

BOOK 3 OF THE LITTLE EXPLORERS LIBRARY

Real Games

Tactics, endings, and sixty puzzles from real games





This book belongs to

How to use it. Read a chapter, then do its puzzles. Solve on the page first, and when you think you have it, set the position up on a real board and play it out. Every puzzle here is from a real game, and every answer is at the back, written in chess notation, which page 3 explains in two minutes.

One rule. Before you look at an answer, say your move out loud, and say why. Being wrong out loud is how you get good.

K Q R B N King, Queen, Rook, Bishop,
kNight (K was taken).

Nf3 The knight goes to f3.

Qh5+ The queen goes to h5, and it is check.

Rd8# The rook goes to d8, and it is checkmate.

Check, and the three ways out

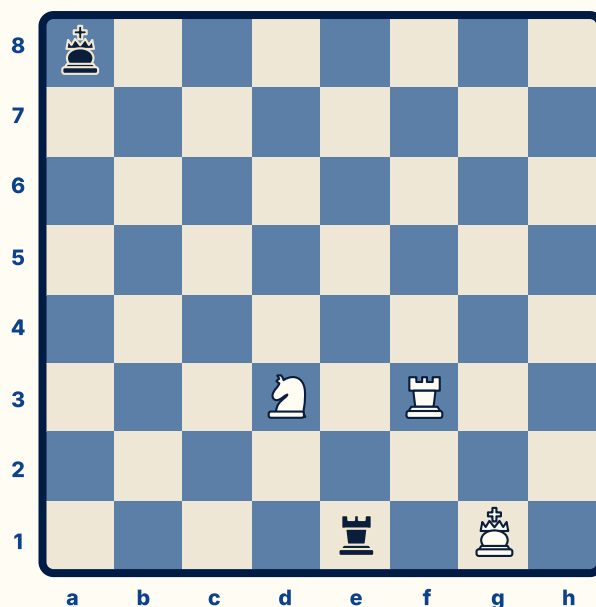
Check means your king is attacked. You are not allowed to leave him there, so on this move you must do one of three things.

Move the king to a square that is not attacked.

Block by putting a piece between the attacker and the king.

Take the piece that is giving check.

On the board, the black rook on e1 is giving check. White can move the king to f2, g2 or h2. White can block with the rook, Rf1. Or White can take the rook with the knight, Nxe1. That is every legal move there is.



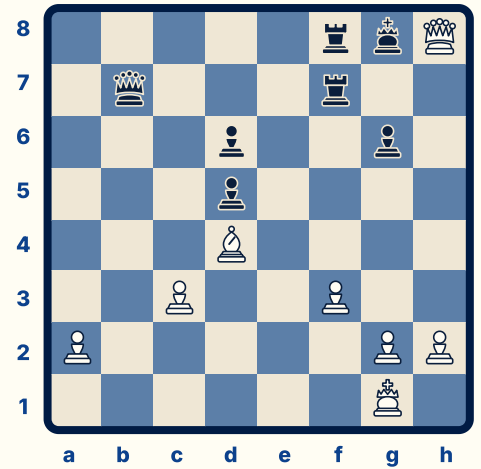
When you are in check, say all three out loud, every time. Taking is usually best. Blocking is usually worst.

Checkmate, and the trap called stalemate

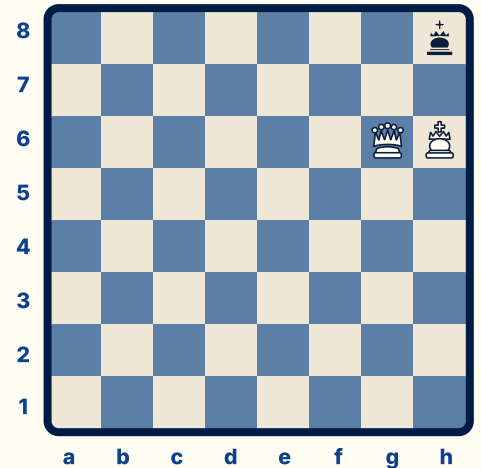
Checkmate is check with no way out: the king cannot move, nothing can block, and the attacker cannot be taken. The game ends there. You never actually take the king.

Stalemate is the opposite, and it catches everybody once. The king is **not** in check, but he has no legal move and neither does anything else. That is a draw, even if you are a queen up.

When you are winning, before every move, ask: after this, does my opponent have a move? If the answer is no and it is not check, do not play it.



Checkmate. The queen on h8 is guarded by the bishop on d4.



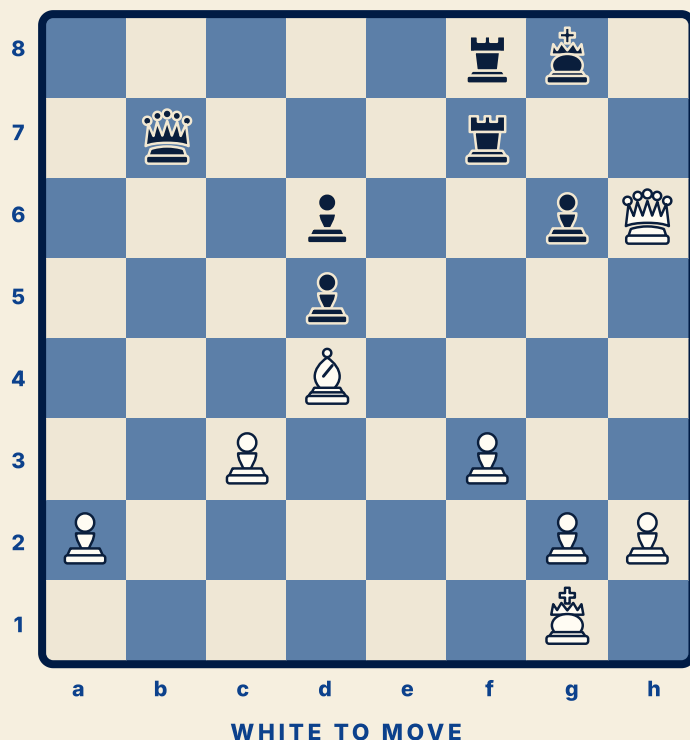
Stalemate. Black to move, not in check, nowhere to go. A draw.

Mate in one

Checkmate means the king is in check and there is nothing to be done about it: he cannot move away, nothing can block, and the piece giving check cannot be taken.

Most mates in one look the same. A queen or a rook lands next to the king, or on his row, and the king has nowhere to go because his own pieces are in the way.

So look at the king first. Count his escape squares. Then find the move that takes the last one away.



WORKED EXAMPLE

Qh8#

Queen to h8 is check. Can the king take her? No: the bishop on d4 is looking all the way up the long diagonal to h8, so the queen is guarded.

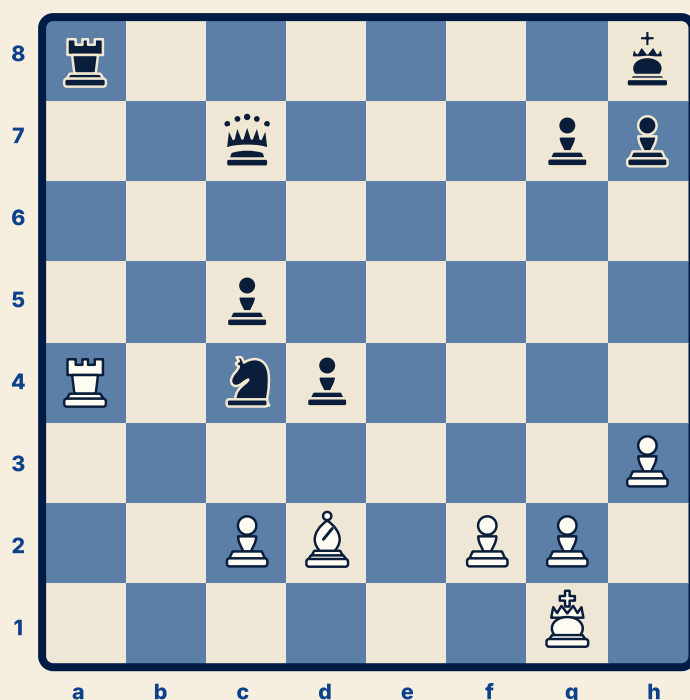
Can the king run? f7 and f8 are full of his own rooks, and h7 is attacked by the queen. Nothing can block a check from next door. Checkmate.

Take what is free

A piece is hanging when it can be taken for nothing. It happens in nearly every game between children, and the player who notices wins.

The check is simple. Point at the enemy piece. Count how many of your pieces attack it. Count how many of theirs defend it. If you attack and nobody defends, it is free.

Do this for every enemy piece, every move. It takes ten seconds and it wins more games than any trick in this book.



WORKED EXAMPLE

Rxa8+ Qb8 Rxb8#

The black rook on a8: who attacks it? The white rook on a4, straight up the file. Who defends it? Nobody. The black queen on c7 is not looking at a8 at all.

