

Opening Guides

OPENING GUIDES

A good opening, in which your stones map out territory efficiently, makes for a good position in middle game fighting. You can play a good opening following these nine basic principles:

- 1. FIRST, PLAY IN THE CORNERS IN ONE OF FIVE WAYS.**
- 2. NEXT, ENCLOSE OR APPROACH “UNBALANCED” CORNERS.**
- 3. AFTER THE CORNERS, PLAY IN THE SIDE STAR REGIONS.**
- 4. MAKE SECONDARY SIDE EXTENSIONS THAT AIM AT INVASIONS.**
- 5. AFTER THE SIDES, ENLARGE AND DEFEND TOWARDS THE CENTER.**
- 6. THE THIRD LINE IS THE LINE OF TERRITORY; THE FOURTH LINE IS THE LINE OF INFLUENCE.**
- 7. FIND YOUR GOOD SIDE.**
- 8. BASES ARE CRUCIAL. DON’T MAKE GROUPS WITHOUT A BASE.**
- 9. STAY AWAY FROM STRENGTH.**

1. PLAY IN THE CORNERS IN ONE OF FIVE WAYS

It's easiest to make territory in the corner, so the game usually begins with players staking these easy claims first. The star point and the 3-4 point are the most common moves, but the 3-3, 3-5, and 4-5 points are also possibilities.

Diagram 1. Playing in the corner at the star point is one of the popular features of modern Go. A hundred years ago this move was considered unplayable, but it is now one of the most common opening plays.

The star point is good for creating influence and leads to a rapid opening development, with its emphasis on extending along the sides rather than enclosing the corner. It's not too great for making territory directly though – its weakness is the invasion at the 3-3 point.

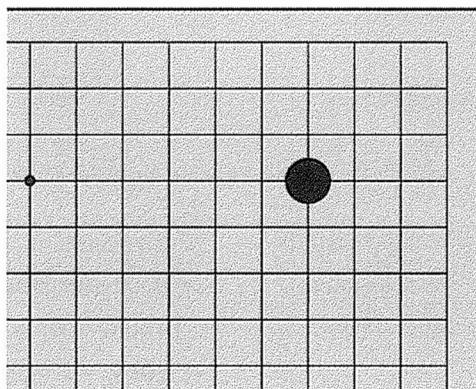
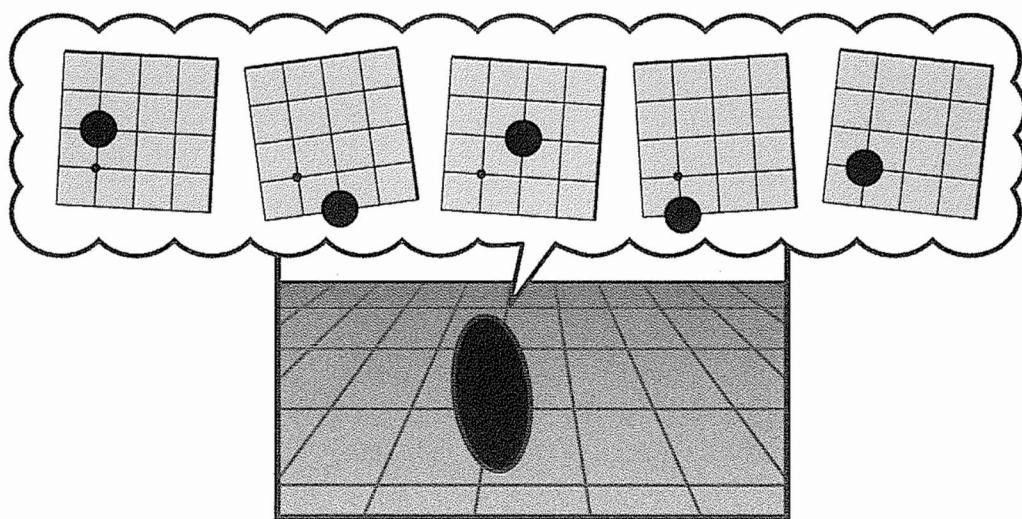


Diagram 1



Opening Guides

1. PLAY IN THE CORNERS IN ONE OF FIVE WAYS

Diagram 2. The 3-4 point is the classic move for playing in the corner, and is still just as popular as the star point. It's got the advantage in making territory in the corner, but it's not quite so powerful.

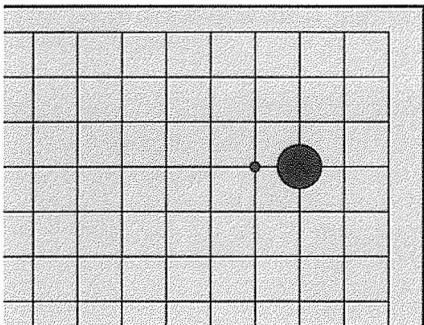


Diagram 2

Diagram 3. The 3-3 point is another move that was once considered unplayable, but was re-evaluated in the modern Go era. Its low position makes the 3-3 point a sure-fire way to take territory in the corner. But its influence is very limited compared to the star point's.

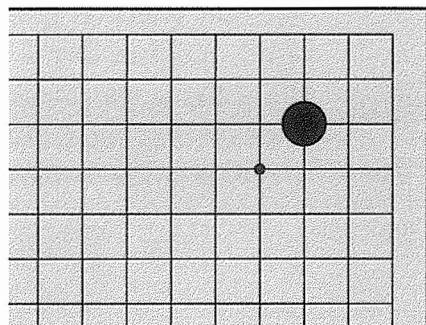


Diagram 3

Diagram 4. The 3-5 point emphasizes the side. Its drawback is that it leaves the corner relatively open (A is also the 3-5 point).

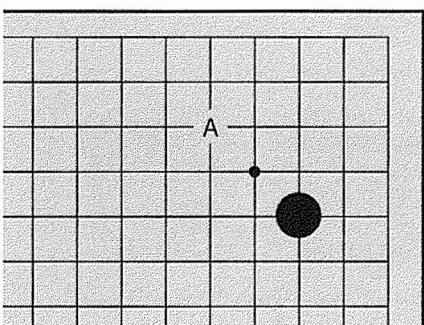


Diagram 4

Diagram 5. The 4-5 point is best in jockeying for position in the center, but again, its drawback is that it leaves the corner territory vulnerable (A is also 4-5 point).

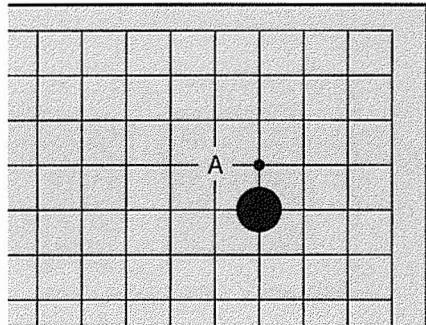


Diagram 5

Each of these moves has pros and cons. But the star point and the 3-4 point are played most often, since not only are they easier to use, but their weaknesses are more subtle than the others.

1. PLAY IN THE CORNERS IN ONE OF FIVE WAYS

Diagram 6. Here's an opening seen in many professional games. Each side has played a star point and a 3-4 point. Incidentally, it's considered polite for Black always to play his first move in the northeast corner (that is, his upper right hand corner) first. Since the board is symmetrical and the choice of corner doesn't really matter, one might as well be polite – and also, it makes it easier to review game records.

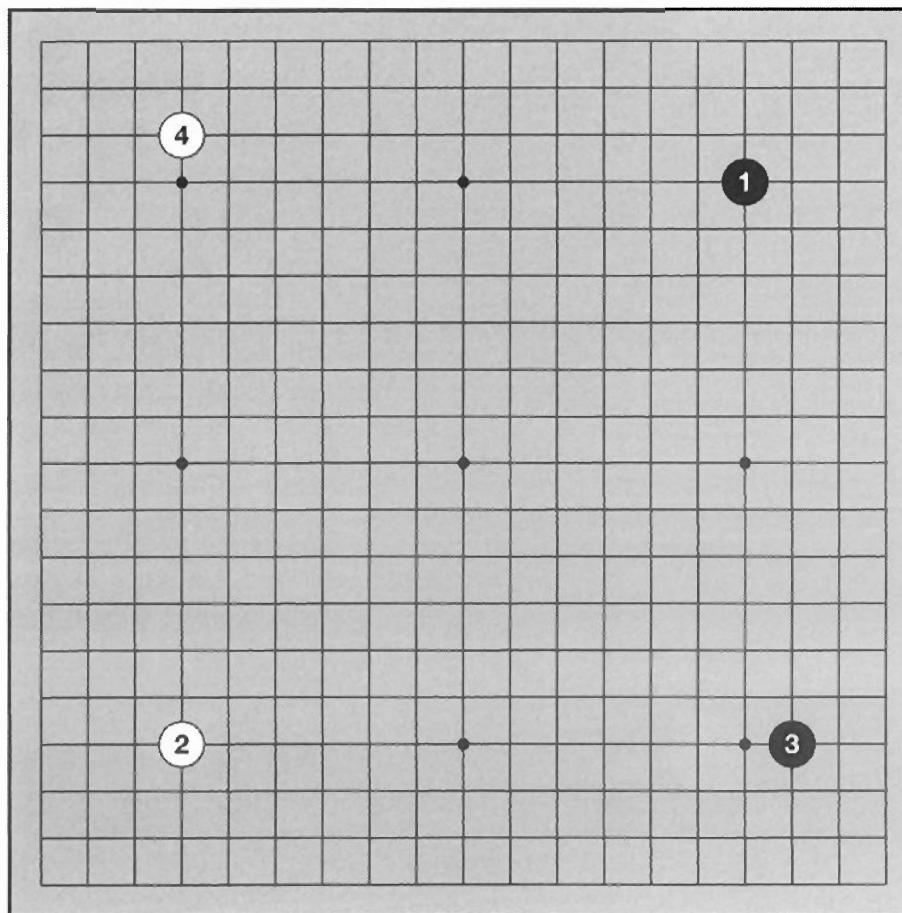


Diagram 6

This kind of opening, where Black plays first in both corners on one side, is called a parallel opening.

1. PLAY IN THE CORNERS IN ONE OF FIVE WAYS

Diagram 7. Here's another common way of opening. In this case, each side has played two star points. This particular situation, where Black has played in diagonal corners, is called an X opening. It often leads to more fighting than the parallel opening.

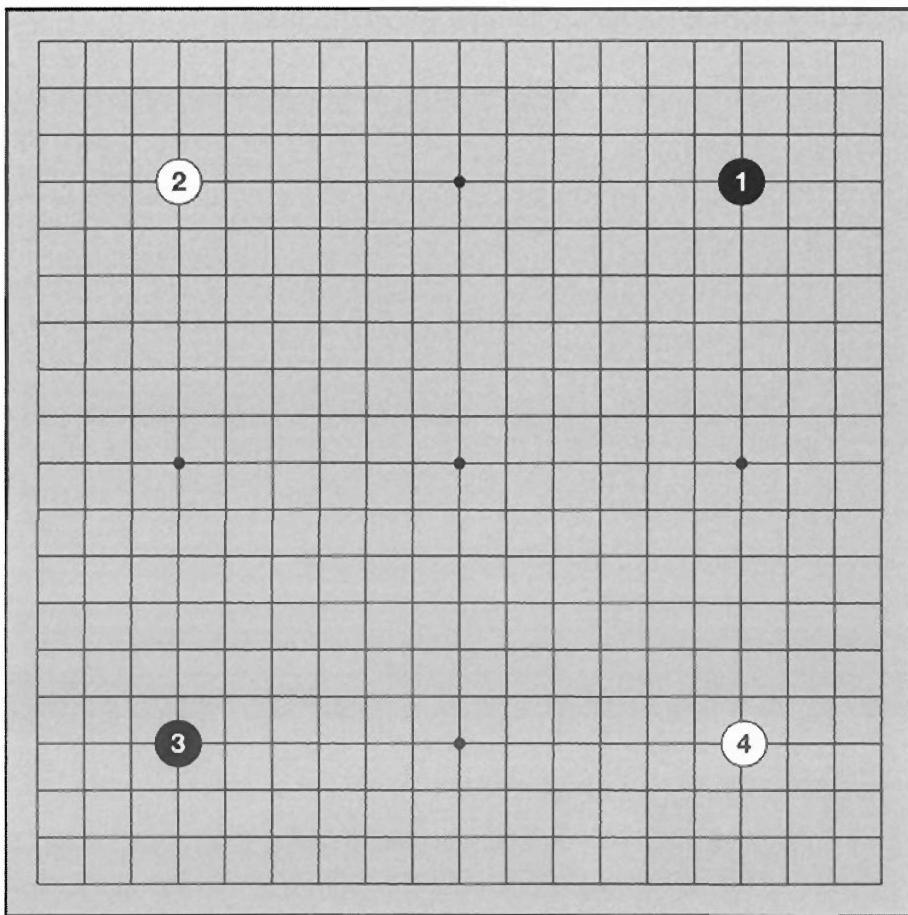


Diagram 7

2. ENCLOSE OR APPROACH “UNBALANCED” CORNERS

Notice that you could also call the corner star point the 4-4 point. I call the 4-4 and the 3-3 plays “balanced” because they’re an equal distance from the sides. By the same token, the 3-4, 5-3, and 5-4 points are “unbalanced”. After someone has played in each corner, the next thing on the opening agenda is to enclose or approach unbalanced corners.

Diagram 8. From the 3-4 point, only one more move is necessary to secure the corner. Black 1 is the knight’s move enclosure.

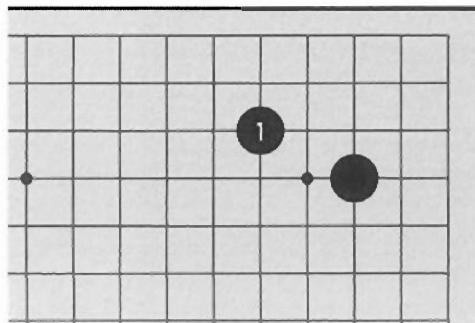


Diagram 8

Diagram 9. Black at 1 here is also possible. This is the one-point enclosure. This move has more power directed to the center, but it leaves the north side more open than the knight’s move.

