

First Steps :

1 e4 e5

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About the Author

John Emms is a Grandmaster. He played for England at two Chess Olympiads and captained the team at the 2002 Bled Olympiad. Emms is an experienced chess coach and has trained many students who have gone on to win national junior championships. He has coached England teams at numerous international events, including the World and European Youth Chess Championships. He is a coach at the Kent Junior Chess Association, whose Under-9 team won the national championship in 2016 and 2017. He has written many books on chess openings, endgames, strategy and tactics.

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Preface

I've always wished to write a follow-up to *Discovering Chess Openings* and I'm delighted that this book has given me an opportunity to do so. In *Discovering Chess Openings* I concentrated mainly on basic opening principles. In this new book, the focus changes to studying a range of openings and making choices about which ones to play in your games.

I've chosen 1 e4 e5 openings (Open Games) because these are the first we learn, so it seemed like a very suitable subject for a First Steps book. For any young chess player (or indeed anyone 'young' in chess experience), there's no better choice than to play 1 e4 e5 openings with White, with Black, or even with both colours. Playing Open Games gives you a wonderful opportunity to improve your skills and knowledge of key tactical ideas you need to master in your development as a chess player. Throughout the book you will find many examples (and exercises, to keep you busy!) involving forks, pins, skewers, discovered attacks, discovered checks, double checks, removing defenders and so on.

The contents of this book are largely based on studying thousands of young players' games over many years. The emphasis is on openings which have appeared most often. Recommendations are made on opening choices that have been successful in developing key chess skills. I've recommended playing some openings with both White and Black, including the Italian Game, Evans Gambit, Two Knights Defence, Ruy Lopez and Scotch Gambit, so these openings are covered in greater detail. If you are taking your very first steps in chess openings, please focus initially on Chapters 1-2, whereas readers with a little more experience may wish to dive in elsewhere. As it's a First Steps book, I've tried to avoid encyclopaedic coverage. In any case, you certainly don't need to remember every single variation and all the notes before playing the opening. Take in the first few moves and the key ideas, and then try it out in your games!

Acknowledgements

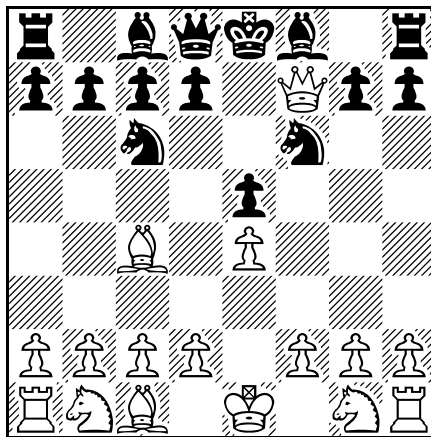
I'd like to warmly thank all students I've had the opportunity to work with over many years, in schools, clubs, teams and one-to-one. They have helped enormously by forcing me to continually reassess and refine the learning processes. Thanks also go to all chess coaches who have been kind enough to share their thoughts. Special thanks to everyone involved with the Kent Junior Chess Association. Finally, special thanks also to Grandmaster Chris Ward, who is always willing to listen and advise whenever I'm talking about chess!

John Emms, Kent, January 2018

Introduction

Let's start at the very beginning; the first 'opening' we all learn: the four-move checkmate!

1 e4 e5 2 ♔h5 ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♞f6 4 ♔xf7



Checkmate! The advantage is that White develops the pieces with a plan – a very basic plan to attack Black's weak spot as quickly as possible, but a plan nevertheless, and a plan which could end with a spectacular result!

Note: The f7-pawn is the known as Black's weak spot because it's defended only by the king whereas all other pawns are defended by at least one other piece. Likewise, f2 is White's weak spot.

The drawback of White's plan is that it only has a chance of working against absolute beginners, albeit quite a good chance! The threat of checkmate is easy to defend against, and furthermore White has ignored an important guideline: *don't move your queen out early in the game unless there's a good reason to do so*. The problem with developing the queen early is that it becomes vulnerable to attacks by enemy pieces. If you have to keep moving your queen to escape attacks, you lose precious time you'd rather spend getting other pieces into the game.

