

Counting sequence of capture

While this basic tactic is important, it is ignored by most if not all chess books.

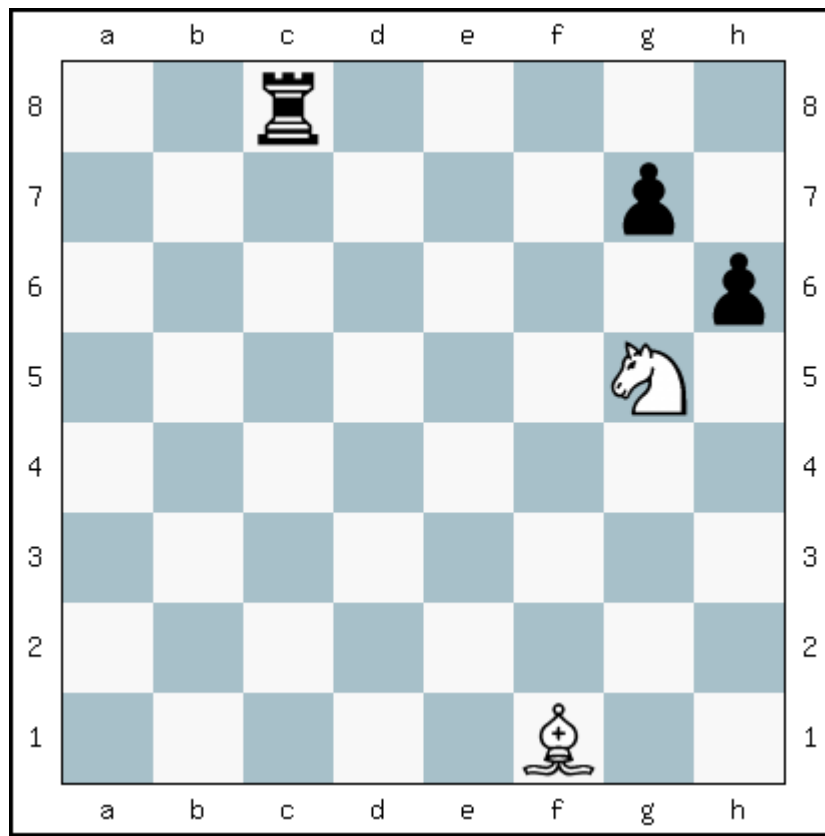
Dan Heisman definition of Counting is: "Determining whether any series of captures might lead to losing material".

Dan Heisman definition of Safe is: "A piece is safe if no possible sequence of exchanges on the square it occupies will lose material, assuming best play".

There are five ways to save an attacked unsafe piece:

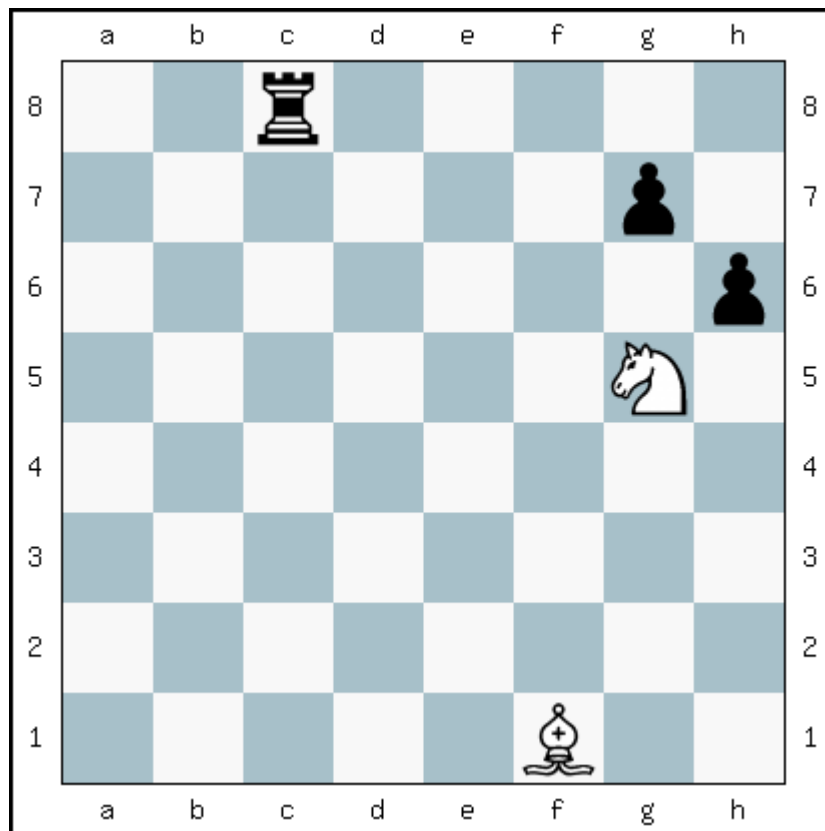
- 1 Move
- 2 Capture
- 3 Interpose
- 4 Protect the piece
- 5 Counterattack (the most dangerous)
including pinning, checking, attack another, capture.

In the case of the King, only the initial three are applicable.



2r5/6p1/7p/6N1/8/8/5B2 w - - 0 1

Black has just moved **1. ... h6** attacking the Knight. White to move, what will you do?



2r5/6p1/7p/6N1/8/8/8/5B2 w - - 0 1

Just retreat the Knight!

