

Becoming a better player – DR

Find out why you lose games (or fail to win them), and work on those things until they aren't a problem any more. The easiest ways to do that are to **practice**, and to get some **feedback** on your chess games. This weekend should give you the chance to do both.

The most common things that decide junior chess games are:

- a. I missed a tactic
- b. I got caught in the opening

The most common other problems I see during junior games are:

- c. I didn't know what to do
- d. I was winning but...

So I'm going to talk about each of these.

Generally... Most mistakes in chess are **doing things you already know you aren't supposed to do** – not because your opponent knew something you didn't. It also follows that improving in chess is a lot about **doing what you already know you should do** – not learning brand new stuff!

There is a set of booklets, talking about the good and bad things the U14 squad have done each year, listed on the front page of this booklet:

<http://www.exeterchessclub.org.uk/juniors.html#games>

The booklets mainly consist of me saying all the things on this page, in different ways, every year... Please, when you are in the U14 team, don't make me have to say them to you!

You can download the games, or play over the games from that booklet directly on the website.

* If you don't have a computer or access to the Internet, let me know, and I can send you what you are interested in.

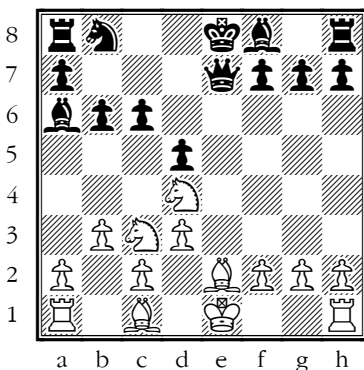
a. I missed a tactic

There are six basic types of tactic, although there is a list of a dozen or so when you look at the details. They are: **jumps** (discoveries), **mates, forks, nets, pins/skewers**, and **ties** (e.g. undermining, decoys). You have to recognise each of them when they appear on the chessboard. The most common types are pins and forks but the one that people miss most often is a **discovery**. Once you know each type, practice more and more complicated examples. So, once you can do one-movers, then try two-movers, and so on.

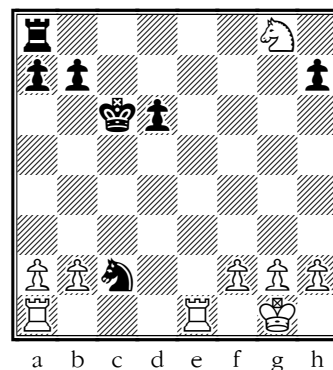
Some people are quite good at finding tactics in puzzles, but still make blunders when playing. Well, chess is a complicated game, and 9 moves out of 10 there won't be a tactic for you, so you get into a bad habit of not checking. So, **always have a second look at your chosen move before you play it** – is it a blunder?

You might say, OK Dave, when I choose a move, I've just *been* looking, so how do I look again and find something different? First of all, look for the clues that there might be a tactic for one side or the other. Look for patterns that go with each type of tactic. Other clues are:

- **Undefended pieces – or pieces that are just defended enough – can be caught with a tactic.**
- **Pieces in a line should make you think of tactics (pins, skewers and discoveries).**



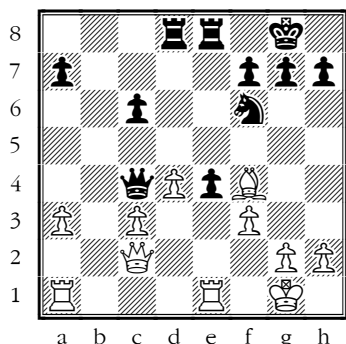
If you look, you can see two completely undefended pieces... can you see what Black should play to win at least one of them?



Black saw the pattern for a fork – very good! But If you look again, you can see some important pieces in a line... can you see what White can play here?

Loose Pieces Drop Off, says John Nunn! (LDPO)

If I had a second tip, it would be, **check every check and every capture on every move**. That's a big thing to ask, but get as close to it as you can. Does that sound odd? The thing is, you get used to looking at 'normal' moves, but when there is a tactic, the move that works can be a really odd one.



Black has a fine position, and all Black's pieces are in excellent positions, so any normal move is good enough...