How to Beat the Four-Move Checkmate

I expect (hope!) that all of you, by now, have learned a way to stop the four-move checkmate, but don't skip to Chapter One just yet. What we are really interested in here is the *best* way to stop it, and this is because it teaches us something vital about good opening play. Let's have a closer look at the moves:

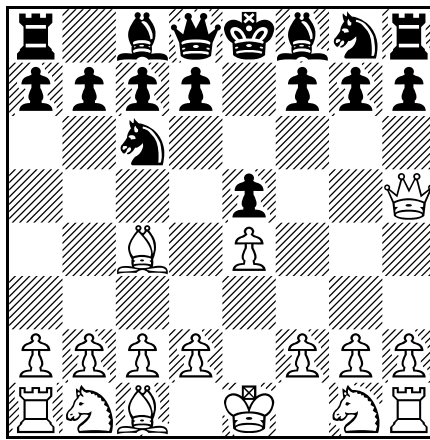
1 e4 e5 2 ♖h5

The queen attacks three pawns, but for the moment it only threatens the unguarded pawn on e5.

2...♘c6!

Black defends the e5-pawn and develops a knight at the same time.

3 ♕c4



Now both the queen *and* the bishop attack the f7-pawn, so White threatens to give checkmate with ♕xf7. Black has a few ways to defend against the threat. For example, we could defend the f-pawn a second time with 3...♖e7, 3...♖f6 or even 3...♘h6. However, the ideal choice is:

3...g6!

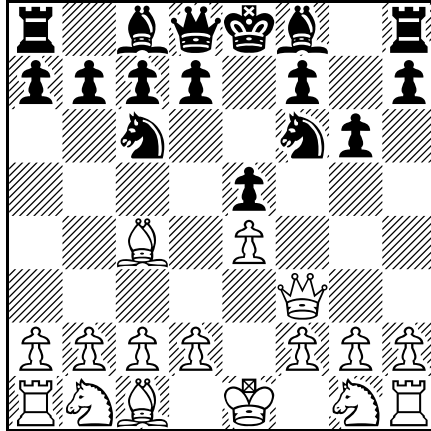
Not only does this move prevent the checkmate by blocking the queen's path to f7, it attacks the queen too!

Tip: Be alert to moves which achieve more than one task. Here 4...g6 defends against a threat and also creates a threat.

4 ♕f3

The queen retreats but still attacks the pawn on f7, so Black is faced with the threat of ♕xf7 mate for a second time. Again, there are a few ways to defend, but the best option is:

4...♘f6!



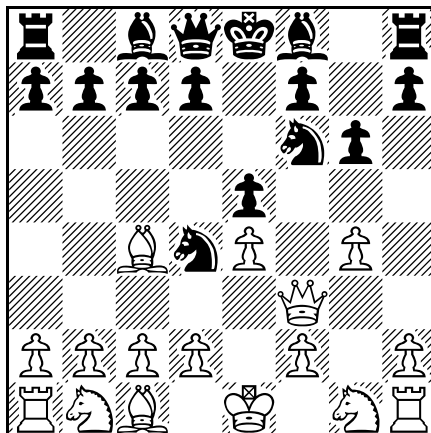
Black blocks the threat of checkmate *and* develops the other knight to its best square – another dual-purpose move.

At this stage White should abandon any ideas of checkmate and begin developing some new pieces. A good start would be 5 ♘e2, getting ready to castle kingside. Let's see what could happen if White fails to do this and instead continues to attack:

5 g4?

White's idea is to threaten the knight by moving the pawn to g5. If the knight then moves, ♙xf7 is checkmate. Unfortunately for White, this isn't going to happen!

5... ♞d4!

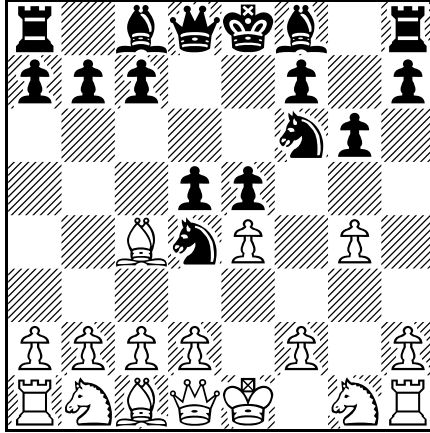


Suddenly Black is the one who is creating the threats. The knight attacks the white queen, but there's also a threat of ...♞xc2+, forking the king and rook. So White's queen has to move and defend the c2-pawn.

