

An Introduction to Chess Tactics

The Pin

Richard Westbrook, 2004

In chess, the most difficult moves to defend against are those which contain two (or more) threats. A pin attacks a less valuable piece that is in front of more a valuable piece and is among the most common and dangerous form of double attack. (A skewer attacks a more valuable piece standing in front of a less valuable piece.)

There are two types of pins: absolute and relative. An absolute pin exists when the king is the piece shielded from attack; the piece in front cannot move until the pin is broken. A relative pin exists in all other situations. Both are shown in Diagram 1.

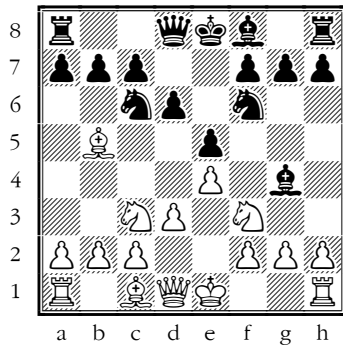


Diagram 1

Black's knight on c6 is caught in an absolute pin against its king and cannot move. White's knight on f3 is in a relative pin against its queen. The knight can move, but White must be willing to suffer the prospect of losing the queen if the knight does move.

One of the most common mistakes in chess is to "forget" that a piece caught in a relative pin can still move! Countless games have been lost this way. A famous trap which dates back to De Legal – St. Brie (Paris, 1750) and exists in many forms is

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1.e4 | e5 |
| 2.Nf3 | d6!? |
| 3.Bc4 | Bg4 |
| 4.Nc3 | g6? |

(See Diagram 2, top of next column.)

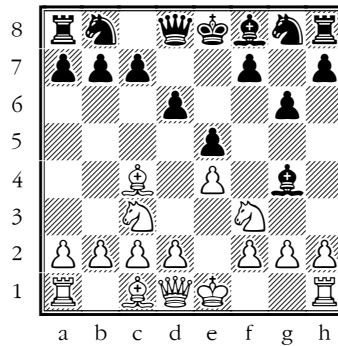


Diagram 2

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 5.Nxe5! | Bxd1?? |
| 6.Bxf7+ | Ke7 |
| 7.Nd5# | 1-0. |

An important feature of a pin is that it reduces the mobility (and value) of the defending forces. This is especially true when the piece in back is involved in the protection of the piece in front.

Instead of immediately trading, the attacker should try to add more pressure to the pinned piece. It is this further exposure to attack, especially when a pawn can be used, which makes pins so devastating. For example, in Diagram 3,

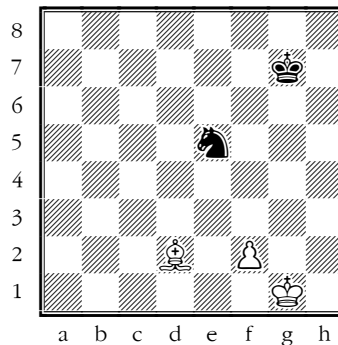


Diagram 3

White wins the knight by playing **1.Bc3 Kf6** **2.f4**. The knight must fall; the extra pawn can be promoted enabling White to win.

In Diagram 4 (top of next page), Black wins by forcing a pin, then adding pressure to the pinned piece.

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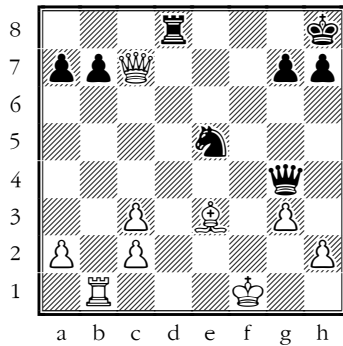


Diagram 4

After,

- 1... Qf3+!** [Double attack!]
2.Bf2 Rf8
3.Qc5 Ng4

the bishop can't be defended and is lost. Note that 1...Rf8+? is weaker.

While a pin often helps win material, it is also used to restrict the opponent's game. Sometimes, when you are unsure of what to do next, look for an undeveloped or inactive piece. Place this piece (especially a rook or bishop) on the same line as the enemy king, queen, or unprotected piece.

