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The Queen's Gambit - Accepted!
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Introduction

"It's an entire world of just 64 squares. I feel safe in it. I can control it; I can dominate it. And it's predictable, so if I get hurt, I only have myself to blame."

Rosie

Beth Harmon is messed up. So was I. I still am, in fact. I'm not going to tell you all the details. You don't need to know them. No offence, but you don't know me well enough. Not yet, at least. I hope you can understand that.

I've suffered some serious trauma and depression. I've battled with self-harm and all kinds of issues, just like Beth.

My therapist gave me a trauma questionnaire. I'm kind-of a nosey person at times, and I happened to spot something I probably wasn't supposed to see: that my trauma was affecting me enough to be compromising my immune system. It was my first session, so I didn't want to have the awkward conversation. It had shocked me, but I kept the information to myself. It made sense though: I've not been physically right recently. A compromised immune system was the last thing I wanted, especially given that we've been locked down for months fighting that awful virus. I can certainly identify with Beth.

The difference is that Beth's a fictional character. I'm real. This is real. Everything we're writing in this book is true (though maybe we've used a little bit of poetic licence with some of the sequencing of the chess games, because we want new players to learn something as well). Oh, and the other difference is that she can play chess just a little bit better than I can…

I'd thrown some chess pieces around a board as a kid. I didn't really know what I was doing, but I'd played a few games with my brother. That was the extent of my interest in chess – until last year.

I had a relapse. No, you still don't know me well enough for all the details. They were messy. I went back to live with my parents for a little while to recover. "Would you like", they asked me in a matter-of-fact way that wasn't supposed to be of any kind of life-changing consequence, "to watch this new Netflix series called *The Queen's Gambit*?"

I wasn't that fussed, but it seemed like the sociable thing to do. I enjoyed it though, and it sparked a bit of curiosity. It put me in the mood to play chess, probably like half the new players across the world. There wasn't anything too special about that.

I have Aspergers. I can sometimes panic in social situations. Too many people, too much crowding, can be a problem. On 64 squares, nothing else matters. It's all there, in black and white, no distractions. Aspergers isn't the worst thing to have for a chessplayer, truth be told. There's a tendency to develop 'obsessions'. Not to labour the whole Beth Harmon thing, but that obsession is what drives the most successful players. I'm not one of those. Not yet, anyway. Have I started too late, in my late 20s? Who cares? I'm enjoying it. This is fun.

I fired up the computer. Basic. Level 1. I was checkmated. I didn't know how I was checkmated. Not the best start. I downloaded the Magnus Carlsen app, learning some basic checkmating moves. Not hooked yet. I wasn't going to pay money, so I switched to a different app once they wanted my cash. I learned bits and pieces, got the bug, and wanted to study it properly.

My rating on chess.com started at a rather miserable 800. Unfortunately, it didn't even stay there. It hit the depths of 340. Actually it might have gone even lower than that at one point, but obviously I'm not going to admit that to you: I was in danger of finding out whether or not it's humanly possible for a (badly-named) four-digit rating to reach zero if my downhill slide kept going for much longer. But on the plus side, I wasn't going to let a little setback like knowing nothing about the game stop me.

Then, I remembered that I actually happened to have a friend who's pretty good at chess. I sent Jonathan a message on Facebook basically asking for a bit of help. The thought of writing a book about it didn't even cross my mind. This book seems to have just...happened..by accident, but we're hoping that it makes it more 'real'.

The conversation went (almost) exactly like this:

Me: "Hey there! How are you doing and how's lockdown treating you? I started playing chess for fun on my phone and thought of you…."

Jonathan: "That's great! I'm good thanks."

Me: "My rating is only around 340 on there…my username is RosieBlundersALot." (This is the poetic licence part…I did have that username for a few days, but on Lichess)

Jonathan: "We can fix that, don't worry."

Me: "The only way I can do checkmate is via kiss of death or staircase technique with two rooks. Hard to do with other pieces there though."

Jonathan: "Yeah I'm just having a look at a couple of your games. You've got the basic stuff right."

Me: "I blunder way too much."

Jonathan: "I'm not fussed about blunders. You'll learn how to avoid them later. If you're still blundering like that in 2-3 months' time, that's different."

Jonathan: "Okay, here's the first thing to pick up on. You see where you moved your bishop onto b5 in that first game? Think about what your opponent can do. They've still got a pawn on c7 so they just move it to c6 and it kicks your bishop back."

[Don't worry if you didn't understand that, we'll explain the 'code' for the names of squares later...]

It was a trivial thing. Really trivial, but it showed something. I needed to start looking at my opponent's plans, not just my own. I learned. I stopped making that mistake. That's the thing. I want to learn.

