it, in our particular example with White to move, it was clearly too slow.

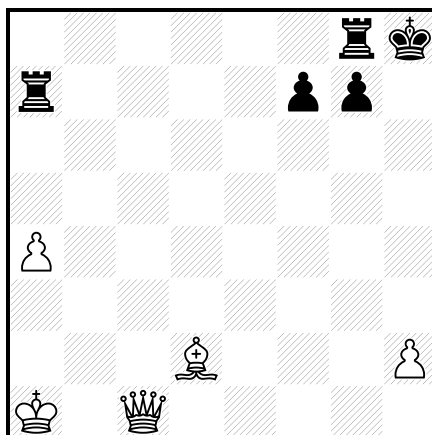
The key here is in observing that although Black does have a pawn shell around his king, in fact some pins come into play. The f7-pawn is definitely pinned by the c4-bishop to the king on g8. Hence it isn’t really guarding its compatriot on g6. The h-pawn can advance but it too can’t afford to transfer files as then there is a mate on h8. All becomes clear after the continuation **1 R_{xg6}!!** Recapturing with the f-pawn would be an illegal move and hence **1...h_{xg6}** and then **2 R_{h8} mate** is forced.



WARNING: Remember, a newly pinned piece may no longer fulfil the role that it did prior.

Playing for hopes

This is something that one really shouldn’t do unless you find yourself in a somewhat desperate situation!

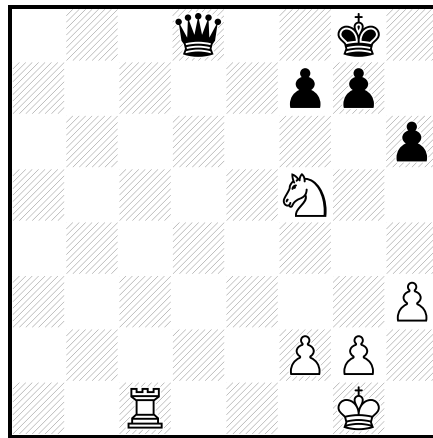


Above White is a queen and a bishop for two rooks up but there are plenty of possibilities for him to mess up! He should defend his a-pawn or advance it and with sensible play in time he will be victorious. Too often though at lower levels I might see the likes of **1 Bh6?** with the logic being that after the pawn takes the bishop, the queen will recapture and it would be checkmate. The point is of course that there is absolutely no compulsion for Black to accept Whites offering. Indeed after **1...Rxa4+ 2 Kb2 Rb8+ 3 Kc3 Rc8+**, a handy skewer will have completely seen the tables turned.

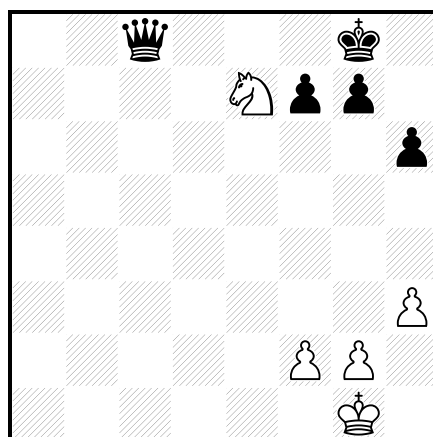
Working with knight forks

I don't know what it is about knights that bring the best and worst out of people. There just seems a certain thrill about delivering a knight fork and possibly it is that factor that tends to persuade weaker players to overvalue knights when compared against other pieces.

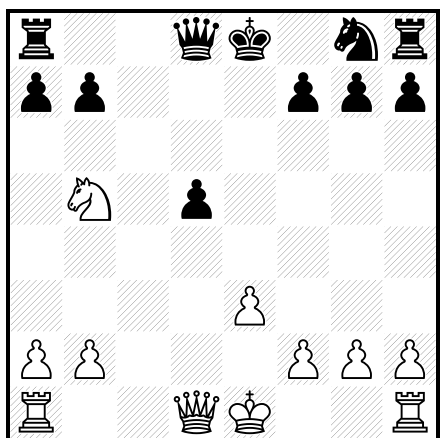
TIP: Knights are tricky pieces and arguably the most unpredictable of all. Do look out for forking opportunities of your own but remember that you never play against a wall! Your opponent will have plans of his own so ensure that you monitor the actions of enemy steeds.



Above in position Black is a queen for a rook and a knight up but as we learnt earlier in the book, a white knight on f5 can be a very dangerous piece. Typically that would be when there is a queen around to combine in an attack but here the partner in crime is the white rook. Were the black h-pawn back on h7 then White could exploit the opponent's vulnerability on the back rank with 1 Nd6. The knight would be immune to capture because of the mating 2 Rc8+ and that aside Black would not have enough time to deal with the skewer 2 Rc8 anyway. However in our position as it stands the black king can escape the back rank via h7 so such a move would not be successful. A useful theme to commit to memory though is **1 Rc8!** This skewers the black king and queen and after **1...Qxc8 2 Ne7+** the diagram below depicts the white knight delivering a killer fork.



There are a few things to consider in our next illustrative example in which the material situation is level but White has a slight lead in development and Black has an isolated d-pawn.

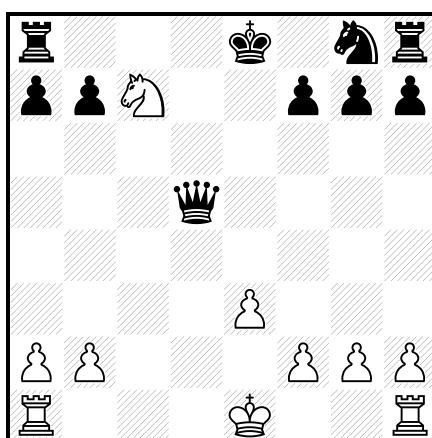


With regards the above then, a few observations:

1) White has not yet castled and to do so now could not be a bad thing. As it happens a black queen check on a5 could be met by the attacked b5-knight being retreated to c3 so that would not be a disaster but I hope you noticed that check all the same!

2) The g7-pawn is currently undefended but scrutinising the weak d5-pawn would look like a sensible plan. The isolated d-pawn could be blockaded and it is not difficult to imagine that in the not so long run White could attack it with a knight and three major pieces along the d-file.

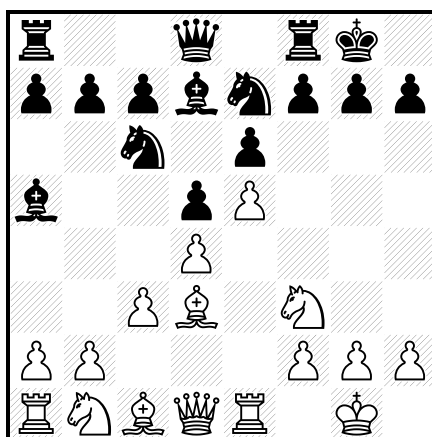
All good stuff but if you were keeping a look out for checks to come then you may have spotted that in fact White can net the pawn immediately via **1 Qxd5!**, the point being **1...Qxd5 2 Nc7+** reaching the position below:



NOTE: Combinations and indeed sacrifices aren't always about delivering checkmate. They could gain a measly pawn (that could later turn into a queen!) or even just a positional advantage. So long as their employment helps in the overall aim of progressing towards a winning game (or a drawing one if you were losing prior) then they are most desirable.

The Greek Gift

Instead of giving a history lesson on soldiers hiding in giant wooden horses, I am going to cut to the chase and give an illustrative example of what a 'greek gift' is in relation to the game of chess.



Above White is blessed with a comfortable space advantage. This is afforded to him by the attractive pawn centre that he has built up and in particular by the pawn on e5. Black has been deprived the chance to settle a knight on f6 and with a fixed pawn on e6 he has a bad bishop locked inside his pawn structure.

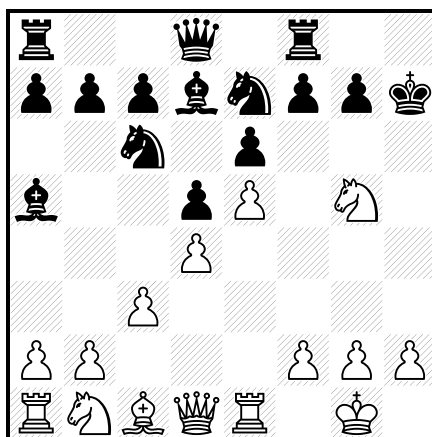
Although Black has moved each of his minor pieces, none of them are particularly active. In contrast White is yet to move his queen's bishop from c1 and yet it has arguably already been developed by other actions as it controls a very useful diagonal towards h6.

The main objection to Black's play up till now is that he did nothing to challenge White's dominant pawn centre and in particular including ...c5 earlier before parking a knight on c6 would at least have given White the problem of having to hold his d- and e-pawns together.

As for a plan for White, an obvious one is to initiate a kingside attack by targeting the h7-square. Aligning the queen and bishop via say Bc2 and Qd3 seems reasonable as then Black may soon be forced to his g-pawn the one square. That would then have the repercussion of conceding a big hole on g7 and justifying the decision to leave the c1-bishop alone for a while, its first move could even be to h6.

All good stuff, but better still here is the Greek gift sacrifice **1 Bxh7+!** Should Black decline the offering with **1...Kh8** then at the very least a valuable defensive pawn has been one and the bishop could be immediately withdrawn with the intention of exploiting the now draughty h-file a little later. Here though (and no doubt in similar situations **2 Ng5 g6 3 Qf3** could soon be curtains. White will be prepared to sacrifice the bishop on g6 and transfer the queen to the h-file to give mate on h7.

Back to **1...Kxh7** and now **2 Ng5+** leaves us with position below in which Black has a decision to make about his king.



Four (not great!) choices

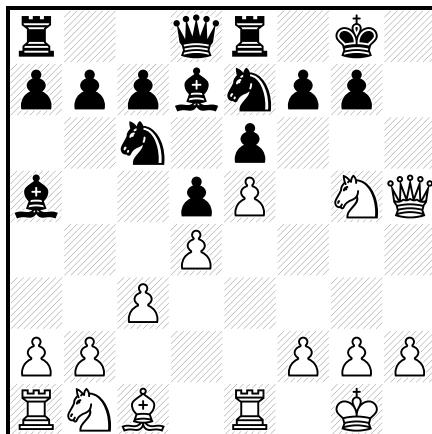
Let's investigate all of Black's choices, something which one would of course have to do when contemplating employing a sacrifice of this type:

a) We can eliminate **2...Kh6** which at the very least walks in the double check and queen winning fork **3 Nxf7+**. Demonstrating why the dark-squared bishop is still key even though it remains at home, there will always be a strong double check although actually keeping it in hand with **3 Qg4** here would actually force mate fairly quickly.

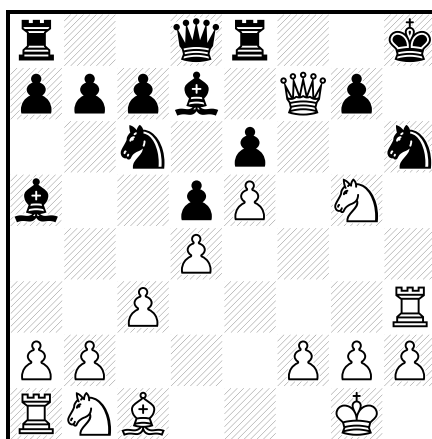
b) More testing would be **2...Kg6**. Though I have not made this my main line, my experience is that in practice this is the option that a Greek gift exponent must be sure he has under control. With the black king running into the open, typical treatments include giving a queen check along the b1-g6 diagonal or employing the h-pawn with the intention of advancing it to h5 to give what could be a crushing check. Even more common though and strongest here is **3 Qg4!** setting up a nasty discovered check. The black king has nowhere to run to and here **3...f5** is destroyed by **4 exf6 Kxf6 5 Rxe6+ Bxe6 6 Qxe6** mate. Even without the white rook on e1 there would be other attacking options.

c) **2...Kh8** clearly walks into a mate in two i.e. **3 Qh5+ Kg8 4 Qh7** mate and thus is easily dismissed.

d) Always White's idea is to meet **2...Kg8** with **3 Qh5** threatening an instant mate on h7. A key element of having a black pawn on e6 is that Black doesn't have the defensive resource ...Bf5. Meanwhile even if a black knight were able to get to f6, the vital white pawn on e5 removes that possibility from the equation anyway. To give the black king chance of an escape here **3...Re8** is forced leading to diagram below.



