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Maurice Ashley

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The Most Valuable Skills in Chess

Maurice Ashley
Contents

Symbols 5
Introduction 6

Part 1: The Basic Skills

1  The Hunters 7
Long-Range Pieces 7
   The Queen 7
   The Rook 10
   The Bishop 14
Short-Range Pieces 16
   The Knight 16
   The King 22
   The Pawn 26
Exercises 29

2  Crowd Control 31
Liberty or Death 31
A Tale of Two Positions 36
Exercises 38

3  Float Like a Butterfly 40
The Landmine Exercise 41
Give-Away Chess 47
Exercises 48

4  Dollars and Sense 50
Up or Down 50
Table of Values 51
Cinderella 53
The Officers 57
Exercises 60
5 Wall Street
Fair Trades 62
Bad Trades 62
Proper Sequencing 66
Exercises 67

6 Homeland Security 73
The TRIP Method of Defence 73
Take 73
Run 74
Interpose 77
Protect 79
Exercises 91

7 Regicide 92
The Bear Hug 92
Quad Mates 95
Back-Rank Mate 97
Exercises 101

Part 2: The Fabulous Five: The Skills in Action

Paul Morphy – Duke of Brunswick / Count Isouard, Paris 1858 104
Wilhelm Steinitz – Curt von Bardeleben, Hastings 1895 112
Mikhail Botvinnik – Milan Vidmar, Nottingham 1936 121
Donald Byrne – Robert Fischer, New York 1956 126
Bent Larsen – Boris Spassky, Belgrade 1970 133

Solutions to Exercises 138

Glossary 154
Dedication 157
Acknowledgements 157
Index of Games 158
Symbols

x     capture
+     check
++    double check
#     checkmate
!!    brilliant move
!     good move
!?    interesting move
?!    dubious move
?     bad move
??    blunder
0-0    castles kingside
0-0-0  castles queenside
(D)   see next diagram

In diagrams:

\[ \star \] crossing point or a square a piece can move to
\[ \star \] an unsafe square

Algebraic Notation

Moves are shown by giving the piece symbol followed by the destination square. For instance, if a knight moves to the square marked in the diagram, this is written as \( \text{\( \mathcal{D}\)f3} \) in algebraic notation. If two pieces of the same type can move to the same square, more information is given. For instance, if there are knights on g1 and e5, then the one on e5 moving to f3 is written as \( \text{\( \mathcal{D}\)ef3} \).

For pawn moves, only the arrival square is given (e.g. e4 means that a pawn moves to the e4-square). For pawn captures, the file the pawn is leaving is also given. Thus exf4 means that a pawn on the e-file makes a capture that brings it to the f4-square.
Introduction

When I was first asked to do a beginner’s book, I felt a bit uneasy. It seemed to me that I had nothing to add to the numerous quality books already in print. Just to slap my name and grandmaster title onto the same old rehashed material seemed boring, and in some way, a bit dishonest. It took a long time for the ideas you now hold in your hands to hit me over the head and insist that they be written. I can’t say that all the material is entirely original, but the approach is unique because it is basically me: the way I teach, the way I talk about chess, the way I think. You’ll also find in these pages my ridiculous love for sports, story-telling and teaching.

But most of all, you’ll find my love for chess. Writing this book for beginners forced me to look very closely at little things about the game. This process led to pleasurable discoveries. My friends seemed bewildered when I called them up in delightful amazement to tell them how I had just discovered for the first time that a nearby king can only attack a bishop from one square. I could hear them thinking, “Maurice, you’re a grandmaster. Surely there’s some complicated opening variation you should be studying.”

Yes, maybe. But chess is built on those tiny observations that grandmasters not only love to notice but find a way to use magically in their games. Hundreds, if not thousands, of trivial-sounding realizations add up to grand awareness and sudden insight. Complicated moves and ideas come from a thorough understanding of the simple ones. It’s no wonder that the great Cuban World Champion Jose Raul Capablanca, whose style seemed as effortless as stroking a cat, insisted that students first study the endgame. Forget about memorizing openings, he insisted, for they go out of fashion fairly quickly. But the intrinsic properties of the pieces won’t change for as long as we have chess as we know it.

This book is a primer on tactics that goes from the basic to the complex. Part 1 covers the basic skills every chess-player should have at his or her fingertips. Each position is meant to serve a long-term purpose. Make sure you understand each diagram before going on to the next. And, when you are all done, I hope you go through it once more. Trust me: it pays to refresh your fundamentals. Eventually you’ll see that the crazy jungle of tactical ideas is not so crazy after all.

The second part of the book covers five of the greatest games ever played. More than just entertainment, they are meant to teach you how the basic skills you learnt in Part 1 come together to make real works of art. Do not be fooled by the years in which these games were played. Works of art, like the Mona Lisa or the Venus de Milo, are timeless.

At the beginning of any new journey, there is a sense of anticipation and excitement. I hope that’s why you came to chess, and why you picked up this book. It is my wish that I’ll be able to enhance those feelings, and open a door to a world of wonder that I experience continually whenever I look at a chessboard. And I hope, most of all, that this book is an inspiring first step on the thousand-mile journey that is chess.
Part 1: The Basic Skills

1 The Hunters

Strategy and tactics must be designed to take advantage of the wisdom embodied in the rules.
BEVIN ALEXANDER, How Wars are Won

Don’t fire until you see the whites of their eyes.
COLONEL WILLIAM PRESCOTT at the Battle of Bunker Hill

Skill 1: Quickly seeing various ways to attack a target

Chess pieces are born hunters. Like lions lying perfectly still while a herd of buffalo graze nearby, the pieces will carefully home in on their desired target before pouncing with deadly efficiency. The laws of the jungle apply from the opening moves, and at every moment the players must carefully scan the entire playing field for the sudden appearance of lethal predators. The study of the art of attacking is essential. Without knowledge of this basic skill, your pieces may well end up being someone’s lunch.

Long-Range Pieces

The Queen

The queen is a voracious attacker. She can cover ground in the blink of an eye, and her multi-tentacled reach often makes her seem everywhere at once. Before the rule changes of the 15th century, the queen could only move one square at a time diagonally. When she gained her new powers, players brought up on the old rules had to adjust to her fantastically wild possibilities. The French, impressed by her chaotic side, called her la dame enragée – the mad queen. Even today she still captures the imagination of all chess-players – beginners and grandmasters alike. Her ability to alter the course of a game remains legendary, and woe be it to the player who does not respect her destructive powers. We will discuss the queen’s many gifts quite a bit in this book, but for now we will study one aspect of her talent: her lightning ability to home in on a target.

Question: How many ways can the white queen attack the black knight?

Before we answer the question, let’s focus on how a queen attacks. Unlike pawns,
pieces capture the way they move. Since a queen moves along ranks, files and diagonals, she will obviously attack in the same way. Now look at the knight on e6. It is standing on the crossroads of a rank (the sixth), a file (the e-file) and two diagonals (a2 to g8 and h3 to c8). The queen is also sitting at an intersection of a rank (the second), a file (the g-file) and two diagonals (f1 to h3 and hl to a8'). By seeing how these crossroads intersect, it becomes very easy to list all the squares from which the queen can attack the knight (or any other square for that matter).

Let's see how this works in the diagram position. The queen can land on the sixth rank on the squares c6 and g6. It can land on the e-file on e2 and e4. It can land on the a2-g8 diagonal on a2, d5 and g8. And finally, it can land on the h3-c8 diagonal on h3 and g4. That makes a total of nine possible attacking squares. We can be sure that there are no more answers to this question, and therefore choose the one we think is best under game circumstances.

I call this method "finding the crossing points" because the only squares from which a piece can attack a target are points where their lines intersect. Let's try to find the crossing points in another set-up:

There are six: on the seventh rank (g7 and c7), on the f-file (f3 and f6) and on the a2-g8 diagonal (b3 and c4). Notice that the queen has no way of getting on the h5-e8 diagonal.

This next one is slightly more difficult:

Find all the crossing points from which the queen can attack the knight.

This time there are eleven: on the sixth rank (a6, d6 and g6), on the c-file (c2, c3 and c4), on the a4-e8 diagonal (b5 and d7) and on the h1-a8 diagonal (d5, e4 and f3).

---

1 From now on diagonals will be described using a dash. Therefore, the group of squares that run from h1 to a8 will be described as the h1-a8 diagonal.
It's easier to see the crossing points if you first focus on the lines emanating from the target piece. The attacking piece will then look to see how it can get to squares on those lines.

Things change when the target is a different piece. Take a look at the following:

Now the queen can safely approach the bishop only along ranks and files. This gives us six solutions out of the eleven approaches (please check this for yourself). Let's see what would happen if the piece on c6 were a king:

Of the eleven possibilities, the four squares next to the king (d5, d6, d7 and b5)
are all dangerous because the king would simply capture the queen if she landed on them. This means that a queen can only safely attack a king at a distance, or up close if she is protected, thereby barring the king from capturing her. In fact, no piece can attack a king from a square adjacent to it without solid protection.

Let's see the case of a pawn on c6:

![Diagram showing a pawn on c6 and a king on b6 or d6]

You should quickly see that the two dangerous squares are b5 and d5. The other nine are there for the taking. The key thing to remember is to attack safely. The power of the queen sometimes blinds beginners into thinking she can go wherever she wants. In fact, the opposite is often true. Since there is no bigger catch than the queen (the king cannot be taken), she always has a target sign on her back.

For the sake of completeness, let's look at the situation of a black queen on c6:

![Diagram showing a black queen on c6 and a king on b6 or d6]

It should be instantly clear that there are no safe squares from which to attack the opposing queen. This leads us to an important if obvious maxim: no piece or pawn can ever attack a similar piece without being under attack itself.

The Rook

The rook has the finesse of a bull in a china shop. Though it long ago lost its place as the most dominant piece on the board, it still has the raw power to smash into a position like a ten-foot wave. Often one of the last pieces left standing, the rook more than any other piece separates grandmasters from pretenders. Let's take a look at how it best attacks other pieces and pawns.
Here we have changed the familiar position from the previous section by replacing the queen with a rook. Though the queen was able to attack the knight from eleven distinct squares, the rook can only approach the knight from two (c3 and d6).

If we change the position as shown here, the answer is still two (b1 and h6). No matter what square we choose to place the knight, the answer will always be two (please experiment with different possibilities yourself). On an open board, a rook can move to attack a target in exactly two ways. The same would be true if the piece on c6 were a bishop or a pawn. However, things change if the target piece is a king or queen (of course a rook cannot attack an opposing rook without support):

The white rook doesn’t dare attack the queen from either e1 or c5 because it would be snapped off the board in a heartbeat.

In the above diagram, the restriction of attacking a king up-close applies. While the rook can safely attack the king from e1, it had better have some protection before it thinks about going next to the king by way of d6.

With the rook being so much weaker than a queen, it’s safe to ask why it provokes so much fear. To begin to appreciate the rook’s power, take a look at the following:
If White were to attack one of the pawns from the front, say with 1 \( \text{f}2 \), then Black would simply reply 1...d6, giving the pawn solid protection. White should instead play 1 \( \text{c}7 \).

Although only two pawns are under direct attack, all the other pawns on the seventh rank feel the rippling effect of the rook’s presence. The rook’s ability to control a block of squares on the same rank or file makes it a formidable attacker. Notice that although the pawns are on different coloured squares, it does not matter. Take a look at this next diagram:

The black pawn is about to promote. White has three ways to try to stop it.

a) 1 \( \text{f}2 \) attacks the pawn, but does nothing about it moving forward. Black simply plays 1...a1\( \text{w} \).

b) 1 \( \text{f}1 \) stops the pawn from advancing, but is not the best.

c) 1 \( \text{a}7 \). Now the pawn is under attack and will be captured if it dares to move. The famous early 20th century chess-player and teacher Siegbert Tarrasch was quoted as saying, “Rooks belong behind passed pawns.” By placing the rook behind the dangerous pawn, the rook effectively controls the file along which the pawn moves.

Tarrasch meant for this principle to apply to one’s own pawns too.

The white pawn would love to advance, but feels Black’s king lurking nearby. But White can play 1 \( \text{a}1 \), providing the pawn with a valuable escort. Now White will easily promote the pawn since 1...b4 can be answered by 2 a5 b5 (the king obviously cannot capture the pawn because it would be in check from the rook) 3 a6 b6 4 a7 b7 5 a8\( \text{w} \). Other than a rook, only a queen is able to chaperone a pawn down a file.

---

1 A passed pawn is a pawn that has no opposing pawn on an adjacent file that can stop it from marching all the way to the last rank.
If one rook can chew up blocks of squares efficiently, two rooks can be all-consuming.

White plays 1 \texttt{a7!} (or 1 \texttt{b7!}). The heat from the white rook radiates along the entire seventh rank and fences in the black king. After 1...\texttt{g8} (the only legal move), White drops the hammer with 2 \texttt{b8#}. The second rook gobbles up the remaining squares to which the king can run.

A combination of the themes from the previous diagram and the one at the top right of page 12 can be seen in the following more complex example.

While White has one rook on the seventh rank, Black has double the power lined up on White’s second rank. Their devastating power can now be unleashed by 1...\texttt{xg2+} 2 \texttt{f1 ef2+} 3 \texttt{e1 xc2} (D) (threatening 4...\texttt{g1#}).

Now White has no defence:

a) 4 \texttt{d1} would meet a wicked finish after 4...\texttt{gd2+}! 5 \texttt{e1 xh2} (intending to play 6...\texttt{h1#}) 6 \texttt{d1} (staying close to a rook; now 6...\texttt{h1+} spoils the mate because of 7 \texttt{xc2}) 6...\texttt{cg2!} (D).

Now checkmate on the back rank is unstoppable.

b) 4 \texttt{f1 xh2} (that mate threat again!) 5 \texttt{g1 cg2+}! 6 \texttt{f1 xa2} (this threatens mate as well as the rook on a1) 7 \texttt{xa2} (the
only reasonable move) 7...\texttt{\textit{\textbackslash b}xa2} 8 \texttt{\textit{\textbackslash b}xc7} \texttt{\textit{\textbackslash d}d2}! 9 \texttt{\textit{\textbackslash b}xa7} (White’s rook cannot defend the d3-pawn from d7, because Black’s pawn is in the way, nor from c3 since Black’s pawn defends that square) 9...\texttt{\textit{\textbackslash d}d3} (D).

A bit melodramatic, one might think, until you see a bishop rip open a cavernous hole in your king’s fortress. Let’s take a look at what makes this lithe-looking piece so distinctive.

Black has successfully demolished all of White’s pawns, and is three pawns up. Black should easily go on to win the game. Because this example was a little complicated, it’s a good idea for you to study it over a few times so you really understand why everything happened. It shows the amazing power of the rooks working together, and dramatically shows why two rooks will often stand up to a mighty queen.

\textbf{The Bishop}

If a bishop were a bird, it would be a hawk. Spying its prey from a distance, it quietly glides over the squares with graceful ease and casually snaps up its hapless quarry. So powerful is the attacking energy of the bishop that eminent chess teacher Siegbert Tarrasch famously wrote: “As Jean-Jacques Rousseau could not write without his favourite cat beside him, I cannot play a game without the king’s bishop. When it is missing, I think the game is without any contents, and I miss the main attacking piece very much.”

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{bishop.png}
\caption{How many ways can the bishop attack the knight in one move?}
\end{figure}
Now the answer is only one because the bishop can only approach from the right. Approaching from the left is impossible because the bishop runs out of room. This is one reason why the bishop is considered to be a weaker piece than the rook. But a much more important reason is seen in the next diagram:

![Diagram showing the bishop's movement]

**How many ways can the bishop attack the knight in one move?**

The answer is absolutely none, and will be none forever. A light-squared bishop can only cover half the chessboard, or 32 squares. The dark-squared bishop is also limited to 32 squares. This means that there are many situations where a lone bishop can be completely helpless to affect the game because the opponent can simply hide pieces on the opposite colour of the bishop. However, two bishops working together blanket the entire board:

![Diagram showing two bishops]

Standing on the squares in this outer ring, the bishop has seven moves.
From this ring, the bishop has nine moves.

In this inner ring, the bishop has thirteen moves.

These diagrams show that the bishop is deeply affected by centralization: when it is closer to the middle of the board it will have many more tactical opportunities than when it's placed on the side of the board.

Short-Range Pieces

The Knight

The knight is the galloping ghost of the chessboard: if you hear it, it's probably too late. Its unique L-shaped move gives both beginners and grandmasters fits. Numerous chess games have dramatically ended because one player failed to notice the knight's sudden twisting approach. Let's study what makes this piece one of the most important to chess tactics.
The knight, more so than other pieces, is deeply affected by where it is on the board. Standing on a1, the knight has only two moves:

![Diagram of a1](image1)

Improving it still further to c1, the knight now has four moves:

![Diagram of c1](image2)

If we improve the knight's position just a bit by placing it on b1, it now has three moves:

![Diagram of b1](image3)

Now put it on c2, and we see it has six moves:

![Diagram of c2](image4)
And finally from e4 the knight has eight moves:

These examples show why great tacticians love to manoeuvre their knights closer to the centre of the board.

The knight has some interesting attacking properties as well. For one, it is the only piece that can attack another piece and be absolutely confident that it is not being attacked in return. If a rook were to attack a queen or king, it might be captured by either piece. A bishop suffers even more so when it attacks because it could be captured not only by a queen or king, but also by a pawn (if it attacks it from close range). Indeed, all the pieces have to be careful of return fire when attacking except the knight, which can confidently attack any piece (except an enemy knight) without fear of retribution. This power seemingly gives it ninja-like invisibility: it appears, attacks, captures and quietly leaves with its surprised victims.

But a strength is often a weakness: if any enemy piece or pawn attacks the knight, it will be powerless to deal with the attacker by itself. This often makes the knight an especially juicy target:
In each case, the knight watches helplessly as it is attacked by various black pieces.

Another weakness of the knight is that it has to be close to its target in order to attack. This means that it often has to venture into enemy territory to do any damage, which presents the very real danger that the knight’s target will have some very angry (not to mention hungry) friends nearby.

*A not-so-bright knight about to be eliminated for trying to steal a pawn.*
Contrast this with the long-range pieces that do not need to be close to be effective:

![Diagram of chessboard with long-range pieces]

Even standing on their original squares, all the long-range pieces still have radiating power. However, the poor knights are moves away from instilling any fear in the opponent.

The knight also shares the bishop's problem of being only able to attack one colour complex at a time.

Another similarity it shares with the bishop is that it can only attack a desired target from at most two squares, and often from only one:

![Diagram of chessboard with knight attacks]

*The knight can attack the white pawn from d7 and c6.*
The knight can only attack the white pawn from c6.

However, unlike the bishop, pieces cannot hide forever from the knight since with each move the knight goes from attacking one colour to the next.

To hide temporarily from the knight, Black’s king should remain on the same colour it was on when attacked. In this last position, 4...d4, 4...d6 and 4...f6 all avoid continued harassment for at least two moves. However, to gain long-term security the best move is 4...f5!, which forces the knight to make three moves before being able to bother the king again.

One singular weakness of the knight is that if it is chased away from controlling a square, it cannot move and maintain contact with that square. Unlike the long-range pieces, it must reorganize itself in order to reconnect with the target once more. This is especially painful to the knight when it is trying to defend a team-mate:
Black can play 1...\textit{e}4!, attacking both knight and pawn. The knight cannot move to save itself \textit{and} keep defending the pawn at the same time. Consider a similar circumstance with a bishop:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw [help lines] (0,0) grid (8,8);
\draw [ultra thick] (1,1) -- (1,7) -- (7,7) -- (7,1) -- (1,1);
\draw [ultra thick] (2,2) -- (2,6) -- (6,6) -- (6,2) -- (2,2);
\draw [ultra thick] (3,3) -- (3,5) -- (5,5) -- (5,3) -- (3,3);
\node at (0.5,0.5) {1}; \node at (7.5,0.5) {8}; \node at (0.5,7.5) {8}; \node at (7.5,7.5) {1};
\node at (0.5,4.5) {B}; \node at (4.5,0.5) {a}; \node at (4.5,7.5) {b}; \node at (7.5,4.5) {c}; \node at (0.5,4.5) {d}; \node at (4.5,1.5) {e}; \node at (4.5,4.5) {f}; \node at (4.5,7.5) {g}; \node at (7.5,4.5) {h};
\draw [ultra thick, fill=black] (3,3) circle (0.5);
\node at (3,3) {\textit{e}4};
\draw [ultra thick, fill=white] (2,2) circle (0.5);
\node at (2,2) {\textit{g}1};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Black again plays 1...\textit{e}4, attacking both bishop and pawn. Now White can simply play 2 \textit{g}1! (or 2 \textit{f}2), easily keeping an eye on the pawn.

All these observations are meant to make it easier to implement the skill of attacking. A full understanding of the pieces is an important part of seeing how to use them to best effect to attack the opposing forces.

\textbf{The King}

The king has the regal bearing of a male lion, mane blowing in the wind, as it calmly scans the grassy plains. At the beginning of the game, players shield the king like the Secret Service surrounding the President, often careful to tuck it away in the corner somewhere, preferably surrounded by a few stalwart pawns. But the king has its own attacking abilities, particularly in the endgame when most of the dangerous pieces (especially the queens) have been traded off. Then the king will run rampant, threatening weak pawns, supporting passed ones, and even aiding the other pieces to destroy its counterpart. There's good reason for the famous quote by the first World Champion, Wilhelm Steinitz: "The king is a fighting piece!"

