

# **365 Steps to Tactical Mastery**

**Daily bite-sized puzzles to improve  
your tactical ability**

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# **365 Steps to Tactical Mastery**

**Daily bite-sized puzzles to improve  
your tactical ability**

**Thinkers' Chess Academy with  
Grandmaster Thomas Luther  
Volume 5**

**Heinz Brunthaler**

**Thinkers Publishing 2024**



## Key to Symbols

|    |                                               |
|----|-----------------------------------------------|
| !  | a good move                                   |
| ?  | a weak move                                   |
| !! | an excellent move                             |
| ?? | a blunder                                     |
| !? | an interesting move                           |
| ?! | a dubious move                                |
| □  | only move                                     |
| ⊙  | zugzwang                                      |
| =  | equality                                      |
| ∞  | unclear position                              |
| ∞  | with compensation for the sacrificed material |
| ±  | White stands slightly better                  |
| ∓  | Black stands slightly better                  |
| ±  | White has a serious advantage                 |
| ∓  | Black has a serious advantage                 |
| +− | White has a decisive advantage                |
| −+ | Black has a decisive advantage                |
| →  | with an attack                                |
| ↑  | with initiative                               |
| ↔  | with counterplay                              |
| Δ  | with the idea of                              |
| ⌒  | better is                                     |
| ≤  | worse is                                      |
| +  | check                                         |
| #  | mate                                          |

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GM Thomas Luther (Editor) *"Hand- und Arbeitsbuch für den Schachtrainer"*, Vol. I-III; Dresden 2020;

Nimzowitsch, Aaron: *"My System - 21st Century Edition"*, Edited by Lou Hays; London 1991;

Selected games from "The Week in Chess.com" downloads.

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# Introduction

## Requirements for the work with this book:

You should know the basics well and no longer make random moves frequently;

You should know the elementary endgames king & queen/rook vs. king;

You should have played chess for at least about six months and in this time gained some practical experience;

You should have a standard size chess set (king's height about 90+ mm and the squares about 5 x 5 cm). If your set is a bit smaller it is sufficient to start with, but it is good to adjust as early as possible to the standard tournament size.

It is not advisable to play with funny or artful chess pieces, such as Mickey Mouse-style, Romans, barbarians or fantasy characters etc. A chess set is inexpensive and can be used for a lifetime. You should not avoid this little investment – it will help you to become a better chess player.

## Foreword

Perhaps you learned chess not so long ago and/or you are on beginner's level and want to become a better player? The way to reach this goal is usually to start learning. And there's a lot to learn: about the opening with all the tricks and pitfalls, tactics & strategy, the endgame ... Sounds like hundreds of hours training are waiting for you!

You may not have the time or patience to study chess systematically. That will prevent you from becoming a master. But to simply become a better player, to have some more understanding of chess, it's not necessary to work so hard. A little lesson or task every day should improve your chess without too much effort over the period of one year.

In this book we've collected typical positions and situations frequently seen on the board. If you know these, you can avoid a lot of typical mistakes. Or, even better, you can exploit your opponent's mistakes.

Choose a time of the day you can nearly always look at one of our examples. It doesn't have to be long, in most cases 5-10 minutes should do. What is important is, to work a little bit on your chess almost *every day*. If you do so, after a while your brain will adapt to chess, making it easier for you to find the right plan or move. Our brain can and will adjust to every task regularly required of it; be it multiplication, word puzzles, or finding chess moves.

Always have a good look at the diagram at the beginning of your little training session. What can you discover in the position? Are there acute threats? Is there something you should keep in mind? Who has advantage, or is the position about equal? After finding out as much as possible, start with the given task or find the answer to the question.

If you have the answer (or at least think so, 😊) look at the solution. Follow the moves of the solution carefully on the diagram. If you are not sure – especially after a few months when the exercises are more complicated – set up the position on a real board and look again.

We start with mate or advantage in 2 moves (the execution of material gain may need some more moves after the motif is visible.) It's about the level of rating 1000 - 1200 (class E) During the year we increase the level to three or four moves, and



sometimes more. This is what a class C player (1400 - 1600) should see/can calculate and what is necessary to use tactics in practical games.

If you cannot find the solution after about five minutes; stop and look at the solution. As a rule, what we cannot find in this time can in most cases not be found in more time. Don't be sad or angry if you cannot solve as many examples as you may have expected. Our aim is not to set a new world record for solving, but to learn. And in many cases, you'll learn most from an example you could not solve as it gives you new knowledge and experience.

If you already have some practical experience, you can solve the examples at the beginning in "rapid-fire style" until you reach your level. But don't skip them. Sometimes there may be something you should know better. But do not solve too many puzzles in one session – when we learn something new, we need time to process it and store it in our memory. You can do this with a few examples (let's say 3 to 6) but probably not too many more. To work through a whole month in one session is not a good idea. We fully understand that you want to become a stronger player as soon as possible, but to improve in chess... patience is essential!

And now let's start your year of fun with chess!



### **For all readers not familiar with chess notation:**

You may not like it, but without a good knowledge of the notation of chess moves and games, no real progress is possible. If you are not fully familiar with the notation, start this book by studying the chapter "The Notation" in the appendix. You may find it boring, but in any sport there are some basics you have to do if you truly want to become better.

An additional benefit of chess notation is that you can communicate with other chess players or teachers/trainers much more easily. Instead of long-winded explanations like, "I moved the pawn in front of the king in my castled position two squares ahead", you can simply say "g2-g4" and anyone will know what you mean.

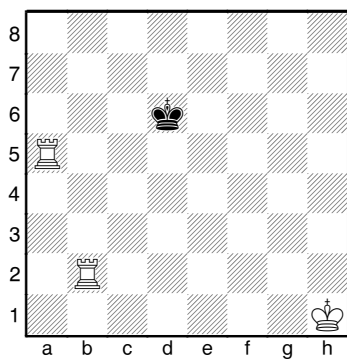
And furthermore, to use notation makes it easier for you to calculate long lines. If you verbalize the moves in your brain in the way of chess notation, concentrated thinking is easier. It may not mean much to you now, but trust us, it will be a great help as soon as you get stronger.