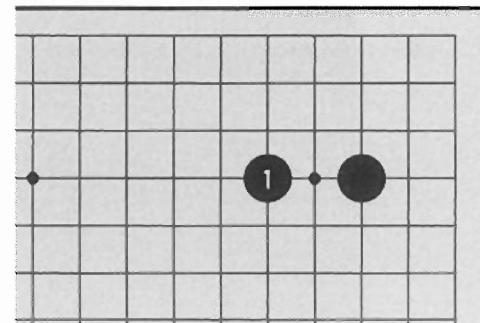


Diagram 9

Diagram 10. The standard knight’s move and the one-point are the most common enclosures, but it’s also possible to make an enclosure with a large knight’s move. This covers more ground than the ordinary knight’s move, but it’s a little weaker in securing the corner.

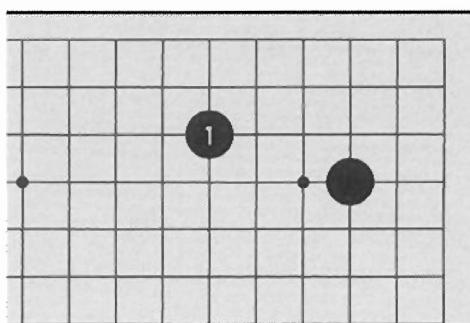


Diagram 10

Diagram 11. The two-point enclosure on the fourth line leaves the corner relatively weak, but has more influence towards the center. This move’s weakness makes it fairly rare.

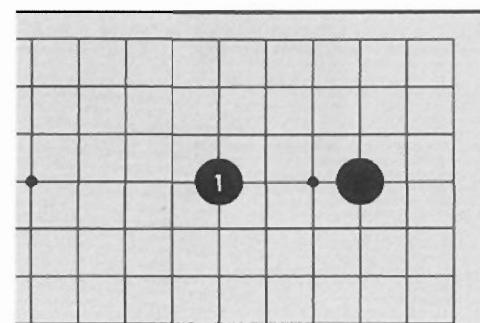


Diagram 11

2. ENCLOSURE OR APPROACH “UNBALANCED” CORNERS

Diagram 12. Each side has played in the empty corners in an X opening. Next, Black plays the knight’s-move enclosure at 5. With 6, White can either enclose the unbalanced southeast corner or approach Black’s unbalanced southwest corner. Approaching is probably preferred in this case, as it’s not good to allow your opponent to make double corner enclosures.

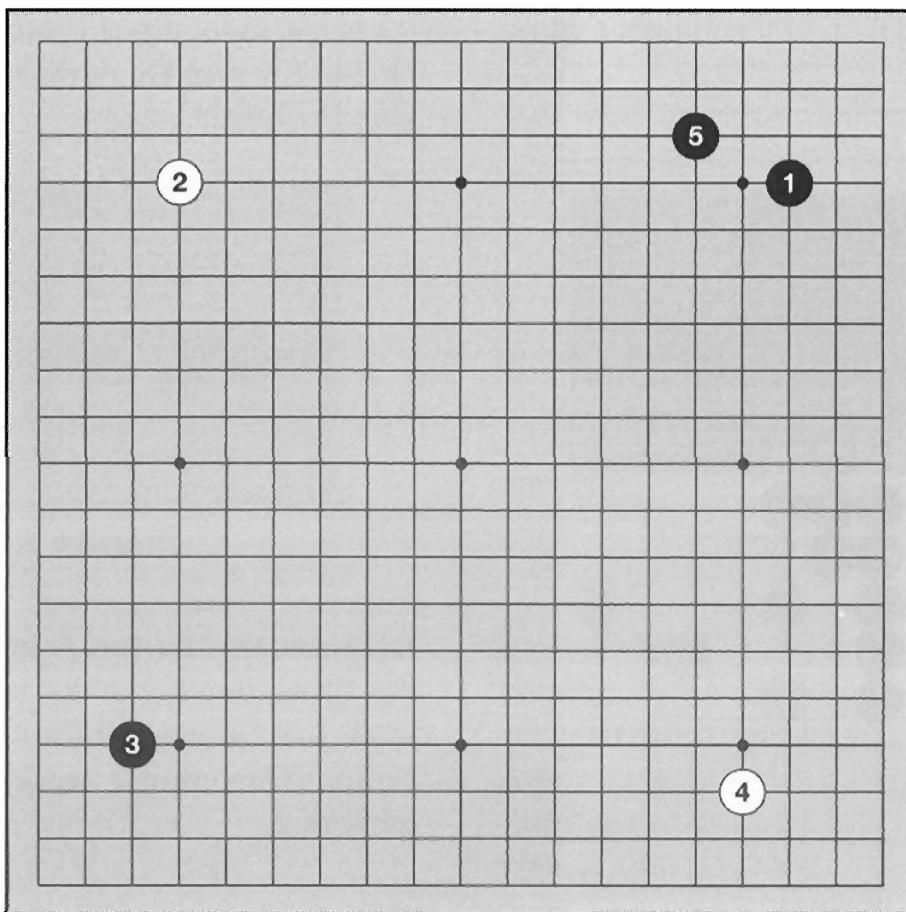


Diagram 12

2. ENCLOSE OR APPROACH “UNBALANCED” CORNERS

Diagram 13. From the star point, after an enclosing move, yet another enclosing move is necessary to secure the corner. Because of its weakness at the 3-3 point, the star point is not really an effective move for making corner territory.

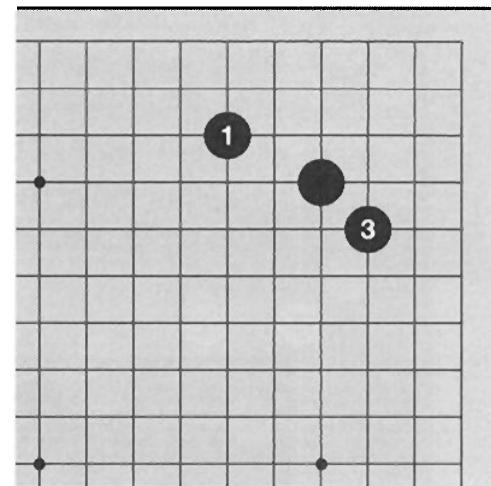


Diagram 13

Diagram 14. If you play either the large knight's move or the one-point jump from the star point at A, you'll also need an additional enclosing move to turn the corner into territory. Since it requires an extra move, the star point isn't so effective as a 3-4 point for making territory. And since it isn't the best way to make territory in the first place, the star-point option doesn't beg for a follow-up move with the urgency of the 3-4. In other words, an enclosing move from a star point doesn't need to be played so early in the opening.

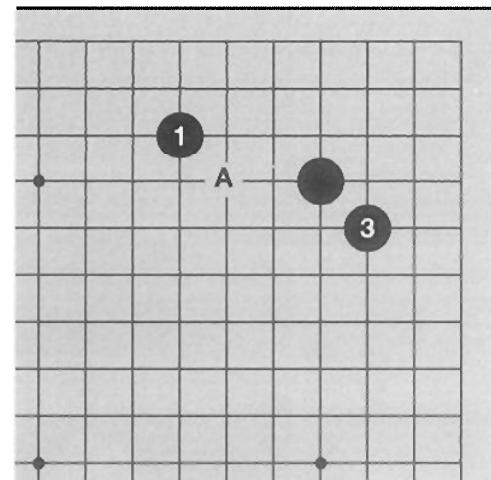


Diagram 14

Diagram 15. From a 3-3 point, you could play at either 1 or A. However, this corner is already secured, so a second move isn't too urgent here either.

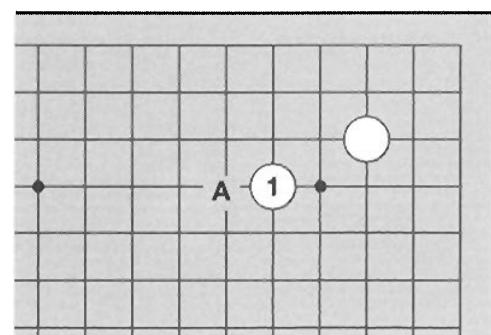


Diagram 15

2. ENCLOSE OR APPROACH “UNBALANCED” CORNERS

Diagram 16. After playing in the empty corners, Black and White each enclose a corner from the 3-4 point with 5 and 6. Next, Black doesn’t play an enclosing move from the star point at A, but instead takes a big side point. A is not bad, but an enclosing move from a star point usually isn’t the most urgent thing on the board. One wants to play the big side star regions instead.

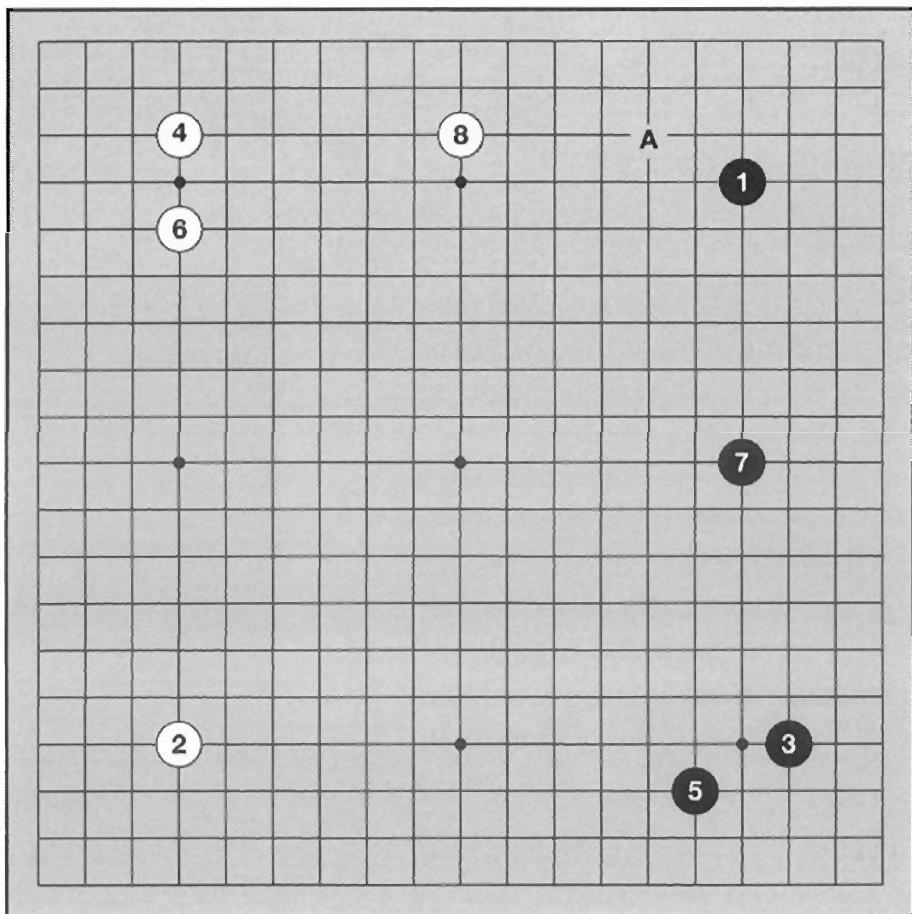


Diagram 16

2. ENCLOSE OR APPROACH “UNBALANCED” CORNERS

Diagram 17. From the 3-5 point, it's common to enclose the corner at the 3-4 point. This result is the same as playing the enclosure from a 3-4 point.

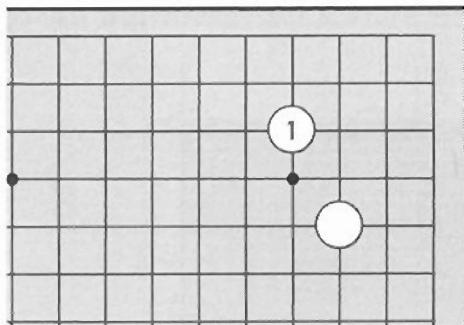


Diagram 17

Diagram 18. The 4-5 point is similar to the 3-5 point. The move at 1 transposes this position to a one-point enclosure from the 3-4 point.

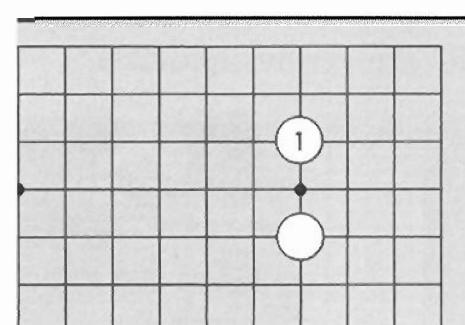


Diagram 18

The 5-3 or the 5-4 point is often played by experienced players who hope that their opponents are too timid to approach the corner “from the inside”. The idea is that they hope to secure a big corner with just one move, because their opponents never approach. Don't be intimidated – that is like giving your opponent an extra move.

Diagram 19. If your opponent has occupied the 3-5 point, playing the 3-4 point at 1 is usual.

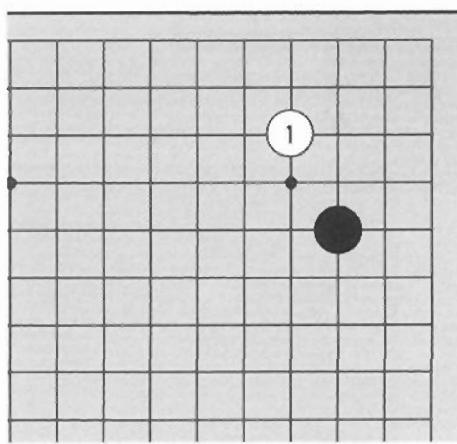


Diagram 19

Diagram 20. The 3-4 point at White 1 is also standard when the stone is on the 4-5 point.