Ah, but the best move isn't a normal one. The best move is **18...Rxd4!**

That takes a pawn which is defended by a pawn... well, normally that is just daft, you will lose a Rook! But the defending pawn is pinned, and so it's really only pretending to defend, and your Rook is safe (19.cxd4 Qxc2).

If Black had looked at 18...Rxd4 for a moment or two, he might have realised that he could actually play it! In the same way, White should have looked at it, and made sure the pawn was really defended.

So, look at every check, and every capture, every turn – it might be a winning move!

■ Getting better at checking...

Well, the best practice is making it a habit during a game. But here are some exercises:

1. On an empty chess board, put all the white pieces (not the pawns) on a chess board so that all the pieces are defended by at least one other piece. Easy -- even I could do it!
2. On an empty chess board, put all the white pieces (not the pawns) on a chess board so that all the pieces are defended by at least one other piece and are also defending at least one other piece
3. On an empty chess board, put all the white pieces (not the pawns) on a chess board so that all the pieces are defended by EXACTLY one other piece and are also defending EXACTLY one other piece. Tricky!
4. On an empty board, add as many black pieces as you can so that no black piece is defending any other black piece. Start using one set; how many pieces can you add from another set? Try the king or knights first!
5. Try again, but you can use any pieces you want from any set, and you can leave out the queen (so you could have a whole rank full of knights!)
6. Put all the white pieces from one set on the board so they attack as many squares as possible
7. Put all the white pieces from one set on the board so they attack as FEW squares as possible
8. On an empty chess board, and using one set, put as many white and black pieces (no pawns) on the same chess board as you can, so that every black piece is being attacked and no black piece is being defended, while no white piece is being attacked, and every white piece is attacking at least one black piece.
9. Now, can you find one with all the pieces from one set where all the white pieces are attacking AND all defended AND not attacked, and the black ones all attacked and undefended?

■ Getting better at spotting tactics

Chess Position Trainer offers a free course in chess tactics from:

<http://community.chesspositiontrainer.com/files/folders/repertoires/entry1006.aspx>

There is a free booklet about chess tactics in the opening available from me at:

http://www.exeterchessclub.org.uk/General/chesblog.html#18th_Sept_09

You can download all the games in that booklet from the same link, and then you can play over the games using any decent chess software; ChessBase Light 2009 is free from:

<http://chessbase.com/download/>

There is a free test-yourself chess tactics website at:

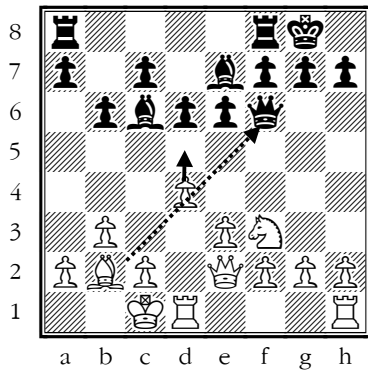
<http://chess.emerald.net/>

Practice playing against a computer – you can download version 5.32 of Fritz for free from

<http://freechess.50webs.com/fritz.html>

There are loads of books on chess tactics – find one that's just a bit harder than you like!

■ Discoveries

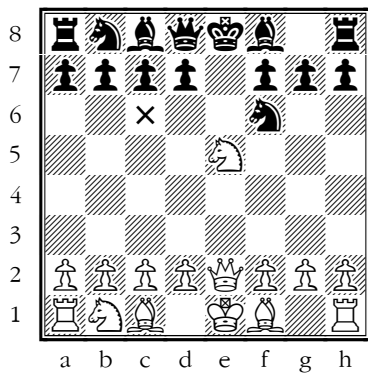


Discoveries are easy to understand but hard to spot! They are the tactic that juniors miss most of all.

It's not just the piece that moves you need to worry about...