6 ♙d1

Things have gone horribly wrong for White. The queen has already moved three times and yet she is now back on her starting square! Black could simply capture the pawn on e4 with the knight on f6, but let's continue the theme of developing with threats:

6...d5!

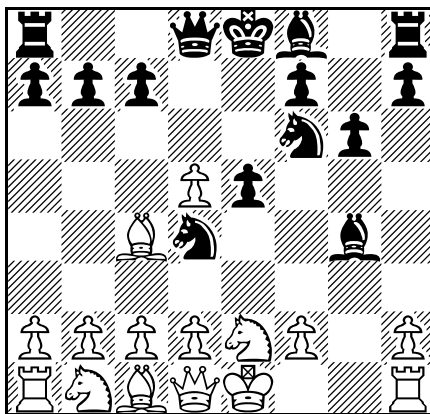


Black threatens the bishop on c4, the pawn on e4, and something else too. Can you see what it is?

7 exd5 ♗xg4!

This was Black's third threat. Moving the d-pawn freed the bishop on c8 and created a discovered attack on the g4-pawn. Now there's a yet another attack on the poor queen. The queen can't move to a safe square so the only option is to block the attack. White's position is already very bad, but if White chooses to block with the knight it gets even worse:

8 ♞e2?



Exercise: Black can now force checkmate in two moves. Can you see how we do this?

Answer: 8...♘f3+!

White's king has only one square to go to.

9 ♔f1 ♙h3 mate!

An amazing end to the game, with the bishop and knight combining beautifully as a team to checkmate the white king. It's difficult to believe that just a few moves ago it was White threatening checkmate!

What Black did so well in this example was to stop White's primitive plan by playing *natural and active developing moves*, and by doing so Black was able to create his own threats and force White to retreat.

In summary, when we learn the best way to deal with the four-move checkmate, and how to beat White's crude attack afterwards with 5 g4?, we also learn some key guidelines which help us to choose moves in all openings:

- 1) Develop your pieces as quickly as possible.
- 2) Defend against threats by playing natural developing moves.
- 3) Search for developing moves which achieve more than one goal. Dual-purpose moves are good, and triple-purpose moves are even better!
- 4) Search for developing moves which create threats. Single threats gain time, and double threats may gain pieces!

Keeping those guidelines in mind, let's move on to our first opening...

Chapter One

Introducing the Italian Game

In this first chapter we'll introduce ourselves to a very popular chess opening, and one that's an ideal choice when you are taking your first steps. It's incredibly popular among young players – I've seen it played in thousands of games! – so we'll be covering it in some detail throughout the book.

Let's begin with the first few moves:

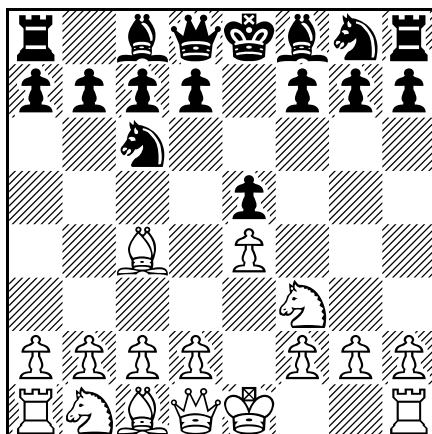
1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3

The best move! White develops the knight to its favourite square and threatens the e5-pawn.

2... ♗c6!

A good response! Black defends the pawn by developing the knight, also to its best square.

3 ♙c4

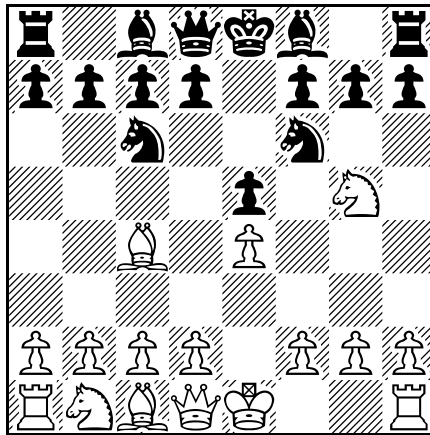


This opening is called the Italian Game. Just like with the four-move checkmate, the bishop moves to an active position, where it attacks Black's weak point, the pawn on f7. Unlike the four-move mate, White's other move, ♘f3, is much better than ♗h5. In the first three moves White

has followed opening guidelines perfectly and is even ready to castle.