The king's main strength is its ability to do battle up-close. Like a stout boxer with short but muscular arms, the king loves to get inside the range of its opponents where it can land some heavy blows.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw [help lines] (0,0) grid (8,8);
\draw [ultra thick] (1,1) -- (1,7) -- (7,7) -- (7,1) -- (1,1);
\draw [ultra thick] (2,2) -- (2,6) -- (6,6) -- (6,2) -- (2,2);
\draw [ultra thick] (3,3) -- (3,5) -- (5,5) -- (5,3) -- (3,3);
\node at (0.5,0.5) {1}; \node at (7.5,0.5) {8}; \node at (0.5,7.5) {8}; \node at (7.5,7.5) {1};
\node at (0.5,4.5) {a}; \node at (7.5,0.5) {b}; \node at (7.5,7.5) {c}; \node at (0.5,4.5) {d}; \node at (4.5,0.5) {e}; \node at (4.5,7.5) {f}; \node at (4.5,4.5) {g}; \node at (7.5,4.5) {h};
\draw [ultra thick, fill=black] (3,3) circle (0.5);
\node at (3,3) {\textit{e}6};
\draw [ultra thick, fill=white] (2,2) circle (0.5);
\node at (2,2) {\textit{g}1};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Black's king is pressuring all of White's pieces (particularly the knight on c4 and the bishop on c5). Notice how fearless the king is among the enemy forces.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw [help lines] (0,0) grid (8,8);
\draw [ultra thick] (1,1) -- (1,7) -- (7,7) -- (7,1) -- (1,1);
\draw [ultra thick] (2,2) -- (2,6) -- (6,6) -- (6,2) -- (2,2);
\draw [ultra thick] (3,3) -- (3,5) -- (5,5) -- (5,3) -- (3,3);
\node at (0.5,0.5) {1}; \node at (7.5,0.5) {8}; \node at (0.5,7.5) {8}; \node at (7.5,7.5) {1};
\node at (0.5,4.5) {a}; \node at (7.5,0.5) {b}; \node at (7.5,7.5) {c}; \node at (0.5,4.5) {d}; \node at (4.5,0.5) {e}; \node at (4.5,7.5) {f}; \node at (4.5,4.5) {g}; \node at (7.5,4.5) {h};
\draw [ultra thick, fill=black] (3,3) circle (0.5);
\node at (3,3) {\textit{e}6};
\draw [ultra thick, fill=white] (2,2) circle (0.5);
\node at (2,2) {\textit{g}1};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

White plays 1 \textit{e}6!, boldly charging at both rooks. Black must lose one of them as
they cannot provide protection for one another.

Here are a couple of other nasty set-ups that favour the king:

White plays 1 \textbf{e7}!. When Black’s rook leaves, White will capture the bishop.

The white king shows off its short-range skills with 1 \textbf{b7}!. The bishop must relinquish protection of the pawn.

A nice way to think about the king is that it has a field of force surrounding it that moves as it does. Enemy pieces dare not enter this field without protection because the king is quite capable of defending itself.

\textbf{No enemy piece dare set foot on } d4, d5, d6, e4, e6, f4, f5 or f6.

\textbf{A king with three moves}
point is critical: all the other forces can put themselves in danger of being captured (if there is a good reason for doing so). But, by the rules of the game, the king is forbidden from offering itself in such a way. This severely limits its attacking potential, and makes it a very attractive target.

Let's leave discussing the king's properties and concentrate on learning how the king can approach various enemy units:

However, as noted earlier, the king will normally wait until most of the dangerous pieces have been exchanged from the board before it comes out into the open. This illustrates the main weakness of the king: it can never allow itself to be in check. It can never attack a queen, never threaten another king, and only approach pieces in ways not dangerous to itself. This final
The king can approach the rook from two squares (d5 and f5). A king will never have more than two ways to attack a nearby rook.

Now the king can approach the pawn from three squares (d7, e7 and f7). Pawns cannot retreat and are helpless to defend themselves against attacks from the rear.

As previously stated, a king can never approach another king or the opposing queen, as can be seen in the following two diagrams.

The king can only approach the pawn from e5. However, things would radically change if the king were behind the pawn:
The d5-, e5- and f5-squares are all mined. The white king cannot approach these targets.

One final point about the king: it generally has many 'shortest' ways to approach a faraway target. Take a look at the following position:

![Chess board with king and pawn](image)

Black wants to win the white pawn. What is the quickest way to approach it?

Most players would draw a straight line along the sixth rank from h6 to g5-f6-e6-d6-c6 and finally to b6: six moves. However, it's mildly surprising to note that the king can also take a zigzag route: from h6 to g5-f6-e5-d5-c5-b6 – again six moves. It might be a bit confusing to see the king take a more unusual route from h6 to g6-f5-e6-d5-c5-b6: also six moves. But it's a real shocker to see the king climb the "top-of-the-pyramid" route from h6 to g5-f4-e3-d4-c5-b6 and still arrive on time in exactly six moves! Knowing little titbits such as this will win you a lot of games.

The Pawn

The pawn is the worker bee of the chessboard. It is a mindless, faceless, nameless drone and in that is its power. It is a willing soldier marching into the fight, ready to form a brave front line against marauding invaders. In the hands of a beginner, a pawn's death may seem irrelevant, collateral damage in the throes of war. However, in the hands of a truly skilled player, the pawn's reckless disregard for its own well-being makes it a vicious aspect of a well-planned attack. The greatest player of the 18th century, Frenchman André Philidor said "The pawns are the soul of chess." He might have added the word 'heart', too.

A pawn can only move to attack a square within its range from one direction. In the above diagram, the white pawn can attack the rook by moving to e4.
With the rook on f5, the pawn again can move to e4 to attack it. There are clearly no other ways to attack the rook.

None of the white pawns can safely attack Black's pieces.

However, replace the knight with a bishop, king or queen and the pawn cannot attack any of these pieces safely.

However, pawns are generally not foolish enough to go off attacking by themselves, and most often will cooperate with at least another pawn providing back-up.

Here the white pawns audaciously challenge her majesty. After 1 e4, the black queen has to back away from capturing the pawn because it is protected. It's ironic that pawns can get away with this against all the
pieces precisely because they are considered to be weak.

There is one piece the pawn loves to attack more than any other: the knight. We’ve seen how the knight is very vulnerable to attacks by other pieces because it is never returning the favour. A pawn can take advantage of this fact, sometimes in devastating fashion.

White’s knight might think it has got the better of the pawn. It could not be more wrong. Black plays 1...e4!, attacking the knight. Now, the knight could decide it wants to punish the pawn for its insolence by attacking it again with 2 \textit{\text{g}f2}. However, the pawn understands the knight’s weakness and continues marching forward with 2...e3! (D).

Still insulted, the knight decides that it can punish the disrespectful pawn by threatening to capture it yet again by 3 \textit{\text{g}d1}. Only after the pawn slyly steps forward with 3...e2! does the knight suddenly realize, to its horror, that it cannot stop the once-frail weakling from becoming an uncontrollable monster when the pawn hits the e1-square and morphs into a queen. We all know very well how this story will end.
Exercises

The following exercises will test your understanding of this chapter. Though I have set up some key positions here, you can create similar ones yourself. Practising these techniques is a great way to develop your skills as a future tactical wizard!

The solutions are on pages 138 to 139.

E1
How many ways can the white pieces safely attack the pawn on e5 in one move?

E2
How many ways can the black pieces safely attack the bishop on e4 in one move?

E3
How many ways can the white queen safely attack the black king in one move?

E4
How many ways can a white piece safely attack the black pawn in one move?
E5
White has to capture Black’s pawn on g6 before trying to promote the white pawn to a queen. What is the fastest path for White’s king to take to achieve that goal?

E6
In this typical endgame position, Black must study the options and decide which move wins. Can you see Black’s best move?
2 Crowd Control

Skill 2: Noticing blocked pieces and pawns

Chess pieces are claustrophobic by nature. To be stuck in a cramped space where all exits are blocked by one’s own or the enemy’s forces is a fate no chess piece ever wishes to endure. Pieces that cannot move because they are blocked in can become useless, or, even worse, targets. While it is impossible for the units to stay totally free from some form of mild blockage, a strong player knows how to prevent this natural condition from turning into an incurable disease. Being able to spot and avoid hemmed-in pieces is a basic skill that demands total proficiency.

Liberty or Death

Let’s start with the pieces most vulnerable to being blocked by pawns: the normally long-range bishops:

Neither bishop can move

The doors are shut
No way to escape from the wall of pawns

Black's bishop is hemmed in by a pawn on f6 and king on f8. With the move 1  ♝×f5, White threatens to take the bishop with the knight. Black must move the bishop to the only safe square it has: 1...  ♖×b8. Now White plays 2  ♝×h7, attacking the bishop yet again. Thanks to the pawn on f6, the bishop cannot run free and will now be captured.

All these bishops were essentially useless because they were blocked by their own pawns. However, bishops are not the only pieces that can suffer from a lack of movement. Consider the following diagrams:

A knight dominates a hapless rook

A rook without a future
Black needs just one move by the bishop to provide the rook with a clear path to freedom. But it’s White’s turn: 1 \( \text{c7} \)! attacks the rook. 1...\( \text{b8} \) is the only safe move. Then 2 \( \text{a7} \)! attacks the poor rook again. It now has nowhere to go and will be captured.

As you can well imagine, knights very rarely get totally blocked by pieces or pawns because of their ability to jump over (or ‘bypass’) everything on the board. But even partial blockage can be deadly to a knight.

White’s knight is on the side of the board, a place where knights must tread carefully since they have fewer moves than when they are placed in the centre. Black can take immediate advantage of this by playing 1...\( \text{b5} \)! The knight will now be captured since it has no safe squares forward and is blocked from going backwards by its own pawns.

The piece most sensitive to being hemmed in is the king. Once its movements are restricted, then it can easily be checkmated.

Black’s king cannot move at all because it is boxed in on all sides. If White is to
move, then by playing $1 \text{Qf7}\#$, he executes the famous **Smothered Mate**.

It makes a world of difference that it is Black's turn to move. White's king is not as restricted as Black's, but it is nevertheless obstructed by its own pawns. Black checkmates by playing $1...\text{Qf1}\#$ – the equally famous **Back-Rank Mate**.

Pawns have been the enemy of this chapter so far, but they too can be the victims of blockage:

![Diagram](image)

Black can take advantage of the pawn's inability to move by playing $1...\text{Qh6}!$. The white knight cripples the pawn from running for its life.

White has doubled pawns on the c-file and the very rare tripled pawns on the f-file. These pawns are immobile and are often easily picked off one by one. The black rook is about to have a feast!

The position in the above diagram is very interesting because the black pawns stand in the way of the white ones. Usually enemy pieces cannot 'block' the same kind of enemy piece. If a black bishop were to step in the way of a white bishop in an attempt to 'block' it from moving, the white one could always simply capture it. But pawns can be blocked from moving by enemy pawns (and pieces, for that matter) because **pawns capture in a different way from how they move**.

Pieces can only block the enemy from moving if they are somehow protected *and* weigh less in importance:

![Diagram](image)

White's bishop cannot escape from this prison because the black pawn on c4 is protected *and* it is not as important as the bishop. White would presumably not want to part with a speedy bishop for a slow-moving pawn. Take a look at the next diagram:
The white bishop is not blocked by the black pawn because it can simply capture the small fry on c4. If it were a white pawn on c4, White could not capture it and would therefore be truly (if temporarily) blocked.

Although the bishop was a dressed-up pawn on this square, the queen happily flies out along the back rank or along the a-file to safety. A similar escape would happen if we replace the rook in the lower right diagram on page 32 with her majesty.

In the above diagram, the black bishop does not really block the white one from moving because White can play 1 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}}}}}}xc4, leading to a fair exchange.

Queens are less prone to blockage because they can squirm out of places that other pieces can't. Imagine if we replace the bishop in the top right diagram on page 31 with a queen:

While the rook had to sit on b7 as a prisoner in its own camp, the queen can easily slip back to c8 or a8 and then happily go about its business.

The price of being a queen is that it is more prone to being blocked by protected enemy pieces. Look at the following position:
The white queen ventured into enemy territory and is not coming out alive. It is blocked from moving along the a-file by a protected black pawn, along the diagonal by a protected black bishop and along the rank by a protected black rook. All of these pieces are less valuable than the queen so she will have to humiliate herself by capturing a weaker piece (most likely the rook).

**A Tale of Two Positions**

Finally, let’s examine two interesting situations.

In this admittedly artificial position, White is down by two rooks and a bishop and would surely lose, if not for a simple series of blocking moves: White plays 1 b4+ b6 2 c5+ c7 3 d6+ d8 (or any other square) 4 e5! (D).

Black can poke around for the next one hundred moves and never get at White’s lone king. This goes to show how important it is for pieces to have open lines on which to operate. The extra forces here are meaningless because they are blocked in by their own pawns.

The initial game position: Block city

We can see that all the pieces (except the knights) are suffering from a serious case of claustrophobia. Pawn moves will have
to be made to free up the bishops, queens and rooks. This is most often done by pushing the centre pawns since control of the centre provides maximum freedom for the forces. Note that the rooks are trapped from moving along the back rank. The best way to free them is usually to move all the pieces off the back rank and then to castle one way or the other so that the rooks 'see' each other. By following these guidelines, you will have a well-mobilized army with plenty of tactical chances.
Exercises

The solutions to this chapter's exercises are on pages 140 to 141.

E7
How can White finish Black off quickly?

E9
Black is a piece up, but it is in the shape of a very ugly bishop. How can White win this game?

E8
Black is trying to queen the h-pawn. How can this be done in style?

E10
Black's king is a rat in a cage. How can White carry out a famous manoeuvre that leads to a forced checkmate in no more than four moves?
E11
Black's king is completely stifled. But can you find a way to force checkmate in two moves?

E12
Black seems to have everything under control and likely to win the game in short order with the extra rook. How can White turn the tables completely?

E13
Black is clearly losing as White has an extra rook. But can White force checkmate in a mere four moves?
3 Float Like a Butterfly

Skill 3: Knowing how to move while simultaneously avoiding dangerous squares

The legendary heavyweight boxer Muhammad Ali used to chant, “Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. You can’t hit what you can’t see!” He clearly understood the danger of being hit by a blow that seemed to come from out of nowhere, which is why he ‘floated’ around the ring so much. Chess pieces need to be able to float too, as there is no greater frustration than watching one of your forces being gobbled up from a square on which you confidently placed it. Even to grandmasters (especially to grandmasters!), the chessboard can seem like a minefield where potential peril lurks behind every pawn front. Thankfully, over time and with practice, the dangers become easier to spot, though a healthy dose of caution is always necessary if one is to avoid unfortunate accidents. This chapter will train you to be more aware of your surroundings, and to stay away from the sudden shock of blindly stepping on a landmine.

In Chapter 1, we learned the idea of crossing points. Those squares are juicy if your pieces can stand on them while safely attacking the opponent’s pieces. But they become dangerous when your piece becomes the target of the attack. Take a look at the following:

The white queen can attack the bishop from a number of squares, but in this chapter we are chiefly interested in the unsafe ones. White must know to avoid d7 or c6 or suffer the consequences. I have watched many beginners blissfully make a move like $\text{Qd7}$ and then wince in pain when the opponent joyfully whips off the queen. Whether it’s due to inattention or inexperience, this sort of blunder frequently costs the game. And it is not only beginners who allow this to happen:
In the above position, White, a future World Champion, overlooked the fact that his queen was being threatened by the black knight on f5. He played 36 \( \text{Qg}5?? \) and gave up immediately after his opponent pocketed the queen. Sometimes we feel a little better if we know it happens to legends of the game too.

Just how can we learn to avoid these hazardous squares? The way beginners usually learn is through the school of hard knocks. After a couple of hundred blunders and bruised egos, we finally begin to stay away from the greedy mouths hungering to swallow up our pieces. I think that is not a bad way to learn (we have all been through it), but I believe there are ways to train yourself to learn how to become much more aware very quickly.

The Landmine Exercise

The point of this exercise is to train your mind to see dangerous squares. The exercise is easy to do and you will soon be making up many of these on your own. Let's start with the following position:

What squares could the rook go to that would result in its instantaneous capture?
Answer: c4, c6, c8, d7, e7, and f7.

I made up my own term for these types of dangerous squares. I call them landmine squares. Pretty gruesome, I know, but imagine how your poor piece feels after it's been blown to bits because of your carelessness (I guess it won't be feeling anything!). Let's try another example, this time moving the rook in the previous diagram to a1:

What are the landmine squares for the rook?
Answer: a2, a6 and e1.

Let's look at another position.

What are the landmine squares for the rook now?
Answer: c4, e4, g4, h3 and h6.

You may have noticed that in the three previous diagrams, what's bad for the rook is also bad for the queen. It doesn't matter that she has superior mobility; whatever squares she prevents the rook from moving to, she cannot step on herself. That means that landmine squares are mutually destructive (with one exception, which we will discuss shortly). Take a look at the following:

White's rook prevents Black's knight from moving to c4, d3, d7 and g4. Naturally, Black's knight restricts White's rook from going to those self-same squares.

Here is another useful example:

White's rook dare not move to a3, e3 or f8. Of course, Black's bishop is in the same boat.
Here are two special cases that are worth knowing:

White's bishop does well to avoid going to g6 or h7. But it's important to note that Black's king cannot move to those squares. While the bishop may somehow find a good reason to move to that square under certain circumstances, the king can never make that decision. The simple rule: kings can never move to landmine squares.

Now, here's an exception to the 'mutually destructive' rule.

Usually, landmine squares are unsafe for both sides. But in this case, while the pawn cannot move to d4 without fear of being captured, the queen can easily do so because, as stated before, pawns do not capture the way they move. The queen would instead avoid moving to c4 or e4 since the pawn is guarding those squares.

At this point we should review the difference between crossing points and landmine squares. Crossing points are the squares where lines (ranks, files or diagonals) emanating from two pieces intersect. In the above diagram, there are many crossing points: c4, d1, d4, d7, e4, f3, f5, g2, g5, g8 and h5. White's queen can attack the pawn from any of these squares. However, as stated earlier, two of these squares are landmine squares for the queen: c4 and e4. White's queen would be captured if it went to these squares. Conversely, the square d4 is a landmine square for the pawn. In chess parlance, if it moved to that square it would hang. (That's a real chess term, not mine. Chess talk can get pretty grisly.)

Landmines become active even before the first move has been played:

All the squares on the third and sixth rank are mined by pawns (as well as four that are defended by knights). The second and seventh ranks where the pawns stand are all defended by pieces. Note that the squares f2 and f7 are mined (defended)
only by the king, which is why beginners often love to attack these squares early in the game.

As for the first and eighth ranks, all the squares are mined, except for the corners where the rooks stand. That means 44 of the 64 squares on the board are immediately treacherous – and the game hasn’t even started yet!

Once the game begins, things quickly get scarier. Let’s take a look at a sample game. We will focus on the squares that become mined (dangerous) on every move.

1 e4
A move with explosive potential. The pawn now mines two important squares in the centre of the board (d5 and f5). In addition, the queen and bishop now mine five additional squares – a6, b5, c4, g4 and h5 (note that f3 and d3 were already mined). Black had better beware of placing any unprotected units on those squares. I have seen some beginners play 1...b5, only to watch the pawn quickly disappear after White plays 2 ¤xb5. It’s good practice to briefly study what new landmines the opponent is laying down with every move.

1...d5
Black jumps into the jaws of the pawn, but for a reason.

2 exd5 ¤xd5
Black’s queen had hidden influence over the d5-square.

3 0-0c3 (D)

Mining a bunch of new squares, of which one is d5, where the black queen stands! Black must now be extremely careful. There is no white piece worth capturing as the squares a2, d2 and g2 are all mined.

3...¤e5+ (D)

Black shifts to target White’s king. Notice how the queen is shooting off in all directions, attacking the knight on c3 and the pawn on h2 as well. Unfortunately for Black, these are all mined squares. White would welcome a capture on any of these squares with open arms (and a sneer, no doubt).
4 \textbf{\textit{\textit{e}2}}

The bishop is very safe as it is protected by two knights, a queen and a king.

4\textbf{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}6}} 5 \textbf{\textit{\textit{f}3}}}

White keeps mining the board, controlling more and more space. In the meantime, Black’s queen must move again as it is under attack.

5\textbf{\textit{\textit{\textit{c}5}} 6 \textbf{\textit{d}4}! (D)}

A lowly pawn challenges the black queen, knowing full well that mutual destruction works in White’s favour. The d4-square is mined by a white knight and queen, which gives it adequate protection against Black’s knight and queen, who thought they had that square under control.

6\textbf{\textit{\textit{b}6} 7 \textbf{\textit{d}5} (D)}

Attacking the knight on c6.

7\textbf{\textit{\textit{f}b4 8 0-0}}

White brings the king to safety and unites the unprotected rook with the rest of the army.

8\textbf{\textit{\textit{g}6} (D)}

Black is in love with moving the queen. Now she helps the black knight to attack the pawn on c2 since only White’s queen protects the pawn. Notice that the black queen is not threatening the pawn on g2 because White’s king has that square covered.

9\textbf{\textit{\textit{e}5} (D)}

White decides enough is enough and attacks Black’s queen. Notice that White has a number of pieces in the game as well as a
safe king. Black has only two pieces in the fight and the black king is still stuck in the middle. Also, observe how White makes a knight move into the centre of the board, from where its power radiates in all directions.

9...\textit{\texttt{Wxc2}}

Black's queen now feels very satisfied. After all those moves, it has finally got to feast on a pawn. Black sees that mutual destruction awaits the queens if White captures on c2.

10 \textit{\texttt{b5+!}}

White ignores the queen and turns up the heat on the black king.

10...\textit{\texttt{c6}}

Black dare not play 10...\textit{\texttt{d8}} because 11 \textit{\texttt{xf7#}} (D) would be checkmate on the spot!

All the squares near the king are mined. Also, Black would have lost a whole piece if 10...\textit{\texttt{d7}} had been played since White has two pieces mining that square (the bishop and knight) while Black has only one (the king).

11 \textit{\texttt{dxc6 Wxd1}} (D)

Black decides that this is a good time to get rid of the queens.

This would have been a nasty way to lose!

The unprotected rook disappears and the exposed king is blocked in. The game is over.

Although only thirteen moves long, this game has a lot of action in it. It clearly shows the potential danger of using her majesty too early. Not only can she be attacked by pieces of less importance, she also finds most of the targets she's after
are well-protected. Great players normally bring out the knights and bishops first (after pushing the centre pawns), make sure the king is safe (castling is often a good way to do this), and then bring the queen and rooks into the game (preferably along the centre files). Then, after this sort of thorough preparation, you can begin to look for opportunities to go after poorly-defended targets. But if the opponent foolishly sends a couple of pieces into your position without protection, I think you know what to do with them!

I made a point earlier that you can practice seeing landmine squares on your own. Here is how I suggest you do it. Take any two pieces, one White and one Black. Place them on two squares of your choosing. Now write down the landmine squares (to make this exercise doubly efficient, you might want to consider also noting the crossing points). Next, place them on two new squares and do the same thing. For almost infinite variety, you can change the two pieces to two other kinds of pieces. Finally, you can slowly add more pieces to the chessboard and do the same exercise with multiple pieces. Your diligence with this practice will soon be rewarded as you will become far more attuned to the dangerous squares on a chessboard.

**Give-Away Chess**

This is another exercise that works wonders to train board awareness. The only stipulation is that you need a partner who wants to play along as well. The goal of give-away chess is simple: the first side to lose all the pieces and pawns wins! This sounds unusual because in chess we like to win the other player's pieces. But this is about vision training, and as such it is highly effective. There are some simple rules to follow:

1) If a piece is offered for capture, it *must* be taken.

2) If there is more than one way to capture an enemy unit, then the player decides with which piece to capture.

3) The kings are in play. Their capture is allowed and losing the king does not mean losing the game.

