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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

First things first: thank you for your confidence! Knowing that you want me to participate in your quest causes me a great satisfaction. I would like to begin by giving you some tips on how to make the most of the pages that lie ahead.

Why does this exist?

Chess knowledge is, these days, very well spread on the Internet. There are books, videos, commented games, databases and plenty of other sources that can be useful in many ways, and you can find them on the Internet, for free! But not everything is good for everyone! Some players may get stuck simply because the material they are working with is meant for a completely different type of player, or is flat out useless at their level. My intention is to provide you some structure to your learning process. You will be presented a selection of material that I consider relevant, with a gradually increasing difficulty.

Should I read this?

If you are a player at the lowest steps of the chess ladder, you will find interesting information here. But do not expect me do to the work for you! As explained in the previous question, selecting what to train with is a critical part of the process, but it is not the only one! You have to actually do the training! Put simply, your chess skills will be improved by reading this only if you are willing to put the effort on making the most out of it! This means to go through each section with an open mind and critical thinking, trying to understand with as much depth as possible each and every of the discussed topics

How much time should this take?

I suggest you to take your time in order to understand the explanations and examples that will be presented. It is not necessary to know the reason behind every single move, but you should at least try! There is also nothing wrong about, once you've become a stronger player, reviewing a chapter you previously read in order to better understand the details. So, go at your own pace and try to assimilate the main concepts explained on each chapter. If you have access to a chess board, reproduce on it the example games, move by move, and try not only to follow them, but also to find your own alternatives.

Should this be the only source?

When making this book, my intention is to make it as complete as possible. However, it would be very arrogant to think that it is possible to concentrate everything you will need during your chess career in a few hundred pages. So, even if you use this as your main source to guide your chess training, don't hesitate in reading other books, watching videos from masters or participating in chess forums! I suggest you to train your

tactical skills (more on that later If you still don't know what I'm talking about) with a chess puzzles book or website (I see no point in filling dozens of pages with hundreds upon hundreds of exercises when you can just find them anywhere, for example, at chesstempo.com where you can make as many of them as you want for free)

Alone or with a friend?

Both possibilities have their pros and cons. On one hand, being able to choose your own pace, while having no restrictions in terms of when to train is a huge advantage. However, the possibility to compare your ideas with someone else is also worth taking into account. My advice is to proceed as you prefer (or can) Eventually, I will suggest some positions to be played with that hypothetical friend. If that's not an available option, skip it! The guide is "complete" without it. Thus, "positions to play with a friend" should be taken as complementary exercises, not as a main part of the training process. After all, you can play as many chess games as you want on the internet, also for free!

Training or practicing?

Reading books is fine, but you also need to put things into practice by playing proper chess games. It is not enough with just seeing how other do it. You may want to try the Internet, on the board friendly matches or even tournaments! It does not matter. The only thing you need to keep in mind is that, at this stage, results are not really that meaningful. Everything can happen at every game. Your goal should be to play good chess (as good as you can, at least) Game analysis is also important. Your own mistakes provide you excellent directions about where to make the next improvement.

TACTICS, STRATEGY, ENDGAME AND OPENING.

WARNING: If you are new in chess, it may be better for you to skip this digression, begin with the actual content, and come back in a few chapters.

A majority of the chapters on this guide will be labeled into one of the tactics, strategy, endgame or opening categories. Let us explain what is understood by each of them.

Traditionally, chess games have been "divided" in three main stages: opening, middlegame and endgame, each of which having its own particularities (even though defining their boarders is no easy task). However, in this guide, chapters focused on tactics are very different from those focused on strategy, so classifying them as "middlegame" would be simply too broad. Also, neither tactics nor strategy are useful just in the middlegame. They are present at all stages of the game, from beginning to end.

This implies that the labels put to each chapter do not confine them in a closed box, they are just offering a reference of what is being discussed. The four topics from the title of this section are often intertwined, being a hard task to tell them apart from each other. Anyway, for practical purposes, I will explain the criteria followed to classify the chapters:

The term "tactics" refers to concrete action. When we say there is tactics in a position, we are saying that there are concrete sequences of moves that make a critical difference. Therefore successful tactics is mostly about accuracy in calculation of the consequences of our moves.

In "strategy" chapters, we will discuss the elaboration of plans. For that matter, we will try to understand the different kinds of advantages either side may be able to achieve, as well as the procedures to exploit them. Please take into account that strategy is often subordinated to tactics, in other words, your plans will rarely succeed if you miss tactical opportunities.

"Opening" is the chess word for talking about the first moves of a game. In the earliest stages of your training, we will try to explain some basic general opening principles. Later on, we will focus on how to play concrete opening positions.

Finally, "endgames", as you may have guessed, are positions where not too many pieces are left on the board, and the final result of the game is close to be decided. We will study some basic theoretical positions, but also the strategical themes characteristic of this stage of the game.

PART 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO CHESS

This first part of the book aims to provide an introduction to the game, beginning with the explanation of chess rules and notation for those who have never seen a board in their lives (chapters 1 and 2) If you are not familiar with either of this topics, please stop reading! Go there immediately (or to whatever other source of your choice)!

As you can see, we begin this guide at the absolute minimum. No previous chess experience is required at all. Now that you know what we are talking about, let us make a quick summary of what lies ahead.

Chapter 3 will be dedicated to basic matting patterns when our opponent has just his king. Of course, the ideas there explained are useful in a wider range of situations, but it is good to start with the simplest cases. It would be unforgivable to arrive into one of the very advantageous spots described there only to finish in a draw because we lack such basic knowledge.

Next, we will dedicate chapter 4 to other types of mating combinations. Tactical skill is critical for overall improvement. There you will your first chance to train it!

Chapter 5 will focus on the value of the pieces and how to make victory as easy as possible once we achieve material superiority. This is the concept of simplification.

Chapter 6 will return to tactics, this time reviewing some of the most recurrent themes in practical games, not always resulting in mate, but giving the players who spots it an immense advantage on his opponent.

Chapter 7 is a particularly beautiful one, since it will show examples of real life games centered around attack to the enemy king.

Finally, we will conclude Part 1 of this guide with a chapter where we will review some of the main opening concerns.

As mentioned above, any person who has never seen a chess board can follow this contents, since we will start by the very beginning. At the end of part 1, you will be able to play your first chess games that actually look like chess games, and not just some monkey making random moves. If you work on your tactical skills, you may be able to defeat some of the weakest players in tournaments, taking advantage of their blunders

Chapter 1: The rules of chess.

NOTE: In this first chapter, we are going to have a look at the rules of the game. If you are already familiar with them, you may want to skip it

1.1: The movement of the pieces.

   Let us begin by learning the set of moves available to each of the pieces. Pawns are the most complicated ones, since their behavior changes depending on their position (see diagram 1.1).
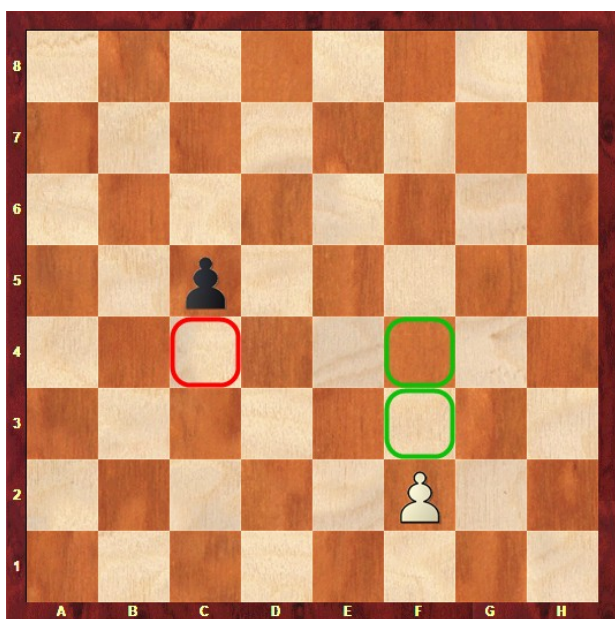

Diagram 1.1: The movement of the pawn

Pawns can only advance one square per move, except when they are placed at their
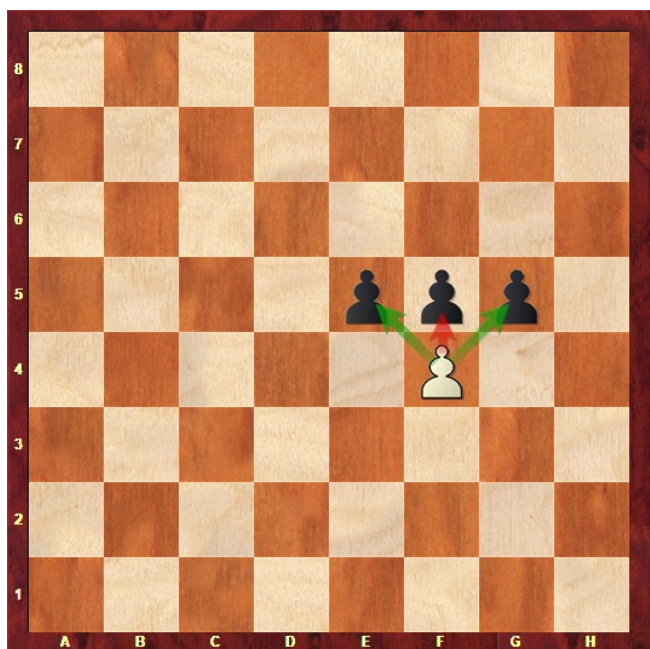
Diagram 1.2: The pawn's captures

starting at the second rank (seventh for Black). In that case, the player can choose between advancing either one or two squares. In the example above, the black pawn has no choice but to move into the squared circled in red (c4). However, the white pawn can choose between the two squares circled in green (f3 and f4)

Another one of the pawn's peculiarities is the fact that they cannot capture in the same way as they move (see diagram 1.2)

   Pawns can capture pieces placed one square diagonally in front (i.e: the moves represented with green arrows are valid), but not the pieces it has in front (i.e: the move represented with a red arrow is not allowed). A captured piece is removed from the board, as the capturing piece takes its place

   Now we move on to the rest of the pieces, which are simpler to understand. See diagram 1.3 for the rook.

   Rooks can moves in straight lines (horizontally or vertically, but not diagonally) as many squared as the player want as well as they don't collide into any obstacle. The squares circled in green in diagram 1.3 are all the possible choices for the white rook.
Note it cannot jump over another piece (friend or enemy) It can take enemy pieces (removing them from the board and occupying their place), but never any piece from its own side.

   Bishops have a similar behavior to that of rooks, but moving along diagonal lines instead of horizontal and vertical ones (see diagram 1.4)
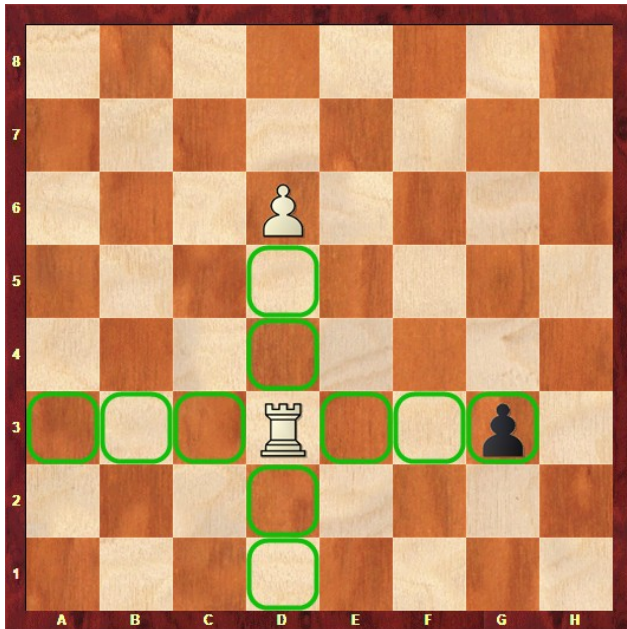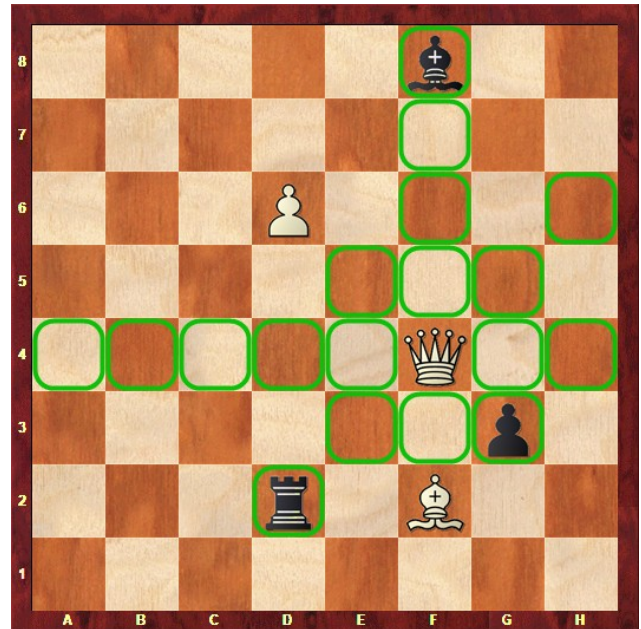
Diagram 1.3: The movement of the rook

Diagram 1.5: The movement of the queen.

Similarly, the king is also able to move in any direction, but only one square at a time (see diagram 1.6)
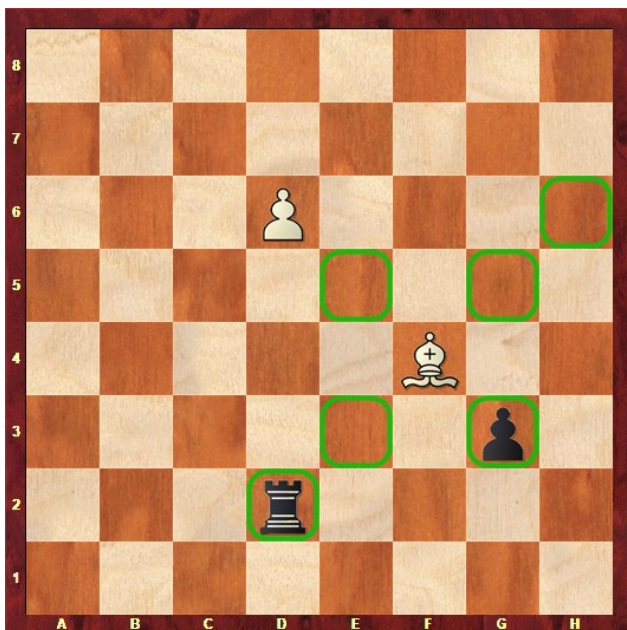

Diagram 1.4: The movement of the bishop

Observe that, if a bishop is placed is a dark square, it will never reach a light one. The converse is also true. Thus, we will often talk about "light-squared" bishops and "dark-squared" bishops, with the one on the diagram being clearly dark-squared.

The queen is without any doubt the strongest piece in chess, being able to move as both a bishop or a rook (see diagram 1.5)
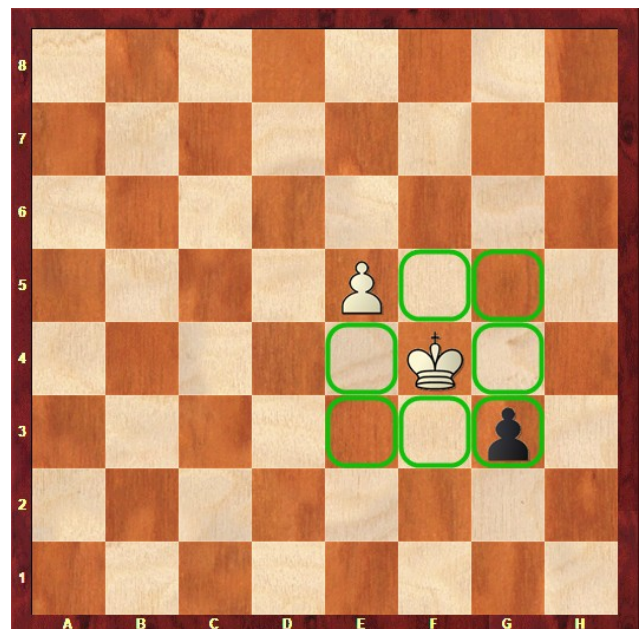

Diagram 1.6: The movement of the king.

Finally, the knight can move to any square that is two squares away horizontally and one square away vertically (or two vertically and one horizontally) describing an "L-shaped" movement. It is also the only piece with the ability to jump over other pieces (both friend and enemy) See diagram 1.7
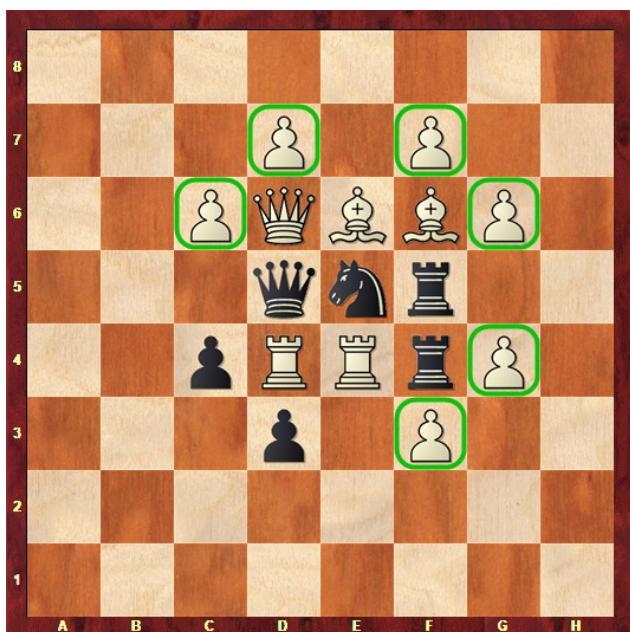
Diagram 1.7: The movement of the knight.

1.2: The starting position.

Diagrams 1.8 and 1.9 show the starting position from White's and Black's perspective respectively. Note that both sides have a light square (h1 or a8) at the bottom of the most-right file. Also, both queens are placed in squared of their own color, with a king alongside them. Surrounding both of them, we find the bishops (each one on a square of different color) and then the knights and rooks.

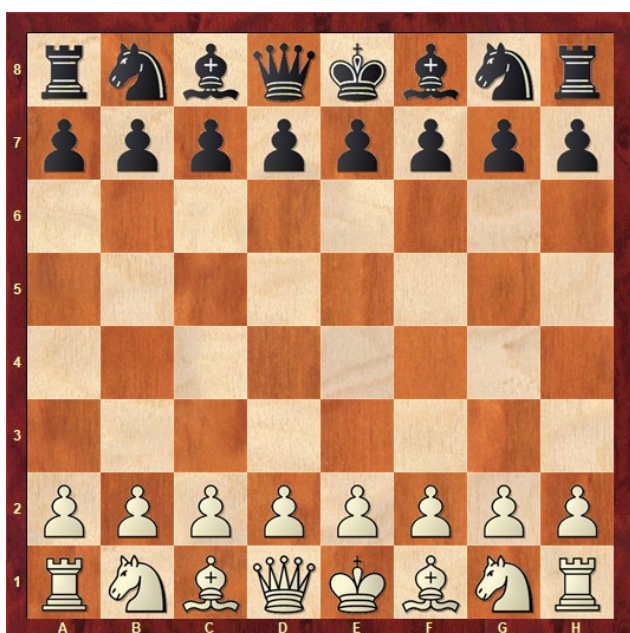The second rank is completely filled with pawns. As we saw in the previous section,

Diagram 1.8: Starting position (White)

this implies that all of them will be able tomove two squares at once (jumping straight into the fourth row)

All games will start from this position, with White moving first and both players taking turns. On our turn, we are forced to make one move (and one move only). This means *"passing" is not allowed in chess, and neither is moving several pieces at the same time (except in the case of castling, which will be discussed in section 1.4)*
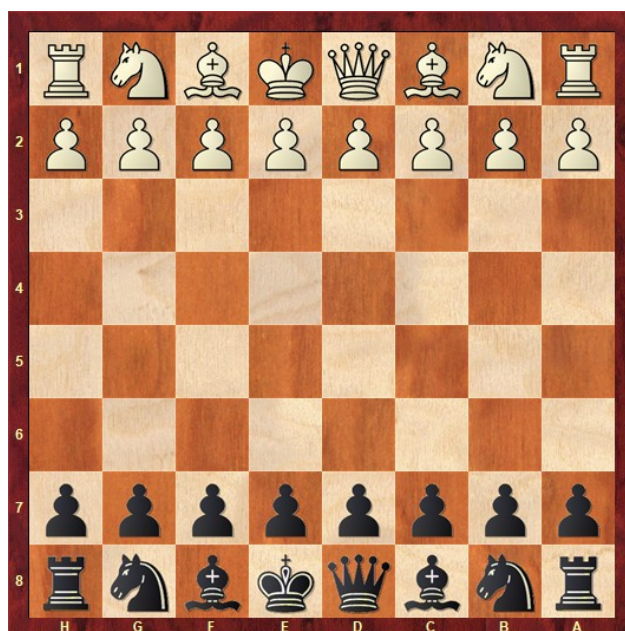

Diagram 1.9: Starting position (Black)

1.3: Check and checkmate

If, after the opponent's turn, an enemy piece is threatening our king, we say we are in check. We are forced to solve that situation before the opponent's next turn. Diagrams 1.10-1.13 show examples of positions where one of the players is in check.

Diagram 1.10: Check!