Did you know? Many openings are named after places where they were invented and first studied. The Italian Game was studied in Italy in the 16th Century, which makes it one of the oldest openings in chess.

It's crucial for us to realize that in the Italian Game White may go for a quick attack against the f7-pawn, using the bishop and the knight. If Black plays the very natural move 3...♘f6, White can reply 4 ♗g5.



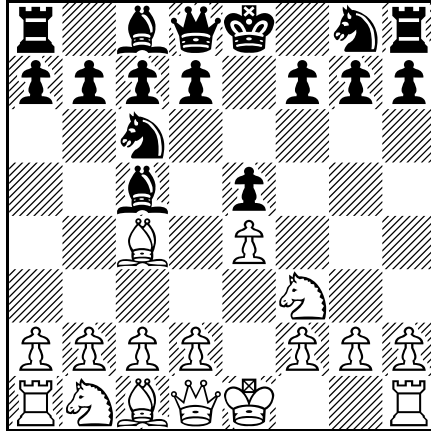
By attacking the pawn on f7 with two pieces, White has created two threats. The first is simply ♗xf7+, winning the pawn and forcing the black king to move. The second threat is even bigger: ♗xf7 would fork Black's queen on d8 and rook on h8! For young, inexperienced players, this attack on f7 is scary, and it's not easy to defend. I've seen this position appear hundreds of times in junior games, and Black often goes astray immediately. I've lost count of the number of times I've seen the player with the black pieces losing a rook, or even worse! There *is* a way for Black to defend against White's threat, by playing 4...d5!. However, even after this move Black has to be very careful. We'll take a look at that line a bit later on in the book, but for now I'm going to recommend a simpler way for Black to deal with White's ♗g5 attack.

How to deal with the ♗g5 Attack

Let's return to the starting position:

1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5!

Black's bishop does the same as White's and moves an active square. Black wants to develop the kingside pieces as quickly as possible, to get ready to castle, but it's *much safer* to move the bishop first. If White now tries 4 ♗g5?, Black simply takes the knight with the queen!



Did you know? The opening after 3...♔c5 is sometimes called the Giuoco Piano, which is Italian for 'Quiet Game'. As we shall see, though, often this opening is anything but quiet!

White has a few options in this position, but the first one we'll consider is:

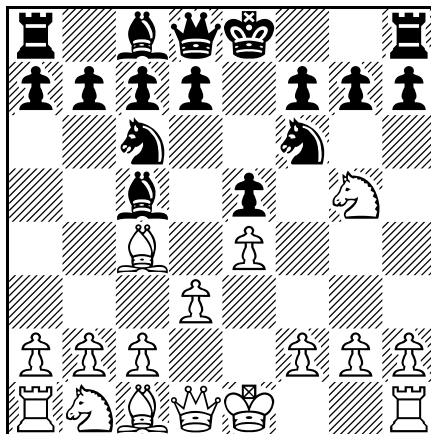
4 d3

This pawn move frees the bishop on c1 and it also allows White to safely move the knight to g5.

4...♞f6!

Now that the bishop has moved, Black gets the knight out too. Let's see what happens if White goes for the attack on f7:

5 ♞g5?!

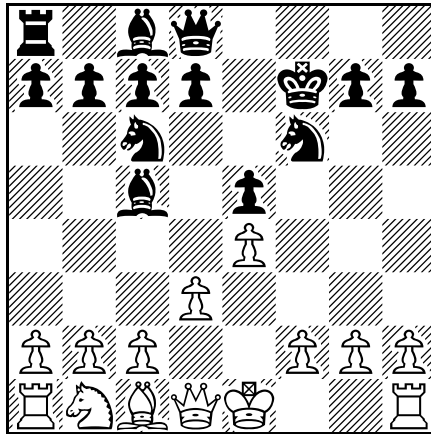


How does Black deal with the threat to the f7-pawn?

5...0-0!

Black protects the f7-pawn in the most natural way – by castling! The attack hasn't worked, White should admit that 5 ♘g5?! was a waste of time and be ready to retreat it after ...h6. Let's check out what happens if White goes ahead and captures the pawn anyway:

6 ♘xf7?! ♖xf7 7 ♙xf7+ ♔xf7



Points-wise, bishop and knight for rook and pawn is a fair exchange, but Black enjoys the advantage in this position, for two reasons.

