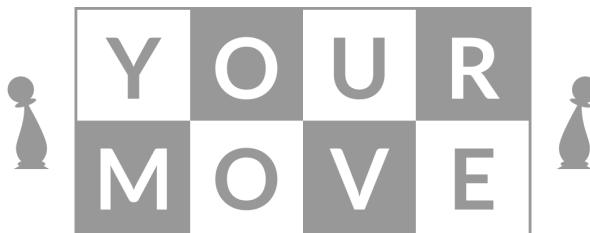


to Wendy

for being you

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First Edition: August 2021
Printed in the United States of America
ISBN: 978-1-7360716-1-8

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Introduction

My Mad Delusion

Last year, over a hundred million kids were born. Maybe one in ten, or probably more, will learn a bit of chess at some point in their lives. Of those, very few will end up loving it.

It can often be more tedious than watching paint dry and at the same time more painful than taking an ice bath. Why is chess so difficult to learn and enjoy?

Maybe this is the natural state of affairs. As one of those unlikely chess nuts, I'd say we might actually just be nuts. If only five percent of folks exposed to chess end up liking it, that lines up pretty well with Stockholm syndrome...

Permit me to share this book with you as a form of group therapy. Because you're here, you must be a budding fellow addict, or at least someone who wants to try sitting in the dark depraved circle of chess crazies to see how the church basement feels.

Hi, my name is Andy, and I have a mad delusion. Everyone should be able to enjoy chess, from the start, with zero friction. Like any game, it should be pleasant, fun, and interesting. Playing should foster a desire to play more!

Even though chess has been around for well over a thousand years, good introductory teaching doesn't exist. So far, nobody has survived chess baptism without scars. Are you ready to join me in making history?

The Pitch

This short book will equip you with everything you need to know in less than an hour. You won't have to slog through boring rule enumeration nor impractical rambling.

I focus on speed but won't sacrifice coverage. There will be plenty of recommended activities to keep you busy and growing in your chess journey for many years to come.

I can't guarantee you'll beat all your friends and family right away afterwards. But I can say that if you've read this seriously and they haven't, then it's only a matter of time. More importantly, you'll enjoy the journey.

The Plan

In chapter 1, we'll engage in a series of minigames. These introduce each piece while also building fundamental chess skills. Even if you've played before, the minigames will help you think ahead and see the entire board better.

By chapter 2, we'll understand the nuances of castling, *en passant*, and draw conditions. We'll engage in "progressive chess" to get faster learning cycles and more swashbuckling action than the normal rules.

In chapter 3, we'll fine-tune our chess instincts, zooming in on specific positions to practice winning tactics. Then we'll zoom out to grasp the arc of a great game in chapter 4, learning from the masters about high-level strategy.

By chapter 5, you'll be a fully developed chess player; all that's left is for you to play a timed game in a serious setting! We'll outline the chess landscape from a birds-eye view with encouraging anecdotes, tips, factoids, and further opportunities to continue exploring on your own.

Chapters 6 and 7 cover endgames and openings, in case you want to pursue more serious study. For the casual reader, these are optional; the first 5 chapters are intended

to stand alone and fully accomplish the book's mission.

I introduce chess notation gradually, so you should be able to read straight through without an issue. However, if you're confused or want to learn more, visit the appendix.

*“While all artists are not chess players,
all chess players are artists.”*

Marcel Duchamp

Chapter 1

The Basics

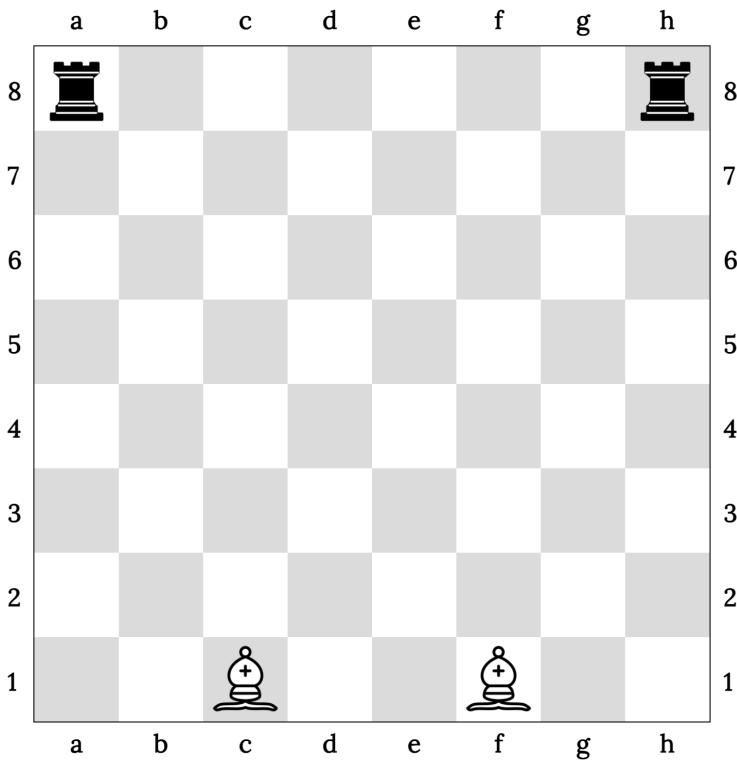
Most adults fall somewhere along the spectrum from "I completely dislike chess; it's complicated; it's boring" to "chess is cool; I like playing casually; would love to get better someday."

This book aims to take you off that spectrum entirely. We completely reimagine chess from the ground up so that it is simple, fun, and your understanding of the game naturally advances as we play.

Whether you've never heard of chess or you've already competed in tournaments, the following minigames are our starting point. Play through them with a partner!

Minigame 1: Bishops + Rooks

White has the two bishops, black has the two rooks. Win by capturing one of your opponent's pieces first. Then switch colors and try again!

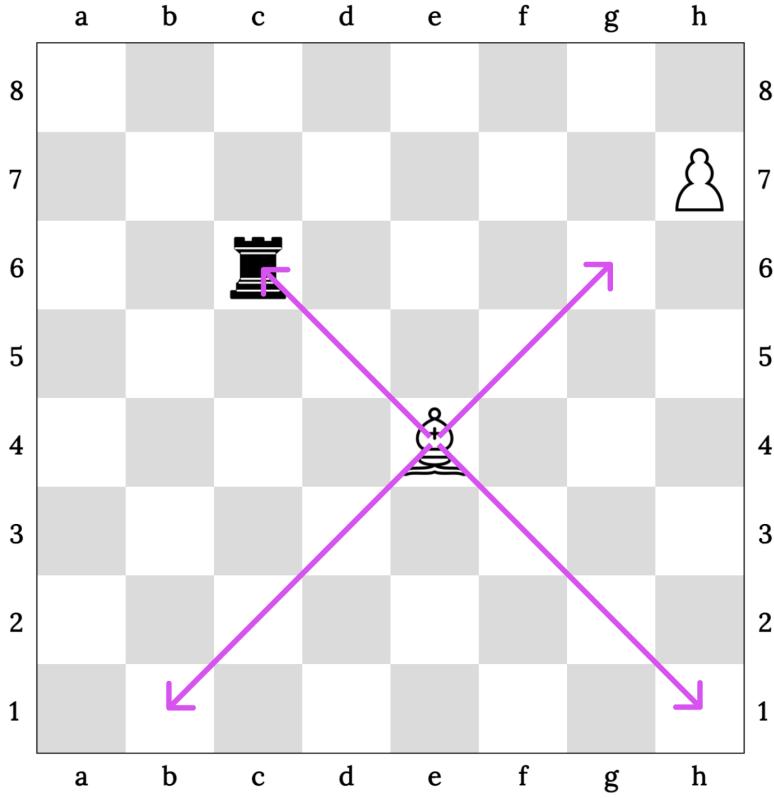


initial setup for B+R, whoever captures first wins

A few chess conventions:

- White always moves first, then you take turns.
- The bottom right square of the board is white.
- After 50 moves each without a capture, it's a draw.

Rooks move in straight lines, vertically or horizontally. For instance, a8 to a2. Bishops move diagonally. Both pieces can move as far as they like along an unobstructed path.



example move options for white's e4 bishop

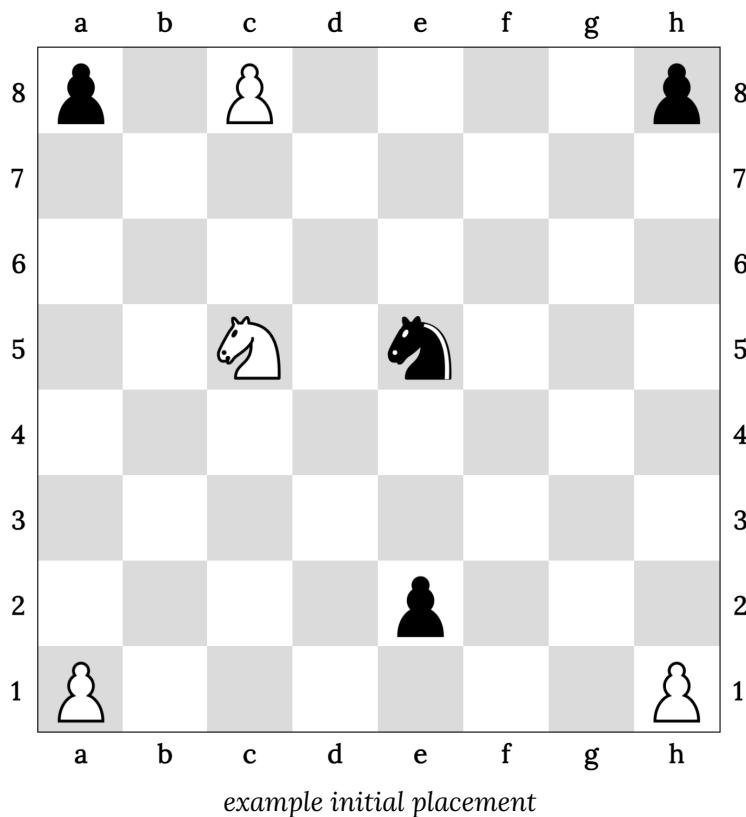
to c6, d5, f5, g6, f3, g2, h1, d3, c2, or b1

Per the diagram, a bishop may move either forward or backward from its starting square. The same applies to rooks.