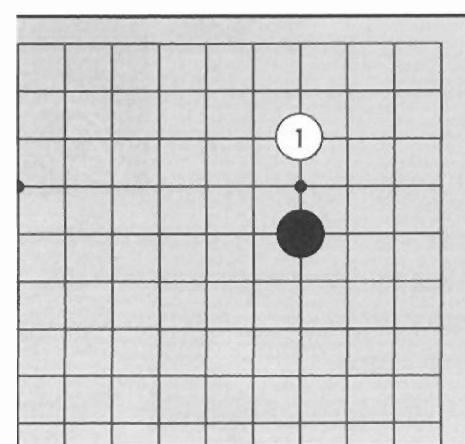


Diagram 20

2. ENCLOSE OR APPROACH “UNBALANCED” CORNERS

Diagram 21. Here, White didn't enclose the corner but played at 1 instead. It's always possible to decide not to follow the order that opening theory suggests, for example as White does here. But when you do you should be pursuing a definite special strategy, and you shouldn't skip more than one opening step. For example, you could omit playing in an empty corner to approach your opponent's 3-4 point, but it's probably better not to skip playing there again in order to play a side star point. Here Black moves toward the corner at 2, with the knight's approach.

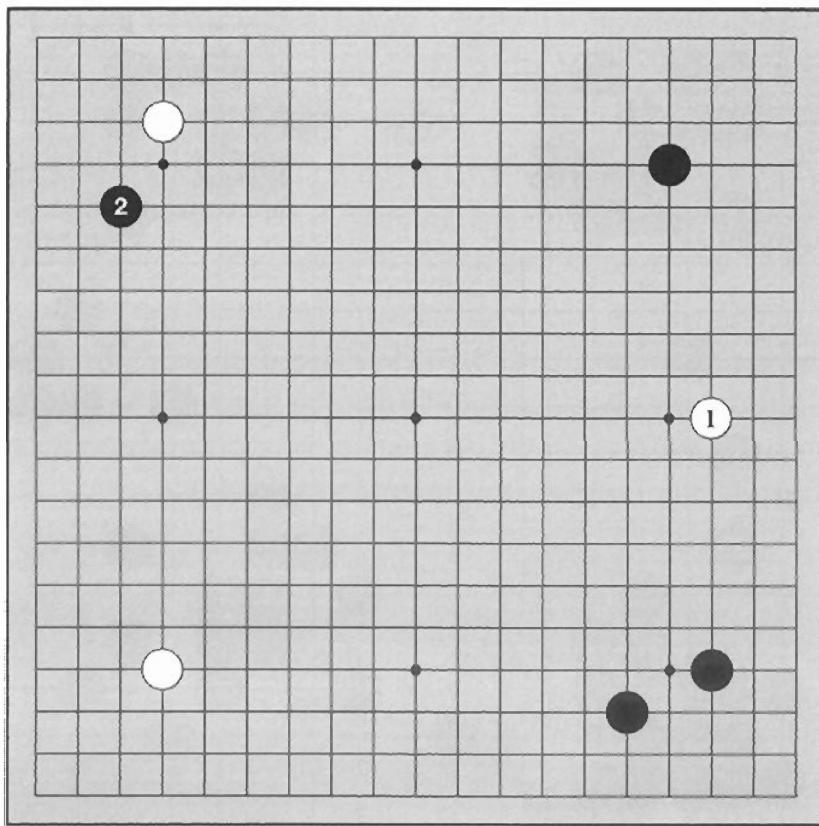


Diagram 21

Diagram 22. There are three other approaches, at A, B, and C. A is a one-point approach. This is just as popular as the knight's approach.

The large knight's approach at B is possible, but not used very often.

C is the two-point approach. This is as rare as the large knight's approach.

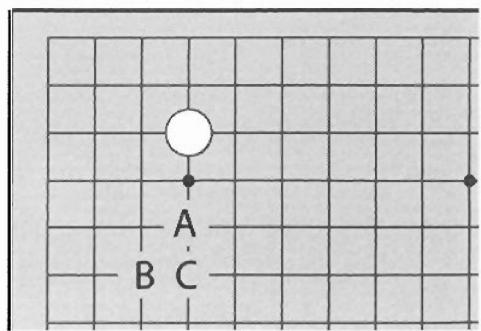


Diagram 22

2. ENCLOSE OR APPROACH “UNBALANCED” CORNERS

Diagram 23. Here's another example in which Black chooses neither to approach White's unbalanced corner right away nor to enclose his own unbalanced corner, but plays at 1 instead. This is known as the “Chinese opening,” since it was first played by an amateur Chinese player (sometimes 1 is played one line higher on the fourth line; then it is called the “High Chinese”). When this move was first played, it was ridiculed as being unsound Go theory. Soon, though, enough players began to recognize its tremendous speed: it combines an enclosure with a large side point, and, if White attempts to approach, the side point backs up the overly wide corner enclosure almost like a giant pincer. This opening became extremely popular, especially in the nineteen-eighties, and many people still use it today.

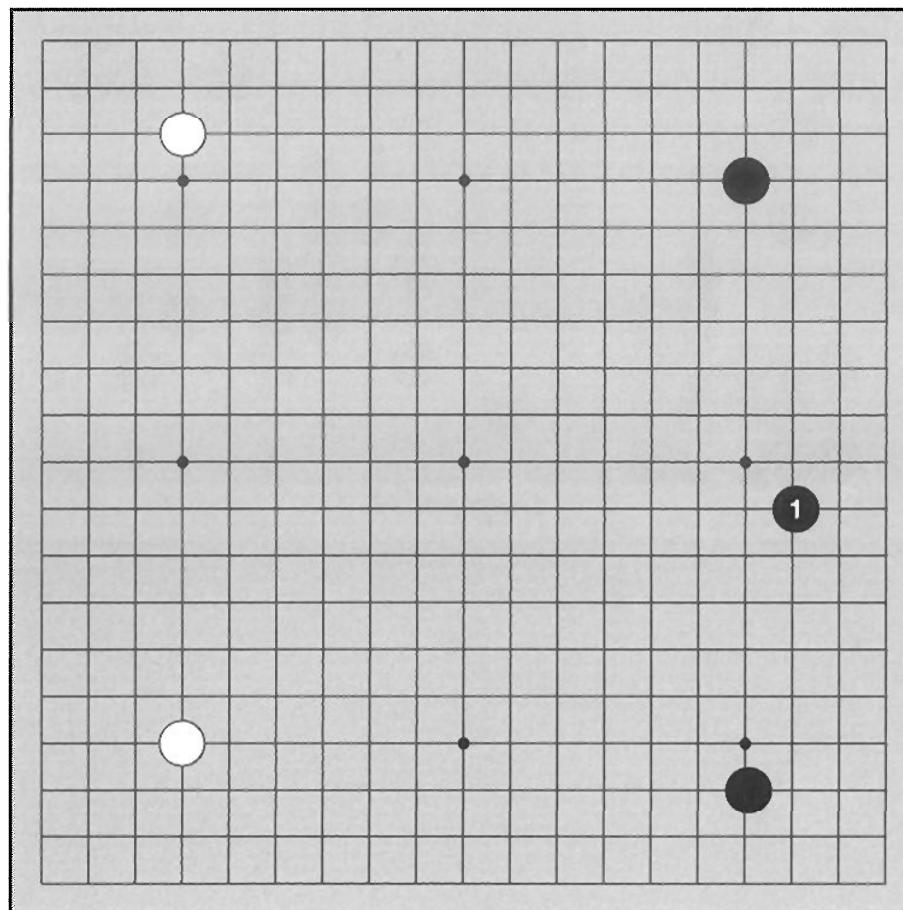


Diagram 23

3. AFTER THE CORNERS, PLAY ON THE SIDES

Diagram 24. After the corners, the big opening points are moves like 1 and 2, in the side star regions. Whoever takes more of these big points tends to have the upper hand in the opening.

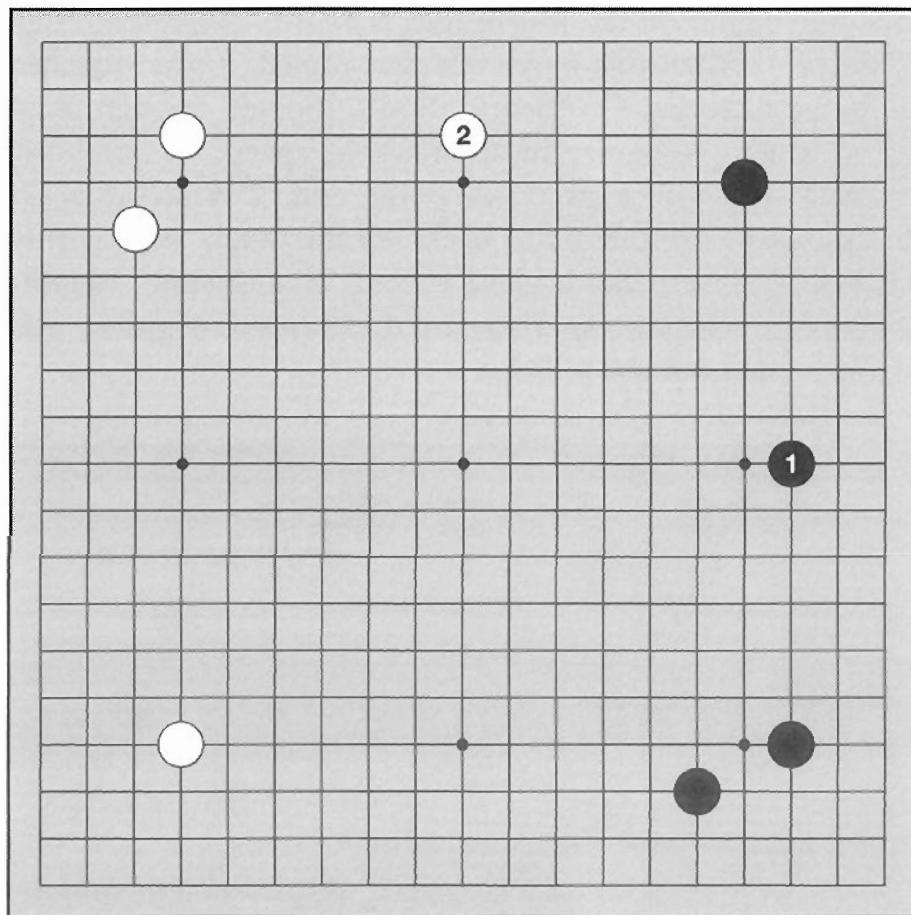


Diagram 24

3. AFTER THE CORNERS, PLAY ON THE SIDES

Diagram 25. Sometimes you might approach a star point in preparation for taking one of the sides. For example, in this case there are no unbalanced corners, so next Black would like to take a big point on the side. He can play at 5 first, and after White responds at 6, then Black can grab the large side point at 7. Of course Black could just have played 7 first, but the approach at 5 is a natural follow-up to 7 and can be played first.

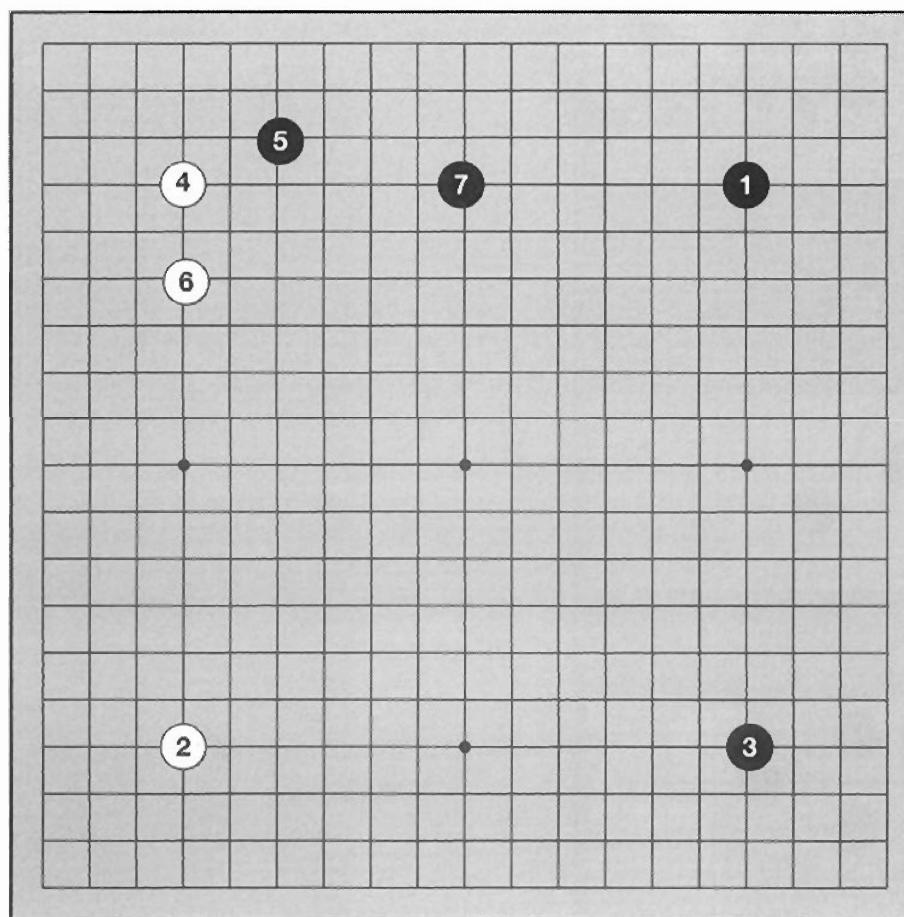


Diagram 25

3. AFTER THE CORNERS, PLAY ON THE SIDES

Diagram 26. Playing here first doesn't mean the whole side will automatically become your territory. It's still possible to invade – in the lower right at White 2, for example. But Black can also benefit by attacking: a move like 3 attacks while expanding the northeast. Whoever gets to the side star region first leads in the fight for that side.

