

TACTICAL IDEA 2: QUEEN FORKS

A FORK is a move which creates two (or more) THREATS in different directions with the same piece. At the start of the game your queen is ideally placed to make FORKS in different ways. First, you have to open lines for her by moving your pawns.

You've just seen how you can use your queen to get a quick CHECKMATE if your opponent's f-pawn moves early in the game. You can also use your queen to make a FORK, moving to h5 to CHECK the enemy king while also THREATENING an enemy piece on the 5th rank.

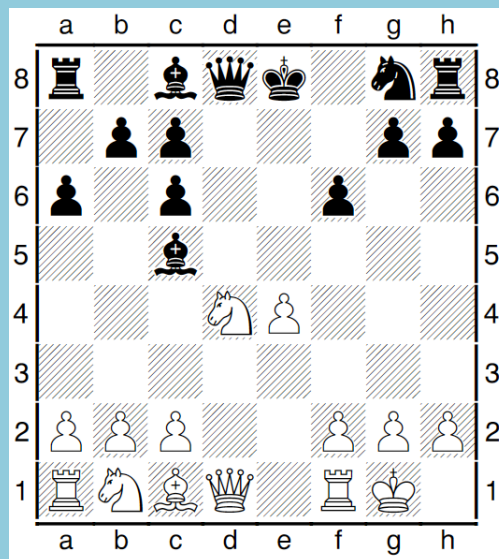
You've already met one QUEEN FORK – for Black on h4. You'll remember the game that started 1. e4 e5 2. f4 d5 3. fxe5 Qh4+. Here are two more examples.

Look at this game.

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bb5 a6
4. Bxc6 bxc6
5. O-O f6
6. d4 exd4
7. Nxd4

All these moves are fine and have been played thousands of times. Now Black usually plays c5 to drive the white knight back, but it's very easy to play a natural move which both DEVELOPS and creates a THREAT.

- 7... Bc5

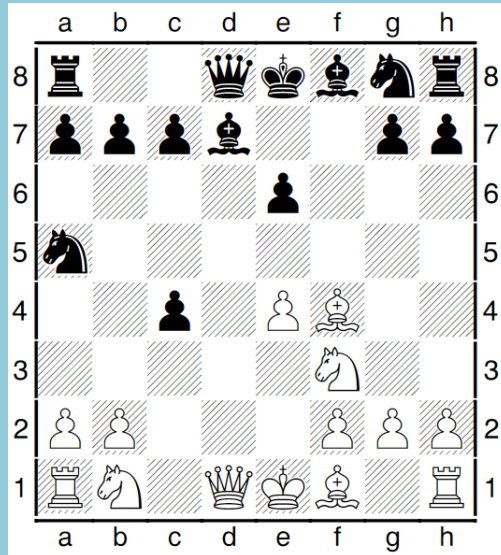


Can you see how White can play a QUEEN FORK here? If you know what you're looking for it's easy. White's move is...

8. Qh5+, winning the bishop on c5.

Here's another example, played over a century ago between two of the world's strongest players. It's a different opening from what you're used to.

1. d4 d5
2. c4 Nc6
3. Nc3 dxc4
4. d5 Na5
5. Bf4 Bd7
6. e4 e6
7. dxe6 fxe6



Black's last move was a bad mistake. He/she should have captured with the bishop instead. You don't need me to tell you White's next move:

8. Qh5+

This time the QUEEN FORK picks up the knight on a5.

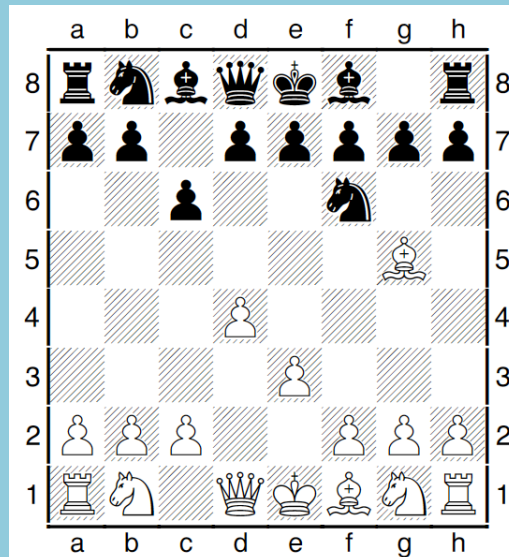
The most common square for a QUEEN FORK in the opening is a4 if you're White, or a5 if you're Black.

You already know about using your e-pawn and d-pawn in the opening, but in many openings you'll also use your c-pawn to fight for the centre.

One advantage of this is that, just like moving your e-pawn, it opens a diagonal for your queen.

In our first example, Black manages to play a QUEEN FORK on only the third move.