To capture an opponent's piece, move into the occupied square and remove their piece from the board.

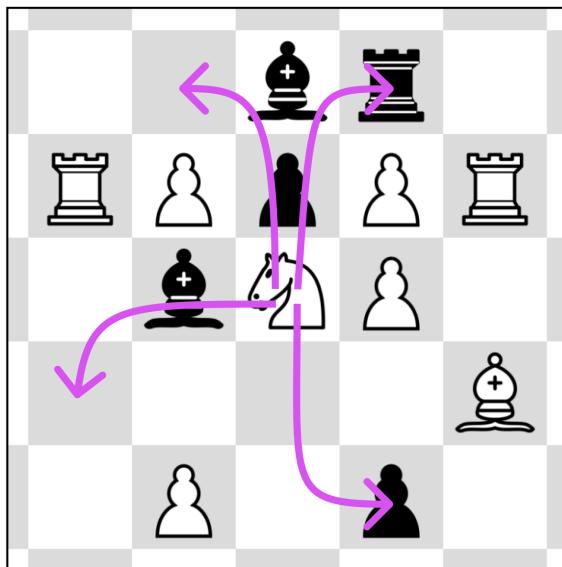
Minigame 2: Knight Battleship

Starting with black, take turns placing one knight then three pawns anywhere on the board. Whoever first captures all the opponent's pawns, or takes the unsuspecting enemy knight, wins.



Once setup is complete, only the knights move. They cannot be placed attacking each other initially.

Knights move in an L shape, two squares in one of the four cardinal directions, then one square at a 90 degree angle. They are the only piece that jumps over teammates and enemies alike to land in their destination square.

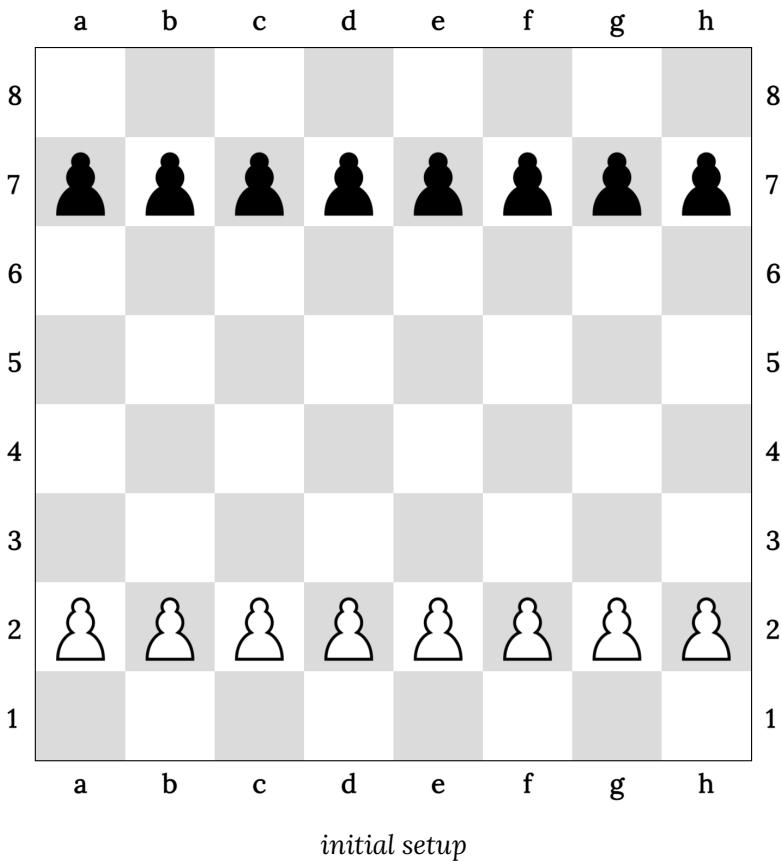


Knights capture by landing on an occupied square and removing the opponent's piece. Knights may not move into a square occupied by a piece of the same color.

In the example initial placement diagram (page 14), the white knight can jump to b7, d7, e6, e4, d3, b3, a4, or a6. The black knight can jump to d7, f7, g6, g4, f3, d3, c4, or c6.

Minigame 3: Pawn Wars

Whoever gets a pawn to the other side first wins!

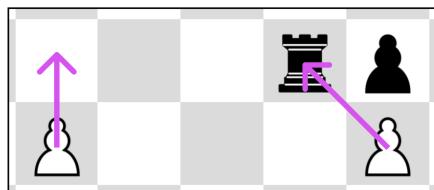


If a player cannot legally move, the opponent may make another move. If both players cannot legally move and neither has reached the other side, it's a draw.

Pawns move forward one square at a time. They are the

only piece which cannot move backward.

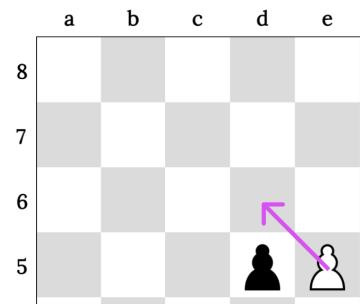
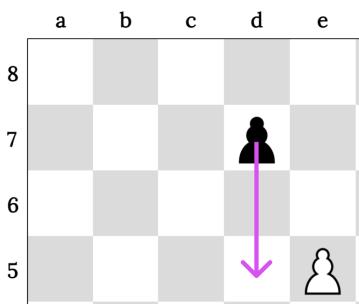
Pawns capture by moving diagonally, and they only move diagonally when capturing. Because they may not capture moving forward, they get stuck "headbutting" other pieces.



From their initial square

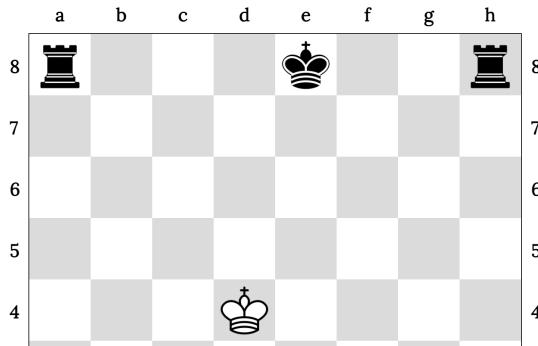
only, unobstructed pawns may move two squares forward on a single turn. This creates a special circumstance when a pawn chooses to "double-step" from its home square.

If an opponent's pawn is next to the destination square, capture is not bypassed. On the next turn only, the opponent has an option called *en passant* (in passing). They may move diagonally to the vacant square behind the double-stepping pawn and remove it from the board.

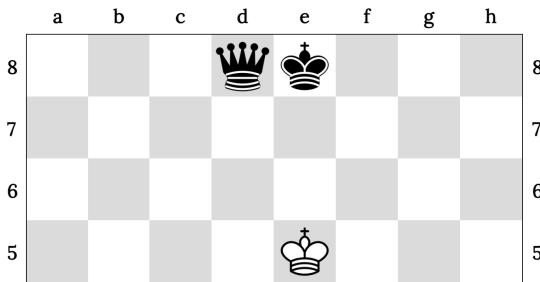


Minigame 4: KQR Checkmates

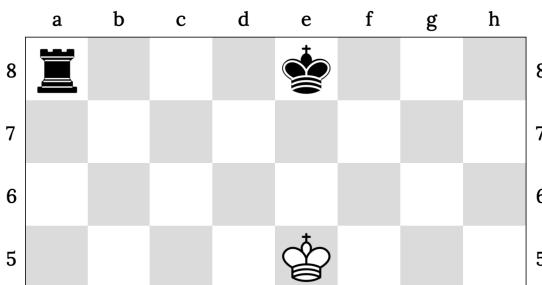
White tries to survive as long as possible, while black tries to unavoidably trap the opponent's king.



Scenario 1: King versus King and two Rooks



Scenario 2: King versus King and Queen



Scenario 3 (extra credit): King versus King and Rook

The queen moves like the bishop and rook combined. She may go as far as desired in any unobstructed straight line: vertically, horizontally, or diagonally. The king moves like the queen, in any direction, but only one square at a time.

You may say “check”, but are not required to, when one of your pieces threatens capture of the opponent’s king on the following move. A king that is under attack must defend immediately, for example by moving to avoid the check or capturing the attacking piece.

If the king cannot defend and capture is inevitable on the very next turn, then it is not only in check but also in “checkmate” and the game is over. The king may not step into a square adjacent to the opponent’s king, because then the opponent could capture it using their king!

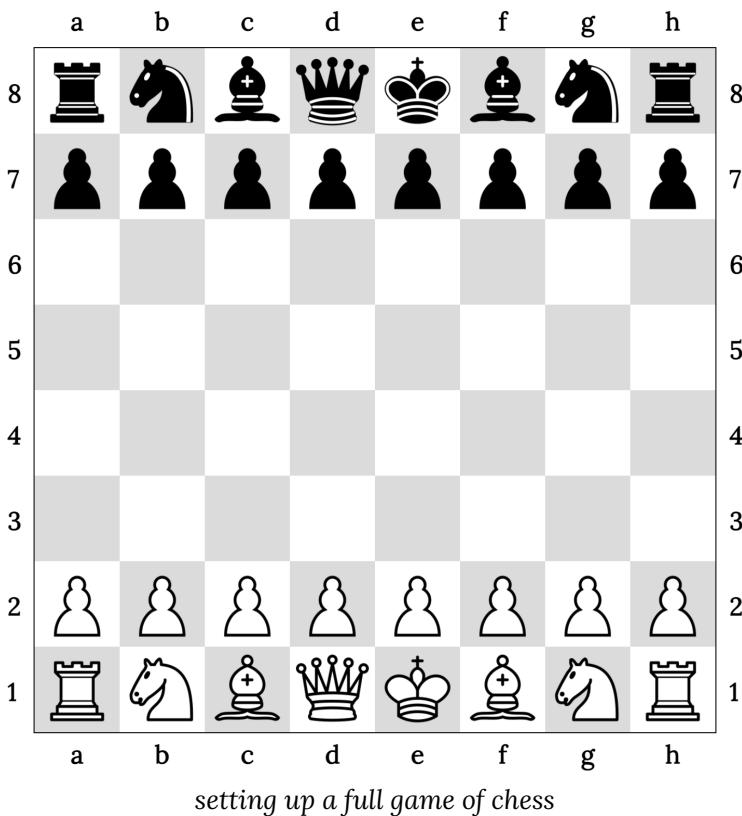
The game ends in a draw per the 50-move rule like Bishops + Rooks, if only kings remain (insufficient material), or if the player to move cannot legally do so but their king is not in check (stalemate).