Jonathan started to coach me. Not formally, at least not at first. We started with a few questions and answers. He invited me to take

part in a simultaneous display he was doing online. Beth did one of those! Yeah, I'd have a go at that. He gave me a few hints and tips after the game, and it went from there. I'd acquired a chess coach. Better still, he's a friend - so I'd acquired a *free* chess coach. I want to improve, and in just a few weeks since then, my rating's headed up from 340. I'm now hovering between 1300 and 1500 on Lichess, and I'm still going up.

Chess is bringing me self-confidence. Do I still have anxiety? Yes, of course I do. But it's giving me a focus, something to help me – and a place where I know what the rules are. I know what I'm allowed to do on a chessboard. There's a clarity which is so highly appealing. The skills are so transferable too. Imagine a job interview. The analytical problem-solving skills I'm learning through chess can be applied straight to the world of work. Maybe I give chess as an example at interview, or maybe I don't. Either way, I can take these skills and use them to make something of my life.

I feel better already. Chess is making me come alive. I won't say that it's transformed my life (it's not God - sorry, Caissa), but it's given me a passion and a direction. When lockdown's over I'm going to want to head off to a few competitions over the board. I'll probably be terrified, but I can't wait. Wish me luck!

I've got a great emotional support network, and they're all learning to play chess too. My friend from university's playing. Even my friend and support 'bubble' Sophie, who's not usually into that kind

of thing, wants me to teach her to play. That's what I want to achieve with this book. I want to encourage a new generation: younger people and women to…

Jonathan interrupts: We! That's what ***we*** *want to achieve with this book…*

Yes, sorry about that. I do have the habit of talking too much, don't I? That's what we want to achieve with this book.

We want to encourage a new generation to take up chess. We want more women and more young people to get inspired by this wonderful game.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rosie

If you have a stereotype of a typical chessplayer, it's not Rosie Irwin. She moved from London to Swansea at the age of 18 to study Art at university. Rosie has worked in various jobs including as a dental assistant (and hopes that you'll find this book less painful than pulling teeth).

It's also an honest story about how her Aspergers and past traumas have presented obstacles to her progress in chess. It's a story of how the lessons she's learned in chess help with life - and vice versa.

She is the proud owner of a 'C' grade certificate in GCSE Maths, which caused hangups about 'whether she would be able to manage' to succeed at chess. Thankfully, that myth has been busted! Rosie loves the game of chess. This book, in many ways, is the story of how Rosie went from complete chess beginner in January 2021 to being able to compete at club level, just three months later.

Inspired by the Netflix series *The Queen's Gambit*, Rosie was determined to use her time in lockdown to develop a new skill. She sees the game of chess as being every bit as creative as art: a world in which beauty and logic form an enchanting mix.

In many ways, the game of chess has already changed Rosie's life and she's already developed plans to aim to compete 'over the board' once restrictions allow.

Jonathan

Jonathan has been coaching chess since he was 15 years old. His Masters Degree in Maths provides the ideal counterfoil for Rosie's artistic background, hopefully providing a book which balances the analytical and creative side of chess.

He is a former Mathematics teacher who has variously set up a charity, run his own publishing company, spent five years in elected politics, written articles for national newspapers, lectured at universities, broadcast regular football commentaries on radio, and travelled the world.

In chess, he is a Candidate Master and former captain of the Yorkshire county team. Jonathan captained the Chessable White Rose side to win the inaugural national title in the online 4NCL (Four Nations Chess League). He's competed three times in the European Club Cup (as he describes it, the 'Champion's League of Chess'). Jonathan isn't one of the top chessplayers in the country himself, but does have an impressive record of scalps of strong Grandmasters.

Jonathan was embarrassingly knocked out in a chessboxing match, topping the bill at the York Hall, though he takes great pains to point out that he knocked his next (not chess-) boxing opponent out in the first round (mainly just to prove that he could). *This book isn't about Jonathan, though...it's about the first steps of Rosie's journey into the world of chess.*

Chapter 1 - Starting at the end

"If they play on, once the dust settles and the endgame emerges, she could find herself in a very different position"

Jonathan

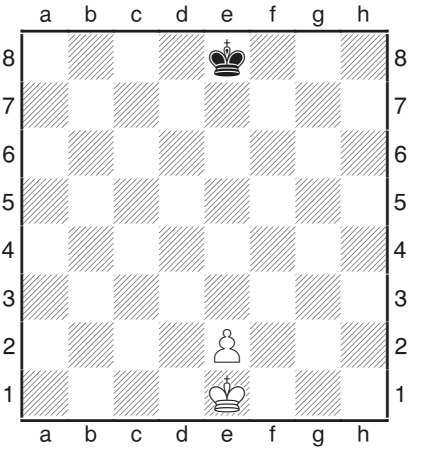
I'm terrible at online chess. I can't focus properly. There are so many distractions, trying to play chess from home. It doesn't help when you're captaining teams and playing for them at the same time: checking everyone's online, entering results when they've finished, keeping the Twitter account up to date and all the other mundane tasks. Even my wins are pretty awful, and the losses are just downright embarrassing.