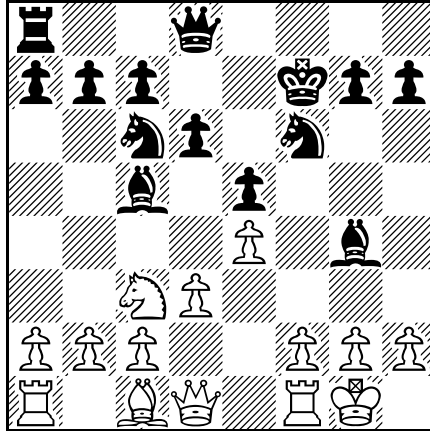
1) Black has many more pieces developed than White.

2) In the early stages of a game, two pieces are definitely worth more than a rook and pawn. Rooks normally take a long time to get into the game, and they only show their full power once the position opens up after some pawn exchanges.

As Black, you may feel that your king has become a little exposed, but the fact that *White has swapped off all his attacking pieces makes the black king perfectly safe*. If you are really concerned, you could always move it back to g8 at some moment.

Here's an example, taken from a student's training game, where Black's army of pieces quickly overwhelms White:

8 0-0 d6 9 ♘c3 ♙g4!



An excellent move. Black develops the bishop and threatens the white queen.

10 ♖e1

White is unable to block the attack with 10 f3, as that would be an illegal move!

10... ♘d4!

There's no let-up - Black continues with forcing moves. The knight hops into a strong central square and creates a new threat of ... ♘xc2, which would fork the queen and rook.

Note: The concept of a 'forcing move' is a very important one in chess tactics. It's a move which gives the opponent very few choices in their reply. A forcing move is nearly always a check, a capture or a threat. Forcing moves should always be considered in your calculations.

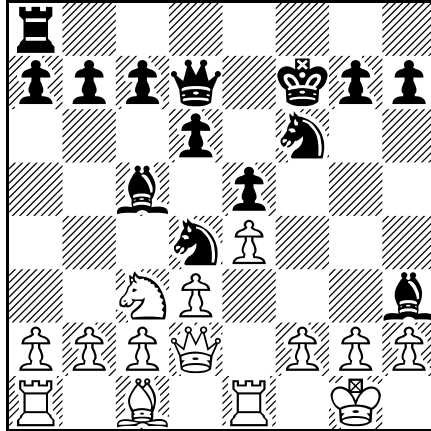
11 ♕d2

White has to move the queen again and block the bishop, which isn't ideal.

11... ♕d7 12 ♖e1

Black has a fantastic position, with many promising ideas here. One option is to play simply 12... ♖f8, followed by ... ♔g8, when the rook comes to life along the half-open f-file and all of Black's pieces attack on the kingside. In the game Black went for a quicker win, and got it!

12... ♘h3!?

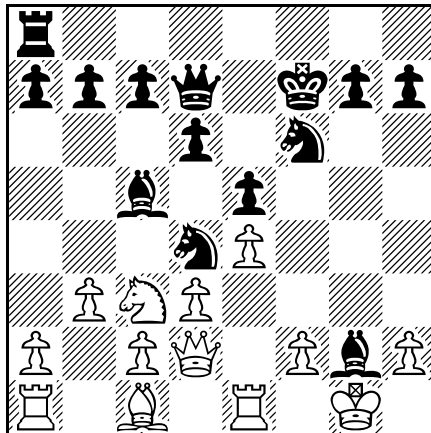


Very creative! If the bishop is captured by the pawn, Black's knight hops into f3 and forks White's king and queen. Black's bishop move also creates a big threat, which White fails to spot.

13 b3?

White's only good defence was 13 ♖e3!, after which Black should play 13...♗e6.

13...♗xg2!



Black sacrifices the bishop in order to blow open White's king. This time it's much more difficult for White to ignore the bishop, given that Black is threatening ...♗f3+.

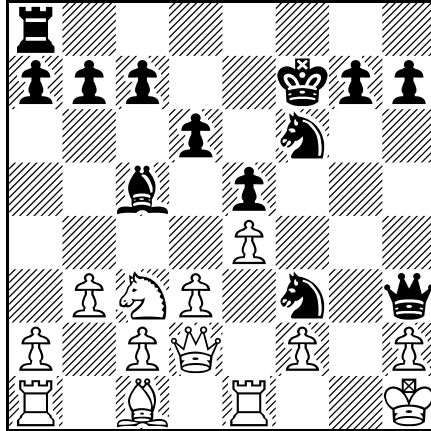
13...♗g4! is another very strong move, and soon leads to checkmate.