# Month 1

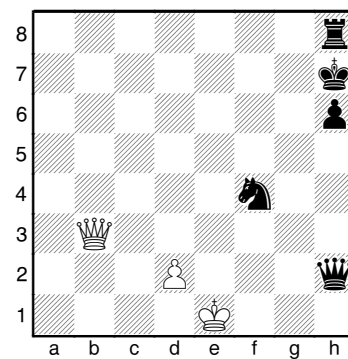
## No. 1 - 30

At the start of our training, you will see typical elementary mate or material advantage combinations in mostly 1 to 2 moves. If you are already more experienced, feel free to work through this chapter quicker. But don't skip it! There may be something you miss and repetition is always essential for learning.



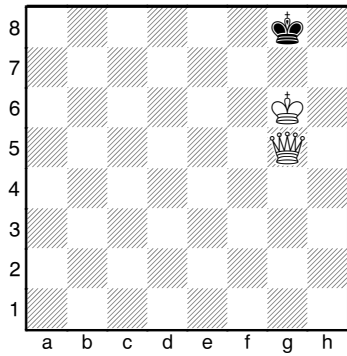
1.

Do you know how to give check-mate with two rooks?



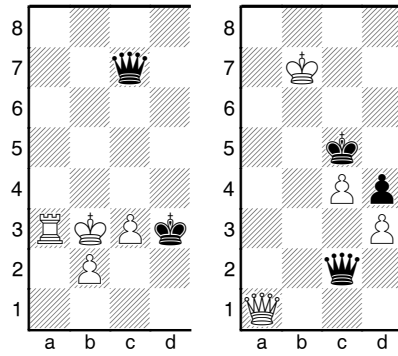
2. ○ / ●

Which queen can give checkmate?



3.

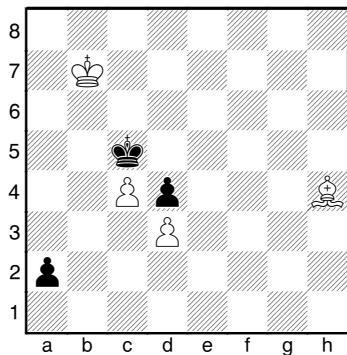
Which is best:  
Moving the queen or the king?



4.a ●

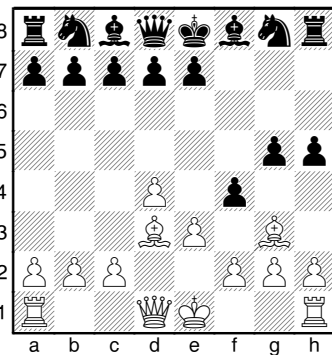
4b ○

What mating threats did White (left)  
and Black (right) miss?



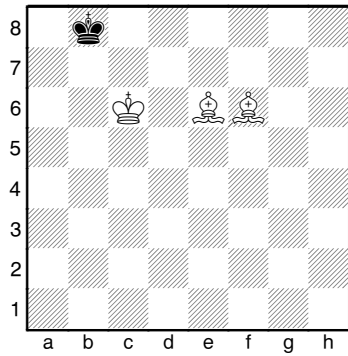
5.

Was Black's last move ...a3-a2 a  
good idea?



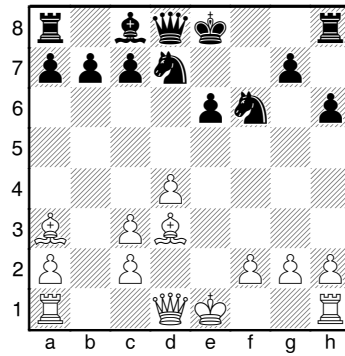
6.

Black stormed ahead with his  
pawns. Was this is a good idea?



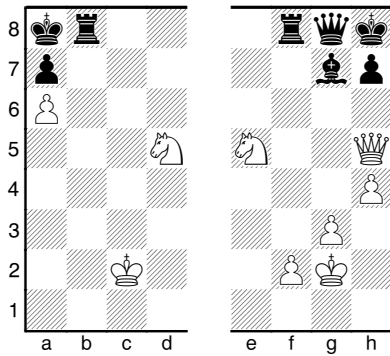
7.

The elementary ending with two bishops against the king - can you finish Black off?



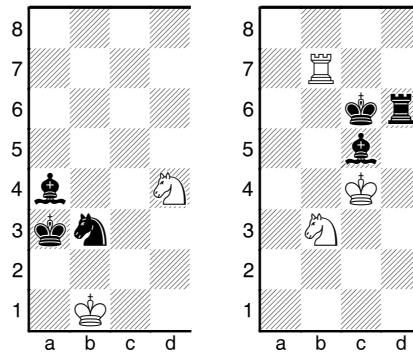
8.

What has Black overlooked?



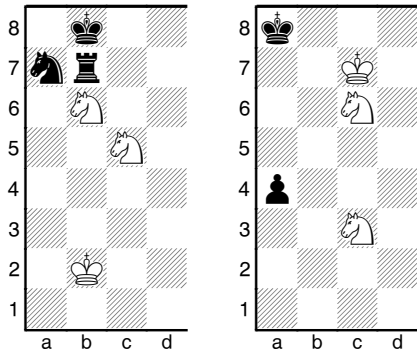
9.a / 9.b

Cramped positions are the knight's favorite food!



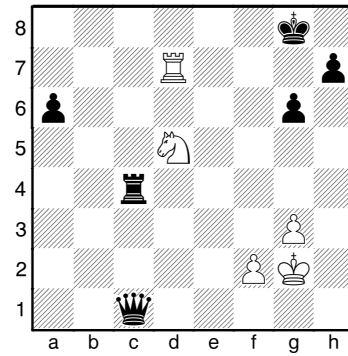
10.a / 10.b

Here you can see a special ability of the knight! White to play and win.