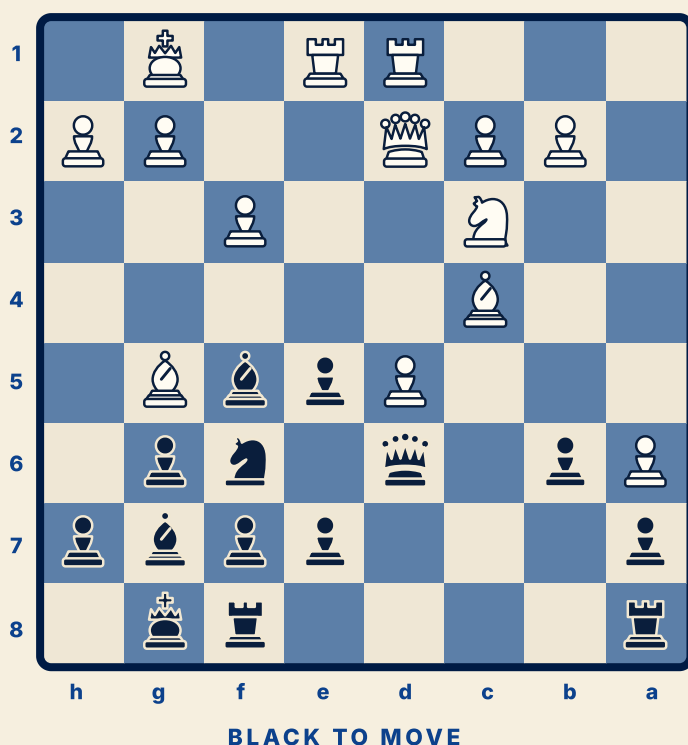
So the rook is free, and taking it is check. Black can only block with the queen on b8, and then the queen goes too.

The fork

A fork is one move that attacks two things at once. Your opponent can only save one of them.

The best forks come with check, because then the king has to be saved first, and the other piece is simply left behind.

Knights are the great forkers, because their move is so odd, but a queen, a pawn or even a king can fork too.



WORKED EXAMPLE

Qc5+ Kh1 Qxc4

The queen goes to c5 with check: a clear diagonal to the king on g1. At the same time she is standing next to the white bishop on c4.

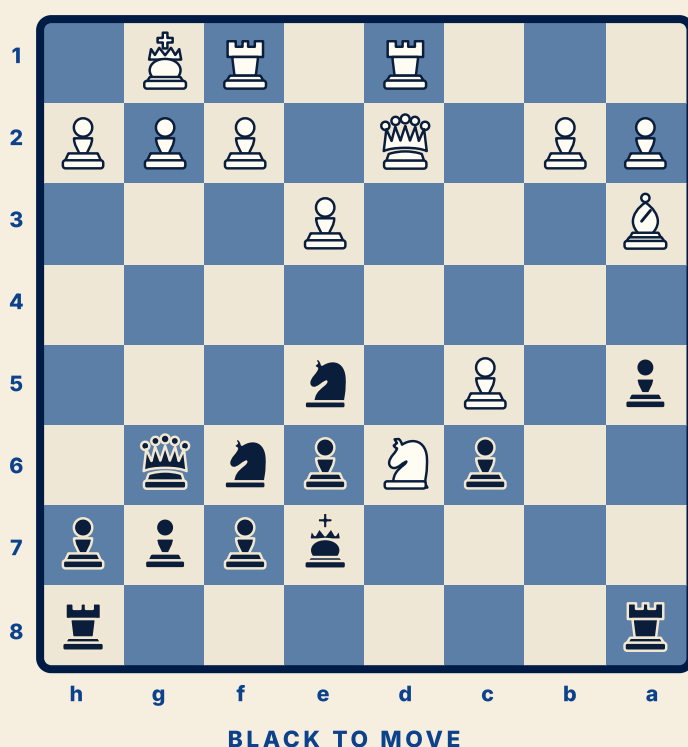
White has to answer the check, and the only way is to move the king. Then the queen takes the bishop. One move, two targets, one of them lost.

The pin

A pin is when a piece cannot move, because if it did, something more important behind it would be exposed. If the thing behind it is the king, the pinned piece is not allowed to move at all.

A pinned piece is a piece that is not really there. It cannot defend anything, and the squares it seems to guard are actually safe for you.

Bishops, rooks and queens pin, because they move in lines. Knights never do.



WORKED EXAMPLE

Nf3+ Kh1 Nxd2

The black queen on g6 is looking straight down the g-file at the white king. So the pawn on g2 is pinned: it may not move, or the king would be in check.

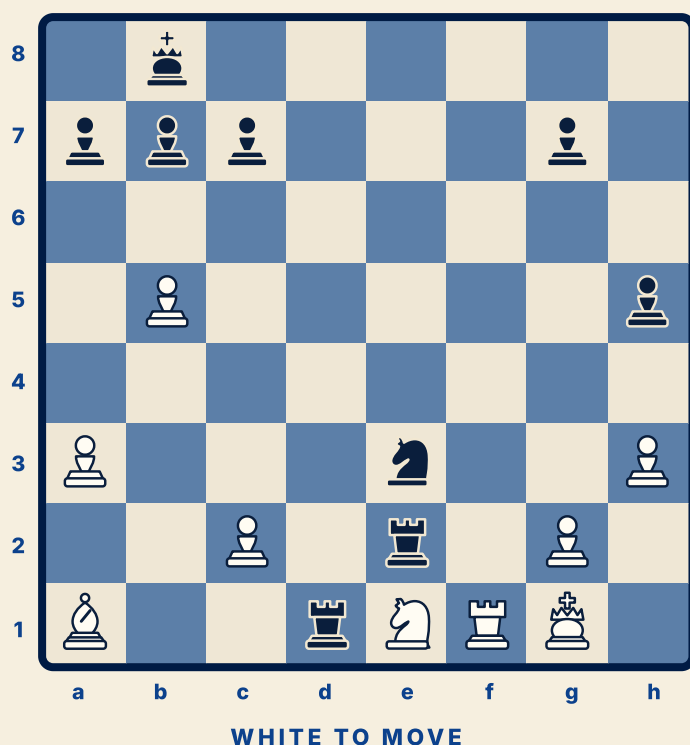
That means f3, which the pawn seems to guard, is actually safe. Knight to f3 is check, the king has to step to h1, and the knight takes the queen on d2.

The back rank

After castling, the king lives behind a row of pawns. It feels safe, and it is, until the middle of the board empties and a rook or queen can reach the back row.

Then the pawns are not a wall. They are a prison. A check on the back rank is mate unless something can block or take.

The cure, when it is your king, is to give him a window: move one pawn, one square, before you need to.



WORKED EXAMPLE

Rf8+ Rd8 Rxd8#

The black king on b8 is boxed in by his own pawns on a7, b7 and c7. Rook to f8 is check along the back row.

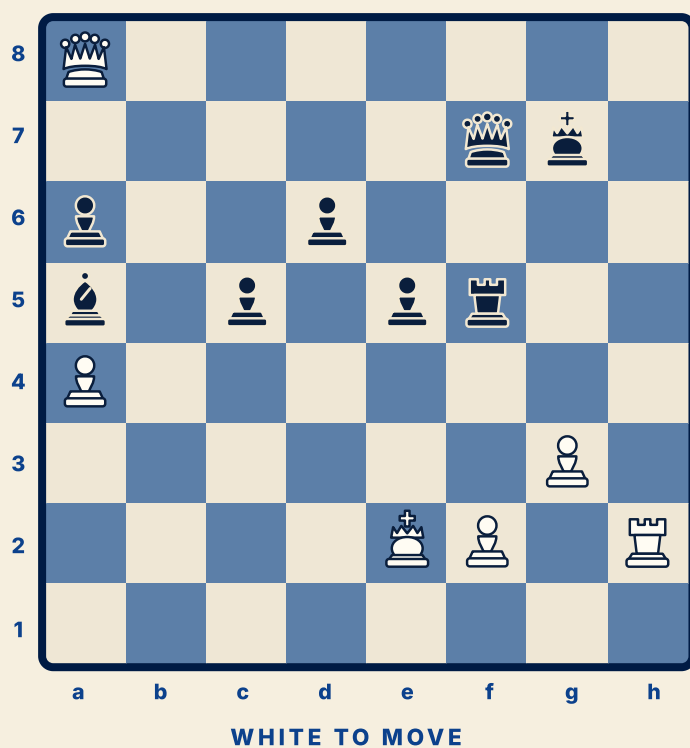
Black can block with the rook coming back to d8, but then the white rook simply takes it, and it is still check on the back row, and now there is nothing left to block with. Checkmate.

Mate in two

A mate in two is two checks in a row: the first one takes away the king's choices, the second one finishes.

Look for a check that leaves the king only one square to go to. Then ask: from there, is there a mate? If yes, play the first check.

You are allowed to think out loud. Say the king's moves. Say your checks. That is exactly what strong players do in their heads.



WORKED EXAMPLE

Qh8+ Kg6 Qh6#

First check: queen to h8. The king cannot take her and cannot block, and f6 and h7 are covered, so he has exactly one square, g6.

Second check: the queen comes back to h6, right next to the king, guarded by the rook on h2. Every square around the king is covered. Checkmate in two moves.

King and queen against king

You will win this ending many times, and you must never draw it. Three steps, in order.

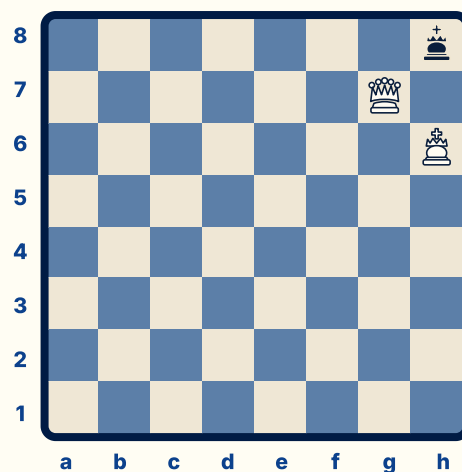
Push the king to the edge with the queen.