The previous minigames introduced piece movements. This final one brings us one step closer to a full game of chess, where the goal is also to checkmate the opponent.

Chapter 2

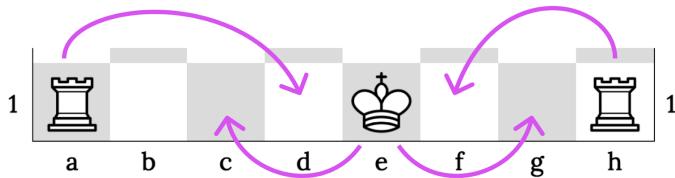
A Full Game

Now that we're familiar with all the pieces, it's time to play chess for real. Set up the board as follows. White goes first, and whoever checkmates the opponent wins!



Special rules to keep in mind when playing a full game:

- **Promotion:** when a pawn reaches the other side of the board, it becomes a piece of your choice (queen, rook, bishop, or knight). Yes, you can have 9 queens!
- **Drawing:** the game can end in a tie by *mutual agreement* or *impossibility of checkmate*. Also, *stalemate* occurs when there are no legal moves for the player whose turn it is, and their king is not in check. You may declare *threefold repetition* during a game if the position on the board is the exact same position reached at least twice previously. You can declare the *50-move rule* if both players make that many consecutive moves without moving a pawn or capturing anything.
- **Castling:** move your king two squares toward a rook and place the rook on the king's other side.



Castling is only possible with vacant space between king and rook. They must not have moved during the game, and you may not pass through check.

Minigame 5: Progressive Chess

Once we're comfortable playing a normal game of chess, it will take a lifetime to explore all the possibilities and nuances. Let's introduce a fun twist that accelerates the game's development and our learning.

Progressive chess is a variant where after white's first move, black gets two moves, then white makes three, black has four, and so on forever. This creates lots of room for creative attacking combinations. Losing a piece isn't as big of a deal, and checkmate is never far away!

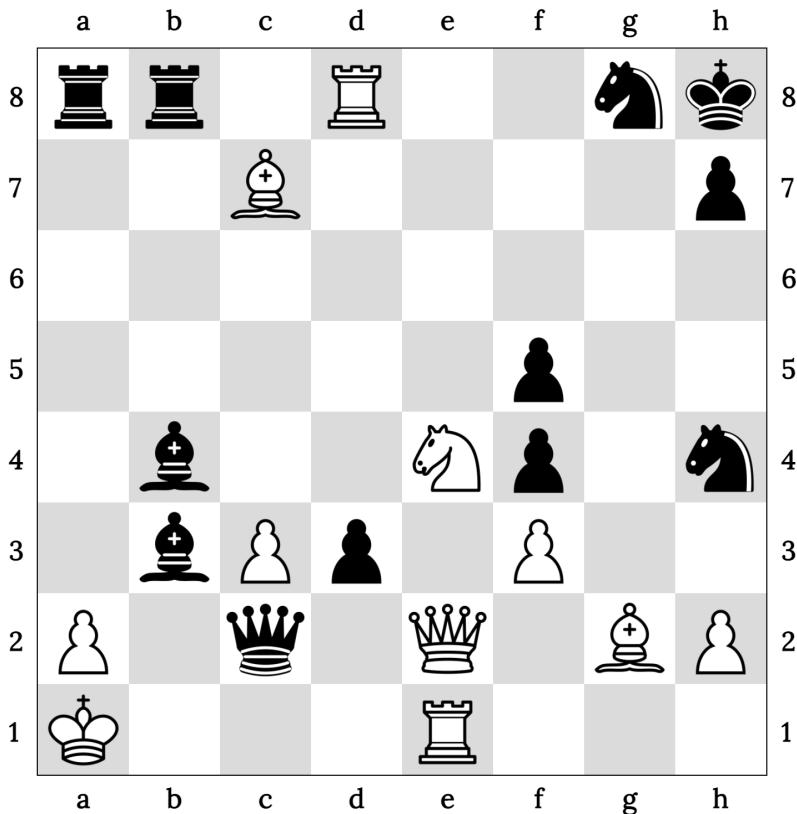
The rules for progressive chess are all the same as normal chess, except for the additional move increment which leads to a special caveat: kings may not move into check or be captured as part of a move sequence.

If a player attacks the opponent's king then their turn ends immediately, and they lose their remaining moves. The opponent gets a single move to legally respond to the check. If they can't then it's game over—checkmate. If they can then after that first move in response to the check, the game "unpauses" and the responding player continues their turn with all their remaining moves.

Chapter 3

Tactics

Take a moment to study the following position. Which side would you rather play?

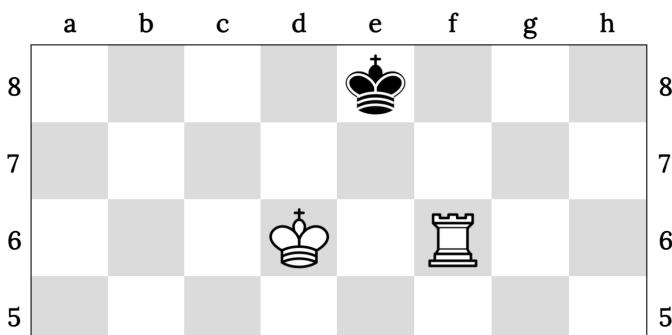


The correct answer is "whichever side has the next move." White to play goes Be5 (moving the bishop from c7 to e5), and black to play moves Rxa2 (capturing the pawn on a2 with the rook). Both moves result in immediate checkmate!

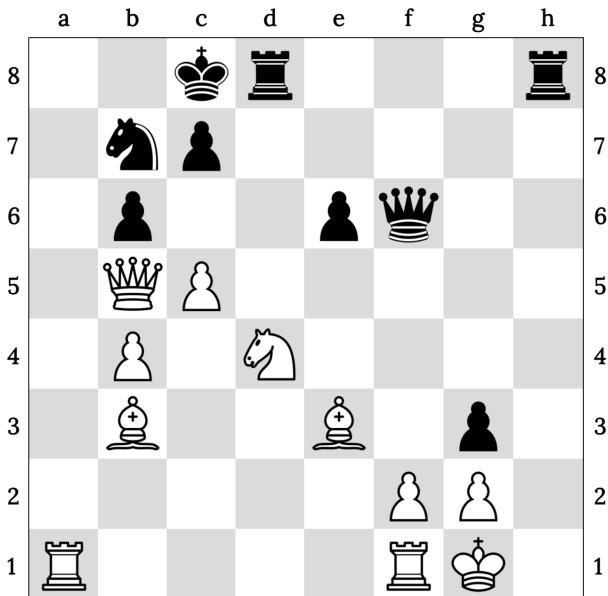
Most chess games are decided by a key moment like this. For amateurs, it might be spotting a checkmate or losing your queen. For pros, it might be winning a pawn or misplacing your rook on a seemingly advantageous square.

Challenging yourself with puzzles is the single best thing you can do to improve at chess. The more patterns you're familiar with, the more readily you'll see all the options and evaluate them correctly when the key moment comes.

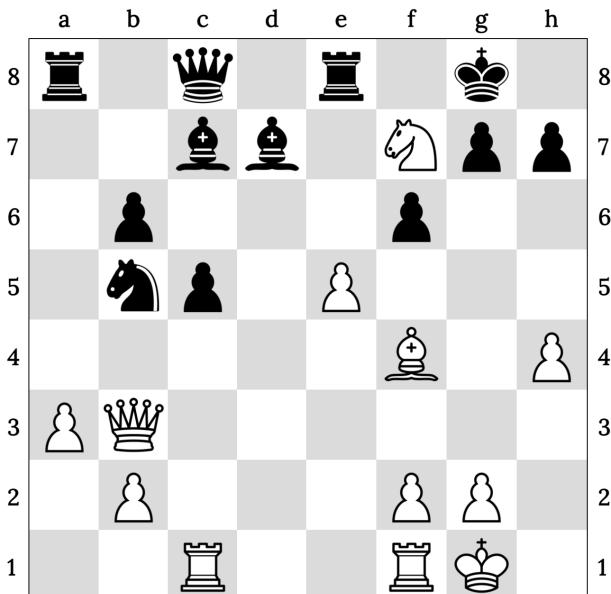
Try your best to solve the following diagrams before turning the page for answers.



Puzzle 1: White to move and checkmate in 2.



Puzzle 2: Black to move and checkmate in 3.



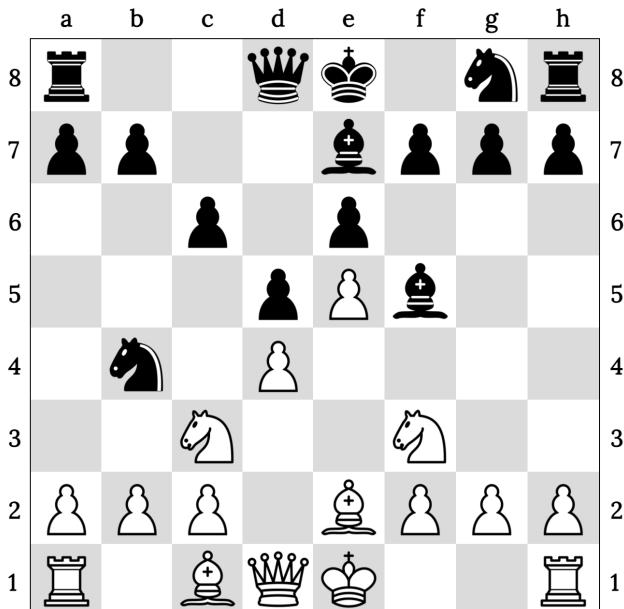
Puzzle 3: White to move and force mate in 3.

In puzzle 1, moving the rook to f5 (or anywhere backwards along the f-file) only allows black the move Kd8. Then white plays Rf8# (checkmate).

