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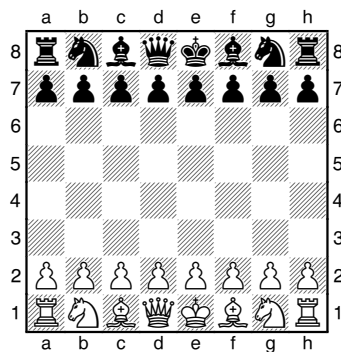
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Lesson 4: The First Obstacles

Now that we know not only the rules of chess but the notation as well, we can proceed to what is often termed the ‘technique’ of the game. How do the rules (which after all are nothing but words on paper) translate into a real game of chess? What is needed for winning a game and what must be avoided? Let us therefore simply start a game and see what problems we encounter while playing.

From here onwards it is advisable to have a real chessboard in front of you while reading this book and physically execute each move that is mentioned. In order to become thoroughly acquainted with chess it is necessary not just to familiarize your thought-processes, but also your *hands* with the actual playing of moves. Reading about chess is fine, but experiencing what it feels like to make a move is better.

I hope you remember the starting position (we saw it earlier in the book), but here it is again:

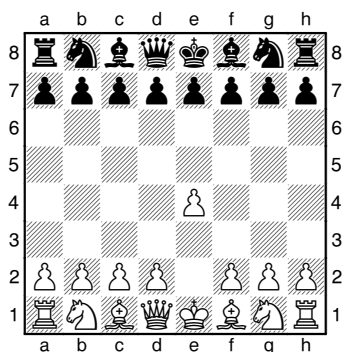


One of the basic characteristics of the starting position is that almost all of the pieces are blocked in. Only the knights can move, and even they have just two possible destination squares: White’s knight on g1 can move to f3 or h3, while the knight on b1 can move to c3 or a3. On the other hand, all the pawns enjoy their maximum

freedom of movement, as they can all move forward one or two squares. Thus it should come as no surprise that the majority of chess games start with a pawn move.

1 e4

As soon as we start discussing moves in a specific position (e.g. the starting position) rather than in general terms, a move number is added to the notation. Thus when the first move is to advance the pawn from e2 to e4, this is noted down as 1 e4 (or 1 e2-e4 in long notation).



Position after 1 e4
Black to move

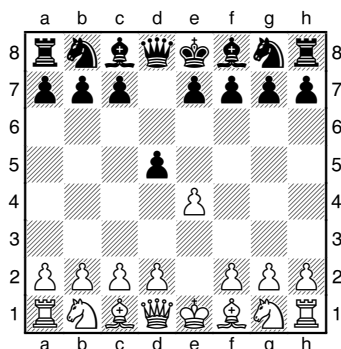
1 e4 and 1 d4 are the most popular first moves. Both moves have the advantage that they open up lines for a bishop and the queen while they also give White a foothold in what is called the *centre* of the board, meaning the four squares e4, d4, e5 and d5. The centre is an area of *strategic importance*, especially in the opening stages of a game, for this is often where the two armies first make contact and where the fighting breaks out.

1...d5

Whenever a move by Black is noted down separately (i.e. without the preceding move by White) we place three dots between the number and the actual notation of the move in order to

Online chess: Follow a high-level event online, trying to understand each move played. While each player is thinking, try to work out what move they are going to play. You can also check your ideas against the computer assessments that many online chess broadcasts feature.

distinguish it from a move by White. This is done to avoid confusion. In a sentence like “37 ♖g5 was a really bad move”, it is important that the reader should understand that it is a move by *White* that is being talked about. Had this been a move by Black, the notation would have read “37... ♜g5”.



Position after 1...d5
White to move

Black also opens up lines for his pieces that are blocked in on the back rank. A *rank*? Yes, in chess terminology a horizontal line is called a rank and a vertical one is a file. Thus we speak of the *a-file* and the *e-file*, but of the first *rank* and the seventh *rank*. The first and eighth ranks are also called *back ranks* if specifically mentioned from either White's or Black's point of view. The first rank is White's back rank, while the eighth rank is Black's back rank.