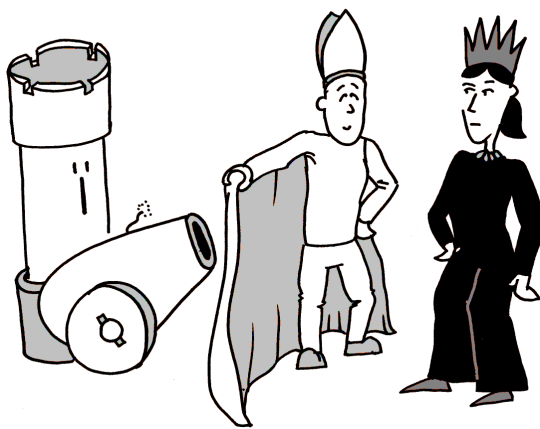
Look for a big piece hiding behind a little one... like here.

If the white Pawn on d4 moves to d5, it *discovers* an attack on the black Queen. The black Queen can move out of the way, but then the Bishop on c6 will be taken.

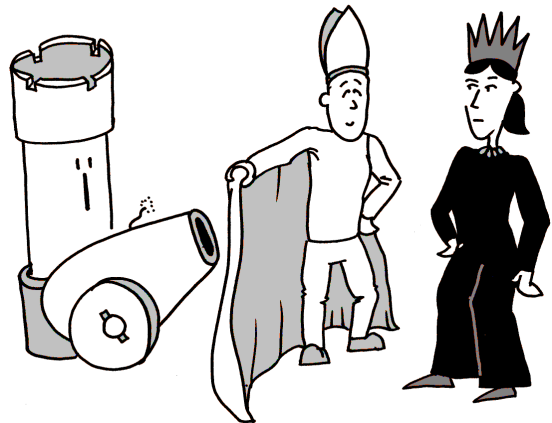
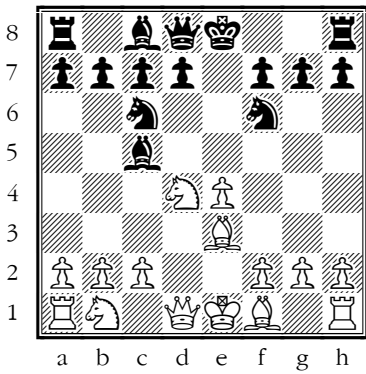
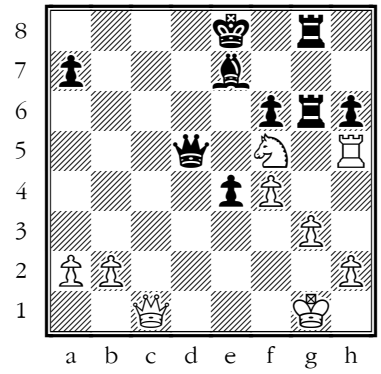
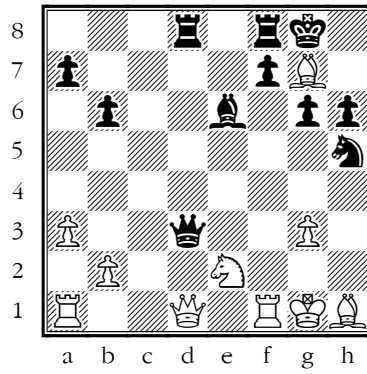
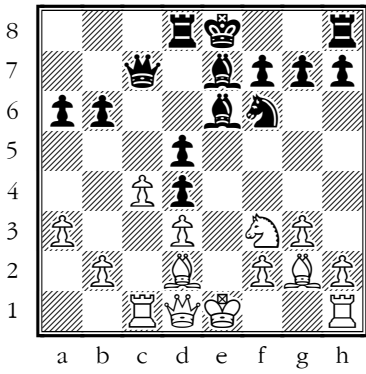
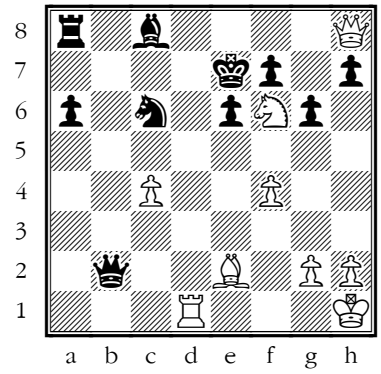
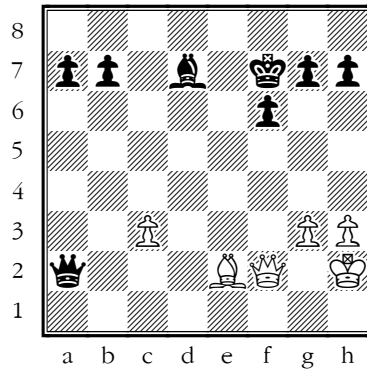
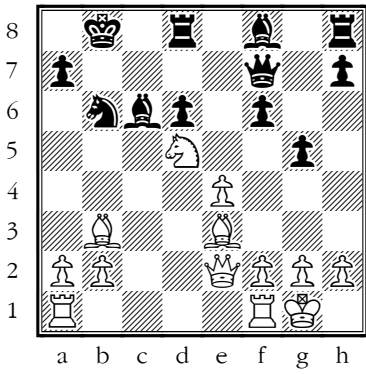
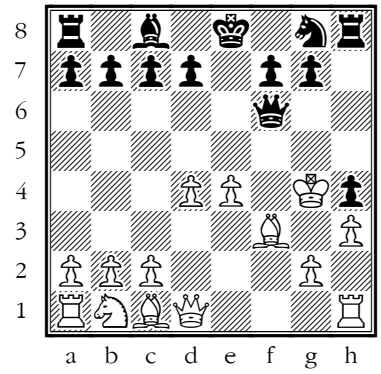
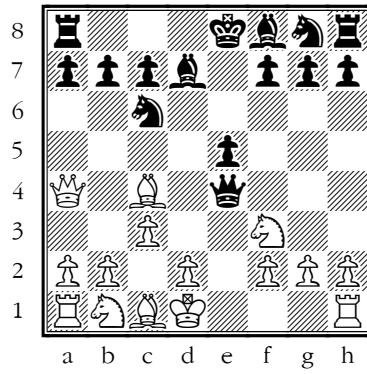
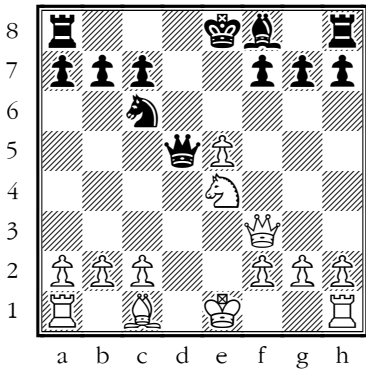