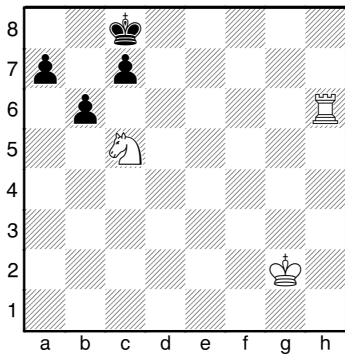
11.a / 11.b

Find mate with the pair of knights!



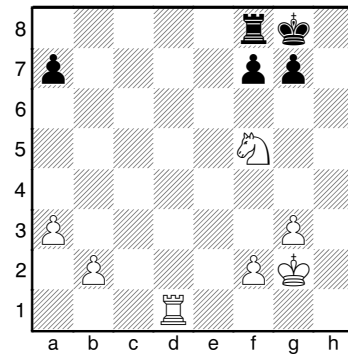
12.

Now rook and knight attack the black king together. Can they win?



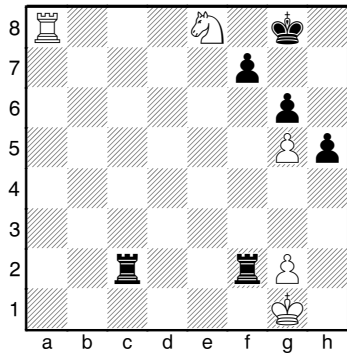
13.

Can Black's last move ...b7-b6 save his king?



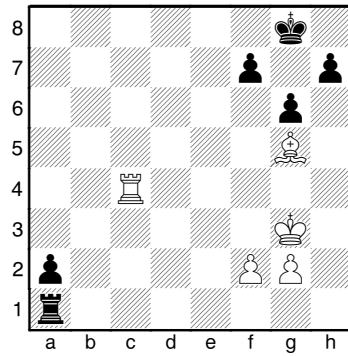
14.

Is the black king safe?



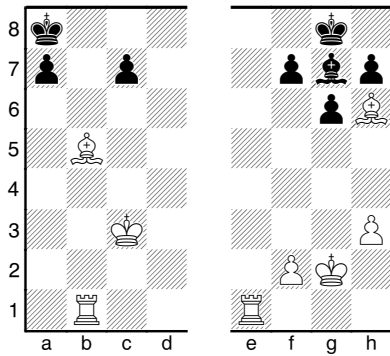
15. ○ / ●

Can White win?  
Can Black to move defend himself?



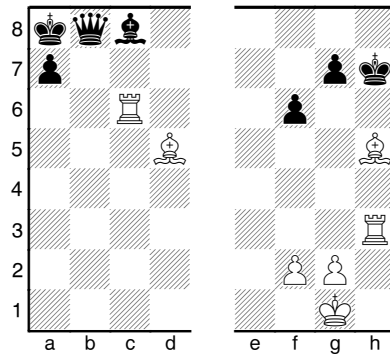
16.

How can rook and bishop win?



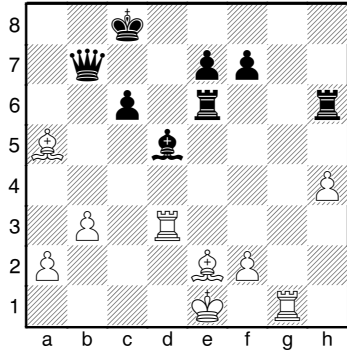
17.a / 17.b

Find the mate!



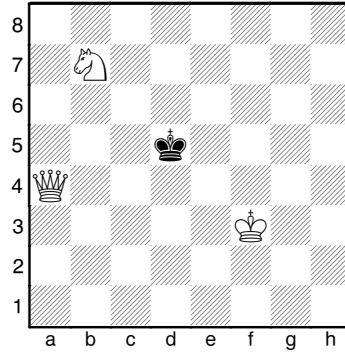
18.a / 18.b

Discovered attacks bring the bishop into action. Do you see how?



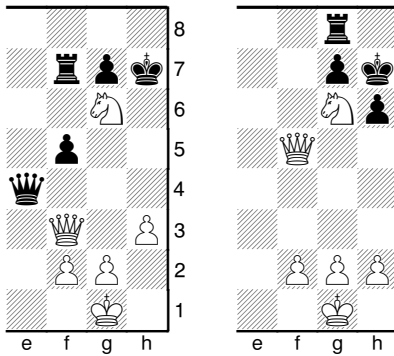
19.

Black looks like a sure winner.  
But is White really lost?



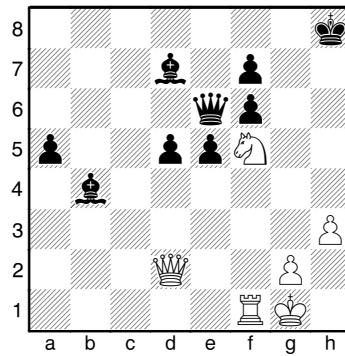
20.

Find the quickest mate!



21.a / 21.b

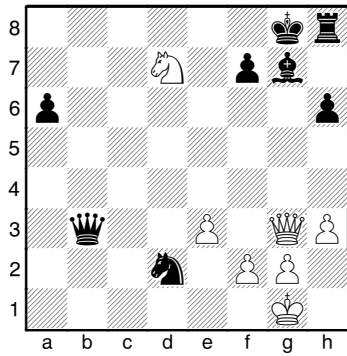
Find the mate with queen and knight!



22.

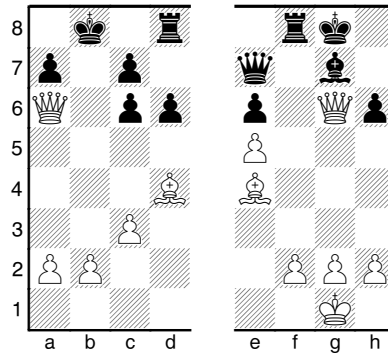
Why was Black's last move  
... ♖f8-b4 a big mistake?