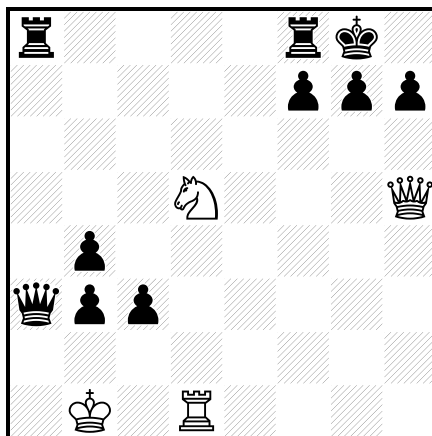
From this position one straightforward winning continuation is **4 Qh7+ Kf8 5 Qh8+ Ng8 6 Nh7+ Ke7 7 Bg5+** when **7...f6** would allow **8 Qxg7** mate. Putting the white rook to good use sees a 'swinger' also forcing the issue after **4 Qxf7+ Kh8 5 Re3 Nf5 6 Rh3+ Nh6**



Above the finishing touches are put on through **7 Rxb6+! gxh6 8 Qh7** mate.

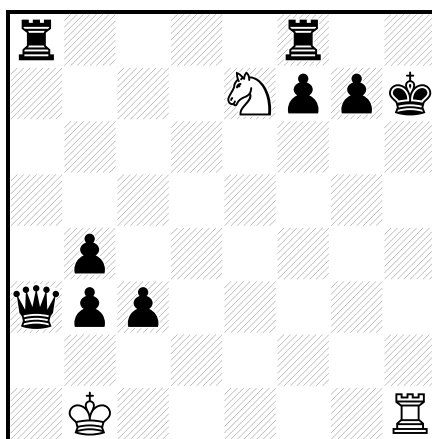
Exploiting the restricted king

WARNING: When a king is deprived of breathing space, alarm bells should start to ring.



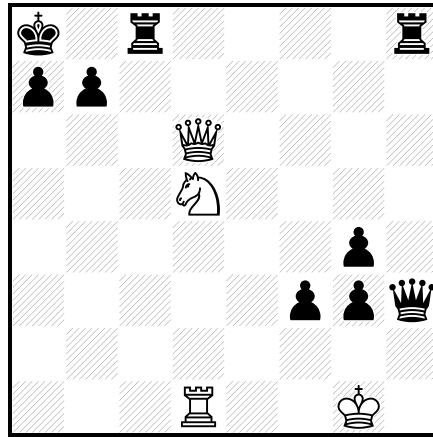
Above the white king is in a pretty hopeless situation and so the emphasis is on White finding a way to give checkmate or obtain a draw somehow (i.e. through stalemate or a perpetual check) before Black can deliver any number of knockout blows.

At present the black monarch has just h8 to move to but after **1 Ne7+ Kh8** it has no breathing space whatsoever. All White need do is somehow get it to give check and **2 Qxh7+!! Kxh7 3 Rh1** mate works a treat! Illustrated below this type of formation is known as ‘**Anastasia’s mate**’ and I can testify it is a theme that does turn up now and again in practical play and is really enjoyable when you get to play it!

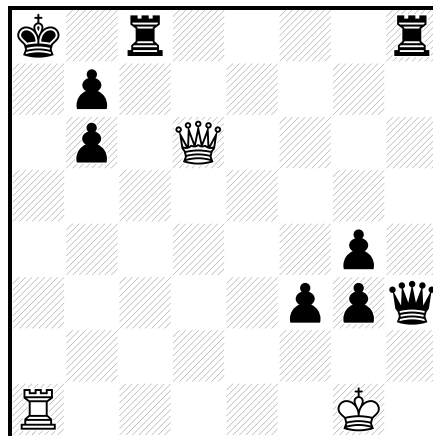


Incidentally had Black’s a8-rook started on a7 instead where it covered the e7-square, then White should still not throw in the towel. As his own king has no breathing space then if he could offload all of his remaining pieces then the result would be stalemate.

For example in that instance (i.e. with the black rook on a7 rather than a8) 1 Nf6+ gxf6 2 Rg1+ Kh8 3 Rg8+ and which ever way Black takes the rook, the kamikaze 4 Qxh7+ to follow would be a very appropriate sequence.



Above, the black king may have a pawn shield surrounding it but because of the white queen on d6, it can't move anywhere. No doubt its hope is that during the middlegame it won't have to move anywhere and instead can remain safely tucked away in the corner. Alas **1 Nb6+!** (and note were the d1-rook on a1 already then because the a-pawn would be pinned, this would already be mate) **1...axb6 2 Ra1 mate** seen below shatters that illusion.



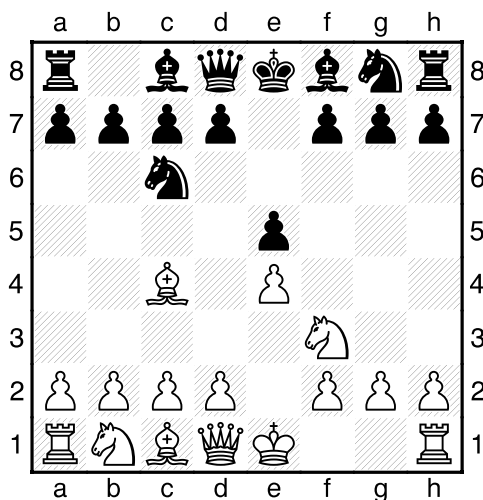
Incidentally it should be observed that in the top position 1 Nc7+ Rxc7 2 Qd8+ doesn't work because rather than accepting the queen offer and getting back rank mated, the calm 2...Rc8 would thwart White's efforts.

Some Openings and Associated Middlegames

A practical 1 e4 e5 lecture

The most common opening at junior level is the ‘Italian Game’:

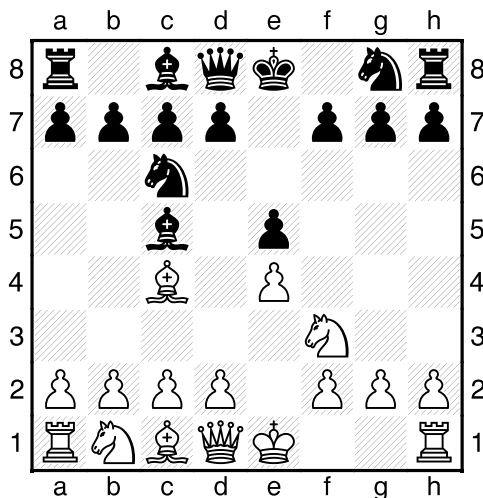
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4



In this opening it is very important that attention is paid to the f7-square but I really don't like to see precautionary moves such as 3...h6? played that have no bearing on the centre or development. I always try to encourage a ‘pawn break’ to be aimed for in the opening/middlegame (to later facilitate some action for the rooks) and in that instance 4 d4 or 4 0-0 intending 5 d4 would leave White placed very well.

The Black response 3...d6?! is also a little passive and after 4 Nc3 it should be noted that already 4...Nf6? 5 Ng5! would be pretty disastrous as there would be no satisfactory way for Black to guard f7. Incidentally a very attractive variation is 4...Bg4 5 h3 Bh5 6 Nxe5!! which after 6...Bxd1 would see Legall's mate of 7 Bxf7+ Ke7 8 Nd5 mate. The importance of forcing the bishop back to h5 first is that instead of taking the queen, capturing the knight with the black knight would have protected the bishop. However now 6...Nxe5 7 Qxh5 Nxc4 would see the fork 8 Qb5+ regaining the piece and leaving White a good pawn up.

Illustrated below after **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4**, **3...Bc5** is a sensible reply.

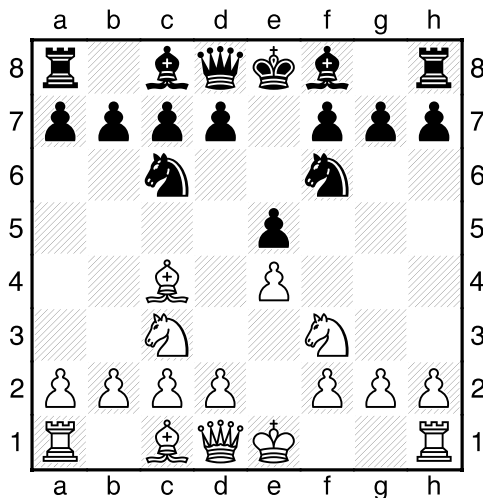


However then it is important that Black is aware of such variations as:

4.c3 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 (or 6.e5 d5 7.Bb5 Ne4 8.cxd4 Bb4+ 9.Bd2 Nxd2 10.Nbxd2 0-0 11.0-0 Bg4) **6...Bb4+ 7.Nc3** (or 7.Bd2 Bxd2+ 8.Nbxd2 d5!) **7...Nxe4 8.0-0 Bxc3!** (8...Nxc3?! 9.bxc3 Bxc3 is very risky because of both 10.Qb3 or 10 Ba3.) **9.d5 Bf6 10.Re1 Ne7 11.Rxe4 d6.**

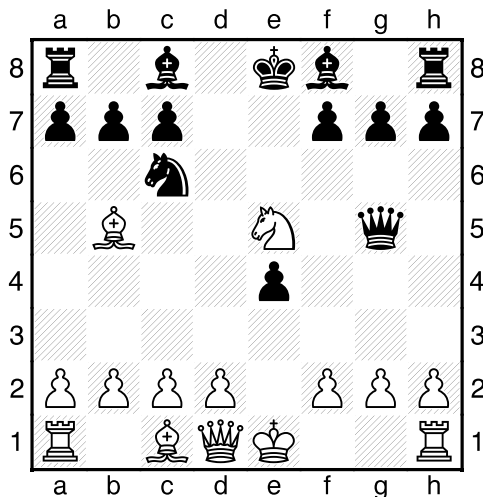
If you want to play such positions as either colour then I would really recommend consulting a chess openings book for more details as such sharp openings could easily go horribly wrong or entertainingly right!

The main alternative is **3...Nf6** and first up is the commonly termed 'fork trick' if White defends the attacked pawn with **4 Nc3** (see the diagram below):



Yes, a very satisfactory reply is **4...Nxe4 5.Nxe4** (Note 5.Bxf7+ Kxf7 6.Nxe4 d5 7.Neg5+ Kg8 may inconvenience the black king, but he has two nice centre pawns, a potentially very powerful bishop pair, a half-open f-file for a rook or two later and the ability to hassle the white knights with the likes of ...e4 or ...h6) **5...d5 6.Bb5** (6.Bd3 dxe4 7.Bxe4 Bd6 is a little bit better for Black) **6...dxe4 7.Nxe5**.

Here White has a very serious material gaining threat on c6 but a very important idea to remember is **7...Qg5!**

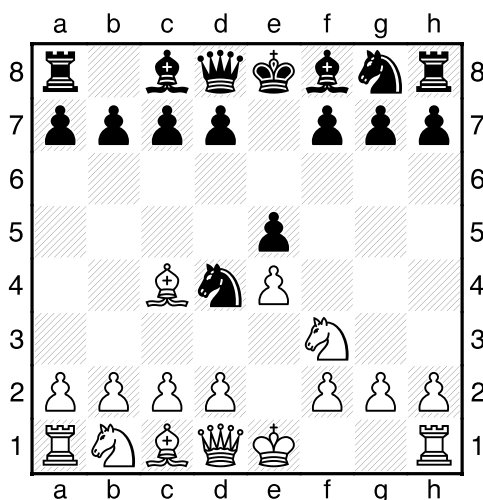


Above note how the black queen attacks g2 as well as the knight and through to the bishop. Now for example after:

8.Bxc6+ bxc6 9.Nxc6 Black would be spoilt between trapping the c6-knight with ...Qc5 or taking on g2 and following that up with either ...Bh3 or ...Bg4.

Although competent players should know that in most openings early queen moves are not advised that same move crops up in the famous 'Oh My God!' trap after the moves:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nd4?!



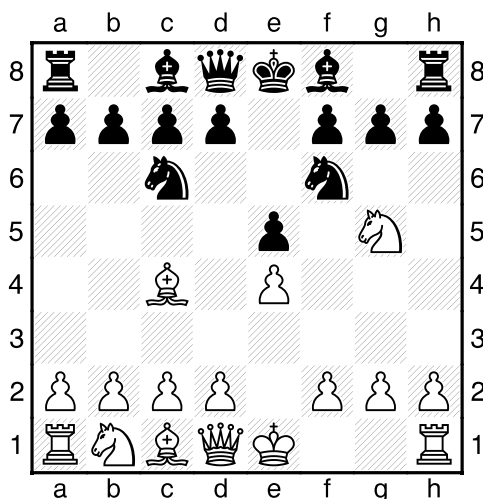
Although moving the same piece twice cannot be justified so early in the game, in the past this trap has been popular with tricky players out for quick wins. White should simply swap knights or else play 4 c3 Nxf3+ 5 Qxf3 when he threatens mate on f7 and is ready to build a nice pawn centre with d2-d4.

As soon as your opponent plays something different from the norm you should always take time to consider your options. Here worth avoiding is:

4.Nxe5? Qg5! 5.Nxf7 Qxg2 6.Rf1 Qxe4+ 7.Be2 Nf3 mate.

Returning to the moves **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6** and first up please be aware that 4 d4 exd4 5 e5 is best met with the important move 5...d5! ignoring for now the attack on the f6-knight to counter-attack the bishop on c4. Then 6 Bb5 Ne4 7 Nxd4 Bd7 is usual.

