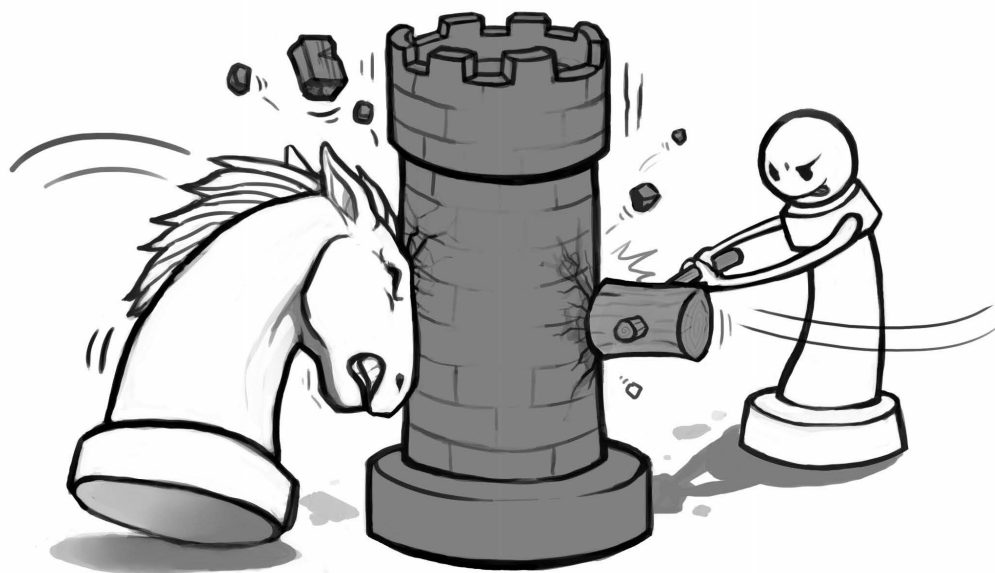


Chess Strategy for Kids

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THE PRINCIPLE OF TWO WEAKNESSES

GAMBIT

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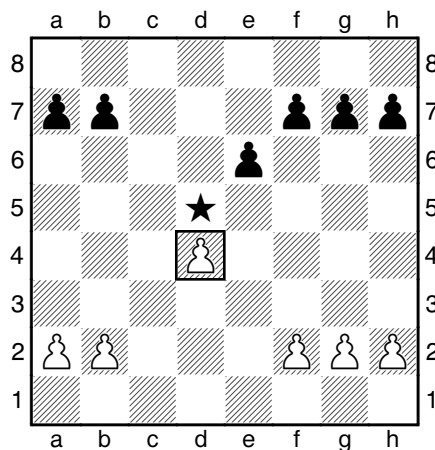
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SMART STRATEGY 16

The Isolated Pawn

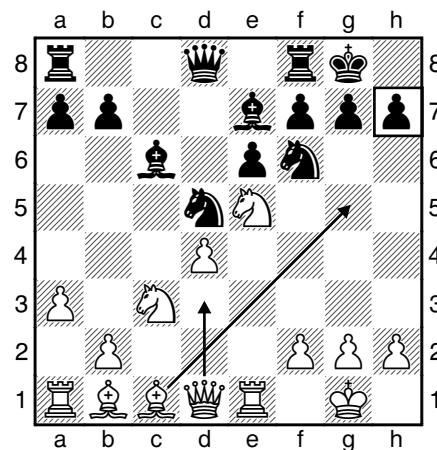
Either a weakness or a strength – or both!

An isolated pawn is one that has no friendly pawns on neighbouring files. For instance, a d-pawn when the c- and e-pawns have been exchanged off. An isolated pawn is generally a weakness since it cannot be defended by another pawn. So if it is attacked, it needs to be defended by a piece, and pieces should normally be put to better use than defending stray pawns. However, with an isolated pawn on one of the centre squares (e.g. d4), matters are not so clear-cut. This pawn stakes out a space advantage and controls some important squares; it is also easy to defend without misplacing any pieces. This creates an interesting and complex strategic imbalance. An isolated pawn becomes weaker as more pieces are exchanged, because it is easier to attack while the dynamic possibilities are reduced. It is not just the pawn itself that is weak, but also the square in front of it, which is an excellent and secure square for an enemy piece. Blockading the isolated pawn fixes it as a target and prevents its advance. This is important because a sudden advance by the pawn is a common tactical ploy to unleash the pent-up energy of the pieces behind it.



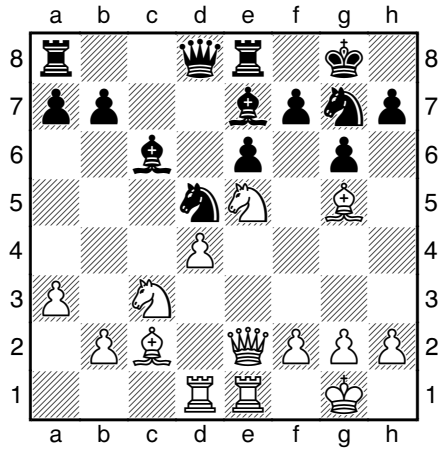
1) The isolated queen's pawn (IQP)

The d4-pawn is isolated. The d5-square is a secure post for a black piece. White has many open lines and a very useful square on e5 for a knight.