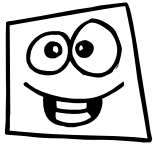
If White moves the Knight anywhere, Black must get out of the *discovered check* from the Queen before worrying about what the Knight is doing.

Nc6+ wins the Queen, because the black Queen can block the check only on e7, where the Knight can still take it.

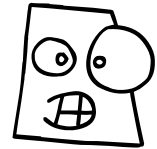


■ Find the **DISCOVERY** in each of these positions:





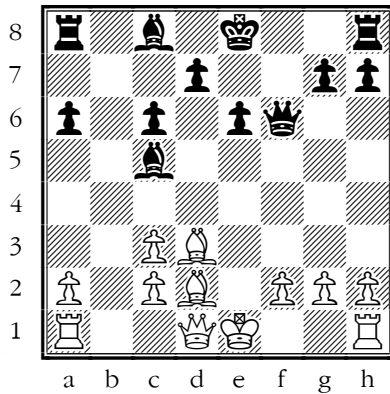
Making tactics work



☐ *Mates Jumps Forks Nets Pins Ties*

➔ Look at forcing moves like checks and captures

■ Checks



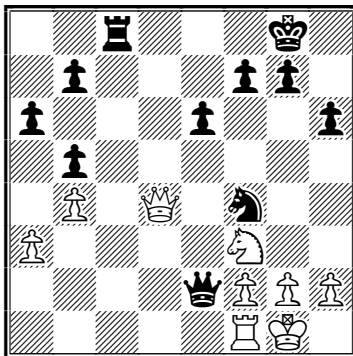
Never play a check unless it does something. But because everything stops for a check, it can give you time to do something great!

