

The Objective of Chess

Part 2 – Attacks and Threats

Attacking and checking the opposing King “is one of the most exciting parts of chess, but it is also one of the hardest to play accurately.” [Art of Attack in Chess by Vladimir Vucović at page 5 (Preface by John Nunn)]. [Full reference provided in the Recommended Readings section] The term, **threat**, usually is used in chess in a broader manner than the term, **attack**. That is to say, a threat generally is an “attack in its widest sense” [Art of Attack in Chess at page 6 (Introduction)], and represents any action on the chessboard that in some way interferes with the opposing player’s chance of winning the game. However, to some a more precise way to approach learning chess is to make a distinction between attacks and threats, by viewing attacking “in its narrower sense...an action involving a direct or indirect threat to the opponent’s [K]ing.” [Art of Attack in Chess at page 7 (Introduction)] I do not subscribe to the narrower view and use the term “attack” in the broader sense focusing the distinction where it is more commonly done...threats and attacks (broadly viewed) vs. checks (more narrow view-threats and attacks on an opposing King).

“Action is the essential basis on which the game of chess is founded and any action which contains a threat...stands out as a prominent feature of the game.” [Art of Attack in Chess at page 6 (Introduction)] Action must occur before, and for the purpose of, checkmating a King (or gaining a draw or stalemate); or else the fighting units sit on the board ready, waiting, bored, forlorn, and itching to jump into the fray to engage the enemy. Action on the board, by itself, is meaningless. A player must have a **game plan**, with knowledge how and when to vary, deviate from, or abandon the game plan, in response to the action on the board by the opposing player as the game progresses.

Attacks against a King may be grouped into four primary categories (in Art of Attack in Chess at pages 7-8 (Introduction), three categories are utilized. I have added the second category below - Hidden Attacks - as a separate category; Mr. Vucović subsumes such attacks (also called concealed attacks) on the opposing King into the first category below...Latent Attacks). The categories below apply more broadly for threats and attacks against all other pieces and pawns as well, not just the opposing King.

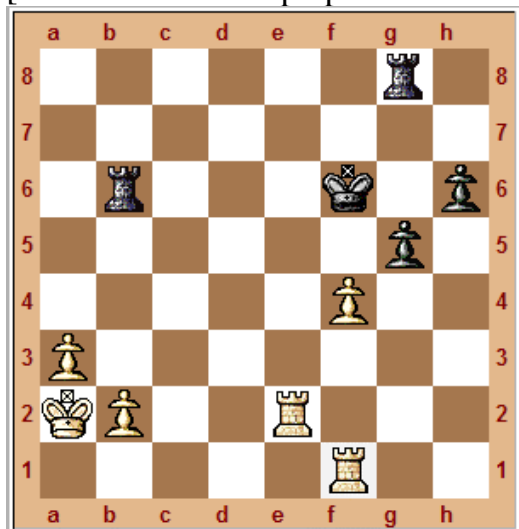
- 1. Latent attacks** arising from the position of pieces and pawns on the chessboard that have the potential to directly attack the opposing King (check) although the piece or pawn is not doing so at the particular moment in the game. [the first degree of attack in the framework established in Art of Attack in Chess at page 7 (Introduction)]

2. **Hidden attacks**, which are direct attacks on the opposing King by one or more pieces of the player that take no immediate active role in developing the attack (i.e. the piece is relatively sitting passively on the board and when another piece or pawn is moved or advanced, the piece then directly attacks the opposing King). This category covers discovered checks and discovered checkmates. Unlike a latent threat, a pawn can never be the fighting unit that does the direct attack from a hidden (passive) position. The reason is because the pawn would need to advance or engage in a capture to directly attack the opposing King. However, the pawn may be the fighting unit that when advanced or does a capture, opens up a hidden attack on the opposing King by another of the player's pieces.
3. **Immediate/Direct attacks on the opposing King** (checks and double checks), often may be accompanied by an unavoidable loss of one or more of the opposing player's fighting units (the **material**) and/or "spoiling" the opposing player's position. The opposing player often must do so in order to "stave off the threat." [the second degree of attack in the framework established in Art of Attack in Chess at page 8 (Introduction)]
4. **Mating attacks**, which are a series of moves and/or pawn advances (with or without captures) resulting in unrelenting action directed against the opposing King by the player's fighting units. The action is a coordinated series of "uncompromising" moves and/or pawn advances (whether with captures or not), forcing the opposing King onto an square where the opposing King is in checkmate. ["the third and highest degree of attack" in the framework established in Art of Attack in Chess at page 8 (Introduction)] This action results in a **forced checkmate** because the opposing player cannot escape the checkmate, **provided the player does not make a mistake or blunder**. A forced checkmate is different than an **opportunistic checkmate**, where the opposing player makes a mistake or blunders allowing the player to checkmate with an otherwise unavailable mating attack, or directly checkmate without a mating attack.

Let's examine threats and attacks with the position shown in the board diagram on the next page. White to Move. Identify what types of attacks exist for the position shown. Then identify what types of threats and attacks exist, or may be created if White's pawn captures Black's pawn on g5. If you are unfamiliar with basic moving, and moving and capturing, by Kings, Rooks, and pawns, a brief overview is provided in the Appendix at the end of this tutorial.

