

Let's Play Chess

A Step-by-Step Guide for New Players

by Bruce Pandolfini





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2nd Edition
Revised and Enlarged



2009
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
Milford, CT USA

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Bruce Pandolfini

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Introduction

Chess is by far the most popular board game in the world. There are millions of players of all ages and the number keeps growing. This is my attempt to lure you to a challenging and fascinating pastime. It's based on the very same lessons I have given to thousands of beginners. Their questions and problems have shaped it. Moreover, some of the best ideas in the book were actually suggested by new players!

I have tried to be as plain and uncomplicated as possible. Just as certain individual problems are made simpler by partitioning them, I saw a correspondence with learning chess itself. Thus to make your journey a smoother one the fundamentals have been broken down into short, logical statements. Each idea is numbered, ordered, and clearly stated. In most sections statements are linked in graded sequence, with the easier ones preceding the harder. Yet this design is sometimes abandoned for elucidation or aptness. I hope you find the format simple enough to follow and the occasional digressions engaging and clarifying. If the overall approach works you should feel yourself learning step by step.

Throughout I have aimed to show how chess players think about their moves. All the ideas are expressed in words, so you don't have to struggle with variations of chess notation before seeing where a thought is going. Explanation has taken precedence over calculation, and the stress has been placed on understanding, not memory. There are also plenty of diagrams for almost every idea to provide visual reinforcement. So you should be able to read this book even without a chess set, though you might want to get one anyway. I hear they're useful for play and study. But then you don't really need a physical chess set in today's computer world of software and the Internet. It's all there, on the electronic highway, with access to thousands of sites and zillions of potential players.

How should you use *Let's Play Chess*? To get the most from your efforts, start with the first statement and begin reading in numbered order. Try to cover entire sections in one reading. If a particular point seems confusing don't get bogged down. Just read on. You can always come back after you've thought about it and learned more. Besides, you should be able to read this book and play chess without understanding every single detail right away. And that's one of the charms of chess. Whether you play at the elementary level, with command over almost nothing, or at the top ech-

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elon, as an exponent of the game's greatest principles, it's hard not to lose yourself in an engaging and compelling miniature universe. But that you can judge for yourself starting with statement number one.

Bruce Pandolfini
New York, New York
January 2009

Acknowledgments

I've had enough practice at this and still don't know how to do it. Unquestionably without the efforts of certain people *Let's Play Chess* wouldn't exist, and if it could exist without them it would be something else and something less. For their suggestions and creative work on the first edition I'd like to thank Roselyn Abrahams, Carol Ann Caronia, Bob Hernandez, Paul Hoffman, Idelle Pandolfini, and Iris Rosoff. I'd mention Ludwig Wittgenstein, but that would be a stretch. For their invaluable work on the second edition my appreciation goes to Mark Donlan, who painstakingly set and designed the present text and layout, and Hanon Russell, whose astute editing and thoughtful insights have fueled, guided, and overseen the entire second edition. While all of these able and talented people have improved my effort with their special stamp, the deficiencies in *Let's Play Chess* are entirely mine. Everything else must be passed over in silence.

Section Thirteen: Winning Material

412. Unless your opponent plays badly it's not likely you'll mate him or her early in the game. If you can't force an immediate mate the game could go on for quite some time. With proper defense, even horribly losing positions can be extended for many moves.

413. In such circumstances it's not expected that you see in your mind all the way to the end of the game. If you could you wouldn't need this book. Maybe I'd be reading your book.

414. From the start of a game you should keep your eyes open for mating opportunities. But the schooled player at first doesn't aim so much for mate. Rather he or she, as we've already seen, plays to get the advantage.

415. As already indicated, various factors determine who has the overall advantage in a chess position, with the easiest factor to understand and evaluate being material.

416. Our opponent doesn't want to give up material for nothing. So the usual trick is to win material by deception and counter-deception.

417. Other than taking for nothing, double attack is the main way to win material.

418. A **double attack** is an aggressive move that menaces the opponent in at least two ways simultaneously.

419. Although there are all kinds of double attacks, usually the concept implies issuing threats to at least two different enemy units.