14 ♖xg2 ♗g4+ 15 ♖f1

15 ♖h1 puts up a better defence, but Black wins anyway after 15...♗f3! 16 ♗e2 ♗h3!.

There's no safe way for White to stop the threat of checkmate with ...♗xh2.

15...♗h3+ 16 ♖g1 ♗f3+ 17 ♖h1



17... ♔xh2 mate

Black could have taken the queen on d2, but checkmate is stronger!

Points to Remember

- 1) Bishop to c5, then knight to f6 – bishop first, then knight! This way of developing the king-side pieces prevents White from playing 4 ♘g5.
- 2) Be prepared to meet the knight coming to g5 by castling kingside, which defends the f7-pawn in the most natural way.
- 3) The ♘g5 attack is normally only a good idea if your opponent can't defend the f7-pawn by castling.

A Powerful Pin

Let's consider what could happen if White doesn't play ♘g5 and instead carries on developing.

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♙c4 ♙c5 4 d3 ♘f6 5 ♘c3

This is a much better move than 5 ♘g5.

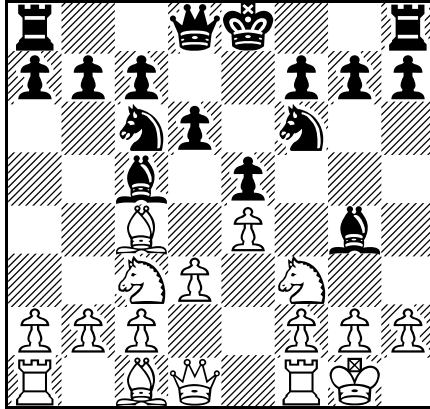
5...d6!

With this pawn move, Black gets ready to develop the light-squared bishop. You'll notice that the position is now completely symmetrical, with both sides having played exactly the same moves.

6 0-0

Castling as soon as possible is nearly always a good idea, but there are some exceptions – and this is one of them!

6... ♙g4!



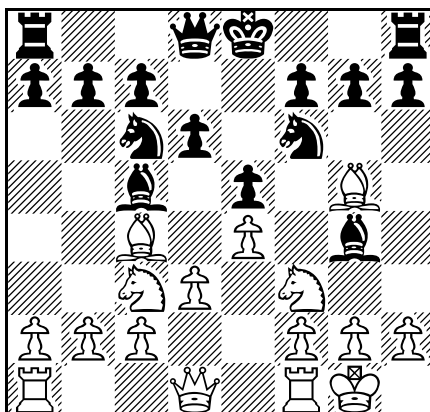
Note: This pin on the knight is often a powerful weapon in the Italian Game.

The problem for White is that it's impossible to break the pin without weakening the king. If the queen moves to either e1 or d2, to escape the pin, Black simply takes the knight and forces White to recapture with the g-pawn, leaving the king exposed. White could also break the pin by attacking the bishop with pawns, with 7 h3 ♗h5 8 g4, but moving the g-pawn up to g4 also exposes the king.

There's no simple solution to this problem, and furthermore Black has another strong move coming up. Let's see how the game progresses if White is unaware of Black's intentions.

7 ♗g5?!

This is a very natural reply by White, who creates his own pin.



Exercise: Find a good move for Black here.

Answer: 7...♞d4!

Tip: Put pressure on the pinned piece! (A catchy phrase I became aware of after students discovered it on the website Chesskid.com.)

Black attacks the pinned knight for a second time. Now when the knight is captured, White will be forced to take back with the pawn, leaving the king on g1 open and vulnerable to attack. On the previous move, White should have chosen 7 ♖e3! instead of 7 ♖g5, to take the knight if it jumps into d4.

Black is already doing well in this position. Let's go through some moves from a student's training game:

8 ♞d5

White copies Black and attacks the pinned knight on f6.