1. Qh5+!

wins the Bc5 (a fork by the Queen)



■ Captures

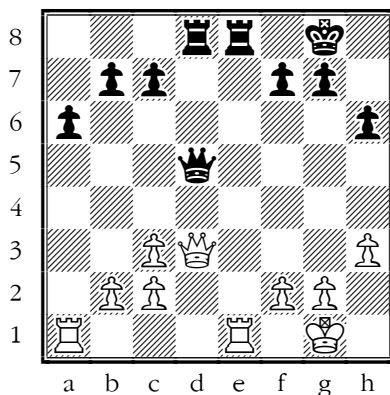


● Look at every check and every capture.

1...Qxf3!

would normally be daft, but it makes space for the knight fork ...Ne2+ without giving White time to defend

■ Both at once!



1. Qxd5 looks promising but it doesn't work (can you see why?)

But

1. Rxe8+!

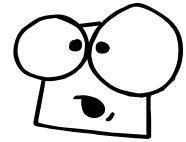
Wins the Queen

If a combination doesn't work, try thinking about it in a different order!



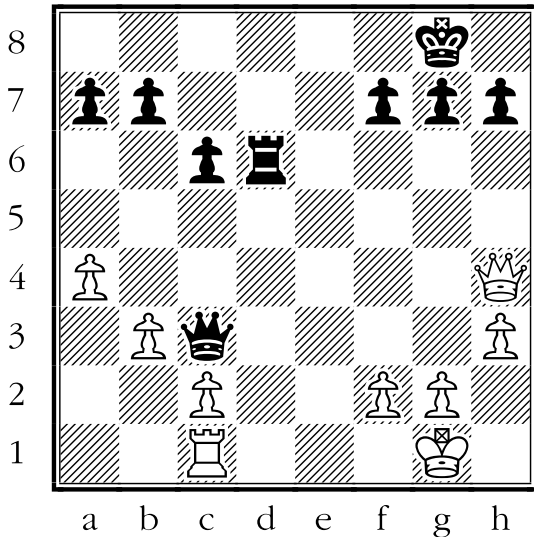


I smell a tactic!



👁️ Look harder if you see loose pieces or an unsafe king

■ Unsafe king? Is there a tactic around?



If the black Rook wasn't on the board, Qd8+ would be checkmate.

And if Queens could bend it like Beckham, Qe8+ would be good.

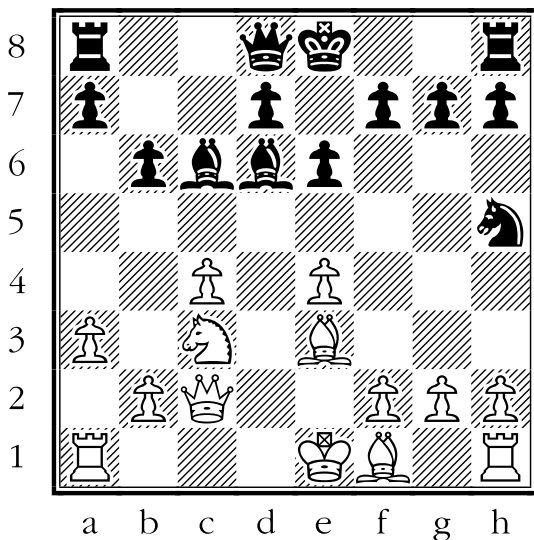
1. Qe7!

Threatens mate, and attacks the Rook, and stops the Rook moving to d8, and... wins.



■ Loose piece? Is there a tactic around?

A loose piece is a piece that is not defended (or only just defended)



The Knight on h5 is obviously loose. But if you attack it, Black will move or defend it.

Aha! The Bishop on d6 is also loose. If you can attack both at once, you will win a piece.

1. Qd1!

Simple but deadly!





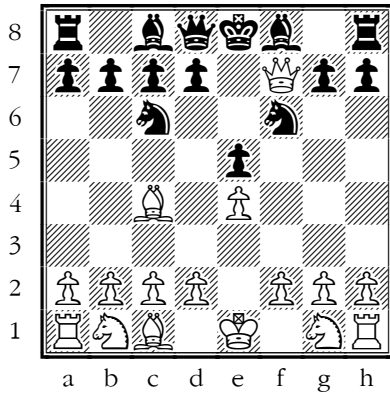
The 6 basic tactics

you Might Just Find a Neat Powerful Tactic!