Working on the time-honoured principle that "Those who can't do, teach", I've treated my shocking form as an opportunity to get back into the swing of things coaching-wise. I've accidentally inherited a junior chess club (the person who'd run it for 40+ years and taught me when I was four years old decided that it was time to retire just a few months before lockdown), so I suppose I've been pushed in that direction a bit too.

Other than publishing a few books, ghost-writing a true story about international child rescue and so on, I was basically sitting around at home doing nothing during lockdown. When Rosie wanted some help with her chess, I actually had some spare time available.

Teaching is fun. I used to love teaching. Paperwork is not fun. My interest in going back to classroom teaching: zero. The events in this book are all true, even if the order is slightly jumbled and the conversations more pointed.

Having established that Rosie could indeed checkmate with an extra Queen, I removed all the pieces from the board - leaving just the two Kings and a single White pawn.



Me: Have a go at winning this.

Rosie: I've only got one pawn…

Me: So that means…?

Rosie: I need to promote the pawn.

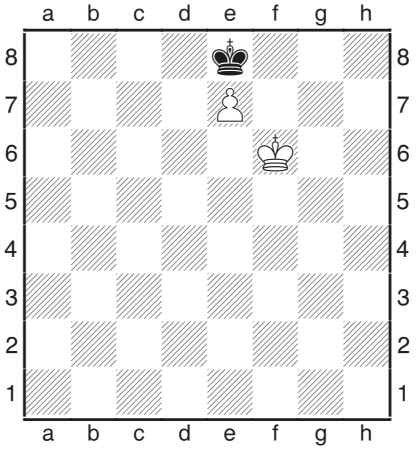
Me: My King's in the way.

Rosie: I need to force it out of the way then.

Me: Okay, give it a go and let's move some pieces.

Rosie clicked a mouse or something, moving the pawn from e2 to e4. Her King followed behind. The pawn crept up the board, one step at a time, eventually landing on e7. Just one step away from

promotion. Her King was safe! I put my King onto the e8 square. Rosie's move.



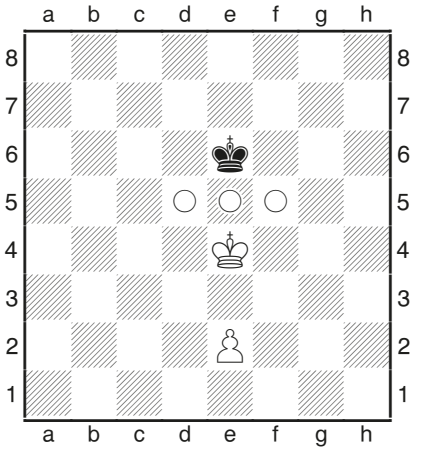
Rosie realised that her only possible move which didn't lose the pawn was to move her King to e6 (we write that as Ke6) – and that would be stalemate. The win had gone. Thankfully, we were playing online. There was no tantrum. Pieces were not thrown across the board in frustration.

Top tip: When winning convincingly, you should always ensure your opponent has a piece which can move to avoid stalemate. Don't be too quick to greedily capture their final pawn...

In truth, the win had already evaporated a few moves earlier. I let it continue because Rosie needed to see for herself why this method doesn't work. Once you've understood *why* moving the pawn first

leads to stalemate, you're less likely to get it wrong in an actual game. I've lost count of the number of times I've seen junior players throw the pawn down the board, only to stalemate their opponents. Many of them had already been taught the correct winning technique (by someone) – but if they don't understand the potential mistakes, why would they understand the correct way?

We switched places electronically and I started from the first position. I escorted my King around the e2 pawn, going past it like a football striker would glide past a Sheffield United defender this season (well it's my city, and they are bottom of the Premier League as I write, so there's bound to be a comment about them sometime). I moved my King forward, opposite Rosie's (the circles indicate the 'barrier' to Black's King).



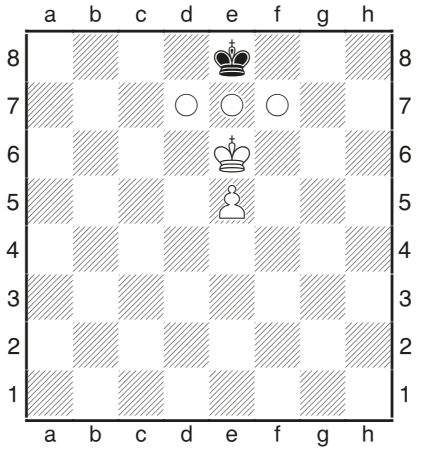
Me: Whichever side your King goes, I'm going the other way.