4) If a player moves without noticing that one of the opponent's pieces or pawns could have been captured, the move must be retracted and the capture made. However, to make give-away chess a more intense and beneficial exercise, it is better practice that the player who misses a capture instantly loses the game. Talk about building awareness!

Give-away chess is great practice, and some of my students even prefer it to regular chess (not my fault!). The games tend to end much quicker than standard chess, and the strategies are much simpler. What's funny is that the player who is wolfing down all of the opponent's pieces is the one who is losing. I would advise that you play several games in a row before switching back to normal chess. When you initially return, it may take a minute to reorient yourself to the fact that it is now a *good* thing to capture the opponent's pieces. Don't worry: the key point is that you have been training yourself to be completely aware of the board.
Exercises

The solutions to this chapter’s exercises are on pages 142 to 143.

**E14**
What are all the crossing points and the landmine squares?

**E15**
How many safe squares can the rook move to?

**E16**
How many safe squares can the bishop move to?

**E17**
The black king is in check. What is its only move?
E18
In this position, your task is to find all the mined squares for all twelve units on the board. Write down the squares to which the pieces or pawns cannot move without being captured.

E19
Black’s queen has ventured deep into White’s position and is now facing an attack by White’s knight. Are there any safe squares for the queen to run to?
4 Dollars and Sense

For what does it profit a man if he shall gain the world and lose his soul?
MARK 8:36, King James Bible

Skill 4: Understanding the table of material values

Everyone knows that “Money makes the world go round.” It shapes our lives each and every day. It separates the rich from the poor. If you have a lot of it, you can think about other things. If you don’t have enough of it, you can’t think of anything else. Money allows you to buy groceries, clothes, books(!), TVs, cars. People spend all their days working to get more of it, use it up, then go back to work to make some more. In the estimation of some, it is the most accurate measure of individual success.

Well, it’s not all that. And, due to the vagaries of international currency trading and that inexorable monster inflation, money isn’t even an accurate measure of itself. Follow the stock market and the same radical fluctuations can be found in all sorts of capital instruments: stocks, bonds, derivatives, foreign currencies. The NYSE, the FTSE, the Nikkei, and the Bourse have their cult following of winners and losers betting to see which way the value of their investments will go today. Accurate? Not nearly!

Chess-players, looking for the same sort of certainty about the value of their chess pieces, have a bit more to rely on to judge their overall piece portfolio. However, laziness creeps into even the wisest players, who sometimes want a simple benchmark from which to judge how important each piece or pawn is. Dream on! Just as on some days a person wakes up and doesn’t quite feel him- or herself, chess pieces sometimes look around and wonder, “Am I a bishop or a glorified pawn?”

In this chapter, we will focus on the all-important topic of material valuation. I can’t stress enough how important the following pages are. The misconceptions many players have about this topic often stick with them for years. Let’s see if we can avoid this from happening to you.

Up or Down

Material is a word you will hear a lot in chess. What the word means is simple: the pieces and pawns that are on the board. How much ‘stuff’ you have. To understand material you have to pay attention to two things: number and quality. Let’s look at the ‘number’ aspect of material first:

It’s easy to see that the two players have the same number of pawns. Chess-players would say that material is even.
Here White has an extra pawn – 6 against 5. In chess lingo, White is a pawn up. Consequently, Black is a pawn down. We would assume that Black is not very happy while White is smiling.

To a beginning player, this might seem like madness. Why quit just because you have lost a piece? Don’t these grandmasters have any heart? I can only say that as you get better you will begin to see how easy it is for players to defeat you once you truly lose something for nothing. For now, you will just have to trust me that going a pawn down, or heaven forbid, a piece down, is a pretty disastrous event on a chessboard. For a professional chess-player who makes a living from the game, losing any amount of material without a very good reason is one short step away from not paying the bills that month! (Still, I would advise all beginning players to play to the bitter end in order to gain a better understanding of why they are really in bad shape.)

**Table of Values**

The number of units is not the only or even the most important way to judge who is ahead in material. Quality of forces is also important. To understand this idea better, we need to look at the following table of values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Piece</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pawn</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knight</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rook</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chart represents the relative value of material (how each pawn or piece compares to the others). When judging which side is material up, **quality often beats number.** Here’s what I mean.
White has six units on the board (the kings are not counted since they cannot be traded), and Black has only one. But what a unit! What Black lacks in number is made up for in quality. The queen, valued at 9 pawns, is clearly better to own than the measly six pawns who won’t look her in the eye.

Here is another position that validates the ‘quality versus number’ rule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$2\Delta$s = $3 + 3 = 6$</td>
<td>$\mathbb{W} = 9$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2\Delta$s = $1 + 1 = 2$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 8 points</td>
<td>9 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can we efficiently look at the board and decide which side is ahead on material? Do a simple comparison: simply compare each type of piece for both sides from least important to most important (or vice versa) and check to see how many of each there are. You can choose to compare what is off the board or compare what is on the board. Both ways work, but most seasoned chess-players prefer to look at what is on the board since that’s where the action is anyway. Take a look at the following:

White has four units to Black’s one, but Black is still to be favoured because the queen is too powerful. The table of values confirms that Black is ahead:
This quick comparison shows us that Black has an extra rook for White’s extra bishop. According to the table of values, Black is ahead by two points.

While the comparison method may seem slightly tedious at first, it is an extremely useful technique to develop. In time, you will learn to do this easily and efficiently. We will have practice exercises at the end of the chapter.

**If only things were that easy.**

For decades, chess instructors (me included) have asked their beginning students to commit this table to memory for later use in their games. As a guide to help assess good and bad trades, these numbers hold up fairly well in practice. The problem is that, much like the stock markets discussed earlier, these values are not set in stone, and exceptions pop up far more often than one might suspect. Players with a deep understanding of what makes a piece hold its value will be much more adept at knowing when to flout the table than those players who are slaves to the numbers. Let’s try to penetrate deeper into the mystery behind this imperfect chart.

**Cinderella**

As stated earlier, pawns are the least valued units on the board. They move at a snail’s pace, can never retreat and are constantly being stopped from moving by some pawn or piece getting in their way. They are considered the baseline on the material scale, meaning that every piece is judged based on how many pawns it is worth. Simple enough. But what happens when the mistreated step-sister suddenly becomes the princess at the ball? Take a look at the following:

What value would you place on each white pawn? The pawn on b2 looks fairly scrawny. It’s just another pawn that’s probably happy to be valued at 1 point. Looking at the d5-pawn, we have even less respect for it than we did the b2-pawn. Though it is advanced (and in the centre), the black king is about to snack on it. We can see this pawn is a lost cause and is not even worth the wood (or plastic) it was made out of. We give it no value. Now, switching our attention to the pawn on h7, we see that nothing can stop it from promoting. It will soon go from being a humble pawn to a majestic superstar, most likely in the form of a dominant queen. Start shining the tiara because we smell perfume! This pawn will start taking prisoners and win the game with ease. If this were the last-round game of a major tournament, this pawn might win us thousands of dollars. It’s almost a shame to say it will be worth only nine points.

Let’s look at another position (see following diagram).

Both sides have three pawns, but White has what is known in the business as an **outside passed pawn**. The a-pawn is a thoroughbred racehorse trying to get to the finish line. Black’s king has to stop it. Let’s watch this tale unfold.
1 a7! b7
Black had no choice but to stop the pawn from going any further. Now White switches the direction of the attack.

2 d6! xa7
Black is now ahead by three pawns to two. But not for long!

3 e7! (D)

3...b6
Black’s f-pawn cannot try to escape by jumping two squares because White could still capture it using the *en-passant* rule.

4 xf7 c6 5 xg6 d6 6 xh5 (D)
The a-pawn has not died in vain. White’s king has eliminated all the black pawns and will now shepherd the remaining white pawns to paradise on the opponent’s back rank. White’s g- and h-pawns will get the glory, but it’s obvious that the a-pawn is the real hero of our story. Trying to put a value on it is impossible. Its mere *potential* to become a queen dictated the flow of the game, causing White to win easily.

From these examples, the reader can no doubt surmise that all evaluations depend on the situation in the game. No piece or pawn has concrete value: there may be a number of reasons that cause its value to fluctuate. Let’s analyse this position.

What value would you place on the white pawn?

The a-pawn is one step from becoming a queen, but Black’s bishop prevents it from
doing so safely. White will never be able to chase this bishop off the diagonal, which means White must accept the inevitable and let Black take the new queen. But the question to be answered was “What value would you place on the white pawn?” Is it worth one point? Is it almost nine? From Black’s standpoint, it’s worth the black bishop. Does that make the pawn worth three points? If Black had a rook instead of the bishop, it would be worth the black rook. Would it then be five? In my mind, it has no set value. Even the idea of a set value is not worth talking about.

Players who are slaves to the table of values often exchange pieces and pawns in a mechanical way. They depend on the numbers, not realizing that it’s all about context. Hopefully, by recognizing this simple truth, you will learn to avoid thinking that way too.

Here are some other interesting positions where the value of pawns changes, for good and bad:

The white bishop prevents the black a-pawn from advancing. Black continues 1...\textit{Wxb3!} 2 \textit{cxb3 a2!}. The pawn will promote to a queen, forcing the white queen to capture it and leaving Black with an extra bishop. The pawn was so important that it was worth sacrificing a queen to move it forward.

Two pawns on the sixth rank easily defeat a rook. No matter what Black does, one of the pawns will become a queen.
White is a lot of material down and the c-pawn is under attack. However, it seems that by promoting the pawn to a queen, White will suddenly be a couple of pawns up. But not so fast! If White were to play 1 \( c8? \text{??} \) then Black could reply 1...\( \text{e1#} \). If White opens a space for the king to run to (let’s say 1 g3), then the black queen will snap off the c-pawn in a blink. White seems dead lost. But, miracle of miracles, White does have a saving move. By playing 1 \( c8\text{\textdagger}! \) (D) White promotes to a knight, checks the black king, and attacks the black queen simultaneously (this is called a fork).

Black must move the king, allowing White to take the queen. White is now winning by a huge margin.

In this highly unlikely position, the five white pawns are meaningless. Black’s king can simply shuffle back and forth in the corner and the best White can ever do is stalemate Black. White would gladly give all of these pawns for just one pawn anywhere else. When pawns are lined up in such a way, they can often lose strength (value). It’s worth knowing the following closely related position:

Even though White has a bishop and five pawns (theoretically White is eight points ahead), this position is drawn because Black’s king cannot be driven from the corner. The five pawns don’t matter and the
bishop is of no help. White would happily give away four of the pawns if only Black would agree to allow the bishop to change colour!

It’s critical for Black to play \( \text{1...a4!} \). White’s two pawns are held frozen by the lone black a-pawn because \( 2 \text{b4} \) is met by \( 2...\text{axb3 en passant} \). White’s b-pawn is known as a **backward pawn** since it has lost the protection of a pawn adjacent to it. For this reason, backward pawns are often less valuable than normal pawns.

### The Officers

Now that we have studied what makes pawns have value, let’s turn to the pieces. The advantage they have over pawns is their mobility. I like to think that if a chess piece cannot move, it basically does not exist. If you think this is an exaggeration, look at the following position (**see next diagram**).

On paper, White is ahead by two points — a bishop for a pawn. But in reality, the bishop is stuck in a cage from which it can never escape. From White’s point of view, the bishop should be dropped off at the nearest garbage dump. Black’s winning plan is to abandon the h-pawn to its fate and hunt down the sorry bishop and weak pawns on the queenside. Play might continue \( \text{1...\text{f2} 2 \text{h2} \text{e2} 3 \text{hxh3} \text{d2} 4 \text{g3} \text{c1} 5 \text{a2} \text{xc2} 6 \text{f3} \text{b2} \) and Black wins easily. The poor bishop had to watch in horror as its fate was sealed.

Using the idea of mobility, we can begin to understand why the pieces have their relative values.
queen is about as strong as two rooks and why a single rook is clearly better than a knight. The bishop’s 13-move potential seems to rival the rook, but because it is frozen on one colour, it often loses a head-to-head contest. However, a rook cowers in the face of two bishops as they can simply dominate the board. A side-by-side comparison will make this very clear.

![Chess diagram showing bishops versus rook]

The bishops cover 26 squares, almost as much as a queen at her maximum! In fact, two bishops protecting two passed pawns would terrify a queen.

![Chess diagram showing bishops protecting passed pawns]

White’s queen does not stand a chance. The pawns, backed up by the incredible power of the bishops, will inexorably advance. This shows how pieces and pawns working well together can often be worth more than their single material value might suggest. This is particularly true of two bishops, which work far better together than two knights.

![Chess diagram showing bishops checkmating]

The bishops can checkmate even from a far distance.

![Chess diagram showing knights versus bishops]

The knights look silly compared to the two bishops in the previous diagram.

Pieces working together often prove the idea of the sum being greater than its parts. We’ve seen the potential of the two bishops against a rook, but even a bishop and knight can get a dominant advantage.
On a purely material count, this position is even. Unfortunately for White, the g-pawn is about to be lost because of the combined attack of the black forces. Not only do the bishop and knight command significantly more squares than a rook, they illustrate the key advantage of having two pieces against one: their superiority when attacking. This is especially true in positions when the mighty queen has to face off against three lesser pieces. Here is a chart that can be used as a guide to understand these important cases:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pieces</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♕ vs ♖, ♗, ♘</td>
<td>The queen can forget it! At their max, these pieces can control as many as 40(!) squares together. If they gang up on any target the queen is helpless to defend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♕ vs ♖, ♗, ♘+</td>
<td>Unless the queen has help in the shape of a couple of potentially dangerous passed pawns, this is also most often a big advantage for the pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♕ vs ♕, ♗, ♘</td>
<td>As long as the pieces are working well together, the queen will have a hard time. But if there are weak pawns for the queen to attack, and especially when the board is wide open, the queen can give these pieces a run for their money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♕ vs ♕, ♘+</td>
<td>The queen has its best chance against this combination as long as they are not all working at peak efficiency. Still, if the pieces can work together with a rook (given that the side with the queen also has a rook), then the gaggle of pieces will run hog-wild all over the chessboard.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This concludes our discussion on material value. It's extremely important to absorb the key points of this chapter. Experience has shown that players who believe material value is a fixed concept often get stuck at a level of development from which it is very difficult to escape. By understanding that material is relative, that the value of pieces fluctuates from game to game, sometimes from move to move, a player can consistently make better decisions that will put him on that fabled road to chess mastery.
Exercises

The solutions to this chapter’s exercises are on pages 144 to 145.

**E20**
Which side is material up and by how much?

**E21**
Which side is ahead and by how much?

**E22**
Which side is ahead and by how much?

**E23**
Which side is ahead and by how much?
Which side is ahead and by how much? Which side is material up and by how much?
5 Wall Street

Skill 5: Knowing how to assess and make good trades

The previous chapter talked about knowing the value of your pieces. Now it’s time to turn our attention to the important topic of making good trades. Much like shopping at a car dealership, playing chess requires that you look for bargains without getting shafted. However, you probably don’t mind paying full price as long as you get good value in return. Here are some simple circumstances to keep in mind.

Fair Trades

Fair trades are unavoidable on the chessboard. They occur early or late, infrequently or often, when you plan for them or sometimes when you would rather not. Fortunately, they are usually not painful. You can do them without worry because the opponent is offering the same amount of material that you are willing to give away.

White can capture the pawn on d5, and Black will capture White’s pawn in return. Each side nets a pawn. No harm, no foul.

Black can choose to capture the white knight on d5, and accept that White will recapture the knight with the pawn. Again, a fair trade. Neither side is worse off.

Black can empty the board in a hurry with 1...\textit{xg3} 2 \textit{hxg3} \textit{Exe2} 3 \textit{Exe2} \textit{Exe2}
\[ \text{Wxe2 We7 5 f1 We2+ 6 xe2} \] and only king and pawns are left to fight. Both sides were careful to exchange fairly. However, if White had decided to be proactive after \(1... \text{hxg3}\) and play \(2 \text{xe7??}\) (D) Black could toss in a \textit{zwischenzug} (an in-between move):

\[ 2... \text{hxh2+! and after 3 h1 xe7 4 xe7 xe7!} \] (D) Black has maintained an extra bishop and pawn.

White would do best to play \(5 \text{e3+ f8 6 g3}\), trapping the bishop, but after \(6... \text{xg3 7 fxg3}\), Black is two pawns to the good.

There are occasions when fair trades happen one after the other, as though a giant vacuum cleaner went out of control and sucked all of the pieces from the chessboard.

This position between two of the best players in the US occurred in a rapidplay game (30 minutes per side) after White’s 14th move. All 32 of the forces are still on the board, and it looks as though a complicated struggle lies ahead. One could hardly suspect that after the next 18 moves nothing but the kings and a few pawns will remain!

\(14... f6\)

A good move, seeking to challenge White’s control of the centre.

\(15 \text{exf6 exf6 16 xe8 xe8 17 e1}\)

White sees nothing better than to suggest yet another trade.

\(17... f5 18 xe8+ xe8 19 e1\)

As the late rapper Biggie Smalls famously chimed, “And another one.”

\(19... \text{xe1+ 20 xe1 d4 21 xd4 xd4+ 22 f1 f7 23 d1 e6}\)

Two moves without trades. But don’t get your hopes up.

\(24 c3 xc3 25 xc3\) (D)

It’s hard to believe that only 11 moves separate the two previous diagrams from
Basic trades such as the ones we have seen above are very simple. As long as the pieces are of the same type, we don’t have to worry that we are being hoodwinked. While there is some room for error (as we saw in the first diagram on page 63), the careful player will have no problem learning how to carry out these simple transactions.

Sometimes, fair trades can be a bit more complicated to evaluate.

Black can deal with White’s threat of \( \text{\texttt{g8#}} \) in three ways that seek trades:

a) The first is to play 1...\( \text{\texttt{xe4+}} \). Black’s plan is to harass White’s king by checking it as many times as possible until White agrees to a draw. (This is known as perpetual check.) However, White can stop this immediately by playing 2 \( \text{\texttt{xe4}} \). After 2...\( \text{\texttt{xe4+}} \) 3 \( \text{\texttt{xe4}} \) \( \text{\texttt{hxh7}} \), both sides have gained ten points in the transaction. The game is obviously a draw.

b) Another more complicated way for Black to defend the position is to play 1...\( \text{\texttt{xe7}} \). Black leaves the other rook unprotected in order to attack White’s queen. If the queen moves away, Black plans to win the white pawn by attacking it with the rook on e5 (by playing 2...\( \text{\texttt{ee7}} \)). White would then have to give away the pawn for nothing. Instead of allowing that to happen,
White could sacrifice the queen by playing 2 \( \text{xf}xg7+ \). After 2...\( \text{xf}xg7 \) 3 \( \text{xe}x5 \text{xe}h7 \), the position is again a draw.

c) Finally, Black can play 1...\( \text{xe}8 \) (D).

The game might continue 2 \( \text{f}f6+ \text{xe}h7 \) 3 \( \text{xe}5 \text{xe}5 \) 4 \( \text{xe}5 \), again with a draw.

In the above example, both sides displayed some skill in keeping the balance. Even more complicated situations can arise:

Ashley – Hodgson

World Open, Philadelphia 2000

1 e4 g6 2 d4 \( \text{g}g7 \) 3 \( \text{c}c3 \) c6 4 \( \text{f}f3 \) d6 5 \( \text{e}e3 \) \( \text{f}f6 \) 6 \( \text{d}d2 \) \( \text{a}a5 \) 7 h3 \( \text{a}a6 \) 8 \( \text{e}e2 \) b5 (D)

Here I played 9 e5, attacking the knight. British grandmaster Julian Hodgson ignored the threat and played 9...b4, attacking my knight. I continued with 10 \text{ex}f6 and he responded with 10...\text{bxc}3 (D) attacking my queen.

So far, we have made a simple trade of knight for knight. Now, however, I made a dramatic move and captured his bishop with 11 \text{fxg}7. This looks a bit nuts as he now played 11...\text{cxd}2+ (D) pocketing my queen for a bishop and calling check at the same time.

Fortunately, I had seen this coming and responded with 12 \( \text{x}x\text{d}2 \) (D).

If we tally up the material, I have traded a bishop and pawn for a queen. Normally, this
would be a completely losing proposition, but the situation on the board tells a different story. My bishop is now attacking his queen and my g-pawn is attacking his rook. If the queen runs away, not only would I grab his rook (which would gain a rook, a bishop and a pawn for my lost queen), I would also promote my pawn to a queen (which would give me a ton of extra material).

It seems as though it's Black who is now in big trouble, but Julian had seen all this. Instead of retreating his queen, he played the spectacular-looking (and only) move $12\ldots \text{xd2}+!$, returning his queen for the bishop. I played $13\text{ xd2}$, and after $13\text{ g8} (D)$, we had the following position:

Black was now destined to win the pawn on g7. A careful tally of the material shows that after my pawn goes, both sides will have an equal number of pieces and pawns on the board. Despite all the interesting complications (which included two exciting queen sacrifices), the forces are in balance once again. We went on to draw the game after many adventures.

**Bad Trades**

Now that we have seen what fair trades look like, let's take a look at what happens when you send your kid to the store with $20 and he comes back with only a loaf of bread and no change!

It would be a horrible mistake for Black to capture the white pawn with $1\text{ xd5}??$. Black would be trading a rook (normally worth five pawns) for a single pawn.

In the following diagram, a quick count of the material shows that both sides are numerically even. Most critically, Black's queen is under attack from a white rook. What should Black do? Let's look at three options:

a) $1\text{ xd2}??$. This would be a bad blunder. White would happily capture the
Another important aspect of trades is the order in which to execute them:

**Which move is better for Black:**

1...\(\text{Qxe4}\) or 1...\(d5\)?

a) 1...\(\text{Qxe4}\)?? is a horrible mistake. Black has three pieces attacking a pawn that has three defenders. After 2 \(\text{Qxe4}\) \(\text{Qxe4}\) 3 \(\text{Qxe4}\) Black dare not capture the bishop for fear of losing the queen.

b) 1...\(d5\)! is an excellent move. Black counts the pieces and correctly sees that there are just as many defenders of the d5-pawn (four) as there are attackers (four). After 2 exd5 \(\text{Qxd5}\) 3 \(\text{Qxd5}\) \(\text{Qxd5}\) 4 \(\text{Qxd5}\) \(\text{Qxd5}\) 5 \(\text{Qxd5}\) \(\text{Qxd5}\), everyone goes home happy.