Keep her a knight's move away from him: close enough to take squares, too far to be touched. Never give check for the sake of it.

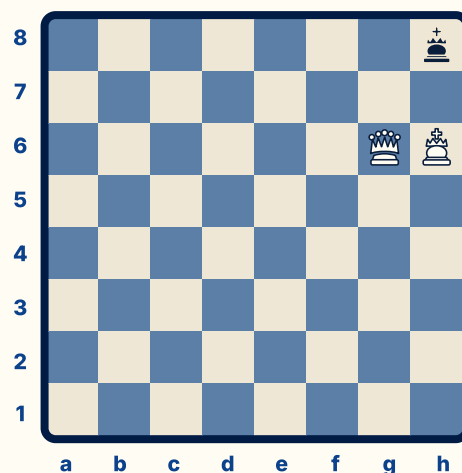
Bring your own king up. The queen cannot mate alone. Walk your king towards theirs until they are two squares apart.

Mate on the edge. The queen lands next to the king, guarded by yours.

Before every queen move, look at the enemy king. Does he still have a square? If not, and it is not check, that is stalemate. Give him a square and try again.



The finish. Queen on g7, guarded by the king on h6. Checkmate.



One square wrong. Queen on g6: no check, no moves. Stalemate.

King and rook against king

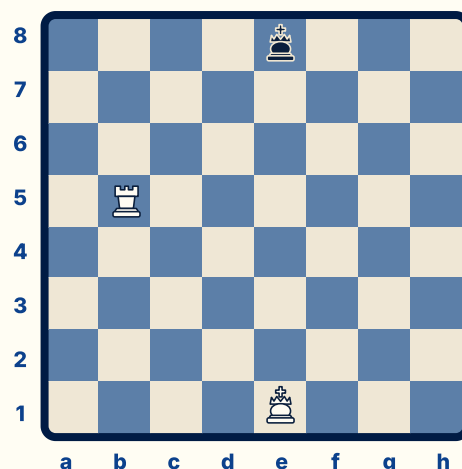
Slower than the queen, but the same shape: cut the king off, walk up, mate on the edge.

Cut him off. Put the rook on a row the king cannot cross. On the board, the rook on b5 keeps the black king above the fifth row for ever.

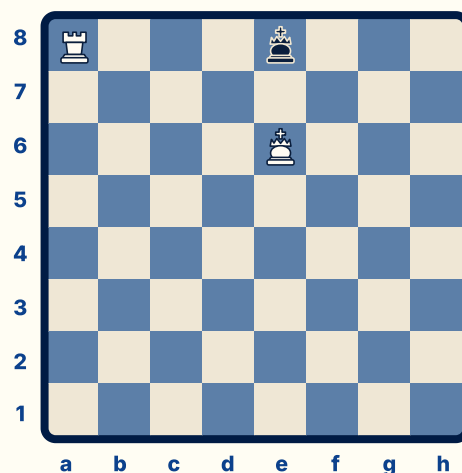
Walk your king up until the two kings stand facing each other with one square between them.

Check on the edge. When the kings face each other, a rook check on the last row is mate, because your king takes away the escape squares.

If the enemy king steps sideways instead of facing yours, waste a move with the rook along its row. Then he has to face you.



Step one. The rook on b5 is a fence the black king cannot cross.



Step three. Kings face each other, rook to a8. Checkmate.

Three rules, not thirty moves

Nobody your age needs to memorise openings. You need three habits, and they get you a good game against anybody.

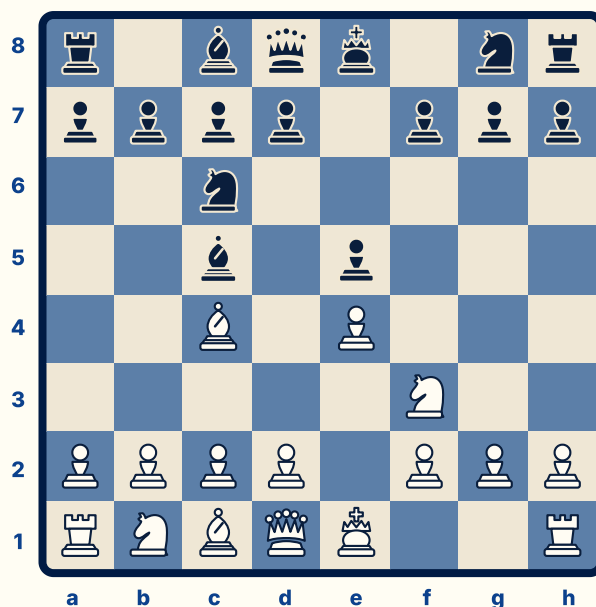
Take the centre. A pawn to e4 or d4 first. The middle squares are where pieces are strongest.

Bring out the knights and bishops. One move each, towards the centre. Do not move the same piece twice while others are still at home.

Castle. Early. The king goes behind his pawns, and the rook comes into the game.

The board shows both sides doing exactly that: 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5. Three moves each, and both players are ready to castle. It has a name, the Italian Game, and it is four hundred years old.

Do not bring the queen out early. She gets chased, and every chase is a free move for the other side.



Three questions

Strong players do not see more. They look in a better order. Ask these three, every move, in this order, and you will stop losing pieces for nothing.

1

Checks. Can I give check? Can they? A check changes everything, so it goes first.

2

Captures. Can I take something? Count attackers and defenders. Can they take something of mine?

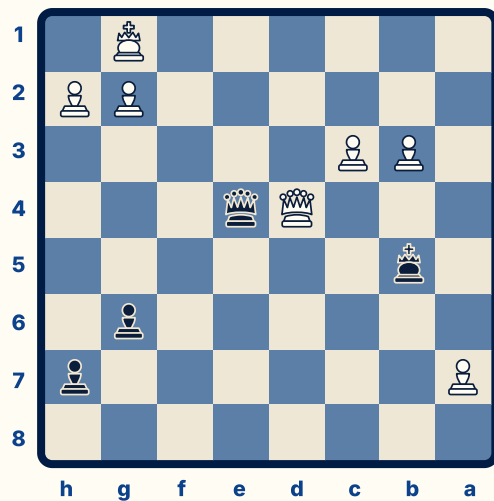
3

Threats. What does their last move attack? What will my move leave undefended?

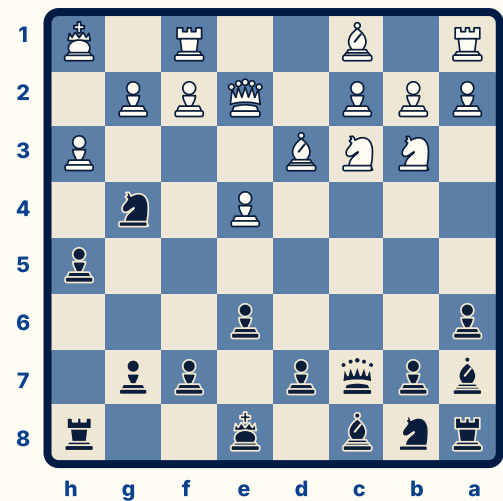
Then, and only then, choose your move. When you have chosen it, ask one last thing: after I play this, what is their best reply?