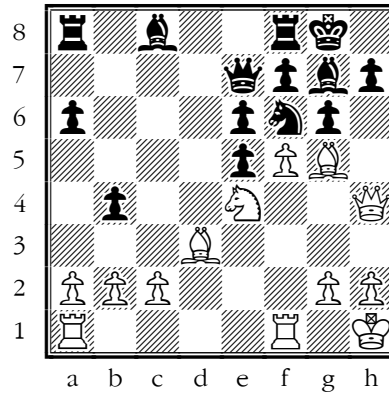


[Mates Jumps Forks Nets Pins & Ties]

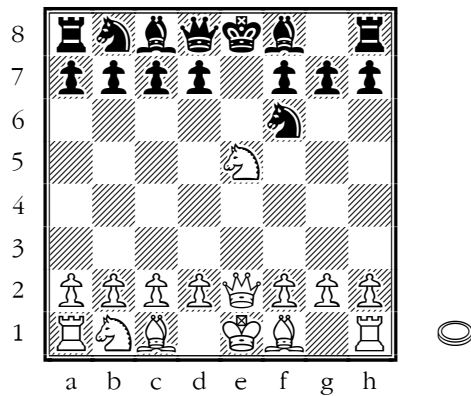
Basic pattern for a **Mate**



Basic pattern for a **Pin**

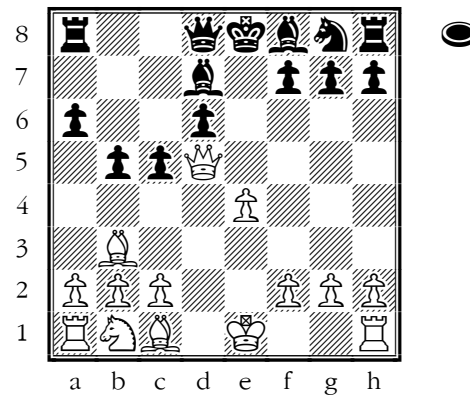


Basic pattern for a **Jump/Disco**



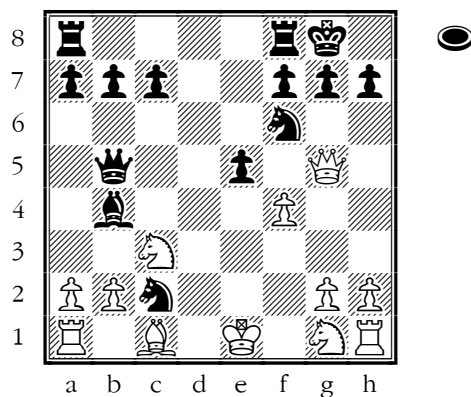
White wins after 1. Nc6+!

Basic pattern for a **Net**

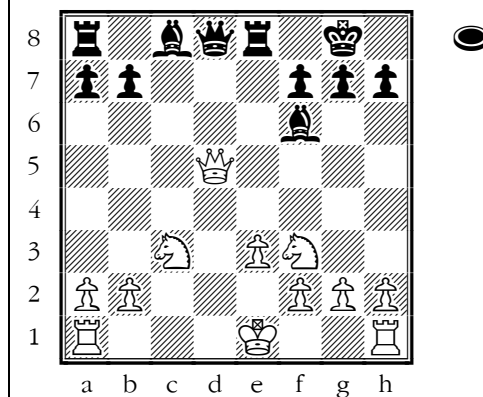


Black wins the Bishop after 1...c4!

Basic pattern for a **Fork**

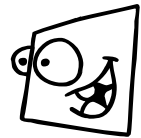
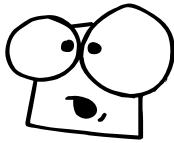