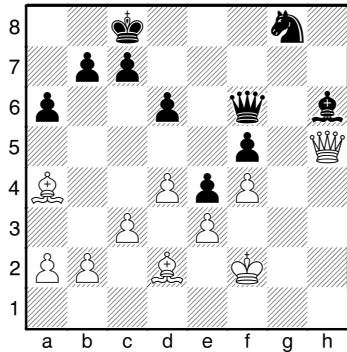
23. ○ / ●

Both sides felt safe against the opponent's attack. Were they right?



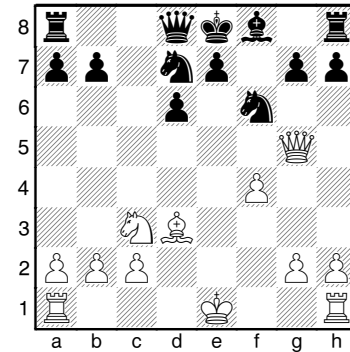
24.a / 24.b

a) How should we capture the pawn? With bishop or queen?  
b) Find the mate!



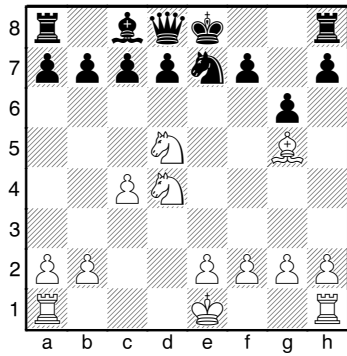
25.

Material is equal but Black has missed something very important. Can you find it?

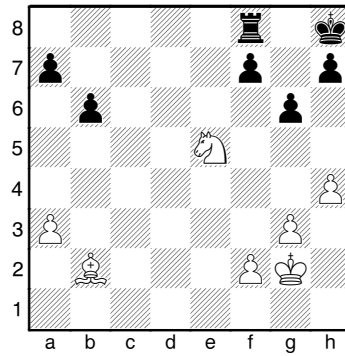


26.

If you develop your pieces, you'll never have the problem Black faces here!



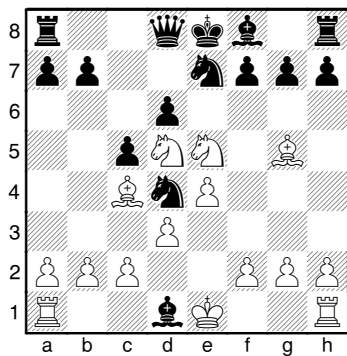
27.



28.

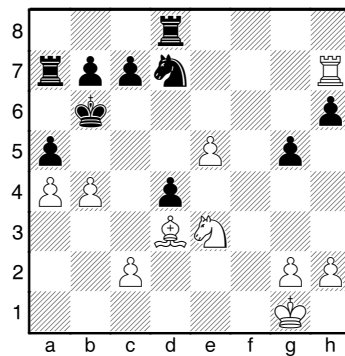
Punish Black for his careless play!

With a discovered check White can win the exchange. But is there more?



29.

White has just given up his queen. Can you work out why he did this?

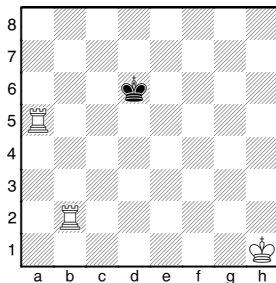


30.

And at the end of the month, a complicated position. Can you find a mate?

## First Month

### Solutions for days 1 - 30

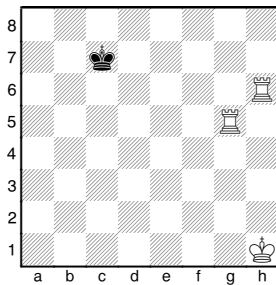


1.

If the opponent's king is not near the rooks, then mate is very easy. Each rook skips ahead two squares and its checkmate on the back rank, as we will see. Here, initially it's more difficult as the king is near the rooks:

1. ♖b2-b6+ ♔d6-c7 2. ♖b6-h6

We move both rooks to the other side and the king cannot follow:

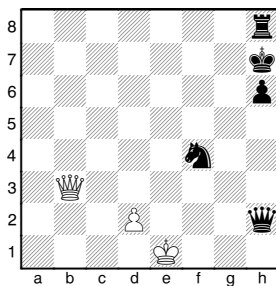


D2

2... ♔c7-b7 3. ♖a5-g5 ♔b7-c7 (D2)

Now we have the typical mating pattern with two rooks!

4. ♖g5-g7+ ♔c7-d8 5. ♖h6-h8#

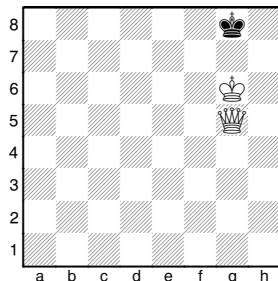


2.

Both queens can deliver checkmate. Black even has two mating squares:

○ 1. ♛b3-f7#

● 1.-- ♛h2-e2# and 1... ♛h2-g1#

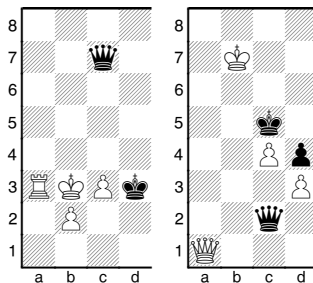


3

The queen is the best choice. If the king stands on the edge of the board, the opponent's queen can attack from distant squares:

1. ♛g5-d8#

1. ♔g6-h6+ needs much longer for a mate; or  
 1. ♔g6-f6+ ♔g8-f8 2. ♛g5-g7+ ♔f8-e8  
 3. ♛g7-e7#