Mate in one

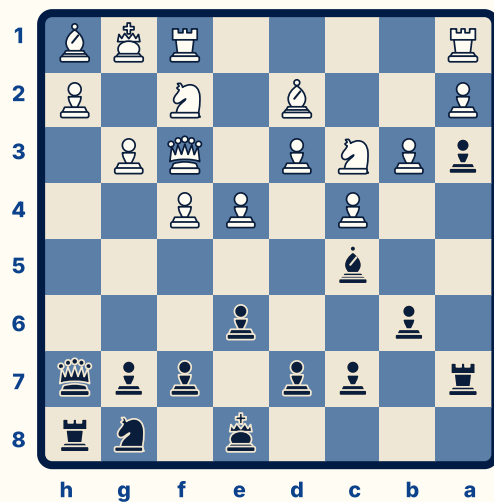
1 MATE IN ONE BLACK TO MOVE



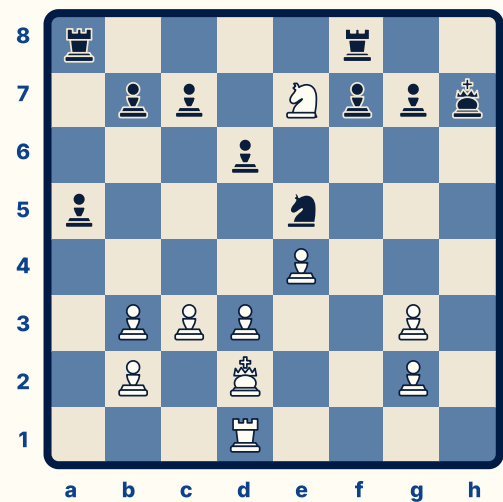
2 MATE IN ONE BLACK TO MOVE



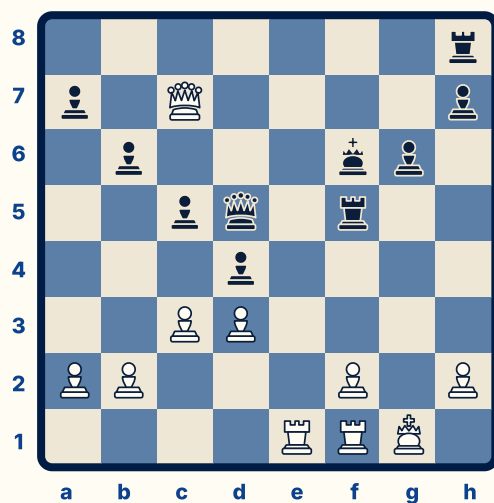
3 MATE IN ONE BLACK TO MOVE



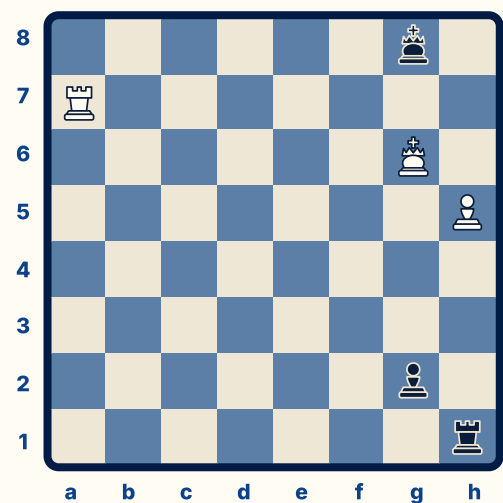
4 MATE IN ONE WHITE TO MOVE



5 MATE IN ONE WHITE TO MOVE

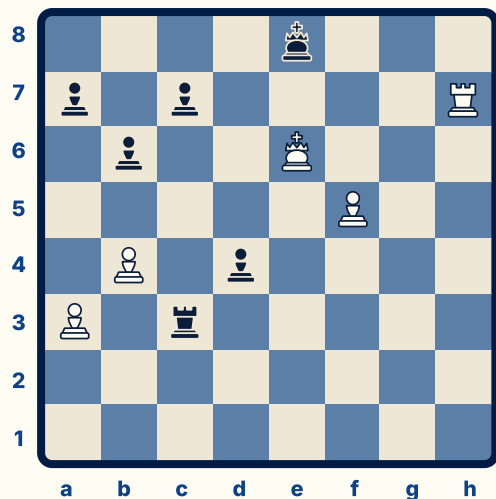


6 MATE IN ONE WHITE TO MOVE

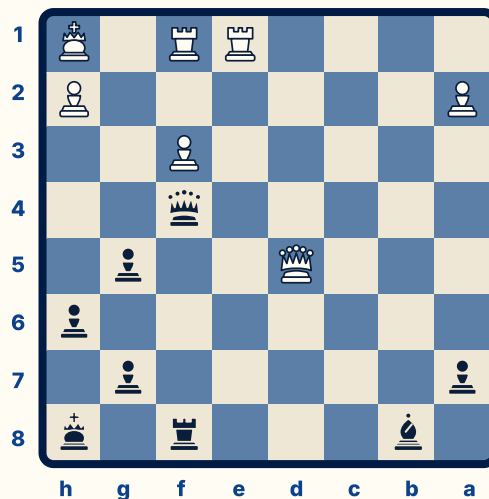


Mate in one and Take what is free

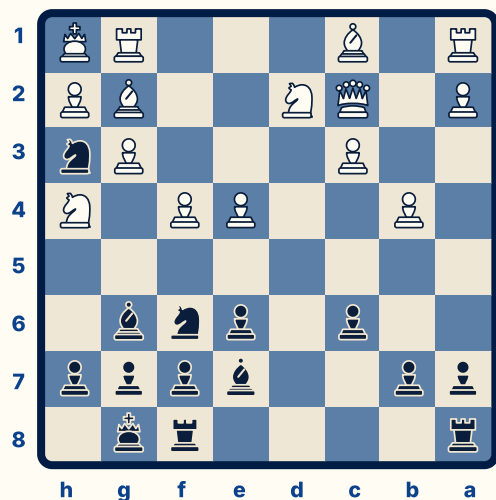
7 MATE IN ONE WHITE TO MOVE



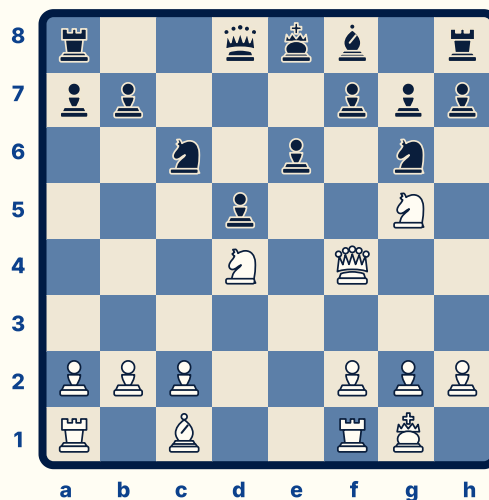
8 MATE IN ONE BLACK TO MOVE



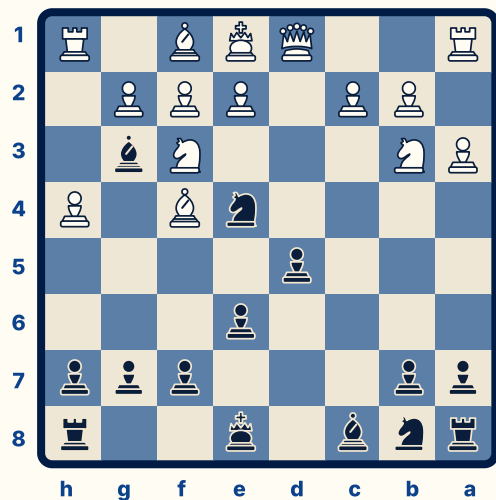
9 MATE IN ONE BLACK TO MOVE



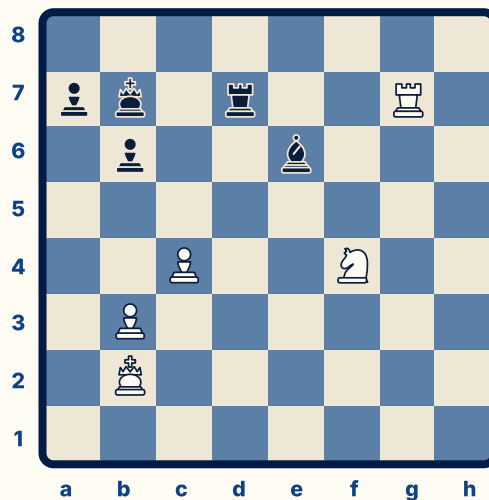
10 MATE IN ONE WHITE TO MOVE



11 MATE IN ONE BLACK TO MOVE

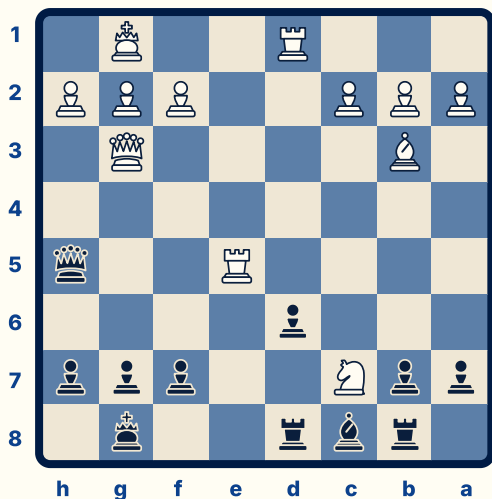


12 TAKE WHAT IS FREE WHITE TO MOVE