420. Double attacks are examples of tactics. Two words often confused are strategy and tactics.

421. **Strategy** refers to an overall plan. It tends to be general and long term.

422. **Tactics** are the individual operations used to bring about that plan. They tend to be specific and short term.

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423. If strategy is what you are going to do, tactics are how you are going to do it.

424. Tactics are the real meat-and-potatoes of a chess game. It could be that as much as three quarters or better of chess play is tactical.

425. There are five main tactical ideas:

- (a) the fork - an attacker threatens to capture two or more defenders;
- (b) the pin - an attacker forces a defender to shield another;
- (c) the skewer - an attacker forces a defender to expose another;
- (d) discovery - an attacker uncovers the attack of another; and
- (e) undermining - an attacker removes or thwarts defense of another.

426. The two most common tactics are forks and pins.

427. The **fork** is a tactic by which one chess unit directly attacks two or more opposing units on the same move.

428. Every unit is capable of giving a fork.

429. Diagram 139 illustrates a knight fork. The knight attacks the black king and queen simultaneously. After Black moves the king to safety the knight captures the queen.

430. Diagram 140 shows a pawn fork. The pawn forks the knight and the rook. If the knight moves, the pawn captures the rook. If the rook moves anywhere but h4, the pawn captures the knight.

Diagram 139
A knight fork

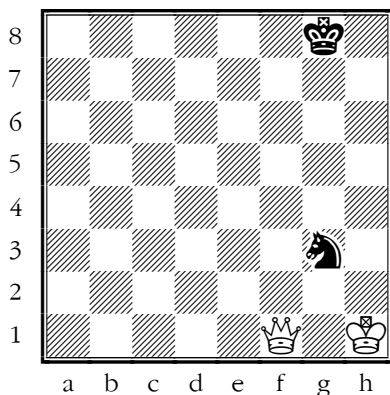


Diagram 140
A pawn fork

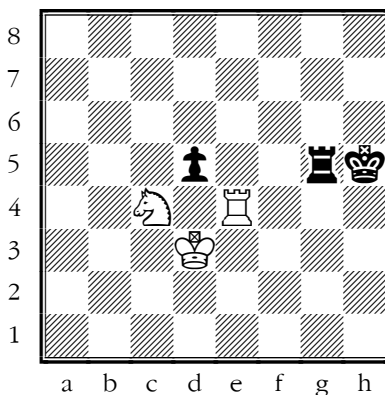


Diagram 141
A bishop fork

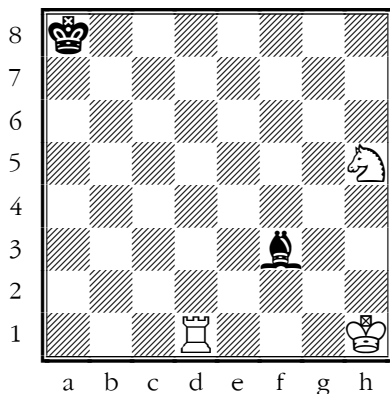
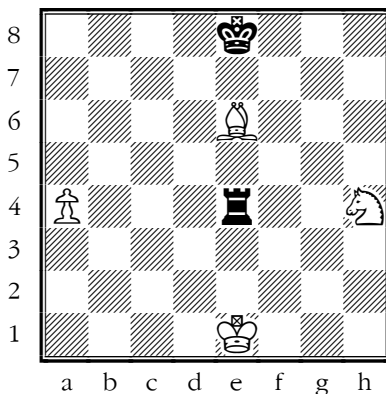


Diagram 142
A rook fork



431. Diagram 141 shows a bishop fork. The bishop forks the king, rook and knight. After White gets out of check the bishop will take the rook.

432. Diagram 142 shows a rook fork. The rook forks the king, bishop, and pawn.

433. Diagram 143 shows a queen fork. The queen forks the white king, rook, knight, bishop, and pawn.

434. In Diagram 144 Black to play can fork the king, queen and rook – known as a **family fork** or a **royal fork**. The solution is **Nd4-c2+**. After White gets out of check the knight will capture the queen.