Quite a lot can be learned from the above analysis. For starters, why is it that in variation ‘a’ Black lost when three attackers met three defenders, yet in variation ‘b’ White was OK when four attackers met four defenders? The answer is based on a simple rule of thumb: when attackers and defenders are the balance, then the target must be worth as much as the capturing piece. In variation ‘b’, every time White captured something, it was with a similar

Now White has a large advantage in material (a queen for a rook and two pawns) with more likely to come.

c) 1...\(\text{Qe8}\). The best move under the circumstances. Black correctly reasons that 2 \(\text{Qxd8}\) \(\text{Qxd8}\) will do no harm since it is a simple fair trade.
unit (pawn took a pawn, knight took a knight, bishop took a bishop, rook took a rook). But in variation ‘a’, Black flouted this rule and took a pawn with a knight. When the smoke cleared, Black was material down. To reinforce this principle, let’s study a similar situation.

\[ \text{Diagram B} \]

Black correctly reasons that 1...d5! is OK. White is attacking the pawn four times (yes, the rook on d1 also counts!) while Black is defending the pawn four times (the rook on d8 helps out). White’s simplest response is to play 2 exd5. Black wants to take back with the knight. But wait! Black is about to take a lowly pawn with an important knight. Isn’t this against the rule I just stated myself? Actually, no. The rule does imply that if there are an equal number of attackers and defenders, then it is normally best for the capturing piece not to be more valuable than the target. The key word above is equal. Once the white pawn captures on d5, it is transformed from being an attacker to being a target! An interesting way of looking at it is that once the pawn took on d5, its power over d5 disappeared. You may even say that now it is the black pieces that are the attackers. If we count them up, four black pieces (two rooks, bishop and knight) are attacking the pawn on d5 while only three white pieces (two rooks and knight) are defending. That’s why Black feels safe recapturing with the knight. After 2...\( \text{Qxd5} \), White can now play 3 \( \text{Qxd5} \). (Notice that it would have been a mistake to play 3 \( \text{Qxd5} \) since White is choosing to use a powerful rook to capture an inferior knight. Black would smile and play 3...\( \text{Qxd5} \) with extra material.) Now after 3...\( \text{Qxd5} \) 4 \( \text{Qxd5} \) \( \text{Qxd5} \) 5 \( \text{Qxd5} \) \( \text{Qxd5} \), both sides are completely even in material.

Again, as long as the capturing piece is not superior to the target, everything should be fine. Now let’s look at an interesting case.

\[ \text{Diagram B} \]

White is hammering at the d5-pawn with five attackers, yet the pawn feels perfectly safe with only one defender. The black helper on c6 practically dares the white pieces to capture. On the other side, Black is putting pressure on the b2-pawn with two pieces (queen and rook) and the pawn is defended only once (by a rook). But here too it’s unsafe to grab the pawn because the queen would be snapped off by a rook. When it comes to capturing enemy units, superior numbers on attack do not defeat inferior quality on defence.

Here is the flip side of the quality versus numbers argument.
White’s pawn has advanced to attack Black’s knight. Despite having no fewer than five defenders against one lone attacker, the knight must run for its life. Here superior numbers on defence could not defend against inferior quality on attack. As we learned in the previous chapter, in any analysis of possible trades the quality of units must be considered as more important than the number of units.

Black has four pieces attacking the pawn on d4 while White has only three pieces defending. With the obviously superior numbers, how should Black capture the pawn?

This position illustrates a reflection of the idea we have already seen: lead with the lowest, i.e. the least valuable unit. Black does well to play 1...\text{\texttt{cxd4}} (or even 1...\text{\texttt{exd4}}). But 1...\text{\texttt{xd4}}? would be a bad mistake, since the rook would be recaptured by a less valuable piece (knight or bishop).

Let’s recap the six rules of making good trades:

1) Fair trades are a normal part of the game. There is no need to fear an exchange of similar pieces (or even bishop for a knight in many cases).

2) Unfair trades could lose games! Never give away pieces of superior quality for pieces worth less without a very good reason.

3) When the number of defenders of a target equals the number of attackers, the target is considered to be safe.

4) When the number of attackers outnumbers the number of defenders, then the target is toast.

5) The value of the pieces involved in a trade is the most important factor. Rules 3 and 4 depend on all pieces involved being of equal importance. If there is any type of inequality, then the player must do the math.

6) Always sequence captures so that the capturing piece is not superior in quality to the defending piece.

It is simply impossible to play good chess without a thorough grasp of these ideas. However, it is important to remember that these are general guidelines, not rules. The phrase “without a very good reason” in principle 2 above is meant to say that chess is not limited by dogmatic unbreakable edicts. No chess principle is carved in stone. If you see a way to win by giving away a piece for an amazing attack,
don't say that the joker who wrote this book told you that it's not a good idea! By all means, give away the piece. But you had better be fairly certain that things will work out or you will be on the fast track to Land of the Muttering Chess Players.
Exercises

The solutions to this chapter’s exercises are on pages 146 to 147.

**E26**

Black has just played $9...d5$. Is the black pawn on d5 adequately protected?

**E27**

It is Black’s turn to move. Could I have won material by capturing on c4?

**E28**

It is White’s turn to move. The black pawn on e5 is under heavy assault. How should White sequence the capture of the pawn?

**E29**

Should Black capture the pawn on e4?
**E30**

Is Black threatening to win the white pawn on d4?

---

**E31**

In a game from one of my favourite tournaments, this position appeared on the board after my 18th move. Was I threatening to capture the pawn on g6 and win material?
Skill 6: Knowing how to execute the TRIP method of defence

Most players love to attack and hate to defend. However, it’s next to impossible to play chess without having to defend not once, but several times during a single game. The skill of successfully parrying your opponent’s threats is one that must be mastered, not just on practical grounds, but also on psychological ones. There is nothing more frustrating to an attacker than a defender who refuses to buckle under pressure. In such situations, the attacker often overreaches, giving up too much for the faint hope of winning the game easily. It’s then that the tenacious defender will buckle down, stopping all threats before beginning an unstoppable counterattack that often sweeps away feeble resistance from an attacker who was unprepared for the change in roles. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen players after a game, shoulders slumped, feet shuffling, muttering to themselves, “I was winning.” No doubt they came up against a tougher defender than they bargained for.

The TRIP Method of Defence

There are four ways to defend directly against a threat. I like to call these the TRIP method of defence. TRIP stands for:

1) Take
2) Run
3) Interpose
4) Protect

Take

Capturing a piece that is attacking one of our pieces is the simplest and potentially most enduring way to defend against a threat. If your opponent’s piece is sitting on the side of the board, it can no longer bother you. This method almost always occurs by way of a fair trade.

Naiditsch – Gelfand
Dortmund 2007

Black’s last move, 13...\(\square d7-c5\), added another attacker to White’s knight on b3 and the pawn on e4. Not seeing anything better, White traded knights with 14 \(\square xc5\) dxc5. The tension was very short, lasting only a move. Trading off attacking pieces has a way of drying up the attacker’s energy, which is why this method is so often used.

Here is another example (from the same tournament) of a simple trade in response to a threat:
White has just attacked Black's queen. Again, after the simple trade, \(28...\textit{xd3 29 }\textit{xd3}\), the threat was removed.

In these last two cases, the attacked piece was able to help itself. But there are many occasions where help must come from one of its team-mates.

White has just played \(1 \textit{xc3}\), threatening the pawn on c7. While the pawn is helpless to defend itself against this attack, the black queen is in a position to help out by trading with \(1...\textit{xc3 2 }\textit{xc3}\).

The white knight has the black b-pawn by the throat. Black's bishop comes to the rescue by eliminating White's knight with \(1...\textit{xd5}\). The attacker has disappeared, and the b-pawn can breathe a sigh of relief.

**Run**

Quick! A lion suddenly appears in front of you. What do you do? Besides kiss your rear end goodbye, most people would say, "Run for your life!" The law of the jungle applies quite often on the chessboard, where every piece may be another's lunch. Chess pieces understand this all too well. As legendary Reggae great Bob Marley used to sing (quoting some military general, no doubt), "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day."

There are a couple of reasons why escape may be the best choice of the defensive options:

\textbf{a) The target is more important than the attacker}

One of the fun paradoxes in chess is that little guys are constantly pushing around bigger ones. The all-powerful queen often acts like the biggest coward when addressed by one of the other pieces. However, an
understanding of material values makes this easy to comprehend, as the following positions illustrate:

In each of these cases, the queen has to cut tail and run for her life. However, these attackers wouldn’t dare disrespect her majesty in such a way if they were not well protected. Still, the queen is not the only one who often has to back down in the face of an attack by a less valuable unit. All the pieces must retreat at one time or another.
Though protected in each case, the rook does well to hot-foot it out of there.

The knight and bishop have to cower before the lowly pawn. Notice that the pawn needs back-up when attacking a bishop, since otherwise the bishop will bite back.

b) The attacked piece is needed for a crucial duty

Black’s bishop, though under attack by White’s knight, seems solidly protected by a pawn. However, the bishop is a critical link in a chain: if it is captured, then Black will lose the g7-pawn followed by the h6-pawn. Black should remove the bishop from the knight’s glare (by playing 1...\textit{xf6}, for example).
White has just played 1 \( \text{a4} \), attacking the pawn on a7 as well as eyeballing the rook on e8. If Black does not suspect anything and plays 1...a6, the shocking 2 \( \text{xe8}! \) would be a rude wake-up call. After 2...\( \text{xe8} \), nothing in the world can stop the white pawn from promoting to a queen after 3 d7. This is another example where running (whether by 1...\( \text{d8} \) or 1...\( \text{a8} \)) would be the best choice of defence.

**Interpose**

Interposing is one of the least desirable (though often necessary) ways to defend against a threat. By placing another unit in the way, the defender is basically presenting the attacker with a new (and hopefully less valuable) target. This method of defence demands real sophistication because the defender may simply be creating a line of targets that will topple under more pressure. However, when done right, interposing (from now on referred to by its simpler equivalent, 'blocking') can be very effective.

There are two general principles when considering how to block an attack.

1) **Avoid blocking an attack with a piece that is more valuable than the attacking piece.**

2) **Try to block with the same type of piece as the attacker or with a unit that will simultaneously counterattack the attacker.**

Let me reemphasize that any principle ever written about chess is only a common-sense guideline. Always let the actual situation on the board dictate what should be done.

Now let's see how these two blocking principles play themselves out in a practical position:

This position arose after the moves 1 e4 d6 2 \( \text{b5}+ \). The bishop check is the sort of move that gets beginners excited as it immediately attacks the enemy king. Something dangerous and exciting seems to be happening after only two moves. Maybe the opponent will be intimidated by the early check, already worried that across the table sits a dangerous species of player with an eye for surprising sudden attacks.

Back to reality. Black can easily defend against the check by blocking the diagonal. Let's study the various options:

a) 2...\( \text{d7} ?? \). This absurd move breaks principle 1 above. The check would have worked like magic, winning a queen for a bishop in a mere three moves.

b) 2...\( \text{d7} \). Not a bad move, but it does congest Black's position a bit.

c) 2...\( \text{d7} \). This move follows the first half of principle 2: **look to block an attack with the same type of piece that is attacking.** Suddenly it is the white bishop which is being attacked, not what White was hoping for when playing the check. Although a trade would yield a bishop for a bishop, Black would recapture and have the advantage of a piece (either queen or knight) leaving the back rank while the rest of White's army is still sleeping at home.
d) 2...c6. Now we see the second half of principle 2 in action: **try to block with a unit that will simultaneously counterattack the attacker**. This is a very effective move that gives the bishop no option but to retreat with its tail between its legs.

In the above diagram, White has just played a terrific-looking pawn advance 11 e5, attacking the knight on f6 and also unleashing an attack by the queen on the rook sitting on a8. This two-fold attack seems destined to win material, but Black has a simple defence that is typical in this kind of position: **11...b7! (D).**

This move follows principle 2 in that it blocks and counterattacks. Once the queen moves, it will now be White's rook on h1 that suffers.

There is one unique blocking situation that bears special mention because it crops up often. Take a look at the following:

In the first of these two diagrams, White has just played 1 w e6+, attacking both the king and knight. Black has the simple but effective reply **1...c7! (see the second diagram).** Not only does the move block the check and save the knight, but it also prevents any immediate attack on the king by the white queen since all the obvious attacking squares (c6, c8, g6 and g8) are perfectly guarded by the knight. Nuggets such as this one are very useful to remember.
Protect

When all else fails, it is often necessary to buckle down and protect one’s pieces. Of the four aspects of the TRIP method, knowing how to protect your forces well may require the most skill and be the most demanding. I can’t stress enough how important the following insights are. Study them again and again until you know them perfectly.

For starters, always choose the protecting piece wisely. Certain pieces make better protectors than others:

Here, all three black pawns demand protection. Black has a simple move, 1...\(\text{Qg6}\), when the black queen brings all the pawns under her umbrella.

The queen can be a great protector because of her tenacity (see following diagram).

The queen is defending the f-pawn from being captured by the rook on f2. If White tries to use the other rook to chase off the queen by playing 1 \(\text{Qd2}\), the black queen can easily maintain contact with the pawn in many ways: along the rank at e7, c7, b7 or a7 or diagonally at e8 or e6. After, let’s say, 1...\(\text{Qc7}\), this little game can go on forever with 2 \(\text{Qc2}\) \(\text{Qa7}\) 3 \(\text{Rb2}\) \(\text{Qd7}\) 4 \(\text{Rad2}\) \(\text{Qe6}\) until White finally gets bored or exhausted.

White has just played 1 \(\text{Qd7}\) with two threats: to capture the rook on e8, and to deliver a quick checkmate by capturing the pawn on g7 with the queen (the Bear Hug Mate, which we will see more of in the chapter on checkmates). Black seems to be

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1 Though the terms defender and protector can be used interchangeably, I prefer to use protector to stress the idea of protecting over the other defensive methods (taking, running, interposing and counterattacking).
in a world of trouble against this attack. However, Black has a wonderful riposte: 1...\(\texttt{Wg6!}\). The black queen shows off its defensive skills by protecting the rook on e8 and the checkmate on g7. But what makes the queen move truly impressive is that it simultaneously combines defence with attack by also striking at the white rook on b1 and threatening checkmate on g2! No other piece on the chessboard has this kind of wide-ranging flexibility. For this reason, the queen is by far the best protector. The only catch is that powerful queens do not like to be tied down to defensive duty for long because they would rather be attacking. For this reason, the queen should be used as a protector only when necessary or clearly advantageous.

The rook, while not as flexible as the queen, can also be a good protector:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{scope}[scale=0.5]
\draw[lightgray] (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{scope}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textit{The rook defends well along a rank.}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{scope}[scale=0.5]
\draw[lightgray] (0,0) grid (8,8);
\end{scope}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textit{A passive defender under attack}

Despite the distant separation between the pawns, the rook easily guards both.

If attacked, the rook can move, maintain its defensive duties and even hit back on occasion.

In this diagram, the knight is trying to chase the rook away from protecting the immobile pawn. White plays 1 \(\texttt{Ec4!} \ (D)\), a move that continues to protect the pawn while also counterattacking. Good players always strive to play active defensive moves such as this one.
After 1 \( \text{Ec}4 \), the rook punches back!

A rook can also switch its direction of defence easily, as the following diagram shows:

However, a rook could experience trouble protecting when it has a limited area in which to move.

In this slightly different situation, Black wins the pawn after 1...\( \text{Ed}2 \). The rook cannot retreat and continue to protect the pawn because of the lack of space in which to manoeuvre.

Although restricted to only one colour, the bishop is often an excellent protector. One of its favourite situations is mutual partnership with a pawn.

Notice how each bishop protects a pawn while also being defended itself. This type of co-protective relationship is extremely useful to remember. Before we move on
with our study of the bishop as a protector, let’s look at all the other co-protective relationships that can occur on the chessboard.

*Queen and bishop*

*Queen and rook*

*Queen and pawn*

*Queen and rook*

*Two rooks*
Let's get back to the bishop. In the last diagram on page 81 we saw how well it co-protected a pawn by placing itself diagonally in front. However, it can also provide magnificent long-range support from behind:

Even when a bishop becomes blocked by its own pawns, it can provide good defense for them. There is a famous quote by the Romanian grandmaster Mihai Suba: “Bad bishops defend good pawns!” Here is
an example of a so-called bad bishop uniting scattered pawns:

2) Its inability to maintain contact with a square once it moves.

Due to these two factors, the knight is generally a poor protector, as the following examples attest:

The infamous 'Scholar's Mate' is a clear example of the bishop's long-range protective powers helping to execute an early attack. The moves leading to the following diagram were 1 e4 e5 2 ♜h5 ♟c6 3 ♟c4 ♟f6?? 4 ♜xf7# (D).

Checkmate in 4 moves thanks to the bishop's long-range protection

Now let's move on to the knight. We have already noted two important properties of the knight:

1) Its inability to fight back directly when attacked by any piece;
In all three diagrams, the knight cannot fight back against the attacking piece. It must move, but once it does, it cannot continue to protect the attacked pawn. Even two knights co-protecting each other have to watch out for moves that will break their fragile connection:

Black plays 1...f5! or 1...b4!. Either move will chase one of the knights away from the defence of the other. Even 1...d5!, a move which allows the pawn to be captured, will divert the c3-knight away from defending its team-mate. After 2 Qxd5 Exe4 Black wins a knight for a pawn.

Despite everything just written, knights often find themselves relegated to defensive duty. A good player will exercise caution when forced to use a knight as a protector, making sure that the knight is secure or on temporary assignment.

Sentry duty comes naturally to pawns. Though as under-appreciated as stay-at-home Moms, without them positions often fall apart at the seams. No unit is called on more frequently when consistent and reliable protection is needed. Pawns get the job done cheaply, efficiently, and without complaint.

Working together, they can form an almost unbreakable chain:

Notice how the pawns in this diagram forge ahead like geese in an inverted-V formation. Each pawn protects the other all the way up the chain with the undefended pawns far back in the rear. This pawn configuration has enormous power that makes it very difficult for the opposing pieces (especially the rooks) to penetrate. As long as the base is strong, the entire structure will usually keep out the enemy. The diagram on the following page shows the protecting relationship even more graphically.

Granted, positions like this one do not happen very often, but the point is to show that all the pawns (except the g-pawn) feel empowered by a fellow pawn protecting it
from behind. It should be sufficient to note that pawns can also provide secure protection to the pieces. However, pawns share the weakness of the knight in that they cannot move and maintain protection of the square they were just guarding.

The final protecting piece to consider is the king. Though it often needs security itself, the king is a great short-range defender. Unlike the knight and pawn, it can often protect a square even if forced to move.

As noted earlier, the king is very sensitive to attacks, and that normally hampers its use as a protector.

Before going on to an example from practical play, I would like to make a few important points:

1) It is physically impossible to interpose (block) when a king, knight or pawn attacks.

2) If a king is under attack (in check), there are only three ways (instead of four) to defend: take the checking piece, run with the king, or interpose along the line of attack. It is impossible to ‘protect’ the king since the king’s capture is not allowed.

3) The truly most desirable way to meet a threat is to find an aggressive way to ignore it. Such an attitude will shock your opponent, who was probably thinking that you were on the ropes. But be very careful: if your opponent can deal with your threat, then your piece will still be in trouble.

Though massively outgunned, the king makes a valiant effort to protect its pawns.
Now let's take a look at the TRIP method in action. The following position occurred in a game between two of this generation's best players, current World Champion (as of July 2009) Viswanathan Anand, who hails from India, and former World Champion Vladimir Kramnik from Russia.

Before looking at the moves that were played, let's carefully study how great players create amazing protective connections between and among their forces. First of all, notice how every single piece and pawn is protected by at least one other unit. In addition, both kings are well-shielded. If we take a closer look at each side, we will see some of the important relationships we have come across in this chapter:

**White:**
1) White's queen and rooks co-protect each other.
2) White's king protects three units at close range (two pawns and the g2-bishop).
3) White's queen protects three units: along a file (pawn), a rank (rook) and a diagonal (pawn).
4) White has an inverted V-formation of pawns with additional support from the e1-bishop. The poorest protective piece, the knight, defends nothing that is in a forward (therefore more vulnerable) position.

**Black:**
1) Black has a queen and rook co-protecting each other.
2) Black has a queen and bishop co-protecting each other.
3) Black's rooks co-protect each other.
4) Black's pawns solidly protect each other. Black has an inverted V-formation that is strong at its base.
5) Black's king is protecting the pawns near it.
6) Black's knight on f6 is not protecting anything while the knight on e5 is guarding two pawns that are already well-fortified.

It is very difficult to defeat players who maintain this level of defensive harmony. The key word is maintain. Each move brings new threats that force the two combatants to adjust the position of their respective armies while trying to preserve their protective connections. This game is no different, as the following moves will show:

21 \[ \text{Qe4} \] (D)

White threatens the bishop on d6 with the knight and rook. To remove the attackers,
Black now carries out a massive trading operation that uses the T part of the TRIP method.

21...\texttt{xcl} 22 \texttt{xcl} \texttt{xcl} 23 \texttt{wcl} \texttt{xe4} 24 \texttt{xe4} (D)

Now that the smoke has cleared, we see that the two pieces that were once attacking the bishop are no longer a threat because they are off the board! With his next move, Black decides to trade yet another piece.

24...\texttt{b4}

Note how this move is only possible due to the bishop’s connection to the queen.

25 \texttt{c8+} (D)

Black has foreseen this move and has prepared a funky reply. Let’s take a close look at all of the TRIP options.

\textbf{Take} – This is not a choice as the white queen is not under attack.

\textbf{Run} – Black’s actual choice (see below).

\textbf{Interpose} – All blocking moves lead to disaster:

25...\texttt{d8??} is horrible and loses the queen for no reason.

25...\texttt{e8??} also loses the queen.

25...\texttt{f8??} 26 \texttt{xf8+} \texttt{xf8} (26...\texttt{xf8??} 27 \texttt{xb4+} costs Black a piece) 27 \texttt{xb7} nets White a pawn with another one in grave danger.

\textbf{Protect} – This does not apply since the king cannot be protected in response to an attack.

25...\texttt{h7}!

Running is by far the best choice.

26 \texttt{c3}

White’s bishop runs to a square that allows co-protection with a pawn \emph{and} attacks the knight on e5. There was another interesting possibility for White that bears mentioning. Instead of playing 26 \texttt{c3}, he could have chosen to take the bishop on b4 in an attempt to win a pawn by playing 26 \texttt{xb4} \texttt{xb4} 27 \texttt{xb7} (D):

This possibility shows how the TRIP method is not the only way to handle danger. Black has just lost a pawn and is threatened with the loss of one more on a6. However, he can ignore what White is doing.
and carry out his own counterattack with 29...\textit{\$e}1+! 30 \textit{\$g}2 \textit{f}5! (the inverted V-formation on attack!) 31 \textit{\$c}2? (after 31 \textit{\$f}3? \textit{\$d}3! Black wins the f-pawn; 31 \textit{\$e}7 and 31 \textit{\$c}7 are better) 31...\textit{\$e}2 32 \textit{\$b}1 \textit{\$g}4 33 \textit{\$f}3 \textit{\$xb}2, when Black has won back the pawn, and is primed to win another one.