On this position (diagram 1.10), it's black's turn, and the white queen is threatening the black king. Black is forced to move his king into safety (I.e: to a square not attacked by the enemy queen)

On diagram 1.11, there is no safe square available for the black king, but the bishop can simply capture the white queen, removing the threat

On diagram 1.12, White is in check, since the enemy bishop is threatening the white king. It is not possible to either escape into safety or capture Black's bishop, however, White's knight can, with his next move, put himself in the way (for example, on the g2
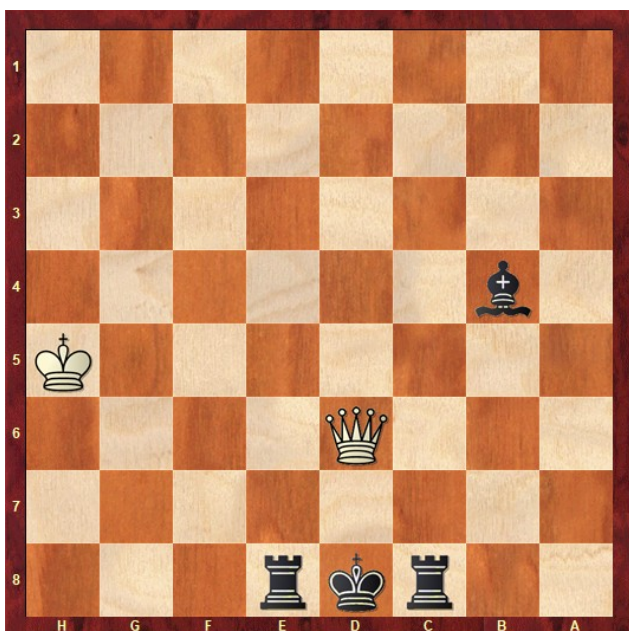

Diagram 1.11: Check!
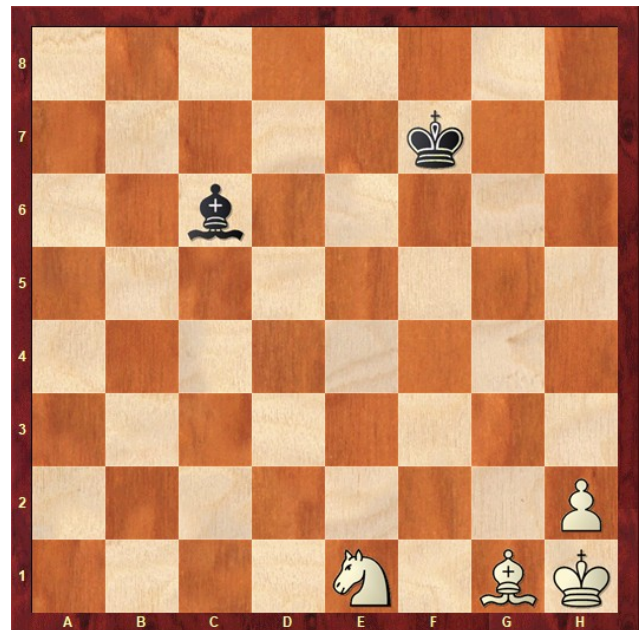
square) protecting the king from the danger.

Diagram 1:12: Check!

Finally, on diagram 1.13, none of the options described before is possible (White cannot "stop being in check" with his next move) In that case, we say White has been checkmated.
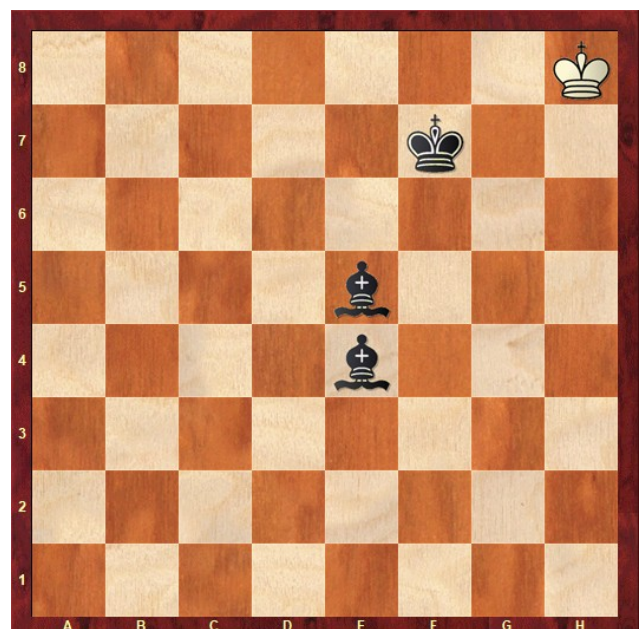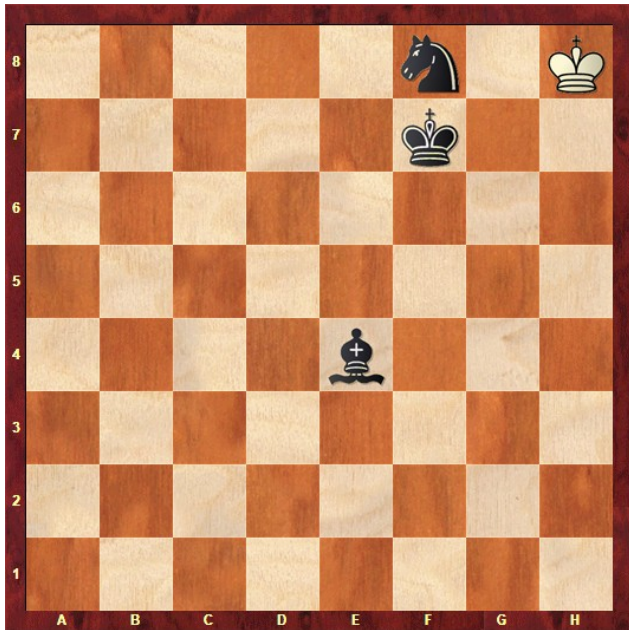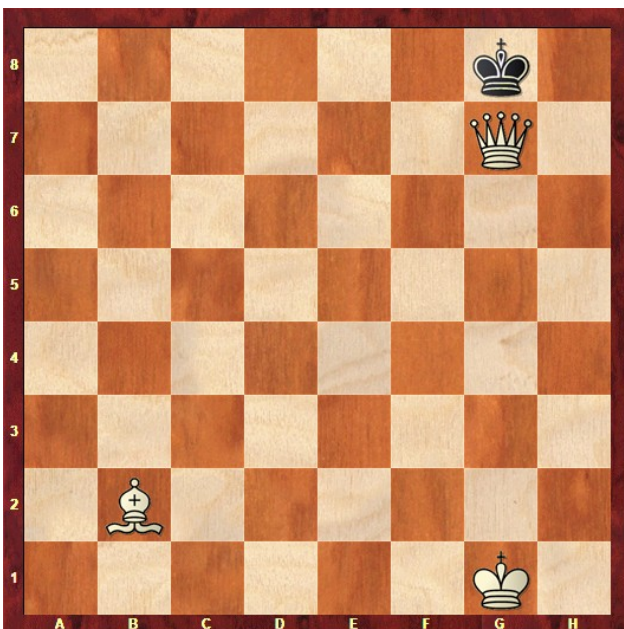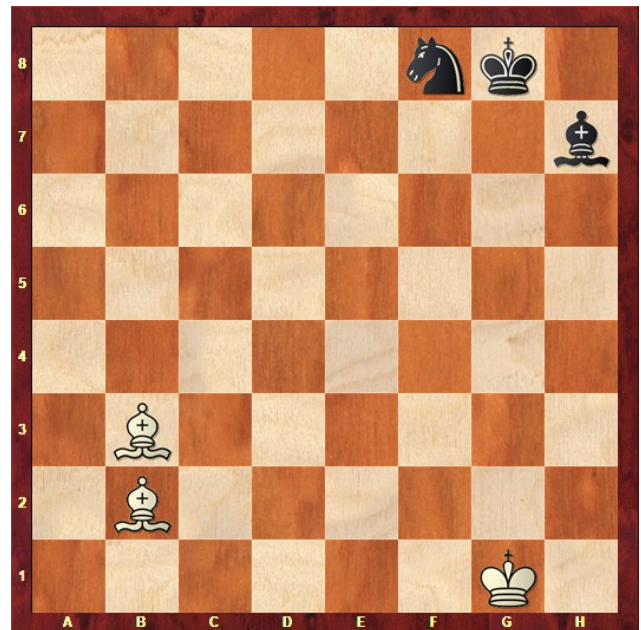

Diagram 1.13: Checkmate!

If a player gets checkmated, he loses the games immediately. For this reason, checkmating the opponent is the ultimate goal in chess, and our decisions should be taken with that direction in mind. As an exercise, judge whether or not the following positions are a checkmate.

Exercise 1: Is White checkmated?

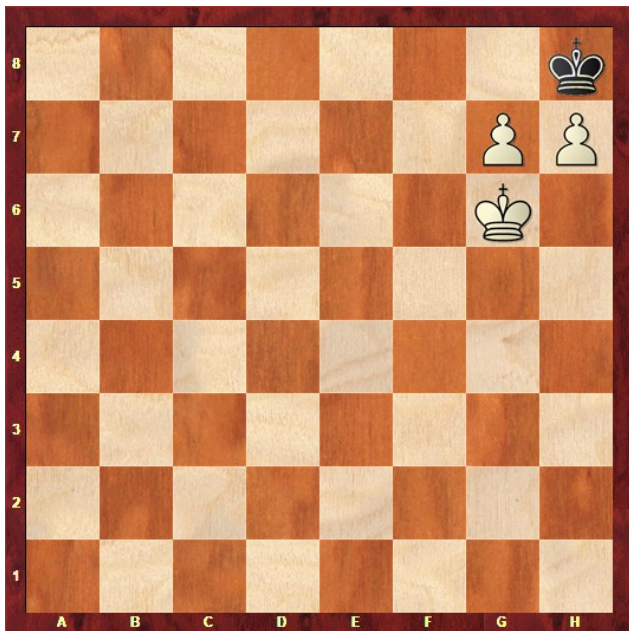*Exercise 3: Is Black checkmated?*

Exercise 4: Is Black checkmated?

Exercie 5: Is White checkmated?

I would like to make a few final remarks before moving on to the next topic:

First, any move that puts your own king into enemy threat will be considered illegal, regardless of whether or not you were already in check. You will be forced to take your move back.

Exercise 7: Is Black checkmated?

If a player has no legal moves avaliable, but is not in check, he won't be considered checkmated, but stalemated, and the game will be ended with a draw. Players on an advantageous situation should avoid stalemating the opponent at all costs! Diagrams 1.14 and 1.15 show examples of stalemate (if it's Black's turn).

Finally, keep in mind that, if multiple pieces attack your king simultaneously, neither taking the enemy pieces nor covering will be an option (see diagrams 1.16 and 1.17)

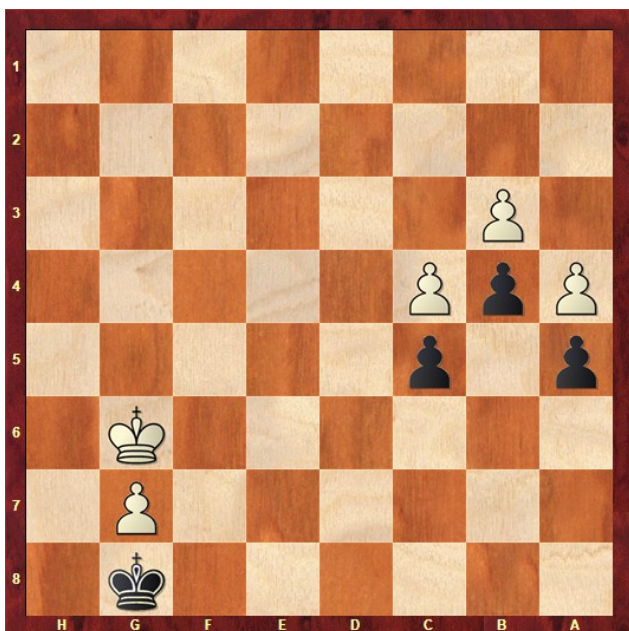*Diagram 1.15: Stalemate (Black to move)*
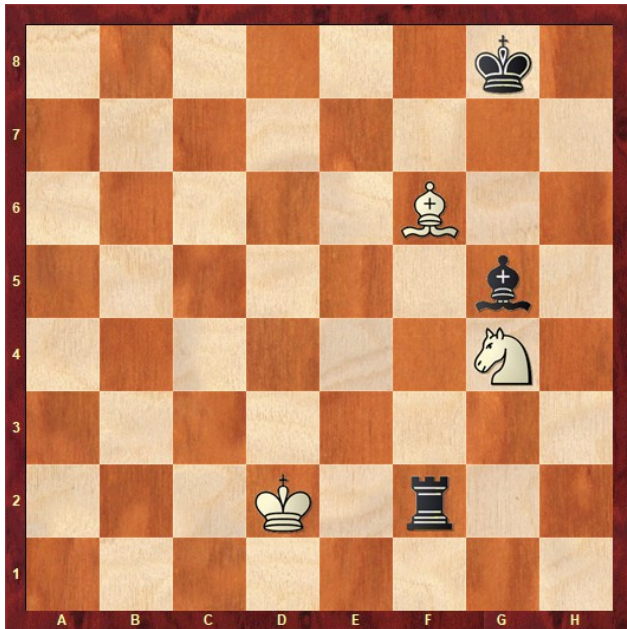

Diagram 1.14: Stalemate (Black to move)

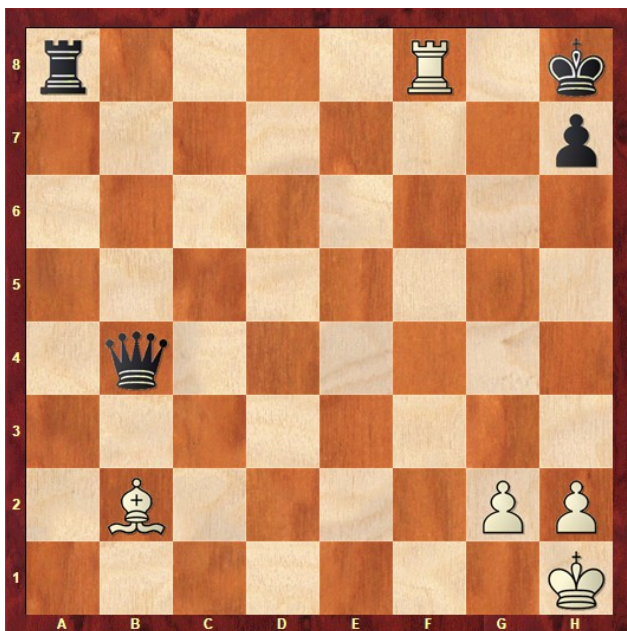*Diagram 1:16 "Double check". Escaping is the only option for white.*

Diagram 1.17: Checkmate!

1.4: Special rules

You have, in the previous sections, learned the main rules of chess, however, there are still a few special moves we have not talked about yet.

It is possible for White to go from diagram 1.18 to diagram 1.19 in just one move. This is called short castling. Similarly, he could go from 1.20 to 1.21 (long castling)

Diagram 1.18: Short castling (before)
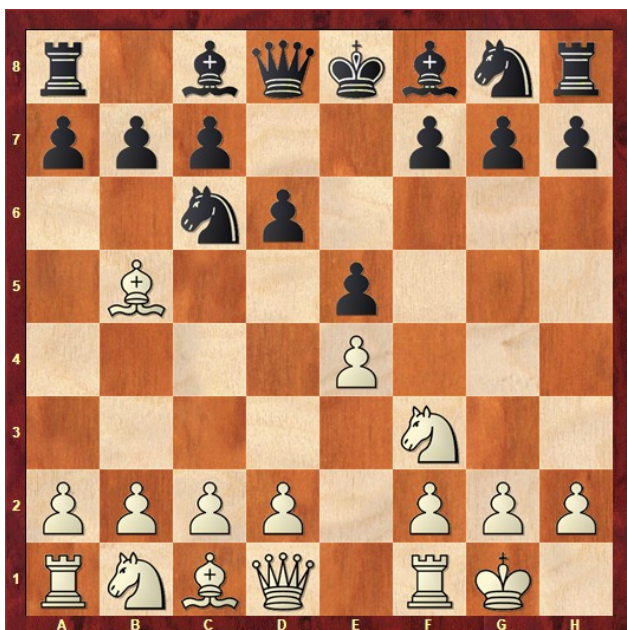
Diagram 1.19: Short castling (after)

Diagram 1.20: Long castling (before)

Diagram 1.21: Long castling (after)

If you are about to castle, keep in mind:
- Your king moves two squares to either side. The rooks crosses through into the square next to the king.
- Castling is not allowed if any pieces (friend or enemy) are placed between your king and your rook
- Castling is not allowed if any of the squares between your king's position and his destination are under enemy attack.

- Castling is not allowed if you've already moved either of the pieces involved.

For example, in diagrams 1.22 and 1.23, White can castle (long and short respectively) (assuming neither the king or the rook involved have always stayed at their starting positions)

Diagram 1.22: White can castle (long)

Diagram 1.23: White can castle (short)

However, castling is not possible on diagrams 1.24 and 1.25

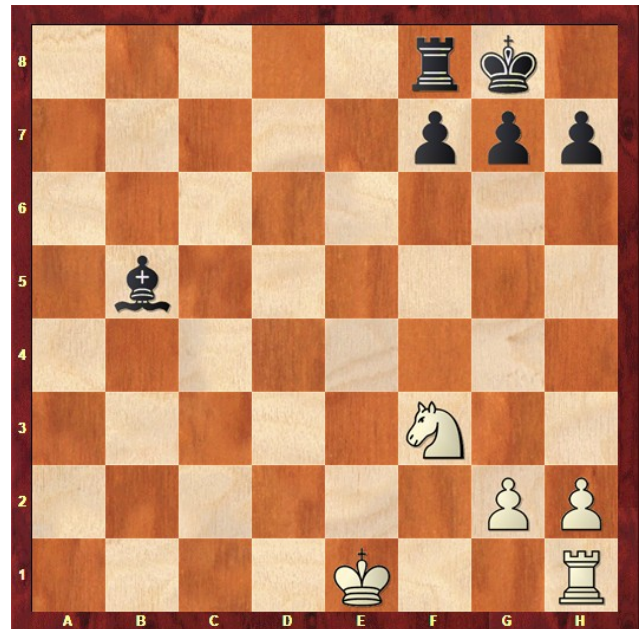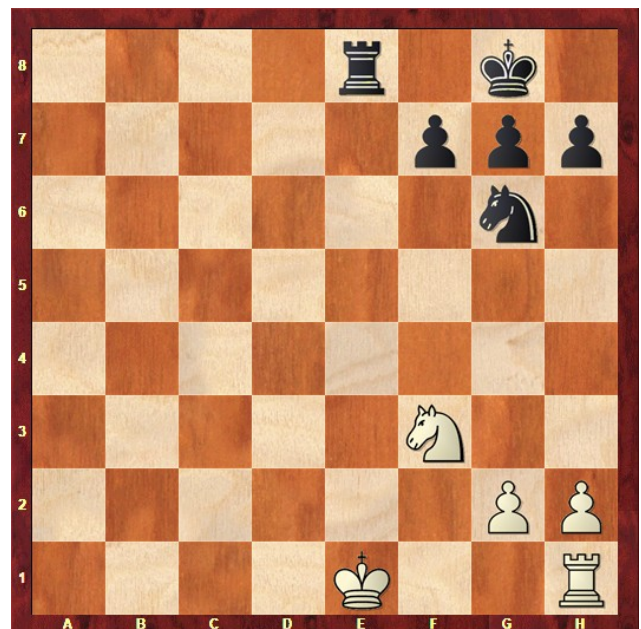*Diagram 1.24: Black's bishop prevents White from castling*

Diagram 1.25: White is in check. He cannot castle

Castling is the only type of moves where a player is allowed to move two pieces on the same turn. In later chapters, we will see its importance.

Another critical rule of chess is pawn promotion. If a pawn makes it into the final rank, it gets promoted, changing into the piece of the player's wish (except for

a king or a pawn) In most situations, a queen is the best replacement.

If the same position appears three times on the board in the same game, any player has the right to claim a draw. The same is true is 50 consecutive moves (by each player) happen without any captures taking places nor any pawn advancing.

Finally, to complete our exploration of the rules, pawns are allowed to make yet another type of move. It is called "en passant" taking. On diagram 1.26, if White decided to push his pawn two squares forward (from f2 to f4), Black, only at his very next turn, would be allowed to take the pawn as if White had only moved one square (from f2 to f3). Thus, White's pawn would be removed from the board, while Black's pawn would move into the f3 square.

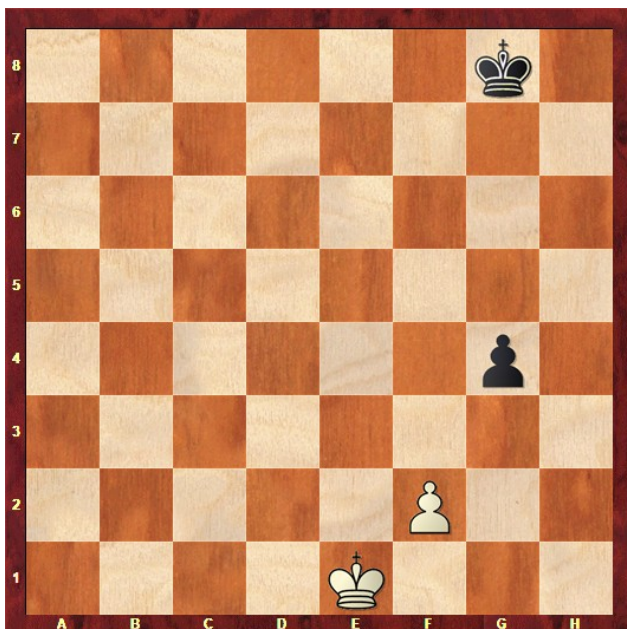*Diagram 1.26: If White pushes his pawn two squares, Black will be allowed an "en passant" capture*

Solutions to exercises:

1-3: These are indeed checkmate. No legal moves can remove the enemy threat on White's monarch.
4: Black can put his own knight between his king and the enemy bishop.
5: Capturing the attacking piece is possible.
6: Black's king can escape (at least for now!).
7: Checkmate!