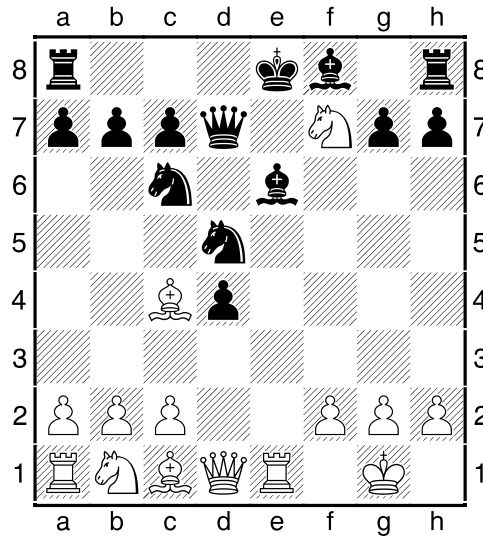
That variation is well worth paying attention to but arguably even more important is **4.Ng5** as illustrated below. This is an important position that many juniors in particular seem capable of reaching with either White or Black



Although this move defies one of the opening principles, there is a clear threat to the f7-pawn and a likely fork of the black queen and rook. Certainly 5 Nxf7 looks good after either 4...Qe7? or 4...Nd5? which coincidentally are two bad moves that I have seen juniors play in the past! However please note that although 4...Bc5 may look equally ignoring of danger, in fact it is a variation known as the 'Trexler'. Now 5.Nxf7?! 5...Bxf2+ 6.Kxf2 Nxe4+ leaves the black queen likely to appear on h4 with a reasonable attack. Again this is an interesting line to consult the text books on but White players note that probably 5.Bxf7+ Ke7 6.Bb3 is a safer way to play.

Anyway the obvious way for Black to deal with the threat his f7-pawn is with **4...d5** although after **5.exd5** it must be observed that the natural **5...Nxd5?!** is actually an error. Many are familiar with the 'Fried Liver' variation of 6.Nxf7 Kxf7 7.Qf3+ (checking the king and attacking the knight on d5) 7..Ke6 8.Nc3. In truth this remains inconclusive but much stronger for White is:

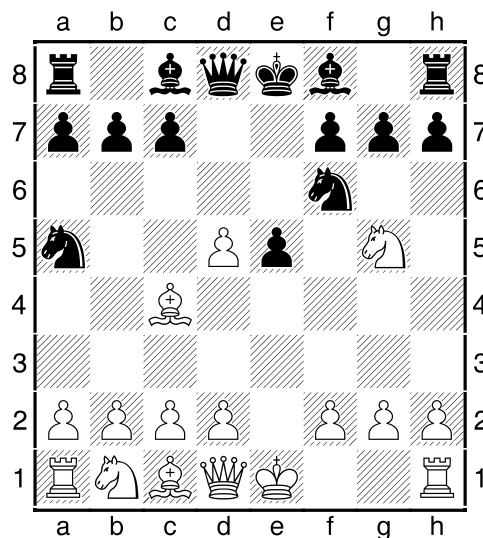
6.d4! exd4 (6...Nxd4 loses a piece to 7 c3) **7.0-0 Be6** (or 7...Be7 8.Nxf7! Kxf7 9.Qh5+ Ke6 10.Re1+ Kd6 11.Qxd5 mate) **8.Re1 Qd7 9.Nxf7!!** leading to the position below.



The bishop on e6 is of course pinned and after **9...Kxf7 10.Qf3+ Kg6** (or 10...Kg8 11.Rxe6 Qxe6 12.Bxd5 with serious problems for Black along the d5-g8 diagonal!) **11.Rxe6+! Qxe6 12.Bd3+** Black will get checkmated.

The above lines and the concept of 6 d4! are very relevant to anyone thinking of playing 4 Ng5 as White but any opting to play this 'Four Knights Defence' as Black should note to stay away from 4...Nxd5?!. I understand that it is difficult to get to grips with not recapturing a pawn and centralising a knight but the fact is that two far better Black options are as follows:

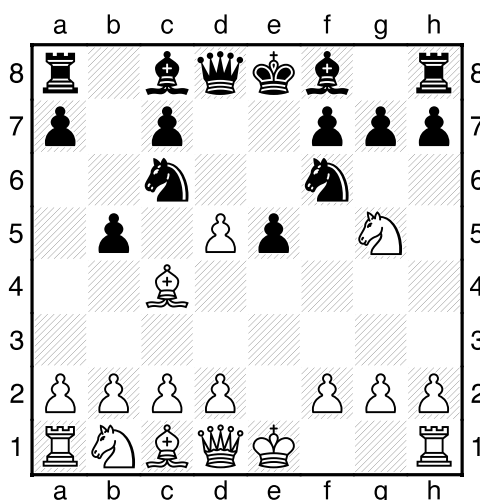
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5 Na5



After **6.Bb5+ c6** (If **6...Bd7** then **7.Qe2** is White's best move) **7.dxc6 bxc6 8.Be2** (An error is **8.Ba4?! h6 9.Nf3 e4 10.Ne5 Qd4!** when the black queen forks the two white minor pieces and after **11.Bxc6+ Nxc6 12.Nxc6 Qc5** traps the knight. Sure, White can essentially get three pawns for it but in the opening and middlegame, pieces are generally far more important.). **8...h6 9.Nf3 e4 10.Ne5 Bd6 11.d4 exd3 12.Nxd3** Black has some compensation for a pawn.

Returning to **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5** and another exciting move worth investing time on is **5...b5**

Again the focus in the position below is on luring the white bishop off of the worrying b3-f7 diagonal.



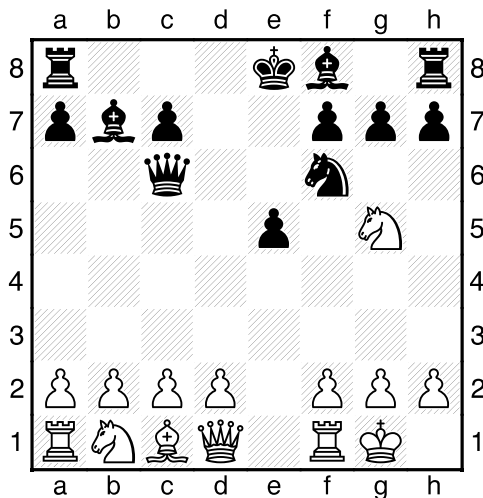
6.Bxb5

Otherwise Black's most likely follow up is **...Nd4** as is highlighted in other White options:

a) **6.Bb3 Nd4! 7.d6 Nxb3 8.dxc7 Qd5! 9.axb3 Qxg2 10.Qf3 Qxf3 11.Nxf3 Bb7 12.Ke2 Nd5** when this knight threatens to pick off the potentially troublesome pawn on c7 as well as a strong check on f4.

b) **6.Bf1 Nd4** (Also though **6...h6 7.Nxf7 Kxf7 8.dxc6 Bc5** is also an interesting possibility. White is up on pawns although it is Black that has one in the centre. Also his lead in development could prove very dangerous if he builds up an attack against f2 or h2. Moves such as **...Rf8, ...Kg8, ...Ne4** or **...Ng4** and **...Qh4** or **...Qd4** could figure.) **7.c3 Nxd5 8.cxd4** (A better move is **8.Ne4** when **8...Qh4 9.Ng3** is complicated! Chess isn't easy!) **8...Qxg5 9.Bxb5+ Kd8 10.Qf3 Bb7 11.0-0** (or **11.Nc3 exd4** allowing the black queen to defend d5.) **11...Rb8** when the threat of **...Nf4** is a very serious one.

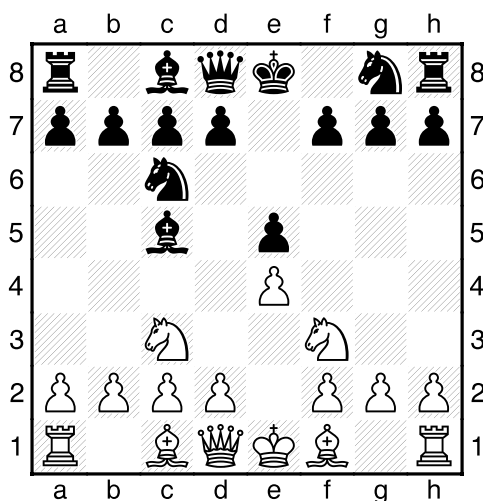
6...Qxd5 7.Bxc6+ Qxc6 8.0-0 Bb7



Above Black has very good compensation for a pawn. Mate is threatened on g2 and even if White prevents that now, that is the area of the board where Black should ultimately scrutinise. He may follow up with the likes of ...Bc5 and ...0-0-0. Although the defensive pawn shell on the queenside could be better, White is in no position to launch an attack over there and a black g-pawn advance could help budge any obstructing future white piece on f3.

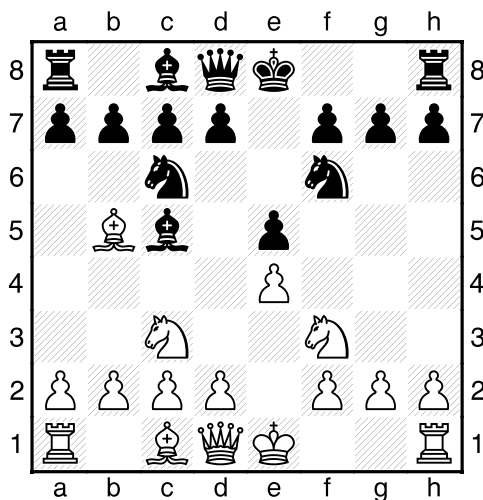
Before I forget I'd like to say a few more things about the so called 'fork trick'. Other examples of when it would work are the following situations:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Bc5



4.Nxe5 Nxe5 5.d4 Bd6 6.dxe5 Bxe5 although it's not that bad for Black.

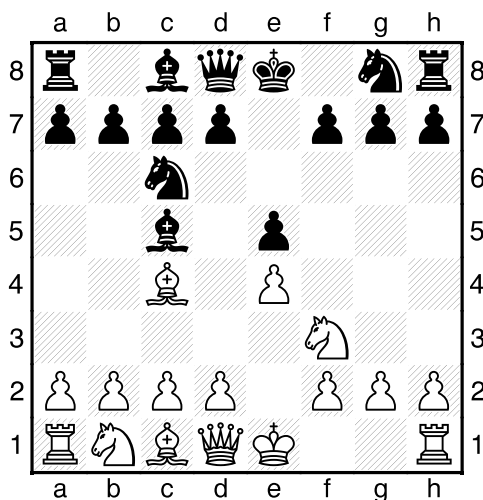
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Bb5 Bc5



5.Nxe5 Nxe5 6.d4 although again 6...Bd6 isn't such a problem for Black.

VERY IMPORTANT though is to note that

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 is NOT such an occasion



4.Nxe5?? Nxe5 5.d4 Nxc4 6.dxc5 and White is a piece down. I have seen more than one confused junior try this in the past but obviously the combination doesn't work if your own bishop is vulnerably placed!

Incredibly common in junior games is the opening sequence

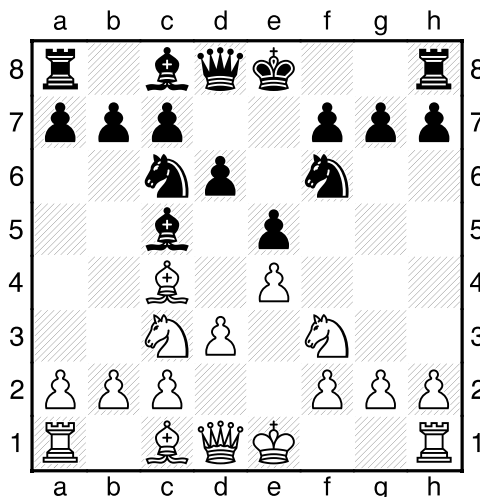
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5

The same position below might be reached by the move order 3...Nf6 4.d3 Bc5 5.Nc3 d6.

4.d3 d6 5.Nc3

Stronger White players tend to accept that the Bg5 and Nd5 idea discussed below won't work and thus tend to favour 5.c3 Nf6 6.0-0 0-0 7.Nbd2 when they might transfer their knight to the kingside via f1 and g3.

5...Nf6



Although usually we are usually encouraged to castle fairly early in games, as the centre is closed this need not be a priority here. Now Black can actually benefit from:

6.Bg5

Instead 6.0-0 Bg4 would leave White reluctant to advance both his h- and g-pawns for fear of reprisal later (in other words in time Black may be able to challenge those pawns and get his pieces behind them!).

Preventing the pin with 6.h3 is time consuming and then 6...Be6 7.Bxe6 (7.Bb3 would be preferable as at least it doesn't gift Black a half-open file.) 7...fxe6 8.0-0 0-0 9.Bg5 Qe8 may see the black queen appear on the aggressive square g6 whilst ...Nh5-f4 could prove really dangerous. Having doubled pawns is not such a problem and at least guarantees a half-open file to aid in rook activity.