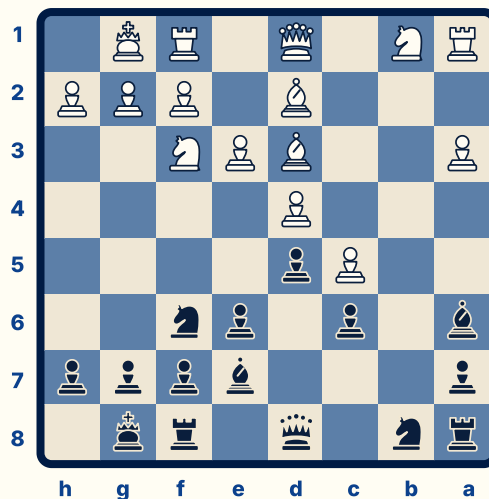


Take what is free

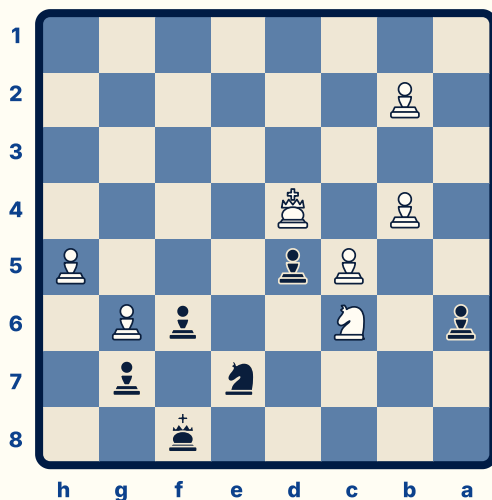
13 TAKE WHAT IS FREE BLACK TO MOVE



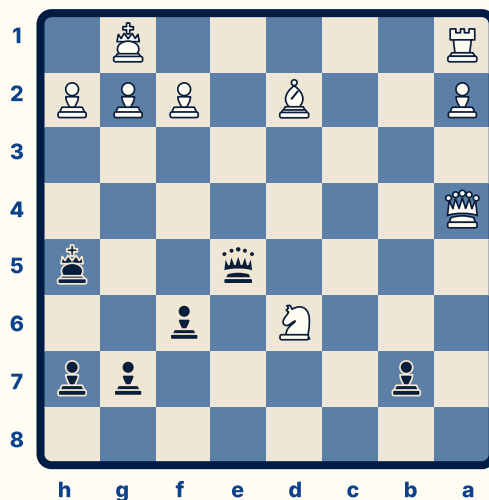
14 TAKE WHAT IS FREE BLACK TO MOVE



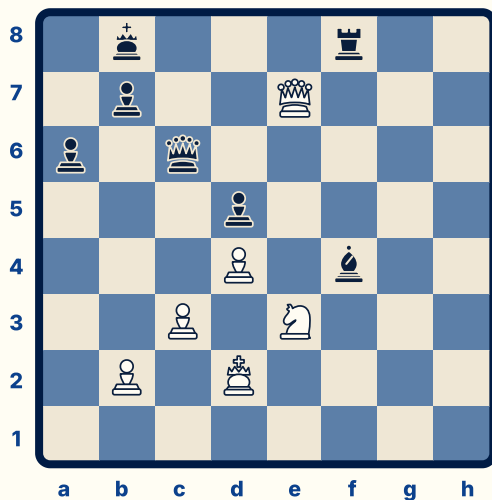
15 TAKE WHAT IS FREE BLACK TO MOVE



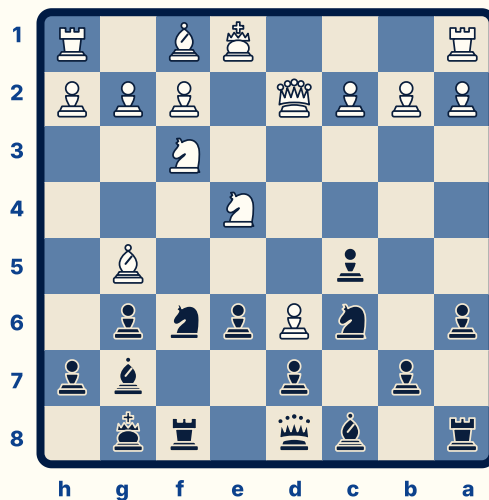
16 TAKE WHAT IS FREE BLACK TO MOVE



17 TAKE WHAT IS FREE WHITE TO MOVE

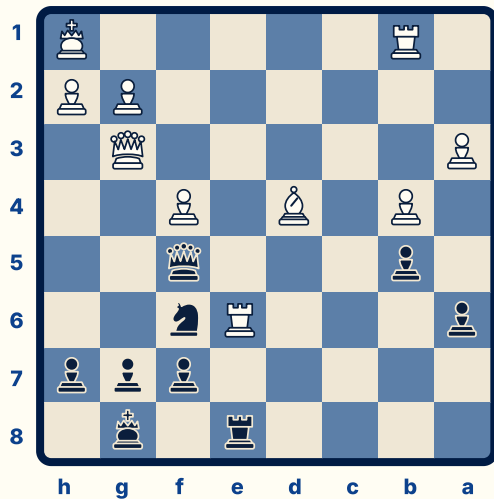


18 TAKE WHAT IS FREE BLACK TO MOVE

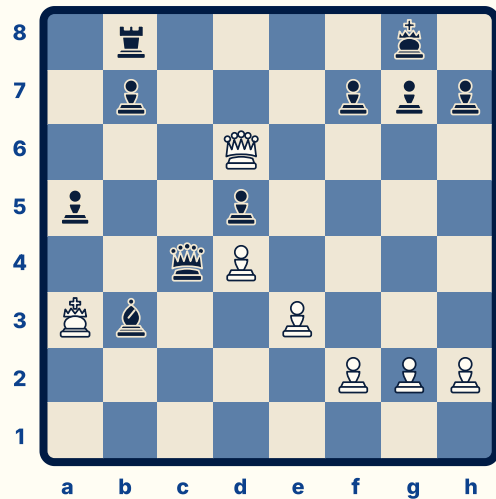


Take what is free and The fork

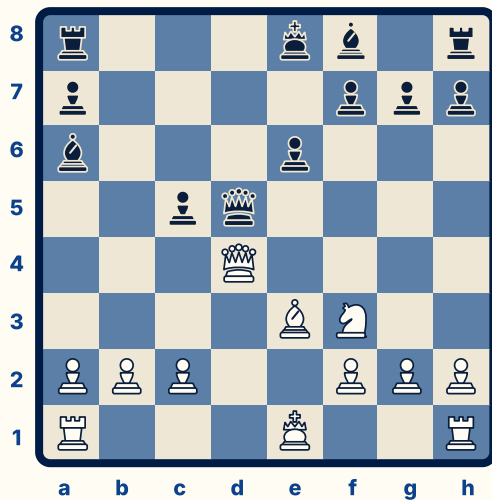
19 TAKE WHAT IS FREE BLACK TO MOVE



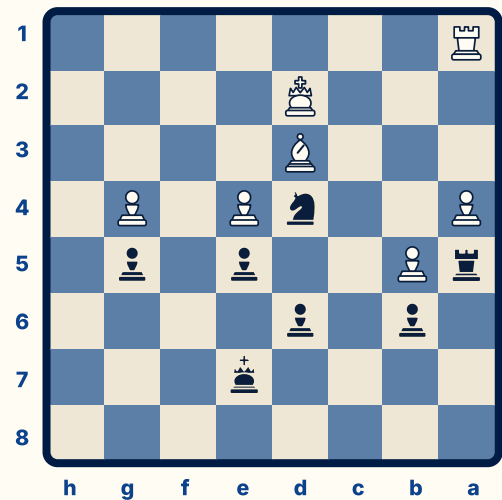
20 TAKE WHAT IS FREE WHITE TO MOVE



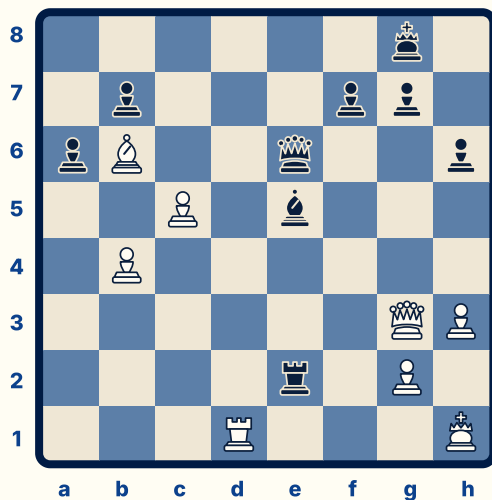
21 THE FORK WHITE TO MOVE



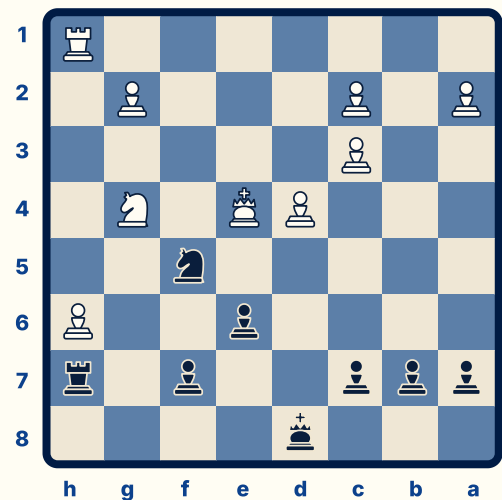
22 THE FORK BLACK TO MOVE