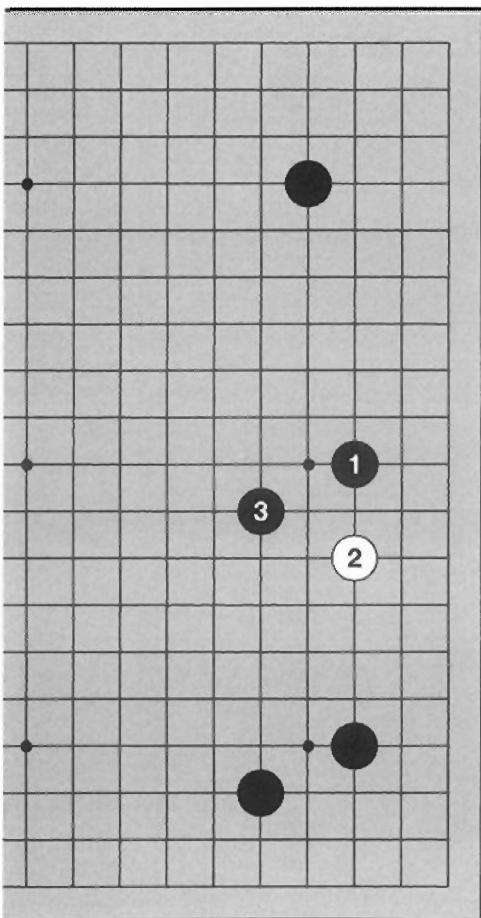


Diagram 26

Diagram 27. When you're taking the big points, moves like Black 1 on the fourth line or at A on the third line are also possible. The third line is more territorial and the fourth line is more suited to developing influence the center.

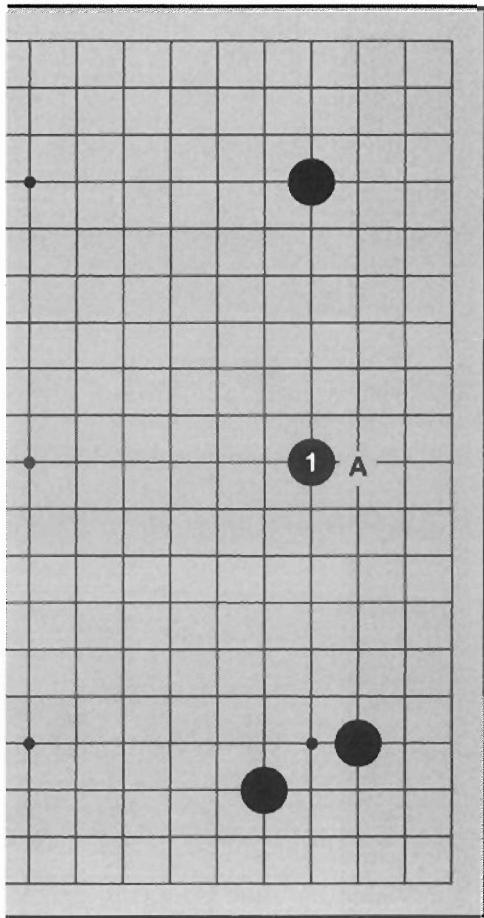


Diagram 27

3. AFTER THE CORNERS, PLAY ON THE SIDES

Diagram 28. Usually, one plays on the side star point or one line below it, but for a little extra oomph, Black may choose to go one line further as he does here. This move is faster and covers more ground, but has a more tenuous relationship to his corner. If Black is sure he has good backup, going farther is a good idea.

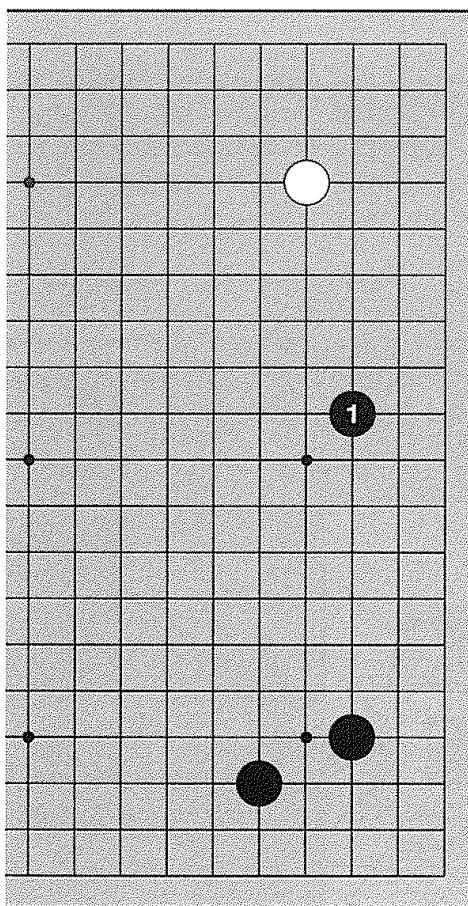


Diagram 28

Diagram 29. By the same rationale, White can go a little farther here as well. (In both this case and in the previous diagram, a move on the fourth line is possible.)

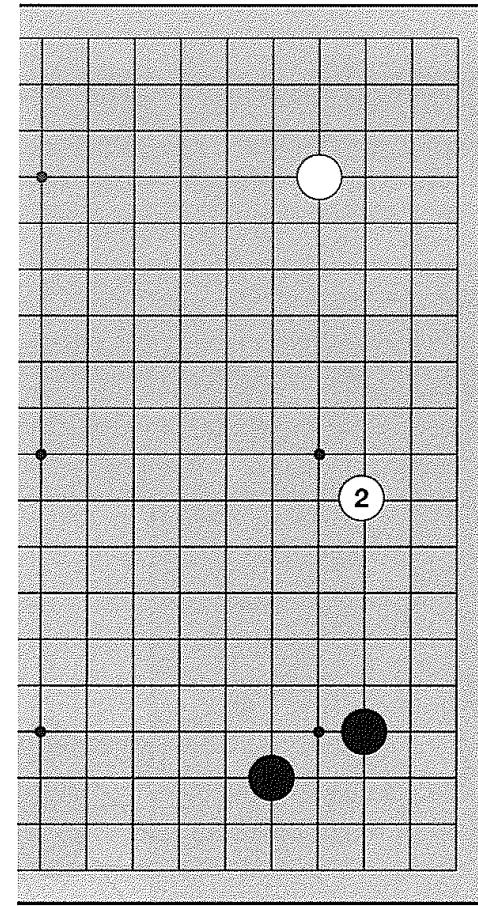


Diagram 29

4. EXTENSIONS LOOKING TOWARDS INVASIONS

In the opening, a side extension looking towards an invasion is bigger than it appears. Don't just look for the emptiest-looking side.

Diagram 30. The extension at 1 is very big. It enlarges Black's territory, and has a good follow-up in the invasion at A. Black 1 may look small compared to moves at B or C, but really it's of comparable size.

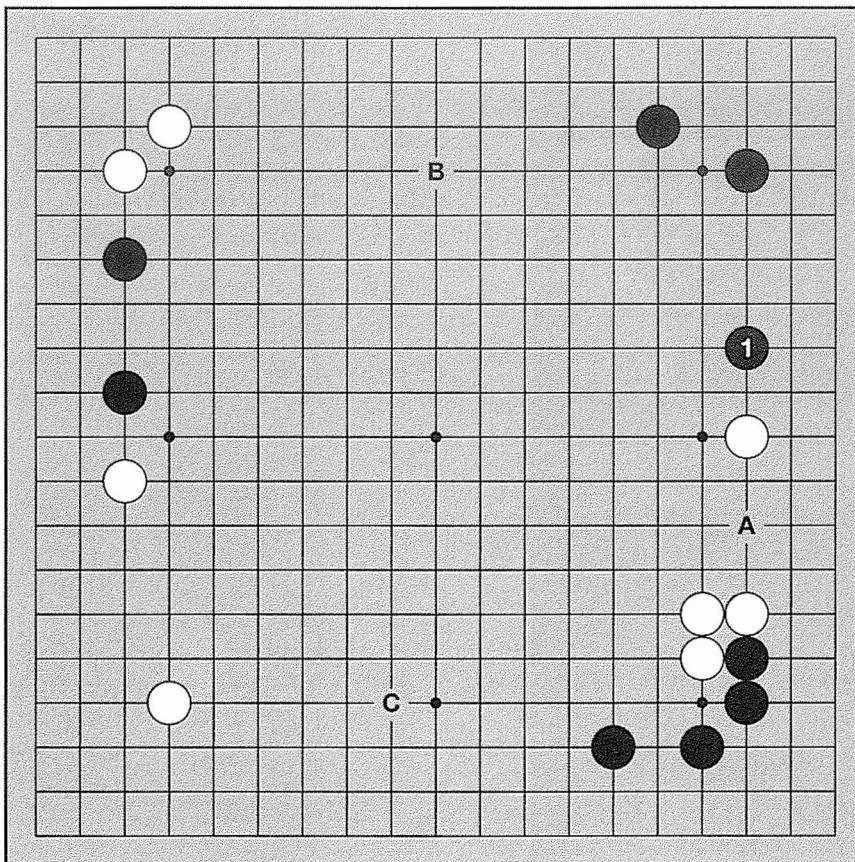


Diagram 30

4. EXTENSIONS LOOKING TOWARDS INVASIONS

Diagram 31. Black 1 is also big, but then White gets to play at 2, preventing Black's expansion while enlarging White's area on the east side.

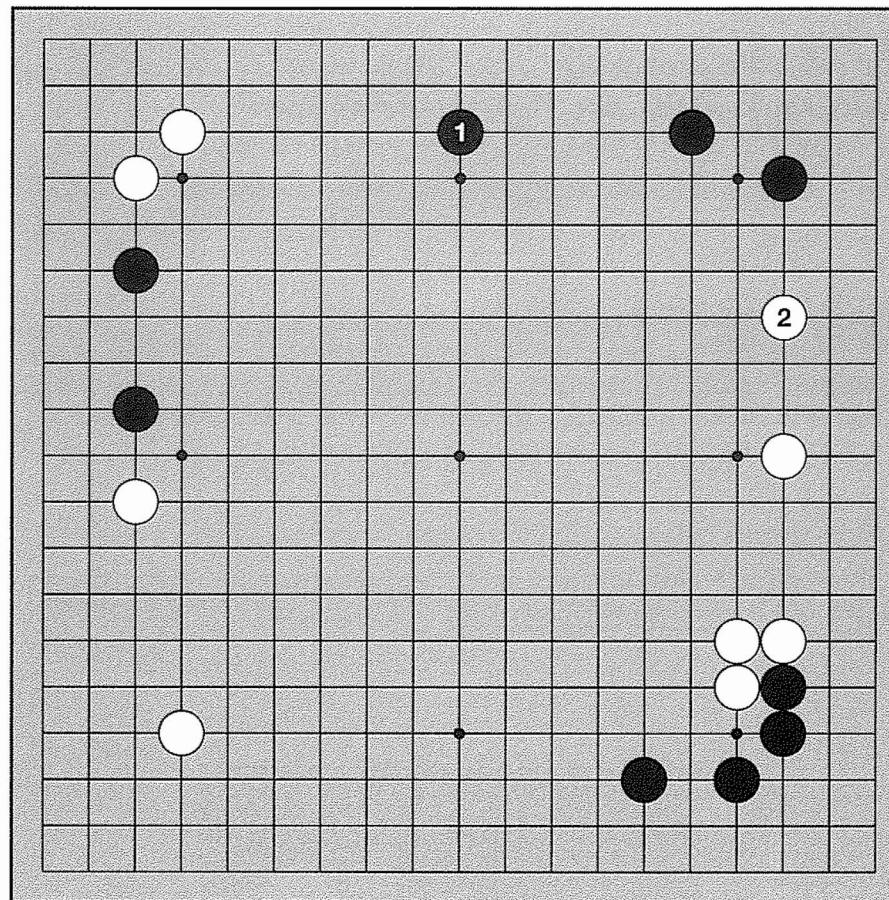
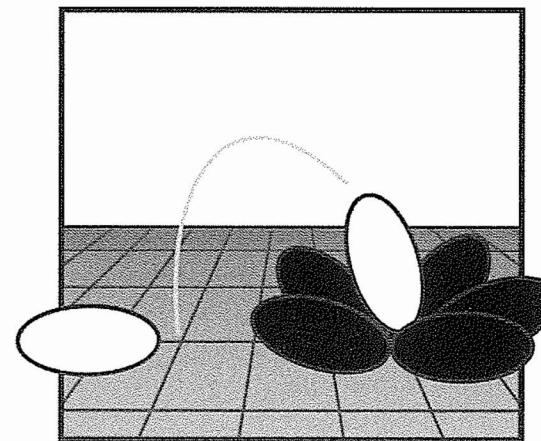


Diagram 31



5. ENLARGE AND PROTECT (OR REDUCE AND INVADE)

After the side extensions, moves that jump toward the center, enlarging and defending territorial frameworks, are big.

Diagram 32. The opening is basically over after corners and the sides are spoken for. Now Black wants to enlarge the big framework on the east. How should he start?