Chapter 2: Chess notation

In this very brief chapter, we are going to learn a method to write down chess moves effectively. This is mandatory in tournament practice, but it will also be critical in your learning process, since it will give you an essentail tool in the understanding of chess literature (indeed, without an effective chess notation system, it would be very difficult to go through sequences of moves or even entire games, forcing this book to be thousand of pages long)

You may have already noticed that, on the margins of every diagram, there is a "coordinate system", using letters for the files (vertical) and numbers for the ranks (horizontal). Thus, it is possible to assign a "name" to every square on the board, combining both the rank and file where it is found. If you are not familiar with these ideas, pick up the starting position diagrams from last chapter (1.8 and 1.9), and try to find out the names of the squares where each piece begins the game (e1 and e8 for the kings, d1 and d8 for the queens, and so on)

To indicate that a certain piece is moving to a certain square, we will just write a capital letter (K for king, Q for queen, R for rook, B for bishop and N for knight) followed by the name of that square. No fletter (just the square) will be used to indicate the movement of a pawn. From the starting position, the moves e4 Nc6 Bc4 d6 result in diagram 2.1.

In modern texts, with the intention of facilitating translation, it is frequent to use (figures (♚♛♜♝♞) instead of letters. We will mainly stick to the traditional system. (after all, that's how you will write your own games) To facilitate the process of reading, numbers will often be added to indicate order of the moves, making the previous text look like either 1. e4 ♞c6 2.♝c4 d6 or 1.e4 Nc6 2.Bc4 d6

Diagram 2.1: Resulting position

With the following rules, you will be able to read and write any chess game:
- Captures are denoted by "x", writing ♞xe6 instead of just ♞e6. If the capturing piece is a pawn, its file of origin will be indicating (for example, in White's turn, fxe4 menas that the pawn on f3 is taking a piece on e4)
- Promotions are written in the format "square=Piece", that is d8=Q, c8=N and so on)
- Short castling is written as 0-0
- Long castling is written as 0-0-0
- Checks are often marked with a "+" symbol at the end (e6+ instead of just e6) Similarly, ++ or # will be used for checkmate.
- If two equal pieces can go to the same square, either their file or rank of origin will be specified (for example, ♜ae8 indicates that the rook on a8 is moving to e8) This is used to avoid ambiguity.

Try to reproduce on a board the following games:

1.e4 ♞c6 2.♝c4 d6 3.♞c3 e5 4.d3 ♞f6 5.f4 exf4 6.♝xf4 ♝e7 7.♞f3 0–0 8.♛d2 ♝g4 9.0–0–0 ♞d4 10.♜df1 c6 11.h3 ♝xf3 12.gxf3 b5 13.♝b3 a5 14.♜fg1 b4

15.♝h6 bxc3 16.♜xg7+ ♚h8 17.bxc3 ♞xb3+ 18.cxb3 a4 19.♜g2 axb3 20.♝g7+ ♚g8 21.♝xf6#

Game 1. Greco - NN
Italy, 1619

1.e4 b6 2.d4 Bb7 3.Bd3 f5 4.exf5 Bxg2 5.Qh5+ g6 6.fxg6 Nf6 7.gxh7+ Nxh5 8.Bg6# 1-0

Now you can try to figure out how the following moves (those indicated with an arrow) would be written.

Exercise 3: How to write this move?
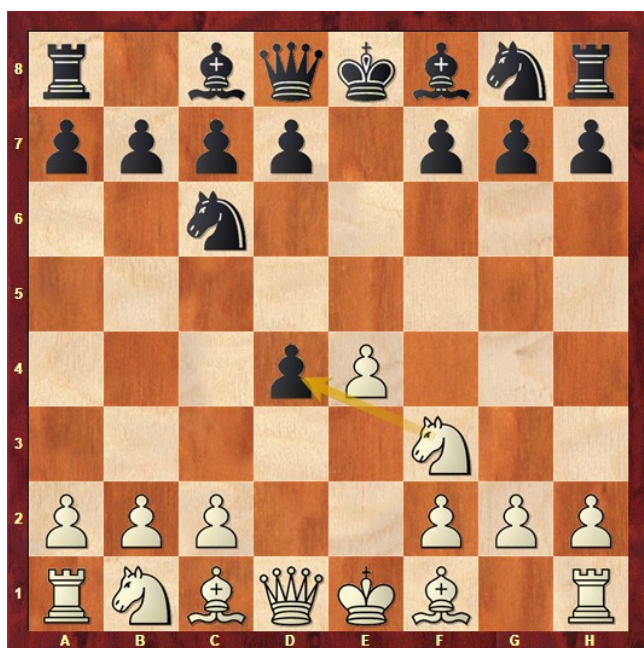
Exercise 1: How to write this move?

Exercise 4: White has just moved his pawn from c2 to c4. Can Black capture "en passant"? How would you write down such a move?

In order to communicate other type of information, the use of the following symbols is quite extended among all chess publications:

!!: Excellent move.
!: Good move.
!?: Interesting move.
?!: Dubious move.
?: Bad move.
??: Blunder.
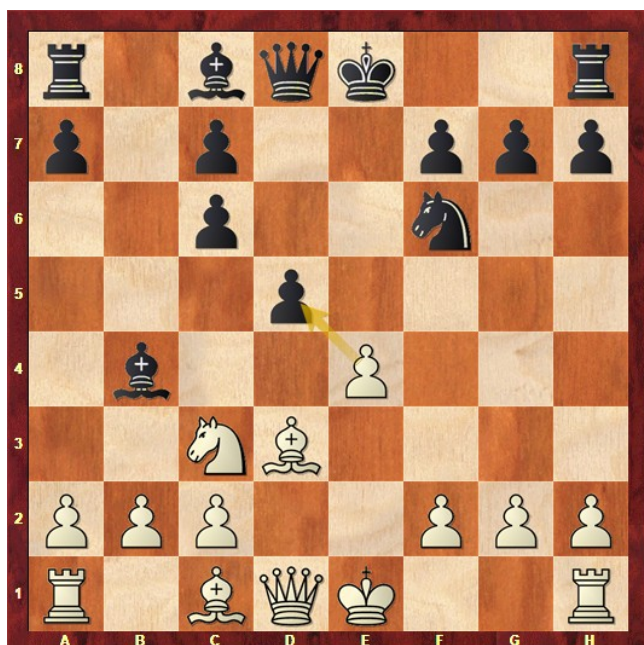
Exercise 2: How to write this move?

+-: White has a decisive advantage.
+/-: White has a clear advantage.
+/=: White is slightly better.
=: The position is equal.
=/+: Black is slightly better.
-/+: Black has a clear advantage.
-+: Black: has a decisive advantage.

Do not worry if you cannot remember all of these symbols. If, at any given time you do not remember the meaning of any of them, come back to this section to consult.

To conclude this section, we are going to see an example of how a typical analysis of a game is done in this book. Note than the game is written in boldface text, while variations and comments are not. Also, when a sequence begins with a move made by Black, three dots (…) will be added at the beginning to indicate it

Game 2. NN – Greco
Italy, 1920

Gioachino Greco (c. 1600 – c. 1634) was one of the first chess players in history whose games have been recorded. Other early strong players were, among others, Ruy López de Segura (Spain, c. 1530 – c. 1580) and François Philidor (Breux, 1726 – London, 1795)

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.0-0 Both sides try to put their pieces into the game (and their king into safety) as fast as possibly) **Nf6 5.Re1 0-0 6.c3** Preparing for a pawn push into d4, what would disturb the enemy bishop. **Qe7 7.d4 exd4 8.e5 Ng4 9.cxd4 Nxd4** It looks as if White was about to win a bishop in exchange for a pawn after 10. Nxd4 Bxd4 11.Qxg4, but Greco has a surprise. **10.Nxd4 Qh4!**

11.Nf3? White needed to defend the f2 square with 11.Be3, but Black would simply reply 11...Qxh2 12.Kf1 Qh1+ 13. Ke2 Qxg2, winning a pawn and putting the enemy king in the middle of the board, where he will be vulnerable. **Qxf2+ 12.Kh1 Qg1+!!** Sacrificing the queen in exchange for checkmating in the next move **13.Nxg1 Nf2# 0-1**

Do not panic if you do not understand the reasons behind all the moves, nor if you still have trouble with the notation. There is still a long way ahead of you!

As a final remark, pay attention to the differences between seeing the board form White's or Black's perspective! White has a1 at his left and h1 at his right, where Black finds h8 and a8 respectively.

Solutions to exercises:

1: Nxd4
2: exd5
3: Bxc3
4: dxc3

Diagram 2.2: Position after 10...Qh4

Chapter 3: The endgame (I): Basic mates.

In this chapter, we are going to learn how to convert an advantageous endgame position into a victory. The ideas behind these basic mates are centered around confining the enemy king to smaller and smaller regions of the board, until he is left with no space and we can find a way to checkmate him. If we wanted to force a checkmate in the middle of the board, a huge material advantage would be required.

3.1: Mating with two rooks.

The most basic mating procedure you need to know is how to win with a two rooks advantage. Of course, the same method can be used if one of the rooks (or both!) is replaced by a queen (beware of stalemate!). From the starting position in diagram 3.1 (try to play it with a friend or maybe against yourself before continuing if you wish), the idea is to use one rook to prevent the king from going up, then the other to check and push him down. When the board is over, it will be checkmate.
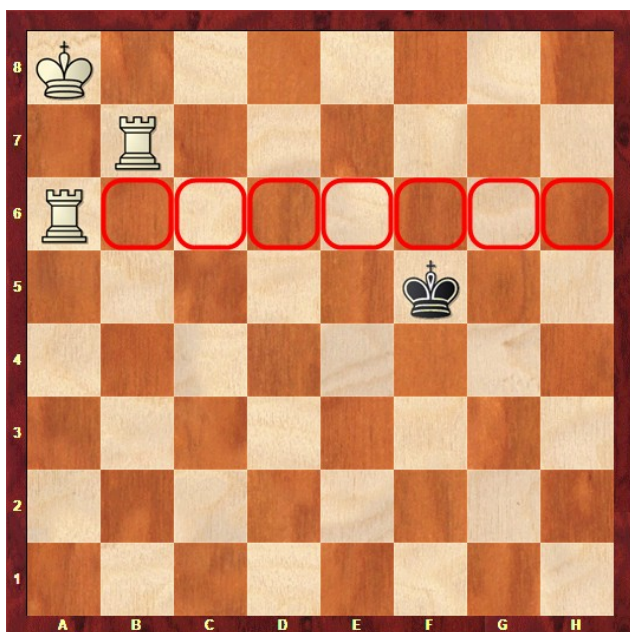

Diagram 3.1: The rook on a6 creates a barrier the black king will never cross again.

For example, White will win **1. Rb5+ Ke4** See how the a6 rook prevent the king from going into the sixth rank. Oher moves result in pretty much the same thing. **2. Ra4+ Kd3 3. Rb3+** If we check with the other rook, Black would just return to the middle of the board. **Kc2** Here, if White carelessly continues with 4. Ra2+, Black would simply take the rook on b3. What should we do then? **4. Rh3!** We just do the same thing from the other side. **4...Kb2** (or maybe 4...Kd2 5. Ra2+. Kc1 6. Rh1#)) **5. Rg4 Kc2 6. Rg2+ Kd1 7. Rh1#**

Sometimes, some preparatory moves will be required if our rooks are misplaced or our king is interrupting our rooks (see diagram 3.2)
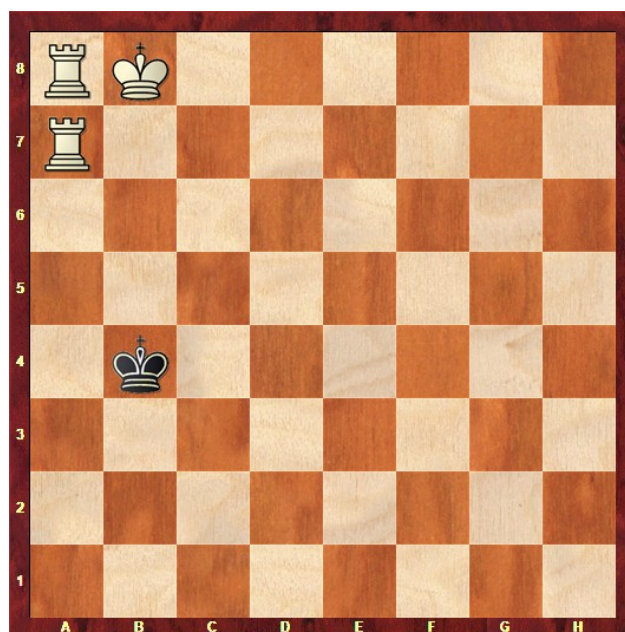

Diagram 3.2: Two rooks. Alternative position

1.Rc7 This time, White will mate the black king on the left side of the board (on the a file) **Kb5 2.Kc8** The king must get out of the way. Of course, 2.Ra1, preparing the Rb1+ threat) is also possible **Kb6 3.Rb8+** The c7 rook is protected **Ka6 4.Rc1 Ka7 5.Ra1#**

3.2: Mating with a queen.

You can try it yourself, but you will never be able to checkmate an opponent with just a queen, unless your own king participates in the battle. Let's see how to make it happen from the position on diagram 3.3.
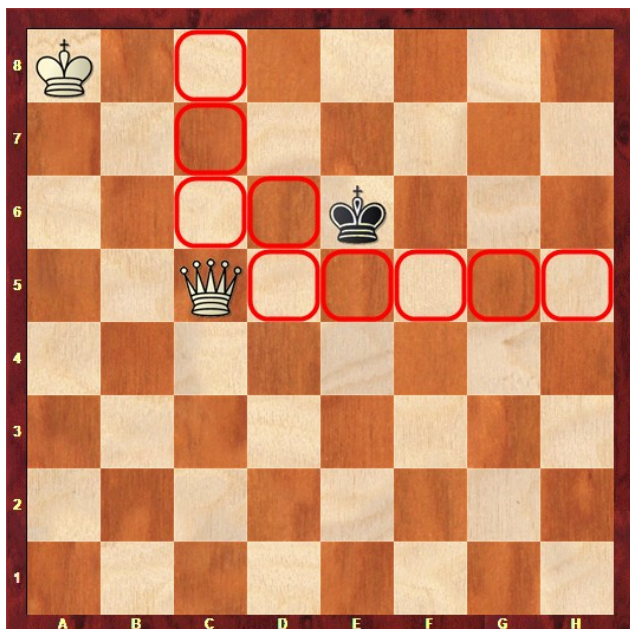

Diagram 3.3: Mating with a queen

The barrier created by a queen is way stronger than that of a rook, the main reason being that the enemy king can never approach her (if there was a rook instead, the move ...Kd6 would be possible, forcing us to retreat)

1.Qd4 Kf5 2.Qe3 We can push the enemy king into a corner just by imitating his moves with our queen, staying always at "one-knight-jump distance". Of course, many other alternatives are possible, as long as we keep shrinking the number of squares outside of the "barrier". Note also that checks are rarely the best option, since they often allow the king to escape. **2...Kg6 3.Qf4 Kg7 4.Qf5 Kg8 5.Qf6 Kh7 6.Qg5 Kh8**

Exercise 1: Why shouldn't we play 7. Qg6?

7.Kb7 Now that the black king is confined to only two squares, we bring our own king into the action. **7...Kh7 8.Kc7 Kh8 9.Kd7 Kh7 10.Ke7 Kh8 11.Kf7 Kh7 12.Qg7#** Observe that 12.Qh5+ is also mate (that's

how we would do it with a rook, see the next section) Also, pay attention to the importance of our king. This is a recurrent theme not only in these basic mates, but also in broader classes of endgames.
In case you need another example, see diagram 3.4.

Diagram 3.4: Mating with a queen (2nd example)

1...Qd1 2.Kf4 Qe2 3.Kf5 Qe3 4.Kg4 Qf2 5.Kg5 Qf3 6.Kg6 Qf4 7.Kg7 Qf5 8.Kg8 Qd7 9.Kf8 Kg3 10.Kg8 Kg4 11.Kf8 Kg5 12.Kg8 Kg6 13.Kf8 Qf7#

3.3: Mating with a rook

The cases we've seen so far are very simple and straight-forward. We are going to advance one step further by analyzing the rook+king vs king endgame. It is instructive to compare diagrams 3.1 and 3.5, looking at the different barriers we build in each case:
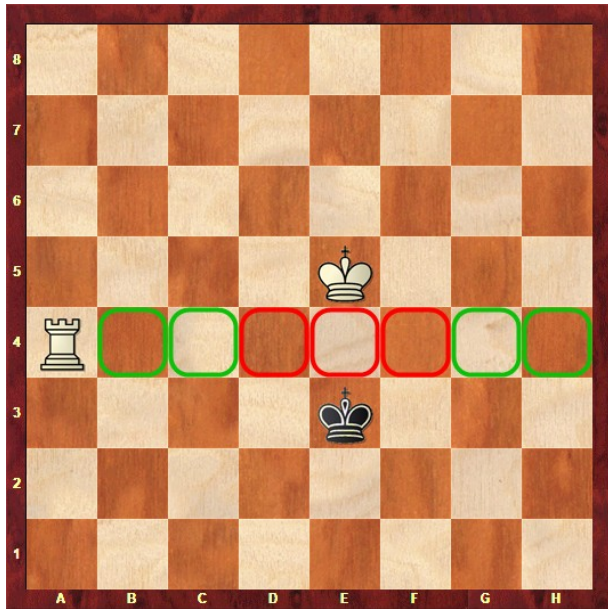
Diagram 3.5: Mating with a rook

On diagram 3.1, the a6 rook created a barrier that banned the black king from the sixth rank. Similarly, on diagram 3.5, the rook on a4 bans the black king from the fourth rank. However, in the former case, we had a second rook at our disposal, who, by giving check, pushed the black king one more rank backwards.

Here, that is no longer an option, that is why we need to use a second barrier: the one created by our own king, painted red on the diagram. With that in mind, we can proceed **1. Ra3+!** Pushing the king closer to the side of the board. Let's assume he plays **1...Ke2**

Think for a while about what to do now. If we continued 2. Ke4, trying to reach an analogue position to that of the diagram, Black would simple answer 2…Kd2, and, with 3. Kd4 Ke2, we could stay like that forever.

For that matter, the easiest way forward for White is **2. Kd4!** with the idea of forcing Black to be the one to put his own king in front of the enemy, then using his next turn to check with the rook.

2...Kf2 3.Ke4 Kg2 This only delays the inevitable. Black will eventually have to "move left" **4.Kf4 Kh2 5.Kg4 Kg2.** Now it's

the time. **6.Ra2+ Kf1** (6...Kg1 Kf3 would lead to mate in two moves, while 6...Kh1 Kg3 would be an immediate win) **7.Kg3 Ke1 8.Kf3 Kd1 9.Ke3 Kc1 10.Kd3 Kb1** Seems like something is not going according to plan, or is it? **11.Rh2 Kc1** Threatening to chase again the rook in case of 12. Kc3 **12.Rg2!** White simply "waits". Remember: we want the opponent to be the one putting his king in front of ours. **Kb1 13.Kc3 Ka1 14.Kb3 Kb1** Finally **15.Rg1#**

Here you can see another example. There are shorter ways of mating, but this is the one following the directions we've just explored (diagram 3.6).
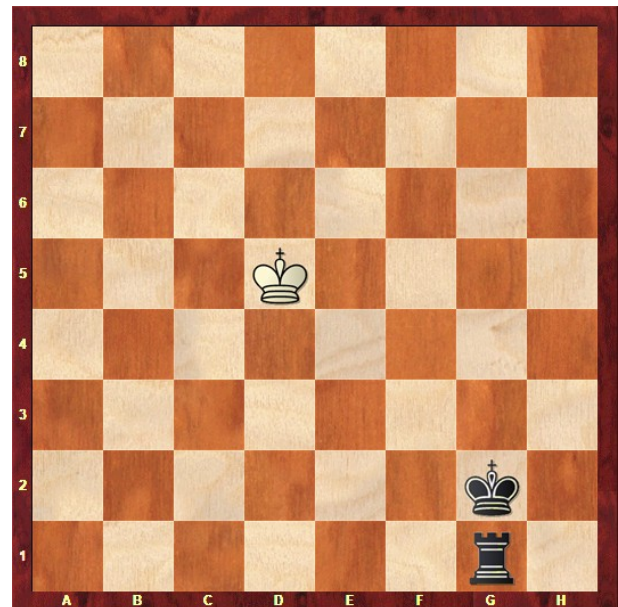

Diagram 3.6: Mating with a rook (2nd example)

1... Re1 2. Kd4 Kf3 3. Kd5 Kf4 4. Kd6 Kf5 5. Kd7 Kf6 6. Kd8 Kf7 7. Kc7 Rd1 8. Kc6 Ke6 9. Kc5 Ke5 10. Kc4 Ke4 11. Kc3 Ke3 12. Kc2 Rd7 13. Kc1 Ke2 14. Kc2 Rc7+ 15. Kb3 Kd2 16. Kb4 Kd3 17. Kb5 Kd4 18. Kb6 Rc1 19. Kb5 Rc2 20. Kb6 Kd5 21. Kb7 Kd6 22. Kb8 Kd7 23. Kb7 Rb2+ 24. Ka6 Kc7 25. Ka5 Kc6 26. Ka4 Kc5 27. Ka3 Rb7 28. Ka4 Rb8 29. Ka3 Kc4 30. Ka2 Kc3 31. Ka1 Kc2 32. Ka2 Ra8#

3.4: Other positions against a lonely king.