23 THE FORK WHITE TO MOVE

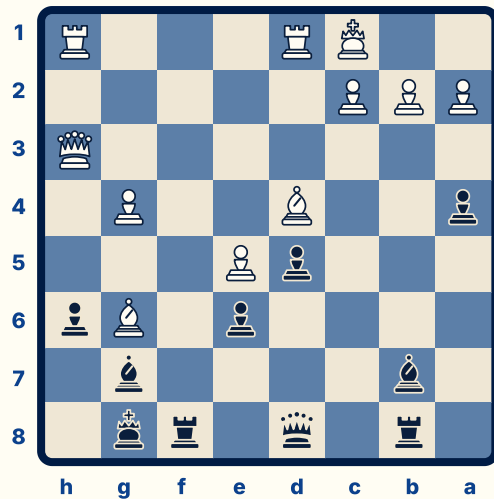


24 THE FORK BLACK TO MOVE

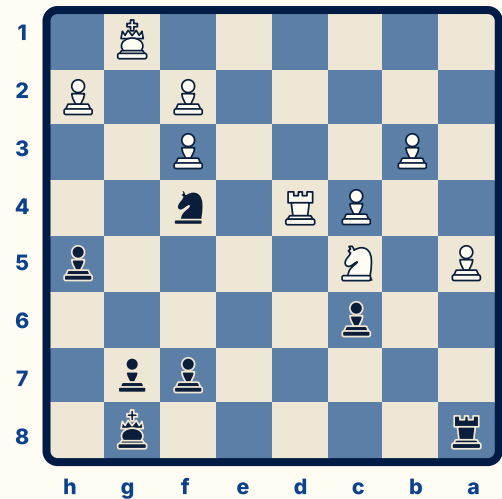


The fork and The pin

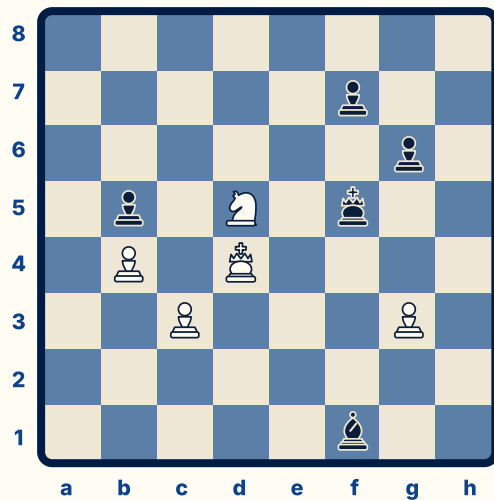
25 THE FORK BLACK TO MOVE



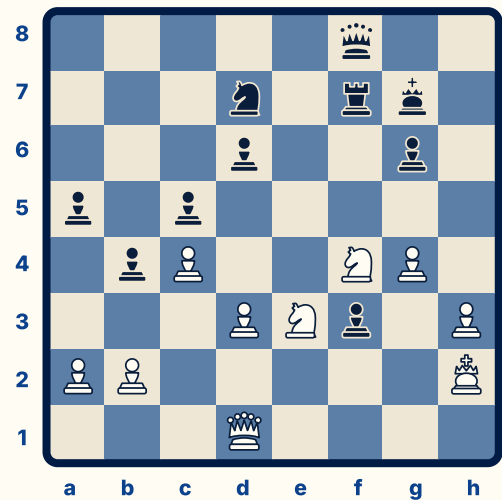
26 THE FORK BLACK TO MOVE



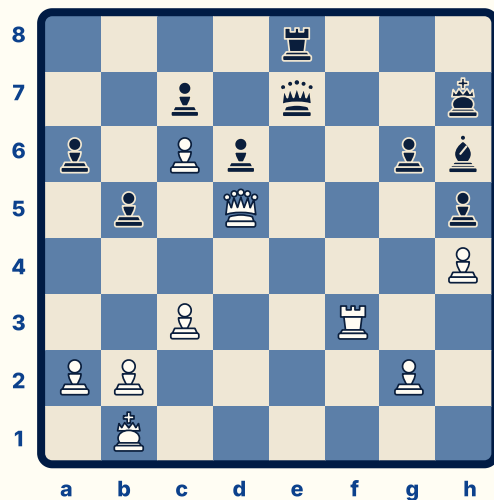
27 THE FORK WHITE TO MOVE



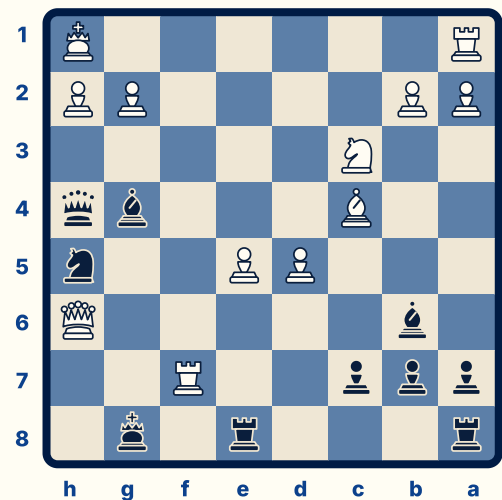
28 THE FORK WHITE TO MOVE



29 THE FORK WHITE TO MOVE

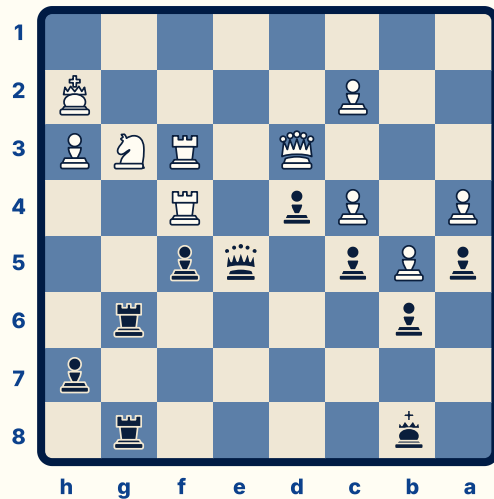


30 THE PIN BLACK TO MOVE

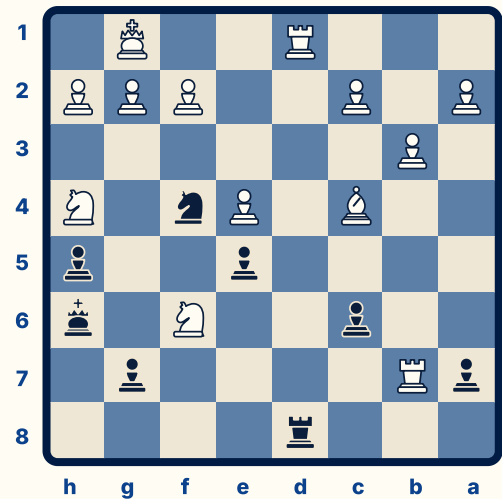


The pin

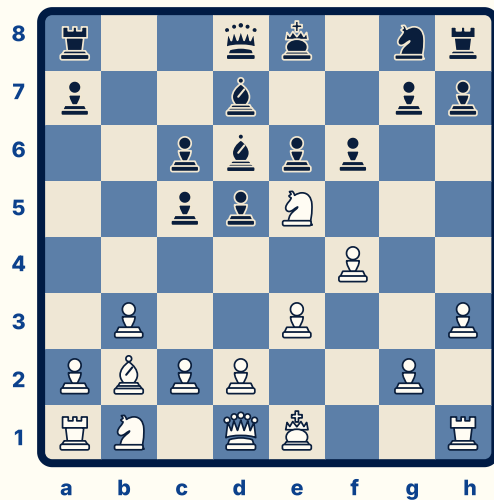
31 THE PIN BLACK TO MOVE



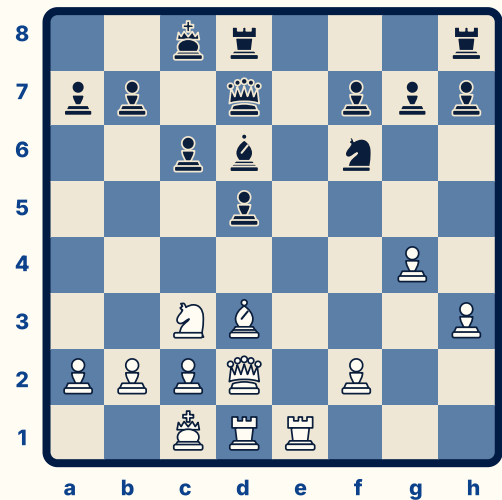
32 THE PIN BLACK TO MOVE



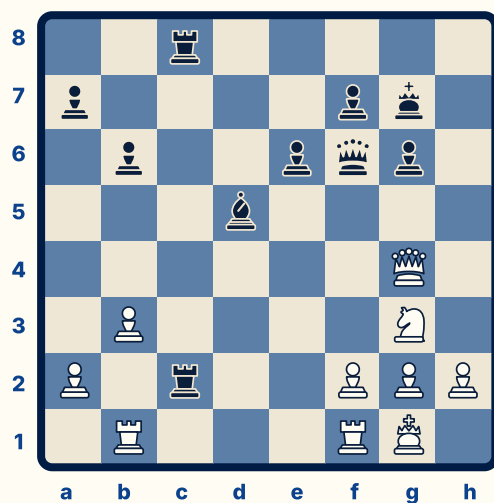
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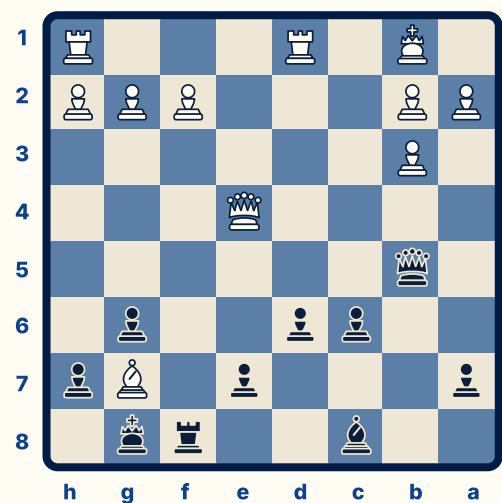
34 THE PIN WHITE TO MOVE