It's called **the opposition**. White's King bullies Black's, forcing it to

yield and give ground. So long as White keeps taking the opposition, and keeps the king 'goal-side' of the pawn (if JVT can do football analogies, so can I) until the King can shepherd it home, there's a win.

Rosie moved her king to f6; I slid mine forwards to d5. Now she had a problem: move her king to f5 and she's no longer controlling the 'Queening square' (e8 – the square where my pawn will be crowned as the new Queen). Go anywhere else, and she's allowed my King to gain ground to e5.

We repeat the process, and I bring the pawn up behind my King, taking care that I still have the opposition (in other words, making sure that it's Rosie's move and that she's the one who has to yield with her King).



Rosie's King has nowhere left to run. It can't go any further back. It moves to d8, and I put mine on f7. Now my pawn can advance unimpeded. It's Game Over.

("Ah-ha!", says the experienced player smugly as she/he reads this. "In that position, it didn't actually need to be Black's move. White could win anyway now that the King is far enough advanced." The experienced player would be correct, but I don't want to overload Rosie with too much information at this stage.)

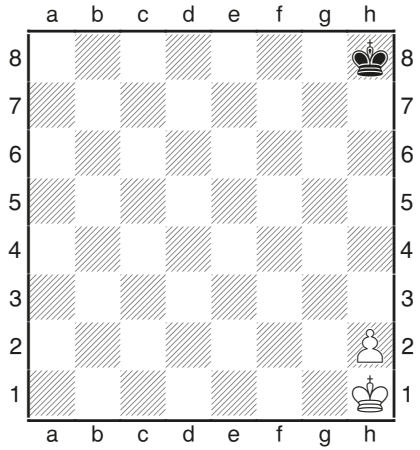
Rosie

I learned another valuable lesson too. The King is the piece which decides the game. Jonathan generalised things for me. He explained that this is a common theme in endgame play. I'd learned a bit about keeping my King safe. That's why I castle. Now I needed to understand that when I'm in an endgame, and my King is not in danger of being checkmated, I need to shift my approach. I'd got almost conditioned to keeping my King hidden, but there comes a point where I need to think differently.

Top tip: Your King often becomes an attacking piece in the endgame. When only a few pieces remain on the board, you can't afford not to use your King.

Jonathan

Once I was confident that Rosie was able to demonstrate the correct technique, I gave her a different position. It looked pretty much the same, but there was one subtle difference.



To be fair to Rosie, it didn't take long before she understood why the technique wasn't going to work this time. She could get the Opposition, but she couldn't take advantage of it. White doesn't have any space on the right-hand side of the board. She needs to be able to move her King in the opposite direction: if I go onto the g-file, she needs to move her King forwards. Off the board. Onto the non-existent i-file. It's a frustration.

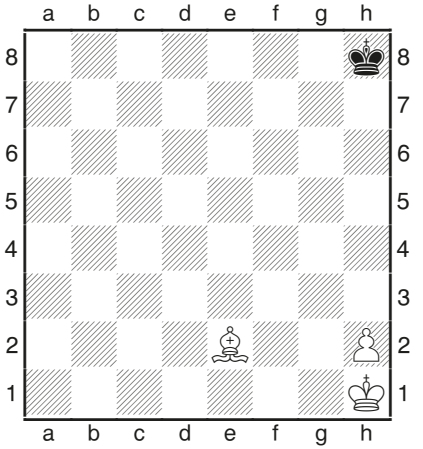
New Word: A file in chess is a column. If I talk about the c-file, I mean all the squares c1, c2...up to c8. We use the word rank for a horizontal row.

Rosie

I guess the fact that I couldn't win with a King and Rook's pawn against King wasn't too surprising, but it's the next position that blew my mind. Jonathan played a cruel trick on me.

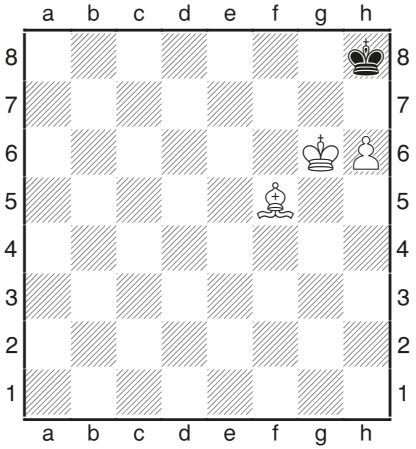
Jonathan: Yes, I suppose it was a bit cruel, but at least it helped you to remember it!