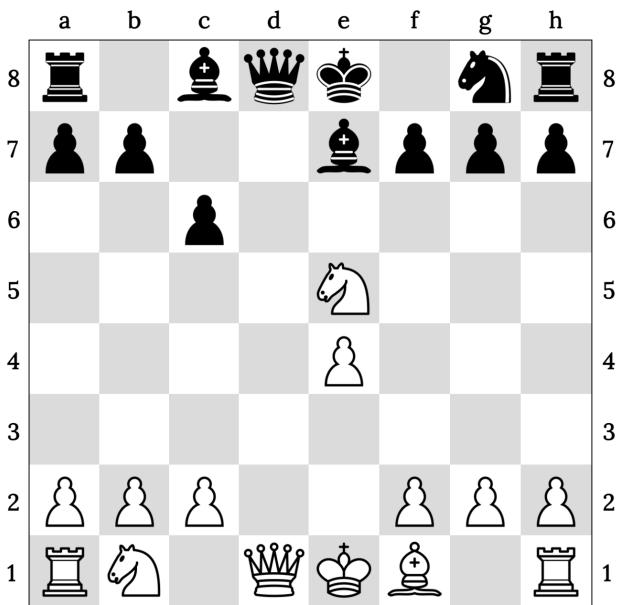
In puzzle 2, white threatens Ra8# so black has to find 1...Rh1+! This forces white's king to capture 2.Kxh1, after which black has 2...Qh4+ 3.Kg1 Qh2#.

In puzzle 3, white is down a piece but manages to win with the double check and smothered mate 1.Nh6+ Kh8 2.Qg8+ Rxg8 3.Nf7#. If 1...Kf7 instead, 2.Qf7# wins on the spot.

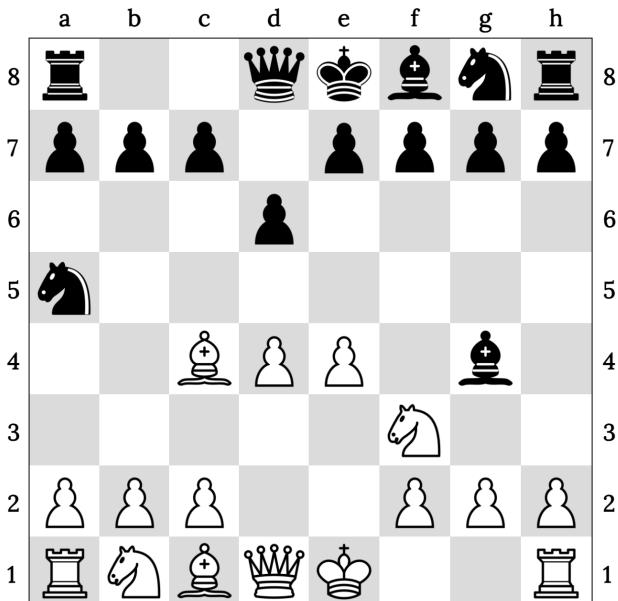
Let's try three more before moving on to the next chapter.



Puzzle 4: Black to move and win material.



Puzzle 5: Black to move and win material.



Puzzle 6: White to move and win material.

In puzzle 4, black has knight to c2, giving check while also attacking the rook on a1.

In puzzle 5, black has Qa5+ and white cannot stop black's queen from picking up the knight on e5 next.

In puzzle 6, white has 1.Bxf7+ Kxf7 2.Ng5+ with Qxg4 coming next. Black is at a heavy disadvantage after losing the right to castle as well as the f-pawn, regardless if the bishops are traded or instead black chooses 1...Kd7.

If the answer to a puzzle doesn't make sense right away, try setting up the position on a physical board and proving it to yourself. For example, in puzzle 2 maybe you wanted to play 2...Qh8+. This works perfectly well also, but it takes an extra move to win after 3.Bh6 Qxh6+.

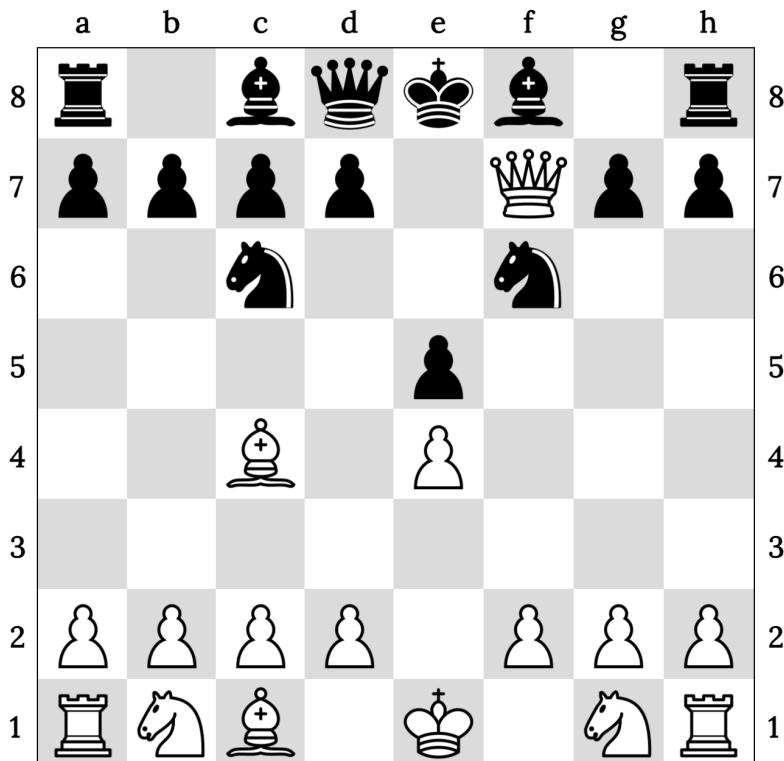
For more practice, check out Chesstempo.com, where you can find great free puzzles that adapt to your skill level. They also have an awesome list of tactical motifs with examples (zugzwang, x-ray attack, etc). Or try Lichess.org's Puzzle Racer, which gamifies speed puzzle-solving with a little car versus other folks online.

My friend started doing puzzles every time he used the toilet. Not something for me, but hey, whatever works!

Chapter 4

Strategy

Chess games can be won or lost as early as the first couple moves. You may be familiar with scholar's mate:



Playing for a quick checkmate will not work against prepared opponents. They will see what's going on and laugh, because they know that *the essence of good chess strategy is piece activity*.

Mobilizing and coordinating our army allows us to control the battle, restricting the opponent's movements and effectively targeting specific weaknesses in their camp. We have to watch out for tactics, but overall our plan should be to develop our pieces toward better and better squares.

Some concrete examples of reasonable initial goals:

- Only one or two pawn moves at the start.
- Knights and bishops out from their initial squares.
- King castled to safety.
- Rooks on open files or behind advancing pawns.

Later, we might:

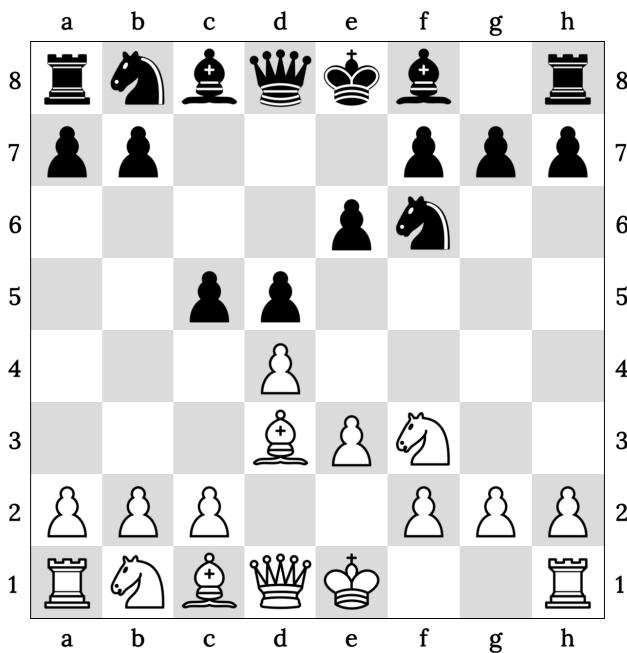
- Trade off the opponent's most active piece(s).
- Outpost our knights to the 5th or 6th rank.
- Advance pawns to gain space, create weaknesses.
- Attack with the king when few pieces are left.

With these lists in mind, we see how the scholar's mate attempt is strategically premature. The rest of white's

army is not properly supporting the queen, so she becomes vulnerable to attacks (3...g6) which delay white's development while helping black achieve the initial goals.

Let's walk through a beautiful game that illustrates the point (Przepiorka vs Prokes, Budapest 1929). Grab a chess board or pull up the game online to follow along with each move and better understand the positions at your leisure.

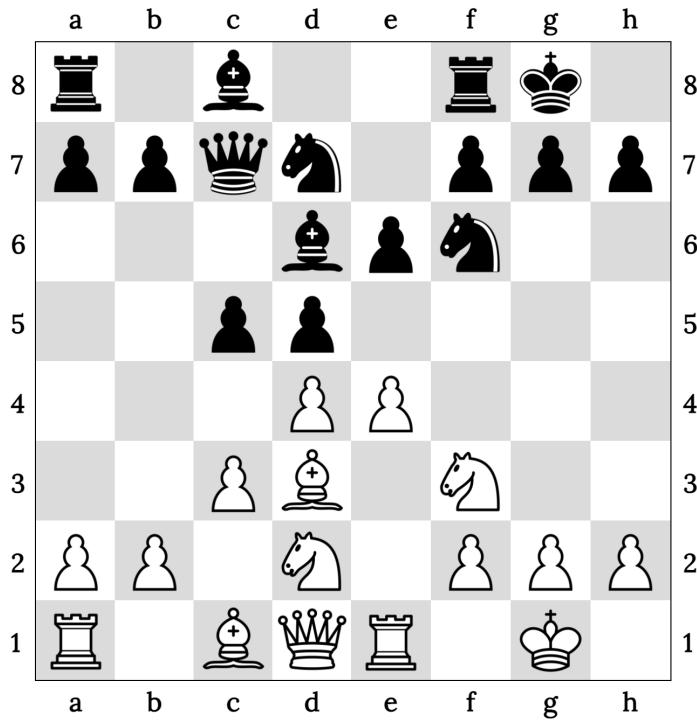
1.d4 Nf6 2.Nf3 e6 3.e3 d5 4.Bd3 c5



White isn't worried about giving check or trading pawns. His goal is to get out his army, castle his king, then advance the e-pawn to control the center and free up his c1 bishop.