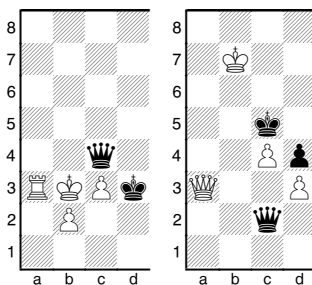


4a

4b

The trickiest mate with the queen is the one diagonal to the enemy king. It can happen if the king is hampered by his own or enemy pieces. It's often not easy to see and can be a bad surprise as we see here in both positions:

4a) Normally White could expect a draw. His position is called a "fortress"; the queen can only give perpetual check but not win. But the last move Ra5-a3? was a huge mistake:



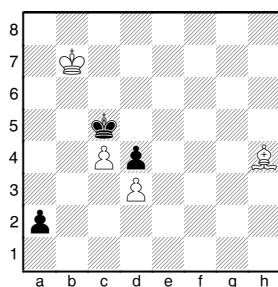
D2a

D2b

1... ♛c7-c4# (D2a)

4b) 1. ♛a1-a7+ ♔c5-b4 2. ♛a7xd4 wins only a pawn and maybe after a long and grueling endgame the game. But out of the blue...

1. ♛a1-a3# (D2b)

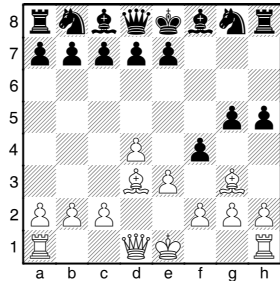


5

Black's last move ...a3-a2? heading for promotion and avoiding the bishop skewer was understandable, but a big mistake. 1... ♔c5-d6 or 1... ♔c5-b4 wins, try it out!

The bishop has only a small part of the queen's power but can give the diagonal mate too:

1. ♗h4-e7#

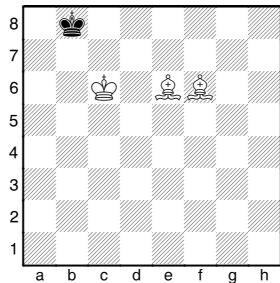


6

No, the pawn avalanche was certainly a very bad idea. Black should have developed his pieces instead. The diagonal e8 to h5 is the king's vulnerable spot during the opening:

1. ♖d3-g6#

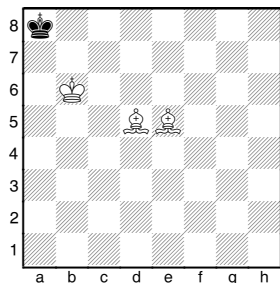
Or even more dramatic with the queen sacrifice: 1. ♔d1xh5+ ♚h8xh5 2. ♖d3-g6#



7

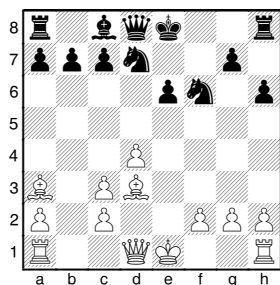
Two rooks can win on their own. Two bishops need help from their king, otherwise the enemy king can escape. The bishop pair stands on parallel diagonals therefore forming a barrier the king cannot overstep. With every move the king's space is narrowed down until he is checkmated in the corner:

1. ♖c6-b6 ♔b8-a8
2. ♖f6-d4 ♔a8-b8
3. ♖d4-e5+ ♔b8-a8
4. ♖e6-d5# (D2)



D2

This elementary mate is rare. More interesting for you is to see how the bishop barrier works, cutting the board and driving the king into a corner. You can use this method sometimes in the middle game.

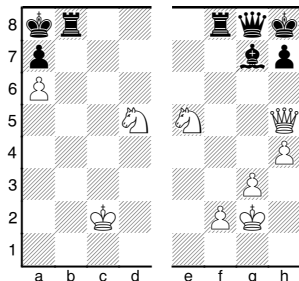


8

The distant, inconspicuous bishop on a3 supports the mate:

1. ♖d3-g6#

Such a threat from a faraway piece you barely have on the "radar" is tricky. Don't only look at the part of the board where the "action" is, but try to see the whole board!



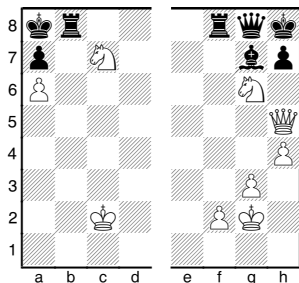
9.a

9.b

The knight knows a lot of tricky mates. He is especially effective against a king in the corner or in a cramped position

9.a) 1.♞d5-c7# (D2a)

The knight is the only piece which can attack over the opponent's pieces. This is even more dangerous if it comes together with other motifs, as here the pin of the pawn on h7:

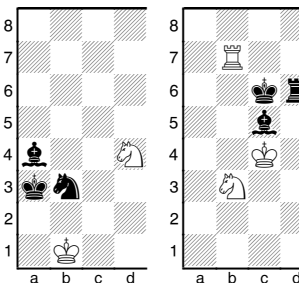


D2a

D2b

9.b) 1.♞e5-g6# (D2b)

If you try to play defensively by withdrawing your pieces into a tight bunch, you often do the knight a favor!



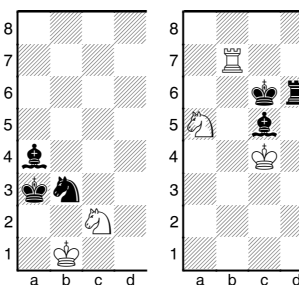
10.a

10.b

A specialty of the knight is his ability to attack and simultaneously take away the adjacent square, as we see in 10.a):

1.♞d4-c2# (D2a)

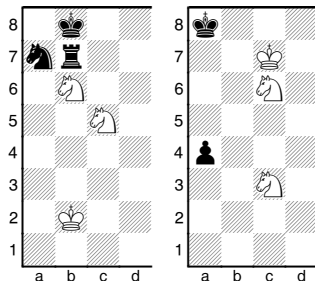
In 10.b) we see another important ability of the knight. He can attack with check and with the same move protect another piece (here the rook). This makes a lot of mates possible.