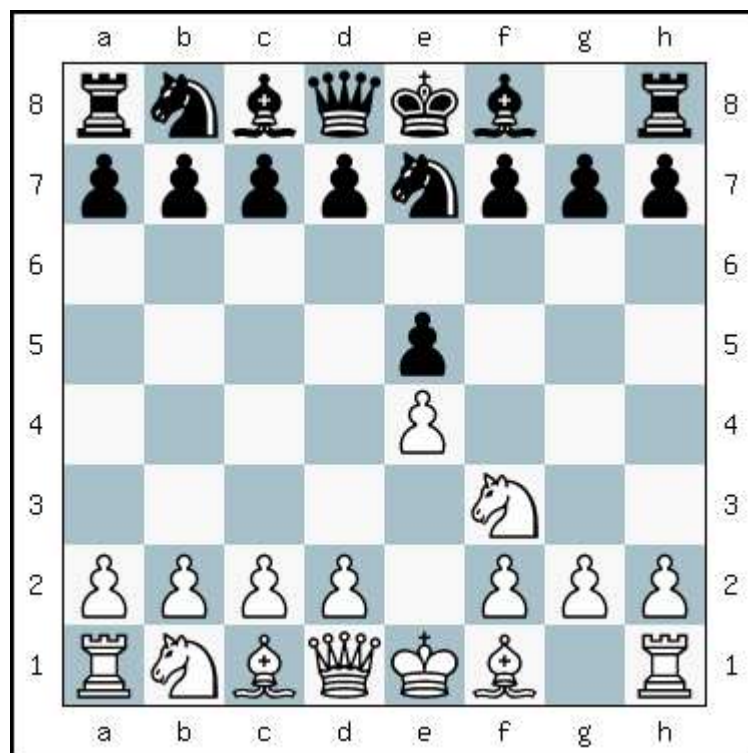
Many beginners unnecessarily look for complications by counterattacking the Rook.

If 2. ♖h3? then 2. ... ♜c3 attacks the Bishop, which is temporarily protected by the Knight. Which must move, therefore one piece is lost.

If 2. ♖a6? then 2. ... ♜a8 3. ♖b7 ♜a7 , with two pieces attacked White must lose one.

You can play through similar games and download the PGN here: <http://scacchi.vecchilibri.eu/partite/counting.html>

Dealing with counting, a basic tactic to learn how to trade pieces.



1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Ne7?? A piece is hanging

A basic situation, where a piece is attacked once and not defended, that is *hanging*
It might be a blunder, it might be a tactic to obtain a greater advantage, it might be a trap.

In previous diagram it is just a mistake. Next move White **MUST** take the pawn, for free.



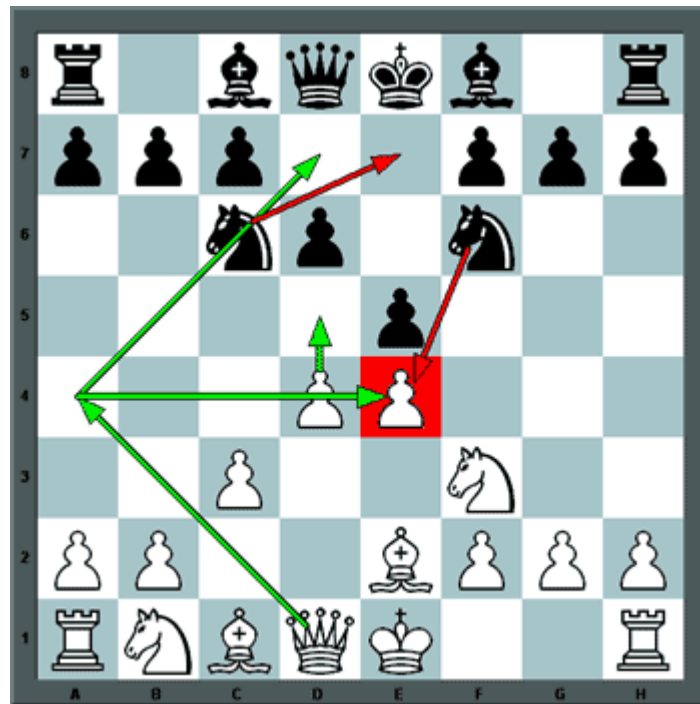
1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bc4 Nd4!?

Black did not follow an opening guideline, by moving twice a piece before having moved the others, and left **e5**-pawn hanging. You might think he is a weak player. **Is Nxe5 safe?**

But it is a trap (Blackburne Shilling), the pawn must NOT be taken. Try to see where the trap lies. After **4.Nxe5 ?** Black answers with **4. ... Qg5** and a mate in 7 moves might follow. a typical sequence **5. Nxf7 Qxg2** a mate threat by capturing the Rook **6.Rf1 Qxe4+** **7. Be2 Nf2#** called *smothered mate*. The e-pawn cannot capture the Knight as it would expose the King to check.