\textbf{26...\textit{\$xc}3!}
Taking the attacker.

\textbf{27 \textit{\$xc}3}
Threatening the knight again.

\textbf{27...\textit{\$g}4}
The knight runs to a safer square.

\textbf{28 \textit{\$f}3}
We have seen how often knights find themselves under attack from the other pieces. Here the knight is forced to move yet again.

\textbf{28...\textit{\$f}6}
The knight lands on a square where it is solidly protected by a pawn. This illustrates one of the characteristics we saw earlier, that pawns are often very reliable and willing protectors.

\textbf{29 \textit{\$c}8 (D)}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\end{center}

White now attacks the pawn on b7 with two pieces (the queen and bishop) while it is defended by only one (the queen). Let's look at the \textit{TRIP} method at work once more:

\textbf{Take} – This is impossible.

\textbf{Run} – If Black chooses to run with 29...b5, he will lose a pawn after 30 \textit{\$xa}6.

\textbf{Interpose} – See the actual game.

\textbf{Protect} – It's impossible to add further protection to the pawn.

\textbf{29...\textit{\$d}5}
The knight shields the pawn from attack. But wait, you say. The knight is more valuable than the pawn. Doesn't this violate one of the guidelines about not blocking threats to inferior units by using superior ones? Of course it does. But there are compelling reasons to ignore the guideline. First of all, Black had no choice! It was either play this move or lose a pawn for nothing. Second, the knight is well-protected (by a pawn!) and so Black risks losing nothing at all. \textbf{Remember: chess is about playing the best move, not being a slave to guidelines.}

\textbf{30 \textit{\$a}3! \textit{a}5! 31 \textit{h}4! \textit{b}6! (D)}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\end{center}

Notice how in the last two moves both sides created protective pawn relationships.

\textbf{32 \textit{\$c}6}
White continues to hunt the poor knight. In addition, since the knight is the sole protector of the pawn on b6 (the last link in the chain), White is looking to get rid of it and then capture the pawn with his queen. If the knight chooses to move, it cannot maintain protection of the threatened pawn.
The black queen comes to the rescue. We have already noted that the queen is the supreme protector. Here she shows up just in the nick of time to guard both threatened units.

33 \textit{xd5} \textit{exd5}

Naturally Black does not recapture with the queen as that would leave the b-pawn without protection.

34 \textit{wc3} \textit{wd7} 35 \textit{g2}

Here White offered a \textbf{draw}, which Black accepted. There is nothing left for either side to attack. High-level defence ruled the day.
**Exercises**

The solutions to this chapter’s exercises are on pages 148 to 149.

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**E32**

This position arises from a highly popular variation of an opening known as the Queen’s Indian Defence (after the moves 1 d4 f6 2 c4 e6 3 f3 b6 4 g3 a6). What do you think is the most popular way to defend the attacked pawn on c4?

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**E33**

What is the best way for Black to reply to the threat to the queen?

---

**E34**

White has just played 11 c1-h6 with the devastating threat of \( \text{wxg7\#} \). Using the TRIP method, can you figure out how Black responded?

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**E35**

What simple defensive move refuted Black’s hope of an attack?
In life, unlike chess, the game continues after checkmate.
ISAAC ASIMOV

Skill 7: Knowing how to execute basic checkmates

The word checkmate has power. Like a magical incantation, it confers victory over the mind of another. Grandmasters who have played thousands of games in their long careers still love to utter the word. It makes the eyes light up, the pulse quicken and a smile come from the inside out. Most sports have an external force that signals the end of the game: a buzzer, a finish line, an umpire’s call. In chess, the player who shows the most cunning, grit, skill and creativity gets to say with total finality that the battle has truly ended.

Before you can magically pull off a checkmate (or mate, as most tournament players say), it’s important to know the most typical ones. In Murray Chandler’s brilliantly simple book *How To Beat Your Dad at Chess*, the author shows a number of famous checkmates in depth. Since this is a book on the basics, this chapter will devote itself to the checkmates that are a must for the new player.

The Bear Hug

The most important checkmate of all has no name. I call it the Bear Hug because it smothers the king completely, giving it no room to breathe and no possibility of escape. Take a look at what makes the Bear Hug so lethal:

The black king has no moves as the queen is not only attacking it, but is also controlling four flight-squares. This would be a totally dominant position except for one thing: the queen needs protection. Without the pawn on d6, the queen would instantly suffer the fate of any piece that dares to enter the king’s inner chamber without backup. As it stands, the king has been mated.

Naturally, any piece can help the queen carry out her deadly mission:
Bear Hugs occur in all sorts of situations:

White plays 1 \textit{\texttt{wh6}}! and the game is over. Black cannot stop checkmate on g7.

In this position, the black knight is preventing the Bear Hug on h7. White plays 1 \textit{\texttt{axf6}}! \textit{\texttt{xf6}}. Now another knight stands guard, so White continues with 2 \textit{\texttt{axf6}}! (D).

Both knights have been eliminated and the threat of checkmate is still there. Black cannot stop it by playing 2...h6 because then White will break through with 3 \textit{\texttt{axh6}}+!, when 3...gxh6 is met by 4 \textit{\texttt{whxh6+ gg8}} 5 \textit{\texttt{wh7#}}. Black must play 2...\textit{\texttt{we4}}, when 3 \textit{\texttt{xe4}} leads to a decisive material advantage for White.
In the above diagram, Black’s queen and rook would deliver a Bear Hug on c2, if not for the white queen standing guard. Black starts by playing 1...\texttt{h6}!. The white queen cannot leave to capture the bishop, nor can it move away since the king would be in check. White can try 2 \texttt{g5} but 2...\texttt{xg5}! continues the joke. After 3 \texttt{f4} \texttt{xf4}! 4 \texttt{e3} \texttt{xe3} White has to defend against the mate (with 5 \texttt{d3}, for instance) and part with the queen.

Bear Hugs can show up when you least expect them:

The white king appears to be well defended. However, this is only a mirage. After 21...\texttt{f3}! White wakes up to realize that his king is being surrounded by deadly scorpions. The black bishop cannot be captured since 22 \texttt{gxf3} is met by the devastating 22...\texttt{wh3}!, when there is no way to stop the mate on g2. White panicked and played 22 \texttt{e3} only to be greeted with the bone-crunching 22...\texttt{wh3}!! (anyway!). An indefensible Bear Hug is threatened on g2 and the queen is untouchable because 23 \texttt{gxh3} loses instantly to 23...\texttt{d3}! . Seeing these embarrassing options, White threw in the towel. (The desperate but spectacular 22 \texttt{e6}! was his best chance, when 22...\texttt{fxe6} 23 \texttt{gxf3} \texttt{d5}! wins either the f3- or the a2-pawn.)

The struggle for the Bear Hug Mate can sometimes get very complex:

With a fantastic bishop lurking on b7, Black can fantasize about giving mate by dropping his queen into g2. In fact, there are several ways to bring this about, all based on moving the knight out of the way. For instance:

a) 1...\texttt{a5}! is the most obvious, as it attacks the white queen and prepares to bring the black queen to h3 or c6. White has no defence.
b) 1...\(\text{d4!}\) is also effective, but a little more complex; e.g., 2 cxd4 \(\text{wh3}\) 3 d5 \(\text{xd5!}\) 4 \(\text{d4}\) and now 4...\(\text{xh2+}\) mates.

c) 1...\(\text{e5!}\) is more spectacular. If White accepts the sacrifice with 2 fxe5, Black plays the crushing 2...\(\text{wc6}\), threatening 3...\(\text{g2#}\). White can try to prevent ...\(\text{wc6}\) by 2 \(\text{d4}\), but Black replies 2...\(\text{h3!}\) (D), when the Bear Hug Mate quickly triumphs.

Notice that the queen is not flattening the king as it did in the Bear Hug, needing the queen on d8 to block the one square the Quad mate does not cover.

As popular as the Scholar's Mate is, it pales in comparison to the following Quad mate:

This mate on h7 is critical to remember because most good players remove their kings from the centre by castling kingside. Because of the specifics of the initial set-up, it is very easy for the f1-bishop to get to d3, the g1-knight to get to g5, and the queen to get to h5. The only hindrance to the conquest of the square is usually a knight on f6. If that piece is captured or diverted, checkmate often follows:

Quad Mates

Quad stands for Queen along diagonal. It is the cousin of the Bear Hug and rivals it in importance. The next diagram shows the most famous Quad mate, the Scholar's Mate (a.k.a. the Four-Move Checkmate):
1 \( \text{Qd5} \) (D) hits the defending knight on f6 and the queen on c7.

Black cannot capture by 1...\( \text{Qxd5} \) since White will then be able to checkmate in one move with 2 \( \text{Qxh7} \). Black also cannot move the black queen away from attack (with 1...\( \text{Qd8} \), for example) as that would allow White to capture the black knight with check and then checkmate with the queen on h7. Either black choice, losing the queen or being checkmated, is a total disaster.

The next example shows a typical combination leading to a quad mate with a few twists thrown in:

White looks like the one who is attacking in this position, as the pawns have stormed ahead to crack open lines around Black’s king. However, White has overlooked the wicked hit 1...\( \text{Qc3} \)!. The knight forks the white king and queen, practically forcing White to play 2 \( \text{Bxc3} \). Now Black replies 2...\( \text{Bxc3} \), discovering a potent attack by the black queen. If the white king moves, i.e. 3 \( \text{Qa1} \) (or 3 \( \text{Qc1} \)), Black finishes the game with the simple quad mate 3...\( \text{Qb2} \) (D).

However, I had described this position as having a bit more drama. The reason is that White can play differently on move 3. Instead of moving the king, White can return the piece with 3 \( \text{b5} \). Of course, Black continues the attack with 3...\( \text{xb5} \) (D).

White’s queen is under attack and Black is threatening to move the bishop out of the
way and again land the quad mate on b2. White can be stubborn and try $4 \text{\textit{W}}f2$ to answer $4...\text{\textit{C}}c4+$ with $5 \text{\textit{B}}b6$. However, Black has the beautiful move $5...\text{\textit{Z}}c5! \,(D)$, which cuts the queen off from defending the pinned bishop.

Although White will not get immediately check mated in this line of play, Black will calmly pocket the bishop on the next move and still have a great attack. The quad mate led to a serious gain in material.

5) The frustrated loser has to go explain to his coach and friends why he lost to the most well-known of all mates.

So what is this most basic of all mates? Here is what it looks like:

The main features for Black’s demise are in place: the black pawns wall in their king while an enemy rook (or queen) has unfettered access to the back row. White wins with the move $1 \text{\textit{Z}}e8\# \,(D)$.

The Back-Rank Mate

The Back-Rank Mate is probably the most feared of all the basic checkmates. Beginner tournaments are filled with stories of back-rank mates, the basic outline of which usually goes like this:

1) One side plays a great game and is ahead by copious amounts of material.
2) The losing side is desperate, but notices one possible trick.
3) The winning side, through cockiness or overconfidence, leaves the back row unprotected.
4) The losing side jumps at the chance to turn the tables, and wins the game by back-rank mate.

The next position is only slightly more complicated (see diagram overleaf):
White wins with $1 \text{e}e8+ \text{xe}8 2 \text{xe}8\#$.

This position presents a greater challenge:

Black's two rooks prevent White from conquering the back rank. White clears the obstacle by sacrificing his queen: $1 \text{wc}8+! \text{xc}8 2 \text{e}e8+ \text{xe}8 3 \text{xe}8\#$.

The following diagram introduces a new twist. The black queen is under attack, but that is hardly the most significant feature of the position. Black sees that White's king is trapped in on the back row. The brilliant $1...\text{wb}1+!$ moves the queen out of one dangerous position into another. However, this one is with a lethal purpose;

White will lose after $2 \text{xb}1 \text{xb}1+ 3 \text{xb}1 \text{e}1\#$.

One of the most famous and succinct back-rank stories in chess history occurred from the following diagram:

Playing the black pieces was the great Cuban World Champion Jose Raul Capablanca. It was his turn to play and he had a choice of moves. It would have been a mistake for him to try $29...\text{wb}1+? 30 \text{f}1 \text{d}1??$ as he would have been shocked by the counter-move $31 \text{c}8+$, when the only reply $31...\text{d}8$ is met by $32 \text{xd}8\#$. Instead,
the great Capa played 29...\texttt{\textit{b}2!}, prompting his opponent to resign immediately! White’s queen and rook are under attack and White is about to suffer heavy losses. Let’s take a look at why White is so helpless:

a) 30 \texttt{\textit{x}b}2 \texttt{\textit{d}1#}.

b) 30 \texttt{\textit{e}1} \texttt{\textit{x}c}3! 31 \texttt{\textit{x}c}3 \texttt{\textit{d}1+} 32 \texttt{\textit{e}1} \texttt{\textit{x}e}1#.

c) Even if the e3-pawn were not there, 30 \texttt{\textit{e}3} would not save White: 30...\texttt{\textit{x}e}2 31 \texttt{\textit{x}e}2 \texttt{\textit{d}1+} and mates.

d) 30 \texttt{\textit{d}3} \texttt{\textit{b}1+} (not 30...\texttt{\textit{x}e}2?? due to 31 \texttt{\textit{x}d}8#) 31 \texttt{\textit{f}1} (or 31 \texttt{\textit{d}1} \texttt{\textit{x}d}1+) 31...\texttt{\textit{x}f}1+ 32 \texttt{\textit{xf}1} \texttt{\textit{d}3} and Black has won a whole rook.

e) 30 \texttt{\textit{d}3} might be the sneakiest move, hoping Black plays 30...\texttt{\textit{d}3}?? 31 \texttt{\textit{c}8+}. Instead, Black replies 30...\texttt{\textit{a}1+} 31 \texttt{\textit{f}1} \texttt{\textit{xc}3} and has again won an entire rook.

While most of us will never be Capablanca, by studying this instructive example we can hope to avoid a similar fate to Bernstein.

Back-rank mate does not always require that three pawns are standing in front of the trapped king. Sometimes it’s an enemy pawn that prevents the monarch from fleeing:

White is down by a full rook in the above diagram, but turns the tables with the move 1 \texttt{\textit{xf}8+!} \texttt{\textit{xf}8} (1...\texttt{\textit{h}7} doesn’t help because of the Bear Hug 2 \texttt{\textit{g}7#} 2 \texttt{\textit{c}8#}.

The following diagram should not cause any confusion:

Black is waiting for the white queen to flee from the rook’s attack in order to execute a Bear Hug Mate. For example, 1 \texttt{\textit{d}6??} \texttt{\textit{h}5+!} 2 \texttt{\textit{x}h}5 (2 \texttt{\textit{g}1} is mated by 2...\texttt{\textit{h}1#}) 2...\texttt{\textit{g}2}. However, White strikes first with 1 \texttt{\textit{xf}8+!} \texttt{\textit{xf}8} 2 \texttt{\textit{c}8#}.

This diagram illustrates another neat trick to remember. White mates by 1 \texttt{\textit{h}8+!} \texttt{\textit{x}h}8 2 \texttt{\textit{f}8#.}
Still another nice piece of technique can be seen in the following diagram:

White starts with $1 \text{dxf7!} \ (D)$.

Black cannot capture the rook as $1... \text{xf7}$ $2 \text{c8+ f8} \ 3 \text{xf8#}$ mates (or $3 \text{f8#}$).

Do these things happen in real games? Check out the next diagram, where one of the greatest players in history falls uncharacteristically for a basic shot.

The great Alekhine has just moved his queen from e7 (where it was under attack from the e1-rook) to the horrible square b4. The Estonian genius Paul Keres was quick to punish the move with the bone-cruncher $23 \text{xd7+!} \ (D)$.

If Black were to capture the intruding white queen with $23... \text{xd7}$ then White replies $24 \text{e8+ d8}$ and either rook capture ends the struggle. Of course, **Black resigned** on the spot.
Exercises

The solutions to this chapter's exercises are on pages 150 to 153.

**E36**
White is already two pawns up, and Black’s king is in a dicey position. How can White win much more material?

**Réti – Bogoljubow**  
*New York 1924*

**E37**
It’s White’s turn to move. How did he force the win of a piece?

**Ashley – Skripchenko**  
*Cannes 1998*

**E38**
Bad things often happen when a white pawn gets to f6. How did White finish off a nice attacking game?

**Ashley – Van Buskirk**  
*Los Angeles 2000*

**E39**
My opponent had been torturing me for some time, and his last move, 29...b5??, was meant to carry out a big attack against my king. How did I manage to remind Black that both sides have kings to defend?
Superstar attacker and former World Champion Mikhail Tal has been up to his old antics, sacrificing a whole rook for a dangerous initiative. Now he decided to add more fuel to the fire with the super-aggressive 24 \textit{\texttt{\texttt{d5}}}!!. This time there are three questions:

1) What happens if Black captures the knight?
2) How did Tal destroy Black’s actual move 24...\textit{\texttt{\texttt{f6}}}e8?  
3) How could Black have defended herself? (You may want to skip this one as it may cause migraine headaches!)}

Defending a difficult position for some time, I had missed the opportunity to play 41 \textit{\texttt{gxf3}} (with chances to draw) and instead blundered with 41 \textit{\texttt{h1-g1}}??. What beautiful sequence did Black now play to force my resignation?
Part 2: The Fabulous Five:  
The Skills in Action

The following games have rightfully gone down as some of the best in chess history. Action packed and full of wild moves and sacrifices, they illustrate why the ancient game of chess continues to attract so many fans.

But these games are not included here solely for their entertainment value. They are intended to show how the basic skills from the first part of the book are deftly woven together by some of the greatest players in history. Review these games many times until you understand them thoroughly. The skills you learn will help you win countless games. Enjoy!
The following game is one of my favourites. Paul Morphy, once a child prodigy from the great American city of New Orleans, dominated the world stage in the late 1850s. Here he plays against a consultation team (it takes two to try to wrestle a giant like Morphy!) at the Opera House in Paris in 1858. His opponents, the Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard, help to create one of the most famous miniatures in chess history, a game that must be carefully studied by anyone who wants to clearly understand the basics of chess play.

1 e4 (D)

The battle begins.

A lone foot soldier, once known by the dignified appellation ‘King’s Pawn’, stoically marches two squares forward to erect an outpost in the centre of the battlefield. The move seems modest, but for centuries the great masters (later given the even more stately title of grandmaster) have understood that this move sends a clear signal to the enemy that the player handling the white pieces wants blood. The pawn stakes its claim to two key squares – d5 and f5 – while unleashing the diagonal force of the king’s hatchet man to his right, the bishop, and the superlative attacker to his left, the queen. No other first move – except for the other regal pawn advance 1 d4 – grabs as much territory or lets loose as much firepower. It’s no wonder that this first move was the favourite of some of the fiercest fighters in chess history: the hypercreative Adolf Anderssen, the dynamic Estonian Paul Keres, the magician from Riga Mikhail Tal, the epic American Bobby Fischer, and the quicksilver Indian Vishy Anand. (Of course, our present hero belongs on this illustrious list.) It’s no state secret: if you want to take your opponent into the teeth of the combat where, as the Spartan mothers once said, you either return with your shield or on it, then 1 e4 is your shot at immortality.

1...e5

The classic response. Black decides to mimic White, if only to gain all the same advantages White did. Black has several alternatives, but they all follow the dominant idea of chess: look to control the central squares. As flowers will lift their faces toward the rising sun, the pieces and pawns look to draw energy from the middle of the board. Sometimes they will occupy the centre, as the pawns do here, or they will pressure it from a distance. Sometimes the control happens immediately or after a few moves. The key point, one that is drummed into chess-players from the womb, remains true today as it did 150 years ago: control the centre and you control the game.

2 ćf3

Diagram
The knight gallops toward the middle of the board to attack the undefended black pawn.

2...d6 (D)

This is Philidor's Defence, named after the greatest player of the 18th century. Today's players usually avoid this move, preferring instead either to defend the pawn with 2...c6 or to counterattack with 2...f6. The drawback to Philidor's move is that it temporarily blocks the bishop on f8, and we have seen in Chapter 2 how blocking a piece can affect one's entire game.

3 d4 (D)

Morphy adds another attacker to the black pawn. More importantly, he looks to control the centre and open up more lines for his pieces to join the contest.

3...g4 (D)

Black decides to freeze one of the attackers by pinning it to the queen. The move looks fancy, and is meant to frighten inexperienced opposition. However, someone should have warned these players that trying to intimidate Morphy is like a fly trying to scare a flyswatter.

4 dxe5! (D)

Morphy ignores the bishop's little demonstration and bites on the pawn. Black suddenly realizes that it is impossible simply to recapture the e-pawn since 4...dxe5 is answered by 5 wxd8+ xd8 6 xe5! (D).
White has gobbled up the poor pawn anyway, and is eyeing another one on f7 (not to mention the bishop on g4).

4...\textit{xf3}

Otherwise Black loses a pawn.

5 \textit{xf3} dxe5 6 \textit{c4}!  

The two white pieces that were let loose on the first move now threaten the most famous Quad mate of all by 7 \textit{xf7#}.

6...\textit{xf6} 7 \textit{b3}!  

Seeing that double protection is impossible, Black decides to guard the sensitive point next to the king and leave the b-pawn to its fate. Though the move blocks the bishop on f8, Black is hoping that this suffocation will be temporary. The events of the game will pour cold water on that optimism.

8 \textit{c3}!

Not many players would refuse the snack on b7, especially since it simply wins a pawn outright. However, Morphy had spotted Black’s desperate plan, i.e. if 8 \textit{xb7} Black can trade queens with 8...\textit{b4+}  

B

W
(the crossing point of the white king and queen).

The great New Orleanian did not want to bore himself with the task of winning a protracted endgame, and instead placed his trust in the smooth and easy activation of his officers. The knight on c3 stops the defensive check on b4 in advance, so the black pawn on b7 is once again under serious pressure.

We thus return to 8 c3! (D):

Unblocking the second rank to allow the queen to protect the threatened pawn. Unfortunately, this move does nothing to improve the possibilities of the black pieces lounging on the back row.