He put a bishop 'randomly' on d2, and showed how easy it was for him to win. I wasn't surprised. King, Bishop and pawn against King? Of course it was easy for him. Then he invited me to try. This time, though, he subtly put the Bishop onto e2.



I gradually started moving my pieces forward, following the techniques that I'd already learned. It proved to be remarkably difficult to drive the King away from the corner.

The more I tried, the more that I felt there was absolutely nothing I could do.



I couldn't put the pawn to h7 – that would be stalemate. I couldn't move my Bishop to e6 – stalemate again. I tried moving my pieces around, but I could never force the King to move more than one square away from the corner. Irritating.

Fortunately, Jonathan 'fessed up soon enough that I didn't get mad at him. In order to drive the King away from the corner, the Bishop had to be on the same colour square as the 'Queening square', h8. Jonathan could do that easily enough with the Bishop starting on a black square, but I had no chance starting on a white square.

Jonathan

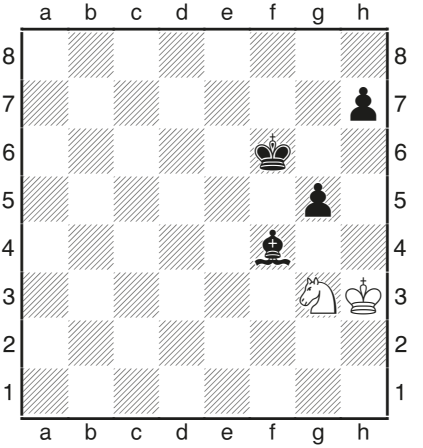
You know the difference between 'knowledge' and 'wisdom', right?

Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit.

Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.

Let's be honest. King, Bishop and Rook's pawn against King isn't going to come up *very* often, is it? It's not the most obvious of endgames. That endgame is great for teaching a beginner how knowledge needs to be *applied*.

I put a position something like this on the board. What should White do here?



From a coaching perspective, I'm wanting a student to spot two things. First, the most important thing, I want them to stop and figure out what White is actually playing for in this position. White's two pawns down. With only a King and Knight remaining, she's not exactly going to be able to force a win. (You cannot checkmate with King and Knight against King, or King and Bishop against King. It's a dead draw.)

To an experienced player, that point is so obvious that you wouldn't even need to make it. If you're a beginner, this is all new to you. It's easy logic when you know, or when you think about it: "The best I can hope for is a draw. Therefore, I'm not trying to win. I'm devoting all my energy to stopping my opponent from winning."

[A little aside from my time learning and teaching Mathematics. All Maths is built on other Maths. We take complex problems and find ways of making them simpler, turning them into something reassuring which we already know how to solve. Spend enough time around mathematicians, and you'll often hear the phrase '…and we've reduced it to the earlier problem', usually followed by a sigh of relief. There are a few self-deprecating 'in' jokes about that, which unfortunately these brackets are too small to contain.]

In chess, we apply that same skill. White needs the knowledge that King, Bishop and wrong-colour Rook's pawn against King is a draw. Then she needs the application: understanding that by capturing the other pawn, we can reach a position which is easy to draw.

She then develops a plan to achieve this: she plays Knight to e4, check. When the Black King moves, she calmly captures the g-pawn. She doesn't need a Knight. White has reduced the position to the earlier problem. It's now an easy draw.

Rosie: I think there's also an interesting point about misconceptions here. It's so easy for students to learn something wrong, and then have to un-learn it again. Jonathan really emphasised the point that this is only the case for a Rook's pawn.

Right! It's so important to be careful about the language we use when teaching. Something which is obvious to an experienced player could be just 'noise' to a beginner, or they won't have the understanding to be able to evaluate what you mean. A really good example of this is when we use statements which are generally true. We'll get round to these later on, but - whether in this book or elsewhere - you'll frequently come across phrases like:

- *A Knight on the rim is always dim*
- *Never move your Queen out early in the opening*
- *Loose Pieces Drop Off*
- *When you've castled, always move a pawn in front of your King to avoid back-rank mates*

Some generalisations have more truth than others. They might be right 99% of the time, or they might be right 40% of the time. They're useful for beginners, but don't trust them as being some kind of absolute truth.

Rosie: These chess 'sayings' are a bit like proverbs, right?

Me: That's a great analogy. They can help you – a lot – provided that you understand their use. They help you to develop an instinct. And don't think that they're all equally valid either. Some are more accurate than others.

Rosie: So when you say 'a Knight on the rim is always dim', it's memorable…but it doesn't mean that I should never, ever put a Knight on the edge of the board?