We will now discuss a few other situations where one side is left with his king alone.

We already know that a king and a rook (or a queen) can win against a lonely king. But this is not the case for both knights and bishops, even in the worst starting position imaginable (try it yourself!).

However, it is possible to checkmate with two bishops, as well as with a bishop and a knight. These endgames will be discussed later in the series, since they are more complicated (specially the bishop and knight one)

On the other hand, it is impossible to win with only two knights Some mating positions exist, but the weaker side is not forced to allow them.

Finally, pawns can often defeat a king by promoting. We will study the case of king+pawn vs king later in this book

I strongly suggest to practice the positions explained above either against yourself or a friend. I am not a huge fan of learning by memorizing, but any chess player who claims to deserve that name needs to be able to win those three endgames every single time he faces them.

Solutions to exercises:

1: The position after 7. Qg6 ?? is a stalemate

Chapter 4: Tactics (I): How to win at chess

Few things are more frustrating for a chess player than missing an opportunity to win a game, and there is no better opportunity than having to chance to directly checkmate your opponent!

4.1: Mate in 1!

In this section, we will focus on positions where either player can mate with his next move. The three following diagrams show examples of positions you are already familiar with where White can win with his next move (White can mate in 1)
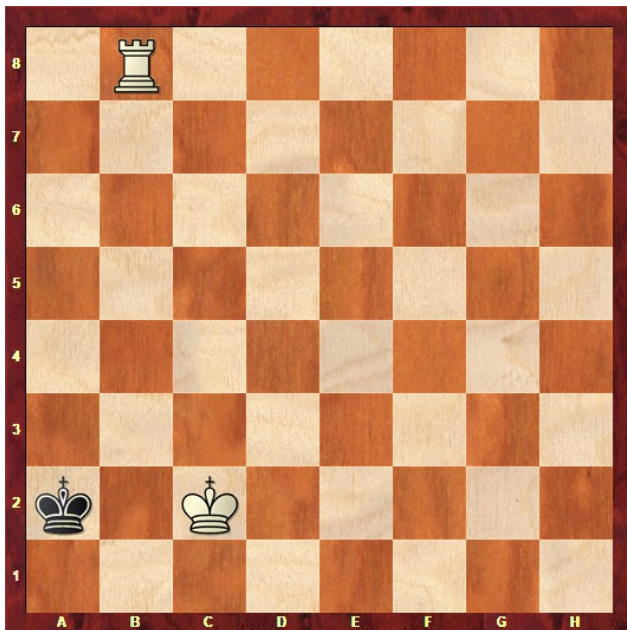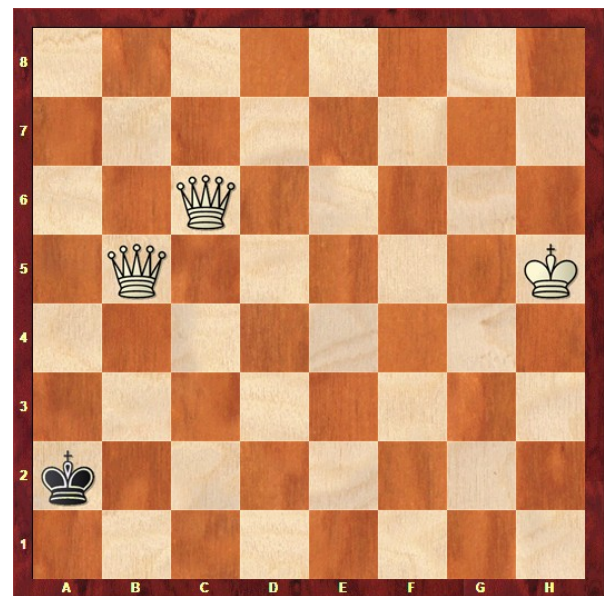

Ilustración 1: Diagram 4.3: White mates in 1

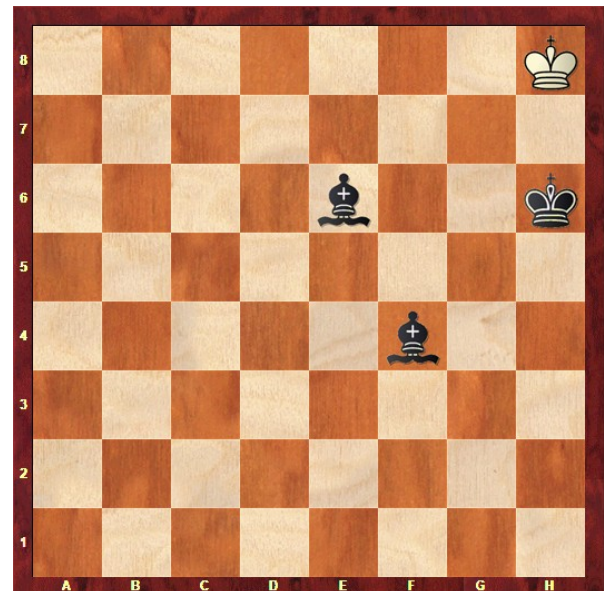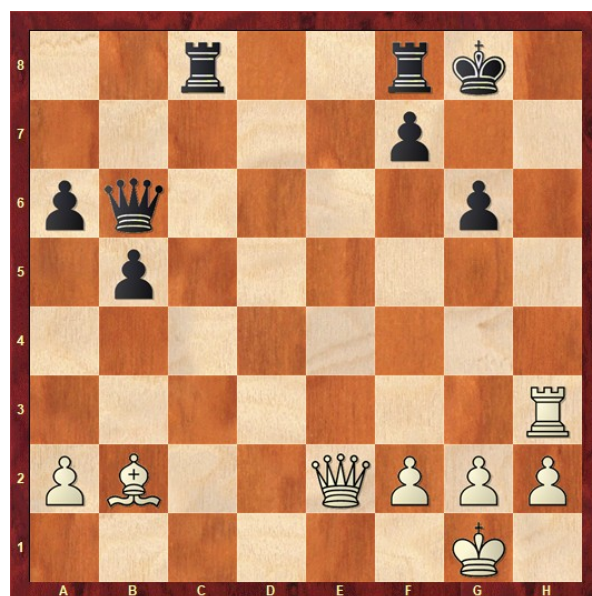We can also present a few examples from the endgames we discussed in section 3.4

Diagram 3.1: White mates in 1

Diagram 4.4: Black mates in 1

Diagram 3.2: White mates in 1

Diagram 4.5: Black mates in 1

Exercise 2: White to move

But enough of silly cases. Chances to mate in 1 move appear in other types of positions, not just in endgames against a lonely king. How many of them can you find? Take your time if you need to!
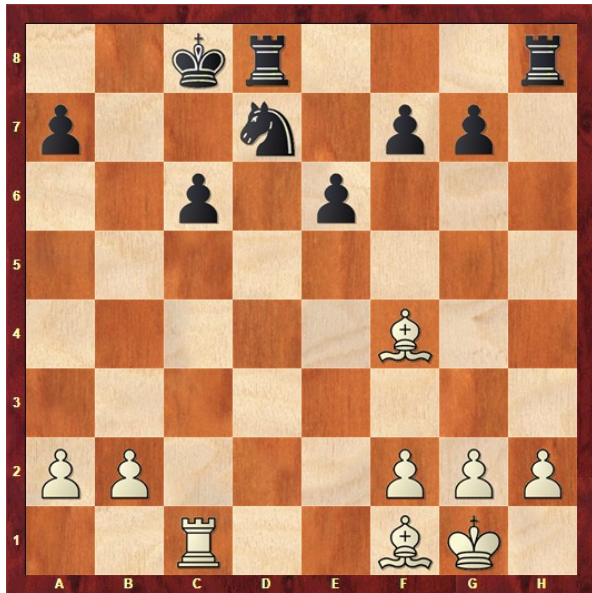
NOTE: I strongly suggest to note down your answers to the exercises, reach the end of the chapter, then review all your previous answers and only at that point check the solutions.

Exercise 3: White to move

Exercise 1: Black to move

Exercise 4: White to move
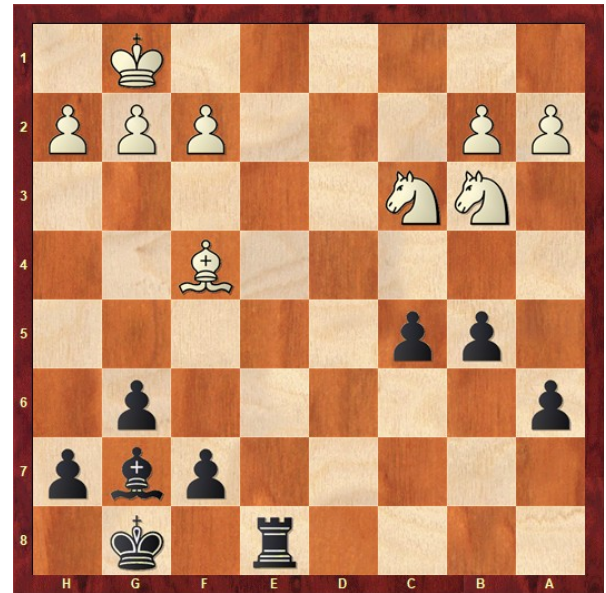
Exercise 9: Black to move
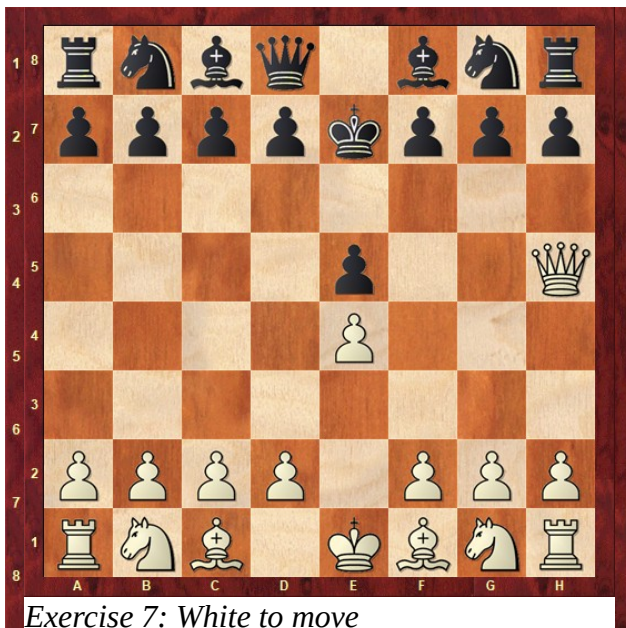
Exercise 7: White to move
Exercise 6: Black to move

Exercise 10: Black to move
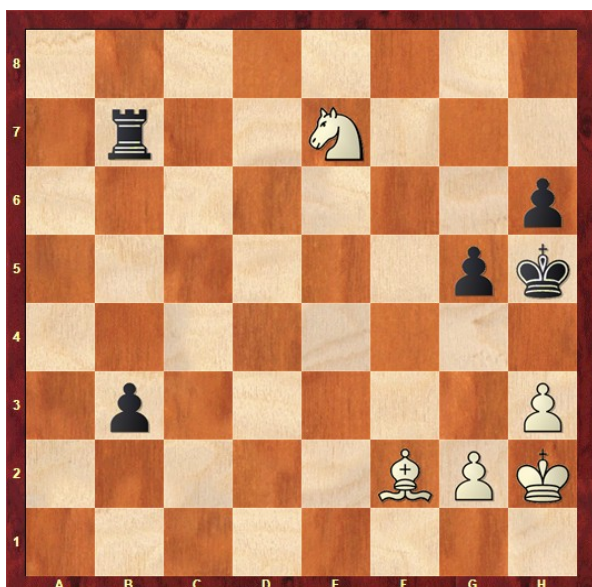
Exercise 8: White to move

4.2: Linear mates in 2

Okay, that was pretty easy, wasn't it? Let's move onto the next step. In the following exercises, you will need to find a mate in 2 moves. This means you will only need to see your next move, but also how to checkmate after the opponent's answer. In this section, only cases where the opponent has an only move will be considered. If you're doing the exercises on a board, do not move

any pieces before you've found the entire solution.
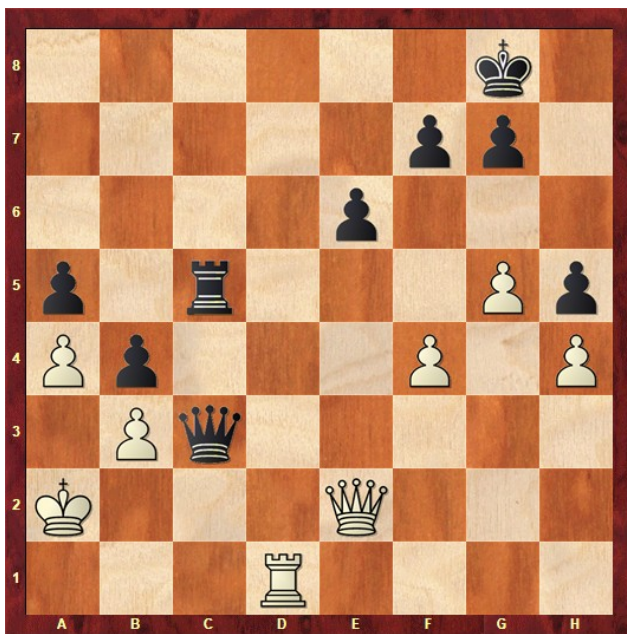
Exercise 11: White to move
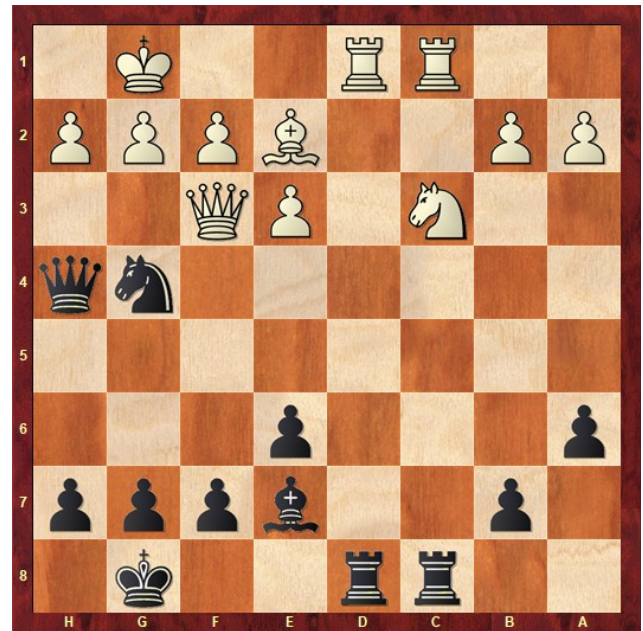
Exercise 14: Black to move
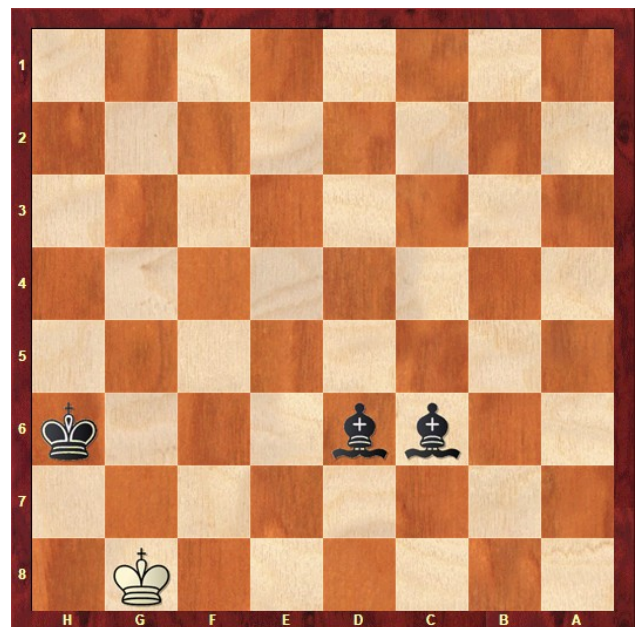
Exercise 15: Black to move

Exercise 13: White to move
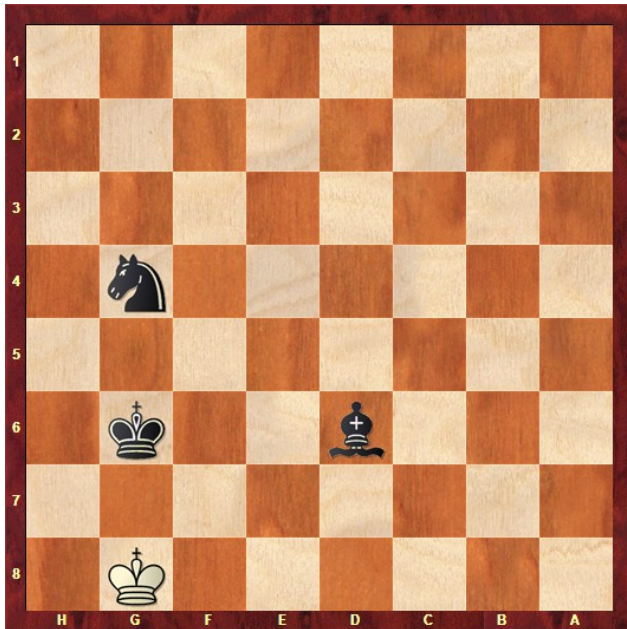
Exercise 16: Black to move

Exercise 18: White to move

4.3: Longer linear mates

Calculating the outcome of our moves is not a hard task when our opponent has no choice about what to do. You can check it yourself by trying the following exercises. Can you find how to force mates?
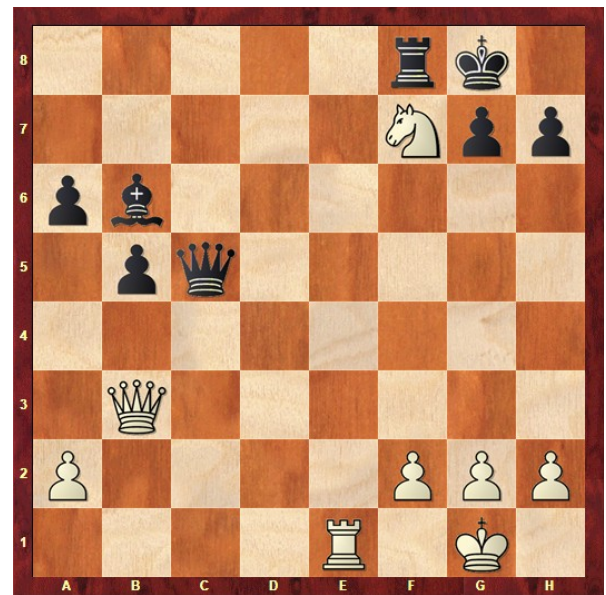
Exercise 19: White to move

Exercise 17: White to move

Exercise 20: White to move

Okay, some of those (I could be refering to that mate in six) were a bit tough. To complete this chapter, we can see a bunch of positions where our opponent has more than just one legal move.

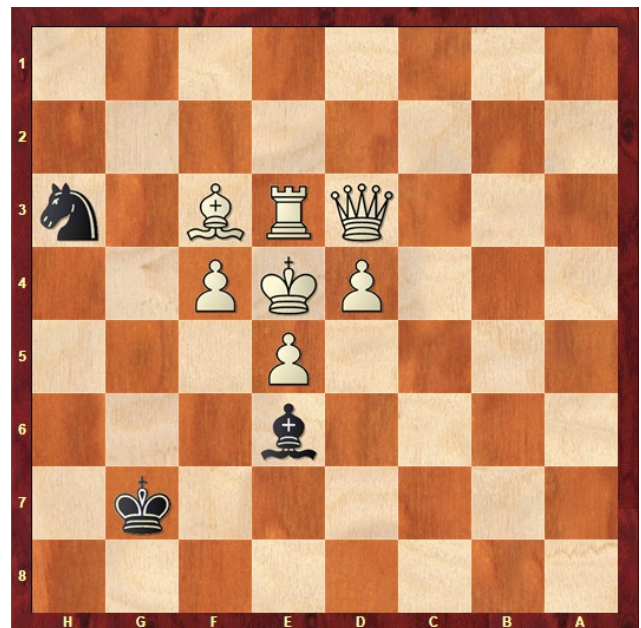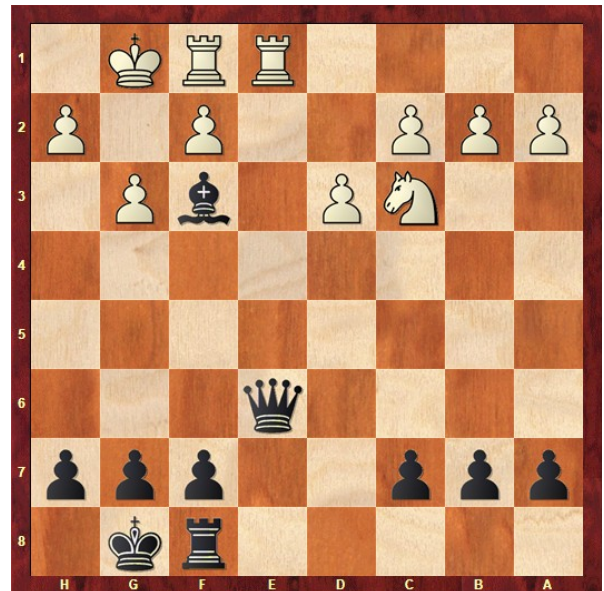*Exercise 24: Black to move*

Exercise 23: White to move
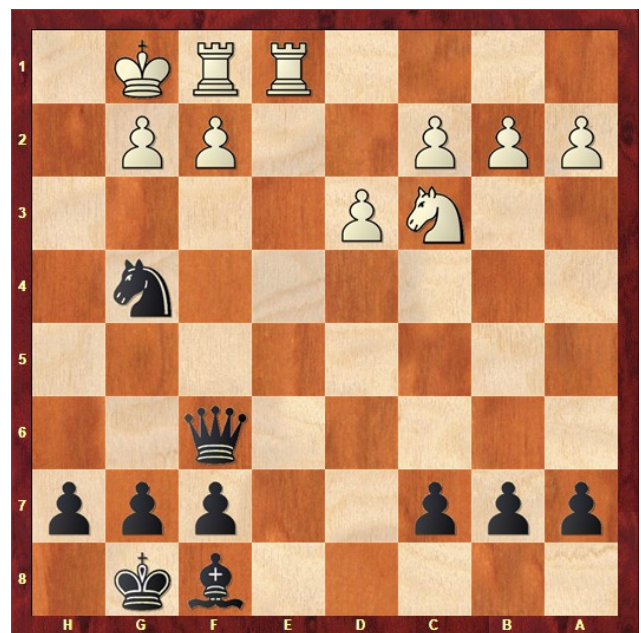
Exercise 25: Black to move

Exercise 23: Black to move

Exercise 26: Black to move

4.5: Miscellaneous.