Note that when we talk of 'lines' in a general sense (e.g., as in 'open lines'), we can mean ranks, files and diagonals.

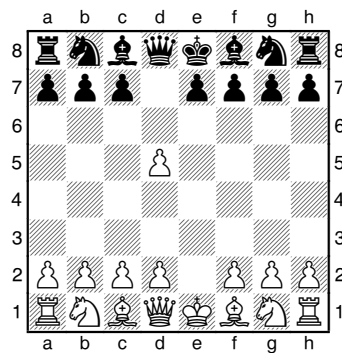
In chess literature, many sequences of initial moves have been given names. This particular *opening* (a word that is used to denote the starting phase of a game) is called the Scandinavian Defence or simply 'the Scandinavian'. The term 'defence' is purely conventional and implies that the defining move of this opening is made by Black, who is *supposed* to be the defender when the game starts. This is due to the fact that it is White who makes the first move, so White is supposed to hold (or to take) the *initiative*. Whether Black (or White) is *really* attacking or defending makes no difference for deciding whether an opening should be called a 'defence' rather than an 'opening'.

The 'initiative' is best defined as 'the ability to create threats'. It is an important feature of chess strategy, and generally a very useful

thing to possess, though not quite the same thing as having an *advantage*.

In this case Black clearly isn't defending, because 1...d5 attacks White's pawn on e4 and if anything this deserves to be called an aggressive move, rather than a defensive one. Still, an attacker should always bear in mind that the enemy can strike too.

2 exd5



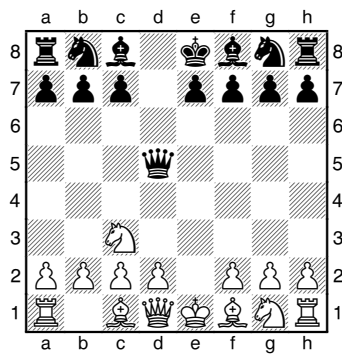
Position after 2 exd5
Black to move

Pawns *move* in a straight line forward, but *capture* diagonally forward. White has now won a pawn, so for the moment, he is a pawn ahead. But Black is able to redress the material balance at once.

2...♔xd5

The black pawn that stood on d5 was *protected* by the black queen. Black has now regained his pawn, and the material balance is restored.

3 ♘c3



Position after 3 ♘c3
Black to move

The battle is heating up. White's knight on c3 is threatening to capture Black's queen. What can Black do about this?

3...♚e5+

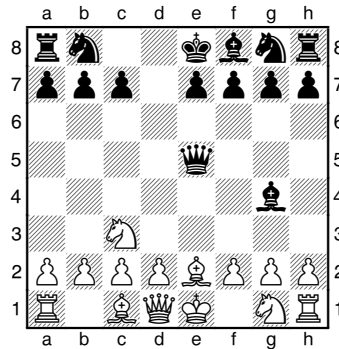
Black's only defence is to move his queen away from the square where it was threatened to another square where it is safe. If we look up this position in chess opening literature (or in a database) we will find that the most popular moves are 3...♚a5, 3...♚d6 and 3...♚d8. These are what are called the *main lines* of the Scandinavian, which means that they are considered the best options for Black by a majority of chess-players. The 'theory' of the Scandinavian, meaning the segment of chess literature that deals with this particular subject, is largely based on these main lines.

But 3...♚e5+ is also a tempting move, because it is *check*. What should White do now?

4 ♔e2

The king itself cannot move, since on e2, its only available square, it would still be in check. So White has to *interpose* a piece between his king and the black queen. 4 ♖e2, 4 ♗ce2 and 4 ♗ge2 were also possible.

4...♗g4



Position after 4...♗g4
White to move

Again Black chooses an aggressive move. He is taking advantage of the white bishop on e2 (the *light-squared bishop*) being 'pinned' in order to place his own light-squared bishop on a square where it would normally be liable to capture (♗xg4).

Whenever a piece is hampered in its freedom of movement because it is either not *allowed* to move (which is the case here: the king can never be exposed to check) or when moving the piece is