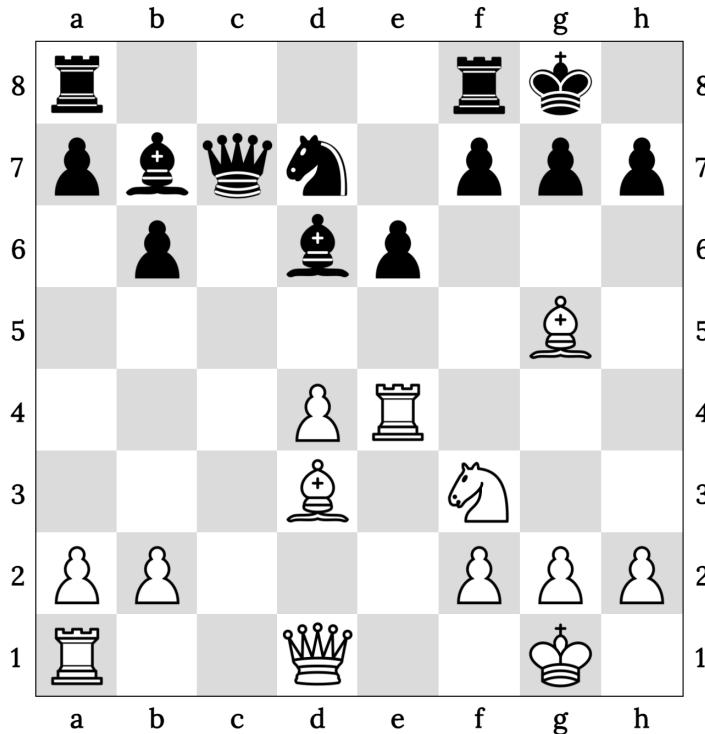
White's next move might look a little mysterious, but the pawn on c3 will be useful in supporting d4 and making space for white's bishop to stay on the b1-h7 diagonal (in case black moves his pawn to c4).

5.c3 Nbd7 6.Nbd2 Bd6 7.O-O O-O 8.Re1 Qc7 9.e4



Mission accomplished! White threatens to win a piece by advancing the pawn to e5, and he welcomes trades since his pieces are mobilized. The rook on e1 is ready to join the battle, as is the bishop on c1, whereas black's rooks remain tucked away, and his c8 bishop is blocked by the e6 pawn.

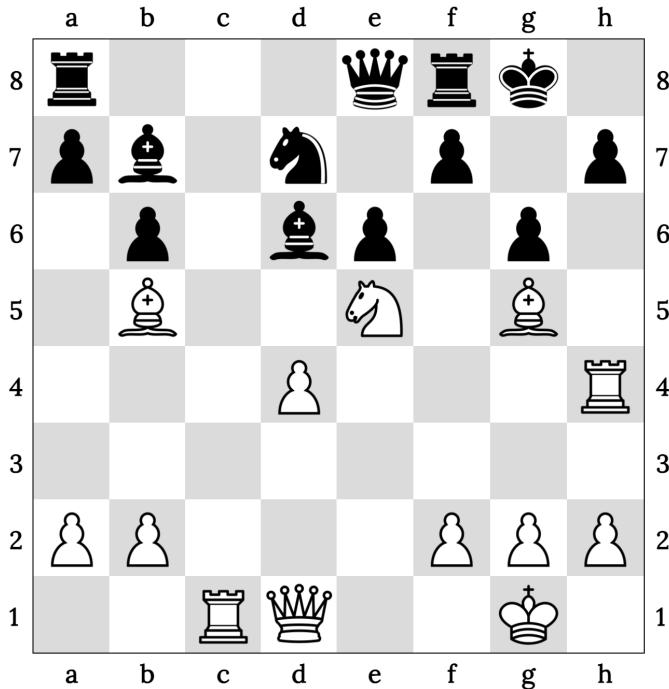
9...cxd4 10.cxd4 dxe4 11.Nxe4 b6 12.Bg5 Nxe4 13.Rxe4 Bb7



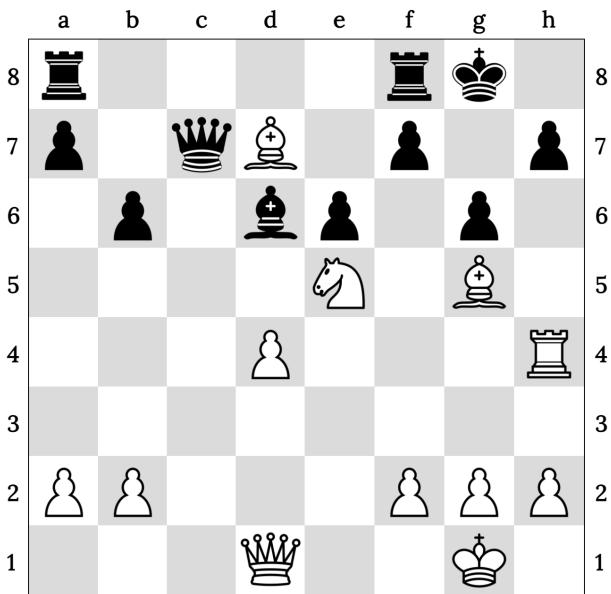
White's kingside attack is starting to play itself. The rook is under fire but it's ready to swing to h4, ganging up on h7 with the bishop. Perhaps white's queen will join in after a timely knight move and Qh5. But first, white sees a great opportunity to bring his last piece into the game, gaining a "tempo" by attacking black's queen.

After **14.Rc1 Qb8 15.Rh4 g6**, white sees that black's pieces are starting to get cramped. In fact, the black knight is nearly trapped—it has no open squares. Reasoning that the

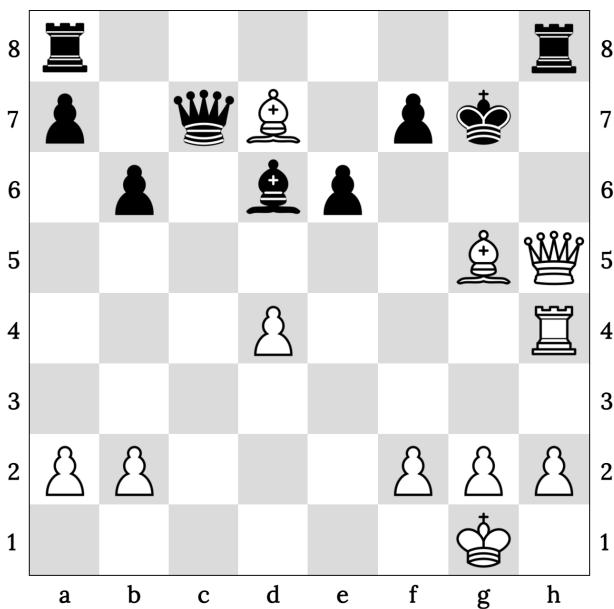
d3 bishop has done its job provoking dark square weaknesses around black's king, and now it's not doing much against the rock on g6, white continues to seek piece activity with **16.Bb5 Qe8 17.Ne5!**



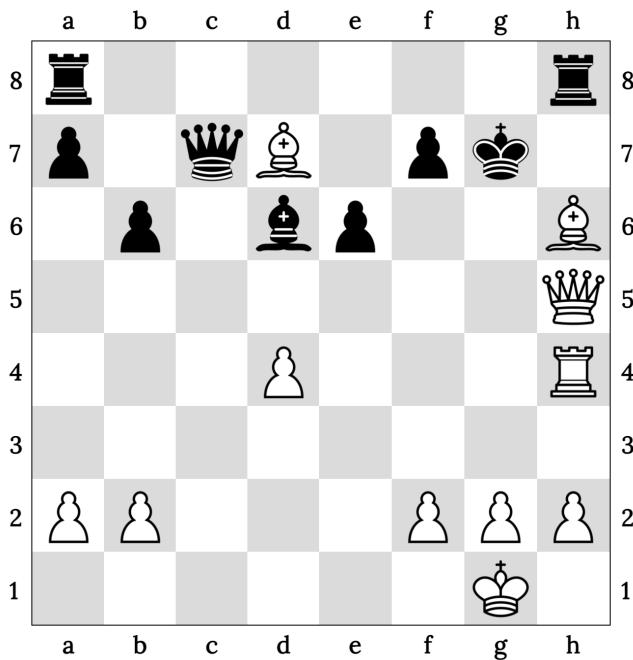
Black does not want to take white's knight since the pawn recapture immediately exposes his pinned d7 knight to another attacker in white's queen. He's forced to cramp his position even more with the sad bishop retreat **17...Bc8**, and white happily trades a rook for two pieces with **18.Rxc8 Qxc8 19.Bxd7 Qc7**. More important than the material gain, white has removed the defense from f6...



20.Ng4 h5 21.Nf6+ Kg7 22.Nxh5+ gxh5 23.Qxh5 Rh8



After 24.Bh6+ black resigned due to unavoidable mate in 2.



In this game, white focused on activating his pieces above all else, for example with 12.Bg5 and 14.Rc1. By quickly mobilizing his full army, he obtained a dominating position.

I invite you to prove the checkmate above, and replay the game to explore it further (what if 9...e5 or 16...Bxf3). For the sake of this chapter, we won't go into these details.

Look up John Bartholomew's youtube explainer on Morphy's famous "Opera Game" versus Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard as another brilliant example!

Chapter 5

Life of a Chess Player

A local recently challenged me outside his shop in the tower of Quito's iconic Basilica.



Clark Park in Philly, Washington Square Park in NYC, and Santa Monica Pier have all retained their appeal through the pandemic—with lots of extra sanitizing spray.



I was served steak tartare and news that I came a hundred years too late to the Café de la Régence in Paris. Thankfully chess was alive and well in the Jardin du Luxembourg.

It's not easy and sometimes impossible to find the locals. Nevertheless, I've always found it gratifying to trawl through google then take to the streets, hunting for chess!

Once you branch out from friends and family, people may

be curious about your "chess rating". Milwaukee's favorite Hungarian physics professor, Arpad Elo, formulated this statistical estimate of chess skill in the 1950s, and it has since spread to other domains like tennis and e-sports.

An Elo rating goes up with wins and down with losses, so a higher rating indicates a relatively stronger player. You get one automatically on websites like Lichess.org or by officially competing in over-the-board tournaments with the U.S. Chess Federation or FIDE, the international org.