Ponziani

for Black. Do NOT take the pawn

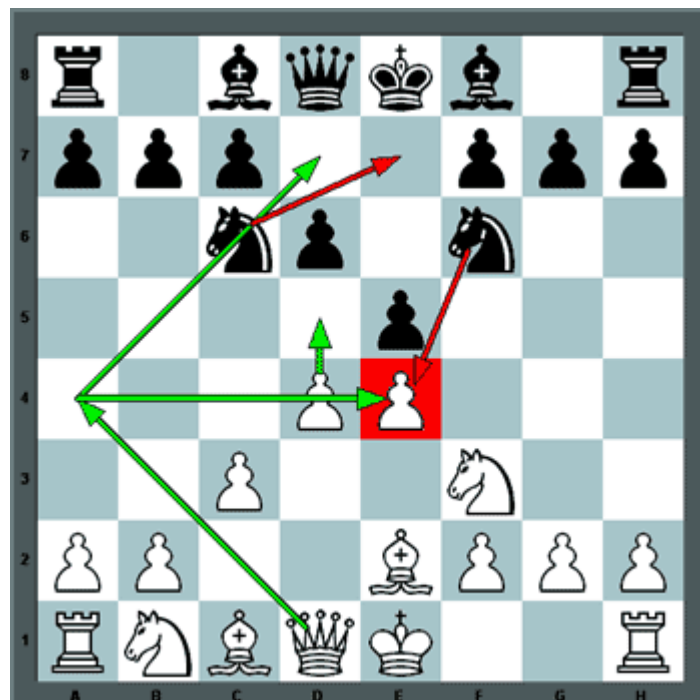


Another example, easier to avoid. It can happen in a Ponziani, judged weaker, but full of tactics in the opening, and however one tempo is gained for the d5 push.

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. c3 Nf6 4. d4. At this point, normally Black captures one of the central pawns, but sometimes protects e5 pushing 4 ... d6.

5. Qe2 Once again the bait is a pawn, and if Black does not bite, last move is only slightly weak. It has anyway a reason, castling fast, so it does not arouse suspicions as with a meaningless move

Is Nxe4 safe?

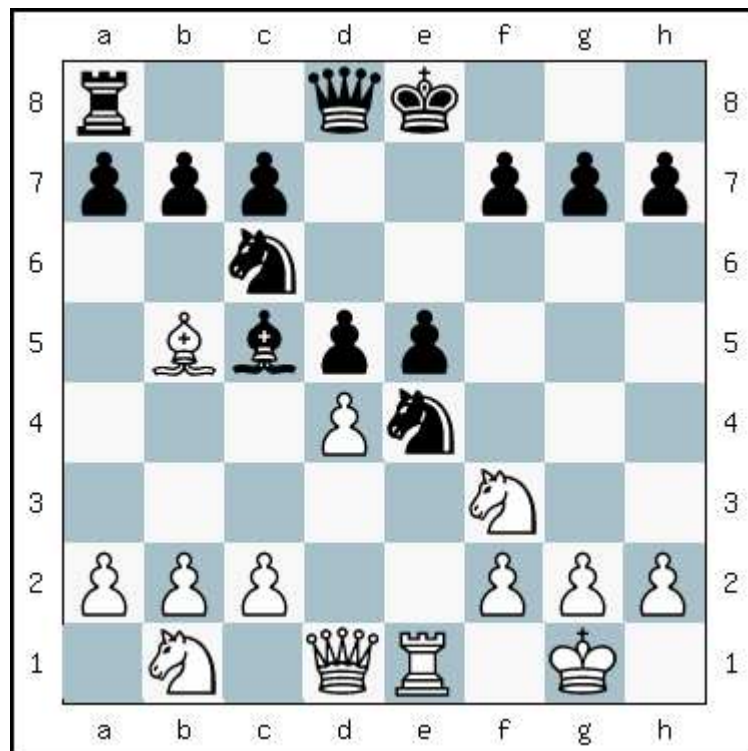


5 ... ♞xe4? 6. d5! ♞e7 7. ♚a4+ Black defends 8. ♚xe4

The pattern to be remembered is not specific of the above two examples, but is related to an unprotected pawn, hiding a trap if captured, resulting in an unprotected piece in the square of the pawn: if located on 4th or 5th rank, it could be captured after a double attack to the King, check, and to the unprotected piece. Many other examples of similar "poisoned pawns" exist, to be found in books about traps, so **beware**.

You can play through sample games and download the PGN here: [Ponziani bait](http://scacchi.vecchilibri.eu/partite/Ponziani.html)
<http://scacchi.vecchilibri.eu/partite/Ponziani.html>

Capture on multiple squares



Black to move after 7. d4

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. O-O Nxe4 5. Re1 d5 6. Bb5 Bc5 7. d4

First check if the pawn is safe. The protection is adequate as it is attacked and protected twice. As the c6-Knight is pinned, it cannot move as the King would be checked.

Black tries to activate the Knight with **1. ... a6 ??**. Counting involves 4 squares: b5 not protected, c6 protected, c5 not protected, d4 protected.

2. Bxc6+ Capturing the Knight with check first, White trades his not protected Bishop for the protected Knight, but after **2. ... bxc6**, White plays **3. dxc5**, winning one piece.

