

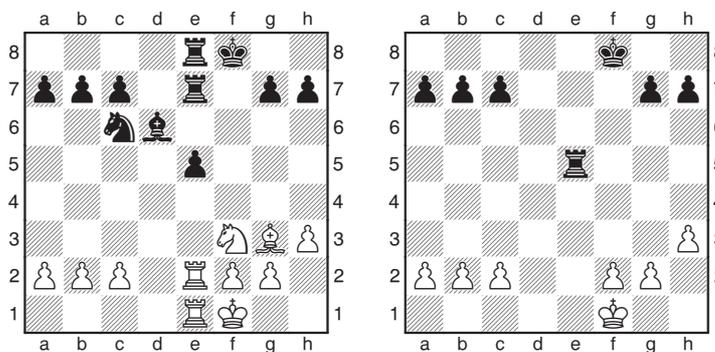
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5 How to Win Material

After having read the last chapter, you might think “That’s all very well; if I win a minor piece, then everything is fine. But how do I win material in the first place?” In this chapter we will cover the most common methods of gaining material. You will have to keep the table of piece values given on page 65 firmly in mind, because it is very rarely possible to win something for nothing; your opponent will usually obtain something in return, and you must make sure that you come out ahead.

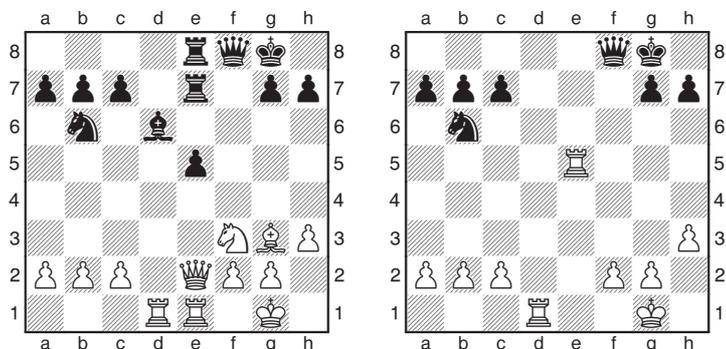
First of all, let’s consider a simple case. You are attacking an enemy piece. Can you take it? If it isn’t defended by another enemy piece, then he can’t recapture and you can probably take it. Of course, it may be a trap and you should always take care before exploiting what looks like an oversight. However, for the moment we will assume that retribution is not about to strike on some other part of the board and the struggle revolves around whether a particular capture is possible or not.



The left-hand diagram is a more complex example. White has several pieces attacking the pawn on e5, and Black has several pieces defending it. Can White take the pawn? The answer is no. Let’s imagine that White starts taking on e5. Play might continue **1**

♞f3xe5? ♕d6xe5 2 ♖g3xe5 ♜c6xe5 3 ♜e2xe5? ♜e7xe5 4 ♜e1xe5 ♜e8xe5. The right-hand diagram shows the result: Black is a rook for a pawn up (an advantage of four points). In this sequence, White made matters worse for himself by his capture on move three; up to this point, he had only lost a knight for a pawn (two points) but he then doubled his deficit by giving away further material. We could have guessed that this sequence would turn out badly for White by counting the pieces in the left-hand diagram: White has four pieces attacking e5, and Black has four pieces defending it. In order to take a particular piece, you normally need **more attackers than the opponent has defenders**. If, for example, we move Black's knight one square to the left, then it is no longer defending the pawn on e5. There are now four attackers and only three defenders, so White can safely take the pawn.

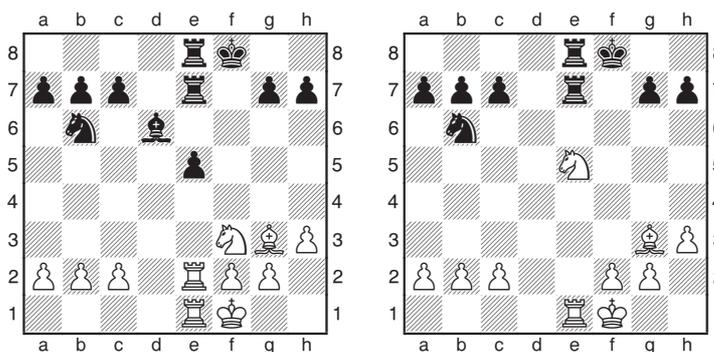
However, the advice given above in bold is not the only factor determining the outcome of a sequence of exchanges. The relative value of the attacking and defending pieces is also important, as is the order in which the captures are made.



The left-hand diagram is similar to the previous position. White has four pieces attacking e5, and Black has only three pieces defending. One might think that White could take the pawn, but look at what happens if he does: 1 ♞f3xe5 ♕d6xe5 2 ♖g3xe5 ♜e7xe5 3 ♜e2xe5 ♜e8xe5 4 ♜e1xe5. Now we have the right-hand diagram. White has two rooks and a pawn (11 points) in return for a queen and a knight (12 points), so Black has come out ahead. The reason for this is that one of the pieces White used to take on e5 was his queen,

which was more valuable than any of the pieces Black surrendered on the same square.

Thus, although the counting advice gives you an indication as to whether a particular capture might succeed, you may have to look at the series of exchanges in more detail to evaluate the result properly. Note that when such a series of exchanges takes place, it is usually best to capture with the **least valuable piece currently available**. Thus as the exchanges proceed, the two players work their way up from the least valuable to the most valuable. The reason for this is that if you take with a more valuable piece first, your opponent may just capture that piece with his least valuable one and stop the series of exchanges at that point.



For example, in the left-hand diagram above, White can win a pawn with 1 Nf3xe5 or 1 Bg3xe5. However, if White starts with 1 Bxe2xe5?? Bg3xe5 2 Nf3xe5 (see the right-hand diagram), Black does not continue with the exchanges (which would again leave White a pawn up) but stops here, having gained a rook (5 points) in return for a bishop and a pawn (4 points), leaving him one point up instead of one down.

Readers should note that while there are lots of general principles and helpful tips which apply in a wide range of chess situations, there are **always exceptions**. It is the specific position in front of you that really matters; you should always supplement general considerations with a careful look at the position on the board. This may sound like one of those ubiquitous little legal disclaimers (the author accepts no responsibility for games lost as a result of reading this