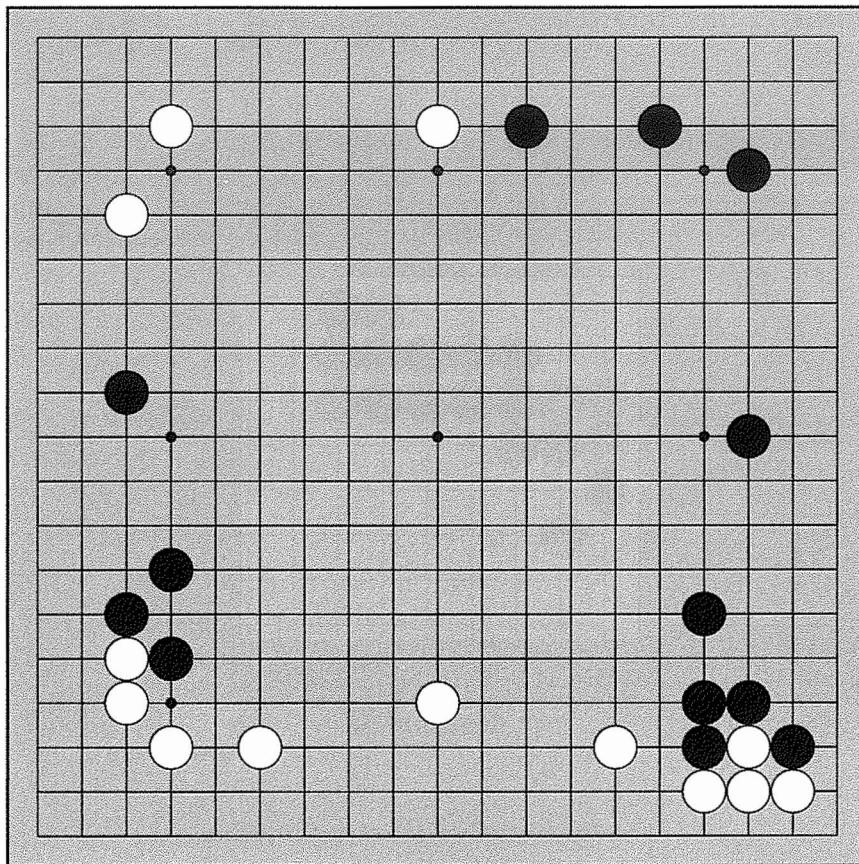


Diagram 32

5. ENLARGE AND PROTECT (OR REDUCE AND INVADE)

Diagram 33. A one-point jump towards the center at 1 is good. Black's area is getting pretty expansive. If White also makes a one-point jump at 2, enlarging her northwest area, Black does the same for the northeast at 3.

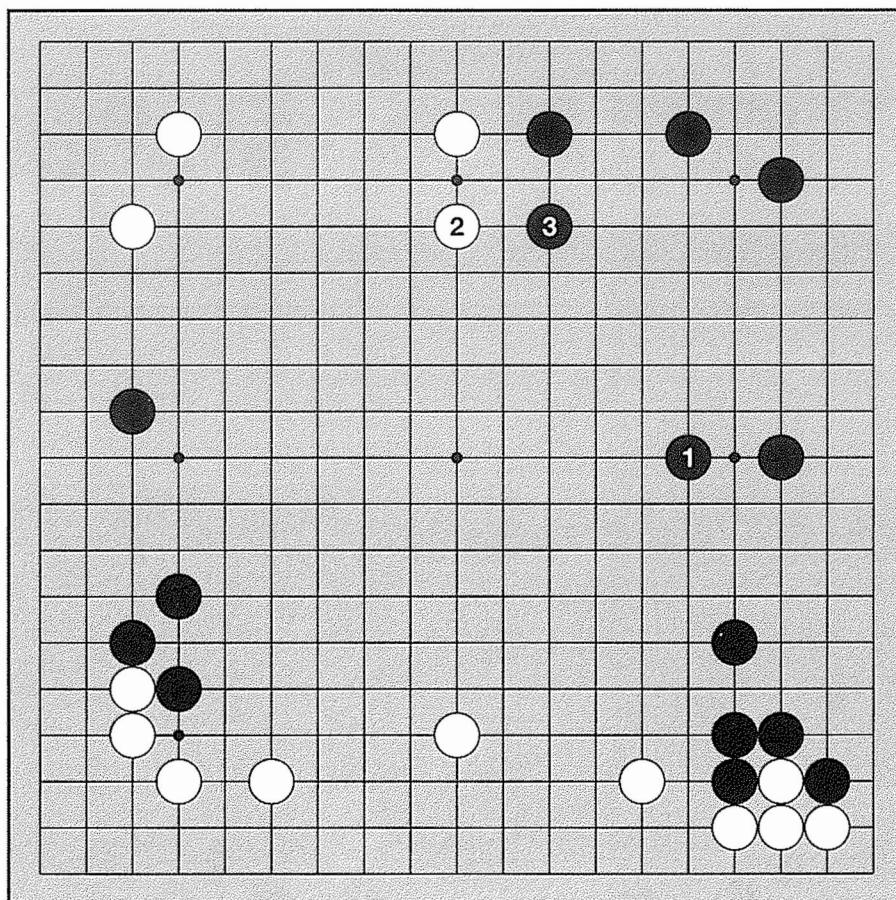


Diagram 33

5. ENLARGE AND PROTECT (OR REDUCE & INVADE)

Diagram 34. The one-point jump is also used to prevent invasions. When Black plays the marked stone, looking to invade next at A, White jumps at 1. This secures the area by preventing Black from making a successful invasion.

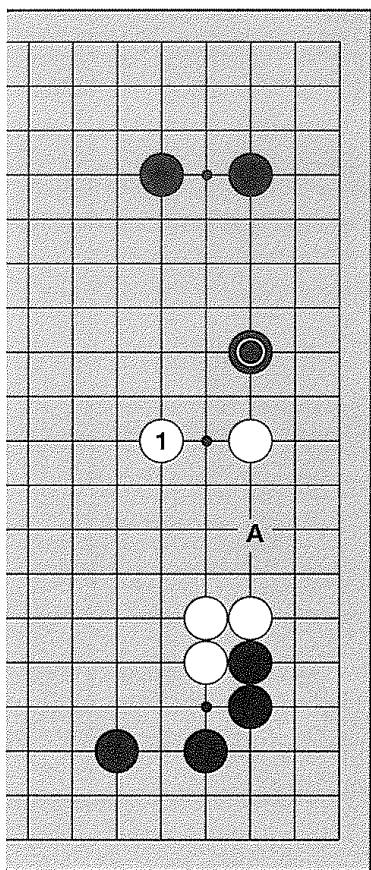


Diagram 34

Diagram 35. In this shape also, Black 1 is good for preventing White from invading at A. As an added bonus the one-point jump also develops the center, creating influence.

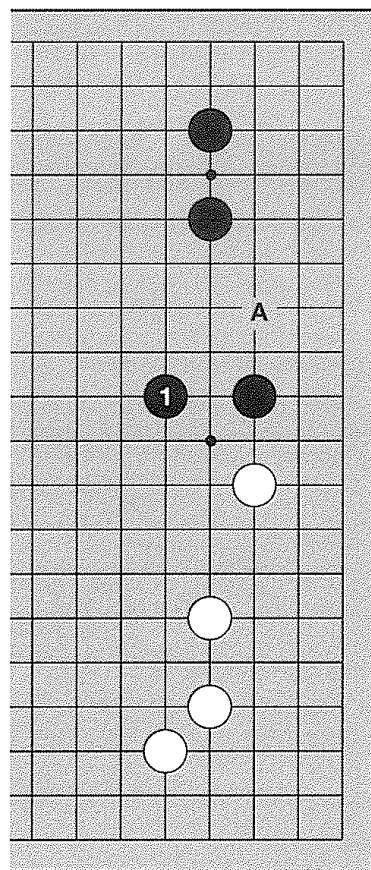


Diagram 35

6. BALANCE: INFLUENCE VS. PROFIT

Opening moves are usually played on the third and fourth lines – since in most cases, the second line is too low and the fifth line is usually too high to surround territory efficiently. The third line is called the territory line, and the fourth line is called the power line. It's good to balance both in the opening.

Diagram 36. Black plays at 1 on the fourth line. When White plays at 2, it's difficult for Black to make territory because White can slide in at A. However, Black's move will have an effect on future fighting.

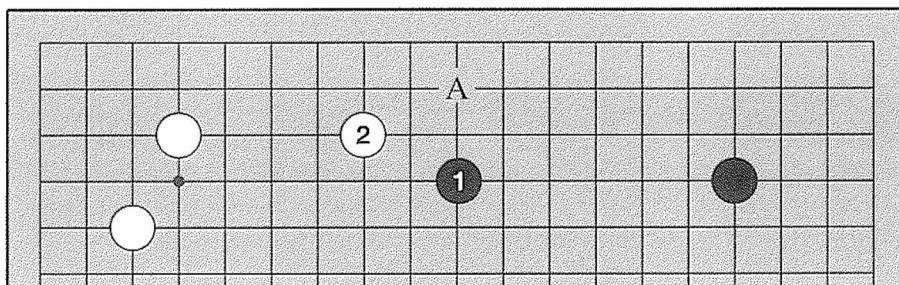


Diagram 36

Diagram 37. A move at 1 goes a long way toward creating territory in the north. It's easier to make territory with a stone on the third line. On the other hand, White can easily reduce Black's territory with the simple cap at 2.

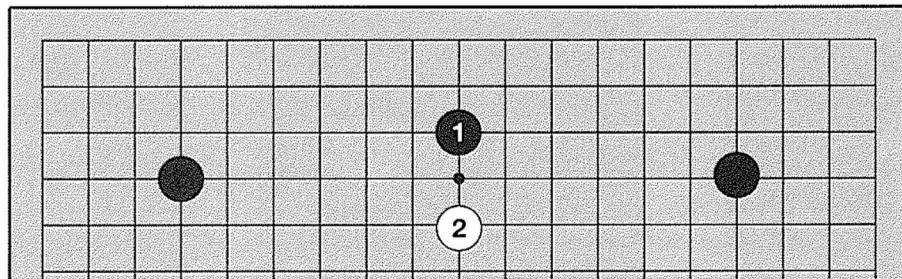


Diagram 37

“Balancing” the third and fourth lines doesn't mean simply playing half of your moves on the third line and half on the fourth line. It's a bit more subtle than that. If a section of your territory is marked out mainly by fourth-line stones, your opponent will immediately consider invading it – since if you end up solidifying fourth-line territory, it will be too large for him to bear. If your territory's made on the third line, though, he'll generally think of reducing, since third-line territory usually can't grow very big, and reducing it is easy. Keeping this in mind, when you're “balancing” the third and the fourth lines, you'll sometimes want to have more stones on the third line and other times you'll want more on the fourth line – all depending on your overall opening strategy.

Opening Guides

6. BALANCE: INFLUENCE VS. PROFIT

Diagram 38. Black would like to strengthen his wide extension on the west side. Where should he play?

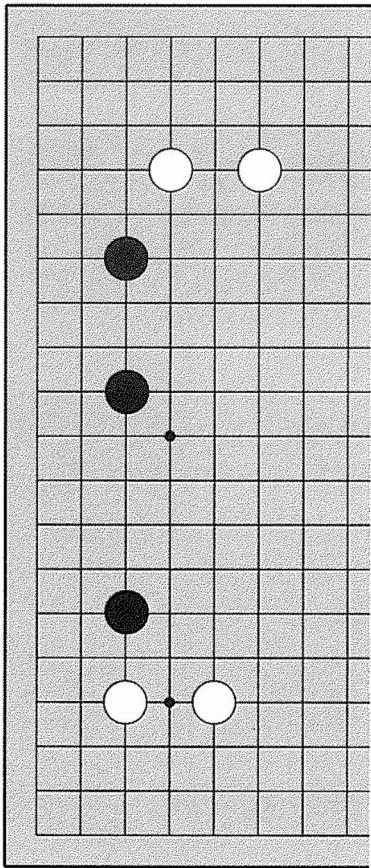


Diagram 38

Diagram 39. If Black plays on the third line at 1, then all of his stones in the area are on the third line. This isn't a good balance.

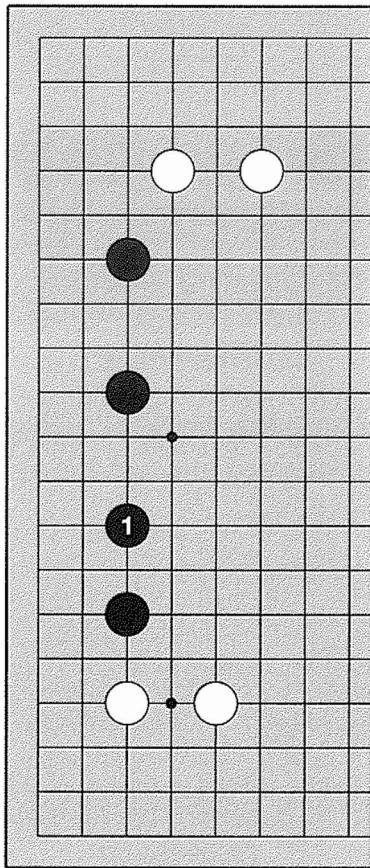


Diagram 39

Diagram 40. Black 1 here, raising his position, is a good combination of the third and fourth lines.