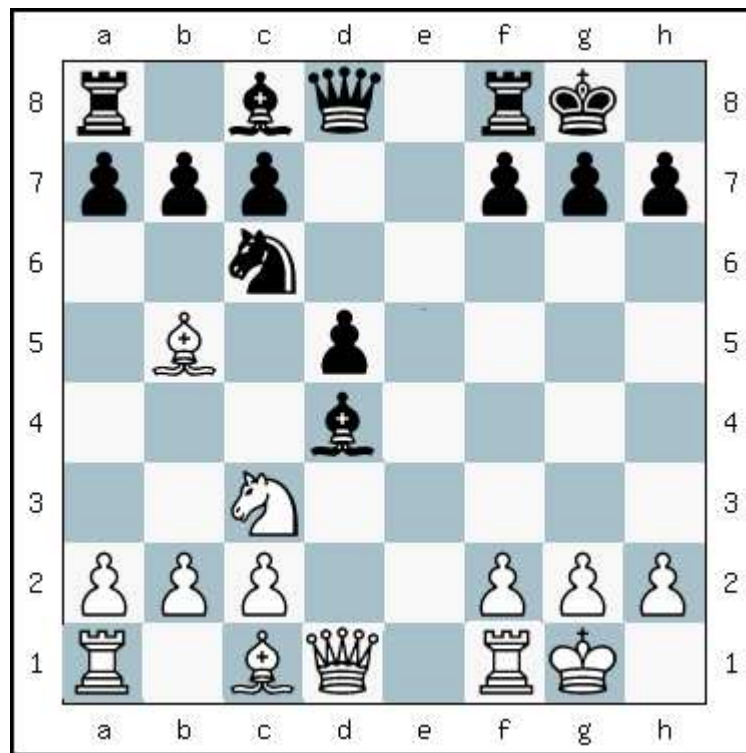
This is not a tactic, which will be dealt with later, but simply a sequence of captures! Counting!

The winning sequence after 7. d4 was there to see, had the analysis of the captures be made. After the correct analysis the only move was 7. ... exd4, any other move was losing.

There are many ways where this mistake could be seen, counting, CCT and comparing the candidate moves. Therefore this is not only a counting error, but it is a blunder, similar to not seeing a fork on c7. The mistake could also be seen by applying CCT, seeing what happens after any possible check.

From the game: Gunsberg, Isidor vs. Marshall, Frank James, 1904.02.15, Monte Carlo, C55 where Black played 7. ... **exd4**!

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. O-O Nxe4 5. Re1 d5 6. Bb5 Bc5 7. d4 **exd4** 8. Nbd2 f5 9. Nb3 Bb4 10. Bd2 Bxd2 11. Bxc6+ bxc6 12. Qxd2 O-O 13. Qxd4 Qd6 14. Rad1 a5 15. Ne5 a4 16. Nd2 Bb7 17. f4 c5 18. Qe3 Rae8 19. Ndf3 d4 20. Qa3 g5 21. c3 g4 22. Nd2 g3 23. hxg3 Re7 24. Nxe4 fxe4 25. cxd4 cxd4 26. Qxa4 c5 27. Rc1 Rc8 28. b4 d3 29. bxc5 Rxc5 30. Rcd1 Qb6 31. Qd4 Rg7 32. Nxd3 Rb5 33. Qxb6 Rxb6 34. Nc5 Rc7 35. Nxb7 Rxb7 36. Rxe4 Rb2 37. Kh2 Rxa2 38. Red4 Rcc2 39. Rg1 Kg7 40. g4 h5 41. gxh5 Kh6 42. Kh3 Kxh5 43. g4+ Kh6 44. Rd6+ Kg7 45. Kh4 Rc4 46. Kg5 Ra5+ 47. f5 Raa4 48. Rg6+ Kf7 49. Kh5 Rc3 50. Rb1 Rh3+ 51. Kg5 Rg3 52. Rb7+ Kf8 53. Rc6 Rgxf4+ 54. Kf6 Ra8 55. Rcb6 Re4 56. Rg7 Re1 57. Rg4 Rea1 58. Rh4 Kg8 59. Rg4+ Kf8 60. Rb7 R1a6+ 61. Kg5 R6a7 1/2-1/2

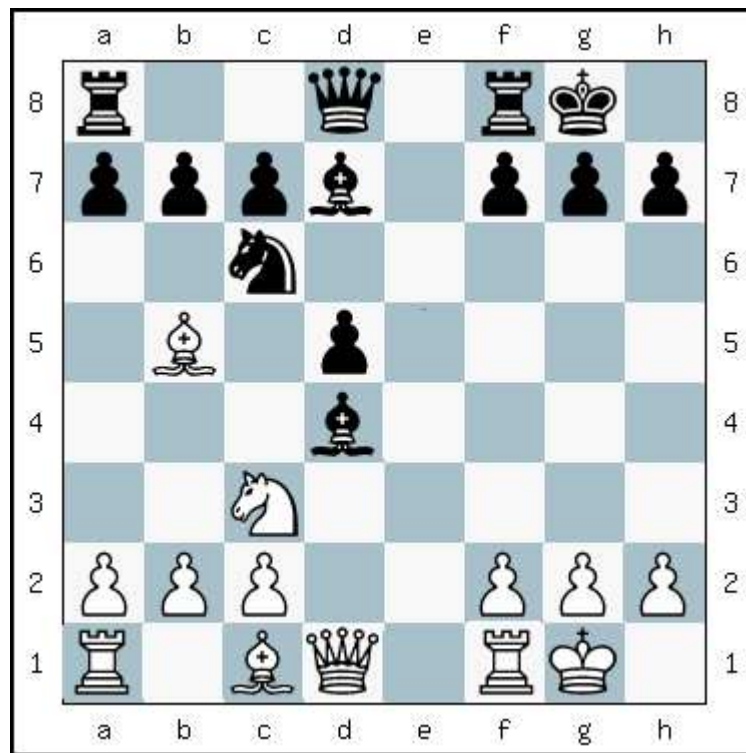


Can White gain one piece?