Diagram 143
A queen fork

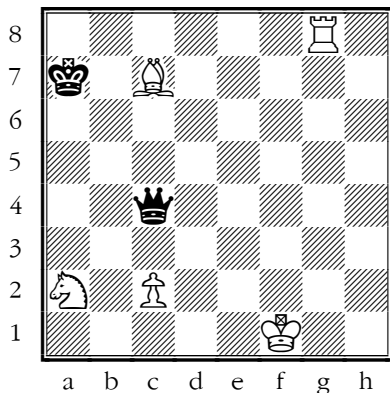
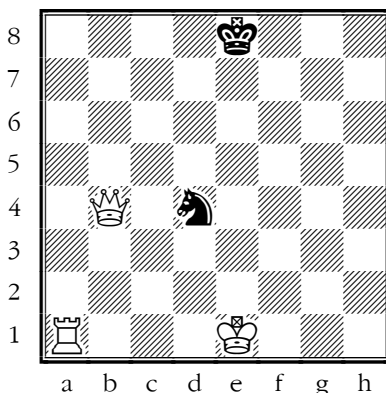


Diagram 144
The knight can fork at c2



435. In Diagram 145 White's queen can capture the pawn, **Qd1xd5+**, thereby forking the black king and rook. After the king gets out of check the rook will be captured.

436. Forks are easy enough to understand, whereas pins are often slightly harder to grasp.

437. The pin is a tactic that prevents an enemy unit from moving off a line. That is, off a rank, file or diagonal. To do so would expose another unit to capture or an important square to attack along the line of the pin.

438. Pins usually involve at least one attacker and two opposing targets.

439. The attacker and its two enemy targets must all be on the same rank, file, or diagonal. In other words a straight line can be drawn through all three units and/or points of interest.

440. Diagram 146 shows a simple pin and should help you to understand the concept. The rook attacks and threatens the knight along the g-file. Black is unable to move the knight to safety because it shields the king from the rook. Thus the knight is frozen or **pinned** and will be captured next move for free.

441. In Diagram 146 the situation is described this way: **the rook pins the knight to the king**. Moreover, all three units – the rook and the two enemy targets – line up on the same file.

442. If you want to use your imagination, picture the rook as a straight pin, the knight as a sheet of paper,

Diagram 145
The queen can fork at d5

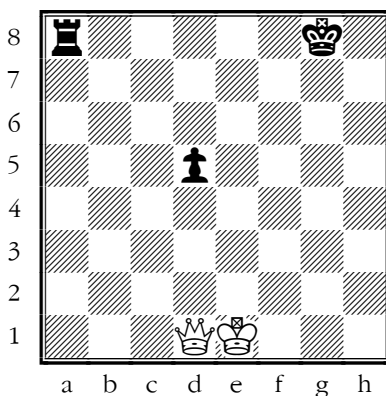
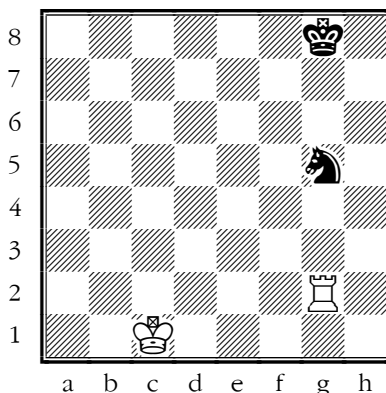


Diagram 146
A simple pin



The knight is lost

and the black king as a bulletin board. This resemblance to a real metal pin partly explains the origin of the word.

443. Only bishops, rooks, and queens – **the line pieces** – can pin.

444. There are two kinds of pins:

- (a) absolute pins; and
- (b) relative pins.

445. An **absolute pin** is a pin to the king. The pinned unit can't move off the line of the pin.

446. A **relative pin** is a pin to any unit other than the king. The pinned unit can legally move off the line of the pin but it may be undesirable to do so.