Me: Correct. In fact, one of the best ways to look at them is to turn them completely around. If the move you want to play breaks that 'rule', ask yourself whether you've got a good reason to be breaking it. If you've played Na3 because that's the only square which doesn't lose the Knight, then obviously you're not going to worry about its placement too much. Any Knight is better than no Knight at all. Of course you're going to put saving the Knight above a general principle. Or maybe your Knight is on b1. You really want to get your Knight to c4. Perhaps moving it there via a3 is better because it doesn't block in your other pieces whilst it's on its way. Yes, the Knight goes to the edge - but only because it's in transit to a better square.

Of course, you can improve the statements: saying "A Knight on the rim is often dim" is a much better approach than "A Knight on the rim is always dim".

It still rhymes, but the word **often** is a signal of the fact that there will be at least **some** exceptions to the rule. Think of it like this:

A complete beginner doesn't know the rule.

A new chess player knows the rule, but sometimes gets confused and forgets to apply it (or applies it incorrectly).

An experienced player follows the rule rigidly every time.

A strong player knows the rule, and sometimes breaks it when it's obviously wrong.

A master has a deep understanding of why the rule is there, what to do when two different rules come into conflict, and can assess the conditions under which a rule should be broken.

Top tip: Don't forget that when a pawn moves, we don't use a letter for 'pawn'. For example, if you see 12 Rg7, it means that a Rook moves to g7 on the 12th move. If you see 12 g7, you know that a pawn moves to g7 on the 12th move.

Appendix 1 - How to talk like a chessplayer (Glossary of key terms)

At some point, hopefully, you'll turn up to your first ever over-the-board competition. You'll meet players - some good at chess, some not so good - who have been playing for many years. They'll throw all kinds of words and phrases at you (and some of them will actually understand what they're talking about). Please use this section as your 'bluffer's guide' to being able to speak the language of chess. Throughout the book we've tried to explain new terminology the first time we've used it, but in case you forget, you can always look them up here. Most of these terms have been covered earlier in this book, but we've added a few fairly common terms which just happened not to come up in the available space.

We hope that you'll find some handy nuggets of information, hints and tips in this section - or, to put it another way, please don't gloss over the glossary.

Analysis - Studying a position, trying to consider all possibilities in order to find the best move. This can be done in preparation for a game, or after the game - looking back over your moves to see how you can learn for next time. After an 'over the board' game, players often analyse the game together. This is commonly (and unnecessarily morbidly) known as a 'post-mortem'.

Arbiter - The 'referee' or 'umpire', whose job it is to enforce the rules of a competition and keep it running smoothly.

Back-rank mate - A checkmate on the back rank. For example, if Black has a King on g8 and pawns on f7/g7/h7, White might be able to play Rd8 and give checkmate. To avoid the possibility of a back-rank mate, it's often helpful to move a pawn in front of your castled King.

Bad Bishop - A Bishop which is hampered by its own pawns on the same colour square, and struggles to act effectively.

Bishop pair - Having two Bishops against Bishop and Knight (or against two Knights). The player with the Bishop pair generally has a slight (rule of thumb 0.3-0.5 pawn) advantage because two Bishops combine effectively together.

Blockade - Using a piece to block the advance of a pawn.

Blunder - A particularly bad move. Common amongst beginners and in Jonathan's games. You'll often see '?' added to a poor move, and '??' to an absolute howler.

Castling short/long - Another way of saying castling on the Kingside / Queenside respectively. The Rook moves further when castling Queenside (hence 'long').

Centre - The middle of the board. The opening is usually a fight for control of the centre.

Closed position - A position which is blocked up by lots of pawns on both sides. Knights become more valuable because of their ability to jump. Careful manoeuvres and pawn breaks become vital, often more so than calculating specific move orders.

Combination - A forcing tactical sequence of moves to gain material or an advantage.

Compensation - When a player has lost (or sacrificed) material, but gained some positional benefit in return. We often weigh up compensation, asking whether there is *sufficient* compensation to justify the loss.

Deflection - Forcing an opponent's piece to move away from the job

that it is currently doing (defending a piece, threatening checkmate, etc), so that you can derive a tactical benefit.

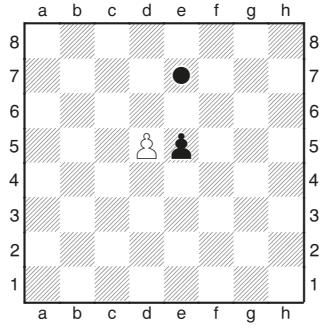
Development - Bringing pieces out into (usually) the centre of the board. The player with the faster development often gains an advantage at the start of the game.

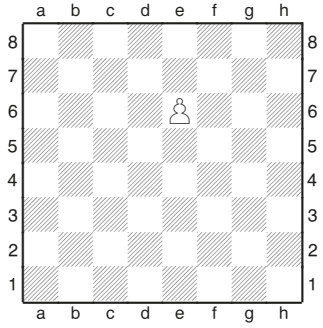
Discovered attack / Discovered check - Moving one piece to uncover an attack by another one. Very sneaky.