How must Black play after **1. Bxc6** not to lose one piece?

Black is not obliged to recapture on c6 (1. ... bxc6 ?? Qxd4), but he can capture a piece on any square.

All the sequences of captures must be considered to find the best, which is : **1. ... Bxc3!** trying to balance, even if White can take back the pawn with **2. Bxd5**



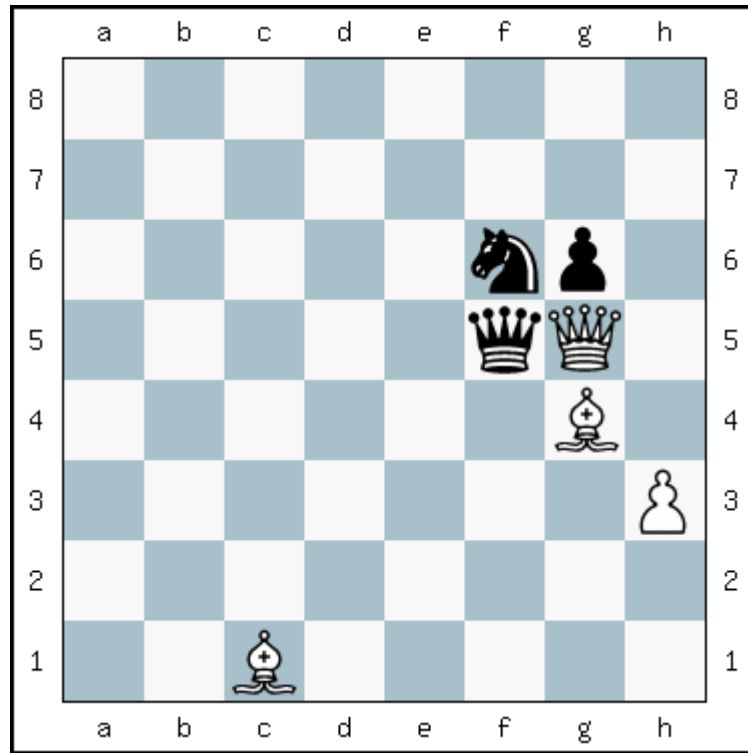
White to move wins

An additional level of complexity

Again **1. Bxc6 Bxc6 2. Qxd4** and White is up one piece.

If **1. Bxc6 Bxc3 2. Bxd7** instead, White wins one piece. Both if Black saves the Bishop taking it back, or if he captures **2. ... Qxd7 3. bxc3**

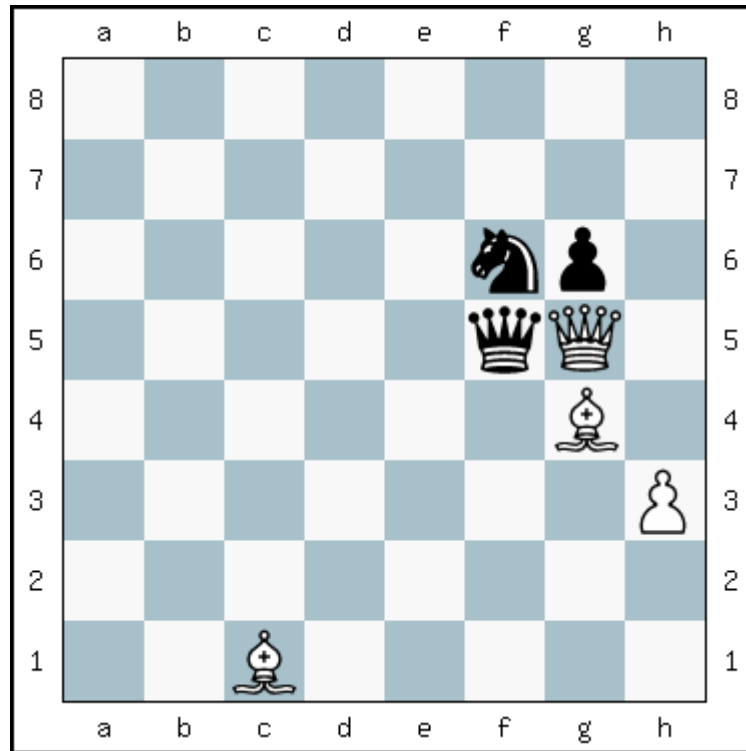
Test



TEST to solve, with algebraic notation: after White moves **1. Bg4** attacking the Queen, Black answers with **1. ... Nxf4. THEN?**