6...h6

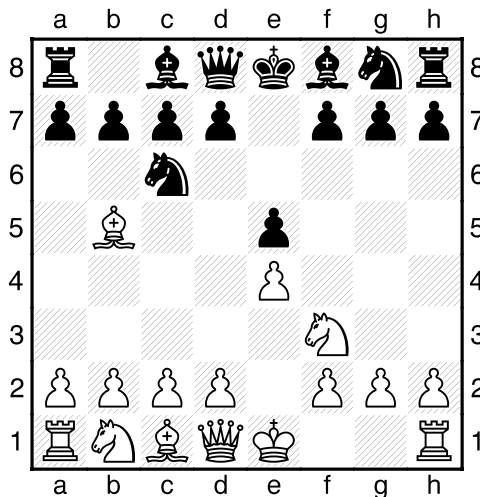
What I hate to see our players walking into is the likes of 6...0-0? 7.Nd5 h6 8.Nxf6+ gxf6 9.Bxh6. Of course if you can have that sort of thing in your favour then you would be doing very well!

7.Bh4 g5 8.Bg3 Bg4

It is not a big concern that Black has advanced his kingside pawns as he can always castle queenside. For White though escaping the g4-d1 pin is not so easy.

Moving on and we have the Ruy Lopez or Spanish Opening:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5



From here I can recall that a junior who had clearly been paying attention in a coaching session had the following game published in a national newspaper:

3...a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0-0 Be7 6.Re1 b5 7.Bb3 0-0 8.c3

Rather than just placing the knight on c3, common in 1 e4 e5 openings is for White to try to build up a big pawn centre with c2-c3 and d2-d4.

8...d5

Here Black opted to sacrifice a pawn with the so called 'Marshall Gambit' rather than continuing with the solid alternative 8...d6.

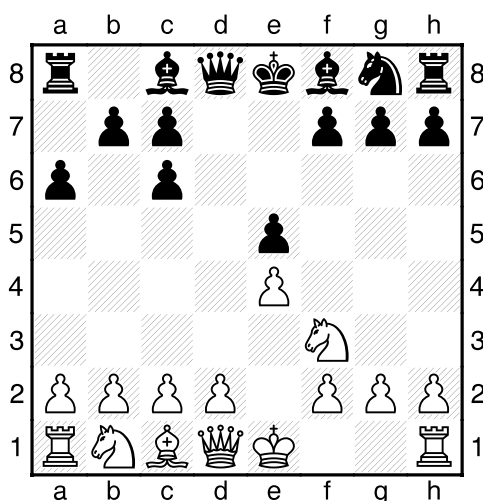
9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Nxe5 Nxe5 11.Rxe5 c6 12.d4 Bd6 13.Re1 Qh4 14.h3

A better defence to the threat to h2 is 14.g3 although after 14...Qh3 Black has some very reasonable compensation for the pawn in the form of a lead in development and attacking chances against the white king.

14...Bxh3 15.gxh3 Qxh3 16.Nd2 Bh2+ 17.Kh1 Bg3+ 18.Kg1 Qh2+ 19.Kf1 Qxf2 mate.

More common at lower levels than at the very top is the 'Exchange variation' of:

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6



5.0-0

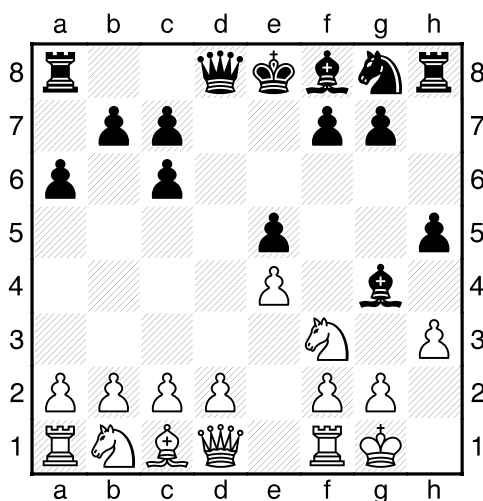
One of the main reasons that Black was able to play 3...a6 is that White wasn't actually really threatening to win a pawn i.e. 5.Nxe5?! Qd4 6.Nf3 Qxe4+ 7.Qe2 Qxe2+ 8.Kxe2 when Black would have a small advantage thanks to a potentially excellent bishop pair on an open board.

Instead 5.Nc3 is okay and after Black defends the e5-pawn, White should look to play d2-d4.

5...Bg4

What follows next is quite an exciting variation but it is far from forced. Indeed generally it's not great to rely on a pin to protect something and this is an exception. All the same the likes of 5...Bd6 or 5...Qd6 are also possible but note that something does have to be done about the e5-pawn as relying on the ...Qd4 idea won't work if a white rook is ready to pin the black queen to the king.

6.h3 h5!?



Of course this whole idea would not work were White not already castled.

7.hxg4?

Accepting the piece offering is asking for trouble as now Black gets a very dangerous open file against the white king. Safer is 7.d3 but then 7...Qf6 8.Nbd2 Bc5 would still see the pressure put on White. As the position changes Black must of course be careful to calculate that his bishop can't be taken but that aside ...Ne7-g6 would bring another piece into the attack.

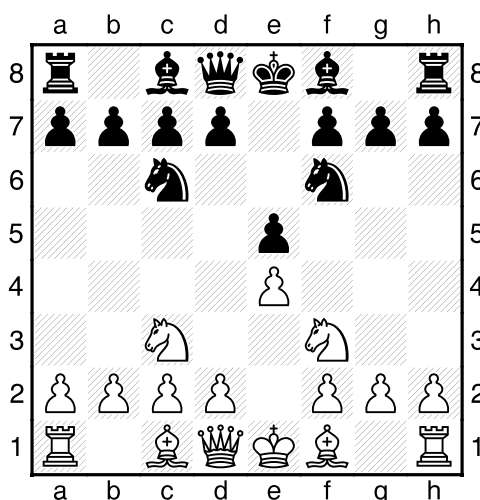
7...hgx4 8.Nxe5 Qh4

Threatening mate on h1 (or h2) which is basically unavoidable!

9.f3 g3

It seems to me that a particularly common position in junior chess arises after

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6



In the above position we have already established that 4 Bc4 isn't brilliant because of the at least equalising 4...Nxe4! fork trick.

Instead 4.d4 exd4 5.Nxd4 Bb4 6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.Bd3 d5 8.exd5 cxd5 9.0-0 0-0 10.Bg5 c6 is a standard line in the 'Four knights Scotch' but also common is:

4.Bb5 with comparisons to be made with the Ruy lopez. Although it is not as straightforward in fact 4...a6 is playable but after 5.Bxc6 dxc6 6.Nxe5 Black must regain the pawn via 6...Nxe4 7.Nxe4 Qd4 when 8.0-0 Qxe5 9.Re1 Be6 10.d4 Qd5 11.Ng5 0-0-0 12.Nxe6 fxe6 is only a little bit better for White (i.e. because of the isolated e-pawn).

Instead 4...Bb4 is okay but more interesting is:

4...Nd4!? 5.Ba4 (or 5.Nxe5 Qe7 regaining the pawn) **5...Bc5 6.Nxe5 0-0 7.0-0 d6 8.Nf3 Bg4**. White is pawn up but with a capture on f3 imminent White will have a kingside full of holes that Black should look to exploit by transferring his queen to that area of the board.

There are plenty of other openings within 1 e4 e5 and to give just a couple of less fashionable ones we have:

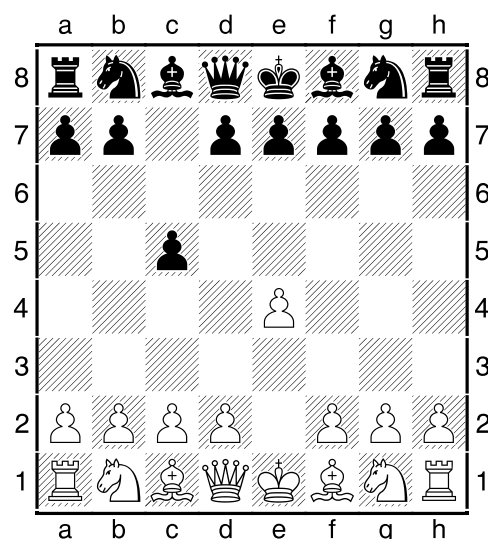
1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 f5 being the dubious Latvian Gambit. Modern opening theory gives **3.Nxe5 Qf6 4.d4 d6 5.Nc4 fxe4 6.Nc3** as better for White because of his handy lead in development.

In the Goring Gambit:

1.e4 e5 2.d4 exd4 3.c3 dxc3 4.Bc4 cxb2 5.Bxb2 White sacrifices two pawns in order to get a nice lead in development. As is often the case with gambits, Black can opt to return the material to side-step any danger with **5...d5 6.Bxd5 Nf6 7.Bxf7+ Kxf7 8.Qxd8 Bb4+ 9.Qd2 Bxd2+ 10.Nxd2**. Following those tactics the position is about level.

The Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5



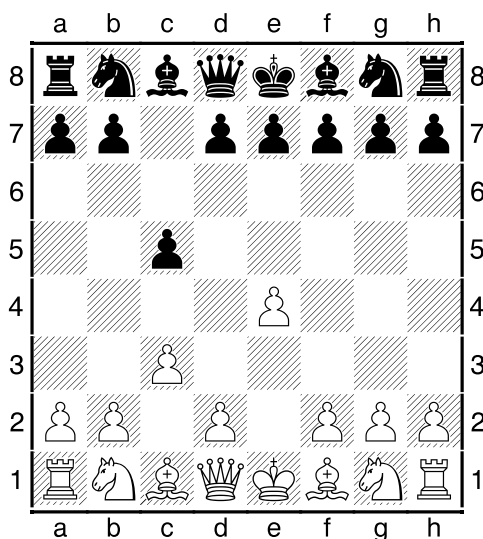
In arguably the most exciting and aggressive defence to 1 e4, Black places a pawn to where it controls an important central square. Specifically of course White is being prevented from achieving the aim of putting two pawns in the middle and although queen development is far from a priority right now, certainly her majesty does have a way into the game for later.

There are numerous lines and variations in the Sicilian about which there is much theory. As an overview of the situation, below are just three completely different White approaches:

The 2 c3 Sicilian

2 c3

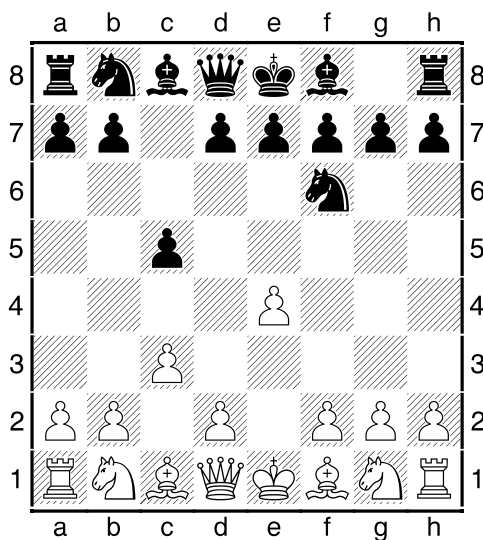
Hence its name!



White's intention is clear. He is determined to get his favourite pawn centre and is prepared to deprive his queen's knight of its natural developing square. Black should now act quickly in preventing White from reaching his goal and so for example 2...Nc6 is not the solution. Black would then only have two pieces on d4 and as White has two covering it himself, then he can proceed with his plan (3 d4). Instead Black must target White's e-pawn, taking advantage of the fact that Nc3 is not possible.

The two main variations are:

2 ... Nf6 as seen below



White can't now defend his e-pawn with Nc3 and other methods are inappropriate. Hence he should advance it and after **3 e5 Nd5** it can be supported with **4 d4**. White has an attractive pawn centre but at least Black has found a niche for a knight. He should look to challenge White's centre pawns in the not too distant future.

And...

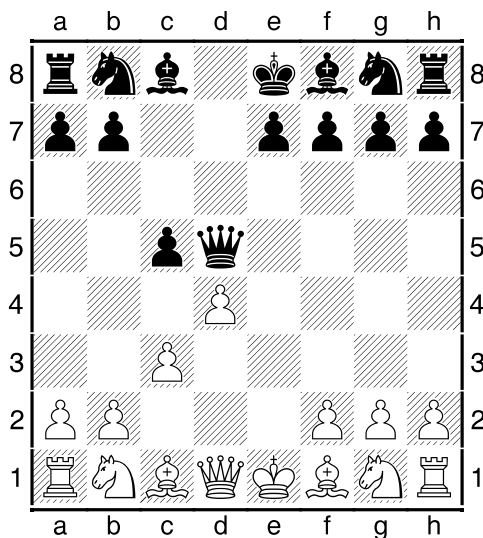
2 ... d5

3 exd5

The possibility of advancing this pawn loses all of its appeal when as is the case here, Black's light squared bishop has not been blocked in by a pawn on e6. Hence Black could develop it first before playing ...e6 (compared to the next section, you will notice that this obtains a very favourable French Defence set up).