9 g5! (D)

Move by relentless move, the white pieces spring into the game to harass the opposition. On move three, it was a black bishop that pinned White’s knight to the queen. Now the proverbial shoe is on the other foot as Black’s only well-positioned piece has been hog-tied to the square. The Duke and Count must have started to steal furtive glances at one another as it dawned on them that their still-unmoved pieces had no easy route to enter the fray. The bishop on f8 is still constrained by the queen, which means that the rook on h8 has no path to potential glory. The rook on a8 is totally blocked in, while the queen on e7 is tied down to the embarrassing defence of pawns. That leaves the knight on b8 as the only piece that might help to deal with the brewing storm about to hit the black position. The problem there is that the only good-looking square for it to go to is d7, which would block the black queen from guarding the b-pawn. Feeling backed into a corner, the duo decide to lash out.

9...b5

Tired of being a target, the pawn lunges forward to attack.

10 xb5! (D)

That sound you hear is a fly being smashed against a wall.
Black sees a chance to pocket a knight for two pawns. Under normal circumstances, this would be a nice idea. But in the brutal economics of this game, the open lines to the exposed black king will easily compensate White for his minor material investment.

11 \textit{\texttt{\textit{x}b5+}}

The hunt is on!

Using the TRIP method of defence as our guide, it's clear that Black cannot take (T) the attacking piece, nor is it possible to protect (P) the king (remember: it's technically impossible to protect a king the way one would protect a pawn or any other piece). That means Black has to decide to run (R) or interpose (I) by blocking the check with one of the black pieces. The first option, attempting escape with the king to the only available square d8, can be attempted by 11...\textit{\texttt{\textit{d}d8}} (D).

Black decides that blocking the check is the least of all evils.

12 \textit{\texttt{0-0-0!}} (D)

It's not often that the simple act of castling leads to such a devastating increase in attacking pressure. Players normally castle
in order to whisk the king to safety and to release the rook from the purgatory of the corner. This move does both of those things... and more. The rook landed on d1 simply because the rules say that’s where it must go when one castles queenside, but it is no coincidence that it is also menacing the freshly pinned knight on d7. Though seemingly defended three times, the knight is, in practical terms, hardly defended at all. Its twin on f6 cannot count as a defender since it is busy shielding her majesty from danger. The king is not a true defender since if the rook on d1 were to capture the knight, the king would be unable to recapture without walking into check. And finally the queen is a poor defender in this case since she would be captured for very little wood in return. That leaves Black with only one reasonable way to deal with the threat.

12...\textit{Ad8}

Black’s TRIP options being squeezed, the gentlemen must directly protect the unfortunate knight with the only piece available. Black probably considered castling in order to get out from under the pin, but no doubt quickly saw that 12...0-0-0 in no way secures the king. White would have surgically ended the game with 13 \textit{a6+ c7 14 b7# (D).}
Now the final point of White’s castling on the 12th move is revealed. The rook that has just watched its brethren sacrifice itself for the cause prepares to mete out immediate vengeance. Note that White is doing all this damage while a piece down. In reality, that’s just a joke. Black’s bishop and rook in the corner do not really count as pieces, just pretenders sitting idly by while Rome burns.

14...\textit{we6} (D)

With lightning bolts striking from on high, the players handling the black pieces resort to their old strategy of trying to trade off the queens. However, the chess god Morphy is not so easily placated.

15 $\text{\textit{xd7+!}}$ $\text{\textit{xd7}}$ (D)

The final position is a poetic picture. Black is a queen and knight ahead, yet must lay down his arms to the bishop and rook.

This game is packed full of basic principles: control the centre; release then quickly activate the forces; only respect threats that are real; find powerful crossing points; avoid blocking pieces; know when material

Black might have breathed a sigh of relief after the last move. It seems that the worst may have passed, that Black may finally be able to bring the slumbering kingside pieces into the game.

16 $\text{\textit{wb8+!!}}$ (D)
advantage or disadvantage matters; and finally, when mating the king is the question, no sacrifice is too great. No wonder this game remains one of the most instructive in chess history. On one pleasant day in Paris long ago, Morphy created a masterpiece for generations to appreciate and learn from for the rest of time.
Wilhelm Steinitz, the first official World Champion, is revered by chess-players for his grand codification of strategic principles. He belongs in a long line of original thinkers: Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*, Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, Isaac Newton in *Principia*. He took principles that masters were aware of at the time and gave them body and depth, and then he went even further to prove that the game had an inherent logic that gave it the validity of a science. One of his greatest discoveries, that no attack succeeds merely because one wishes it to but rather because the position demands it, transformed an entire culture of chess that believed in the Romantic idea that he who strikes first and with boldness should get the glory. Steinitz put his ideas to good use and began to dominate world chess, causing everyone to study his writings and copy his ideas. His greatest affirmation came when his admitted disciple, Emanuel Lasker, defeated him in a match for the world title and then later wrote a book in homage to the man he had vanquished. Even today, more than a century later, the ghost of Steinitz’s ideas still permeates every tournament hall.

Ironically, despite his many brilliancies that involved deep manoeuvres, Steinitz’s most unforgettable game was played almost completely in the ‘gangster’ attacking style he had helped to discredit. Steinitz might have preferred that we remember one of his subtle positional masterpieces, but the viewing public will always prefer watching a king getting mercilessly hunted rather than trying to decipher the complexities of a deep endgame. At the sprightly age of 59, Steinitz takes his opponent, 25 years his junior, to warrior school.

1 e4 e5 (D)

2 d3 d6 (D)

The knight hops to its favourite square to defend the king’s underling. This move has the advantage of not blocking the path of any of the officers, as the move 2...d6 did to the bishop in the previous game.

3 â7c4 (D)

The white bishop swiftly occupies the dangerous a2-g8 diagonal, where it cuts through key central squares all the way to the sensitive pressure point on f7. The move
3 \textit{b}5, which is known as the Ruy Lopez, usurped this move among most masters, including Steinitz himself. It generally leads to a slower game with a more lasting build-up. With 3 \textit{c}4, Steinitz is intentionally striving for a wilder, more aggressive contest. As early as move 3 he's telling his opponent that this will be all-out war.

\textbf{3 ... e5 4 c3 (D)}

\textbf{5 d4}

White ignores the attack on his pawn and forges ahead as planned.

\textbf{5... exd4 6 cxd4 (D)}

A simple count shows that Black dare not touch the pawn on d4, as the two attackers (bishop and knight) are ill-prepared to overwhelm the two defenders (knight and queen).

\textbf{6 ... b4+ 7 c3}

This opening, known as the Giuoco Piano, Italian for ‘quiet game’, is proving to be anything but. Only seven moves have elapsed and we have already seen pawns threatened, defended and exchanged, a black bishop unceremoniously pushed away from the centre, and the white king forced to deal with an annoying check. Black can now try to gobble up the pawn with 7 ... \textit{d}xe4. However correct this move is, it has been analysed in great depth and requires the players to have perfect knowledge of all the precarious possibilities. Still, it is Black’s best chance for equality (and even chances to win) and should be played (preferably after studying a good book on the variation). It’s exactly the move we would have expected from the young German master looking for a fight against his older opponent. Instead, he retreats from Steinitz’s dare, venturing an alternative that quickly lands him in hot water.

\textbf{4 ... f6}

The second black knight bounds into the game with purely aggressive intent, menacing the white pawn on e4.
7...d5?! (D)

Normally this move is the ideal recipe to break White’s stranglehold on the centre. However, in this position, it simply opens up lines for White’s pieces.

8 exd5 ♗xd5 (D)

Black sees that after 9 ♗xd5 ♘xd5, White cannot touch the black queen because the knight on c3 is pinned to the king. Now the same knight is under attack from two black pieces and is defended only once.

9 0-0! (D)

Ignoring the attack on the knight, White whiskers his king from the middle of the action and mobilizes his rook to join the assault. White is after big game as the black king has not yet found a fortress behind a few sturdy pawns. Nor can Black castle now, as his momentarily safe knight on d5 is about to be vaporized.

9...♗e6

Protecting d5. Attack, protect, capture, recapture: all this happens in the flow of a chess game and challenges the players to display their mastery of the basic skills.

Still, the question needs to be asked: what would have happened if Black had decided to capture twice on c3? The beauty of chess is in the rewind. Unlike most other sports, chess fans get to play Monday morning quarterback, debating contingencies across decades, even centuries. In this case, however, the issue is totally one-sided and resolved. A capture on c3 would have led to disaster:

a) 9...♗xc3 (D).
10 bxc3 \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}c3}}? 11 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{b}3!}}}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}a1}}} 12 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f}7+}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{f}8}}} 13 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{a}3+}}} \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}7}}} 14 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{h}5}} \texttt{\texttt{g6}} 15 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g5}}} \texttt{\texttt{e8}} 16 \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}1}} \) and the crossing point on e7 is about to be the scene of an accident.

b) 9...\( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}c3}}} \) (D).

10 bxc3 \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{x}c3}}} \) 11 \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{b}3}}} \) (or 11 \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}1+}}} \) and White is hitting c3 and the tender spot on f7. Let’s go back to the game after 9...\( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}6}}} \) (D).

\( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{g}5}}} \) (D)

Attacking the queen and gaining, in chess parlance, a tempo (or free move). Black has to respond to the threat instead of doing something more productive with his forces.

10...\( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}7}}} \)

Black now seems to be covering all the threats and is finally ready to castle and breathe a sigh of relief. However, Steinitz carries out a series of exchanges that doesn’t let his opponent come up for air.

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{11 \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}5}}} \) \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}5}}} \) 12 \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}5}}} \) \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{d}5}}} \) 13 \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}7}}} \) \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}7}}} \) (D) \end{array} \]

Six pieces, three White and three Black, have been sucked from the board, leaving a somewhat cleared landscape. However, the simplified chessboard doesn’t mean that the danger has lessened for Black. Steinitz’s next move makes it clear that Black’s troubles have only just begun.

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{14 \( \texttt{\texttt{\texttt{\texttt{e}1!}} \) (D) \end{array} \]

Shattering Black’s illusion of being able to castle to safety. Black is now forced to seek extreme measures in order to get his rooks into the game.
Then 15...c6? 16 a3 leads to a strong attack for White. For example, 16 d7 17 xe7+! xe7 18 e1! (D) wins the queen:

Let's return to the game after 15 e2 (D):

15 We2
Threatening a standard Bear Hug Mate. White also could have played 15 a4+ (D).

15 d7 16 ac1
Steinitz builds the pressure by bringing his final piece onto an open line. The paradoxical move 16 ad1, suggested by the late Soviet grandmaster Alexander Zaitsev, may be even more powerful. Then 16 f7 is met by 17 c4+ d5 18 e5+! fxe5 19 dxe5 (D), threatening the knight on d5 and a crushing pawn fork on e6.

16...c6?!
It is well known that defending is much harder than attacking. The beleaguered
defender sees the storm approaching from multiple directions, even to the point of seeing ghosts, while the attacker is keenly focused on closing in for the kill. While this is not always true, it does generally reflect the state of mind of the two combatants when in either role. It takes a steely-minded gladiator to continuously make good decisions when all the warning signs suggest impending doom, and here the pressure gets to Black. Instead of the text-move, 16...f7 would have kept him more or less in the game. Instead, Black’s position is hit by a hurricane.

17 d5! (D)

The knight is so close that the black king can smell its breath. Somewhere in the back of his mind, von Bardeleben must have known that his army was in desperate trouble. But little could he suspect that he was about to face one of the most famous onslaughts in chess history.

19...h8 (D)

The rook hustles into the struggle, but lateness on the chessboard is a crime often punishable by death.

17...cxd5 18 ♞d4! (D)
20 \( \textit{wg4} \)
Threatening destruction on g7.
20...\textit{g6} 21 \( \textit{\&g5}+! \) (D)

The knight is taboo as 21...\textit{fxg5} allows White to snatch the queen with 22 \( \textit{\&xd7} \).

21...\textit{\&e8}
Defending the queen. How bad is Black's position?

22 \( \textit{\&xe7}+! \)
Very bad. If the knight on e6 was a beast, the rook on e7 is a monster. It cannot be touched by the queen since 22...\( \textit{\&xe7} \) loses to 23 \( \textit{\&xc8}+ \) (D).

After 23...\( \textit{\&xc8} \) 24 \( \textit{\&xc8}+ \), White has won a piece.

Even worse is 22...\( \textit{\&xe7} \) 23 \( \textit{\&e1}+ \). The black king must now stay close to the queen, but both ways to do so lose by force:

a) 23...\( \textit{\&d8} \) 24 \( \textit{\&e6}+ \) \( \textit{\&e7} \) 25 \( \textit{\&c5}+ \), when Black will lose the queen on the next move.

b) 23...\( \textit{\&d6} \) 24 \( \textit{\&b4}+ \) \( \textit{\&c7} \) (or 24...\( \textit{\&c5} \) 25 \( \textit{\&e6}+ \) \( \textit{\&c7} \) 26 \( \textit{\&xc5}+ \) when White wins a piece and keeps the attack going) 25 \( \textit{\&e6}+ \) \( \textit{\&b8} \) 26 \( \textit{\&f4}+ \) \( \textit{\&c7} \) 27 \( \textit{\&xc7} \) \( \textit{\&xc7} \) 28 \( \textit{\&e8}# \) (D).

To avoid these painful possibilities, Black comes up with a brilliant defence.

22...\( \textit{\&f8}! \) (D)
OK, it's his only move, but what a move! Black leaves his queen to be captured, but White cannot take it with either his rook or his queen because he would be harshly
checkmated on the back rank. Now it’s White who has four pieces hanging, en prise, under attack, however you wish to say it. Amazing that this could happen in the middle of an attack, that every one of the attacker’s pieces (including the king!) can suddenly find itself in mortal danger. Had Steinitz foreseen that all his pieces would be dangling from the edge of the abyss? We will never know for sure. However, his next two moves prove that the great ones are ready for any eventuality.

23 \( \text{xf7}+! \) (D)

Once again the rook is untouchable since 23...\( \text{xf7} \) loses to 24 \( \text{xc8}+ \) and White ends up a piece ahead.

23...\( \text{g8}! \) (D)

Steinitz is undaunted. The rook is dancing around like a burglar in an empty living room. Black still cannot capture the impudent piece without losing material, since 24...\( \text{xg7} \) allows 25 \( \text{xd7} \) with check. Black also cannot play 24...\( \text{f8} \) since 25 \( \text{xh7}+ \) gives him a choice between the complete embarrassment associated with 25...\( \text{xg7} \) 26 \( \text{xd7}+ \) or immediate demise after 25...\( \text{e8} \) 26 \( \text{xd7#} \). That means his next move is forced.

24...\( \text{h8} \) 25 \( \text{hxh7}+! \) (D)
and Black resigned!
Or did he?

The story goes that von Bardeleben, seeing the inevitable finish, left the playing hall and did not return. That’s one good way of being branded a poor sport for all time. This unseemly behaviour didn’t worry Steinitz. Instead, he proceeded to show the spectators the wicked finish that he had planned.

An energetic attacking game by Steinitz. Like the venerable Yoda in Star Wars, Steinitz showed that the force can be with you at any age.

If Black had continued with 25...\texttt{g8} then the game would have concluded 26 \texttt{g7+! h8} 27 \texttt{h4+ xg7} 28 \texttt{h7+ f8} 29 \texttt{h8+ e7} 30 \texttt{g7+ e8} 31 \texttt{g8+ e7} 32 \texttt{f7+ d8} 33 \texttt{f8+ e8} 34 \texttt{f7+ d7} 35 \texttt{d6# (D)}. 
Mikhail Botvinnik was the patriarch of the Soviet chess domination that continued unabated from the end of World War II until 1972, when the American Bobby Fischer momentarily snatched away the crown. Botvinnik was the only champion to recapture his title after having lost it twice. His iron determination, steely logic, and strict regimen made him an incredibly difficult man to defeat two matches in a row. His deep opening preparation and unflagging discipline would influence generations of Soviets, including the consummate professional Garry Kasparov, the last champion to reign while the Soviet Union was still one country.

The following game, played in the early part of his career, shows Botvinnik at his logical best. He methodically builds his forces in the space afforded by an isolated queen’s pawn, only then to open the game and unleash a series of shattering blows that rip apart his opponent’s defensive position.

1 c4 (D)

This is called the English Opening. Any pawn move that controls a key central square, as this one does, deserves consideration as a respectable first move. Even 1 f4, known as Bird’s Opening, has had its adherents, despite the drawback of exposing the king’s wing so early in the game. The English unquestionably retains a better reputation, not the least because it allows for many transpositions to other openings, as we will see happen in this game.

1...e6 (D)

Black aims for a specific set-up. Opening play has become so advanced that players would much rather steer play to positions they have seen before than risk venturing into unfamiliar territory, even if it means playing the best move. These days, the classical move 1...e5 seems to have gone ahead of the pack as the leading candidate for best reply to the English, but opening fashion also has a way of being as fickle as the latest winter wear in Paris.

2 Qf3 d5 3 d4 (D)

Through a not-so-subtle chess metamorphosis, the English Opening has transformed into a Queen’s Gambit. This exact same position could have arisen with the
move-order 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 (taking the pawn with 2...dxc4 would slip into a Queen’s Gambit Accepted) 3 ∞f3. Note that while all these names are very useful for categorizing openings, they are less relevant to good chess play. Give me the player who will boldly sacrifice a piece for a lively mating attack over the pedantic scholar who brags that he has memorized the first fifteen moves of the Dragon Variation of the Sicilian Defence.

3...∞f6

Black can capture the pawn on c4 either now or later, but will find it impossible to keep the booty. For one, after 3...dxc4 White can always play 4 ∞a4+ (D) if a nervous twitch makes him want to get his pawn back immediately.

However, the calm 4 e3 (D) will also do the trick.

Then 4...b5 5 a4 c6 6 b3! cxb3 7 axb5 allows White to make a mess of Black’s queenside pawns.

4 ∞g5 ∞e7 5 c3 0-0 6 e3 ∞bd7 7 ∞d3 c5 (D)

The tension mounts in the centre of the board. Most beginners will jump at the first chance to trade pawns or pieces. Grandmasters want to know what’s in it for them before making any exchanges. Seeing no advantage to trading, Botvinnik continues mobilizing his forces.

8 0-0 cxd4 9 exd4 dxc4 10 ∞xc4 (D)

The pawn exchanges in the centre have created a very common pawn-structure,
with White having what is known as an isolated queen’s pawn on d4. Since the pawn is no longer attached to one of its fellow foot-soldiers, it can sometimes become the target of the opponent’s pieces. However, this game (and many more like it) has shown that many weaknesses can paradoxically prove to be strengths. For one thing, having an isolated queen’s pawn necessarily means that the file to its left and the file to its right are open ground for rooks to play on. In addition, the owner of the isolated queen’s pawn generally enjoys more space for all his pieces to manoeuvre, which often gives him greater chances to attack. What follows is a model game on how to take advantage of these pluses.

10...\(\text{b6} 11 \text{b3} \text{d7} (D)\)

The knight takes up an aggressive post, well-protected by the pawn on d4.

13...\(\text{c6} 14 \text{ad1} (D)\)

White does not hurry to wreck Black’s pawn-structure by trading off his wonderful knight for the bishop. Experience has shown that in these types of positions the resultant isolated pawn on c6 is rarely any weaker than the one on d4.

Notice too that the rook went to the d-file instead of the open c-file. This move not only cements the protection of the pawn, it also reminds Black that he must always be on the watch for the d4-pawn being pushed forward to d5 to break open the game for White’s pieces.
But there is another deep point. The c-file is currently completely open, meaning that if the white knight and black bishop were to move off this file, then no pawn would hinder the movement of rooks along the file. This is true for both sides, meaning that neither side has a monopoly on that important highway. When this is the case, occupation of the file often leads to mutual annihilation. Since White wants to attack, he is less interested in trading because the attacking side often likes to keep as many pieces on the board as possible. Hence the reason why he places his rook on a closed (to him) file, where it has potential value instead of the open one where it might be traded off.

14...\(\text{\#b4}\) 15 \(\text{\#h3}\) \(\text{\#d5}\) 16 \(\text{\#xd5!}\) (\(D\))

White is happy to exchange now. The time has come to attack!

16...\(\text{\#bxd5}\) 17 \(\text{\#f4!}\) \(\text{\#c8}\)

Black places his rook on the open c-file, but there is nothing there to attack. Ironically, this rook will prove to be his downfall.

18 \(\text{\#f5!}\) (\(D\))

18...\(\text{\#xf5}\) 19 \(\text{\#xf5}\)

White has broken open the f-file, and now an ominous gathering of his forces stands ready to blast through the black defences.

19...\(\text{\#d6?}\) (\(D\))

With the ever-increasing energy of the white army reaching disquieting levels, Black immediately blunders. He could have tried to hold onto the game with 19...\(\text{\#c7}\), although 20 \(\text{\#f3}\) would have reinforced all the aggressive connections to Black’s pieces. After the text-move, Black’s position is ripped apart.

20 \(\text{\#xf7!}\) \(\text{\#xf7}\)

20...\(\text{\#xf7}\) would have lost simply to 21 \(\text{\#xd5+}\) as the black knight cannot recapture.

21 \(\text{\#xf6!}\) (\(D\))

Removing the protection from the knight on d5. If the piece tries to escape by playing 21...\(\text{\#xf6}\) then 22 \(\text{\#xf6!}\) \(\text{\#xf6}\) 23 \(\text{\#xc8+}\)
(the fact that this rook went undefended by the queen on move 19 was the catalyst to the entire combination) 23...\texttt{w}f8 24 \texttt{x}f7+, when White is an exchange and a pawn up.

21 ... \texttt{x}f6 22 \texttt{xd}5 (D)

White dangles a rook in front of Black, with the caveat that the rook on c8 would instantly pay the price.

23 \texttt{w}e8 24 \texttt{d}7 (D)

Black resigned.
He will lose an entire rook.

\textsuperscript{1} This is chess terminology for 'rook for bishop' or 'rook for knight'.
Donald Byrne – Robert James Fischer

New York 1956

On October 17, 1956, a streak of light flashed across the chess firmament. A 13-year-old boy from Brooklyn, New York, played a game of such brilliance that commentator Hans Kmoch, with over four decades of potential candidates remaining, ebulliently dubbed it 'The Game of the Century.' Other commentators would be just as effusive with their praise. In their book *Bobby Fischer Goes to War*, the authors describe the game as "A dazzling work of art, multi-layered in its complexity ... demonstrating audacious vision." Soviet grandmaster Yuri Averbakh spoke for many of his countrymen when he said that it was after this game that he realized that the Soviets faced a threat to their hegemony.

High praise for a game played by a teenager. But this was no ordinary teenager, as time would quickly reveal. Robert James Fischer, soon known worldwide as Bobby, would take the chess world by storm. Shortly after this game, he became the youngest grandmaster of all time at the tender age of fifteen. He would go on to dominate his country's national championships, in one event winning by an unprecedented score of 11-0! On the international stage he quickly became the talk of the chess world, battling venerable grandmasters with a ferocity and aggressive spirit that quickly gained him numerous fans. His meteoric rise saw him contend for the throne on many occasions, culminating in a resounding victory which crowned him World Champion in 1972 in the most famous chess match in history.