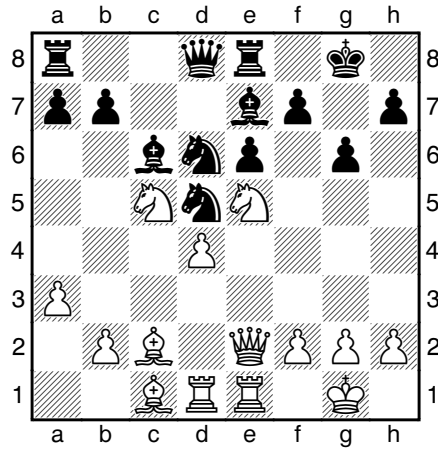
2) White moves

Both sides have occupied their strong-points in this pawn-structure. Now ♔d3 followed by ♕g5 provokes a weakness like ...g6, creating *holes* on f6 and h6.



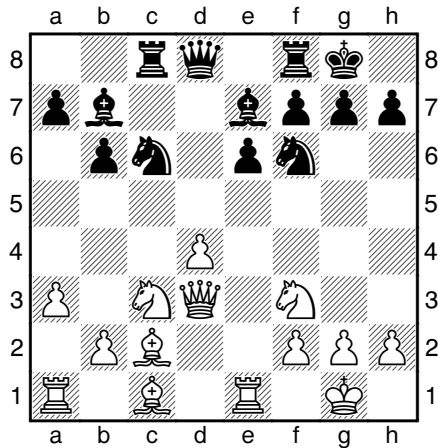
3a) White moves

Black wants to exchange pieces, which White avoids with 23 ♙c1 . We see this again after 23... ♞f5 24 ♞e4 ♞d6 25 ♞c5 (3b): White keeps the pieces on and seeks attacking chances in the middlegame.



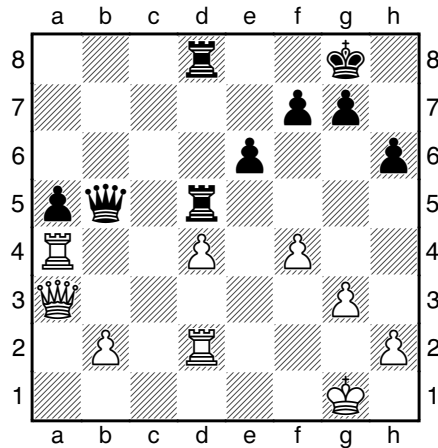
3b) Black moves

White has established knights on both outposts (c5 and e5). Black has also fortified his knight on the key square in front of the isolated pawn. A tough fight lies ahead; both sides have chances.



4) White moves

14 d5! is a strong and typical thrust by the IQP. Black has enormous problems because 14... exd5? loses to 15 ♙g5 (threatening ♙xf6) 15... g6 16 ♞xe7! ♞xe7 17 ♞xd5 – a sequence to remember.



5) Black moves

The other side of the coin: 35... e5! exploits the weakness of the IQP in a simplified position. 36 fxe5 ♞xe5 37 ♞a1 ♞e8! 38 dxe5 ♞xd2 39 ♞xa5 ♞c6 gives Black a decisive attack on the white king.

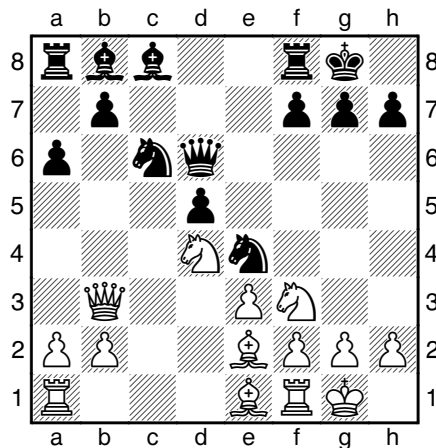
SMART STRATEGY 17

The Isolated Pawn Couple and Hanging Pawns

The family tree

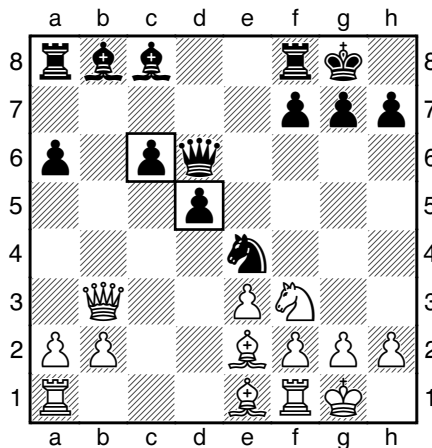
These are both structures that can arise from an isolated queen's pawn (IQP) following a standard change in the structure, though they can also come about by other means. In both cases, one side (let's say White) has c- and d-pawns but no b- or e-pawns. Meanwhile Black has no pawns on the c- and d-files. Thus White has an 'isolated' pair of pawns. When both pawns are on their fourth rank, they have a special name: *hanging pawns*. In that case they don't protect each other, but they pose more of a threat to the opponent, as either pawn might advance aggressively at any moment. Given their potent attacking force, before allowing the opponent hanging pawns, it makes sense to have a specific plan in mind for how to restrain them. In diagrams 1a-1c, we see the whole family tree within just three moves.