3 ... Qxd5

4 d4



White has got one pawn in the centre and although the black queen is occupying an active post, there is an interesting paradox at work. In order for Black to leave White's centre weak, he will ultimately have to trade pawns on d4. That will isolate the d-pawn, but then also give his opponent back the use of the c3-square. Naturally the white knight would welcome that, upon which the black queen would be forced to expend another tempo to move elsewhere.

The Open Sicilian

2 Nf3 d6

There are many different Sicilian variations available to Black (with all sorts of fancy names!) when White delves in the 'Open Sicilian' and it follows that 2...e6, 2...Nc6 and 2...g6 are all reasonable alternatives depending upon the individuals taste.

3 d4

This is the pawn break that characterises the ‘Open Sicilian’. White knows that this pawn will not stay long on d4, but rather is opening up lines for his pieces and allowing a knight to take centre stage.

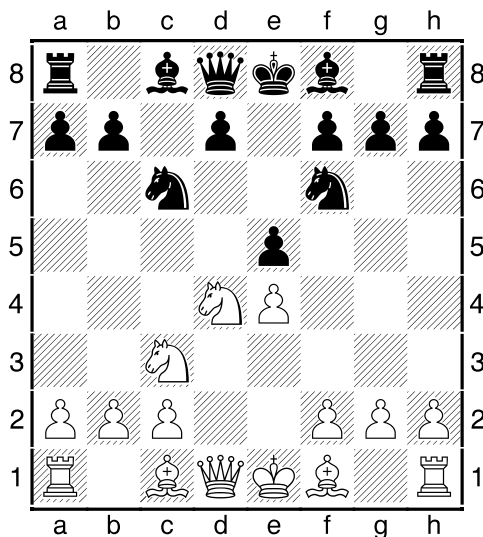
3 ... cxd4

4 Nxd4 Nf6

5 Nc3

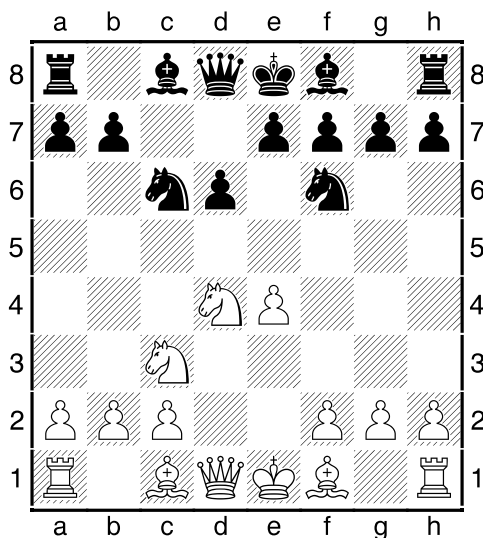
Here White has a space advantage courtesy of the e4-pawn and a half-open d-file whilst Black has the corresponding half-open c-file and an extra centre pawn.

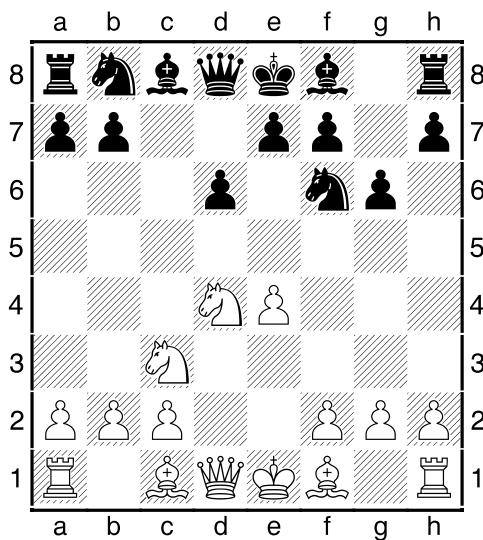
Different Sicilian Variations include:



The **Pelikan** (above) in which Black immediately strikes out in the centre but does so at the risk of weakening the d5- and d6-squares.

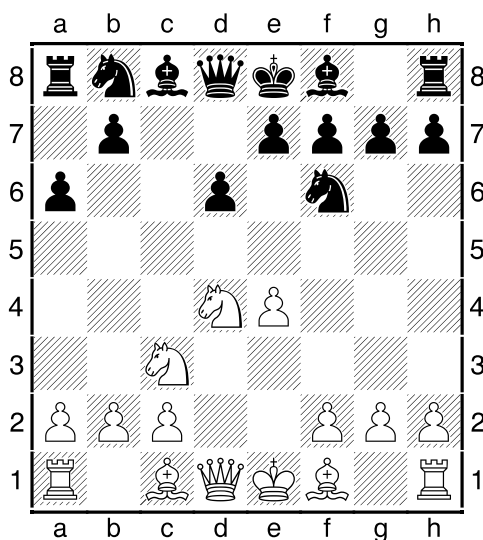
The **Classical** (below) in which Black calmly develops the queen’s knight and typically intends ...e6 and ...Be7 next.





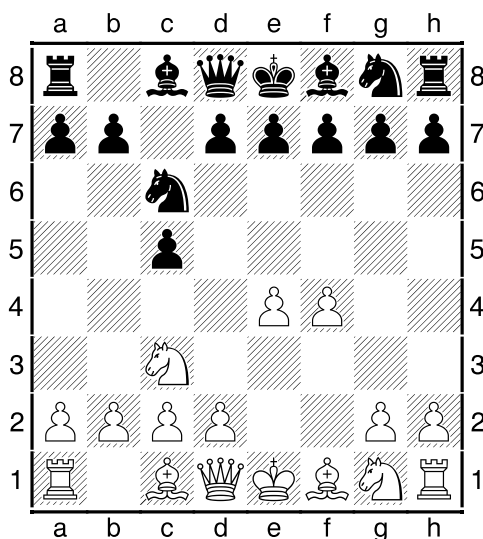
The **Dragon** (above) which is characterised by a fianchetto of the black king's bishop.

The **Najdorf** (below) in which Black's 5...a6 prepares a future ...b5 and the queen's knight often slides to d7 so as not to obstruct its queenside partner if it makes its home on b7.



The Grand Prix Attack

2 **Nc3** **Nc6**
 3 **f4**



In the so called ‘Closed Sicilian’, White dispenses with the general idea of the early pawn break d4, although doesn’t entirely rule it out as a future possibility. Instead White turns to his f-pawn to provide that bit of flexibility that is required to both aid in central control and possibly use as a springboard for an attack against the enemy king. The officially named ‘Closed Sicilian’ is strictly speaking 3 g3. With that White engages in a quiet kingside fianchetto, but nevertheless often calls his f-pawn into active duty later anyhow.

3 ... **g6**

When Black fianchettoes in the Open Sicilian, as we have seen it is known as the ‘Dragon variation’. There it is a matter of taste and is utilised by many a club player and professional player alike. In the more closed positions however, a kingside fianchetto is universally accepted as a good idea, with the extra pressure that the bishop can offer in the centre hoping to make White regret not getting in d4 when he had the chance.

4 **Nf3** **Bg7**

5 **Bc4**

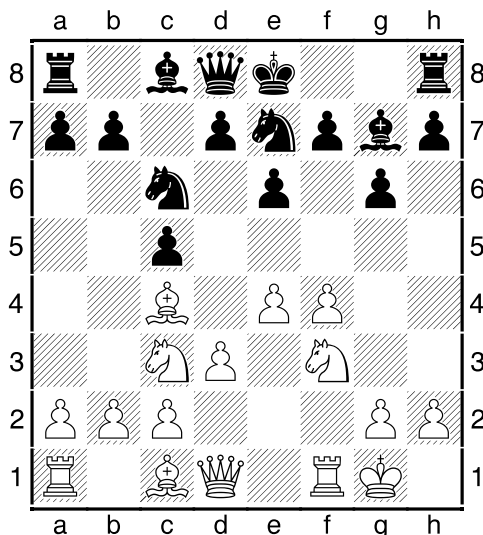
Clearly this piece wanted to come out next in order to facilitate a speedier castling. Although not actually doing any pinning, b5 would also be a reasonable square for it.

5 ... **e6**

A sensible continuation that makes White’s previously dangerous looking light-squared bishop bite on granite. It also enables an alternative developing of his king’s knight that is highly recommended in closed variations.

6 **d3** **Nge7**

7 **0-0**



Above the black knight is on a far better track on e7 than it would have been on f6. Other than the obvious fact that it doesn't obstruct the bishop, it controls some vital squares. Firstly d5 which is a pawn push that Black should seriously give some consideration to in order to regain space and embarrass the white bishop. Then there is f5, a pawn push that White would no doubt like to achieve in order to allow his pieces to get at the black king. On top of that, it could always replace the c6-knight, should that move on into the handy d4 square. As Black's d6-square is weak, he will want to avoid White from getting a half-open d-file. Logically the aforementioned ...Nd4 may be vital to ensure d2-d4 never comes.

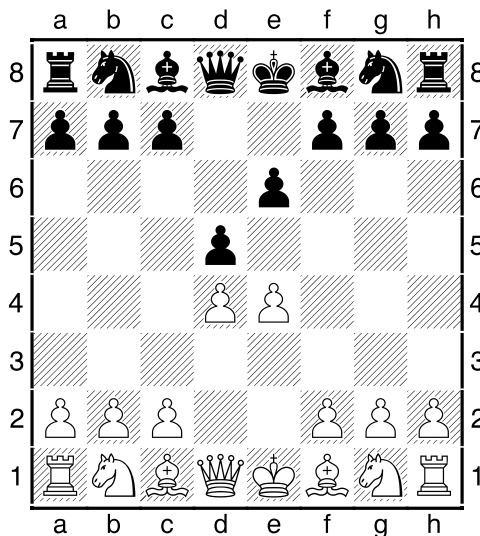
The French Defence

1 e4 e6

On the face of it, not perhaps the most impressive looking move! I mean why move a pawn once when you can move it twice?

2 d4 d5

This is the point. Giving no more ground, Black immediately strikes back in the centre.



Now White is posed a question. What is he to do about the tension in the centre. One obvious solution is simply to trade pawns. Known as the ‘**Exchange**’ variation, after 3 exd5 exd5 the position would be completely symmetrical. As White would be on the move then he would have a very slight initiative, but as the d5-pawn will always be well supported, Black would hardly be quaking in his boots.

Note that when deciding on whether to trade pawns, remember that effectively you will be swapping your pawn doing the initial taking with the enemy one doing the replacing. Above e4 for d5 seems like a fair swap, but in reality of course it is e4 for e6 (as the e6-pawn will switch to d5).

Now 3 f3 is unplayable because of 3...dxe4 4 fxe4 Qh4+ and the problem with defending the e4-pawn with too valuable a piece is that then ...Nf6 will hassle it. Note then that 3 Bd3 dxe4 Nf6 will leave the bishop having to move again because frankly it is a better piece than the black knight.

The three main variations of the French Defence variations are:

The Advanced Variation

3 e5

Very popular amongst juniors whose naturally inclination when faced with pawn challenges seems to be to push on.

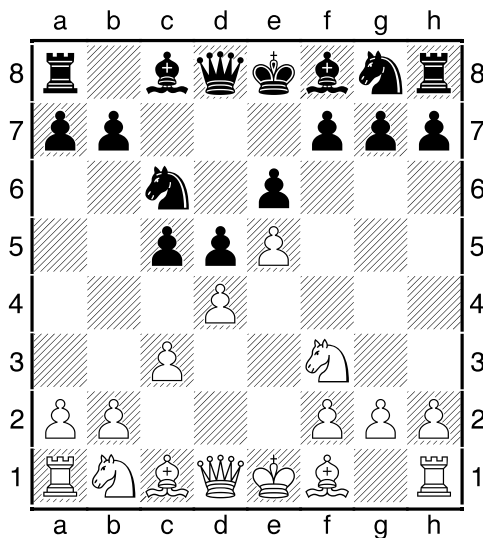
3 ... c5

This is a very important concept to come to grips with. Simply developing pieces will leave Black horribly cramped. Engaging in this simple pawn break though provides him with some useful space on the queenside and something to attack (White’s centre).