D2a

D2b

1.♞b3-a5# (Db2)



11.a

11.b

One knight can cause a lot of trouble and the pair of knights is even more dangerous.

11a.) The pair of knights can checkmate a king who is restricted by his own pieces:

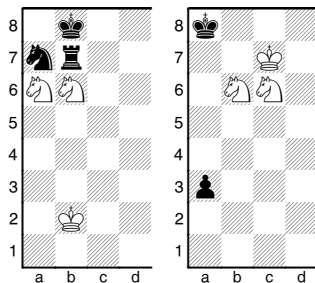
1. ♖c5-a6# (D2a)

11.b) In the endgame you cannot force a win with two knights as the opponent's king can escape into stalemate. But, if they have a pawn left, they can often lose:

1. ♖c3-d5

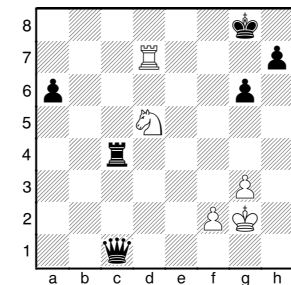
If 1. ♖c3xa4?? stalemate!

1...a4-a3 2. ♖d5-b6# (D2b)



D2a

D2b



12

The knight works well together with other pieces, here with the rook. But here the pairing can only secure a draw.

1. ♖d5-f6+ ♔g8-f8

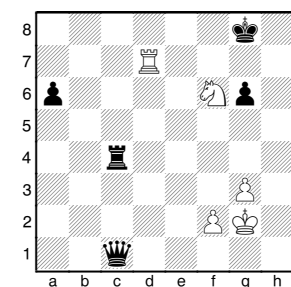
And not 1...♔g8-h8?? 2. ♖d7xh7#

This is the oldest checkmate. It's known from the ancient Arabian chess, the ancestor of our modern game, in which most pieces were slower than today. E.g. the queen could not move much better than a pawn. It's called the "Arabian mate", and can appear in different types, often supported by an opponent's pieces which stand in the way of their king.

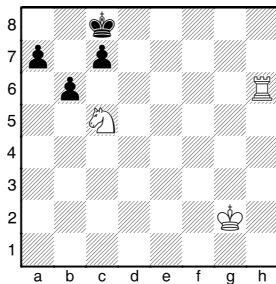
2. ♖f6xh7+ ♔f8-g8/e8

3. ♖h7-f6+ (D2)

And a draw by perpetual check!



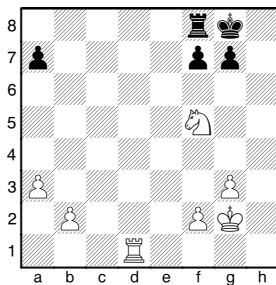
D2



13

No, not at all. The king cannot escape as the knight has control over both escape squares (b7/d7). Necessary was ...c7-c6 or ...Kc8-d8. Now follows...

1. ♖h6-h8#

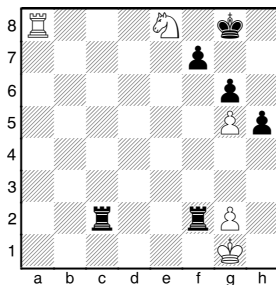


14

No, the king is lost. But the mate is not as obvious as in the example before:

1. ♞f5-e7+ ♔g8-h7 2. ♖d1-h1#

The "trick" for the attacker as well as for the defender is to imagine the position after the check. Concentrate and try to picture the resulting position if you plan to give a check or if your opponent can give you a check.



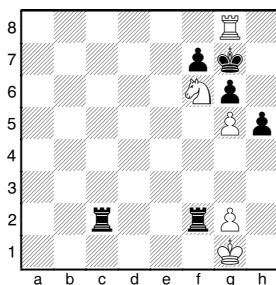
15

The black king has more space than in the previous example but it's not enough:

1. ♞e8-f6+ Double check!  
1... ♔g8-g7 2. ♖a8-g8# (D2)

**Black** to move can defend the mate:

1... ♖f2xg2+ 2. ♔g1-f1 ♖g2xg5



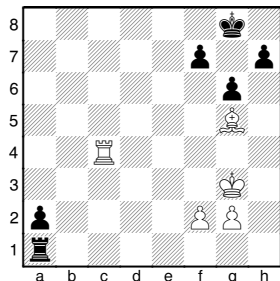
D2

And after the elimination of the outpost pawn on g5, the mate threat is no longer real. Black can go for a win.

Instead of capturing the pawn Black can also secure a draw with the perpetual check

2... ♖g2-h2+ 3. ♔h1-g1 ♖h2-g2+ etc., =



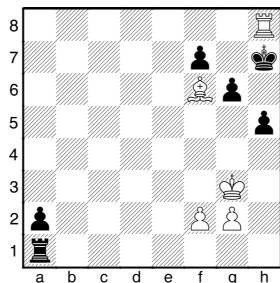


16

Rook and bishop are especially effective if the king's castle has holes, as here on f6, g7 and h6:

**1. ♖g5-f6** and Black can only delay the mate. It always ends **2. ♜c4-c8#**

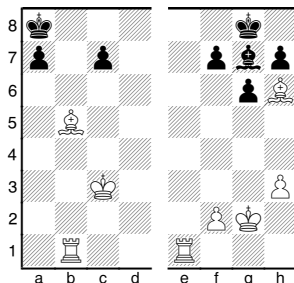
Not better 1...h7-h5 2. ♜c4-c8+ ♔g8-h7 3. ♜c8-h8# (D2)



D2

A mistake would be **1. ♖g5-h6?** f7-f6 and the king can escape.

Be careful with pawn moves in front of your king! Especially if the opponent still has their queen or a bishop of the same color as your holes (they are called "**weak squares**").