Before we move to the next thing, let's get a bit closer to how this things present themselves in real life. These problems will be challenging, so expect them to take you quite some time to get right. Can you find how to force mate in the following positions?

Exercise 29: White to move

Exercise 27: White to move
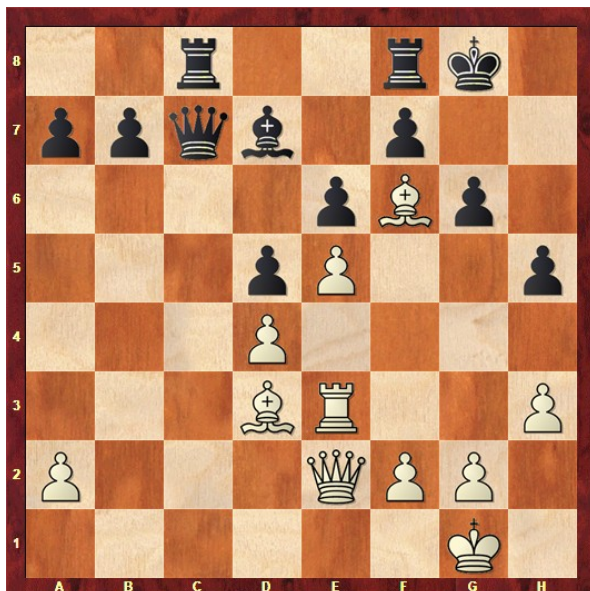
Exercise 28: White to move
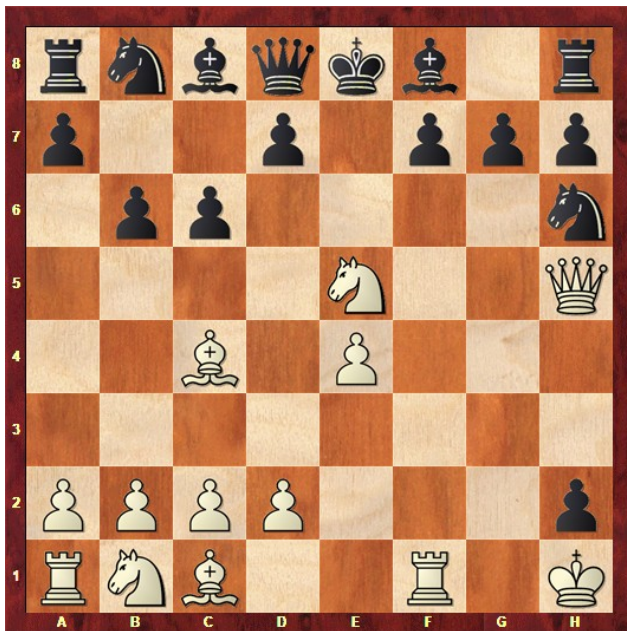
Exercise 30: White to move
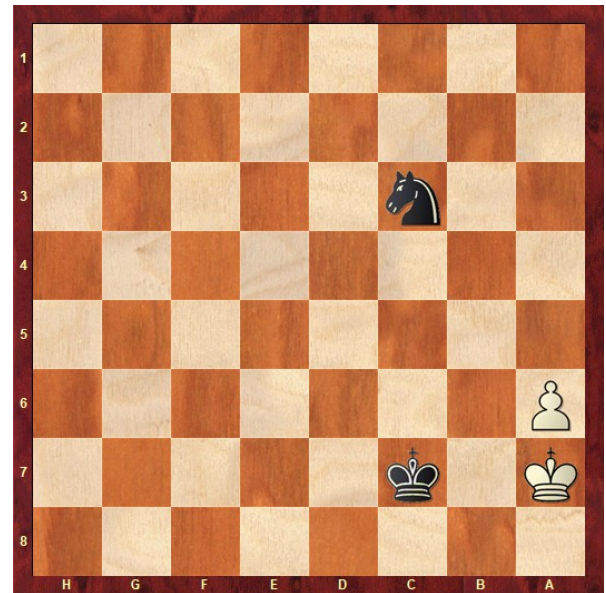
Exercise 34: Black to move
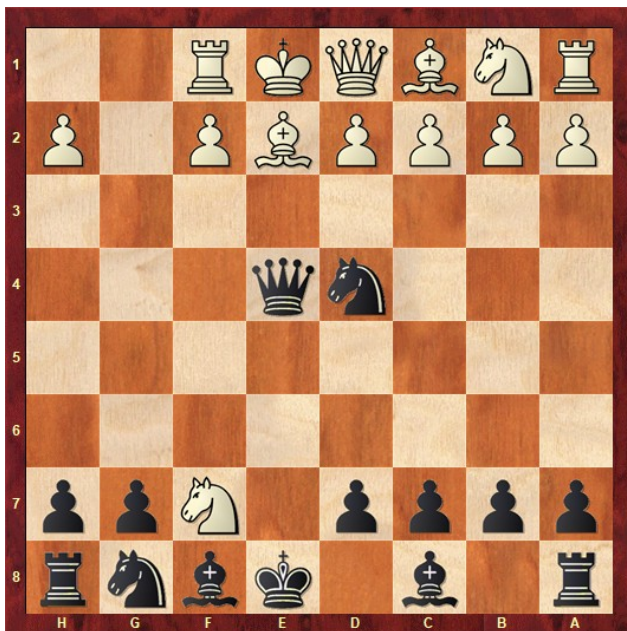
Exercise 31: Black to move
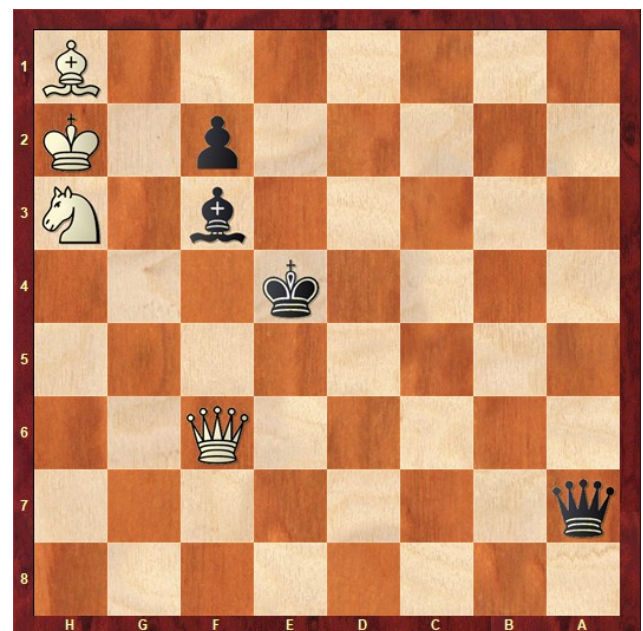
Exercise 35: Black to move
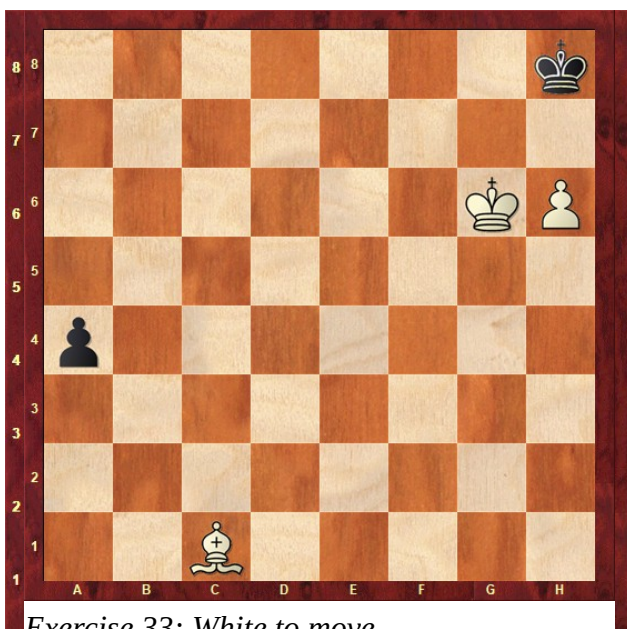
Exercise 33: White to move
Exercise 32: White to move

4.6: Main reasons why people fail to find the good moves.

Time to check your answers! How well did it go? At this point you are in a situation that can very likely be classified into one of these groups:

1: You've found the solution to pretty much all the problems without much

difficulty. Maybe you missed some details in the tougher ones, but you would say it went well. If this is the case, good for you!

2. You've answered correctly a majority of the puzzles, but you needed an eternity in many of them

3. You were able to solve the easier ones, but it didn't go well with those on the last sections.

If you are in group 1, you are likely to be doing it the right way. Keep on going and make sure you understand why the solutions to those few positions you failed are the good moves. Also, take a quick look at your wrong answers and try to find how the opponent could get away with them.

Those in group 2 understand the basics of the topics we discussed so far, but may be looking the wrong way at the different options available in a position. My advice to them is to begin the calculations by the most forcing moves (namely checks and captures), then move to mate threats, promotions, piece threats, and finally the rest of the moves. With this procedure, exercise 30 (at least for me, one of the most difficult ones) would be solved in a way similar to this: "Okay, I have two checks: Bxf7+ and Qxf7+. The latter fails to ..Nxf7 Bxf7+ Ke7, since I lost my queen and I can't see any more threats. However, after Bxf7, ...Ke7 is forced. Now I have three options to check: Qg5+, Nxc6+ and Ng6+" Once you are here, finding the solution is reduced to finding a "nonlinear" mate in 2 where you already know the first move.

Finally, if you are in group 3, do not lose hope. I don't know whether you are a silly person or not, but even if you actually are, that's not the reason why you are here. The reason is, probably, that you have tried to advance too much too fast. Take a breath, give one step backwards and try again.

Solutions to exercises:

1: ...Nf2#

2: Rh8#
3: Qxh7#
4: Ba6#
5: Qxh7#
6: ...Bh4#
7: Qxe5#
8.: g4#
9: ...Re1#
10...Nf2#
11: Rd1+ Kh7 Dxh5#
12: Re8+ Rxe8 Rxe8#
13: Bg6+ (or anywhere else along this diagonal) Kg8 Qh7#
14: ...Qxh2+ Kf1 Qh1#
15: ...Bd5+ Kh8 Be5#
16: ...Nh6+ Kh8 Be5#
17: Qd8+ Rxd8 Rxd8+ Rxd8 Rxd8#
18: Bxh7+ Kh8 Bg6+ Kg8 Qh7#
19: Nh6+ Kh8 Qg8+ Rxg8 Nf7#
20: Qxh7+ Kxh7 Rh3+ Kg8 Rh8#
21: Nf5 Kg8 Nh6+ Kh8 Be5#
22: Rh1+ Kg8 Rh8+ Kxh8 Qh1+ Kg8 Qh7+ Kf8 Qh8+ Re7 Qxg7#
23:Bd5 (or anywhere else except to e4) Kb1 Be4+ Ka1 Be5#
24: ...Qh3 followed by ...Qg2#
25: ...Qh4 followed by ...Qh2#
26: ...**Qg3+ Kf1** (Kh1 Nf2#) **Qf2#**
27: Qxf6 followed by Qg7# (or Qh8#)
28: **Qxh5 gxh5** (Black can extend the agony with...Qc1+ Kh2 Qh1+ (or ...Qxe3 Qh8#) Kxh1 Rc1+ Kh2 Rh1+ Kxh1 but now the checkmate will come) **Rg3#**
29: Bxf7+ Ke7 Nd5#
30: **Bxf7+ Ke7 Ng6+ hxg6** (...Kd6 Qe5#) **Qe5#**
31: **Be3 Rc3** (Bf2# follows otherwise) **Bf2+ Rg3 Bxg3#**
32: c8=Q followed by Qh8#
33: h7 a3 Bf4 (or anywhere else except for b2 and a3) a2 Be5#
34: ...Ng4+ Kh1 Kf1 h2 Nf2#
35: ...f1=N#

Chapter 5: Strategy (I): Material superiority.

Until this point, we have always worked with an only goal in mind: checkmate. On chapter 3, we studied technical maneuvers against a lonely king, while in chapter 4, we focused on chaotic positions that, for some yet mysterious reason, gave us the opportunity to go for an immediate win. Anyway, checkmate was the only thing in mind, and the only success we considered as such.

However, with the skills acquired from chapter 3, you don't need to be a genius to ask yourself. Can't I just try to win a queen or a rook and then trade every other piece until I am fighting a lonely king? Or even the more radical question: Would it be enough with winning a single pawn, then promote him into a queen and win the game?

And, indeed, you don' need a lot of practical experience to realize that that's actually how a huge number of games are won. This chapter will analyze a few examples where victory is achieved like that.

The plan described above sounds great but, unless you are playing a complete beginner, it is much easier said than done!

First of all, what if, while I'm capturing (or preparing the attack on) an enemy pawn/knight/whatever, the opponent launches a counter-offensive at checkmates my king? Isn't that what happened to Greco's rival on game 2? (See chapter 2, on chess notation)

Also, what pieces can I give away in order to take an enemy one? Obviously, a queen is worth more than a pawn, probably more than two? But is it better than five? It's already hard to decide in concrete positions, so does it even make sense to ask it in an abstract general case?

To throw some light on those two issues, I would reformulate them as "How can I safely get/preserve material superiority?" and "What exactly counts as material superiority?"

5.1: The value of the pieces.

Pretty much every single chess book for beginners includes a chart that assigns a "numerical value" to every piece (often taking "pawn=1" as a reference) They are also available everywhere on the Internet, with some slight differences between them, but with similar underlying ideas.

If you have never seen anything like that, stop your search now! If you have already learned one of those, then you will face the great challenge of forgetting about it!

Instead of giving the reader a set of numbers to remember, I prefer to go with him through the basic reasons why some pieces are better than others (just an introduction, since more on the topic will be addressed when we talk about piece activity. I would suggest you to think about it for a while before continuing. Which piece do you think of as the best? Which one is the worst? What about those in between? Chapter 3 gives us a grasp of what the answers would be in the endgame, but… chess games have a lot of moves before those "lonely king endgames" In fact, many of them don't even arrive there!

First things first, the king. How strong is he? We simply don't care! We will never change our king for any of the opponents pieces!

Now onto the pawns. You don't have to be a genius to realize that they are the weakest. Their movement is very limited and they can get completely blocked in many situations (this happens only exceptionally to other pieces) It is true that there is the promotion possibility,

converting them into whatever we want, but moving from the second rank to the eighth takes five moves even on an empty board… Do you really think the opponent will just stand there and wait as we advance our pawns into promotion? Seems unlikely. Let's just say that pawns are very week pieces, but still far from useless, since they hide a huge potential.

OK, pawns suck! You probably already knew! Enough of that! Let's compare bishops and rooks. At first sight, the match looks pretty balanced. Don't they just do the same thing? Or, at least, "a 45º rotation of the same thing"? That's a good point, however, one of the consequences of playing chess in 8x8 boards instead of, let's say, 120x120 sized boards is the fact that diagonals hit the edges way too soon! For instance, a rook on b2 (if nothing stand in its way) can move to 14 different squares /7 horizontally and 7 vertically) while the bishop can move to 7 different locations along the longer diagonal… and only 2 of them along the shorter one!

Another (more important?) advantage for the rook is the possibility of visiting squares of both colors, while bishops are denied access to half of the board. This is sometimes "compensated" by having a light-squared and a dark-squared bishop, but this basically means you need two copies in order to do what others can do with just one.

In conclusions, unless the characteristics of the position dictate otherwise (let's say, no opened files and a lot of the action happening along a diagonal), rooks are stronger than bishops. I would also like to state clearly that, despite what was discussed before, a rook is most often in clear disadvantage when facing a bishop pair.

The strength of the queen seems now an easy topic. She is, for obvious reasons, stronger than rooks and bishops, since she has the ability to "mutate" between them. If you want to give any trouble to Her Majesty

with just rooks and bishops, you will need at least two of them working together (some extra "useless" pawns may also help) Quick digression: two rooks have an advantage over bishop pair and rook+bishop tandems since they can mutually protect each other, something impossible to achieve for the other two combinations.

Fine, so bishops are way better than rooks, rooks have a tiny edge on bishops and the queen is simply a baddass. But there is one piece we have not even mentioned yet: the knight.

If we could read the mind of every chess player in the world and look for their favorite chess piece, we would only get the knight 10% of the time. But that's because the rest of the players don't care about this question!! Well, a few weirdos who do not care about the beauty of the game and are only worried about winning would say the queen, but anyway, there is no doubt that the knight is an amazing, very tricky, irreplaceable chess piece.

Okay, now onto the serious stuff. First of all, the knight is slow, not pawn-liike slow, but quite slow. Rooks and bishops can cross to the other side of the board in just two moves, the knight often needs an eternity. So, maybe the knight is more like a short-range weapon, but is it really? Look at diagram 5.1 and imagine a there is a piece on the e4 square. Considering only squares lying at "two king's-steps distance", if it's a rook (respectively, a bishop or a knight) it can go to the red (respectively, green or yellow) squares. There are exactly eight of each! And there would be no yellow squares outside that "box".
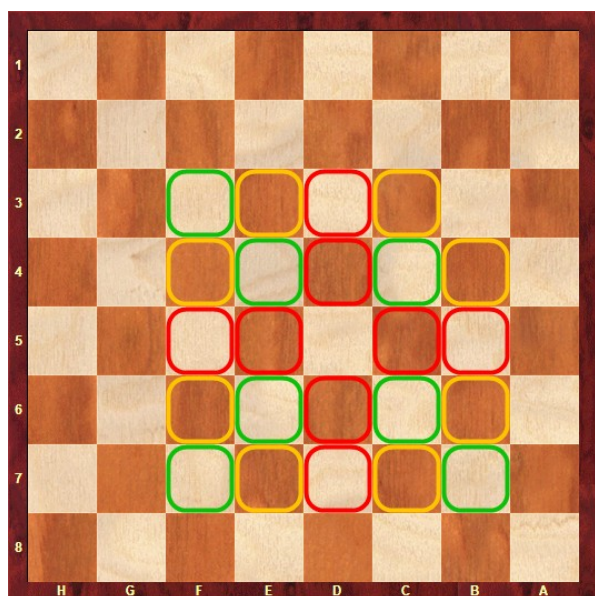
Diagram 5.1: A piece is on e4

Also, even though this is more of a piece activity topic, but, as always, everything is intertwined, look at how poor of a job a knight can do on the corner? Try to reach the g2 square from h1. It takes four moves! Four moves! Seriously? What kind of short-range weapon needs for turns to move one square diagonally. By the way: Have you noticed that knights always change square color at every turn? Both h1 and g2 are light, and the journey cannot be completed in 2 moves, so at least 4 are needed.

So… It looks like the knight sucks? Why is it such a beloved piece then? Is it because people simply like underdogs? At least pawns have the potential to become stronger via promotion, but what does the knight have to offer (remember, from chapter 3, that not even two of them can win against a solo king)

Let's take a look at the knight's positives: On one hand, knights can jump, so by showing diagrams of empty boards, we are far from making a fair comparison. For instance, can bishops, queens, rooks and kings move at the starting position? I could just as well have shown that diagram and claim that the knight is the only valuable piece in the game! After all, every single game reaches the starting position, have you ever played a chess game on an empty board?

Fine, so knights can jump. Great! What else do they have to offer? Knights have a very special pair of "dual properties":

1. If an enemy piece (apart from another knight) is attacking a knight, it cannot answer by just capturing the attacker
2. If a knight is attacking an enemy piece (apart from another knight) it cannot answer by just capturing the knight.

So… Is this an advantage or a disadvantage? Well, at first glance, it seems that, because of (1), knights should be a very vulnerable piece that can be easily pushed away from their position. However, property (2) is way more interesting. It means that knights can simultaneously attack multiple targets without them being able to do anything about it except for running away. If you have already played a few games, I am pretty an enemy knight has already attacked your king and queen in the same move, with your queen having no chance of surviving!

After pages and pages of discussion, we have already "sorted" pawns, bishops, rooks and queens in terms of their power, but we are still at the starting point respecting to knights. At this point, you may be struggling to resist the temptation of just ignore my advice and go find one of those charts I ranted about before. But I think this argument, even though abstract and far from the practice, can help you better understand the game.

Anyway, but do not worry, I would not allow my readers to go to the outside world without knowing how strong their knights really are. We will reach a "conclusion" by the end of this chapter.

5.2: Simplification.

If I had to choose one only concept to remember from this chapter, it would be the idea of simplification. Let's assume we have material superiority. Put simply, simplification is the process of removing pieces from the board, so that our material superiority becomes more noticeable, while the opponent's chances of fighting back get diminished.