4 c3

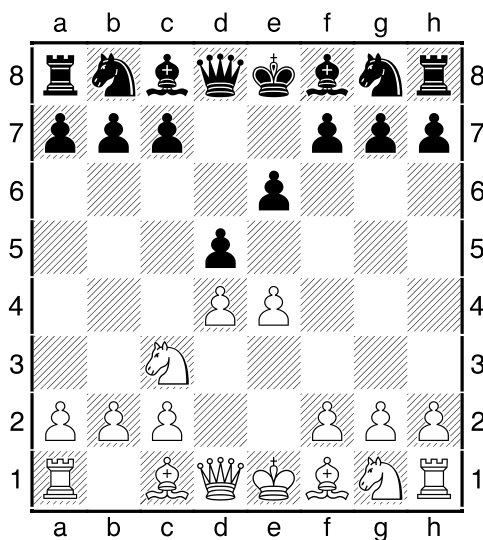
The obvious way to maintain the pawn chain. Otherwise if the d4-pawn is swapped off, the e5 one would be left more vulnerable

4 ... Nc6
5 Nf3



The Winawer Variation

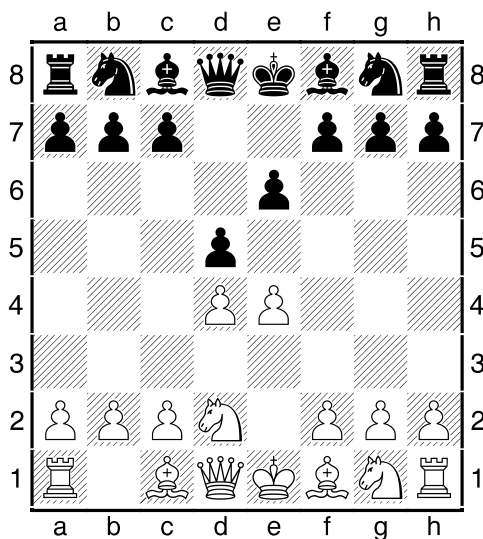
3 Nc3



This sensible looking move sees the knight protect the e-pawn and if Black chooses to swap now then this knight will be zoomed into a nice central square. Some opt to play like that with Black, but there can be little disputing that White's space advantage leaves him with the more comfortable position.

The Tarrasch Variation

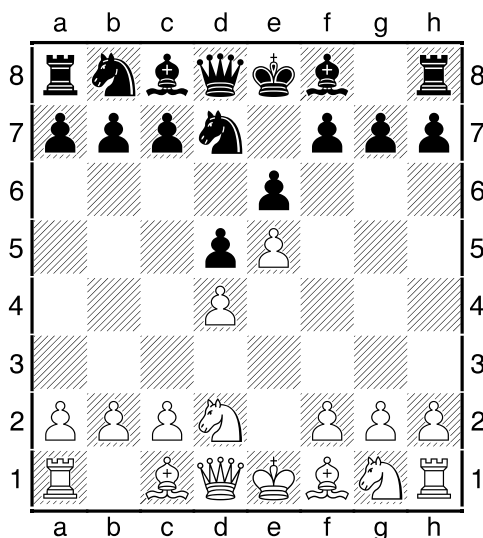
3 Nd2



On d2, the knight fulfils the same role as a knight on c3 (namely defending the e4-pawn), but in not obstructing the c-pawn means that a ...Bb4 pin would be futile due to c3. Many wouldn't select this move as it does after all get in the way of the bishop, although this may only be a temporary state of affairs.

One way in which Black players often try to exploit 3 Nd2 is with 3...c5. This attacks White's currently under defended centre and when he trades on d5, Black will have two options. He can either recapture with the pawn and argue that even if White makes it isolated (by later taking on c5), as White's queen's knight is unable to make it to c3 his d5-pawn won't be in line for too much attention. Secondly he could just meet an exd5 with ...Qxd5 avoiding getting any isolated pawns. He will still have to solve the problem of activating his c8-bishop but his queen isn't so vulnerable with Nc3 unavailable.

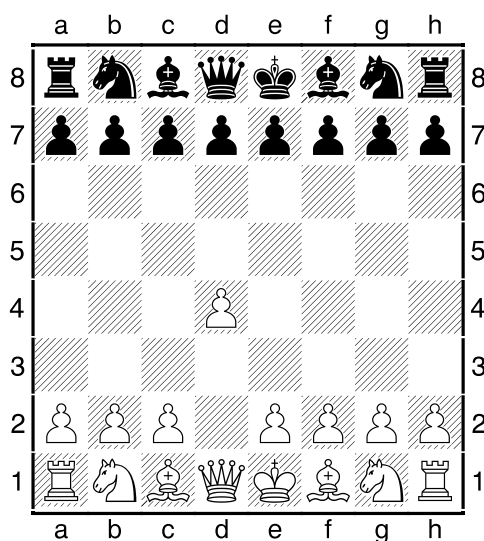
3 ... Nf6
4 e5 Nfd7



Again this is a kind of ‘Advanced variation’ but with the knights on slightly odd squares. Typical from here on in is for Black to strike out at White’s centre with ...c5 and later even ...f6. White usually relies on his c-pawn to support the centre and has the option to employ f4 to bolster e5. The best square for his bishop is d3 although instead of the obvious Ngf3, White may want to try Nge2 and Ndf3 in order to unblock his c1-bishop and provide further support to his d-pawn.

The Nimzo-Indian Defence

1 d4



This course is limiting its opening scope to 1 e4 and the above illustrated 1 d4. Although World Champions have employed 1 c4 and 1 Nf3 from time to time, it is the two most central pushes that are the most critical openings. Note that even after starting with 1 c4 or 1 Nf3 White is typically looking to follow up with d4 or e4 soon and likewise if White could have another go now it would be 2 e4 with central domination.

The instinctive beginner reaction to 1 d4 is the blocking 1...d5 and although we will come to that, for now let’s look at the main alternative:

1 ... Nf6

Black develops a piece and simultaneously prevents his opponent from getting in the desired 2 e4.

2 c4

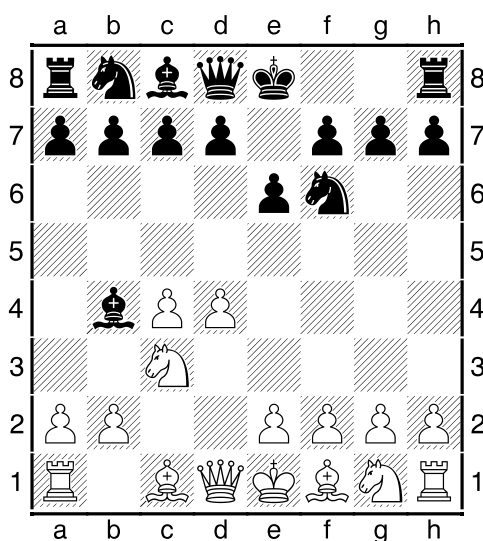
This is a very important move in Queen’s pawn openings. If White were to try to hurry things through with 2 Nc3 then after 2...d5, given that ...Bf5 might feature

soon, achieving e2-e4 in the near future would be close to impossible. Instead the text buys some space and in pressurising the centre dissuades a black d-pawn advance.

2 ... e6
3 Nc3

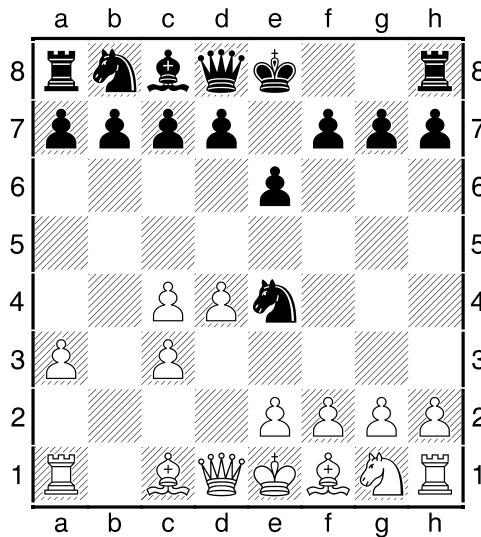
Of course with 3 Nf3 very reasonable too, this is far from forced but the text continues White's quest to achieve central domination as it threatens 4 e4.

3 ... Bb4



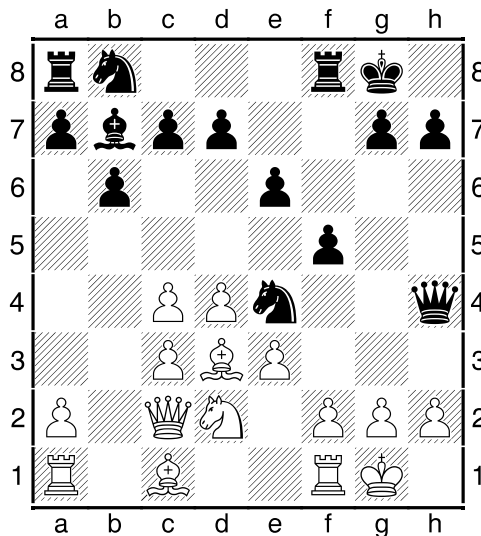
A highly regarded defence, the Nimzo-Indian's 3...Bb4 halts White's plans for progress in the centre without having to transpose to the soon up QGD (Queen's Gambit Declined) via 3...d5. The early battling in this opening is all about the e4-square and invariably the game gets imbalanced when Black is forced to give up his bishop for the c3-knight. If this involves White getting doubled c-pawns then some fascinating positions emerge and if structural defects are avoided then the tempo lost for White in achieving this means that he must often survive some lively play before he can consolidate his two bishops advantage.

White has numerous options here, but take a look at some interesting theoretical positions:

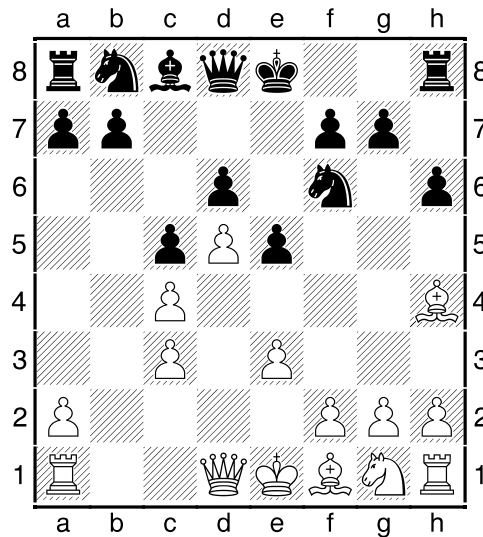


Above the knight can't capture on c3 because it would have no escape route after Qc2. However it's not easy for White to budge this annoying knight as 6...Qh4+ 7 g3 Nxg3.

Meanwhile below again the black knight sits nicely in the middle. White is trying to eject it, but Black is using all available resource to keep it there.

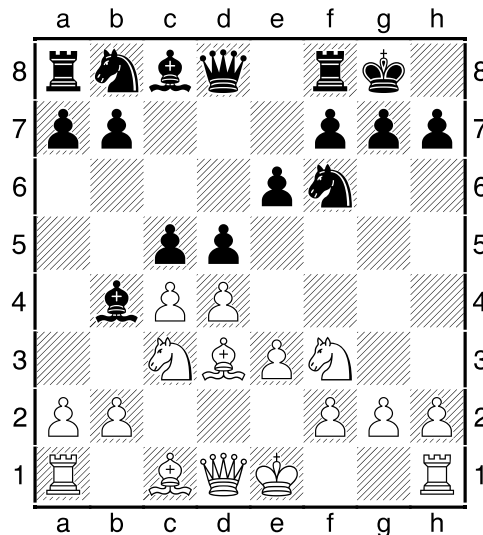


White must be careful here as Black is threatening to swap knights and sacrifice his bishop on g2 which combined with a couple of queen checks and a ...Rf6-g6 swinger is extremely dangerous. Furthermore 11...Ng5! in view of 12 gxh4?? Nh3 mate. White should opt for 11 f3 which will budge the knight and lock out Black's bishop along the b7-g2 diagonal.

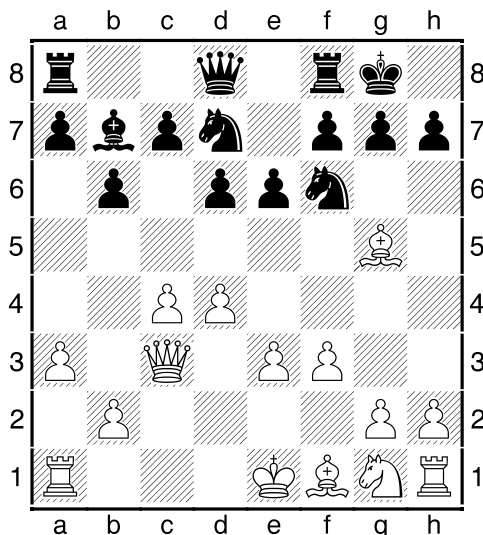


The black knights might like things closed and the doubled c-pawns are potential targets. However the f6-pin can be a tricky one to negotiate, with ...g5 giving White more pawn break options on the kingside.

If the characteristic doubled c-pawns emerge as above, it often makes sense for Black to target the c4 one as that can't easily be protected by a rook. Indeed though not possible here, it can be worth considering a plan involving getting a bishop to a6 and a knight to a5.



Above the situation in the centre is complicated with plenty of pawn trades available. In fact a typical IQP (Isolated Queen's Pawn) position often occurs when the white d4-pawn is the last one left standing!