In his adult years, Fischer's all-consuming desire to crush every opponent made him a world-beater, but he also became a highly controversial figure. But that was far off in the future in 1956. The following game, a masterpiece to be played over and over as long as there is a game called chess, will forever signify the moment chess fans looked to the sky and saw a star being born.

1 e4 d6 2 c4 g6 3 Nf3 c3 g7 4 d4 0-0 5 Ng4 d5 (D)

We have now reached a line of the opening known as the Grünfeld Defence.

6 Qb3 (D)

The queen quickly enters the battle. Although queens generally sit back early in
THE FABULOUS FIVE

the game for fear of coming under fire from the lesser pieces, in this position the point of White's move is to place additional pressure on Black's central pawn. As we have seen, control of the centre means control of the game. Still, White must be very careful to ensure that the strategy is carried out well, or else his queen may be left hung out to dry.

6...dxc4 7 wxc4 c6 8 e4 (D)

There was a time when a phalanx of central pawns was dreaded as much as a hangman's noose. The possessor of such formidable infantrymen was thought to control so much space, to dominate so many critical squares that their mere existence guaranteed the restriction and eventual suffocation of the enemy officers. Not only that, but with their rabid "lust to expand", as the great player and writer Aron Nimzowitsch colourfully described it, the pawns had to be treated like caged animals that at any moment threatened to lunge forward, chasing and biting at the heels of enemy pieces foolish enough to stand in their path.

However, in the 1920s, young iconoclasts - Réti, Breyer, Grünfeld, and the aforementioned Nimzowitsch - began to question the old order. They suspected and slowly proved that there was a dark side to having big central pawns, that standing there controlling all that space meant that the pawns themselves could become targets that needed to be defended. As many professional armies have discovered - the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s is a case in point - occupation does not necessarily translate into domination. Advanced outposts can easily collapse under the constant need for support. This new conception applied on the chessboard gave rise to creative 'Hypermodern' defences: the Nimzo-Indian, the Queen's Indian, the King's Indian, the Alekhine, the Pirc, and the Grünfeld being played in this game. In the most aggressive lines of these openings, Black allows White to build a vast central pawn network, all the while looking for just the right moment to attack it at its weakest point. When the strategy works, the once-proud central pawns crumble like old bricks, leaving the white position in ruins and exposed to plunder. When it fails, well, it's the old hangman's noose for Black.

8...bd7 9 d1 b6 (D)

10 wc5

The queen cheekily decides to venture into Black's half of the board. It is much safer to head to friendlier confines with 10 wb3. But since no black pieces can
seriously harass the white queen, there is no real problem with this post.

10...g4 11 g5? (D)

A bishop shuffles forward one square... except it’s the wrong bishop! If Byrne had played 11 e2, obeying the most fundamental opening principle in chess, development of all the pieces in preparation to castle to safety, then he would have forced Black to dream up some sort of plan to deal with those ominous-looking central pawns.

Instead, he violates another basic principle – not moving the same piece twice in the opening without good reason.

The key phrase is “without good reason”. Sometimes moving the same piece twice is a brilliant idea as it may force the opponent to give up castling rights, place his pieces on awkward squares, compromise his pawn-structure, or even lose important material. But try as one might, it’s hard to see what Byrne was thinking when he decided that this bishop in particular really demanded to be moved again. It does not really threaten the knight or anything else the eye can see, which simply means that White has committed the sin of wasting a move. Fischer probably scratched his head when he first saw the move, and then started wondering how to punish it. His response must have caused Byrne’s jaw to hit the floor.

11...a4!! (D)

Black responds to the breaking of a principle by breaking one himself! The knight leaps to the far reaches of the stage where knights usually avoid, where ‘on the rim, its chances are dim’ as the ditty goes. But this knight does not plan to live a long life on the edge. Instead it is the lead force in the initial assault, willingly sacrificing itself so that the other pieces can stream through the breach it creates.

12 wa3

Byrne declines the Trojan horse. After 12 a4 xe4, a new knight takes centre stage, attacking the queen on c5 and the unfortunate bishop on g5. All of White’s attempts to save himself would lead to ruin:

a) 13 xc7 a5+ 14 b4 xa4 15 xe4 fe8 16 e7 xf3 17 gxf3 f8, when White must give back the piece. Take a look at White’s wrecked pawn-formation.

b) 13 c1 a5+ 14 c3 xf3 15 gxf3 xg5 and Black wins back the piece with White’s pawns once again a wreck.

c) 13 xe7 xc5 14 xd8 xa4 15 g5 xf3 16 gxf3 xb2 and Black wins a pawn while the remaining white pawns will be tempting targets.
d) Fischer also analysed 13 \textit{wb}4 \textit{gxg}5 14 \textit{gxg}5 \textit{xd}1 15 \textit{xd}1 \textit{xd}4 16 \textit{wd}2 \textit{xf}2, when he simply has too much extra booty.

So for one move, the kid has calculated like a machine. But this is only the beginning.

12...\textit{xc}3 13 \textit{bxc}3 \textit{xe}4! (D)

The once-proud phalanx is no more. The Hypermoderns, playing chess on that mountain in the sky, must have been nodding their approval.

14 \textit{xc}7 \textit{fb}6 (D)

White his queen. White could instead bail out into a horrible endgame after 17 \textit{xb}6 \textit{xb}6, but Byrne was not looking to suffer. Now he is just one move away from castling and looking forward to an easier life. 15...\textit{xc}3! (D)

Black is relentless. Now 16 \textit{xc}3 \textit{fe}8 will win back the piece with an extra pawn to boot. But Byrne spots an idea that he hopes Fischer has overlooked.

16 \textit{c}5 \textit{fe}8+ 17 \textit{f}1

Suddenly the black queen and knight are both under attack. It looks as though Black’s razzle-dazzle is about to cost him dearly. 17...\textit{e}6!! (D)

A mind-blowing twist in the story that elevates this game to the status of legend.

15 \textit{c}4

Taking the rook would not have helped, as 15 \textit{xf}8 \textit{xf}8 16 \textit{wb}3 is answered by 16...\textit{xc}3!, when 17 \textit{xc}3?? \textit{b}4 costs
The black queen is left hanging and the knight ignored as a black bishop sitting quietly off in space retreats(!) to reunite with the rest of the army to deliver a series of crushing body blows. This move was literally a shot heard round the world. It was on seeing this move that the giants in Moscow first understood that soon there would be a mortal threat to their complete dominance over the chessboard.

18 \( \text{Exb6?} \)

In the shock and awe of Black's audacious tactics, Byrne decides to grab the queen, but it soon becomes clear that Black will get a busload of material in return. The other paths also lead to White's demise, varying from a quick death to slow torture.

The first is death by smothering: 18 \( \text{Exe6?} \) \( \text{Wb5+} \) 19 \( \text{Qg1} \) \( \text{Qe2+} \) 20 \( \text{ff1} \) \( \text{g3++} \) 21 \( \text{Qg1} \) \( \text{Qf1+!} \) 22 \( \text{Qxf1} \) \( \text{Qe2#} \). Also, there is protracted suffering after 18 \( \text{Qxc3?} \) \( \text{Qxc5!} \), when 19 \( \text{dx5} \) \( \text{Qxc3} \) leaves Black a clear pawn up with a won endgame.

If the fireworks had not blinded him, Byrne might have chosen 18 \( \text{Qd3} \) \( \text{b5} \) 19 \( \text{Exb6} \) \( \text{Qxa3} \) 20 \( \text{Qc5} \) \( \text{Qc4} \), when although he is down by a pawn and definitely losing, he would have given his young opponent a more difficult road to victory.

18... \( \text{Qxc4+} \) 19 \( \text{Qg1} \) \( \text{Qe2+} \) 20 \( \text{ff1} \) \( \text{Qxd4+!} \) \( (D) \)

It's critical to remove this pawn, as will be seen shortly.

21 \( \text{Qg1} \) \( \text{Qe2+} \) 22 \( \text{ff1} \) \( \text{Qc3+} \) 23 \( \text{Qg1} \) \( \text{axb6!} \) \( (D) \)

Capturing a piece and discovering an attack on White's queen. Note that White cannot capture Black's knight since it is protected by Black's bishop on g7! (cf. note to Black's 20th move).

24 \( \text{Qb4} \) \( (D) \)

White cannot save the rook since 24 \( \text{Qc1} \) loses the queen to 24... \( \text{Qe2+!} \).

24... \( \text{Ma4!} \) \( (D) \)

The black pieces form a harmonious whole as the web of protection extends from the bishop on g7 to the knight on c3 to the rook on a4 to the bishop on c4! This
move may have been overlooked by Byrne when he played 18 \( \text{x} b_6 \), as he might have been hoping for 24...\( \text{xd}1 \)? 25 \( \text{xc}4 \).

The rook's move to a4 is very easy to overlook since when White first captured the queen on b6, the rook did not have easy access to a4. The same can be said about the protected knight on c3 as the pawn on d4 was still stopping things up. All of these points serve to justify the true depth of 17...

\( \text{e}6 \)!!.

Now, to make matters worse, White has no way to defend his rook on d1.

25 \( \text{xb}6 \) \( \text{xd}1 \) (D)

A simple count shows that Black has a rook, two bishops, and a pawn with which to battle White's queen (all else being equal).

This counts as a decisive material advantage, so much so that no one would have blamed Byrne if he had resigned right now. Story has it that he later offered one of his students this explanation as to why he played on to the bitter end:

"First of all, you have to remember that in 1956 no one knew that Bobby Fischer was going to become Bobby Fischer! He was just a very promising 13-year-old kid who played a great game against me. When it got to the position where I was lost, I asked some of the other competitors if it might be a nice thing to let the kid mate me, as a kind of tribute to the fine game he played. They said, 'Sure, why not?' and so I did."

26 h3 \( \text{xa}2 \) 27 \( \text{h}2 \) \( \text{xf}2 \) 28 \( \text{e}1 \) \( \text{xe}1 \) 29 \( \text{d}8+ \) \( \text{f}8 \) 30 \( \text{xe}1 \) \( \text{d}5 \) (D)

Now the unified black army, the same group that so perfectly protected each other on move 24, bands together to hunt down the white king.

31 \( \text{f}3 \) \( \text{e}4 \) 32 \( \text{b}8 \) b5 33 h4 h5 34 \( \text{e}5 \) \( \text{g}7 \) 35 \( \text{g}1 \) \( \text{c}5+ \) (D)

Now the unified black army, the same group that so perfectly protected each other on move 24, bands together to hunt down the white king.

36 \( \text{f}1 \)

36 \( \text{h}2 \) \( \text{d}6 \) 37 \( \text{e}8 \) \( \text{f}6! \) wins the knight on e5.

36...\( \text{g}3+ \) 37 \( \text{e}1 \) \( \text{b}4+ \)

37...\( \text{e}2+ \) 38 \( \text{d}1 \) \( \text{b}3+ \) 39 \( \text{c}1 \) \( \text{a}3+ \) 40 \( \text{b}1 \) \( \text{e}1\# \) was one move faster, but no
doubt the boy genius wanted to end the game in picturesque fashion.
To be most remembered for one’s failure is never a great feeling. It’s even worse when you have managed to accomplish what few in history have ever done: become the champion of the world of chess. Unfortunately, Boris Spassky, despite all his successes as one of the dominant players of the 1960s, will always be remembered by many as the loser of the most famous chess match in history. In September 1972, in the city of Reykjavik, Iceland, the whole world watched as he, the World Champion and pride of the Soviet establishment, lost an epic struggle against the mercurial American, Bobby Fischer. The chess match went beyond the board and into the hearts and minds of the citizens from both countries. In the West, Fischer’s win was held up as a symbolic victory over Communism. In the USSR, Spassky’s loss forced a society to collectively wonder what had gone wrong.

No chess match could ever settle such a profound issue as the superiority of two political systems. And this match should not have tainted the loser as much as it did. To true chess fans, Spassky remains a marvelous player with an amazing eye for the perfect moment to attack. His collection of games should be studied by every chess enthusiast. In the following battle, he plays against another great player, the Dane Bent Larsen (who coincidentally was crushed by Fischer in a match six games to none!).

The game is instructive for how chess fundamentals can be used to defeat unorthodox experiments.

1 b3 (D)

Some opening moves have never caught on, and Larsen’s pet opening is one of them. Its plus is that it prepares to activate the bishop to the b2-square where it will bear down on the long diagonal cutting through the centre of the board. The drawback is that it leaves Black with a free hand to play however he wishes in the centre. It would be hard to condemn the opening as it doesn’t break any standard rules of strategy. However, the fact that it poses no real problems for Black and that no serious player in the modern era has faithfully adopted it suggests that extreme creativity will be needed to dust off its cobwebs of obscurity. Or that maybe it should stay in the crypt.

1...e5

Black responds with a natural move.

2 Ab2 Ac6 3 c4 Af6 4 Af3?! (D)

Now White crosses the line from unusual, maybe even extravagant, to downright suspicious. One of the reasons grandmasters spend so much time studying openings is to make sure that nothing truly unpleasant happens to them from the very first moves. Larsen must not have taken good care to study this line, as he simply donates the initiative to Black for no good reason.
Pawns in the centre love nothing more than to force newly activated pieces to relinquish their posts. White must find a fresh square for his knight...

5 \( \text{d}4 \text{c}5! \)

...from where he is immediately harassed! Black activates with tempo, forcing White to deal with the threat to his knight once again.

6 \( \text{d}x\text{c}6 \)

Maybe it was better to play instead 6 e3 (D):

However, 6...\( \text{a}x\text{d}4 \text{exd}4 \text{d}5 \) would leave the white bishop on b2 blocked in by its own pawn. Still, the text-move seems to give Black all he could ask for.

There is an ancient principle in chess that states that pawns should capture toward the centre in order to exert greater control of those important squares. If Spassky had blindly followed that dictum, he would have captured on c6 with his b-pawn. However, the great ones hear the drone of standard principles and then find original ways to make their own music. By capturing with the d-pawn, Black opens the c8-h3 diagonal for his light-squared bishop and the d-file for a rook to occupy in the near future. Seen in that light, the move is not positional heresy. It simply makes sense.

7 e3 \( \text{f}5 \) 8 \( \text{c}2 \text{e}7 \) (D)
Black's forces are completely mobilized, and Spassky can now turn his thoughts towards penetrating White's position. Larsen, on the other hand, still has pieces lounging on the back row and a king waffling in the middle of the board. If the first move in chess is supposed to confer the same advantage as the serve does in tennis, then White has essentially tossed the ball across the net underarm. He should expect it to be smashed back in his face.

10 f4? (D)

Even legends such as Larsen are not immune to horrid lapses in judgement. This was not the time to move yet another pawn while the pieces on the back row were screaming to be included in the fight. 10 \( \text{c3} \) begs to be played, leaving Black to figure out a way to enter the white position. Instead, White's last move simply opens a door to the king's jewels...

\[ \text{...g4!} \] (D)

...which Black eagerly seeks to step through. The threat is 11...\( \text{h4+} \) 12 g3 \( \text{h3} \) (D).

\[ \text{f3? (D)} \]

The light squares near White's king are leaking black pieces.

11 g3

White seeks to quickly caulk up the breach, but in chess it often happens that an attempted cure leads to yet another disease.

11...h5! (D)
The h-pawn marches forward to challenge the white g-pawn and open a file for the rook on h8. This thrust would not have been as powerful if Black had castled kingside on move 9 since there would no longer have been a rook sitting on h8. Did Spassky foresee this? Of course not. Most often, a grandmaster simply plays the right move and waits for events to justify his thoughts. Only when the position demands deep calculation will he take time to study the many forced possibilities.

12 h3

Larsen wants to chase the knight. Then he will be ready to respond to the black pawn moving to h4 by pushing past to g4. He is in for a rude awakening.

12...h4! (D)

Anyway! There is nothing more shocking and demoralizing than an opponent playing a move that you thought you had stopped. Spassky accurately senses that the time for the execution has arrived.

13 hxg4 hxg3! (D)

Opening a direct route to the white king. If only White had an extra move, he could move his knight to c3, and then castle queenside. To paraphrase Shakespeare’s Richard III, “A move, a move, my kingdom for a move!” Soon the king will die on the battlefield.

14 hgl

Trying to escape the dangerous file...

14...h1!! (D)

...only to be dragged back onto it!
15 $\text{xh1}$ g2! ($D$)

The sapling that rose up just five moves ago has grown into a giant oak tree.

16 $\text{xf1}$
White begs to satisfy the pawn's appetite. 16 $\text{g1}$ also loses, to 16...$\text{h4+}$ 17 $\text{d1}$ $\text{h1!}$ ($D$).

16...$\text{h4+}$ 17 $\text{d1}$ $\text{gxf1}$ $\text{h+}$ ($D$)
White resigns.

Larsen did not want to see the finish after 18 $\text{xf1}$ $\text{xg4+}$ 19 $\text{c1}$ $\text{e1+}$ 20 $\text{d1}$ $\text{xd1}$# ($D$).

A gem of a game that shows that activation of all one's forces is not a luxury, but a necessity, and how a single passed pawn can terrorize an entire army. It is also an eloquent reminder of the genius who was Boris Spassky in his prime.
Solutions to Exercises

Solutions for Chapter 1

**E1**

- **Question:** How many ways can the white pieces safely attack the pawn on e5 in one move?
- **Answer:** Eight – a5, b2, f3, d5, d6, e2, e1 and h5. The light-squared bishop on f1 cannot attack the pawn.

**E2**

- **Question:** How many ways can the white pieces safely attack the pawn on e5 in one move?
- **Answer:** Eight – a5, b2, f3, d5, d6, e2, e1 and h5. The light-squared bishop on f1 cannot attack the pawn.

**E3**

- **Question:** How many ways can the black pieces safely attack the bishop on e4 in one move?
- **Answer:** Six – a4, f6, d4, e7, e8 and h4. Neither black bishop can properly attack the e4-bishop.

- **Question:** How many ways can the white queen safely attack the black king in one move?
- **Answer:** Seven – d6+, e4+, e6+, e8+, f5+, g5+ and h5+. 
**Question:** How many ways can a white piece safely attack the black pawn in one move?

**Answer:** Two – ♕c4 and ♖d6.

**Question:** White has to capture Black’s pawn on g6 before trying to promote the white pawn to a queen. What is the fastest path for White’s king to take to achieve that goal?

**Answer:** ♙d4, ♙e5, ♙f6 and ♙xg6.

**Question:** In this typical endgame position, Black must study the options and decide which move wins. Can you see Black’s best move?

**Answer:** Black must be very careful: After the natural 1...♖f4?? 2 ♕d5 White wins Black’s pawn. The correct way is 1...♖f3! 2 ♕d5 ♖f4!, when Black wins the white pawn.
Solutions for Chapter 2

E7

Question: How can White finish Black off quickly?

Answer: White begins with 1 \( \textcolor{blue}{\text{Q}}d8+ \textcolor{red}{\text{N}}x\text{d8} \) (1...\( \textcolor{red}{\text{N}}x\text{d8} \) 2 \( \textcolor{blue}{\text{Q}}e8#\)) 2 \( \textcolor{red}{\text{N}}x\text{d8}+ \textcolor{blue}{\text{Q}}x\text{d8} \) 3 \( \textcolor{blue}{\text{Q}}e8#\).

E8

Question: Black is trying to queen the h-pawn. How can this be done in style?

Answer: 1...\( \textcolor{blue}{\text{N}}d1! \) 2 \( \textcolor{blue}{\text{Q}}x\text{d1} \) (if 2 f5, intending 3 \( \textcolor{red}{\text{N}}h4+, \) then 2...g5!) 2...\( \textcolor{blue}{\text{h2}} \) and Black will queen the pawn.

E9

Question: Black is a piece up, but it is in the shape of a very ugly bishop. How can White win this game?

Answer: Black’s bishop will be hunted from pillar to post after 1 \( \textcolor{blue}{\text{Q}}e7! \textcolor{red}{\text{N}}c8 \) 2 \( \textcolor{blue}{\text{Q}}d8! \textcolor{red}{\text{N}}b7 \) 3 \( \textcolor{blue}{\text{Q}}c7! \textcolor{red}{\text{N}}a8 \) 4 \( \textcolor{blue}{\text{Q}}b8! \). The hemmed-in bishop is now kaput. White will capture it, pick off one of Black’s pawns, and quickly queen one of his own.

E10

Question: Black’s king is a rat in a cage. How can White carry out a famous manoeuvre that leads to a forced checkmate in no more than four moves?
Answer: 1 \texttt{d}f7+ \texttt{g}g8 (if 1...\texttt{xf}7, then 2 \texttt{xb}8+) 2 \texttt{h}h6++! \texttt{h}h8 3 \texttt{g}g8+!! \texttt{x}xg8 4 \texttt{f}f7#. This method of forcing a Smothered Mate should be seared into your brain!

E11

Question: Black's king is completely stifled. But can you find a way to force checkmate in two moves?

Answer: 1 \texttt{h}h6!! \texttt{gx}h6 (if the bishop moves, then 2 \texttt{x}xh7#) 2 \texttt{g}7#. This neat "checkmate in two" problem was created by Paul Morphy.

E12

Question: Black seems to have everything under control and likely to win the game soon with the extra rook. How can White turn the tables completely?

Answer: 1 \texttt{e}e5!! (White bottles up Black's rook and bishop at their intersecting point) 1...\texttt{xe}5 (1...\texttt{xe}5 2 \texttt{e}8\texttt{w}) 2 \texttt{b}8\texttt{w} \texttt{e}e2+ (apparently winning White's queen) 3 \texttt{d}1 \texttt{xb}8 4 \texttt{xe}2 and another queen will grow from the belly of the e-pawn.

E13

Question: Black is clearly losing because White has an extra rook. But can White force checkmate in a mere four moves?

Answer: 1 \texttt{h}h3+! (a surprising move that totally reduces Black's options and seals in his king) 1...\texttt{gx}h3+ 2 \texttt{f}f3! \texttt{g}4+ 3 \texttt{f}4 \texttt{g}3 4 \texttt{hx}g3#. The origin of this position is not totally clear, although similar ideas go back at least to the 19th century.
Solutions for Chapter 3

E14

Question: What are all the crossing points and the landmine squares?
Answer: Crossing points: c8, d7, e6, f6, g6, b5, c5, d5, e4, f3 and c2. Landmine squares: a5 and e5.

E15

Question: How many safe squares can the rook move to?
Answer: Four: c1, a3, a4 and a5.

E16

Question: How many safe squares can the bishop move to?
Answer: One: g7.