In Diagram 5, White completes developing with -

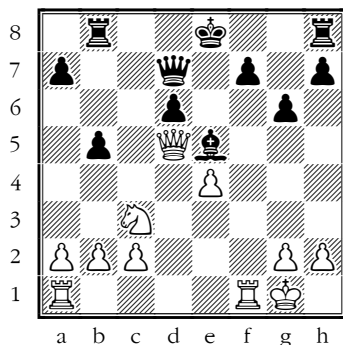


Diagram 5

1.Rad1! This move threatens nothing directly, but it does create an indirect threat – a pin along the d-file. Thus, if 1... 0-0?? **2.Qxe5!** wins the bishop. Therefore, Black can not castle and so is burdened with the king in the

center and a rook which can not be brought into play. (After 1.Rad1, Black should consider playing such moves as 1...a6 or 1...Rb7.)

In Diagram 6, we see White creating a common pinning situation:

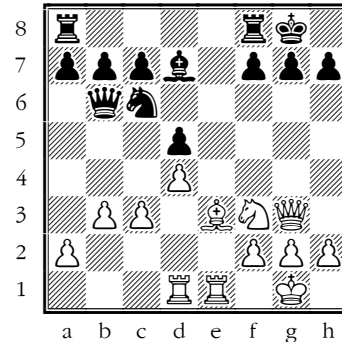


Diagram 6

After **1.Bh6!**, the g-pawn is threatened but cannot capture because it is pinned. Black is forced to play **1...g6** to avoid checkmate; but then **2.Bxf8** wins the exchange for White.

In Diagram 7, Black to move takes advantage of the fact that White's queen is unprotected and plays -

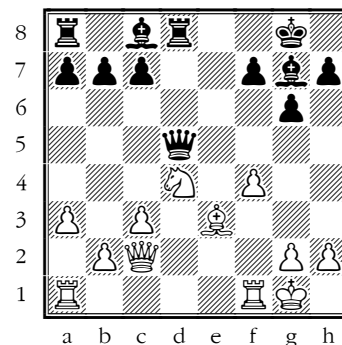


Diagram 7

1...Qc4! which creates a pin against White's c-pawn. White must now be careful in choosing a reply. If 2.Qb3? Rxd4! wins a piece, while 2.Qd2? c5 3.Qe2 Rxd4 also wins a piece. The pawn move b2-b3 risks weakening the long diagonal too much. Therefore, White should try 2.Qf2 when

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Black continues to have a slightly better position.

Creating a pin by sacrificing material is a standard tactic in chess. In Diagram 8, Black is already in big trouble. White's forces are coordinated against the enemy king while Black's forces are scattered and ineffective. All White lacks is a way in which is achieved by a sacrifice to set up a crushing pin

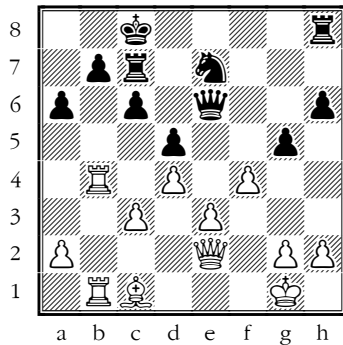


Diagram 8

1.Rxb7 Rxb7
2.Qxa6 Qd7!?

Less catastrophic, but still losing, is 2...Kd8.

3.Qa8+ Kc7
4.Rxb7+ Kd6
5.Rxd7+ Kxd7
6.Qxh8 and White will win with ease.

In Diagram 9, Black first applies pressure to one of White's weak points, then temporarily sacrifices a rook in order to win material.

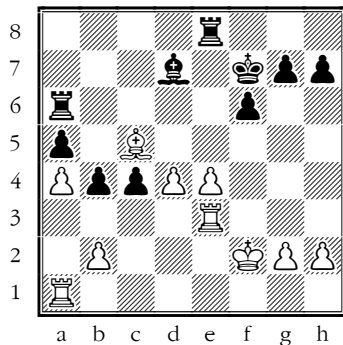


Diagram 9

After 1... Rae6
2.Kf3!? Rxe4
3.Rxe4 Bc6!
4.Rae1 f5

Black regains the rook and nets a pawn in the process.

Beware of voluntarily "walking into" a pin. In Diagram 10, Black snatches a pawn without fully considering the consequences.