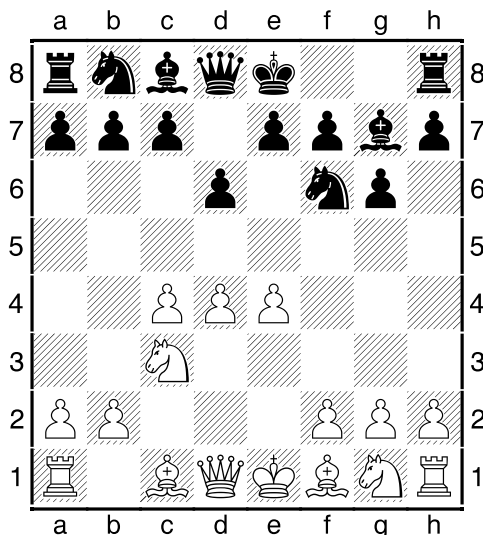
The 'Classical Variation' (4 Qc2) obviously involves moving the queen early and the above is a typical position that might be reached. White has obtained the bishop pair without having his queenside pawn structure compromised. However this has taken time and with ...c5 most likely up soon, Black can use his lead in development to put White under pressure.

The King's Indian

1	d4	Nf6
2	c4	g6
3	Nc3	Bg7

Black has made his mind up on a kingside fianchetto and in playing this now he has decided willingly to hand over the centre to his opponent. Although there is no compulsion for White to take up the gauntlet, accepting the offer to get in e4 for free is the most natural and thematic continuation.

4	e4	d6
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The concept behind the above illustrated King's Indian is that Black gives up the centre, with the intention of testing White's control of it a little later. However having said that Black doesn't want to be over-run and the text prevents 5 e5 (in view of 5...dxe5 6 dxe5 Qxd1+ when the e5-pawn will be a target).

Note that having a space advantage is all very well when your opponent is cramped. However if the odd piece is swapped off and the opponent's pieces get 'in around the back', then there is often a good chance of them wreaking havoc. Hence care is required at all times.

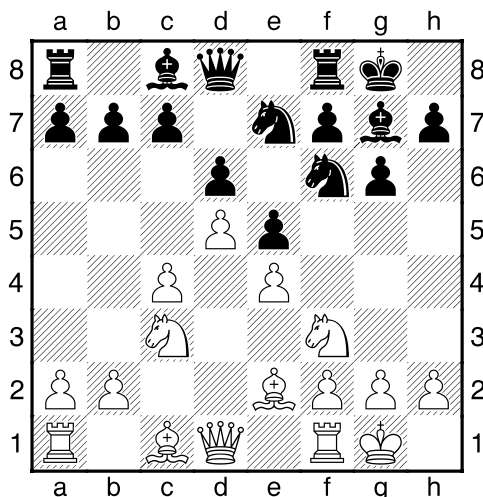
Although occasionally Black may play around the edges with niggly ideas like ...c6, ...a6 and ...b5, usually Black's main decision boils down to whether he will strike at White's centre with ...c5 or ...e5. As usual there are several variations that White can choose from and each branches off into numerous lines of their own. A good cross section of these is supplied below:

The Classical Variation

5.Nf3 0-0 6.Be2 e5 7.0-0

Note that although 7 dxe5 dxe5 8 Qxd8 Rxd8 is very possible, White doesn't actually win a pawn with 9 Nxe5 because of 9...Nxe4!

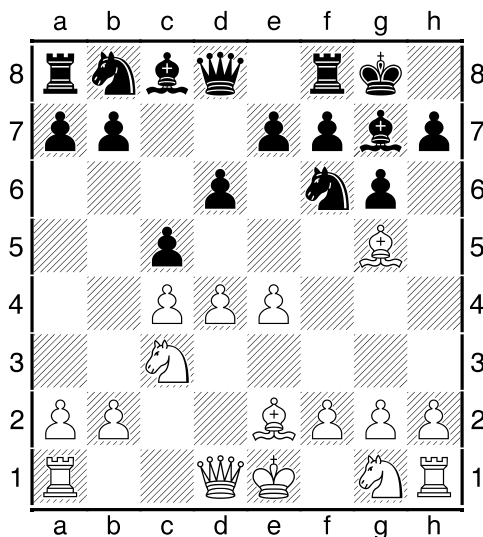
7...Nc6 8.d5 Ne7



Probably more often than not the King's Indian bishop (on g7) ends up being blocked in by its own e5 pawn. However although it may thus be considered as a comparatively bad piece, the reality is that if it ever escapes, it can often do so to devastating effect. White's pawn chain leads to the queenside and so he will aim for the pawn break c5, whilst Black will move his f6-knight in order to facilitate ...f5.

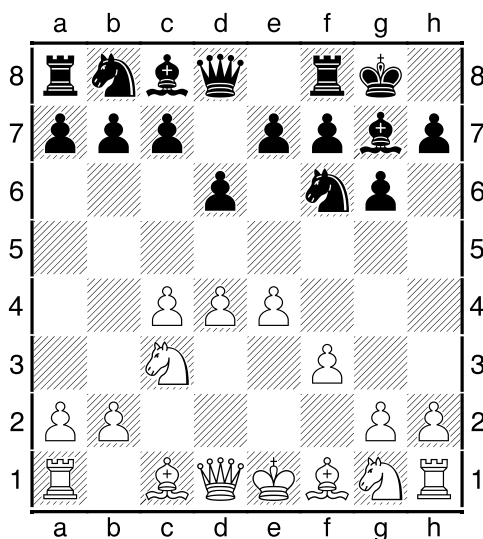
The Averbakh System

5 Be2 0-0 6 Bg5 when 6...c5 as illustrated below is typical.



An early Bg5 by White is designed to deter Black from ...e5 and so he naturally turns to the alternative. Note that 7 d5 is a main option now as is 7 dxc5. In the case of the latter, then 7...dxc5 8 Qxd8 Rxd8 9 e5 could be awkward for Black who instead has the tactical resource 9...Qa5, threatening the e4-pawn and preparing to recapture on c5 with the queen.

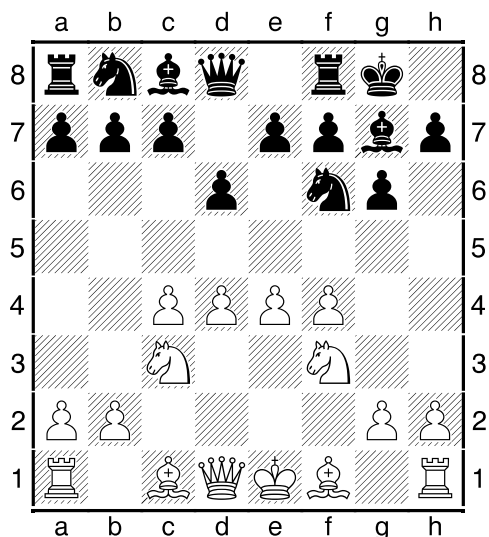
The 'Samisch Variation'



Notoriously an aggressive system, White parks a pawn on f3 to safeguard a future Be3 from an annoying ...Ng4. This structure also provides a springboard for an attack should White consider a future g4 and h4-h5 plan. As usual Black will have to decide between the ...e5 or ...c5 breaks although ...a6 and ...c6 looking for ...b5 is possible too and a decision doesn't necessarily have to be made just yet.

The Four Pawns Attack

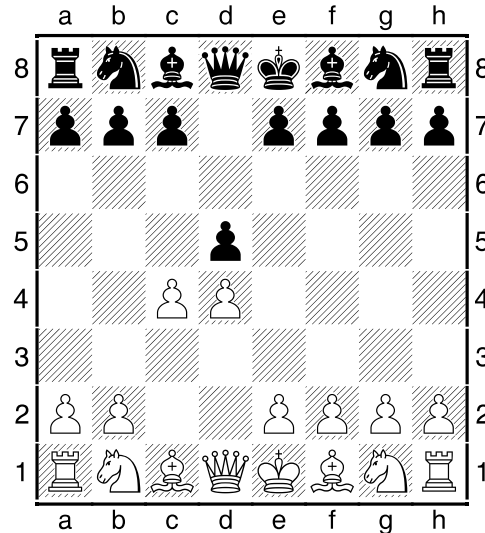
After 5 f4 0-0 6 Nf3, below we have the main starting position of an extremely threatening looking system.



Black however should not feel too intimidated. If White gets in e5, then after the knight retreats he can try and chisel away at White's centre with the likes of ...c5 and ...f6. White must himself be careful not to over-reach as although he has a clear space

advantage, he has also forgone development whilst advancing pawns and things could easily go horribly wrong.

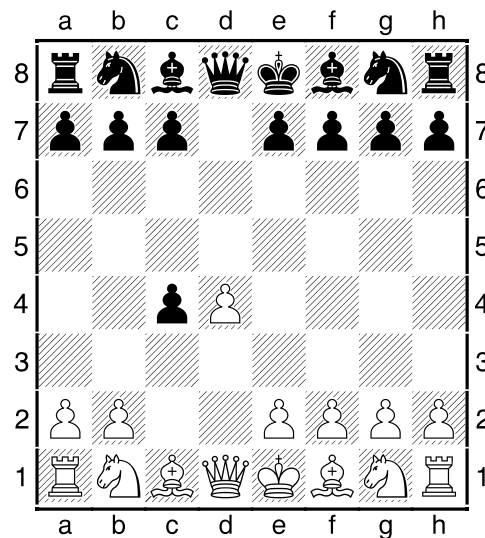
The Queen's Gambit



The Queen's Gambit is one of the most famous openings of all. After 1 d4 Black has thwarted White's plans of central domination via 2 e4 with the obvious 1...d5. The move 2 c4 seeks to lure this blocking pawn away whilst also making the pawn break that guarantees future action along the c-file. Although Black has several options here, for now we will take a quick look at the Accepted and Declined variations.

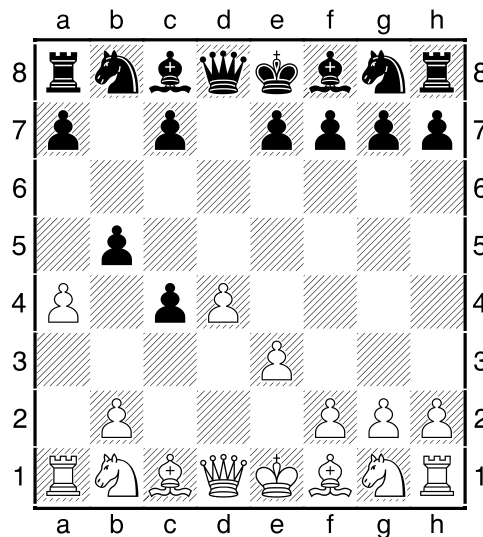
The Queen's Gambit Accepted

1 d4 d5
2 c4 dxc4

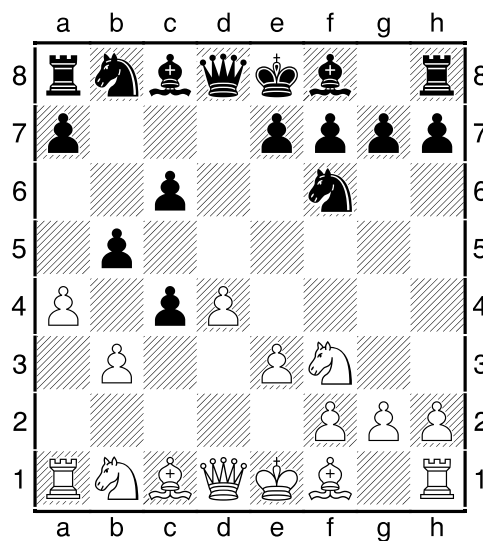


As it happens strictly speaking the Queen's Gambit isn't really a gambit as Black is unable to keep his extra pawn.

With regards the above note, let's take a look at what might happen if Black stubbornly refuses to give it up, starting with one of White's main options here 3 e3. Well Black can cement it with 3...b5 and then rather than just developing, White should act quickly to undermine this protection with 4 a4.



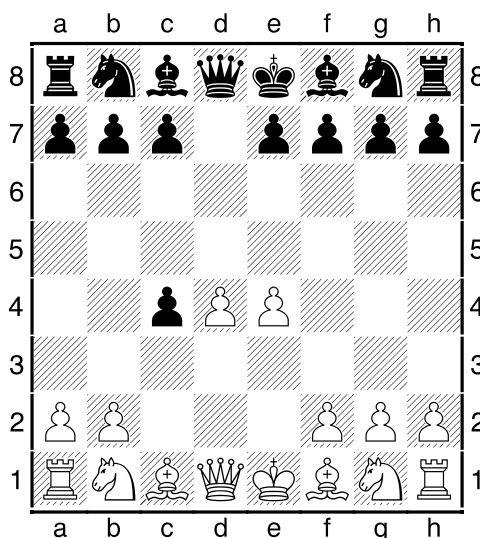
It soon becomes apparent that although Black needs to maintain a pawn on b5 in order to cling on to his c4-pawn, in fact that just isn't possible. As the a-pawn would be pinned, 4...a6 doesn't help and 4...c6 5 axb5 cxb5 6 Qf3 is rather embarrassing. Well this last trick may seem a bit fortuitous but in fact were both sides king's knights already developed there would be another way to place Black under pressure.