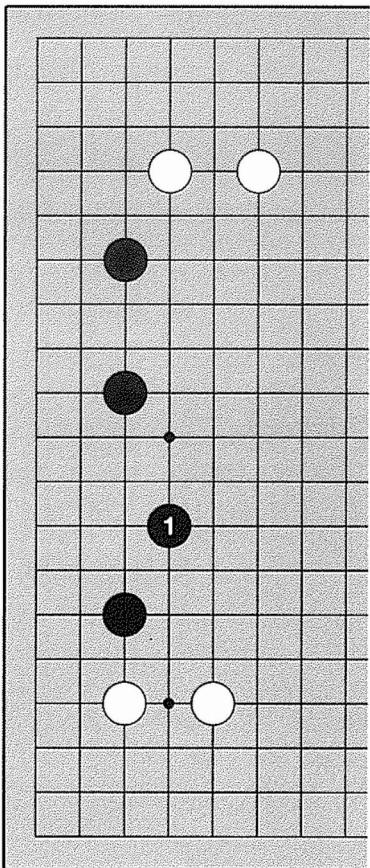
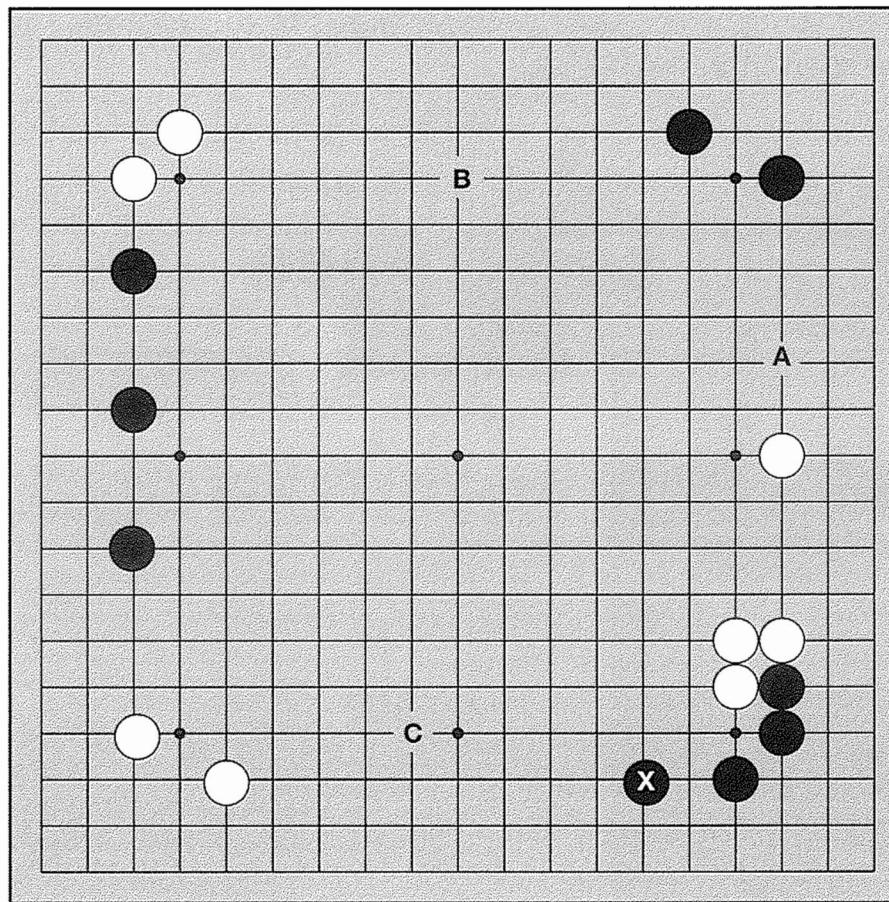


Diagram 40

EXTRA FOR EXPERTS



Take a look at the position in the southeast corner. This pattern was invented by the great Go Seigen early in the 20th century. At the time, people said the position was bad for Black because of Black's overemphasis on the third line on the south side; before, Black had usually tried to raise his position by playing the marked stone on the fourth line. Nowadays we recognize that Black has made a nice, solid chunk of territory in the corner, so we don't worry about his low profile. This position does have one serious implication, though: the south side is now what I call "dead for development." It's the smallest side on the board, because Black's low stone has already limited how much territory he can effectively develop here.

Of the three choices of follow-up, Black would most like to play A. If that's not possible, he can substitute B or, at worst, C.

7. FIND YOUR GOOD SIDE

Which side should you play on? Here are some things to consider: the splitting play, the double wing, the open edge, and backup.

Diagram 41. White wants to prevent Black from staking a claim to a huge area on the side. How?

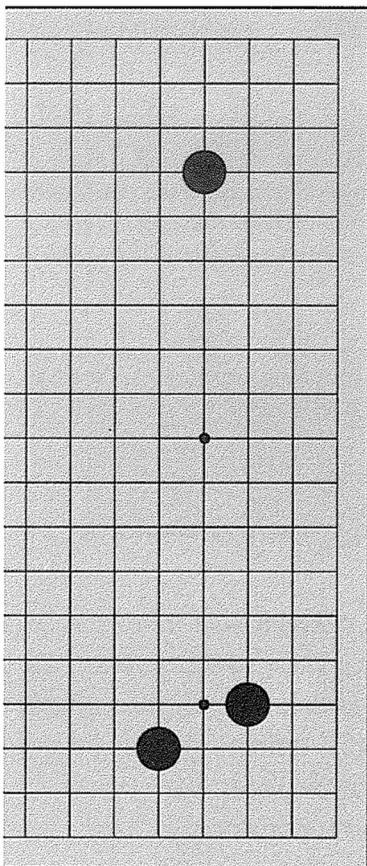


Diagram 41

Diagram 42. A move at 1 near the secured corner is not a great idea, since it can be severely attacked at Black 2.

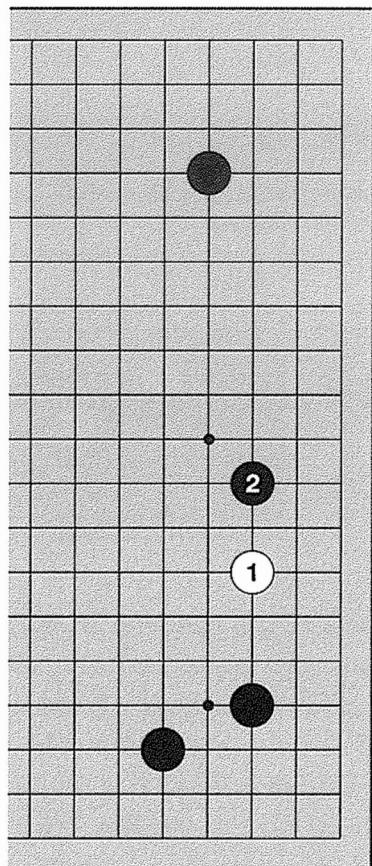


Diagram 42

7. FIND YOUR GOOD SIDE

Diagram 43. Getting close to the top corner at 1 allows Black to play the big point while attacking at 2.

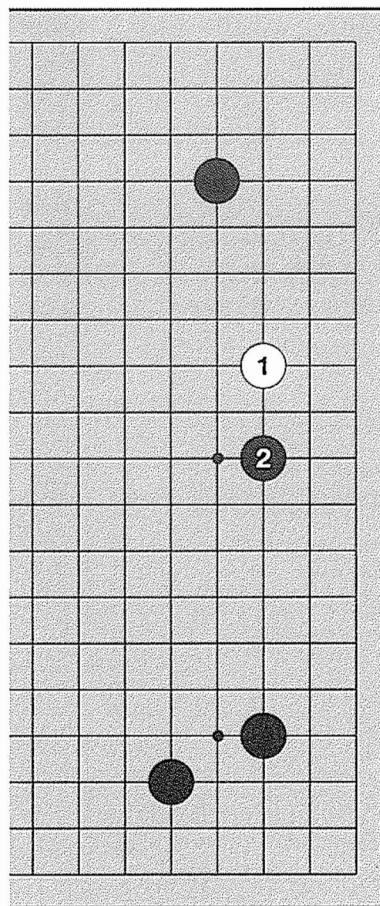


Diagram 43

Diagram 44. The splitting play at 1, right in the middle, is good in this case. If Black 2, White makes a base at 3. If Black plays on the other side at A instead, White can play at B.

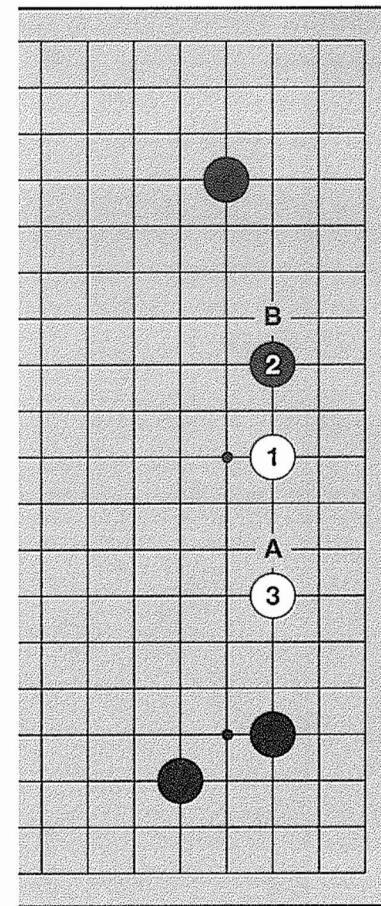


Diagram 44

The successful splitting play is usually going to be on the third line. Why? Remember that the third line is the line of territory. This also means it's the line where it's easiest to make a base. You'll want enough room on either side of your splitting play so that you can make a base if your opponent approaches.

Opening Guides

7. FIND YOUR GOOD SIDE

Try to prevent your opponent from making a “double wing”, and make one yourself if you can.

Diagram 45. Black’s two marked stones are forming a “wing.” And if Black plays one more stone around the marked point on the south side, he will have formed a double wing. The double wing is an ideal territory-making formation, because if your opponent plays on one side, the other side is likely to become solid territory.

In this position, White’s largest move is quickly to play a move on the south side to prevent the second wing.

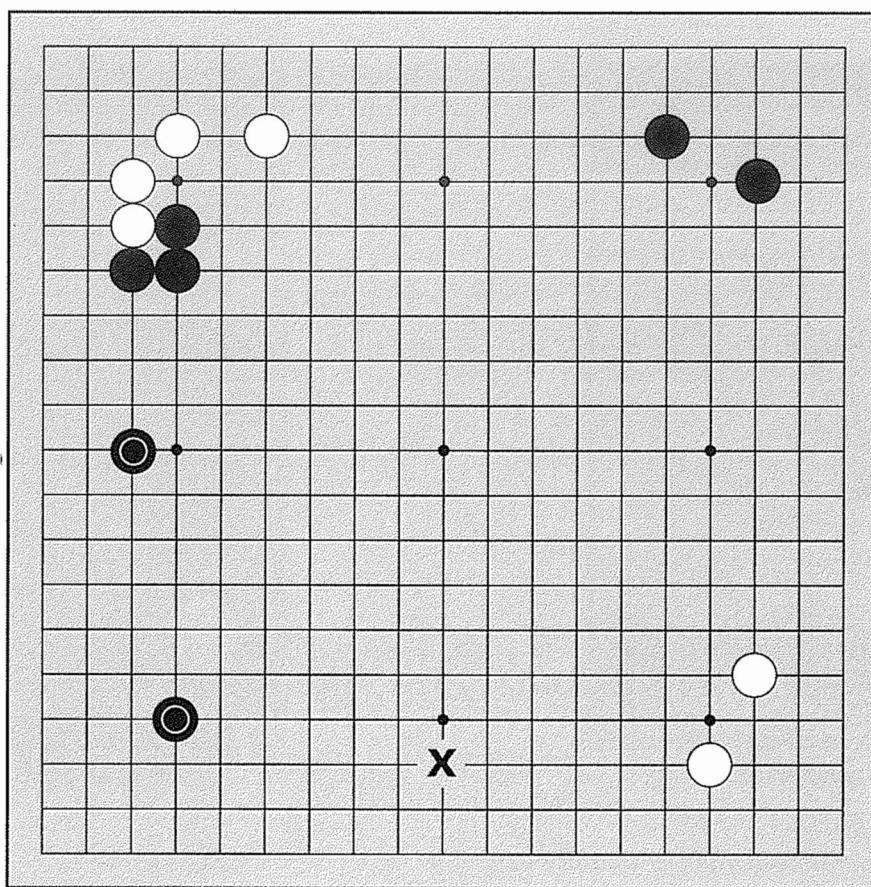


Diagram 45

The “joint” of a double-wing formation doesn’t have to be a star point; sometimes it’s a corner enclosure. Remember that geometrically speaking you’ll want to build shapes with volume or “more than one side to them,” rather than flat shapes, since it’s easiest to make territory this way. Having too many stones on one side – particularly on the third line – is a recipe for coming up short on territory.

7. FIND YOUR GOOD SIDE

Diagram 46. Which side is more valuable here, the south or the east? Often when deciding which side is more valuable to play, you should ask yourself, “On which side does territory stand to be made?” Here, the south side has an open edge. It will be hard for White to make territory on this side, because she’ll have to close off the bottom as well as make an extension. It’s much more likely that White will make territory on the east side, where the edge is effectively closed. So that’s the side Black and White would prefer to play.

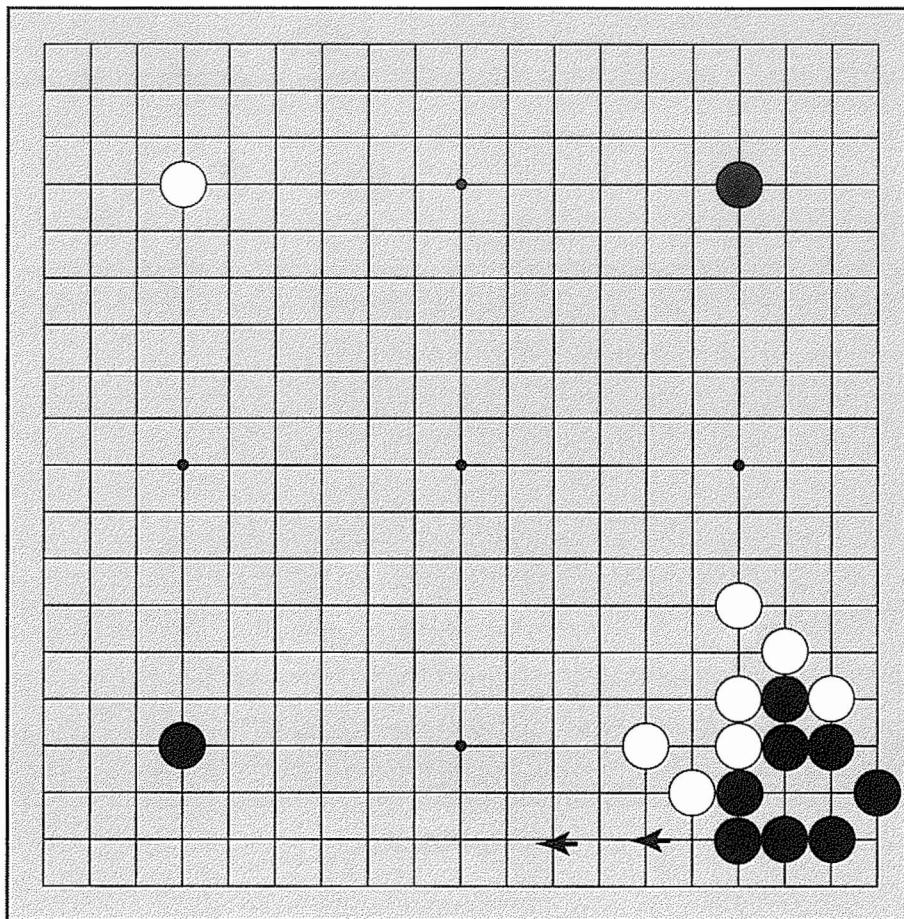


Diagram 46

Opening Guides

7. FIND YOUR GOOD SIDE

Generally, your preference should be to make it easy on yourself if you can – that is, play on the side where you have backup.