The following two games show examples where simplification leads to an easy victory for the stronger side. You will notice that the players are quite weak. This is due to the fact that, among masters, it is usual to resign in positions with that kind of disadvantage. However, at our skill level, it is important to understand how to proceed in this situations. We will often rush through the opening moves, since they are not our main interest right now, but you can try to make sense of them yourself.

Unknown − Unknown
Chess.com, 2018

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.e3 Be7 5.Bd3 a6 6.Nbd2 h6 7.0–0 Nbd7 8.Re1 0–0 9.b3 c6?! 10.e4 dxe4 11.Nxe4 Nxe4 12.Bxe4 Nf6 13.Bc2 b5? 14.Ne5 Bb7 15.Qd3 h5? 16.Bg5 Re8 17.Rad1 Bd6 18.Bxf6 Qxf6 *Exercise 1: What would have happened in case of 18...gxf6?* **19.Qh7+ Kf8 20.Nd7+ Ke7 21.Nxf6 gxf6**

Diagram 5.2: Position after 21...gxf6

White has a queen in exchange for a bishop, but it is not time to relax yet. If too many pieces stay on the board, Black could still have a tiny chance of attacking the white king.

22.d5 A first preventive move, blocking the bishop's diagonal. **cxd5 23.cxd5 e5** *Exercise 2: Could Black just take the pawn?* **24.Bg6 Rf8 25.Rc1 Bxd5** Black is allowed to take the pawn, but more piece trading will come next. So White is basically giving away a tiny part of his advantage in exchange for simplifications **26.Be4 Bxe4 27.Qxe4 a5 28.Red1 Rad8 29.Rc6 Rd7 30.Rcxd6** We said rooks are better than bishops, but White will get a pawn and, more importantly, the position would be simplified further **Rxd6 31.Qb7+ Ke6 32.Rxd6+ Kxd6 33.Qxb5 Rc8 34.g3** Now ...Rc1 is no longer a threat **Rc5 35.Qb6+ Rc6 36.Qxa5 Rc5 37.Qxc5+** The ultimate simplification! White changes his queen for the enemy rook because he's sure he will get a new one, with the position becoming completely riskless **Kxc5 38.Kf1** The king is brought into the game to help the advance of the panws. **Kb4 39.Ke2 Ka3 40.Ke3 Kxa2 41.b4** The pawn has escaped! **Kb3 42.b5 Kc4 43.b6 Kd5 44.b7 Ke6 45.b8=Q f5 46.f4 exf4+ 47.Kxf4 Kf6 48.Qe5+ Kg6 49.Qxf5+ Kg7 50.Qxh5 Kf6 51.Qe5+ Kg6 52.h4 f6 53.h5+ Kg7 54.Qe7+ Kh6 55.Qxf6+ Kh7 56.Kg5 Kg8 57.Qe7 Kh8 58.Kg6 Kg8 59.Qg7# 1–0**

Game 4: Unknown − Unknown
Chess.com, 2018

1.f4 Nf6 2.Nc3 g6 3.e4 d6 4.d4 Bg7 5.Be2 0–0 6.g4 e5 7.g5 Nfd7 8.dxe5 dxe5 9.f5 f6 10.Bc4+ Kh8 11.fxg6 hxg6 12.Qg4

Diagram 5.3: Position after 12. Qg4

Bh6 Black has to give away his bishop in order to prevent mate **13.Qh4 Qe7 14.Qxh6+ Qh7** Of course, White does not refuse the queen trade. Of course this stops his immediate chances of attack, but who cares? White can simply win the "war of attrition" **15.Qxh7+ Kxh7 16.Nd5 Na6 17.gxf6** Now White trades it all. **Nxf6 18.Nxf6+ Rxf6 19.Bg5 Rf8 20.Bxa6 bxa6 21.0–0–0 Bb7 22.Ne2 Bxe4 23.Rhf1 Rf5 24.Rxf5 gxf5 25.Ng3 Kg6 26.Nxe4 fxe4 27.h4 Rf8 28.Re1 Re8 29.Rxe4** With only one rook left, Black will be unable to defend his pawns **Kh5 30.Kd2 a5 31.Ke3 Kg6 32.Rc4 c6 33.Rxc6+ Kf7 34.Ke4 Kg7 35.h5** Black's rook is too busy defending pawns, White can simply walk forward **Kh7 36.Rc7+ Kg8 37.h6 Kh8 38.Bf6+ Kg8 39.h7+ Kf8 40.Bg7# 1–0**

Fine, so if we have a huge material advantage, simplifying is an easy way to victory. But let's say that, for example, we are in a rook vs bishop situation. If only the rook and the bishop stay with the kings, the game will most likely finish in a draw. Should we keep a few pawns? Maybe knights? Queens? Let's look at an example (this time from actual strong tournament players, not just the average Joe you find on the Internet)

Game 5. Dolzhykova- Ianovsky
Kiev, 2005

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d5 3.exd5 Bd6 4.Nc3 Nf6 5.d4 e4 6.Ne5 0–0 7.Bg5 Re8 8.Bb5 Nbd7 9.Bxf6 Nxf6 10.Bxe8 Qxe8 11.0–0 Bxe5 12.dxe5 Qxe5 Fine. White now has a rook for a bishop. What's next?
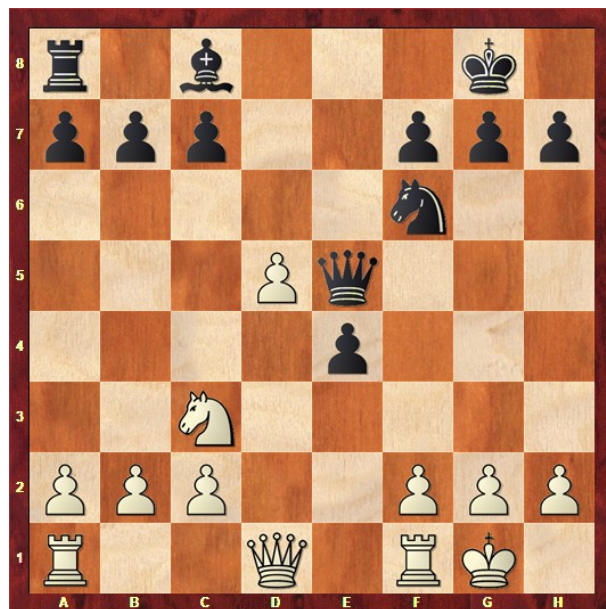
Diagram 5.4: Position after 12...Qxe5

13.f4 Qd6 The "en passant" capture gives nothing special to Black 13...exf3 14.Qxf3 **14.Qd4 Bf5 15.Rad1 a6 16.h3** Against the direct attempt of simplification, Black can reply 16.Qe5 Qb6+ 17.Kh1 Bg4 18.Rde1 Re8 getting some initiative 19.Qg5 e3 This pawn will become a headache. **16...Re8 17.Rd2 e3 18.Re2 c5 19.Qd1 b5 20.Qe1 c4 21.Kh1** I would suggest to directly take the pawn 21.Rxe3 **21...b4 22.Nd1 Nxd5 23.Nxe3 Nxe3** Black, being the weaker side, should have avoided simplifications at all costs, but, how? A possible complicated continuation could have been 23...Qe7 24.Qg3 Nxe3 The gain is only temporary 25.Rfe1 Qd8 26.Rxe3 Rf8 Simplifications have been avoided, but in exchange of Black pieces now doing pretty much nothing. **24.Rxe3 Rxe3 25.Qxe3 Bxc2** At least Black gets a pawn in echange for the simplifications. *Exercise 3: How to proceed at White?*

Diagram 5.5 Position after 25...Bxc2

Diagram 5.6: Rook vs bishop

26.Qe8+ Qf8 27.Qc6 It would seem that the following continuation would fit better into our simplification plans 27.Qxf8+ Kxf8 However, the advanced bl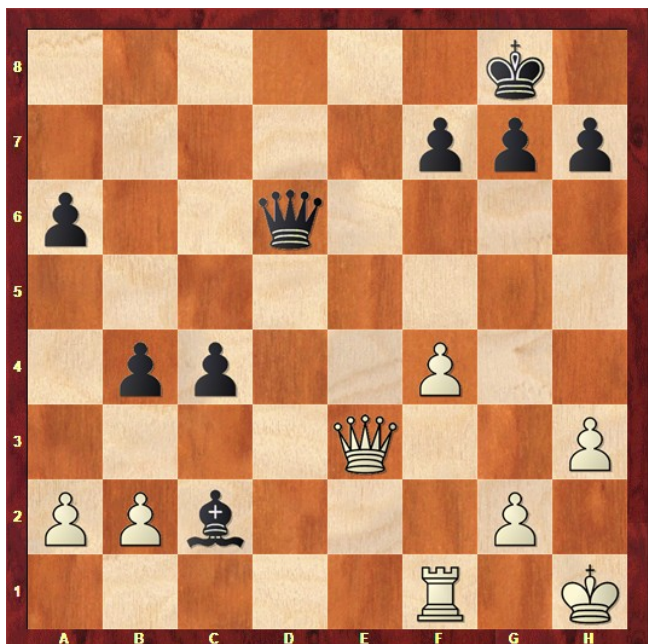ack pawns could cause some trouble 28.Rc1 Bd3 29.Kg1 Also, the move from the game, 27. Qc6! is a very strong attacking move (not only because of the threats against Black pawns, but also because of the incorporation of the rook, via the "e" file) **27...Bf5 28.Re1!!** [Much stronger than to simply take the pawn on c4] **28...c3** 28...Be6 29.f5 And now Re8 is unstoppable **29.Re8 cxb2** Black is forced to give up his queen. His hopes are related to the b2 pawn, however, White has a way to stop it **30.Rxf8+ Kxf8 31.Qc5+! Kg8 32.Qxf5 a5 33.Qb1 a4 34.Qxb2 1–0** Being one queen down and about to lose his pawns, Black resigned

Exercise 4: White to move

As you can see, in rook vs bishop positions, simplifications become a more difficult task, but they are still one of the strongest strategies available. After all (try it with a friend if you can and wish) a position like the one on diagram 5.6 is very likely to result in a victory for White (let's say, for the sake of example, that, it's Black to move)

To conclude this section, you may want to invest some time into thinking how you to continue, as Black, on exercise 4.
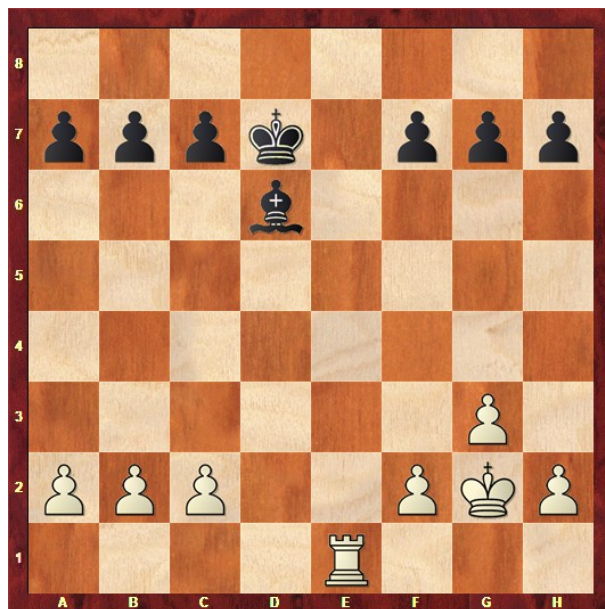
5.3: The value of the knight.

As we've seen before, when we are ahead in material, it is often a good strategy to trade pieces and get a simpler position, where the opponents weaker (or outnumbered) forces will not be able to generate any counterplay.

All of that would be great… only if we actually knew the relative strength of all pieces! In chapter 5.1, we learned that bishops are better than pawns, rooks have a slight edge on bishops, while queens most often are capable of beating any of them. So, where does the knight land? First, try to make your own educated guess, and we will see how far from the truth it is.

I think we can all agree that, in most situations, a knight will be weaker than a queen. With no immediate tactics taking place, the knight would be the preferable piece only in ridiculous positions like diagram 5.7
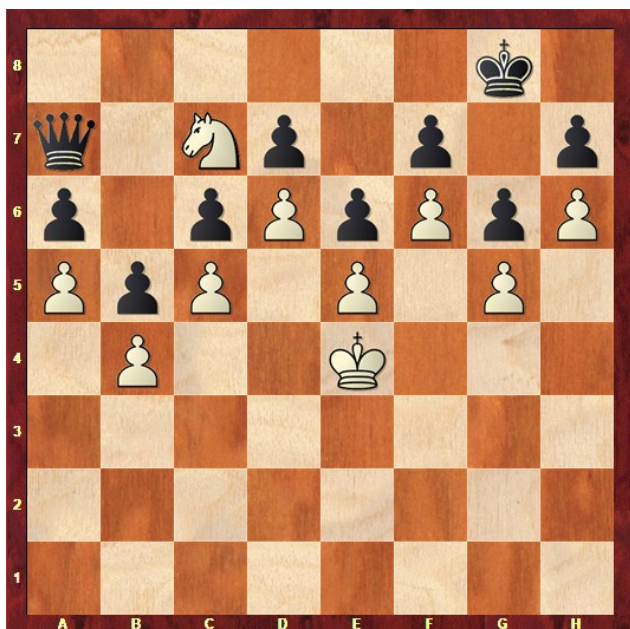

Diagram 5.7: Knights rule!

Now take the position from diagram 5.6 and replace the black bishop with a knight. If you can, try playing that position a couple of times with a friend, otherwise, analyze some possible continuations (or simply believe me): the knight will have a hard time! If we removed every pawn from any

half of the board, there would be chances of getting a draw, but not much more.

However, if it's the rook who gets replaced by a knight instead, the battle would be pretty close! Indeed, one of those magical coincidences that makes chess so exciting is the existing balance between bishop and knight despite the fact of their respective skills having nothing to do with each other.

5.4: Some final considerations.

Please take with a grain of salt everything said in this chapter with regard to piece strength. When facing a real position on a real board, abstract absolutes often have to be forgotten in favor of the specific characteristics for that given position. For instance, there are many examples of players as good as World Championship contenders (and winners) giving away one of his rooks in exchange for a knight or a bishop simply because, on that particular occasion, the "weaker" piece resulted to be more powerful.

Similarly, the statement "knights and bishops have similar strengths" does not mean that all knights are interchangeable with all bishops in every situation. It just means that, "on average", we cannot say the game is "biased" towards either of them. Depending on what's on the board, there are bishops that will get their ass kicked by knights, and there are knights who won't stand a chance against some bishops. A player who wants to reach a good level must learn how to identify them (of course, this topic will be widely discussed later on the series)

If you are one of those beginners who checks whether he has material superiority by counting the pieces that have left the board, leave that habit right now!! We do not care about pieces which are not there anymore, we care about

those who are still on the board! Count and judge the strength of those ones instead!

Finally, I will present you some chess jargon (we'll use them frequently from this point on) that you'll now be able to understand:

- Unless the opposite is stated, when a chess player talks about "pieces", pawns are not included.

- Bishops and knights are referred jointly as "minor pieces", with "major pieces" being queens and rooks, even though this term is less frequently used. Sometimes, when no misunderstood is possible, knights and bishops will be referred as just "pieces" You will often hear "I dropped a piece!" meaning he lost a minor piece.

- If a player has a rook for either a bishop or a knight, we will be said to have "exchange advantage"

Anyway, who cares? Onto the next chapter!

Solutions to exercises:

1: White would simply mate after 19.Qh7+ Kf8 20.Qxf7#
2: 23...Bxd5 is met with 24.Rxd5!, with the e6 pawn being unable to recapture (Black would "put himself in check"
3: Qe8+ is a solid move that leads to simplifications. But it is even better because of other reasons, as we will see in the game.
4: Being a rook and a bishop up, there are plenty of continuations that leave White with a decisive advantage. However, if your opponent were the World Champion, my recommendation would be Re8+. Black cannot avoid simplifications without giving away extra material, so after **1. Re8+ Qxe8 2. Qxe8+ Rxe8 3.Rxe8 Kh7**, even Mr. Carlsen himself has to say goodbye to all hope

Chapter 6: Tactics (II): Winning material.

If you have been playing some chess games while reading this book, particularly against more experienced players, you may notice that the themes explained on the previous three chapters are used more often by your opponents than by yourself.

It may result frustrating to know how to mate in certain situations only to never be able to achieve them, or to know about simplifying strategies when you are ahead on material and then be at least one rook down in every single game.
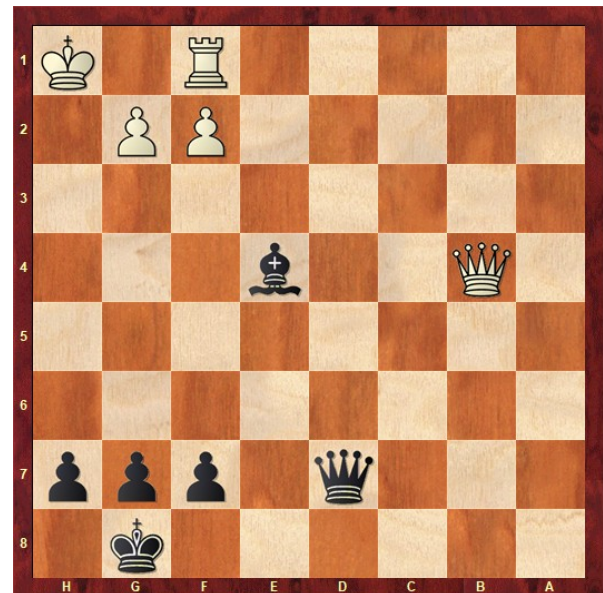
On this chapter, we will see some of the most important tactical motifs that will allow you to exploit your opponent's mistakes by checkmating, winning material, or getting an advantage of any other kind.

6.1: Pinned pieces.

We say that a piece is pinned if, by moving, a more important piece (generally the king) will be exposed to attack. On diagram 6.1, both Black knights are pinned. However, the pin on the c6 knight is a more restrictive one, since he is forbidden to move under any circumstance. Meanwhile, the f6 knight could possibly move, for example, if he was about to check the enemy king.

Exercise 1: Black to move

Exercise 2: White to move

I cannot exaggerate the convinience of looking first at checks and captures, then mate threats, other threats and finally the rest of the moves whenever you are analyzing a position (or, for instance, your opponent's possible replies to your move)

Diagram 6.1: Pinned knights
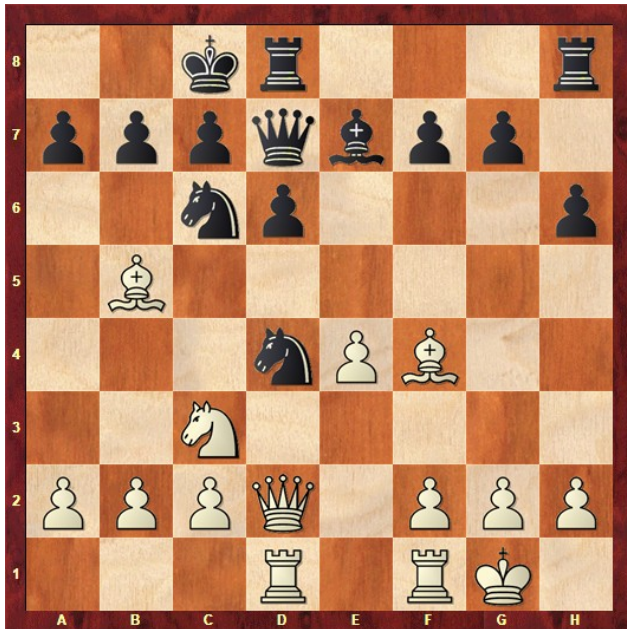
Exercise 3: White to move
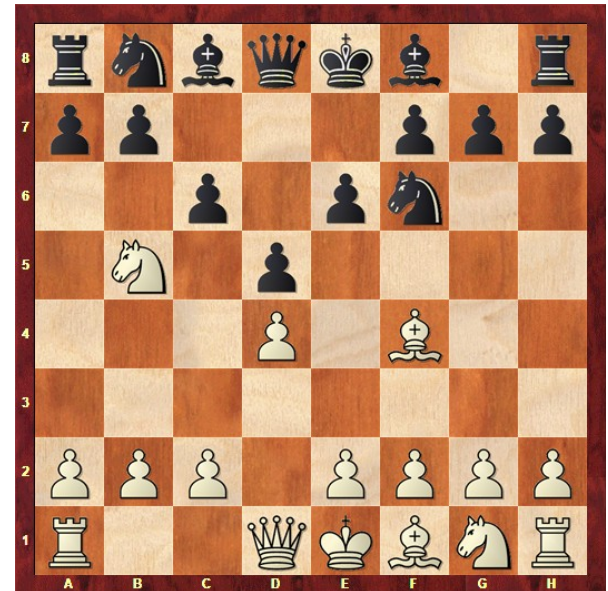
Exercise 5: White to move
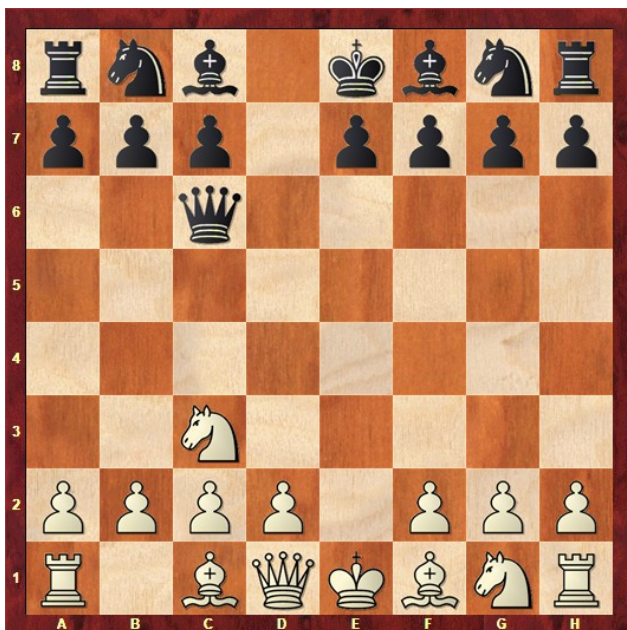
Exercise 4: White to move

Exercise 6: Should White kick the g4 knight away by moving h3?