8...c6 9 ♞xf6+ gxf6 10 ♖h4

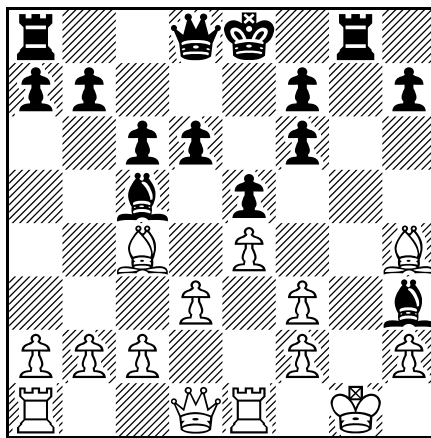
The bishop retreats and keeps the pin on the f6-pawn.

10...♞xf3+ 11 gxf3 ♖h3!

The bishop threatens the rook on f1.

12 ♖e1 ♜g8+!

Following the knight exchanges on the f6- and f3-squares, the g-file is now completely open. Only White's king is in danger, though, because earlier on White castled kingside whereas Black didn't!



Exercise: Find a strong idea for Black if White gets out of check by playing 13 ♖h1.

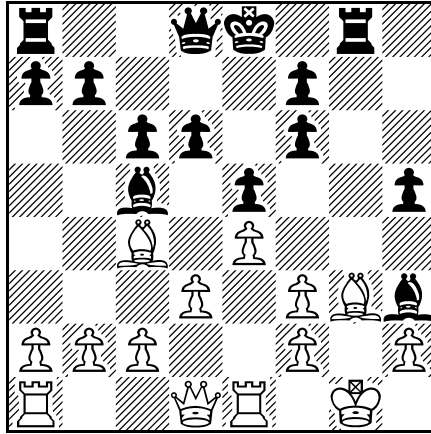
Answer: If 13 ♖h1, Black plays 13...♖g2+! 14 ♖g1 and now 14...♖xf3+!. It's a discovered check and Black wins the queen.

13 ♖g3!

Blocking the check is definitely the best choice, but the bishop on g3 is now pinned to its king by Black's rook. How can Black take advantage of this?

Note: When a piece is pinned to its king, it's often called an absolute pin.

13...h5!



Remember, put pressure on the pinned piece! Black's threat is to play ...h4, winning the pinned bishop.

14 ♔h1

White defends against the threat of ...h4, by moving the king to break the pin.

14...h4!

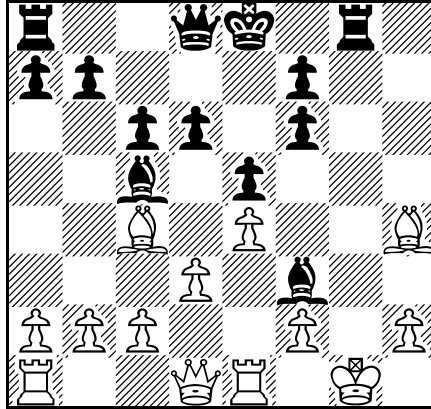
Black plays the move anyway!

Note: This time Black is using a different tactic, called deflection. Black uses the pawn to force the bishop off the g-file.

15 ♗xh4 ♕g2+!

And this is why! With the bishop removed from g3, it's now safe to play this powerful check we saw earlier.

16 ♔g1 ♗xf3+



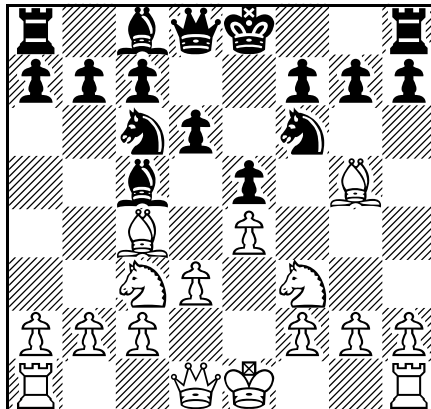
Discovered check! Black again wins the queen.

Points to Remember

- 1) If White doesn't play Ng5 , don't castle straightaway.
- 2) Play $\dots\text{d6}$ and, if possible, pin the knight with $\dots\text{Bg4}$. This is a good idea for Black, especially if White has castled.
- 3) Aim to put more pressure on White's pinned knight by playing $\dots\text{Nd4}$.

Let's go back and consider a better option for White than castling:

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 d3 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 Bg5 !



This is a wise choice. This time it's White who is first to create a pin.

Exercise: If Black now castles, how should White respond?