Large tournaments take place in hotel conference centers and can span a long weekend or even an entire week. Local ones might be held on a Saturday or weeknight in the basement of a church, at a cafe, or in your city's club space. Entry fees and prize money vary with event size.

Playing in a tournament is basically like what you see in shows and movies, with significantly less drama. The playing hall is silent (phones off) after players shake hands, wish the opponent good luck, and start the clocks.

Time controls typically range from three minutes to three hours per side, with zero to ten seconds extra per move. Clocks may be available from the organizers, or players

might bring their own. For longer time controls, you are required to record each move on a provided scoresheet.

After the game ends, it's customary to shake hands and say "good game." Outside the playing hall, a friendly opponent might want to analyze the game. This is one of the best learning opportunities a chess player could ask for! Some of my fondest chess memories involve beer with retirees, or hamburgers with eager students and their families, as we traded notes and ideas for 20 minutes after the battle.

Trained organizers will be available for any questions or problems at a tournament. Expect them to announce various rules and etiquette before starting round 1. For example, touch move is the official policy during a game; when you touch a piece, you must move it. Also, you use the same hand to move your piece then press your clock.

If an illegal move is made, stop the clock and raise your hand to call over an official. They will apply the appropriate time penalty or otherwise resolve the issue. Especially if it's your first tournament, with sweat and blood and money on the line, don't let your opponent talk you into letting things slide! And when playing speed chess on the street, clarify all rules and bets before starting.

Maybe you want to spectate or learn more prior to a tournament commitment. Try Chess24, Chess.com/tv, Twitch, or YouTube! There's content for all levels, my favorite being live coverage of super-grandmaster events featuring Magnus Carlsen, the current world champion.

Magnus is considered one of the all-time greats along with Garry Kasparov and Bobby Fischer, the Ali / Woods / Federer of chess. Check out *Capablanca's Best Chess Endings*, *The Life and Games of Mikhail Tal*, and Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games* if you'd like to peek into the mind of a champion. Those books are all well worth it!

However, my favorite chess book of all time is *Zurich 1953* by Bronstein, hands-down. That tournament had no less than three and a half world champions participating. More importantly, the games are brilliant—entertaining and highly instructive—even for beginners.

I hope this chapter painted a more complete picture of the chess landscape for your future journeys. If you've taken the previous chapters' activities seriously, and made it this far, then I believe you are well-equipped to venture forth on your own into the magical world of chess and enjoy it.

The remaining chapters are "extra credit" with more advanced material. I encourage you to pause your reading here and spend some time playing 60-minute (per side) games online, with a friend, or in a tournament! Review with a partner afterward to learn from your mistakes.

I still remember my first local tournament from freshman year of high school. I managed a draw against a more experienced student in the first round, then I lost every single game after that to a bunch of young kids. It was horribly humiliating, but lit a fire under me to get better. I could see my mistakes, and I knew I could beat those kids.

A year later, I tied for first place at the Midwest Class Championships in Chicago, with a \$1000 prize. In the first round, we didn't have a clock. I was so nervous that I blundered a bishop on move 3! He returned the favor on move 9 but was still a pawn up. We played on for hours until the arbiters introduced a clock at 1am, and my older opponent finally crumbled from exhaustion. Poor guy.

The point of my story is that it's never too early to play in a tournament, especially if you find one with a low or unrated beginners' section. I'll be wishing you much luck, success, and enjoyment!

Chapter 6

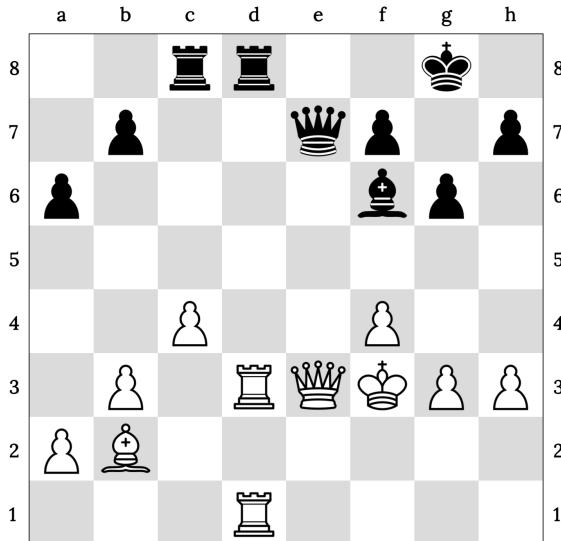
The Endgame

Tactics dominate and decide games, including those of your humble author and on through master-level play. If we want to get better at chess, we must practice tactics.

In addition to solving puzzles directly, like in chapter 3, we can study endgames. These studies develop our tactical vision by requiring precise play on a simplified board. We often have to look many moves ahead to achieve victory.

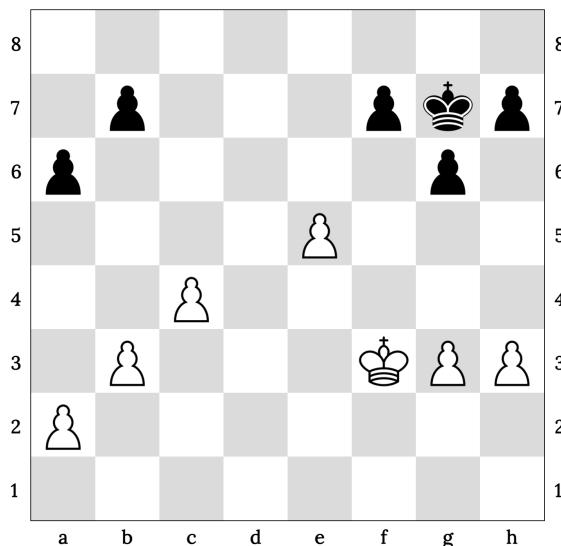
The bishop and knight checkmate, for instance, requires intricate maneuvering to avoid running into a draw by the 50-move rule. Even if you never encounter this situation in your games, practicing the technique will boost your skills.

Studying the endgame yields other practical benefits aside from directly developing our pattern recognition. For example, we learn how to plan for a smooth win by trading queens and liquidating all the other pieces from the board after we gain a pawn or slight positional advantage.



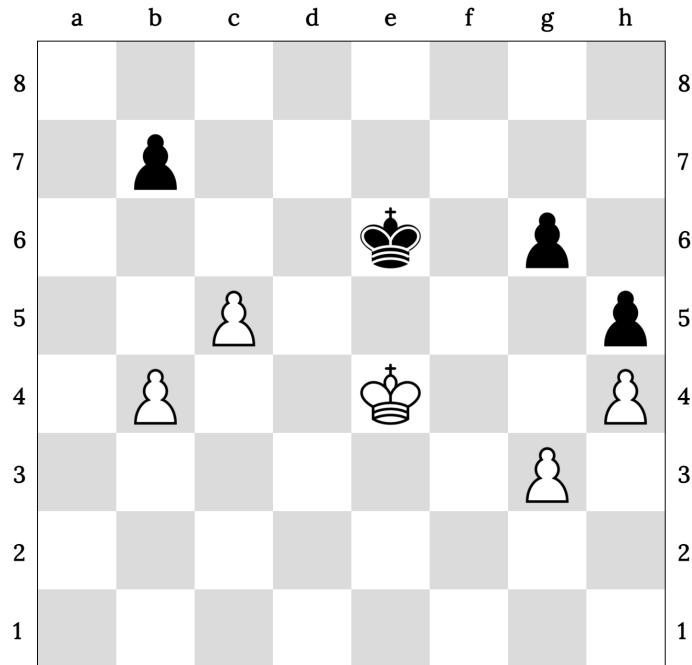
How to win with white to move?

White trades everything! Black is lost after **1.Rxd8+ Rxd8**
2.Rxd8+ Qxd8 **3.Bxf6 Qxf6** **4.Qe8+ Kg7** **5.Qe5 Qxe5** **6.fxe5.**



The plan is to place the white king on e4 and get a passed pawn on the c-file. Black's king will have to stop this pawn from promoting, so white's king can attack the undefended pawns on the other side of the board.

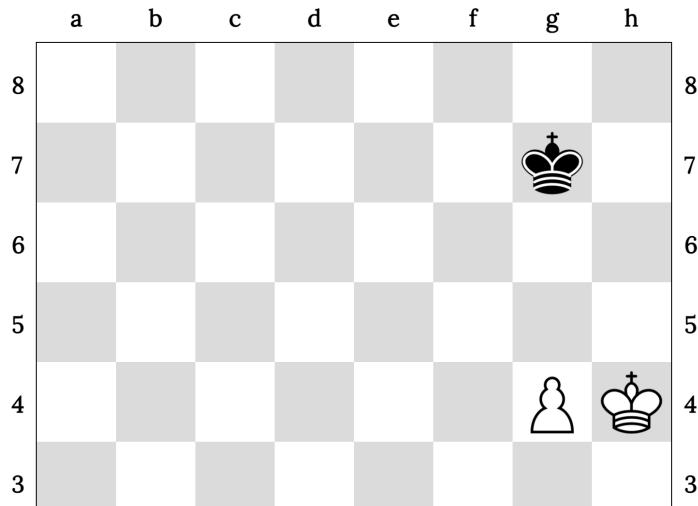
An example continuation: **6...f5 7.exf6+e.p. Kxf6 8.Ke4 Ke6 9.c5 a5 10.a3 h6 11.b4 axb4 12.axb4 h5 13.h4.**



Black is in zugzwang; there are no good moves.

13...Ke7 14.Kd5 Kd7 15.b5 Ke7 16.c6 bxc6 17.bxc6 Kd8 18.Ke6 Kc7 19.Kf6 Kxc6 20.Kxg6 and black can resign since white's two remaining pawns will decide the game.

But what if black doesn't resign, or if the position isn't so easy to win, for instance with only one pawn left?



Only one move wins for white...

In this diagram, white has to play Kg5! Black to move would leap at making a draw with Kg6, and any other move by white loses the advantage.

An example winning continuation: **1.Kg5! Kh7 2.Kf6 Kg8 3.Kg6 Kf8 4.Kh7 Kf7 5.g5 Kf8 6.g6 Ke7 7.g7 Kf7 8.g8=Q+**.

Notice how the white king leads to obtain control over g8 and queen the pawn, patiently pushing black's king aside.