6.2: Double attack.

If we attack only one target at a time, the opponent is likely to able able to defend. However, if multiple threats are posed at one, defense becomes a more complicated or even impossible task. Cases were one of the targets is the enemy king can be particularly devastating.
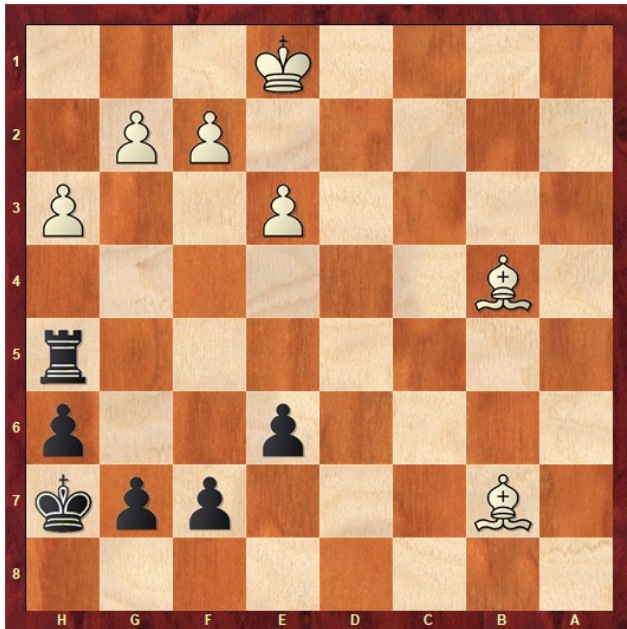
Exercise 7: Black to move
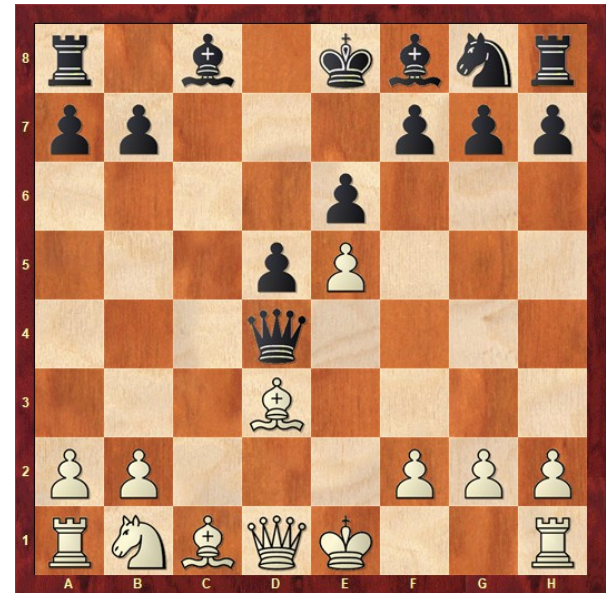
Exercise 9: White to move
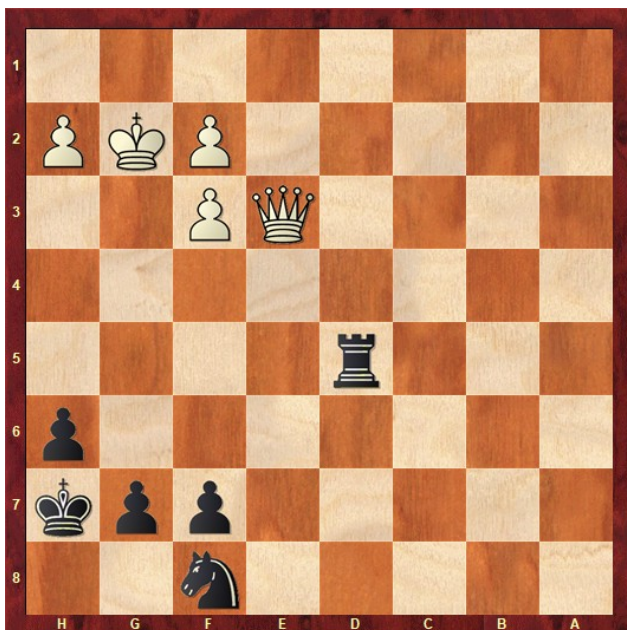
Exercise 8: It's White's turn. Is there any hope for Black!
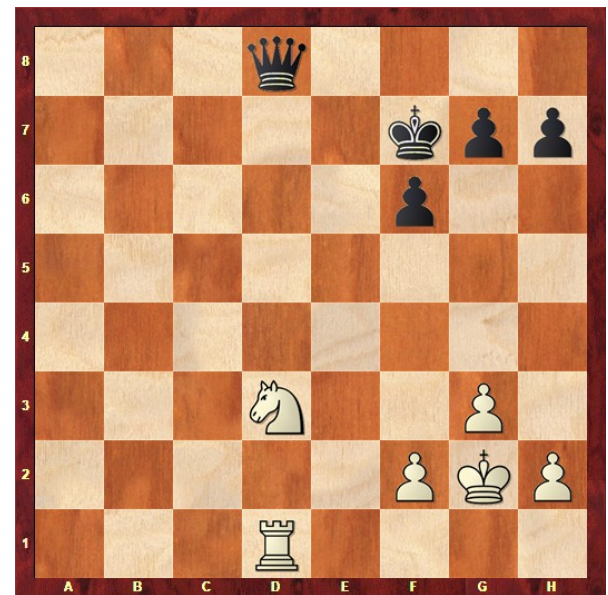
Exercise 10: White to move

6.3: Discovered attack.

There is a specially devastating type of double attack, which happens when a piece, by moving, releases the power of another piece that was previously being blocked. The following exercises show some instructive examples:

Diagram 11: Black to move
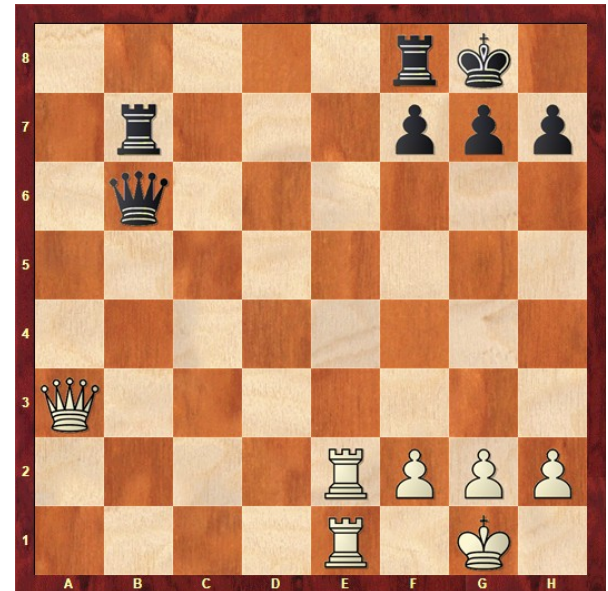
Exercise 13: White to move
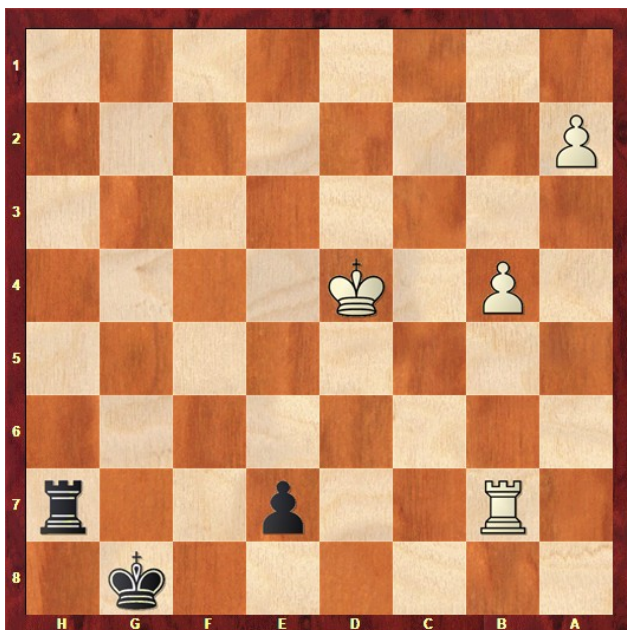
Diagram 12: Black to move
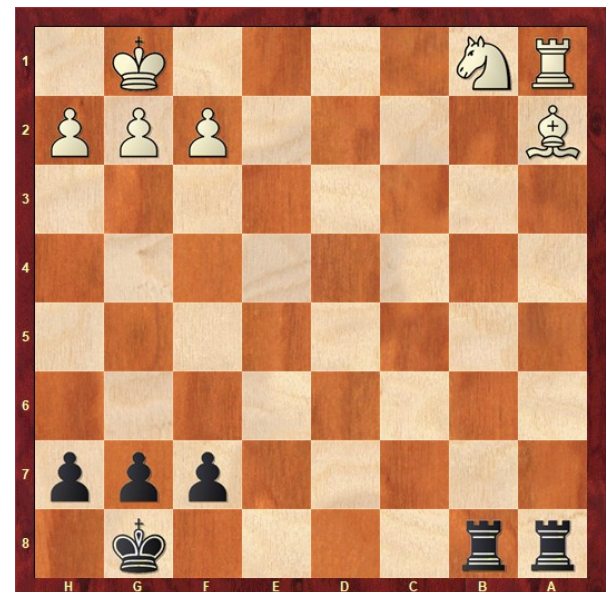
Exercise 14: Black to move

6.4: Deviation and elimination of defenders.

Kicking away a defending piece is one of the most frequent ways to successfully attack a target. A more radical option is to simply remove it from the board.
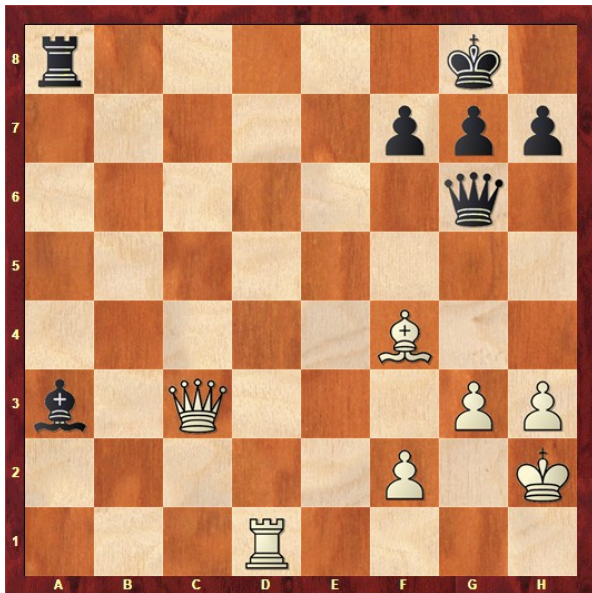
Exercise 15: White to move

6.5: Miscellaneous.

During a real game, no one will be there to tell you when you are in front of a chance to exploit a pin, or when a double attack is possible. The following exercises won't either.

Exercise 18: White to move

Exercise 16: White to move

Exercise 19: Black to move

Exercise 17: White to move
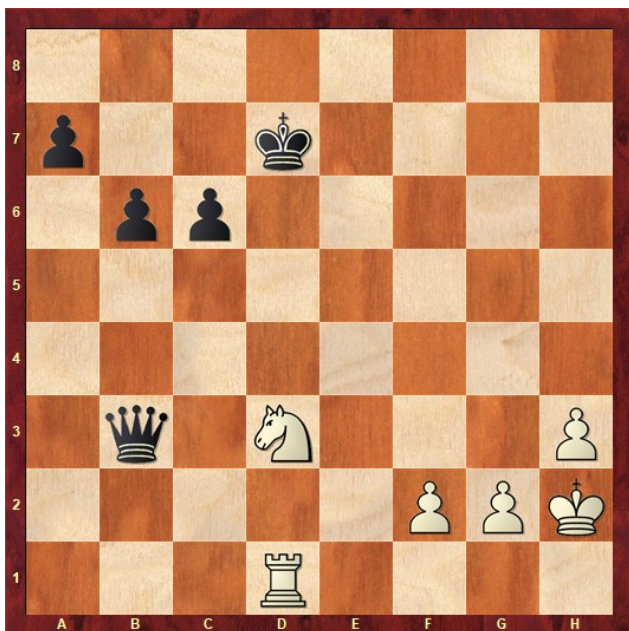
Exercise 20: White to move
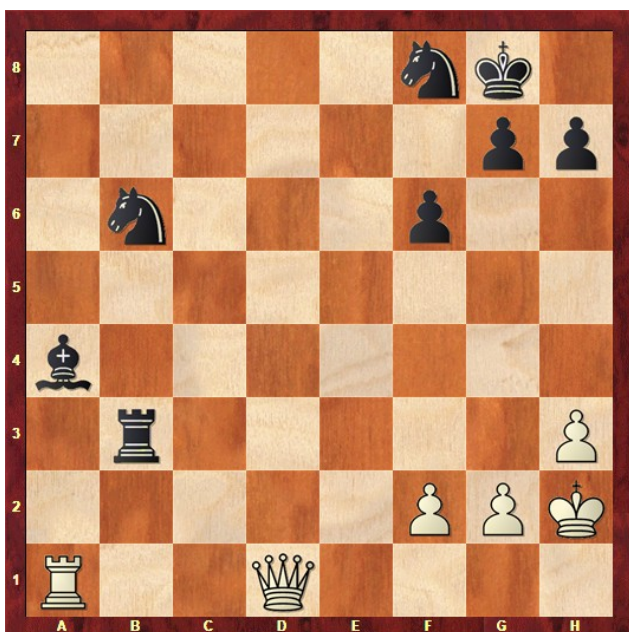
Exercise 21: White to move
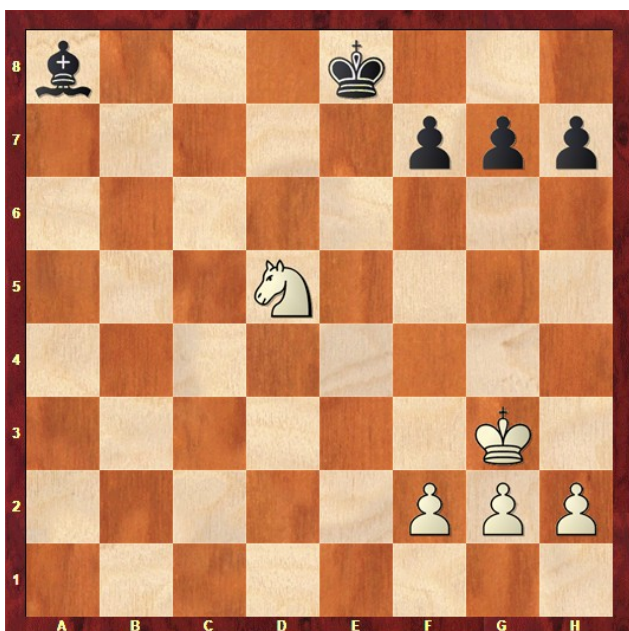
Exercise 22: White to move

6.6: Some thoughts on tactics.

Beginners' games are often decided by tactical mistakes. Be constantly looking for them, since otherwise you may be missing a great opportunity. For that matter, the "forced moves (checks, captures and so on) method" can be a great tool at your disposal.

You may notice that spotting tactical winning moves is often easier in these exercises in comparison with an actual game, as here you already know there is a winning move, while in practice you do not have that information.

However, what (almost) always stays true is that there is one move (or a handful) that is better than the others even though it may not lead you into a decisive advantage. Later on this series, we will explore other types of smaller advantages to be obtained

Anyway, as we have said (and still will say) many times throughout this book, there is no doubt that improving your tactical skills is the most critical aspect to take into account if you want to increase your overall strength.

Many books and websites offer you the possibility of solving chess puzzles like the ones showed in this guide, with thousands of them available. A few minutes of practice everyday will already be enough to strengthen your play.

Finally, I would like to remark that the tactical motifs exposed here are just examples of the most important cases. No matter how exhaustive we are, there will always be move that fall outside of our classification.

Solutions to exercises:

1:...Qh3+ (the g2 pawn is pinned and therefore it is illegal to take the black queen) Kg1 Qxg2#

2: Qxd4 wins a knight. (Bxc6+ fails to win anything after ...Nxc6)

3: Qxd4 Nxd4 Bxd7+ Rxd7 Rxd4 and White is one knight up

4: Bb5! Pinning and threatening the queen at the same time!

5: Nc7+ and now black has to choose between giving away his queen (...Qxc7 Bxc7) or lose his a8 rook

6: No way! Check by yourself that Black will be doing great after h3?? Nd4!!

7: Rb5 (double attack) Be4+ f5 (with yet another double attack) Note that after, for example, Rb5 Be4+ Kg8 Bd2, Black has won no material at all.

8: At first glance, White is about a rook by means of double attack. But Black can fight back! After Qe4+ Ng6!, Qxd5 is met with Nf4+! Winning the queen. So the white queen still has to prove herself against the black knight+rook tandem, with a White victory being very unlikely Also, the alternative double attack (Qe8) can be defended with ...Kg8.

9: **Bb5+ Bd7** (against other moves, White simple captures the queen on d4) **Bxd7+ Kxd7 Qxd4 +-**

10: Ne5! And Black can only choose between being a rook down (...fxe5) or just a knight (...Ke8 Rxd8 Kxd8)

11: ...Rf2 Qg2 Rfxg2 (other captures are possible as well) Black's threats still continue.

12: ...e5+ winning the rook.

13: Qxf8+ Kxf8 Re8#

14: ...Rxa2!!

15: Qxa3! (….Rxa3 is answered with Rc8+)

16: Bh6 Qxh6 Qxe5+ Qg7 (or...Kg8 Nf6+ Kf7 Bh5+ Kg7 Ng4+) **Qxd6**

17: Nd5+! Black's queen is lost.

18: **Nxf6+ Bxf6** (or whatever) **Qxh7#**

19: ...Rxd6 Rxd6 Qxd6 exd6 Bxc3

20: Nc5+

21: Rxa4 Nxa4 Qxb3+ Kh8 Qxa4

22: **Nc7+ Kd7 Nxa8.** This is an interesting case of deviation. Black can retake the knight with ...**Kc6** (there is no escape for the trapped a8 knight), but White would simply play **Kf4** and chase the enemy pawns with his king. An example could be **Kb7 Ke5 Kxa8 Kd6 Kb7 Ke7 f5 Kf7 g6 Kg7** check by yourself how easily White will win now.

Chapter 7: Strategy (II): Attacking the enemy king.

The last two chapters where mainly focused on material (of course, a few checkmates appeared here and there anyway) but in this one, we are going to turn our focus back to the ultimate goal of the game: checkmate.

This does not mean that we should forget about the possibility of a superior endgame, we are just saying that, in the games shown on this chapter, attacks against the enemy king will be the main theme.

The tactical motifs seen in the previous chapter will, alongside many others, appear recurrently in these games. Piece activity will also be vaguely introduced, since, as you may expect, pieces who stay at home doing nothing are not exactly the secret ingredient of a successful attack. Put in other words, if you are looking for a checkmate, your pieces need a way to pose threats on the enemy king.

Feel free to study the opening moves of the games in detail if you are curious, but do not worry if you do not get the idea behind some of them. We will discuss the basic principles of the opening in the next chapter. The important stuff will begin after the first diagram of every game.

Our first example comes from a classical 19th century game between two of the greatest masters of the time. Let's see how they do it.

Game 6: Bird- Morphy
London, 1858

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 f5 4.Nc3 fxe4 5.Nxe4 d5 6.Ng3 e4 7.Ne5 Nf6 8.Bg5 Bd6 9.Nh5 0–0 10.Qd2 Qe8 11.g4? Supporting the h5 knight, however, retreating was a better option.

Diagram 7.1: Position after 11.g4

11...Nxg4 12.Nxg4?! Since he is about to lose the h5 knight anyway, White should have tried 12.Nxg7!? **Qxh5 13.Ne5 Nc6 14.Be2 Qh3 15.Nxc6 bxc6 16.Be3 Rb8 17.0–0–0 Rxf2!** A very strong move with an amazing tactical justification **18.Bxf2 Qa3** The queen cannot be captured! **19.c3 Qxa2 20.b4 Qa1+ 21.Kc2 Qa4+ 22.Kb2 Bxb4!!** Sacrificing yet another piece in order to expose the enemy king. **23.cxb4 Rxb4+ 24.Qxb4** *Exercise 1: Was White forced to give away his queen?* **Qxb4+ 25.Kc2 e3!** The queen alone will not be able to make too much harm, but after this move, the passive c8 bishop will join the game **26.Bxe3 Bf5+ 27.Rd3** (27.Kc1? Qc3#) **Qc4+ 28.Kd2 Qa2+ 29.Kd1 Qb1+ 0-1** Even though White is going to lose a lot of material, I would suggest you not to resign in this position. However, these players were world class at the time, and Morphy would absolutely have won without much effort.

The ineffectiveness of White pieces at the task of protecting their king and their inability to generate any counterattack where the main factors which, combined with Morphy's brilliancy, led to a Black

defeat in the previous game. Similar themes can be found in the next game.