Double check - Giving check by two pieces at once, by way of a discovered attack.

Endgame - The final phase of the game, when only a few pieces are left. Commonly, but not absolutely always, the endgame is described as beginning when the Queens are no longer on the board and King safety is less critical.

En passant - The French for 'in passing'. It is the rule in chess whereby a pawn can capture an opposing pawn immediately after it has moved two spaces *as though it had only moved one*. Important to know before playing your first over-the-board competition.





In the diagram on the left, Black has just moved the pawn two squares from e7 to e5. White captures it en passant *as though it had only moved one square* to e6.

(The notation would be dxe6, with the letters e.p. optionally used to make it doubly clear that we're talking about en passant)

Exchange (the/a) - A confusing word because it has two different meanings depending on how it's used:

1. To 'exchange' pieces is to simply swap off pieces of the same rank. We might 'exchange' Queens to reach an endgame.

2. (*The* exchange or *A/an* exchange) The word can also be used with a specific meaning of gaining a Rook and losing a Bishop or Knight. If I win a Rook for a Bishop, I might say "I have won *the exchange*". Later in the game, I might describe myself as being "*an exchange* up".

Fianchetto - Placing a Bishop onto b2/g2/b7/g7 to control the long diagonal early in the game

File - A column on the board. The g-file would be the squares g1, g2, g3...and all the way up to g8.

Fork - Moving a piece to attack two of your opponent's pieces at the same time. Attacking the King and Queen in this way is often known as a 'royal' fork.

Gambit - An opening where one side sacrifices a pawn (usually speculatively, with no absolute guarantee of regaining the pawn) in order to gain some compensation (faster development, control of the centre, better King safety, etc.).

Good Bishop - The opposite of a 'bad Bishop'. It is a Bishop which has plenty of freedom, usually caused by having your pawn chains on the opposite colour square to your Bishop. Don't get us started on 'good bad' and 'bad good' Bishops...check out IM Jeremy Silman for more complex discussions.

Intermezzo (intermediate move) - Playing a different, usually forcing, move before continuing with your plan. For example, whilst swapping Queens you might interpose a check to gain a positional advantage. You then recapture the Queen the following move.

Isolated pawn (or isolani) - A pawn which cannot be defended by other friendly pawns. Usually it is therefore weak, and often ends up being sacrificed (as in the phrase "play the isolani like a gambit").

Long diagonal - The two longest diagonals on the board are from a1 to h8, and from h1 to a8. These are known as the long diagonals.

Loose piece - A piece which is not defended by any other piece, as in the phrase 'Loose Pieces Drop Off', which indicates that loose pieces are a target for potential tactics.

Material - Your pieces (in relation to your opponent's). If you capture more 'points' than your opponent, you'd say that you've gained material.

Middlegame - Everything between the opening and the endgame. The most difficult part of the game for beginners, because it usually requires a plan.

Open file - A file which has no pawns. Open files are particularly good for Rooks. The phrase 'semi-open file' is also used to describe a file on which there is only one pawn. Somewhat lazily, it's easy to slip into the habit of using 'open' when 'semi-open' is correct. Many players do this, so don't be concerned if you hear it used in that way.

Open position - The opposite of a closed position. There are few pawns acting as obstacles to pieces travelling from one side of the board to the other. Bishops favour open positions in the same way that Knights favour closed positions.

Opening - The start of a game of chess, usually characterised by the battle for control of the centre of the board and the importance of ensuring the safety of the King. Openings in chess are well-researched, so players may know 'opening theory': tried and tested methods of playing the opening, depending on their opponent's response.

Opposite-colour(ed) Bishops - When one player has a Black-squared Bishop and the other player has a White-squared Bishop. In an endgame, opposite-colour Bishops increase the likelihood of a draw because it's hard to force a pawn to promote when your opponent has significant control over one half of all the squares.

In the middlegame, opposite-coloured Bishops tend to favour the attacking player because they can exploit squares which the opponent is unable to properly defend.

Opposition (the) - Placing your King two squares away from your opponent's King in (usually) a King and pawn endgame, in order to force your opponent to move their King out of the way. This is helpful when your plan to win the endgame involves using your own King to shepherd a pawn through to promotion.

Outpost - A square which is a good location for one of your pieces to occupy, because it's defended by a pawn and your opponent is unable to attack it with a pawn. An outpost is usually a key square and point of entry to your opponent's position.

Over The Board (OTB) - Playing chess with a real set and physical pieces. Older players often consider this to be the true form of chess, with online play being a poor substitute.

Overloading - Forcing your opponent's piece to do too many different things at the same time, so that they cannot possibly defend against every threat.