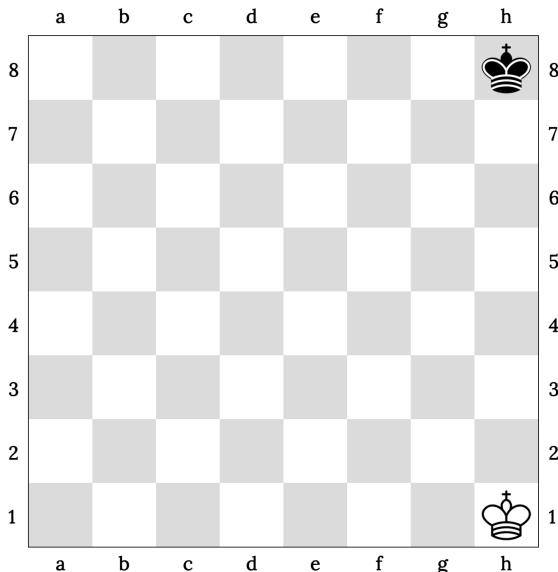
Not winning: **1.g5? Kg6 2.Kg4 Kg7 3.Kf5 Kf7 4.g6+ Kg7 5.Kg5 Kg8 6.Kh6 Kh8 7.g7+ Kg8 8.Kg6**, stalemate.

In the non-winning line, black opposed white's king from making progress. Stepping backwards first allowed a sideways follow-up to block white's entry attempt from either direction. White's advanced pawn was a liability.

Endgames teach us that when few pieces remain on the board, we have to actively use our king. Despite being one of the weakest pieces, and requiring constant supervision lest it get checkmated, the king can be extremely useful.

Minigame 6: King Opposition

White wins if the king reaches a8, b8, or c8. Black tries to prevent this. There is a forced win for white, but it's tricky!



I like to start with this minigame when teaching folks who are already confident in their basic chess skills and can spot simple tactics. After a few tries, I'll give hints so they get the basic concepts in half an hour or so.

Then we put a pawn on the board and use the same techniques to promote it into a rook, which is then used for king + rook versus king checkmating practice.

Try this out yourself with a partner, at least a couple times from both sides, before searching "king opposition" and "distant opposition" to learn all the secrets and shortcuts.

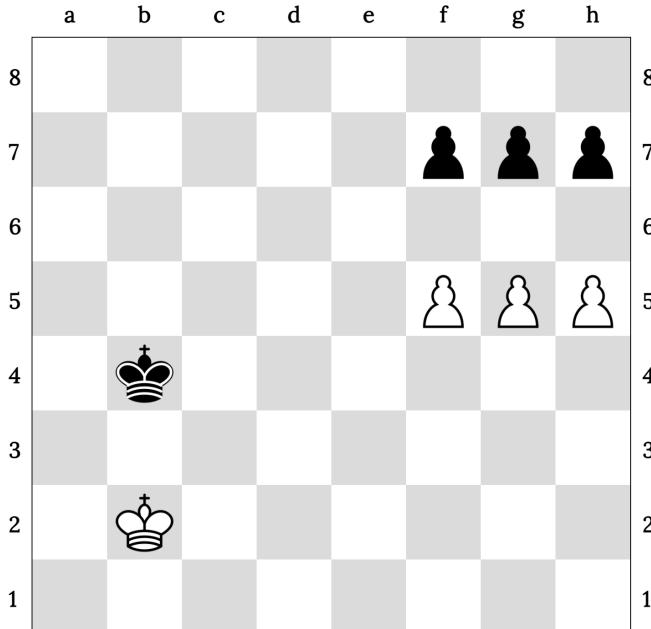
We could go on about endgames all day, but we'll end this chapter with suggestions for further study, one more example, and a few helpful rules of thumb.

I've mentioned *Capablanca's Best Chess Endings* previously. This is a fantastic first book for serious chess study in general. The Cuban champ instructively converts simple yet brilliant games, similar to this chapter's first diagram, and Chernev's annotations are wonderful.

The one endgame-specific book I recommend is Silman's *Complete Endgame Course*. The content is laid out really nicely by skill level, the explanations are well-written and

concise, the exercises can be played through quickly, and it really does manage complete coverage of the subject.

The real meat of the endgame lies in rook and pawn positions, of which Capablanca and Silman share plenty. We've barely scratched the surface here with kings and pawns. Let's look at one more example before moving on.



How to win as white? Try it before turning the page!

If the pawns are locked, then black's king will march over and gobble up white's hopes and dreams. The white king is too far away to help defend. White has to find a pawn

break with g6! Capture is forced, then a flank pawn sacrifices itself so the last one can go score a touchdown!

For instance, **1.g6 fxg6 2.h6 gxh6 3.f6**, and the survivor is unstoppably fast to queen. White should have no problem mopping up black's pawns and delivering checkmate.

Hopefully this chapter opened your eyes to the many wonders of the endgame. I'll leave you with a few useful tidbits that generally—but not always—apply:

- To evaluate knight and pawn positions, imagine the knights cancel each other out and vanish.
- Same thing for kings and bishops of the same color. Imagine the bishops are gone, leaving only pawns.
- Bishops of opposite color frequently lead to draws, even with a pawn or two advantage for one side.
- Bishop and pawn win versus lone king, unless the pawn queens in a corner not of the bishop's color.
- If the opponent's king reaches the corner in front of a lone side pawn (a- or h-file), they can always draw.
- Two connected pawns on the 6th rank, with the move, beat or paralyze any other single piece.
- Pawns like supporting each other down the board. The more "pawn islands," the weaker your position.

Chapter 7

The Opening

Let's survey common ways to start a solid chess game. We'll keep things simplified at an overview level and discuss four broad groups: king's pawn, queen's pawn, fianchetto setups, and miscellaneous. Then we'll explore how opening preparation fits in with the rest of the book.

The King's Pawn Opening 1.e4

This popular opening often involves direct attacking play. Pieces are deployed by necessity to certain squares in response to tactical threats. A misplaced piece can be fatal.

In this sharp territory, white tries to get a big initiative. Since black usually has clear plans to improve a worse defensive position, white should be careful not to over-press and suddenly lose steam to a counterattack.

Some responses:

- **1...e5** – White dictates with more space and initiative. Black patiently waits, content with a slightly cramped but not worse position, inviting white to misstep. Depending on both sides' choices, pressure may be built and relieved relatively slowly, or quickly and explosively.
- **1...c5** – The Sicilian leads to a very dynamic game, meaning both sides have interesting asymmetrical play. Black tends to have better long-term chances if white doesn't make good use of initial attacking activity. This is full-bodied chess, with both sides trying to outplay each other.
- **1...c6, e6, d5, or Nf6** – These are different setups where the black player steers the game into familiar waters sooner rather than later. Black goes for equality first, neutralizing white's initiative rather than attempting to outplay white and win directly. Black may specialize in their chosen system, which can lead to a preparation advantage if white is not as familiar with the Caro-Kann, French, Scandinavian, or Alekhine, respectively.

The Queen's Pawn Opening 1.d4

The king's pawn opening is known for furious romantic attacks (e.g. The Immortal Game, Morphy's Opera Game) whereas the queen's pawn opening is known for more subtle positional crushes (e.g. Alekhine - Yates London 1922, Capablanca - Treybal Karlsbad 1929).

White tries to nurture a small initiative into a dominating position, building tension by maneuvering pieces. The middlegame can become sharp and tactical a bit later on, or play might continue peacefully through to the endgame.

Some responses:

- **1...d5** - White tends to have more space and presses for initiative, slowly building pressure into a better endgame or an attack. Like in the symmetric king's pawn game, black patiently develops, waiting for an opportunity to equalize or turn the tables. The Queen's Gambit may follow with white playing c4, but white can also opt for other options. For example, we saw the Colle System in chapter 4.
- **1...Nf6** - A flexible response which signals black

wants to delay or entirely avoid certain Queen's Gambit setups. The aggressive King's Indian Defense can arise after black plays g6, Bg7, and d6. Black might want the more positional Nimzo-Indian after e6 and Bb4, the Grünfeld after a timely d5, or the Benoni with c5. Like the Sicilian, black fights back dynamically with these asymmetric setups.

- **1...f5, b6** - The Dutch and accelerated Queen's Indian are my personal favorites, a bit off the beaten trail. These setups are slightly less challenging for white, but black can get a playable position with familiar strategic themes and a flexible asymmetric setup, avoiding the theory-heavy lines above.

Fianchetto Setups 1.g3 or 1.b3

These systems place a bishop on the long diagonal, aiming for a flexible setup involving an early castled king and gradual piece development.

Black can respond with their own fianchetto, or they can occupy the center immediately, for instance with 1...e5 or

1...d5. These positions may transpose into some sort of Indian Defense with colors reversed.

The general plan here is to prepare for rolling pawn pushes later in the game. These will break and undermine the opponent's center, gain space and lock in a positional advantage, or just directly attack the opponent's king.

Other Openings

Among the miscellaneous openings not covered so far, the English with 1.c4 is perhaps the most respected, and often transposes into Queen's Pawn territory or is accompanied by g3 and Bg2 to achieve a fianchetto setup.

The Bird with 1.f4 and the Polish (or Orangutang) with 1.b4 are quirky lines. They are not horribly unplayable, but they also don't give white the kind of straightforward, solid, normal development that the first move affords.

Starting with the pawns on the a- or h-file is not recommended. This is a complete violation of opening principles. Such pawn moves waste time that could be spent developing pieces or gaining space by advancing pawns in the center. Furthermore, you will be actively

creating weaknesses on the flanks which an alert opponent can later plan around and exploit.

How To Study The Opening

The opening really should be the last place to focus chess study efforts. In order, here's what you should do first:

1. tactics
2. playing full, timed games (tournaments)
3. looking at grandmaster games
4. endgame study

The top three items will help your opening indirectly. The fourth will help you finish off your opponents. It's no use learning how to start a game well if you cannot finish it!

Let's suppose for whatever reason you really do want to study openings. The direct approach would be to search chess opening explorers online or get a copy of *Modern Chess Openings* and play through a bunch of lines.

These resources will give you plenty of concrete examples and lots of interesting ideas. It's likely to be overwhelming, like reading a dictionary or encyclopedia. You can easily

lose yourself in the nuances of the Fried Liver, Albin Counter Gambit, or Frankenstein-Dracula Variation.