Yes the move 6 b3 challenges Black's grip with 6...cxb3 7 axb5 cxb5 8 Bxb5+ followed by Qxb3 leaving White comfortably in the driving seat. He has an extra centre pawn and a half-open file against Black's isolated a-pawn.

I have seen many a junior chuckle when seeing Black accept the Queen's Gambit, suggesting that it is simply a mistake. It's true that it does appear to give White a free run in the centre, but that is hardly the end of the story. Take the most obvious continuation:

3 e4



Ultimately what White is angling for and the QGA at its most basic level. Although White has achieved a delightful centre, the fact that he has not yet regained the c-pawn offers Black the opportunity to launch a counter offensive.

3 ... e5

This and 3...c5 both give White something to think about. The point is that 4 dxe5 Qxd1+ 5 Kxd1 is certainly not favourable for White. It's not clear that either side will lose their 'extra' doubled pawn and it is the white monarch that is the most inconvenienced. However 4 d5 is little better as after 4...Nf6 5 Nc3, 5...b5 is possible because White has his e4-pawn to think about.

White should play 4 Nf3 when there are all sorts of things going on in the centre.

The above sharp variation is why many players prefer to side-step ...e5 possibilities with:

3 Nf3 Nf6

4 e3

As we have seen, 4...b5 isn't wise and so this is a safe approach for White to adopt. Whilst White will have development on his mind with a future squashing plan of e4 (and maybe e5) available later, Black has time to react. Here for example he can excavate his bishop (before playing ...e6), but must be careful after 4...Bg4 5 Bxc4 not to fall for the previously seen in this course tactic Bxf7+. Hence the satisfactory 5...e6.

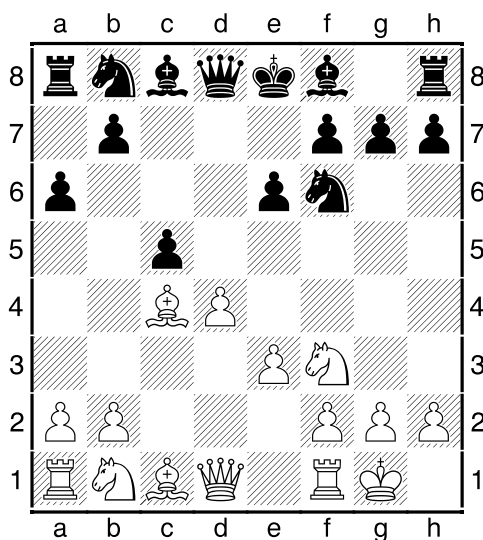
4 ... e6

This however is a more popular approach these days with Black having alternative plans for his c8-bishop.

5 Bxc4 c5

A reminder to White, that although he currently has an extra centre pawn, Black is prepared to fight for a fair share of the action in the middle.

6 0-0 a6



Above Black intends an expansion on the queenside via ...b5 when he will most likely park his light-squared bishop on b7.

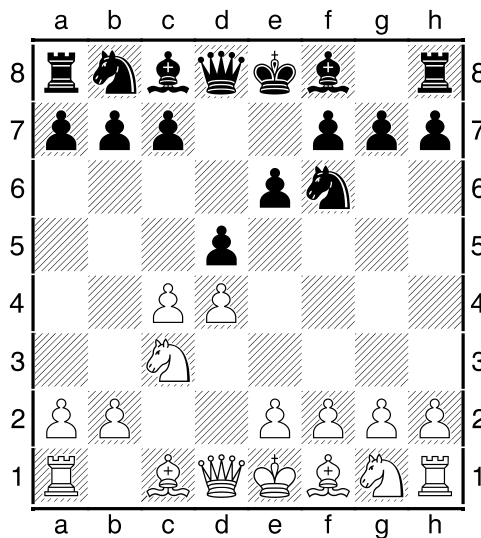
The Queen's Gambit Declined

1 d4 d5

2 c4 e6

The 'Slav Defence' of 2...c6 is another popular Queen's pawn defence which also sees Black bolstering his d5-pawn.

3 Nc3 Nf6



I suppose logically anything that is not accepting the gambit (which isn't actually a gambit!), must really be declining it! However when we refer to the 'Queen's Gambit Declined', images similar to the above are conjured up. Not interested in conceding the e4-square, Black has supported his d5-pawn with another pawn. Note that as it is the e-pawn, a trade now or later in the centre will lead to an imbalance. White will have a half-open c-file with Black the corresponding e-file. Although it is usually at White's discretion when this trade is made, it should be noted that Black has not ruled out ...dxc4 entirely and could easily employ it later.

4 Bg5 Be7

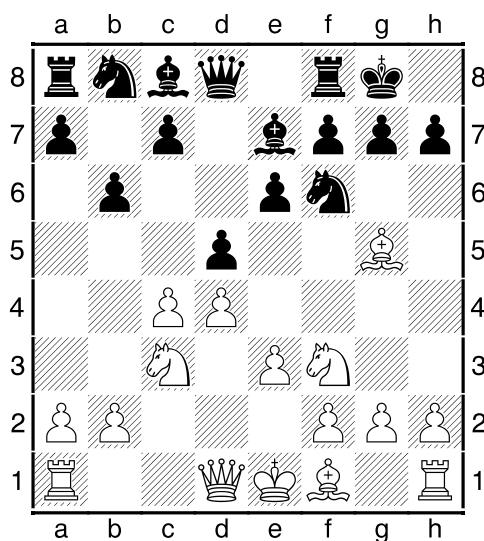
Unpinning the knight and thus relieving some of the pressure on d5. 4...dxc4 5 e4 is not what Black is after, but 4...Nbd7 is possible as White must beware 5 cxd5 exd5 6 Nxd5? as after 6...Nxd5! 7 Bxd8 Black can regain the queen with 7...Bb4+ and will ultimately emerge a piece for a pawn up.

5 e3 0-0

6 Nf3 b6

As always there are several variations within an opening. The final part of this text for example sees the 'Exchange variation' in action.

Returning to 6...b6 and as White hasn't traded pawns in the middle, Black takes matters into his own hands regards freeing his light-squared bishop.



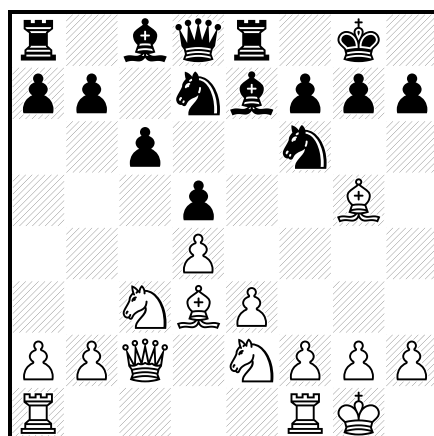
Above Black's light-squared bishop looks to be heading for b7 whilst a ...c5 thrust is now also supported. Black could happily throw in ...h6 at some point and also has the option of meeting cxd5 with ...Nxd5.

Finally then a practical encounter introducing an important middlegame theme:

Ward,C - Johnson,J

Ramsgate, 1989

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Bg5 Be7 6 e3 c6 7 Bd3 0-0 8 Qc2 Nbd7 9 Nge2 Re8 10 0-0



10...Nf8

This is a standard black steed manoeuvre. The knight on f8 does protect h7 so there are no problems for him there, whilst not having flicked in ...h6 means that the steed

can re-emerge on g6. Also possible is a later ...Ne6 (i.e. only when Bxf6 wouldn't net h7) and for now the c8-bishop now has a clear view of the diagonal down to h3.

11 Rab1

Although White has available a half-open c-file, he won't have much joy there whilst Black's pawn on c6 remains rock solid. We are about to witness a 'minority attack' in which White's fewer pawns attack Black's majority.

11...Ng4

Despite the fact that this game was played so long ago, I still think that it is quite an instructive one (and actually a game that I am very pleased with to this very day). I certainly don't want to give the impression that 11 Rab1 is a forced win though and Black has some reasonable alternatives to the text in 11...Ng6, 11...Bg4 and 11...Be6. The main White plan remains the same though; to break down Black's queenside.

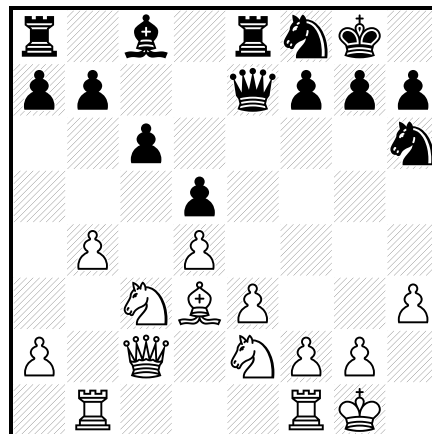
12 Bxe7

12 Bf4 is an alternative move that may or may not keep the black pieces away from the white king for a little longer. Either way a b4-b5 plan is still what White is going for.

12...Qxe7 13 h3 Nh6

I suspect at the time Black felt as though he wasn't really progressing with 13...Nf6 but after 14 b4 Ne6, placing a knight on g5 should have something to say for it.

14 b4



The basic concept then is that White wants to advance this pawn a square further in order to challenge Black's sturdy structure. Note that without this break, the half-open c-file means very little but should bxc6 occur then the new backward c-pawn will come under all sorts of pressure. Should Black meet b4-b5 with ...cxb5 then he will be left with an isolated d-pawn and can expect his b-pawn to be targeted too.

14...a6

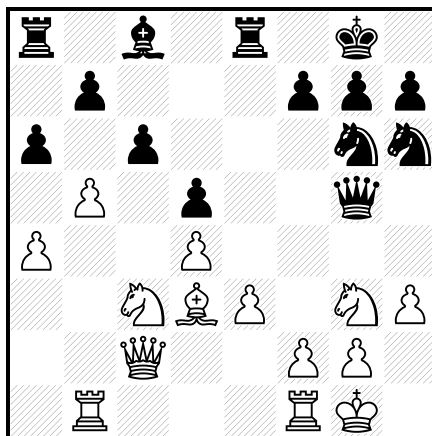
It looks like b4-b5 will happen but Black has the choice of whether or not he wants the a-file opened at the end. Here "Yes" is his decision!

15 a4 Qg5

When employing a minority attack, White must always have something in mind against the blocking advance ...b5. In particular it could be a problem for White if a black knight is within striking distance of the c4-square, but as that is not the case here, the voluntary weakening of the c6-pawn is not a concern.

16 Ng3

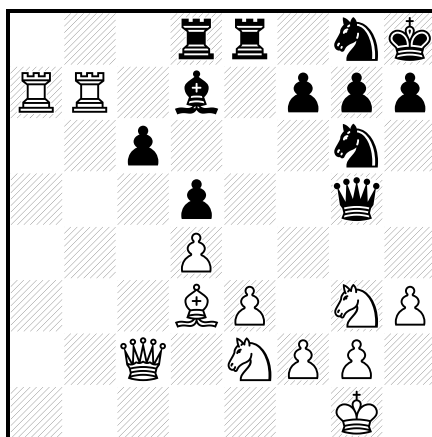
Removing the threat of ...Bxh3 whilst simultaneously keeping a black piece out of f5.

16...Ng6 17 b5**17...axb5 18 axb5 Kh8**

Not seeing any obvious way to continue with his kingside attack, Black prepares to re-position his h6-knight. This is a long process though and in the meantime White is about to reap the rewards of his minority attack.

19 bxc6 bxc6 20 Nce2 Bd7 21 Rb7

As you should know by now rooks love open files and they love 7th ranks!

21...Rad8 22 Ra1 Ng8 23 Raa7

They also love doubling and doubling on the 7th rank is the ultimate! This is such simple (but effective!) chess.

23...Nf6 24 Bf5!

Seeking to trade off the piece that is currently holding the black position together.

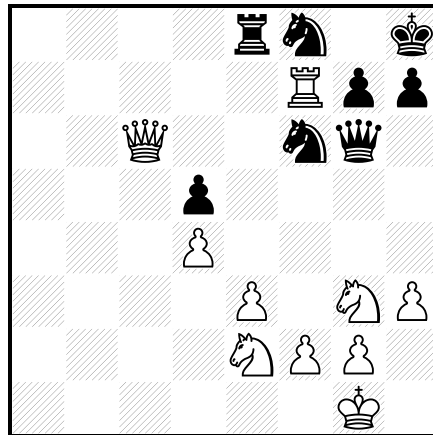
24...Nf8 25 Bxd7 Rxd7 26 Rxd7 N6xd7 27 Qxc6

The backward c-pawn falls and now the d-pawn is officially isolated.

27...Nf6 28 Rxf7

White has now bagged three extra pawns and throughout all this White's structure has remained super-solid.

28...Qg6



And now for a nice tactic to finish things off. Black had his 2nd rank dominated but the curtain closer is on his back rank.

29 Qxe8! 1-0

The queen sacrifice is all for the greater cause of Rxf8 mate.