35 THE PIN WHITE TO MOVE

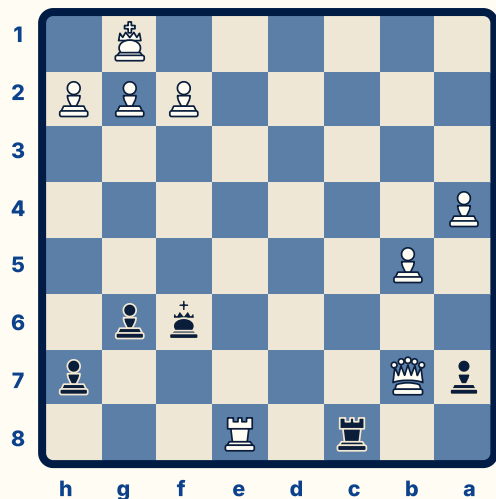


36 THE PIN BLACK TO MOVE

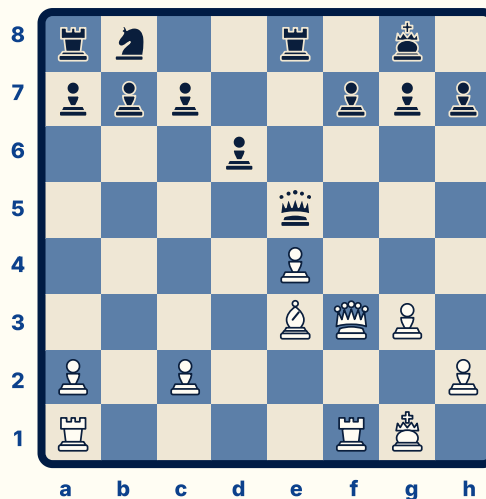


The back rank

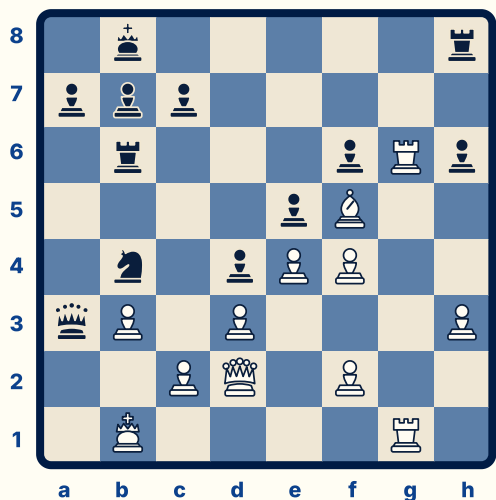
37 THE BACK RANK BLACK TO MOVE



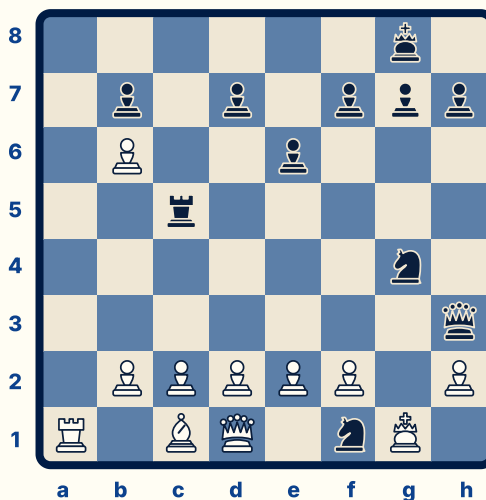
38 THE BACK RANK WHITE TO MOVE



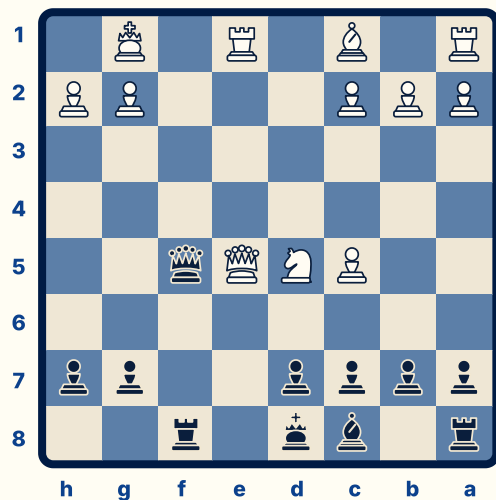
39 THE BACK RANK WHITE TO MOVE



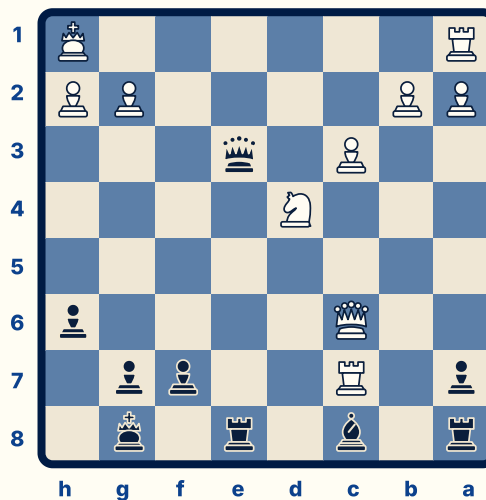
40 THE BACK RANK WHITE TO MOVE



41 THE BACK RANK BLACK TO MOVE

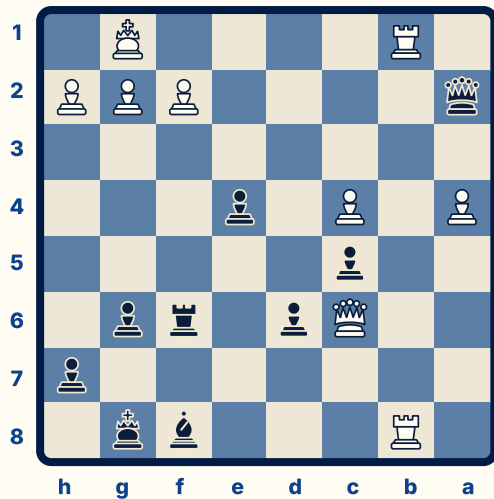


42 THE BACK RANK BLACK TO MOVE

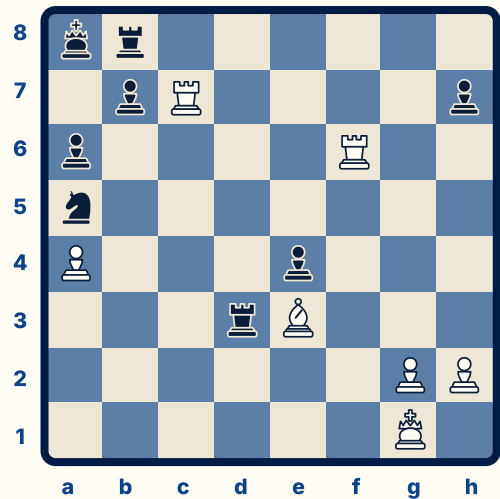


The back rank and Mate in two

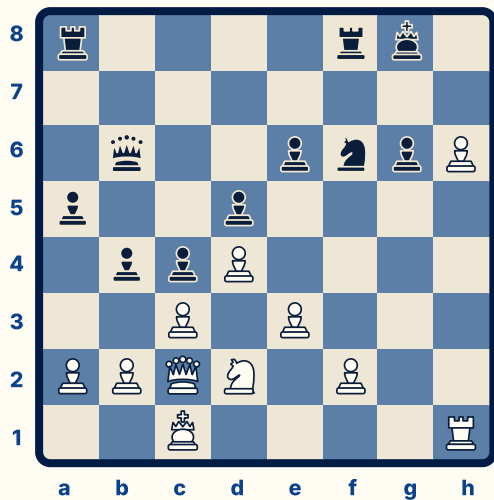
43 THE BACK RANK BLACK TO MOVE



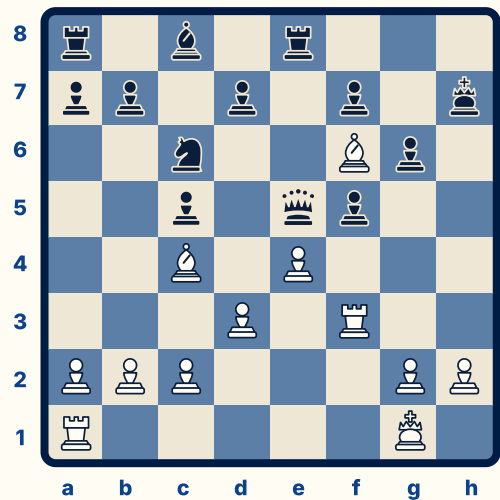
44 MATE IN TWO WHITE TO MOVE



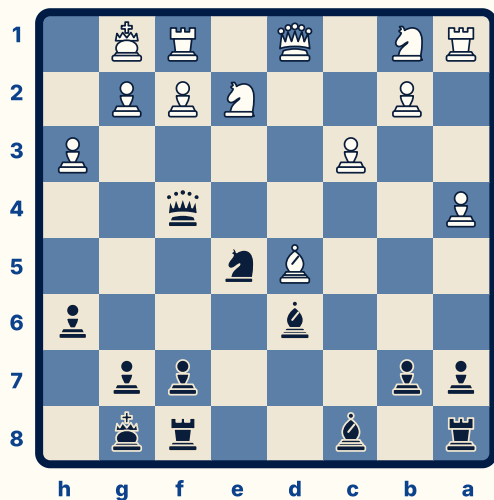
45 MATE IN TWO WHITE TO MOVE



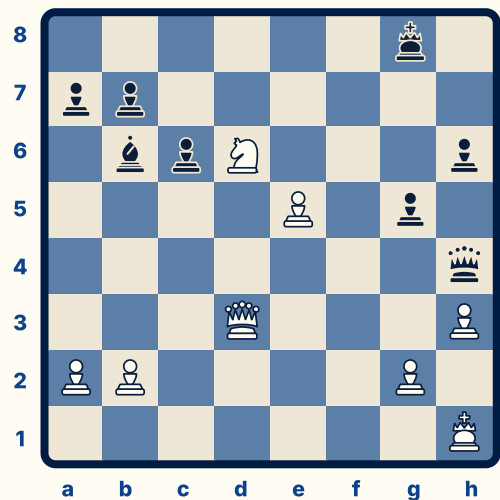
46 MATE IN TWO WHITE TO MOVE



47 MATE IN TWO BLACK TO MOVE

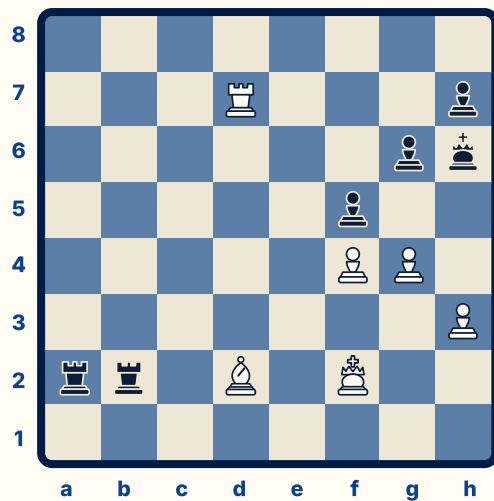


48 MATE IN TWO WHITE TO MOVE

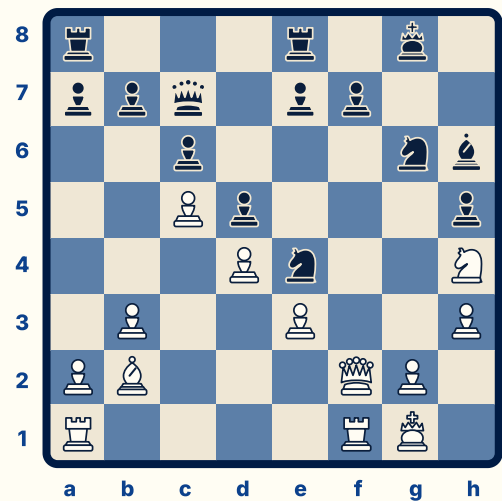


Mate in two

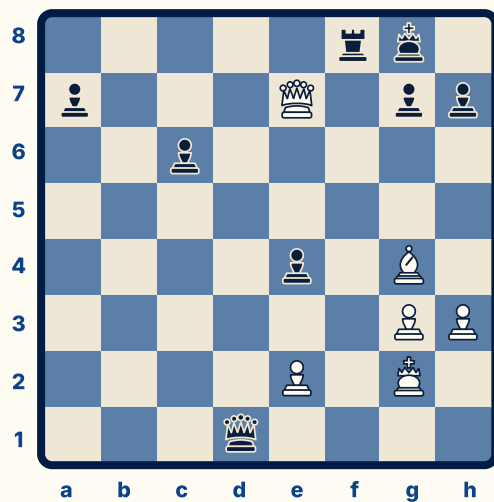
49 MATE IN TWO WHITE TO MOVE



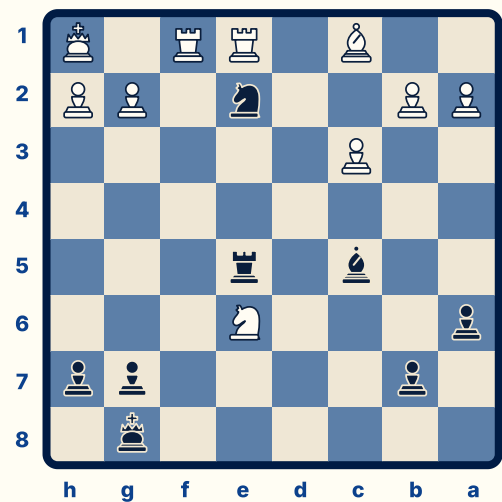
50 MATE IN TWO WHITE TO MOVE



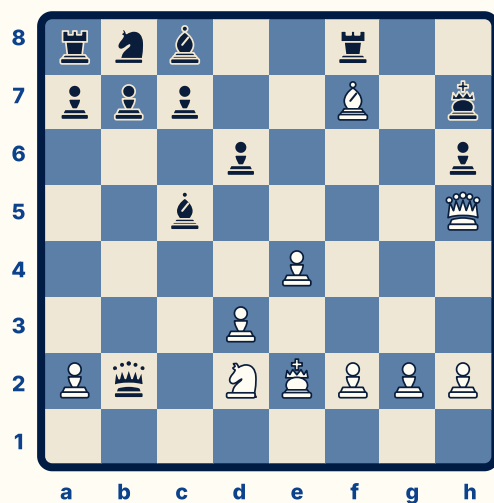
51 MATE IN TWO WHITE TO MOVE



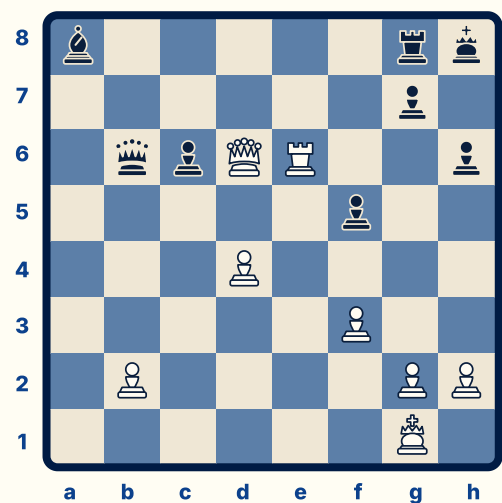
52 MATE IN TWO BLACK TO MOVE



53 MATE IN TWO WHITE TO MOVE



54 MATE IN TWO WHITE TO MOVE



Check your moves

1. **Qe1#**

MATE IN ONE

2. **Qh2#**

MATE IN ONE

3. **Qxh2#**

MATE IN ONE

4. **Rh1#**

MATE IN ONE

5. **Qe7#**

MATE IN ONE

6. **Ra8#**

MATE IN ONE

7. **Rh8#**

MATE IN ONE

8. **Qxh2#**

MATE IN ONE

9. **Nf2#**

MATE IN ONE

10. **Qxf7#**

MATE IN ONE

11. **Bxf2#**

MATE IN ONE

12. **Nxe6 Rxc7 Nxg7**

TAKE WHAT IS FREE

13. **Qxd1+ Re1 Qxe1#**

TAKE WHAT IS FREE

14. **Bxd3 Ba5 Qxa5**

TAKE WHAT IS FREE

15. **Nxc6+ Kxd5 Nxb4+**

TAKE WHAT IS FREE

16. **Qxa1+ Bc1 Qxc1+ Qd1+ Qxd1#**

TAKE WHAT IS FREE

17. **Qxf8+ Ka7 Qxf4**

TAKE WHAT IS FREE

18. **Nxe4 Bxd8 Nxd2**

TAKE WHAT IS FREE

19. **Qxb1+ Qe1 Qxe1+ Rxe1 Rxe1+**

TAKE WHAT IS FREE

20. **Qxb8+ Qc8 Qxc8#**

TAKE WHAT IS FREE

21. **Qa4+ Bb5 Qxb5+**

THE FORK

22. **Nb3+ Kc3 Nxa1**

THE FORK

23. **Rd8+ Kh7 Qd3+ Qg6 Qxe2**

THE FORK

24. **Ng3+ Kf4 Nxh1**

THE FORK

25. **Qg5+ Kb1 Qxg6**

THE FORK

26. **Ne2+ Kf1 Nxd4**

THE FORK

27. **Ne3+ Ke6 Nxf1**

THE FORK