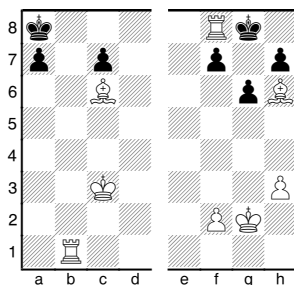
17.a

17.b

**(17a)** The king in the corner falls victim to rook and bishop. The latter moves to open the file for the rook, thus taking away the escape square of the king:

**1. ♖b5-c6#** (D2a)

**(17b)** Black's last move ...Bf6-g7 cannot prevent the mate. The only way to do that would be ...Bf6-e5 Re1xe5 and ...f7-f6/f5; but the endgame is hopeless.



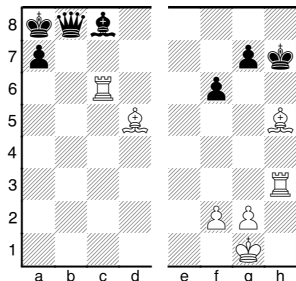
D2a

D2b

**1. ♜e1-e8+ ♖g7-f8 2. ♜e8xf8#** (D2b)

Against rook and bishop, holes in the king's castle are even worse than against rook and knight. We cannot repeat it often enough:

**Beware of unnecessary pawn moves in front of your king!**



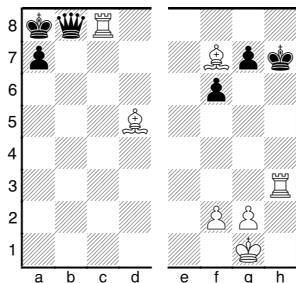
18.a

18.b

(18a) With a discovered attack White pins the queen and gives check:

1. ♖c6xc8# (D2a)

This can easily be missed as Black's position looks well defended by the king's two "body-guards" – queen and bishop.

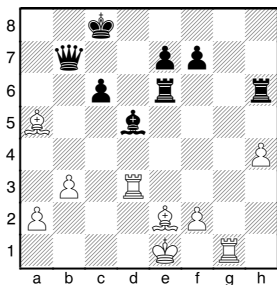


D2a

D2b

(18b) Similar to the knight, the bishop can control two escape squares, leading here through a discovered check to mate:

1. ♗h5-f7# (D2b)

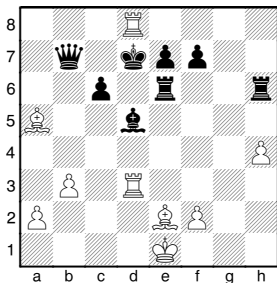


19

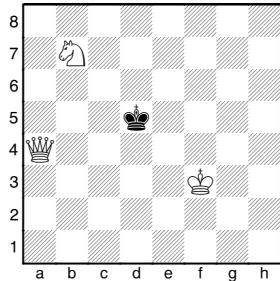
There are many more mating positions with rook and bishop than we can show here. Some of them you'll see later in the book, and some are not as easy as the ones in our exercises, but really tricky. Here a nice example:

1. ♖g1-g8+ ♗c8-d7 2. ♖g8-d8# (D2)

That's enough for rook and bishop for now as the queen very urgently wants to show you some of her special tricks over the next few days.



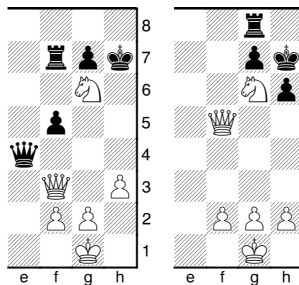
D2



20

1. ♔a4-e4#

The fastest mate. It's astonishing how many squares queen and knight cover together; giving mate on a seemingly empty board. Naturally there are a lot of other winning ways, but the second quickest mate needs 6 moves!



21.a

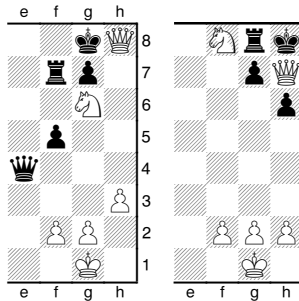


21.b

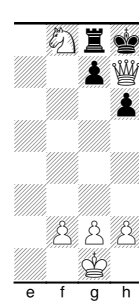
The ability of the queen to move like a bishop and a rook makes many mate motifs possible.

In 21a) The queen moves like a bishop, checking and at the same time defending the knight. On the next move she moves like a rook:

1. ♔f3-h5+ ♔h7-g8 2. ♔h5-h8# (D2a)



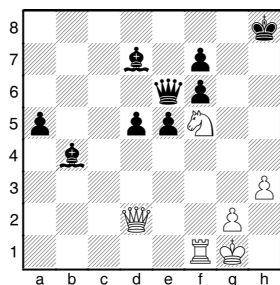
D2a



D2b

21b) A discovered attack by the knight is often devastating. Even more if it's a double check, like here:

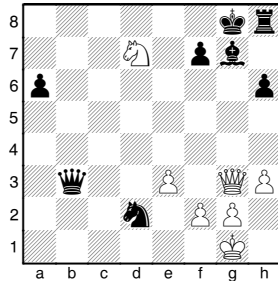
1. ♘g6-f8+ Double check! ♔h7-h8  
2. ♔f5-h7# (D2b)



22

Yes, it was Black's final mistake in the game. The bishop was the defender of the h6-square, which is now used by the white queen:

1. ♔d2-h6+ ♔h8-g8 2. ♔h6-g7#

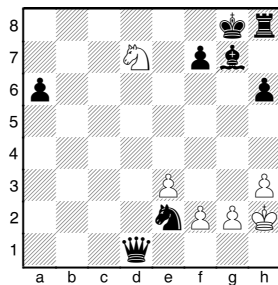


23

Black felt safe as his queen defends the checking square on b8. But he missed another mate motif:

1. ♘d7-f6+ ♔g8-f8 2. ♕g3-d6#

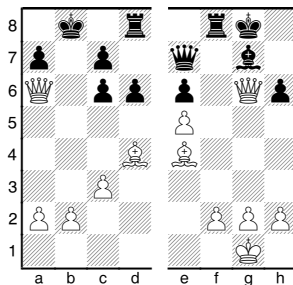
Despite White's escape square on h2 **Black** can win the queen and give checkmate – it needs several moves and is not easy to see:



D2

1... ♕b3-d1+/b1+  
 2. ♔g1-h2 ♘d2-f1+  
 3. ♔h2-g1 ♗f1xg3+  
 4. ♔g1-h2 ♘g3-e2 (D2)

And not only is the queen lost but White gets checkmated in 4 moves. Try it out!