Like the IQP itself, both of these structures may prove a liability in an endgame. A famous example of the weakness of the isolated pawn couple in an ending is the game Flohr-Vidmar, Nottingham 1936 (diagram 2).



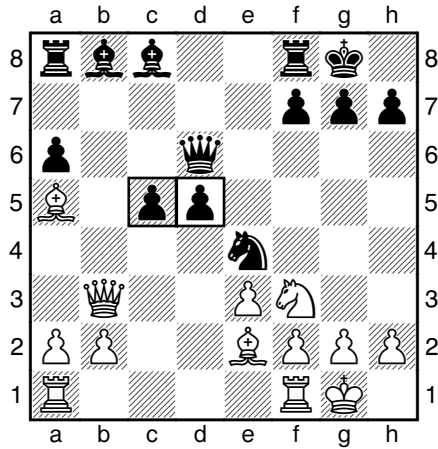
1a) White moves

An exchange of knights on d4 would give White an unpromising symmetrical position, so he exchanges on c6. After 16 ♖xc6 bxc6 (1b) Black has an *isolated pawn couple* on c6 and d5.



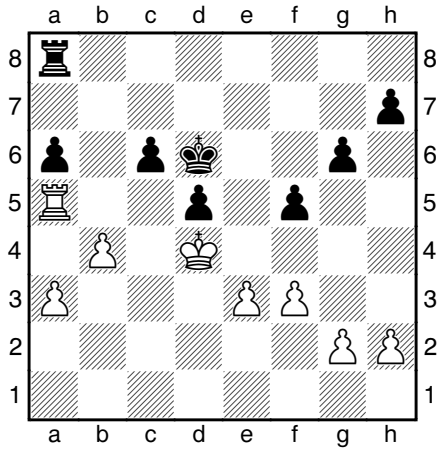
1b) White moves

White provokes ...c5 to weaken the d5-pawn with 17 ♗b4 c5 18 ♗a5 (1c), transforming the structure from the isolated pawn couple to the hanging pawns, with pawns on c5 and d5.



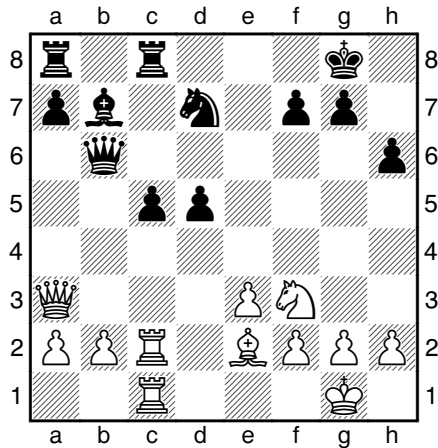
1c) Black moves

Black's hanging pawns are both strong and weak. White must watch out for both ...c4 and ...d4 advances. Black's pawns might prove weak in an endgame, but White faces a tricky middlegame first.



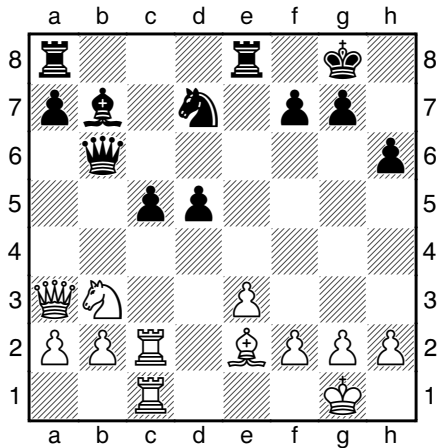
2) White moves

If firmly blockaded, the isolated pawn couple is simply weak. 38 e4! fxe4 39 fxe4 dxe4 40 ♔xe4 destroys the d5-pawn and, with two weak isolated pawns to target as well as active pieces, Flohr won.



3a) White moves

19 ♖d2! plans ♖b3 and the pin ♗g4, targeting one of the defenders of the c5-pawn. After 19...♗e8 20 ♖b3 (3b), White hopes to induce 20...c4, with 21 ♖d4 to come (see Smart Strategy 20).



3b) Black moves

With 20...d4! Black sacrifices a pawn to activate the bishop on the long diagonal and the e8-rook on the e-file. After 21 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 22 ♗xc5 dxe3 23 fxe3 ♗e7 Black has good compensation.