Diagram 47. Here, jumping into your opponent's sphere of influence would mean an uphill battle that you could easily have avoided. A Black play at A is a much easier way to stay ahead than to try to jump into White's area at B.

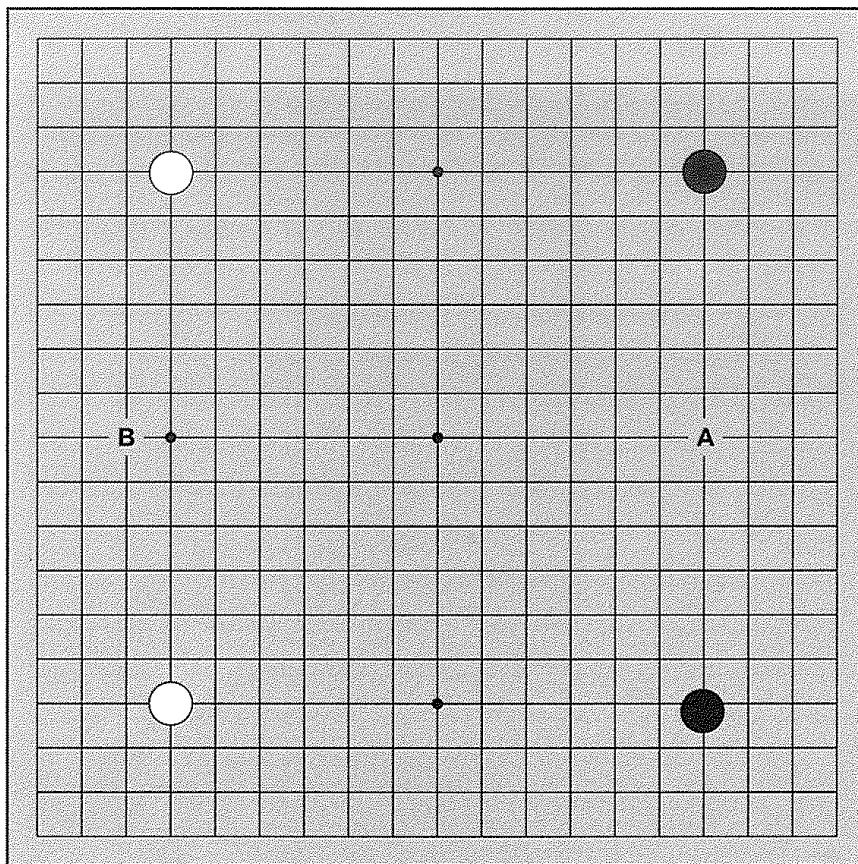


Diagram 47

7. FIND YOUR GOOD SIDE

Diagram 48. By the same logic, it's much easier for Black to approach at A here – using his star point as backup and planning next to follow up by playing the north side star point – than to approach from inside White's sphere of influence at B.

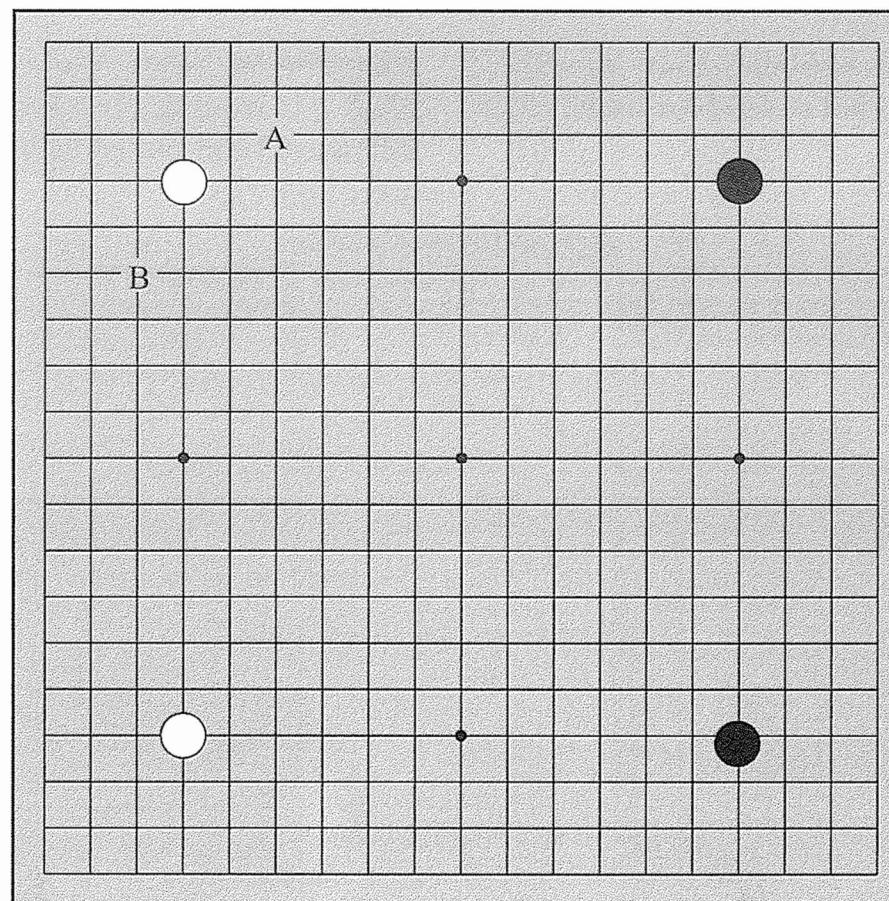


Diagram 48

8. MAKE A BASE

It's unwise to form a group without a base. You may be tempted to make a big play instead of bothering with the grunt work of laying a foundation. But it's crucial to make a base for any stones that you plan to keep – otherwise, as your opponent attacks your baseless group, he can make a big move with every turn, easily gaining more than you made with your one big move. That's why there's a Go saying: "Urgent before big."

Diagram 49. Black shouldn't just leave the stone on the top left to fend for itself.

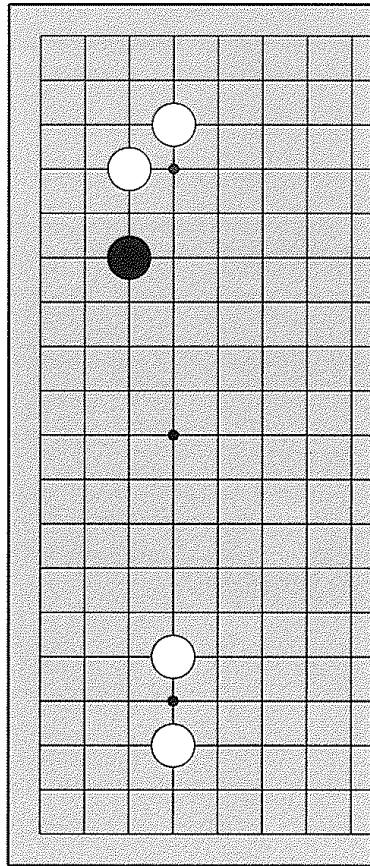


Diagram 49

Diagram 50. When White attacks at 1, Black is in trouble. Black jumps at 2, White follows at 3 and Black is still in trouble. It's most important to make a base.

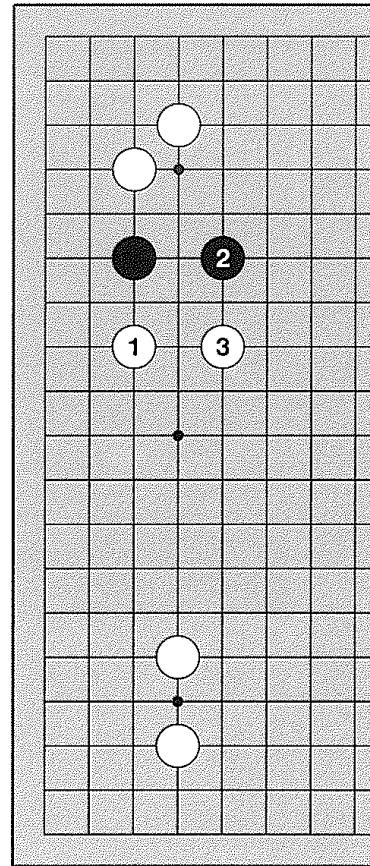


Diagram 50

8. MAKE A BASE

Diagram 51. Black needs to make a two-point extension to prevent an attack. Black 1, forming a base, makes Black safe for now. When there is one stone, a two-point extension is ideal. If there are two stones in a row (a two-story construction), then a three-point extension is ideal.

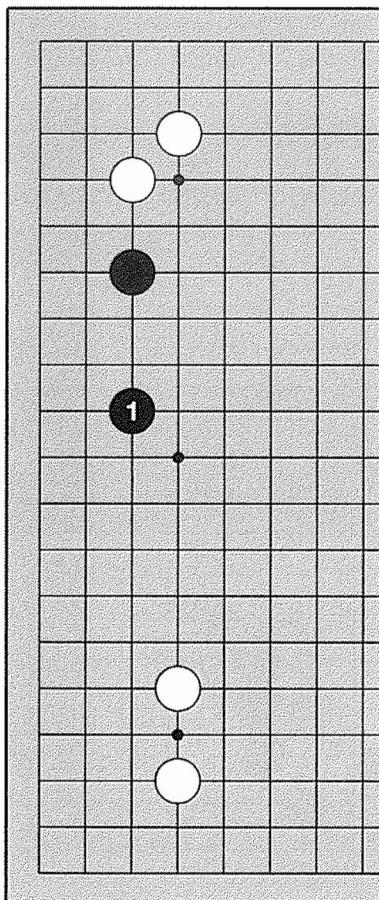


Diagram 51

Diagram 52. How should Black play to make a base for his stones?

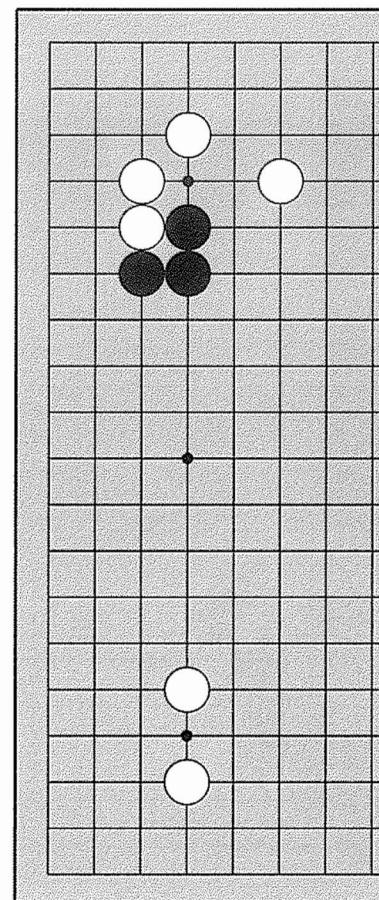


Diagram 52

Opening Guides

8. MAKE A BASE

Diagram 53. If Black doesn't play in this area, a White move at 1 is severe. Black's stones are without a base and he'll pay a big price as he gets chased around.

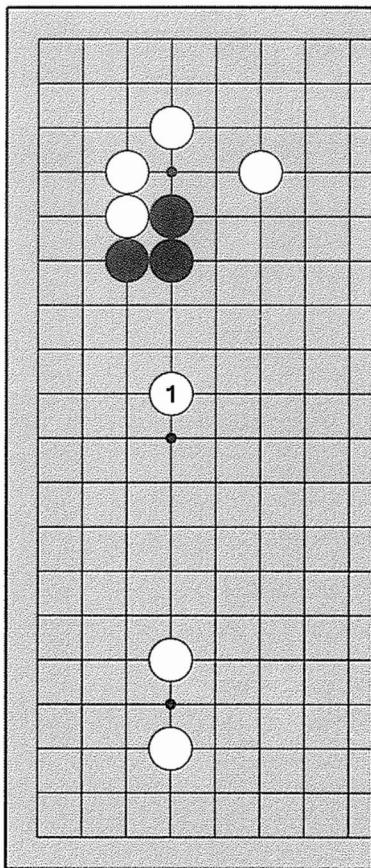


Diagram 53

Diagram 54. The three stones on the top left actually make a two-story shape. Therefore a three-point extension at 1 is ideal. You may remember the proverb from previous volumes: "If one, jump two; if two, jump three."