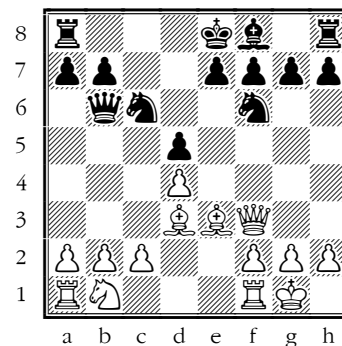


Diagram 10

1... Nxd4?
2.Qf4! Ne6?!

Black tries to wiggle out of trouble by attacking White's queen, but this backfires.

Black could try to interrupt the queen's attack on d4 with 2...Ne4 3.Nc3 e6 4.Nxe4 dxe4 5.Bxd4! Qxd4?! 6.Bb5+ Ke7 7.Rad1 but lands in hot water nevertheless.

3.Qa4+ Qc6
4.Bb5 wins the queen for a bishop.

If Black tries 1...Qxb2!? 2.Nd2 Nxd4 3.Qf4! Black has won another pawn, but at the cost of falling dangerously behind in development!

Best is 1...e6 which will help Black finish developing.

In Diagram 11 (top of next page), White sacrifices the queen to set up a pin by a rook.

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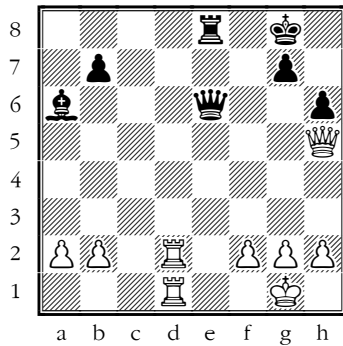


Diagram 11

After **1.Qxe8+! Qxe8 2.Rd8** White will regain the queen and win with ease.

Occasionally, games are decided by a counter-pin. Diagram 12 comes from Chatard - Amateur (Paris, 1906) in which Black set up a pin only to fall victim to a counter-pin.

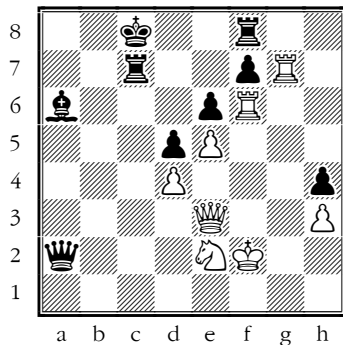


Diagram 12

1.Rg1 Bxe2? [Better is 1...Rc2.]
2.Qxe2 Rc2??

Black should play **2...Qxe2+ 3.Kxe2 Rc2+ 4.Kf1 Rc3** with plenty of fight left in the position.

3.Rc1!! 1-0.

Suddenly, Black can't take White's queen or even save his rook!

In Diagram 13 (Halosar - Poschauko, 1941, top of next column), Black finds a way to penetrate White's position decisively.

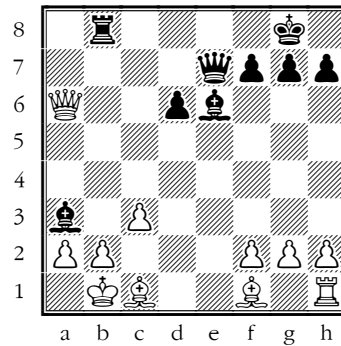


Diagram 13

1... Bf5+
2.Bd3 Qe2!! 0-1.

Diagram 14 shows an interesting example of a double pin. In Stensaker - Westbrook, 1994, Black takes advantage of the fact that White's Ne3 and Rd2 are unprotected.

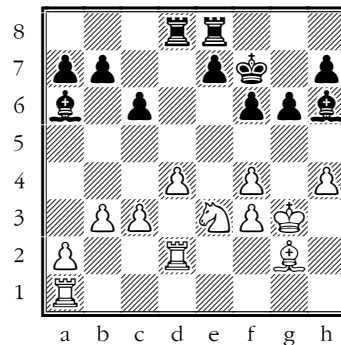


Diagram 14

25... e5!
26.Kh3? ...

Better is **26.Kf2** but then either **26...Bxf4** or **26...exd4** lead to a win for Black.

26... Bxf4
27.Re1 exd4
28.Rxd4 Rxd4
29.cxd4 Rxe3
30.Rd1 Bd3! [Threatens ...Bf5#.]
31.Kg4 Bd6 [Renews the threat.]
32.Rd2 Bf5# 0-1.