Basic pattern for a **Tie**

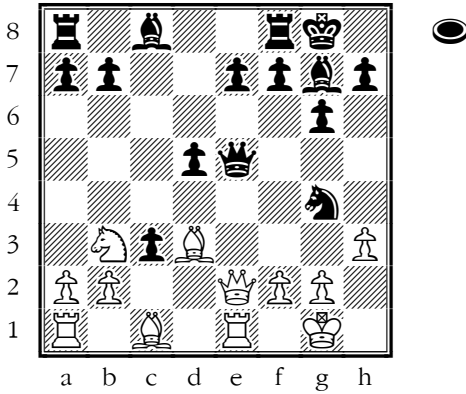


1...Bxc3+ undermines the Queen

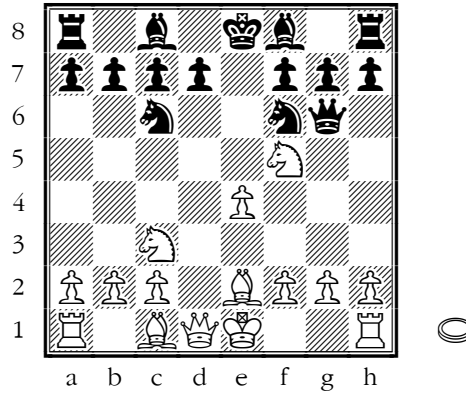
Test your tactics!



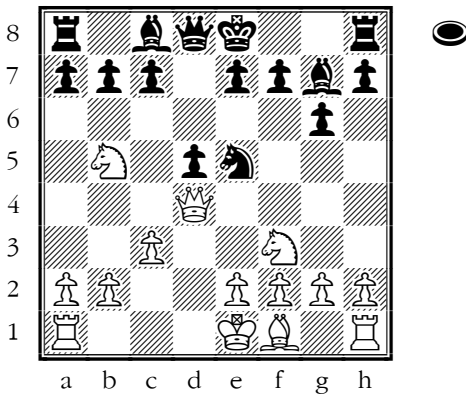
Find the **Mate**



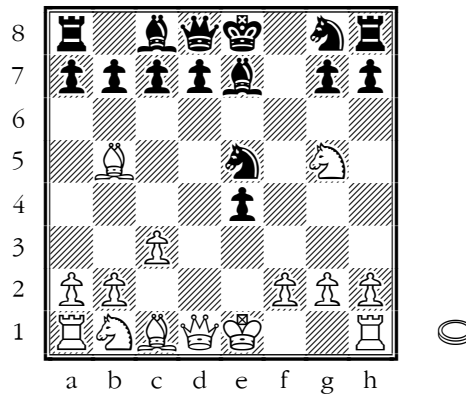
Find the **Net**



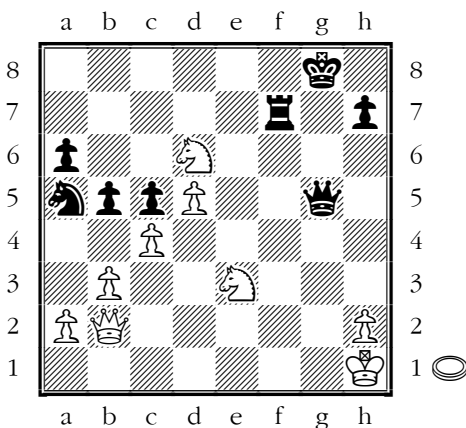
Find the **Jump**



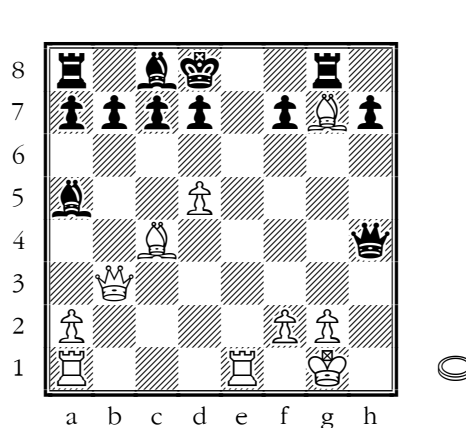
Find the **Pin**



Find the **Fork**



Find the **Tie**



Mates : 1...Qh2+ and 2...Qh1#

Jumps : 1...Nxf3+ and 2...Bxd4

Forks : 1. Qh8+ and 2. Nxf7+ (one of Spassky's)

Nets : 1. Nh4

Pins : 1. Ne6!

Ties : 1. Qg3 (one of Fischer's)