Game 7: Lasker - Bauer
Amsterdam 1889

1.f4 d5 2.e3 Nf6 3.b3 e6 4.Bb2 Be7 5.Bd3 b6 6.Nc3 Bb7 7.Nf3 Nbd7 8.0–0 0–0 9.Ne2 c5 10.Ng3 Qc7 11.Ne5 Nxe5 12.Bxe5 Qc6 13.Qe2 a6 14.Nh5 Nxh5 See diagram 7.2 What seemed like an innocent piece trade is about to become a real nightmare for Black!

Diagram 7.2: Position after 14...Nxh5

15.Bxh7+!! (15.Qxh5 looks threatening but 15...f5 blocks the bishop's sight and does the job for Black) **Kxh7 16.Qxh5+ Kg8 17.Bxg7** (This was the point of the previous sacrifice)
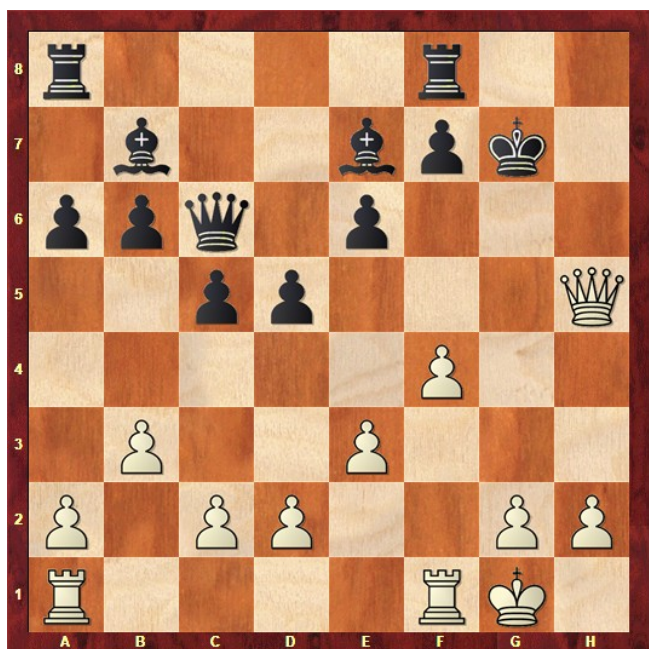
DIagram 7.3: Position after 17...Kxg7

Kxg7 (See diagram 7.3) The black king is uncovered in open field, but White has sacrificed both bishops, so either mate is found or Black will eventually come back on top.

18.Qg4+ Similar to the two rooks mate on chapter 3. White wants to confine the enemy king to just one file, then bring a rook to h3. **Kh7 19.Rf3** 19.Qh5+ would only lead to draw by repetition **e5** The only move to avoid mate. **20.Rh3+ Qh6 21.Rxh6+ Kxh6 22.Qd7** Winning yet another bishop. The fact that Lasker had to predict this exact outcome or otherwise miss the opportunity of 15.Bxh7+ shows you that accurate tactical calculation is critical in chess. **Bf6 23.Qxb7 Kg7 24.Rf1 Rab8 25.Qd7 Rfd8 26.Qg4+ Kf8 27.fxe5 Bg7 28.e6 Rb7 29.Qg6 f6 30.Rxf6+** This is not just simplification. Can you see how to get from here to a queen vs rook situation? **Bxf6 31.Qxf6+ Ke8 32.Qh8+ Ke7 33.Qg7+ Kxe6 34.Qxb7 Rd6 35.Qxa6 d4 36.exd4 cxd4 37.h4 d3 38.Qxd3** Ending any Black chance by just simplifying. **1–0**

In the following example, attack is used to obtain material advantage. After that, the way to victory was shown by simplification.

Game 8: Alekhine - Rubinstein
Karlsbad, 1923

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 Be7 5.Bg5 Nbd7 6.e3 0–0 7.Rc1 c6 8.Qc2 a6 9.a4 Re8 10.Bd3 dxc4 11.Bxc4 Nd5 12.Bf4 Nxf4 13.exf4 c5 14.dxc5 Qc7 15.0–0 Qxf4 16.Ne4 Nxc5 17.Nxc5 Bxc5 18.Bd3 Regaining the pawn by double attack. **b6 19.Bxh7+ Kh8 20.Be4 Ra7 21.b4** See diagram 7.4:

Diagram 7.4: Position after 21.b4

Bf8 *Exercise 2: Why do other moves fail?* **22.Qc6 Rd7 23.g3 Qb8 24.Ng5 Red8**
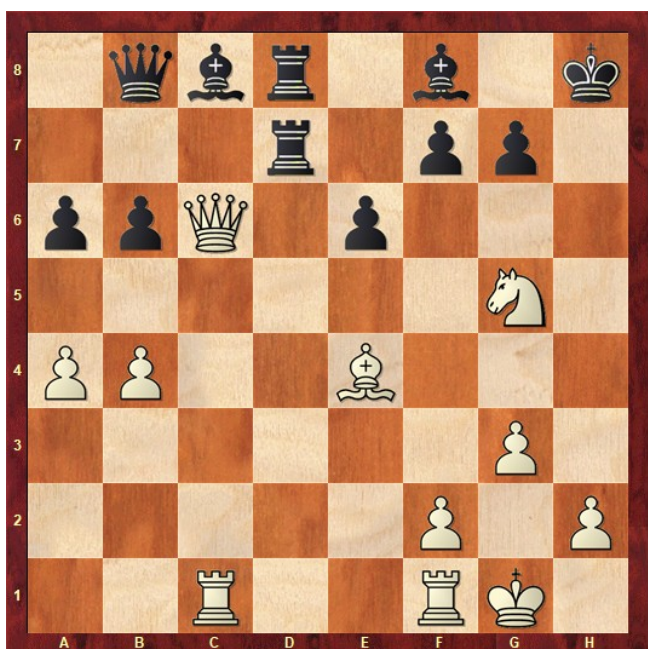
Diagram 7.5: Position after 24...Red8

25.Bg6!! Qe5 Exercise 3: Why can't Black just take the bishop? **26.Nxf7+ Rxf7 27.Bxf7 Qf5 28.Rfd1 Rxd1+ 29.Rxd1 Qxf7 30.Qxc8 Kh7 31.Qxa6 Qf3 32.Qd3+** Black resigned, since the game is lost after trading queens..**1–0**

In the games seen so far, because of the players being some of the greatest in

history, very complicated tactics are required to make an attack successful. Games 9 and 10 provide examples that look more like those attacks a beginner would make.

Game 9. Pérez - Camarero
Lugo, 2011

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 exd5 4.Nf3 Bd6 5.Bd3 Nf6 6.0–0 0–0 7.Bg5 Bg4 8.Nbd2 Nbd7 9.h3 Bh5 10.c3 c6 11.Qc2 Qc7 12.Rfe1 Rae8 13.Nh4 Bg6 14.Nf5 Bxf5 15.Bxf5 h6 16.Be3 Re7 17.Re2 Rfe8 18.c4 Qb8 19.c5 Bc7 20.Rae1 Nh5 21.Bxd7 Rxd7 22.Qf5 Nf6 23.Bxh6 This not only wins a pawn, it also leaves the enemy king more vulnerable to assault **Rxe2 24.Rxe2 gxh6 25.Qxf6 Qf8 26.Nf3 Bd8 27.Qf5 Rc7 28.Ne5 f6 29.Ng6 Qf7 30.Re3 b6 31.Rg3 Qh7** See exercise 4:

Exercise 4: White to move

Game 10: Luther - Salgado
Ferrol, 2002

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.0–0 b5 6.Bb3 Bb7 7.d3 Bc5 8.Nc3 d6 9.a3 0–0 10.Ne2 h6 11.Ng3 Ne7 12.Nh4 Kh7 13.Be3 Bxe3 This cannot be good, since it allows the f1 rook to join the game. **14.fxe3 d5** This move blocks White's bishop's sight, but fails to defend White's threat. (See diagram 7.6)

Diagram 7.6: Position after 14...d5

15.Rxf6 This allows the queen to enter the game via h5. It also creates a new target: the h6 pawn. After it falls, the king will be very vulnerable. **gxf6 16.Qh5 f5 17.Nhxf5 Nxf5 18.Qxf5+** (18.Nxf5 is answered with 18...Qg5, stopping the attack with simplifications) **Kh8 19.Qxe5+ Kg8 20.Nf5 Qg5 21.h4** *Exercise 5: Why did Black resign?* **1–0**

Before the end of the chapter, let's see an illustrative game on attacking an uncastled king.

Game 11: Zhigalko - Agdestein
Doha, 2016

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.Nxf7 Kxf7 7.Qf3+ Ke6 Other moves lose the d5 knight, leaving Black with one pawn less and no right to castle
8.Nc3 Nce7 9.0–0 c6 10.d4 Opening lines to increase the pressure. 10.Re1 was also possible **10...Kd6 11.Bg5 Be6 12.Rfe1 exd4 13.Ne4+ Kc7 14.Qg3+ Kb6 15.Qb3+ Kc7 16.Qg3+ Kb6 17.Nd6 Qd7 18.a4 a5 19.Qe5 Ng6 20.Qxd4+ c5 21.Qd3 Qxd6** White loses the knight, but it will be regained profitting from the pin **22.Rad1 h6 23.Rxe6** Beautiful and sound!

23...Qxe6 24.Bxd5 Qd6?? Black blunders. Black should have played 24...Qd7 25.Qxg6+ Ka7 26.Be3 With still a quite complicated game. *Exercise 6: How does White win the game?*

I hope you enjoyed the previous games. Attacking is probably the most beautiful part in chess, leading to very interesting situations. As mentioned many times before, accuracy in calculation is key, but it is also good to take some ideas from the masters and their games. Hopefully, as you keep progressing, you will also be able to make your own "art pieces"

Solutions to exercises:

1: Yes, he was. White would get checkmated after 24.Kc1? Qa1+ Kb2 Qb2#
2: Bishop retreats to any square but f8 are faced with 22.Qxc8!
3: 25...fxg6 26. Qe4! There is no good reply. For example, 26...Bd6 27.Qh4+ Kh8 28.Qh7+ Kf8 29. Qh8+ Ke7 30. Kxg7+ Ke8 31.Qg8+ Ke7 32. Qf7# Alternatives to 26...Bd6 make it even easier for White.
4: **32. Ne7+** was played and Black resigned as his queen is lost.
5: 21...Qg4 22.Nh6+! 21...f6 Qe6+ and White wins the queen anyway Other moves either lose the queen or allow 22.Qg7#
6: The game continued **25.Qb3+ Ka7 26.Qxb7# 1–0** These things can happen in a 5 minutes game.

Chapter 8: The opening(I): Basic opening principles.

We have already discussed a variety of topics in this guide, however, none of them was necessarily related to the first moves of the game. In this chapter, we will study the main strategical priorities at the early stages of a chess games. Once again, particularities of the position could dictate against those principles, and it is the player himself who must learn how to identify those spots. With that in mind, we will try to make a few recommendations that will work in most situations, while illustrating it all with a few examples.

Some players will have prepared some traps, cheap tricks they memorize to obtain a winning position if you fall into them. Others will have some knowledge of a particular type of position. But there is no reason to panic. If you play solid, active sound moves without tactical blunders, you can be sure to be doing fine in pretty much all situations.

8.1: Piece development.

At the beginning of our games, none of our pieces is doing anything at all. Indeed, most of them cannot even move! A main opening objective to keep in mind is to bring your pieces into the game (i.e. to develop your pieces) In the example games from previous chapters, you had many chances to observe by yourself how active pieces tend to defeat their passive counterparts. But the question that arises is: how can we actually develop our pieces? Which ones should be prioritize? Let's assume we want to bring our strongest pieces into the game as soon as possible, so that a devastating attack is possible. Playing as White, we could try, against an opponent who does not follow this rule and develops pieces randomly, **1.e4 Nc6 2. Qh5** What could be more active? **g6 3. Qf3 Bg7 4. a4** Let's develop the a1 rook **Nf6 5. Ra3 d6 6. Re3** (see diagram 8.1)
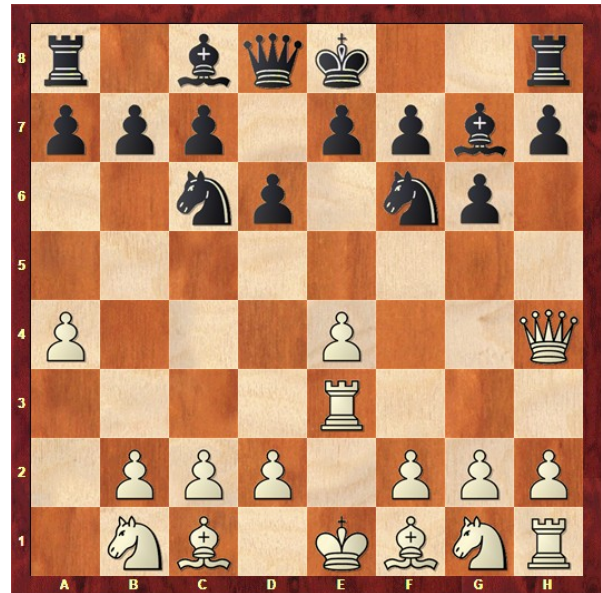

Diagram 8.1: Major piece development vs minor piece development

I can't call the resulting position a success for White. Not at all. Most of Black's pieces are placed in very reasonable squares. Our powerful major pieces are out, however, they are creating no threat whatsoever. Indeed, they will be targets instead. Black could continue, for instance, 6...Ng4 followed by 7...Bf6, kicking our pieces away. Despite having the advantage of moving first, I think every player with a minimal understanding of the game would prefer to play as Black here.

In conclusion, if we want to develop our pieces, we should start by our minor pieces. Rooks are likely to join after castling and, if we move our queen, we have to make sure it does not become a target for enemy attack.

Other simple examples could be **1.a4 Nf6 2.Ra3 e5 3.Re3 Nc6 4.h4 Be7 5.Rhh3 d5 6.Rhg3 0–0** or maybe **1.e4 e5 2.Qf3 Nc6 3.h4 Bc5 4.h5 Nf6 5.Rh4 d6 6.a4 Be6** where, in both cases, Black completed his development while White pieces were running away from threats

Okay, so we should not bring our queen and rooks too early into the game, couldn't we, by a similar reasoning, suggest that knights and bishops should stay at home, to prevent them from being targets for enemy pawns? Maybe we can just do nothing and focus on defending concrete threats posed by the opponent.

Well, it does not work like that! I am sure you would prefer to be White after the moves **1.Nf3 f6 2.Nc3 e5 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4 c5 5.Ndb5 a6 6.Nd6+ Bxd6 7.Qxd6**

To summarize, in the earliest stages of the game, minor piece development should be the first problem to solve, as we will see in the real game examples that we will analyze later.

8.2: Central control

In the last example of the previous section, we showed that moving pawn forward in order to kick enemy pieces out of their squares is not always a sound strategy. Well, there are some cases where it is! **1.d4 Nc6 2.d5 Ne5 3.e4 Nf6 4.f4 Ng6 5.e5 Ng8 6.Nf3** provides a good example (see diagram 8.2)
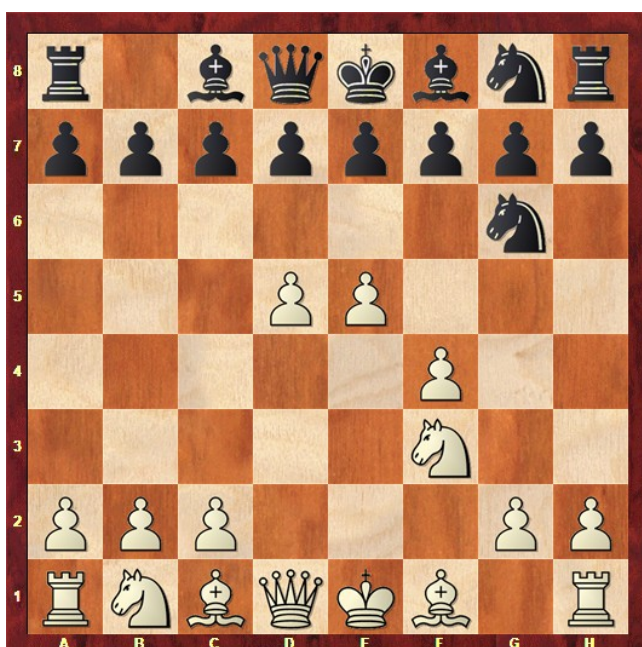

Diagram 8.2: Central pawns advancing

So, basically, Black has developed his knights only to either return them to their starting square or leaving them with not too much perspective on g6. At this point, you may be asking yourself: Where's the difference?

Here is where we introduce the concept of central control, which is, alongside development, one to the major opening objectives. In fact, the center is the battleground for a lot of chess action, not only in the opening, but during the whole game.

In the case from diagram 8.2, White has pushed Black pieces away while controlling many important central squares. For that reason, the knights have no good square to retire. For example, after **1. e4 g6 2. Nc3 Bg7 3. d4**, if Black wants to develop his g8 knight, he should begin by a move like **3...d6**, making it as difficult as possible for White to push the "e" pawn forward. .

From this section, we can conclude two main pieces of advice. First, if you are pushing an enemy piece away from its square, make sure you are not also giving it a better square to go. Second, central pawns are, more often than not, the ideal pawns to advance in order to secure your own development while disturbing the enemy!

8.3: General opening tips.

With those two goals in mind (central control and development), we can formulate a list of tips that will be useful in a wide range of situations:

- Do not move the same piece two many times in the opening. Some authors would go as far as to say "do not move the same piece twice during the opening" I would not be so strict, since, for instance, **1. e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 exd4 4.Nxd4** is perfectly valid. However, **1.Nc3 d5 2. e3**

e5 3. Ne2 Nf6 4. Ng3 Nc6 5.Bb5 Be7 6. Nf1 is making the opponent's life way too easy.

- Don't lose a chance to make "double purpose moves". If you can develop a piece while creating a threat Why not?

- Advancing central pawns is often justified. Advancing side pawns is rarely. This is due to central control often being a major issue, while side pawns often do nothing for the center. Use those moves to develop pieces instead!

- Castling is often the way to bring rooks into the game! Remember those examples where one side tried to bring the rooks into action by playing "h4-Rh3 kind of maneuvers" Remember how it didn't work? Try to bring them into a useful file through the first rank instead!

- These rules and any other we can think of have plenty of exceptions. Don't do what is good in general, do what is good in the position you have in front!

8.4: Examples form mainline theory.

If you have been to chess tournaments, clubs or forum, you probably have noticed that opening theory is a recurrent topic of debate. Some players will stick to one particular opening, knowing as much as they can about it. I recommend you to avoid that kind of approach, even though it could provide you slightly better results in the short term, it will slow down your chess improvements because, on one hand, the variety of positions you play will shrink, and on the other, you will often be repeating moves almost by heart, without having to think for yourself from the beginning of every games.

But, despite of that, I think it is worth taking a look on some examples to illustrate the concepts we have just learned.

1.e4 Pushing a pawn into the center while opening room for one of the bishops **d5** Similar intention **2.exd5 Qxd5 3.Nc3** Developing while attacking **Qa5 4.Bc4 Nf6 5.d4 Bf5 6.Nf3 Nbd7 7.Bd2** Once again, improving our bishop a little bit while speculating with some discovered attack on the enemy queen **c6** Preventing the queen from getting trapped. White is slightly ahead in development and seems to have the upper hand in the center.

1.e4 e6 2.d4 Taking as much central space as possible **d5** Answering White's central control. After 2..b6 3.Bd3 Bd7 4. Nf3, White would be slightly ahead, with his pieces being easier to bring into the game **3.e5 c5!** Immediately putting pressure on White's central pawns **4.c3** Other moves would eventually allow the f8 bishop to move into the magnificent c5 square **Nc6 5.Nf3 Qb6!** Increasing the pressure. Note that the queen is not vulnerable to attack on b6. Otherwise, this move would not be recommended. The queen also makes it difficult for the c1 bishop to develop, due to the attack on the b2 pawn.

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 Helping development while pressuring the center. **exd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6** Attacking the e4 pawn **5.Nc3 Bb4** Pinning the piece that defends the e4 pawn **6.Nxc6 bxc6 7.Bd3 0–0 8.0–0** Both sides put their kings into safety, as the "e" file will probably be open soon **d5!** Finally answering White's central domination.

1.d4 Nf6 2.Nc3 Preparing the e4 push **g6** Maybe 2...d5, starting a fight for the e4 square. A possible continuation would be 3.Bg5 Bf5 4. f3!? **3.e4 d6 4.f4 Bg7 5.Nf3 0–0 6.Bc4** With a very sharp game ahead, where Black can survive, but has to be careful about the e5 pawn push

1.Nf3 This time, White tries a different way to work on the center **d5 2.b3 c5 3.Bb2 Nc6 4.e3 Qc7** Black insists on the ..e5 push **5.Bb5** White insists on preventing it **e6 6.Ne5 Bd6** 6...f6 fails to

7.Qh5+! Can you see the tactical tricks that appear? **7.f4** White has good development (except for the b1 knight) and a fair share of central control (he rules the e5 square after all!)

1.e4 c5!? An interesting way to prevent White from creating an annoying pawn duo in the e4 and d4 squares **2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 g6** 5...e6 is also possible, but ask the f8 bishop what would he like better! **6.Be3 Bg7** White has changed one of his central pawns, but is leading in development and can still control a decent amount of central squares (see the d4 knight) Of course, Black could kick him away with ..e5, but the g7 bishop would not be happy at all. Also, this would be practically giving away the d5 square.

1.e4 e5 2.d4 exd4 3.c3 dxc3 4.Bc4 cxb2 5.Bxb2 White has lost two pawns, but has a clear development advantage. The position is very unclear to evaluate. Black should go after simplification, while White should immediately start an offensive. If you have that possibility, try to play this position with a similar-levelled player a couple of times!