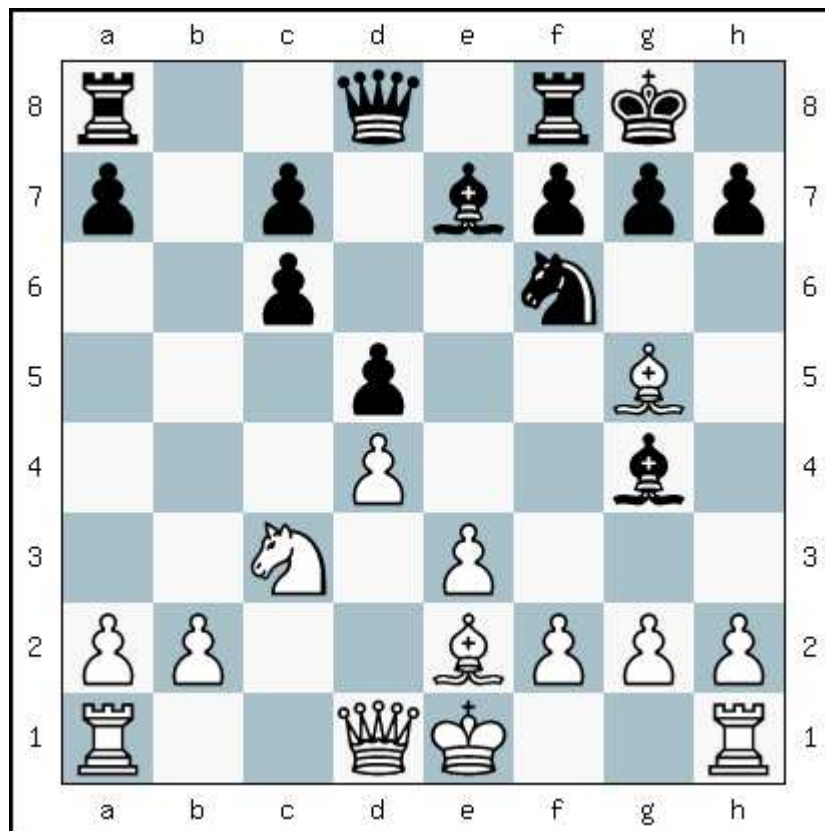
Indicate both the sequence and the final material balance, without using a chessboard.

Solution



1. ... Nxf4 2. hxg4! Qxg5 3. Bxg5 the balance is even after the trades.

An error would have been **1. ... Nxf4 2. Qxf5 gxf5 3. hxg4 fxf4** as Black comes out after the trades one pawn up.

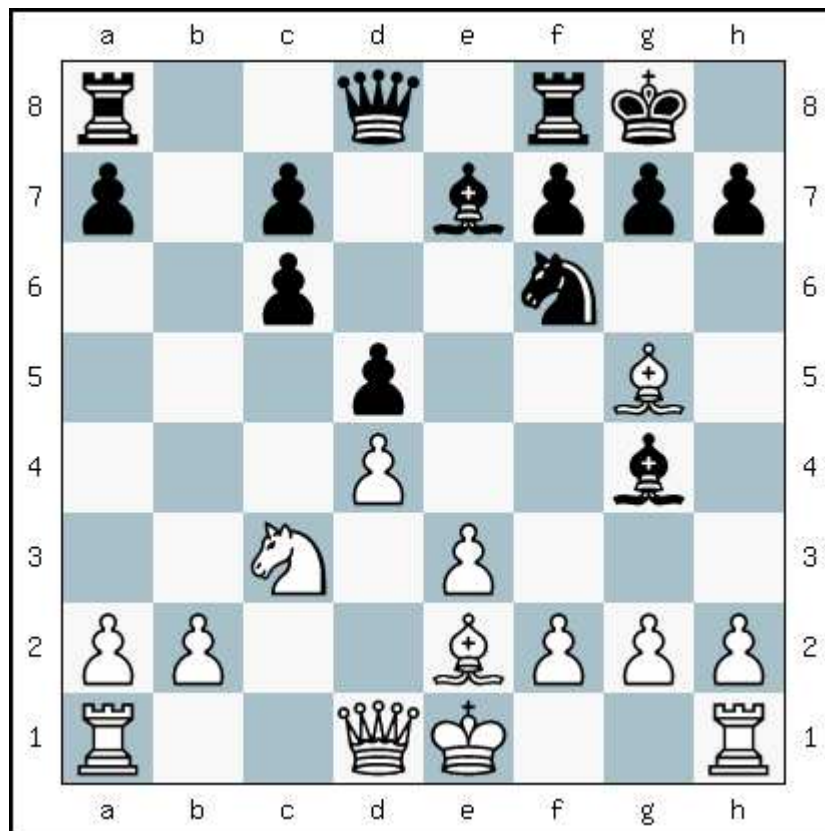


r2q1rk1/p1p1bppp/2p2n2/3p2B1/3P2b1/2N1P3/PP2BPPP/R2QK2R b KQ - 0 10
after 10. Be2 Black to move

Counterattack

1. d4 d5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. c4 e6 4. Nc3 Nf6 5. Bg5 Be7 6. Ne5 O-O 7. cxd5 exd5 8. Nxc6 bxc6 9. e3 Bg4 10. Be2 see above diagram

Black plans to play **10. ... h6**. Is this safe?



r2q1rk1/p1p1bppp/2p2n2/3p2B1/3P2b1/2N1P3/PP2BPPP/R2QK2R b KQ - 0 10
after 10. Be2 Black to move