E17

Question: The black king is in check. What is its only move?
Answer: 1...\text{\textgambit \textxh6}.
**Question:** In this position, your task is to find all the mined squares for all twelve units on the board. Write down the squares to which the pieces or pawns cannot move without being captured.

**Answer:** Chess-players have to train themselves to see answers like this almost instantaneously. White must avoid moving one of his pieces to a6, b4, c2, c3, c6, c8, d7, e2, e6, e7, e8, f7, g7 and h7. Black must avoid moving to the squares a2, a4, b2, c2, c8, d3, d7, e2, h4 and h7.

**Question:** Black’s queen has ventured deep into White’s position and is now facing an attack by White’s knight. Are there any safe squares for the queen to run to?

**Answer:** No. Even mighty queens have to take heed when crossing into enemy lines.
Solutions for Chapter 4

E20

A. Schneider – Ashley
Philadelphia 1991

Question: Which side is material up and by how much?

Answer: White is a pawn and a knight up. However, since Black is about to promote the a-pawn to a queen, White decided to draw the game by perpetual check with 50 \textit{if}d3+ \textit{if}g8 51 \textit{if}d8+ \textit{if}h7.

E21

Ashley – Fedorowicz
New York 1994

Question: Which side is ahead and by how much?

Answer: Arithmetically, material is even. However, White’s passed pawns are so powerful that they will easily overpower Black. White played 70 \textit{f}7! and Black decided he did not want to see the rest, so he resigned. A bit premature you might say, but with 71 \textit{g}6 coming next, it’s pretty clear that Black does not stand a chance.

E22

Ashley – Weeramantry
New York 1991

Question: Which side is ahead and by how much?

Answer: Black is two points up, 29-27. However, it’s a good thing that chess is not simply a case of adding up material. It’s important to remember that all sorts of factors go into deciding who is winning. In this position, White’s pawn on f7 will easily be worth a knight or maybe even a rook. With that in mind, it’s easy to see that White has all the chances. I went on to win after 23 \textit{c}3! (opening lines to the black king) 23...\textit{w}xc3 24 \textit{h}c1 \textit{w}b2+ 25 \textit{f}f1 \textit{h}b6 26 \textit{ab}1! \textit{wx}a2? (greed will not pay) 27 \textit{a}a1 \textit{wx}b3 28 \textit{ax}a7 \textit{b}b7 29 \textit{xb}b7! \textit{xb}7 29...\textit{xb}7 30 \textit{c}c5+) 30 \textit{xc}6+ and Black resigned.
30...\texttt{d7} 31 \texttt{c7#} mates! The white pawn on f7 never needed to move!

\textbf{E23}

\begin{center}
\texttt{Poldauf - Ashley}
\textit{New York 1992}
\end{center}

\textbf{Question:} Which side is ahead and by how much?

\textbf{Answer:} Material is even. However, White’s king is terminally exposed and was quickly checkmated after 45 \texttt{h1} \texttt{xf4+} 46 \texttt{g1} \texttt{g3+} with mate on g2 to follow.

\textbf{E24}

\begin{center}
\texttt{Mednis - Ashley}
\textit{New York 1991}
\end{center}

\textbf{Question:} Which side is ahead and by how much?

\textbf{Answer:} White is 5 points up, 18-13. Sometimes numbers just don’t lie. I was in a bad way and decided to resign after 45 \texttt{e5} \texttt{xe8} 46 \texttt{d7+}. It’s raining pawns.

\textbf{E25}

\begin{center}
\texttt{Stenzel - Ashley}
\textit{New York 1994}
\end{center}

\textbf{Question:} Which side is material up and by how much?

\textbf{Answer:} Black is one point up, 14-13, but the story is really all about those passed pawns about to promote. White tried one last-ditch effort to cause havoc with his queen by 31 \texttt{xa6} \texttt{h1+} 32 \texttt{b2} 34 \texttt{d6+} \texttt{g8} 35 \texttt{xd5+} \texttt{h7} 36 \texttt{g6+} \texttt{h6} but ran out of checks and had to call it quits.
Solutions for Chapter 5

E26

Fridman - Ashley
Bermuda 1998

Question: Black has just played 9...d5. Is the black pawn on d5 adequately protected?

Answer: Of course. It is attacked three times (by queen, knight and pawn) and defended three times (by queen, knight and pawn).

E27

Shliperman - Ashley
New York 1999

Question: It is Black's turn to move. Could I have won material by capturing on c4?

Answer: No. Black has no advantage in attackers versus defenders as both sides have three pieces covering the c4-square.

E28

White could also have played 2 leckxie5.
E29

**Question:** Should Black capture the pawn on e4?

**Answer:** No way. Black clearly has more attackers on the pawn than White has defenders, but the quality of the attacking pieces outweighs the importance of the defenders. Black would lose material after 1...\(\text{xe}4?\) 2 \(\text{dxe4}\) \(\text{xe4}\) 3 \(\text{xe4}\) \(\text{xe4}\) (8 points to 7).

E30

**Question:** Is Black threatening to win the white pawn on d4?

**Answer:** Absolutely. Black has seven monsters trained on the d4-pawn. White does well to play 1 \(\text{d5!}\), reinforcing the pawn in cement, and beginning an attack on the e5-pawn.

E31

**Question:** In a game from one of my favourite tournaments, this position appeared on the board after my 18th move. Was I threatening to capture the pawn on g6 and win material?

**Answer:** Yes. Although there is a balance of attackers and defenders, two of Black’s defensive pieces (the king and queen) are of immense value. In addition, White threatens to add another assailant to terrify the g6-pawn by way of 19 \(\text{h5!}\). Believe it or not, that simple threat to increase the pressure caused Black to resign!
Solutions for Chapter 6

E32

Question: This position arises from a highly popular variation of an opening known as the Queen’s Indian Defence (after the moves 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 f3 b6 4 g3 fxe3). What do you think is the most popular way to defend the attacked pawn on c4?

Answer: White has many logical ways to defend the pawn such as 5 a4, 5 b3, 5 c2 and 5 d2, all of which have been tested at grandmaster level, but the simple 5 b3, using a pawn to defend a fellow pawn, has been the main line for years.

E33

Kariakin – Rublevsky
Foros 2007

Question: White has just played 11 c1-h6 with the devastating threat of wxg7#. Using the TRIP method, can you figure out how Black responded?

Answer: Black’s best move is unquestionably 11...e8!. There are very few defences:

a) Taking the bishop is illegal as the pawn is pinned.
b) The pawn ought not run since 11...g6 loses the rook on f8 for the less valuable bishop.
c) The sole interposing move 11...g4 simply loses the knight.
d) There are two ways to protect g7: 11...h5 and 11...e8. The former fails to impress after White attacks the knight with 12 g4.

That leaves 11...e8! as the safest and best defence.
Question: What simple defensive move refuted Black’s hope of an attack?

Answer: From what was a fine position, Black has just played 28...c5-g5??, a terrible blunder that suddenly cost him the game after the ‘defensive’ 29 h2!, trapping the black queen. Black could have resigned now, but in shock he played a few more moves. After 29...hxg3 30 fxg3 Wh6 31 Wh3 Wh5 32 Wh2 Wh8+ he decided it was time to resign. Black blocked in his own queen because he probably thought that no defensive move could be that powerful.
Solutions for Chapter 7

E36

Ashley – NN
St Louis (simul) 2007

**Question:** White is already two pawns up, and Black's king is in a dicey position. How can White win much more material?

**Answer:** I ended the game quickly with the blow 22 \textit{\texttt{b5!}} (D).

Black could not capture my bishop because 22...\texttt{xb5} loses instantly to the Bear Hug 23 \texttt{xf7#}. Trying to save the queen and defend against mate with 22...\texttt{e7} loses to 23 \texttt{b8+ e8 24 xe8#}. Black tried 22...\texttt{e2+ 23 h1} and then resigned.

22 \texttt{b1} also wins comfortably.

E37

Réti – Bogoljubow
New York 1924

**Question:** It's White's turn to move. How did he force the win of a piece?

**Answer:** In this well-known position, Réti found the crispy \textit{coup de grace} 24 \texttt{f7+ h8 25 e8!!} (D), after which Black resigned.

First and foremost, the bishop on f8 is threatened. If 25...\texttt{x8}, then 26 \texttt{xf8+! xf8 27 xf8#}. Moving the bishop does not help: 25...\texttt{e7} is also answered by 26
Solutions to Exercises

151

\[ \text{Solutions to Exercises} \]

Wf8+!. Black can give away the bishop with 25...\textbullet xc5+ 26 \textbullet xc5, but he still gets burned by the power of the back-rank mate as 26...h6 gets clobbered by 27 Wf8+ Wh7 28 \textbullet g6+! xg6 29 Wh5#.

E38

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Ashley – Skripchenko
Cannes 1998

Question: Bad things usually happen when a white pawn gets to f6 in front of the enemy king. How did White finish off a nice attacking game?

Answer: White ended the game with 26 Whxh6 \textbullet e6 (the only move to stop the mate on g7) 27 \textbullet g5 (D).

E39

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Ashley – Van Buskirk
Los Angeles 2000

Question: My opponent had been torturing me for some time, and his last move 29...b5?? was meant to carry out a big attack against my king. How did I manage to remind Black that both sides have kings to defend?

Answer: After all my pain and suffering, I managed to slip the knot and play the killing move 30 Wf6!, which forced my opponent to begrudgingly resign. The queen is poison since 30...\textbullet xf6 is pierced by 31 Hd8+ \textbullet e8 32 Hxe8#. Watch that back rank!
Superstar attacker and former World Champion Mikhail Tal has been up to his old antics, sacrificing a whole rook for a dangerous initiative. Now he decided to add more fuel to the fire with the super-aggressive move $24 \text{d}5!!$ (D).

This time there are three questions for you:

1) What happens if Black captures the knight?
2) How did Tal destroy Black’s actual move $24 \ldots \text{f}e8$?
3) How could Black have defended herself? (You may want to skip this one as it may cause migraine headaches!)

**Answer:** Being on the business end of a Tal attack is never pleasant. After $24 \text{d}5!!$ Black has to display nerves of steel (or silicon!) to weather the storm.

a) The capture on d5 loses immediately to a Quad mate: $24 \ldots \text{xd}5?? 25 \text{g}5+!$ (not $25 \text{h}6?? \text{g}2$ when Black wins!) $25 \ldots \text{h}8$ $26 \text{h}6$ and Black must give up her queen on g2 to avoid mate since $26 \ldots \text{g}8 27 \text{f}6+ \text{g}7 28 \text{xg}7#$ mates.

b) Black tried $24 \ldots \text{fe8}$? only to get pummelled by $25 \text{g}5+! \text{h}8$ (25...f8 $26 \text{h}6+ \text{g}8 27 \text{f}6+ \text{h}8 28 \text{xh}7#$) $26 \text{h}6! \text{e}4$ (26...g8 27 f6+ $27 \text{f}6 \text{g}8 28 \text{g}7+!! \text{g}7 29 \text{xg}7+ \text{g}8 30 \text{e}7#$ (Black actually resigned on move 27).

c) One way to defend is $24 \ldots \text{fc}8!$, as the rook is more active here than it is on e8. After $25 \text{g}5+ \text{h}8??$, White has nothing better than perpetual check by $26 \text{f}6+ \text{g}8 27 \text{g}5+$, etc. If instead $26 \text{h}6? \text{e}4 27 \text{f}6$, then Black has the devastating countersacrifice $27 \ldots \text{xc}2+! 28 \text{xc}2 \text{d}3+$ $29 \text{c}1 \text{c}8+ 30 \text{c}3 \text{xf}1+$.

d) Another good defence is to give the black king some air by playing $24 \ldots \text{h}6!$ (D).

Now it’s White who must be careful to draw by force with $25 \text{h}6 \text{xd}5! 26 \text{f}3$
f6!! 27 \texttt{Wg6}+ (not 27 \texttt{Hg3}+? \texttt{f7}, when Black slips out) 27...\texttt{h8} 28 \texttt{Wh6}+ (after 28 \texttt{Hg3}?? \texttt{f7}! 29 \texttt{Wh6}+ \texttt{h7} White's attack has disappeared!) 28...\texttt{g8} 29 \texttt{Wg6}+ with a draw by perpetual check. Don’t quit your day job if you have to find moves like these to survive!

\textbf{E41}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Question:} Defending a difficult position for some time, I had missed the opportunity to play 41 gxf3 (with chances to draw) and instead blundered with 41 \texttt{h1-g1}??. What beautiful sequence did Black now play to force my resignation?

\textbf{Answer:} Black finished the game in style with 41...\texttt{a1}+! 42 \texttt{h2} \texttt{f1}! (\textit{D}), threatening a Bear Hug with 43...\texttt{xg2}#.

\begin{center}
43 gxf3 \texttt{h3}! (again threatening a Bear Hug on g2) 44 \texttt{xf4} \texttt{e5}! (and again!) 45 \texttt{g3} \texttt{g2}+ and I resigned in view of 46 \texttt{h4} \texttt{f6}+ 47 \texttt{h5} \texttt{g5}#.
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Ashley – Fedorowicz}
\textit{New York 1993}
\end{center}
Glossary

This short glossary contains terms from the book that may need clarification. Most of the words are common chess lingo, but there are a few expressions that I have felt the need to create in order to crystallize key ideas to my students. I have indicated those special terms with an asterisk (*).

**back rank** – the horizontal row on which the pieces (not pawns) stand at the beginning of the game.

**back-rank mate** – a common checkmate with a rook or queen that takes place when an opposing king is hemmed in on the back rank.

**backward pawn** – a pawn that cannot move to gain the protection of an adjacent pawn because that pawn has moved too far ahead.

**Bear Hug Mate** – a common checkmate in which a protected queen stands directly in front of an opposing king sitting on the side or edge of the chessboard. It is the most popular mate in all of chess.

**blunder** – a mistake that unnecessarily loses material or allows checkmate.

**Candidates** – a series of matches (or a tournament) held to determine a challenger to the reigning World Champion.

**centre** – the four squares in the middle of the board (e4, d4, e5, d5).

**centre files** – the e-file and d-file. Sometimes the c- and f-files are included in the definition.

**centralization** – the act of moving pieces and pawns into or toward the centre of the board.

**co-protective relationship** – a state where two pieces or a piece and a pawn mutually defend one another.

**crossing point** – a square where lines (ranks, files or diagonals) emanating from two pieces intersect.

**draw** – the final result in a chess game where neither side wins. There are many ways for this to happen, one of which is by stalemate. However, stalemate in chess specifically refers to a moment in which one side has no legal moves but is not in check.
**en passant** – an unusual move where a pawn captures an opposing pawn that has moved two squares forward as if it had moved only one. An *en passant* capture must be executed immediately or not at all.

**en prise** – a piece that is under attack and can be taken (cf. hang).

**file** – a vertical column of squares on the chessboard. Files are designated alphabetically from left to right. For example, the file on the far left edge from White’s point of view is called the a-file while the file on White’s far right is called the h-file.

**Grandmaster** (officially, ‘International Grandmaster’) – the highest official title in chess (short of World Champion) bestowed by the International Chess Federation (FIDE). It is given to a player who has produced world-class results in a rigorous series of international tournaments.

**hang** – a piece is ‘hanging’ if it is undefended and can be attacked (cf. en prise).

**Hypermodern** – a school of thought emerging in the early decades of the 20th century that insisted that the centre need not be occupied by pawns, but can instead be controlled at a distance by pieces.

**isolated pawn** (also called an isolani) – a pawn which has no friendly pawn on an adjacent file.

**landmine square*** – a square on which a piece or pawn would be in immediate danger of being captured.

**material** – chess pieces and pawns; the sum of pieces and pawns on the chessboard.

**passed pawn** – a pawn that has no opposing pawn on an adjacent file that can stop it from marching all the way to the last rank.

**pawn-structure** – the set formation of pawns for both sides. The pawn-structure often dictates how play should proceed.

**piece** – a knight, bishop, rook, queen or king. A pawn is not generally considered a piece, though sometimes the term ‘chess pieces’ is used to describe a complete set.

**phalanx** – pawns standing abreast.

**pin** – a common tactic where a bishop, rook or queen attacks an opposing piece that is shielding a more valuable piece from being captured.

**protector*** (often used interchangeably with ‘defender’) – a unit that protects another of its forces.
Quad mate* (Queen along diagonal mate) – a common mate where a protected queen mates an opposing king by standing on the closest diagonal square.

**rank** – a horizontal row of squares on the chessboard. Ranks are designated numerically with White’s pieces initially being set up on the first and second rank and Black’s pieces being set up on the seventh and eighth.

**Ruy Lopez** – a classic opening named after a Spanish priest, and characterized by the moves 1 e4 e5 2 \(\text{e}f3 \text{c}6 3 \text{b}5.\) Also known as the Spanish Opening.

**sacrifice** – a move that gives away material in the hope of obtaining something better in return (such as checkmate).

**Scholar’s Mate** (often incorrectly called Fool’s Mate) – A Quad mate that occurs when one side targets the weak f2- or f7-pawn. A common way for it to occur among beginners is 1 e4 e5 2 \(\text{h}5 \text{c}6 3 \text{c}4 \text{f}6?? 4 \text{x}7#.\)

**trade** – a simple exchange of material of equal value.

**zwischenzug** (in-between move) – an unexpected move that breaks the logical flow in the action. It is often played instead of an automatic recapture of an enemy piece.
Dedication

To my mother and grandmother, who taught me life's most valuable skills.

Acknowledgements

"No man is an island, alone unto himself."

The truth of this John Donne quote was nowhere more evident than in the writing of this book. Without a few key people in my life, I cannot imagine how I would have finished.

First of all, I'd like to express my sincere gratitude to my former students, Kasaun Henry and Charu Robinson, for helping to create diagrams, suggest basic changes, and provide feedback on the quality of the material. It's amazing to see the little boys who were a critical part of our team that won a national scholastic chess championship now act as grown men who have yet again helped their old coach in another of his important accomplishments. I'm lucky to be able to call them friends.

Words cannot express how thankful I am for the help my father provided by way of eagle-eyed editing, stylistic advice, and loving support. For us to connect this deeply so late in life is a blessing I do not take for granted. I'm thrilled to be able to immortalize how much I love him in these lines.

I stand amazed at the immense patience displayed by the whole team at Gambit. I guess being chess-players themselves, they know how chess authors can be, though I suspect I am on the extreme end of procrastinating chess writers. They run a first-class publishing company whose family I am excited to join. Hopefully this book will add a small piece to their already amazing collection of excellent publications.

Of course, I cannot forget my kids, Nia and Jayden, the lights of my life. My job takes me away from them more often than I wish, and I know how much they miss when Daddy's gone. The same thing happened with the writing of this book as I sequestered myself to try not to miss yet another deadline. Their patience is as responsible for my success as anything else in my life. I hope one day they will know how much I ached being away from them, and how much I appreciated their sacrifice.

And finally, success would be bland without my dear wife Michele, whose love and support grows stronger each passing year. None of this matters without her.
Index of Games

The numbers in this index refer to pages in the book. When a player’s name appear in bold text, that player had the white pieces in that game. Otherwise, the player whose name is given first, in SMALL CAPITALS, played with the white pieces.

An italic page reference indicates a puzzle position, while a bold page number shows that this is one of the five games annotated in full in Part 2 of the book.

ALEKHINE – Keres 100
ANAND – Kramnik 87
ASHLEY – Fedorowicz 144, 153; Fridman 146; Hess, Ra. 149; Mednis 145; NN 150; Poldauf 145; Schneider, A. 144; Shaw, A. 147; Shliperman 146; Skripchenko 151; Stenzel 145; Van Buskirk 151; Weeramantry 144
BENJAMIN – Yudasin 63
BERNSTEIN, O. – Capablanca 98
BOGOLJUBOW – Réti 150
BOTVINNIK – Vidmar 121
BRONSTEIN – Petrosian 41
BYRNE, D. – Fischer 126
CAPABLANCA – Bernstein, O. 98
DUKE OF BRUNSWICK AND COUNT ISOUARD – Morphy 104
FEDOROVICZ – Ashley 144, 153
FISCHER – Byrne, D. 126
FORBES, C. – Tal 152
FRIDMAN – Ashley 146
GELFAND – Naiditsch 73
HESS, RA. – Ashley 149
KARIAKIN – Rublevsky 148
KERES – Alekhine 100
KRAMNIK – Anand 87
LARSEN – Spassky 133
LEKO – Mamedyarov 74
LENGYEL – Mikhalevski 94
MAMEDYAROV – Leko 74
MEDNIS – Ashley 145
MIKHALEVSKI – Lengyel 94
MORPHY – Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard 104
NAIDITSCH – Gelfand 73
NN – Ashley 150
PETROSIAN – Bronstein 41
POLDAUF – Ashley 145
INDEX OF GAMES

RÉTI – Bogoljubow 150
RUBLEVSKY – Kariakin 148
SCHNEIDER, A. – Ashley 144
SHAW, A. – Ashley 147
SHLIPERMAN – Ashley 146
SKRIPCHENKO – Ashley 151
SPASSKY – Larsen 133
STEINITZ – von Bardeleben 112
STENZEL – Ashley 145
TAL – Forbes, C. 152
VAN BUSKIRK – Ashley 151
VIDMAR – Botvinnik 121
VON BARDELEBEN – Steinitz 112
WEERAMANTRY – Ashley 144
YUDASIN – Benjamin 63
How to Beat Your Dad at Chess
Murray Chandler
“Don’t let the title fool you; this is a book that almost anyone below the Expert level would benefit greatly from. Chandler has a very clear idea of his audience and I think that almost anybody who studied this book closely would improve his or her tactical vision” – Bill Whited, CHESSVILLE.COM
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About the Publisher: Gambit is a publishing company owned and run exclusively by chess masters and grandmasters. We are passionate about producing innovative and instructive chess books, suitable for all levels of player.

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Assuming no knowledge of chess beyond the rules, Maurice Ashley guides you on an inspirational journey through the world of chess tactics. He brings the pieces to life by examining their fundamental characteristics, and shows how their powers can be put to use to win pieces or give checkmate – the building-blocks upon which all chess skills are based.

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He has been called the Tiger Woods of chess. In 1999, Maurice Ashley became the first African-American to qualify for the elite Grandmaster title, an achievement that was widely reported in the international media, including Time magazine, USA Today, New York Times, Sports Illustrated and The Times (London). Ashley is one of the highest-profile figures in American chess, and has commentated on the game for ESPN and Channel Four Television (UK). He sees chess as playing a role in helping at-risk youth, and has coached a number of junior teams to victory in national championships, most famously the Raging Rooks of Harlem, whose achievement is planned to be the subject of a feature film. In 2003 he was named Grandmaster of the Year by the US Chess Federation.