Where more than one move is written, the second is the opponent's best reply and the third is yours again. If the opponent plays something else, look for the same idea: it is still there.

And the rest

28. **Ne6+ Kg8 Nxf8**

THE FORK

29. **Rf7+ Bg7 Rxe7**

THE FORK

30. **Ng3#**

THE PIN

31. **Rxg3 Rxg3 Qxf4**

THE PIN

32. **Rxd1+ Bf1 Ne2+ Kh1 Rxf1#**

THE PIN

33. **Qh5+ g6 Nxg6 hxg6 Qxh8**

THE PIN

34. **Bf5 Qxf5 gxf5**

THE PIN

35. **Nh5+ Kf8 Nxf6**

THE PIN

36. **Bf5 Bxf8 Bxe4+**

THE PIN

37. **Rc1+ Re1 Rxe1#**

THE BACK RANK

38. **Qxf7+ Kh8 Qf8+ Rxf8 Rxf8#**

THE BACK RANK

39. **Rg8+ Rxg8 Rxg8#**

THE BACK RANK

40. **Ra8+ Rc8 Rxc8#**

THE BACK RANK

41. **Qf2+ Kh1 Qf1+ Rxf1 Rxf1#**

THE BACK RANK

42. **Qe1+ Rxe1 Rxe1#**

THE BACK RANK

43. **Qxf2+ Kh1 Qf1+ Rxf1 Rxf1#**

THE BACK RANK

44. **Rxa6+ bxa6 Ra7#**

MATE IN TWO

45. **Qxg6+ Kh8 Qg7#**

MATE IN TWO

46. **Rh3+ Kg8 Rh8#**

MATE IN TWO

47. **Nf3+ gxf3 Qh2#**

MATE IN TWO

48. **Qg6+ Kh8 Nf7#**

MATE IN TWO

49. **g5+ Kh5 Rxh7#**

MATE IN TWO

50. **Qxf7+ Kh8 Nxg6#**

MATE IN TWO

51. **Be6+ Kh8 Qxf8#**

MATE IN TWO

52. **Ng3+ hxg3 Rh5#**

MATE IN TWO

53. **Qg6+ Kh8 Qxh6#**

MATE IN TWO

54. **Rxh6+ gxh6 Qxh6#**

MATE IN TWO

Where more than one move is written, the second is the opponent's best reply and the third is yours again. If the opponent plays something else, look for the same idea: it is still there.

WHAT NEXT

Play, lose, look, play again

Sixty puzzles is a start. The rest is games: real ones, against real people, that you sometimes lose. After each one, set up the position where it went wrong and ask the three questions from page 15. That is the whole method, and it works at every level there is.

Every puzzle in this book came from a real game played on the free site Lichess, whose puzzle collection is open for anyone to use. If you want more, there are millions, and they are free too.

The two younger books in this library, *The Little Explorers of Dublin* and *First Moves*, are for a younger brother or sister. Pass them on.





Little Chess Explorers

Real Games is the Little Chess Explorers programme for 3rd to 6th Class, on paper: the ideas that win games at that age, each shown in a real position and practised in puzzles. This book is free: read it, print it, and pass it on.

All sixty puzzles are from the open Lichess puzzle database, each verified by engine there and checked again here against the rules of chess before it was printed.

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