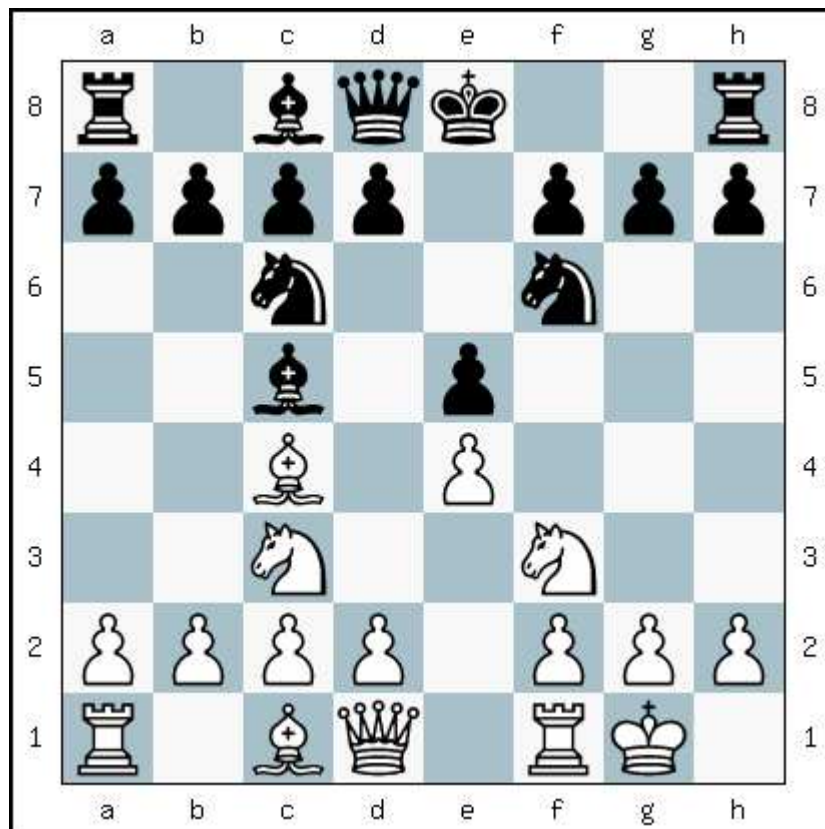
Black plays **10. ... h6?** (+4.50)

11. Bxg4? hxg5 would be equality, the answer Black was awaiting.

However **11. Bxf6 Bxe2 12. Bxe7 Qxe7 13. Qxe2** and White wins a piece.

Do you remember when after some quick exchange you count the pieces and are a pawn down and wonder how this happened?

You can play through sample games and download the PGN here: [Counting](http://scacchi.vecchilibri.eu/partite/counting.html)
<http://scacchi.vecchilibri.eu/partite/counting.html>

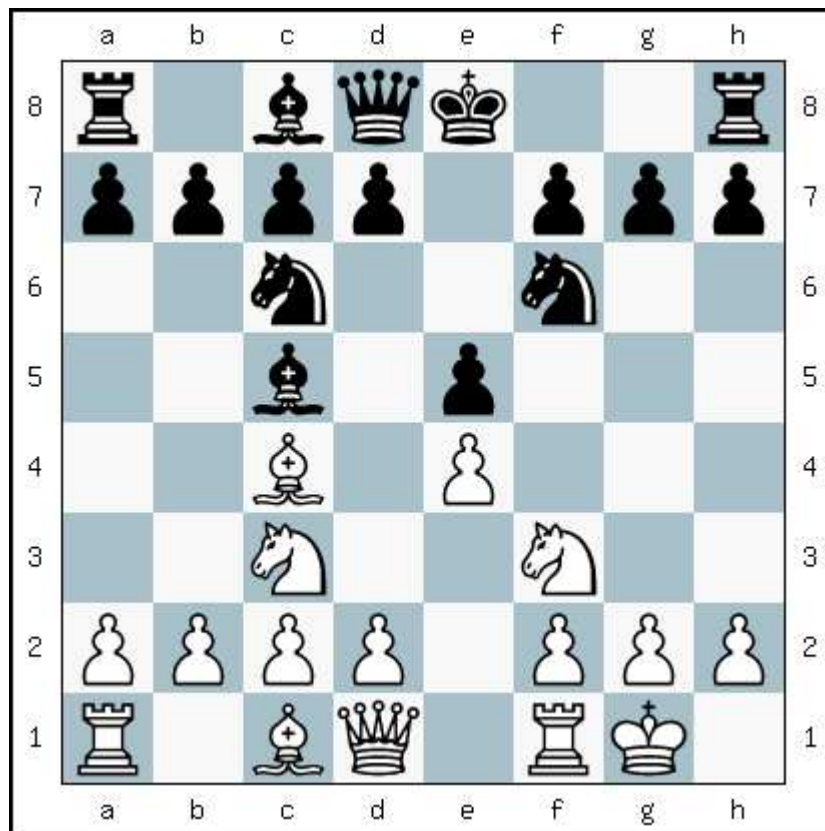


r1bqk2r/pppp1ppp/2n2n2/2b1p3/2B1P3/2N2N2/PPPP1PPP/R1BQ1RK1 b kq - 0 1
after 5. O-O Black to move

Pseudo sacrifice

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bc4 Nf6 4. Nc3 Bc5 **5. O-O** diagram above