24.a

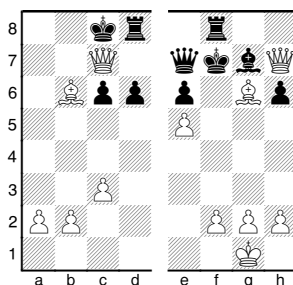
24.b

(24.a) 1. ♕a6xa7+? lets the king escape:

1... ♔b8-c8 2. ♕a7-a8+ ♔c8-d7

A checkmate motif worth memorizing appears after...

1. ♗d4xa7+ ♔b8-a8  
 2. ♗a7-b6+ ♔a8-b8  
 3. ♕a6-a7+ ♔b8-c8  
 4. ♕a7xc7# (D2a)

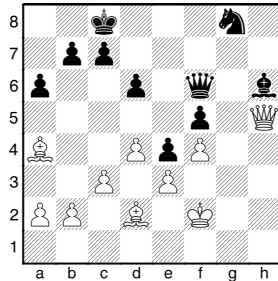


D2a

D2b

(24.b) If queen and bishop are standing on the same diagonal it's called a **"battery"**. A battery is a strong tool for the attacker and can decide a game:

1. ♕g6-h7+ ♔g8-f7 2. ♗e4-g6# (D2b)

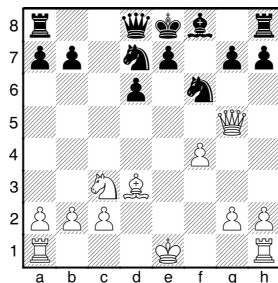


25

**1. ♖h5-e8+ ♜f6-d8 2. ♗a4-d7+!**  
The pinned black queen cannot capture the brazen bishop!

**2... ♔c8-b8 3. ♜e8xd8+** and White wins easily.

This maneuver is not easy to see but more than once has been the surprising end to a game. Keep it in mind!

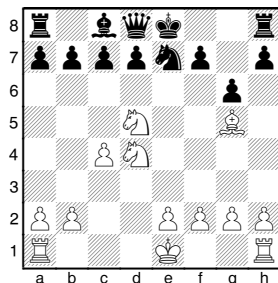


26

Hopefully you did remember No.6 and could solve this exercise in a split second! Again, bad development and a weak diagonal e8 – h5 killed the game on the spot:

**1. ♗d3-g6+ h7xg6 2. ♜g5xg6#**

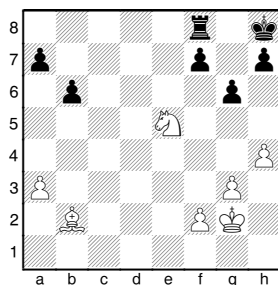
Or with a bit of dramatic flair, using the queen sacrifice **1. ♜g5-g6+ h7xg6 2. ♗d3xg6#**



27

Black has not developed well and did not heed our warnings about holes (weak squares) in the king's position. The squares f6, g7 and h6 are all weak. Okay, take that:

**1. ♘d5-f6+ ♔e8-f8 2. ♗g5-h6#**

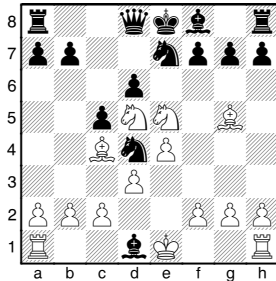


28

Oh yes, there is more! A smart mating attack ends the game quickly:

**1. ♘e5xf7+ Double check! ♔h8-g8 and now 2. ♘f7-h6#**

Not easy to see; especially when winning the exchange is so obvious and may block our deeper thinking.

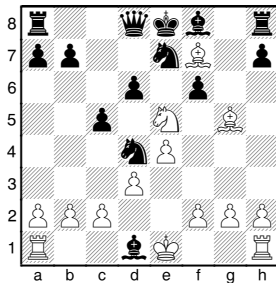


29

Today you see a really famous position. White sacrificed his queen on the last move for an attack by his minor pieces (bishop and knight are called "**minor pieces**", rook and queen are "**heavy pieces**"):

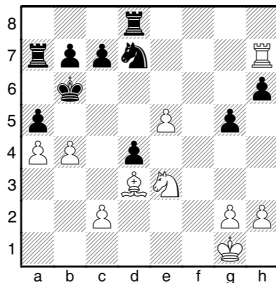
1. ♖d5-f6+ ♗g7xf6 2. ♘c4xf7# (D2)

This mating motif was invented by the French master **de Légal** (1702-1792) and is named after him "**Légal's mate**".



D2

Be careful if your opponent offers material, especially his queen! Think hard and try to find out his intention. Not everyone is a patzer!



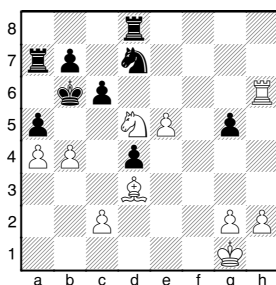
30

If the king is forced to emerge from his safe castled position he is nearly always in grave danger. And even more so if the opponent has some minor pieces:

1. ♖e3-c4+ ♔b6-c6 2. ♘d3-e4#

Or 1... ♕b6-a6 2. b4-b5#

Probably you looked first at



D2

1. ♖h7xh6+ ♗c7-c6 2. ♖e3-d5# (D2)

It's not a genuine forced mate (as Black can give up material to avoid it) but after they are in a truly hopeless position.