447. Diagram 146 shows an absolute pin. It's illegal for Black to move the knight.

448. Diagram 147 shows a relative pin. The rook can move but that would expose the queen to capture. There are times when sacrificing the queen might be worth it but this is not one of them.

449. A useful pinning idea occurs in Diagram 148 with Black to play. It starts with the rook moving to e8, pinning the bishop to the king, as shown in Diagram 148a.

450. To protect the bishop White must play d2-d3. That saves the bishop but it remains pinned (Diagram 149).

Diagram 147
A relative pin

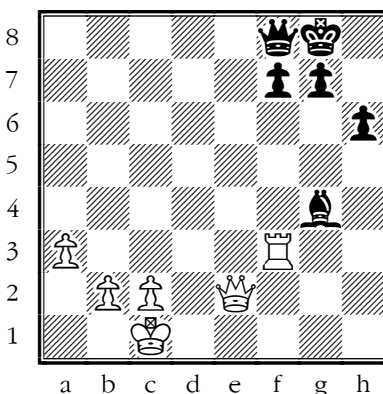
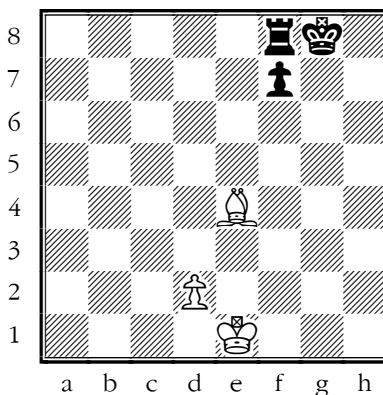


Diagram 148
Black to move



451. Naturally, Black will not take the bishop (worth three pawns) since White's pawn then takes the rook (worth five pawns). That's not a good deal, with Black losing two pawns in value. But there's no need to take the bishop. It's pinned and can't run away.

452. So if it's not immediately desirable to capture a pinned unit, what should one do to it?

453. The answer is to attack the pinned unit once again, especially with something of little value. Thus we see in Diagram 150 that Black plays the f-pawn to f5 and the bishop is lost. The pawn will take the bishop next move.

Diagram 148a
After pinning the bishop

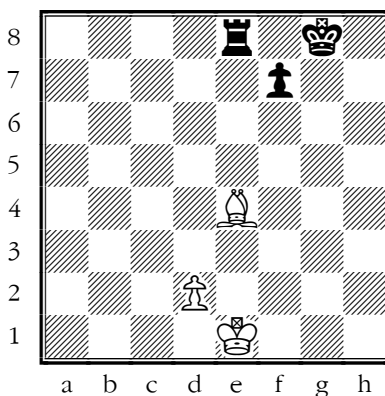


Diagram 149
After defending the bishop

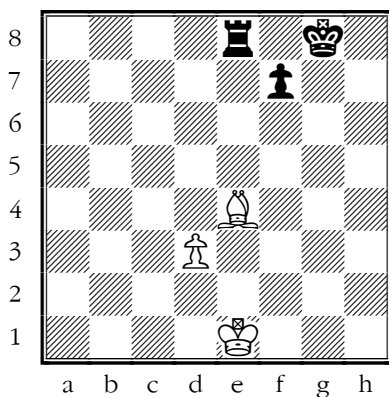
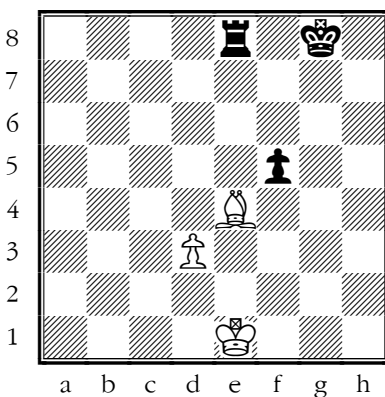


Diagram 150
White's bishop is lost



454. As a rule of thumb try to pin your opponent's pieces.

455. Avoid putting your own pieces in pins.

456. And once you've pinned an enemy unit don't necessarily take it. Make sure capturing it is to your advantage.