Black intends to move **5. ... Nxe4**, is it safe? Solution next page

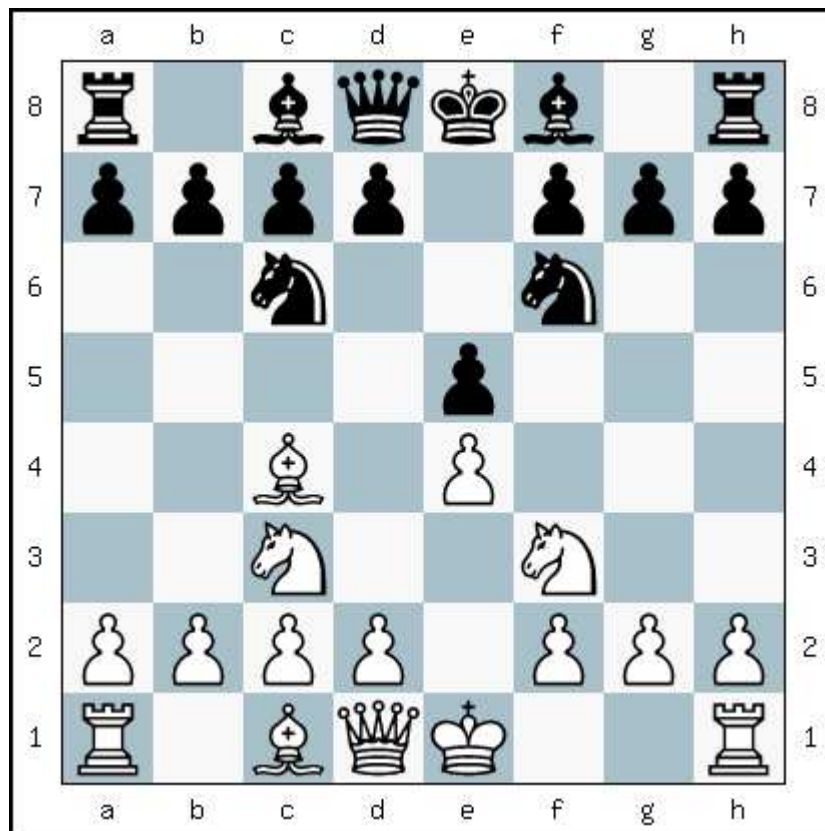


r1bqk2r/pppp1ppp/2n2n2/2b1p3/2B1P3/2N2N2/PPPP1PPP/R1BQ1RK1 b kq - 0 1
after 5. O-O Black to move

The intended move loses a piece **5... Nxe4** {? +3.80 flaw} **6. Nxe4 d5 7. Nxc5** {capturing back} **dx4**

The original game went on like this: 5. ... O-O 6. d3 d6 7. Be3 Bb6 8. Qd2 Be6 9. Bb3 Ba5 10. Ng5 Bxb3 11. axb3 d5 12. exd5 Nxd5 13. Bc5 Nxc3 14. bxc3 Re8 15. f4 e4 16. Rae1 Qd5 17. b4 exd3 18. cxd3 Bb6 19. Bxb6 axb6 20. f5 Rxe1 21. Rxe1 Qxf5 22. Rf1 Qd5 23. Nxf7 Ra2 24. Qg5 Qxg5 25. Nxg5 Re2 26. b5 Ne5 27. Ne6 Nf3+ 28. Rxf3 Rxe6 1/2-1/2

From the game Tarrasch, Siegbert vs. Schlechter, Carl, 1911.04, Cologne, C50



r1bqkb1r/pppp1ppp/2n2n2/4p3/2B1P3/2N2N2/PPPP1PPP/R1BQK2R b KQkq - 0 4
after 4. Bc4 Black to move

From the game Tarrasch, Siegbert vs. Marshall, Frank James, 1912, Breslau, C55

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. Nc3 Nc6 4. Bc4

The previous black player mistaked the position, he thought to be in this standard position, where the standard moves are:

4. ... Nxe4 5. Nxe4 d5 6. Bd3 dxe4 7. Bxe4

The Masters game went on like this:

7. ... Bd6 8. d4 Nxd4 9. Nxd4 exd4 10. Qxd4 O-O 11. Be3 Qe7 12. O-O-O Re8 13. Rhe1 Be6 14. Qd3 Rad8 15. Qe2 Qf6 16. Qh5 h6 17. Qa5 Bg4 18. f3 Rxe4 19. fxe4 Bxd1 20. Rxd1 a6 21. e5 Qf5 22. Qc3 Be7 23. Rxd8+ Bxd8 24. Qd3 Qc8 25. c4 Be7 26. h3 Qe6 27. Qd5 Qf5 28. a3 c6 29. Qf3 Qxe5 30. Bd2 f5 31. Qb3 Qe6 32. Qxb7 Qxc4+ 33. Kd1 Bf8 34. Qc8 Qf1+ 35. Kc2 Qc4+ 36. Kd1 Qb5 37. Kc2 Kf7 38. g4 Qa4+ 39. Kc1 Qc4+ 40. Kd1 fxg4 41. hxg4 Qe6 42. Qc7+ Be7 43. Qf4+ Kg8 44. Qb8+ Kh7 45. Qg3 Qd6 46. Qxd6 Bxd6 47. Ke2 g5 48. Kd3 Kg6 49. Ke4 h5 50. gxh5+ Kxh5 51. Kf5 g4 52. Be3 g3 53. Ke6 Bf8 54. Kd7 Bh6 55. Bd4 Kg4 56. Kxc6 Kf3 57. b4 Be3 58. Be5 g2 59. Bh2 Kf2 60. a4 Bf4 61. Bxf4 g1=Q 62. Bd6 Qa1 0-1