DIAGRAM OBJ-2 Attacks and Threats Example

[FEN: "6r1/8/1r3k1p/6p1/5P2/P7/KP2R3/5R2 w - - 0 61"]



For position shown: Black's Rook at b6 is attacking White's pawn at b2, which is defended by both White's King at a2 and White's Rook at e2. White's pawn at f4 is attacking Black's pawn at g5, which is defended by Black's King at f6, Black's Rook at g8, and Black's pawn at h6. White has a latent threat of an attack (check) against Black's King via a pawn capture - White's pawn on a4 captures Black's pawn on g5. White has a hidden (also latent) threat of an attack (discovered check) against Black's King by White's Rook at f1 if White does the pawn capture.

If White does the pawn capture: Black's Rook attack on White's pawn at b2 remains. There is a double check against Black's King by White's Rook at f1 and White's pawn now on g5. There also is a fork check by White's pawn on g5 against Black's King on f6 and Black's pawn on h6. Therefore, a combined double check and fork check now exists.

While Black's pawn on h6 would be attacking White's pawn on g5, and Black's Rook on g8 also would be attacking White's pawn, neither may capture White's pawn because doing either one would not get Black's King out of check despite removing White's pawn attack on Black's King. This is because White's Rook at f1 would still be attacking/checking Black's King. Black's King also is attacking White's pawn on g5.

Black's King cannot move to e7, e6, or e5, because White's Rook at e1 would check Black's King. Black's King cannot move to either f5 or f7, because doing so would not get out of the check by White's Rook at f1. Therefore, Black's King has three only options to get out of check: (1) move to g7; or (2) move to g6; or (3) capture White's pawn at g5.

If Black's King moves and captures White's pawn at g5, White moves Rook to g1 attacking and checking Black's King - a skewer, and when Black's King moves to h5, h5, f4, f5, or f6 to get out of check, White's Rook captures Black's Rook at g8. Therefore, Black's King should be moved to either g7 or g6, but analyses those lines requires more advanced principles and concepts beyond the scope of this example.

In addition to the four categories above, attacking the King may be viewed within the framework of the optional King-Rook move called castling or the castle move...a one-time unique move available to each player to shield their respective Kings in a protective defensive position either to the Kingside or the Queenside (this optional move is covered in detail in The Castle Move or Castling tutorial, available under The King tutorial). That is to say:

1. **“Attack before castling, i.e. against the [K]ing which has not yet castled,”** and
2. **“Attack against the castled [K]ing.”**

[[Art of Attack in Chess](#) at page 9 (Introduction)]

“Attack can also be divided on the basis of so-called mating patterns; **of focal points, of basic formations of pieces, files, ranks, and diagonals, of basic sacrifices, as well as by the stage which the attack has reached.** These divisions according to **spatial, material, and temporal aspects** of an attack” are useful to arrange concepts and principles in a fashion designed “to reveal the part played by each factor.” [[Art of Attack in Chess](#) at page 9 (Introduction)]

The above factors are not only central, integral components for checking and checkmating, but also for reaching one of the alternative objectives in chess: draws or stalemate (covered in Part 6 of this tutorial).

Part 1 – Checkmate and Checking

Part 3 – Checkmates (simple and complex); Anatomy of Mate/Patterns; Mating Net; Pattern Recognition

Part 4 - Simple Checkmates and Controlling Squares

Part 5 - Rapid Checkmates

Part 6 - The Alternatives to Checkmate – Resignation; Draws; and Stalemate

Mark Lowery's Exciting World of Chess

APPENDIX - Moving Review

The following is a brief overview for purposes of analyses of the board position used in Part 2 (note: this review is not comprehensive and additional rules, principles, and concepts apply and are covered in other tutorials.)

A piece or a pawn may not be moved if doing so would expose the player's King to attack and check by an opposing piece.

1. A King may move, or move and capture, only one square at a time. A King may move, or move and capture, horizontally to the right or left in a rank, or vertically upward or downward in a file, or diagonally forward or backward along either diagonal line from the square on which it is located, provided the square upon which the King would land:

a. is not occupied by a piece or pawn of that player; and

b. is not adjacent to (touching at any point whether horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) the square on which the opposing King is located; and

c. is not a square on which the King would be in check.

2. A Rook may move, or move and capture, horizontally left or right along a rank, or vertically up or down a file, from the square upon which the Rook is located to squares located in the same rank or same file, except:

a. a square on which another of the player's pieces or pawns is located, and only to empty squares located in the same file or rank up to that square: and

b. squares in the same file or rank beyond a square on which an opposing piece or pawn is located, but may move to empty squares up to such square, and also move to such square (unless occupied by the opposing King), thereby capturing the opposing piece or pawn on that square.

3. A pawn may only advance one square vertically upward for White, and vertically downward for Black, in the file in which it is located, except when it is blocked from doing so by a piece or pawn of either player located on the square immediately in front of the square on which the pawn is located. A pawn may never go backward.

A pawn may advance and capture an opposing piece or pawn (other than the opposing King) only on a square located diagonally and vertically one square upward to the right or left (in the adjacent files) from the square upon which the pawn is located for White's pawns, and located diagonally and vertically downward one square to the right or left (in the adjacent files) from the square upon which the pawn is located for Black's pawns.

A pawn may only attack and check an opposing King diagonally and vertically following the above rule.

However, a pawn may be subject to being attacked, and perhaps captured, by an opposing piece from any square if the rules for moving and capturing by the attacking opposing piece are followed.