Overprotecting - Defending a piece more times than strictly necessary, often to avoid any risk of overloading one of your defensive pieces.

Passed pawn - A pawn which has gone 'past' any enemy pawns which could stop it: for example, a pawn on the c-file is 'passed' if your opponent has no pawns on the b-, c- or d- files between your pawn and the Queening square.

Pawn break - Moving a pawn to challenge your opponent's pawn chain.

Pawn centre - Placing pawns in the middle of the board (phrase usually used when the opponent has not also done so) in order to control the centre, typically in the opening.

Pawn chain - Pawns which form a diagonal line, so that they are defending each other.

Pawn island - Pawns on consecutive files which could conceivably defend each other. For example, pawns on the a/b/c files would form a 'pawn island' independent of a 'pawn island' on the e/f files. The fewer pawn islands, the better for your pawn structure.

Perpetual check - A situation where one player can force a draw by continually checking their opponent. Annoying, but a perfectly legitimate strategy. If you're winning (or losing) a Queen endgame in particular, always look out for the possibility of a perpetual check. Also used for constantly attacking a bare King which cannot escape, but which it is impossible to checkmate.

Pin - Attacking a piece in such a way that it cannot reasonably move: either because it would create a check (absolute pin) or because it would expose a greater-value piece to attack (relative pin).

Positional play - The art of moving pieces in such a way as to enhance their long-term potential whilst limiting your opponent's. An easy introduction to positional play is the idea that 'if you don't know what to do, find your worst-placed piece and think of a plan to bring it to a more useful square.'

Queening square - The square on which a pawn would be able to promote to a Queen (or technically another piece), if allowed.

Rank - a horizontal row of the board. The coordinates all share a number, such as the squares a4, b4, c4 up to h4, which would therefore be known as the 4th rank.

Removal of the guard (removal of the defender, undermining) - Swapping off, deflecting or attacking a piece which is doing a defensive job such as defending an important piece or key square. With the defender otherwise distracted, you can focus on your main objective.

Sacrifice - Giving away material in the hope of gaining more significant long-term benefits. When a sacrifice is obviously temporary (and is, in fact, just a tactic) it should properly be called a pseudo-sacrifice. Beginners in particular are likely to not bother with that technical distinction (and indeed, neither have we in this book, for simplicity's sake).

Scholar's mate - The direct approach by absolute beginners of trying to checkmate by playing e4, Bc4, Qh5 (or Qf3) and then Qxf7 checkmate. Easily stopped provided you're alert to the possibility.

Simplification - Swapping off pieces in order to achieve a position, usually an endgame, which is easier to play or win.

Skewer - The reverse of a pin. Attacking a major piece so that when it moves, a minor piece is opposed to attack.

Smothered mate - A checkmate by a Knight which only works because your opponent's King is surrounded by other pieces, depriving it of escape squares.

Stalemate - When one player is left unable to move, without being in check, the game is a draw by stalemate. A player who is losing but has only a couple of pieces remaining might try to sacrifice those pieces in order to force a draw by stalemate.

Strategy and Tactics - Thankfully, these happen to be next to each other in our alphabetical order of terms so we can explain them together.

Strategy is your overall plan: the approach you intend to take in order to win the game. This might involve placement of pieces on attacking squares, exchanging into an endgame, or positional goals such as creating weaknesses in your opponent's pawn structure.

By contrast, tactics are more immediate: using themes such as pins, forks, skewers, deflections, removal of the guard, etc, to achieve a clear benefit. Strategy and tactics may seem like opposites, and people often describe themselves as 'strategic' or 'tactical' players, but in reality they are not. There is a symbiotic relationship between the two: good strategy increases the chance of a tactic becoming possible, whilst tactical play can be used to realise strategic goals.

Swindle - When a player wins a game they were losing, usually by getting their opponent to fall for a cheap trap (or 'cheapo'). This is (only half-jokingly) basically an irregular verb:

I played a beautiful speculative sacrifice

You swindled your opponent

He was lucky to win

Tempo - Time (on the board, measured in moves not minutes). If your opponent spends two moves doing something they could have done in one, they have lost time. Specifically, they have lost one move - or *one tempo*. The plural of tempo is *tempi*, and (for example) a Gambit might involve sacrificing a pawn in order to gain two tempi.

Zugzwang - A position in which the player to move has nothing useful to do, and any move they play will weaken their position. Rarely, mutual zugzwang occurs: a position in which is is disadvantageous to both players to have the move. *(In the game of Nim with a 1-3-5-7 starting position, the first player to move should always lose: that game begins with mutual zugzwang)*

Zwischenzug - See *intermezzo*. Also note that the German word Zwischenschach can be used for a Zwischenzug which is also check, but you will rarely hear this word in conversation - possibly because so few players know how to pronounce it...