However, obsessing over specific lines is the chess equivalent of Facebook news feed scrolling, and I encourage you to avoid this addiction. Instead, pick a general opening like "The Italian Game" and play through a couple grandmaster games to get a feel for it before quickly moving on to try the opening yourself. Just playing chess is really the best way to learn openings.

Many people start with attacking ambitions (à la Greco, Morphy) then transition to elegant positional appreciation (Capablanca, Petrosian) before landing somewhere in the middle. Throughout, you'll want to try a bunch of different stuff to find positions that suit your preferences.

You'll naturally develop a repertoire and want to look up variations as you play and experiment. Reading books on specific openings can wait until you are in the 1400-1800 level of playing strength, then creating your own deep prep can really wait until you are in the 2000-2300 zone.

I started out with zero opening theory, just playing the Scandinavian against friends at school after some key

themes were explained to me (where to put queen after Nc3, play Nf6 and c6, bring out bishop before pushing e6).

Then I found role models in GMs Kurajica and Tiviakov. I looked at their games using the wonderful resource Chessgames.com. With these examples in mind, I experimented more against online opponents.

My general knowledge and personal experience quickly accumulated, allowing me to target and review various wins and losses. With the help of opening encyclopedias and computer analysis, I could then better understand specific lines where I wasn't getting the best positions.

Another example is the Adams Attack, which I learned about from *My 60 Memorable Games*. I was rated around 1200 and enjoyed playing through Fischer - Najdorf (Varna, 1962) as well as other Sicilian examples from the book where white got great positions. I learned about specific variations as well as general opening best-practices.

In the Najdorf game, for instance, we see by move 12 that Fischer has his king tucked away in the corner with five pieces readily deployed. Najdorf, on the other hand, has his king stuck in the center and only one developed piece. The

game ends 12 moves later in fantastic fashion.

Learn by osmosis through grandmaster games and frequently experiment through your own play, even when you don't know the specifics of every line. This process will provide much more learning and enjoyment than the alternative theoretical approach where you can lose the forest for the trees, dreaming about all kinds of opening lines which will rarely occur in practical play.

Conclusion

Just Like Chocolate

Beginners of all ages and abilities will find value in the minigames from chapter 1. Competing with a partner on the same level playing field motivates quick progress.

After building fundamental piece skills through minigames, it's a short leap to practicing checkmating attacks with progressive chess. We begin to execute complex plans and original ideas, making full use of our available army.

After this empowering experience, tactical and strategic understanding are easily incorporated. We gain the confidence to play timed games against strangers on the street. Endgames and openings start to make sense.

We're off to the races! What's next?

My favorite activity is paging through game collections with a physical board in front of me. But more important than any of my recommendations is to simply follow your own interests.

Maybe you like practicing tactics puzzles, or maybe you prefer watching YouTube videos. Having playing partners and finding a community can be very fun and helpful too. Just keep playing more chess and enjoying this new world however and whenever you like!

This book contains many suggestions for further study, and a coach can come in handy if you want to learn more. I'm open to any questions you may have; contact me via AndyTrattner.com/chess. You don't generally need a coach until after you try a couple local or online tournaments, to see if you want to pursue chess more seriously.

In the end, you may not enjoy chess, and that's OK. Some people don't like chocolate, and I think it's basically the same! At least these non-interested folks will understand and respect the thing, enough to give it a serious try.

Regardless of the outcome, they won't call chocolate intrinsically disgusting or boring.

And they won't find chess inaccessibly difficult or mysterious anymore.

*“Chess is everything:
art, science, and sport.”*

Anatoly Karpov

Acknowledgments

Big Thanks

To Mr. Brown,

To Aunt Lai and Uncle Tom,

To Debbie and Joe,

To Lucas and Alexis,

To Grammy and Papa,

To Mom and Dad,

To the Schneiders,

To the Portland Chess Club,

To Lincoln, Nicolet, and e3 Civic High,

To the Saint Louis Chess Club,

To the Mechanics Institute,

To all my students, teachers, and teammates,

To Drew, Efe, Mina,

To Katherin,

To Maya,

And to Caissa.

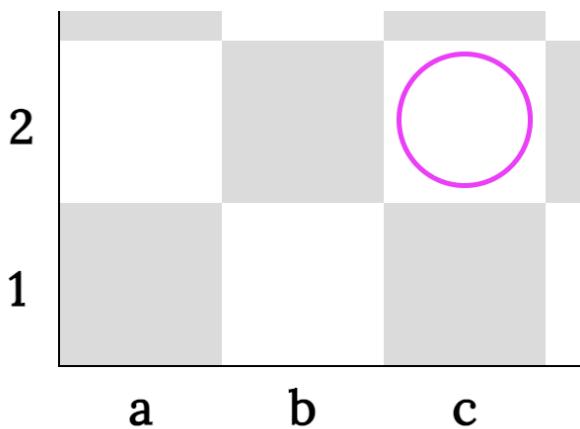
*“Every chess master
was once a beginner.”*

Irving Chernev

Appendix

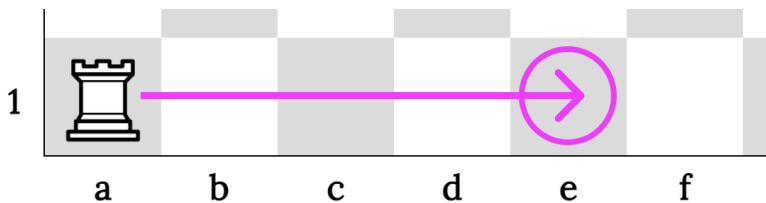
Notation Guide

Modern (algebraic) chess notation is a shorthand method for describing the players' turns. Each notation block indicates a piece and which square it moved to.

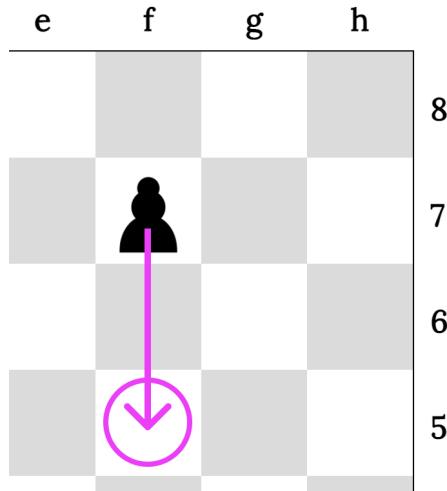


"The c2 square."

Pieces are represented by letters. K = king, Q = queen, R = rook, B = bishop, N = knight. Pawns do not get letters, but instead are assumed to move if no piece is indicated.

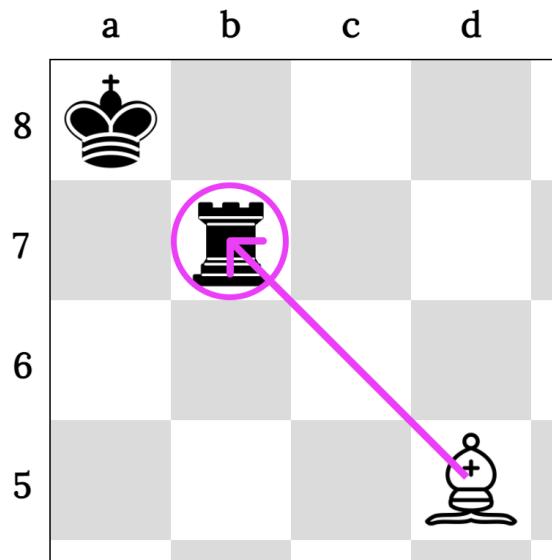


To note a rook move from a1 to e1, we write "Re1".

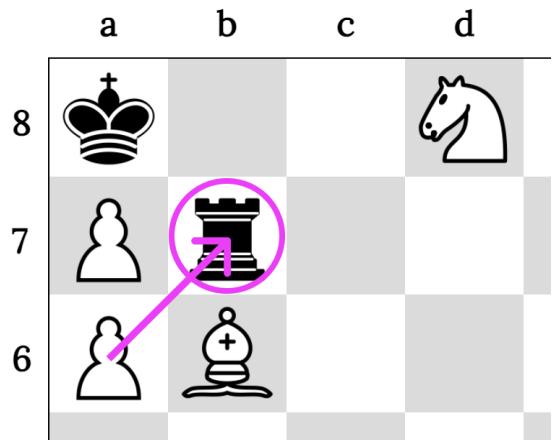


To note a pawn move from f7 to f5, write "f5".

Captures are indicated with an "x" between the piece and the square. Checks are indicated with a "+" after the notation block. Checkmate is indicated by "#" and often accompanied by a result "1 - 0" white wins, "0 - 1" black wins, or "½ - ½" draw.

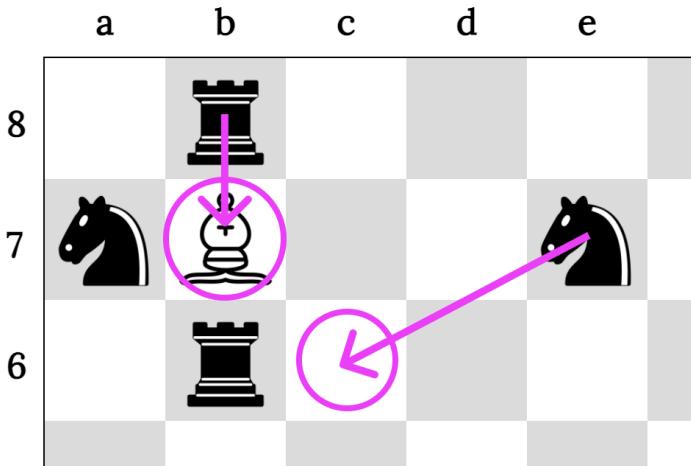


Bishop captures rook with check: "Bxb7+"



Pawn captures rook with checkmate: "axb7# 1-0"

"Files" are vertical lettered columns. "Ranks" are horizontal numbered rows. It is standard practice to note the file a capturing pawn originated from, as well as to disambiguate via file or rank when multiple pieces make the same move.



To ensure moves are unique, write "R8xb7" or "Nec6".

Castling short (kingside) is denoted "0-0". Castling long (queenside) is denoted "0-0-0". Pawn promotion is denoted with an equal sign, adding checks and captures as needed: "e8=Q" or "fxe8=Q+" (pawn queens on e8). En passant is annotated as a regular pawn capture, indicating the final square, and optionally with letters after: "gxh6e.p."