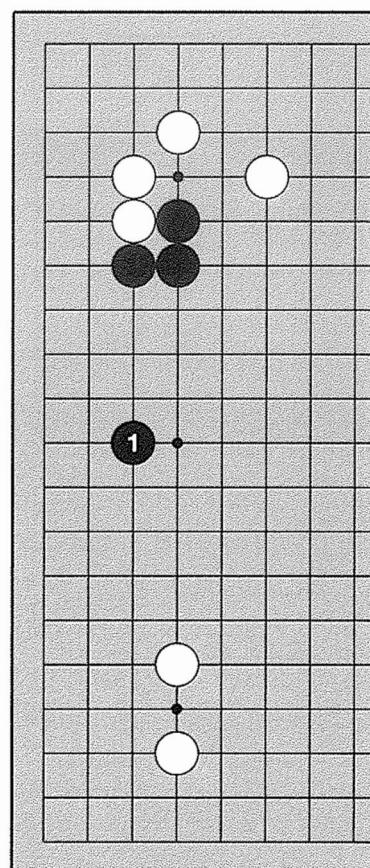
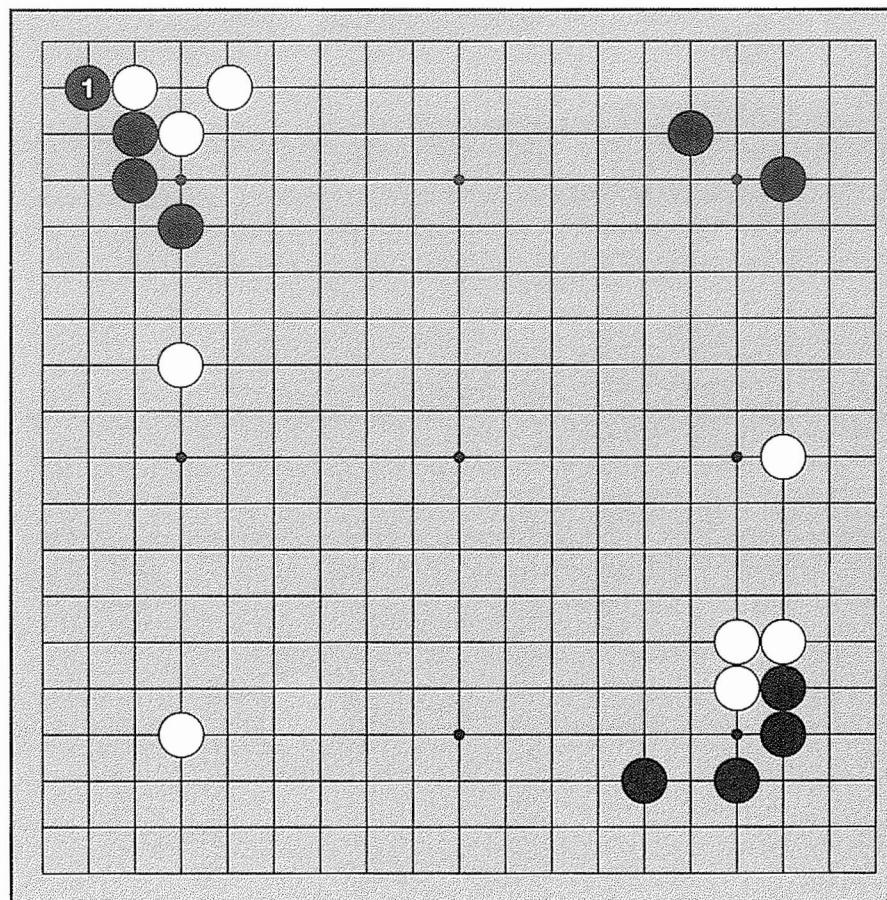


Diagram 54

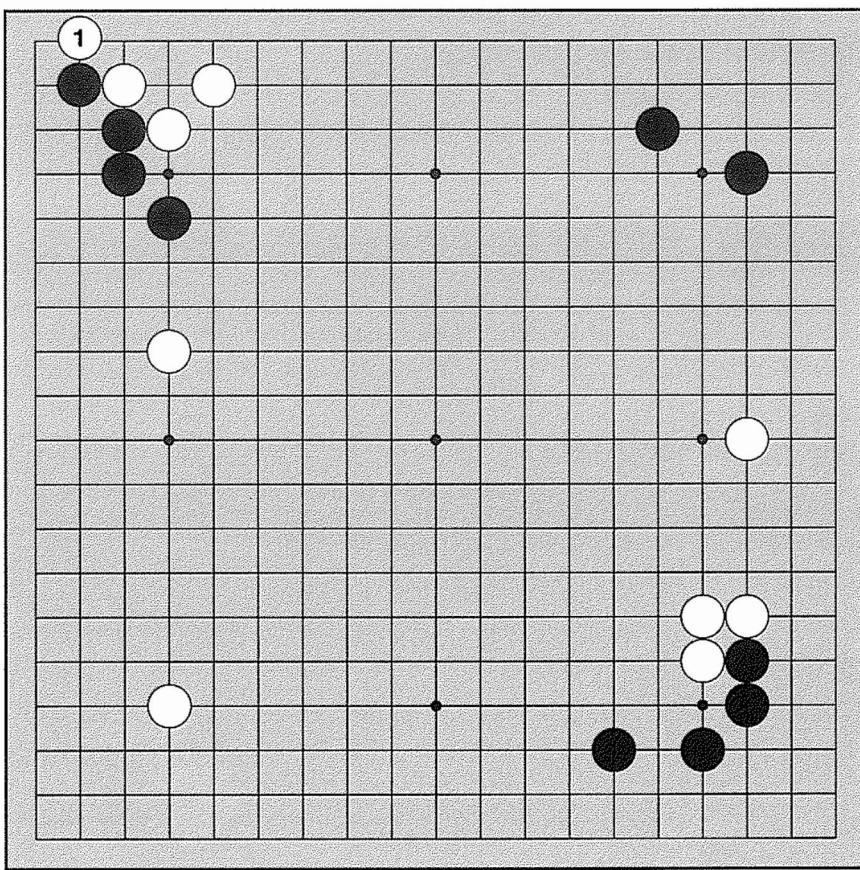
EXTRA FOR EXPERTS

If you're going through an exercise book with a lot of full-board opening problems, you can score some easy points if you remember this key principle: if you can, make or break a base. And if there's a move that involves the bases of two groups, you don't even have to look at the rest of the board. In this diagram, if Black plays at 1, what do you think is the most important move on the board?



EXTRA FOR EXPERTS

The most important move is for White to play at 1 – an interesting example of the largest opening move's being on the first line. This move both keeps Black from securing his base, and helps White with her own.



9. STAY AWAY FROM STRENGTH

There is a saying: "Play away from strength." If you play near your opponent's strength, there's a chance that your stones will get hurt.

Diagram 55. White has influence in the west. Black wants to make an extension in the north. Where should he play?

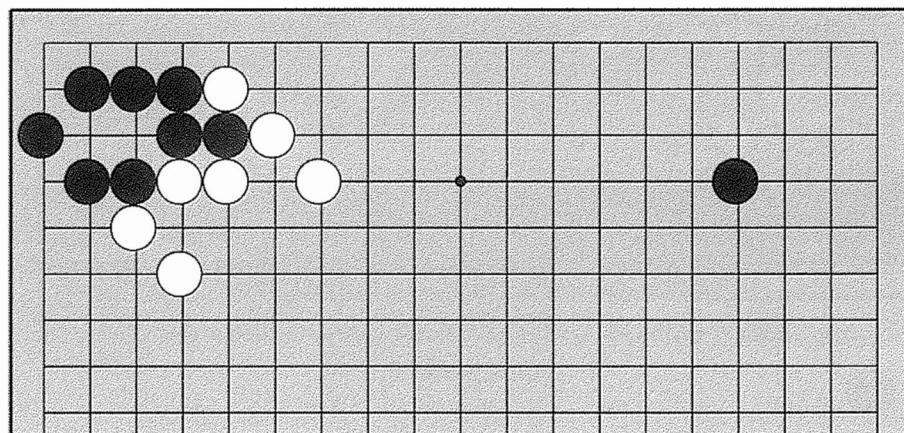


Diagram 55

Diagram 56. A wide extension at Black 1, near White's influence, is dangerous. White can invade at 2.

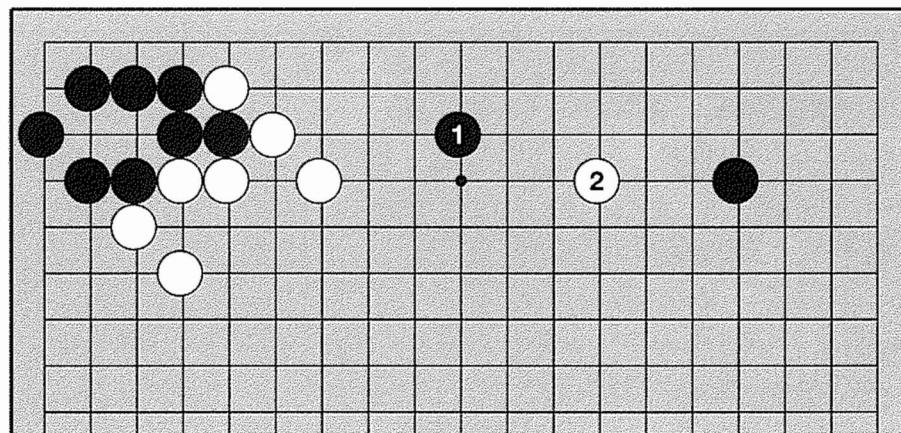


Diagram 56

Opening Guides

9. STAY AWAY FROM STRENGTH

Diagram 57. A large knight's move is as far as one can go and still be safe.

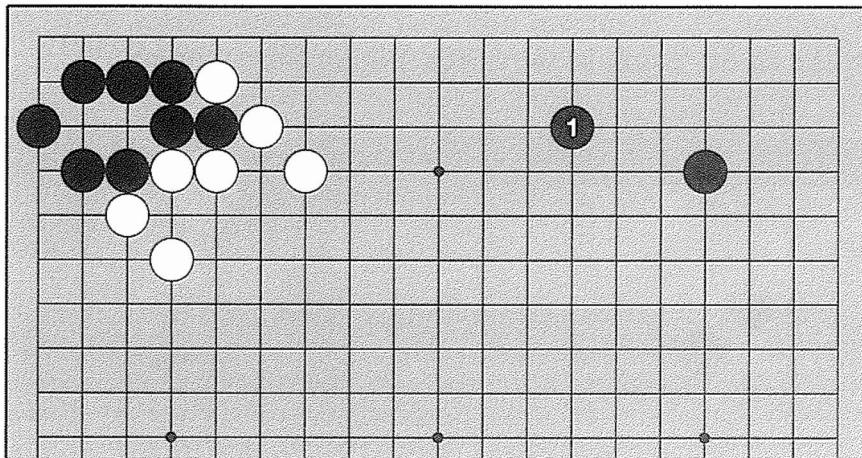


Diagram 57

Diagram 58. On the other hand, if White wants to play in this area, where's a good move?

The saying also works the other way: one should also play away from one's own strength. An extension at 1 in this case is too close.

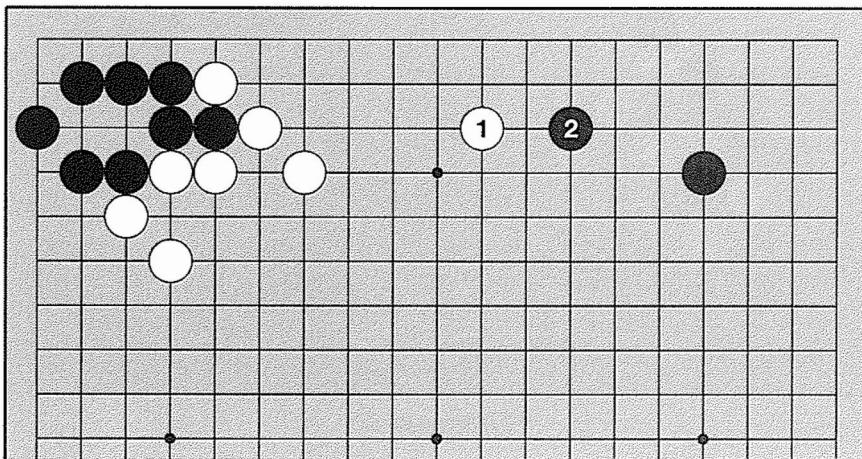


Diagram 58

9. STAY AWAY FROM STRENGTH

Diagram 59. White should approach at 1. When Black responds at 2, White plays 3. Because of White's strength in the west, Black can't easily invade this area.

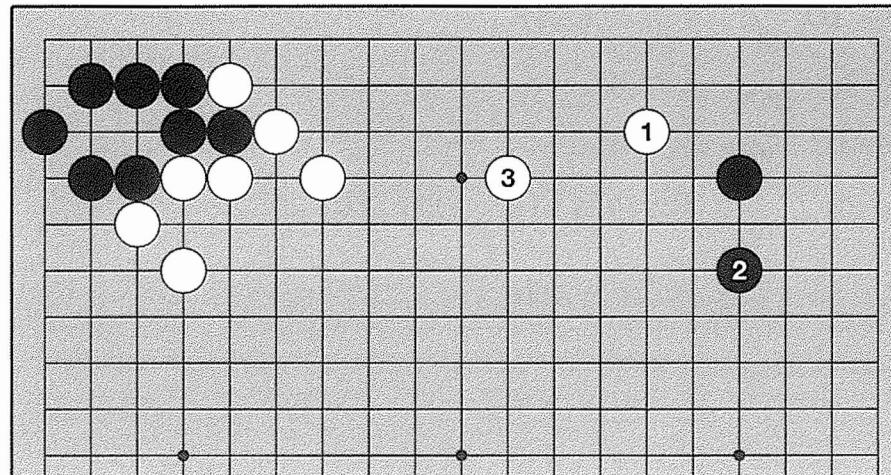


Diagram 59