1. d4 Nf6
2. Bg5 c6
3. e3

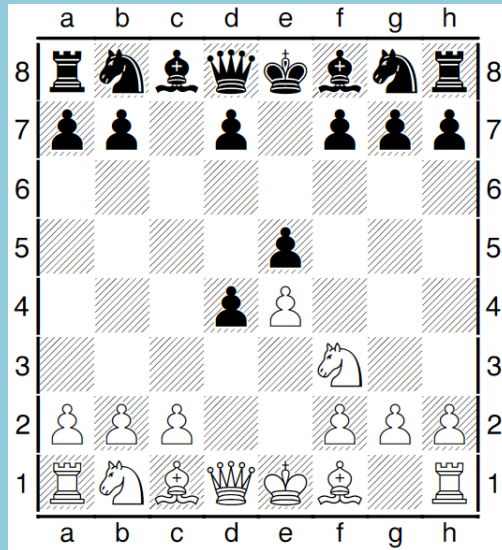


3... Qa5+

Black is winning the undefended bishop on g5. This only happened because White's 3rd move, e3, closed the diagonal between c1 and g5. Even after a useless 3rd move, White would have been able to play either Qd2 or Bd2 to save the piece.

Here's another example. Black's first move is the SICILIAN DEFENCE, a very popular reply to 1. e4.

1. e4 c5
2. d4 cxd4
3. Nf3 e5



Black sets a trap. White snatches at the bait.

4. Nxe5

And this time Black picks up the stray knight:

4... Qa5+

Here's one way White can try for the same thing:

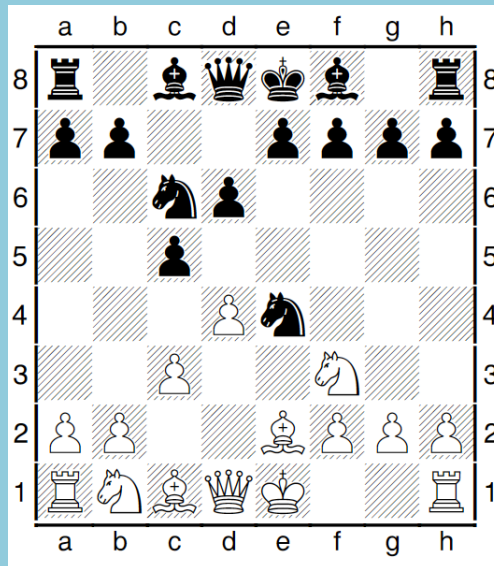
1. e4 c5
2. Nf3 d6
3. Be2 Nf6
4. c3

Baiting the first trap. Black spots that after 4... Nxe4 White will play 5. Qa4+ so plays instead...

- 4... Nc6
5. d4

Now it looks safe for Black to capture on e4...

5... Nxe4



Can you find White's next move here?

The pawn on d4 is in the way so White can play...
6. d5

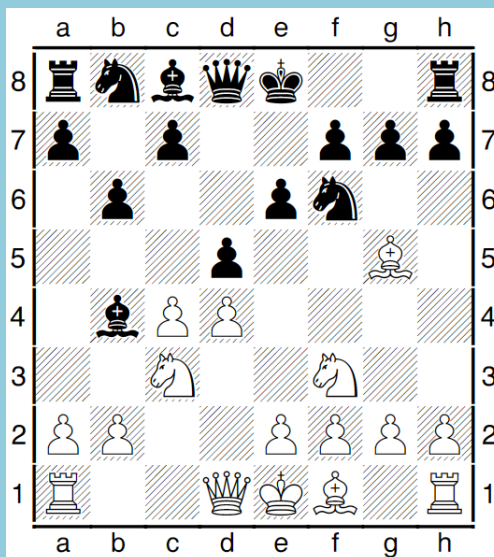
White will win one of Black's knights. If the knight on c6 doesn't move White will take it off. And if it does move, then White will use a FORK to win a piece.

Two more examples. This time White opens with the d-pawn and chooses a very popular and strong opening called the QUEEN'S GAMBIT.

1. d4 d5
2. c4 e6
3. Nc3 Nf6
4. Bg5 Bb4

At this point White could play 5. Qa4+ but Black would get out of the FORK by playing Nc6. So White decides to wait.

5. Nf3 b6



This time the FORK works. 6. Qa4+ will win either a bishop or a knight as after 6... Nc6 White plays

7. Qxc6+.

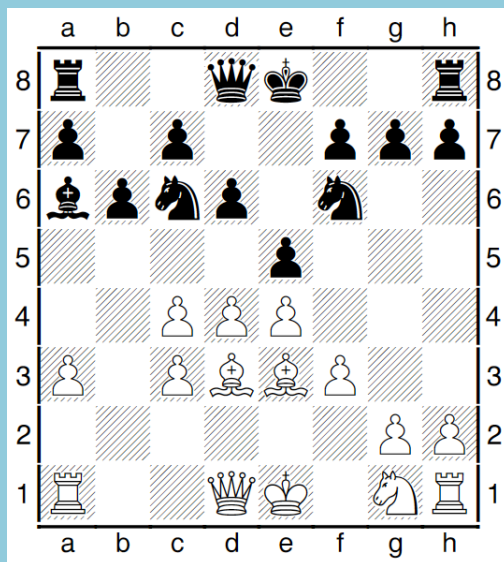
The idea can sometimes be extended. Your opponent can get out of the FORK by blocking and defending at the same time, but you can then THREATEN THE PINNED PIECE.

Even the greatest players in the world fall for this idea from time to time. Jose Raul Capablanca, who was world champion between 1921 and 1927, was one of the hardest players to beat in the history of chess.

Here's the start of a game he lost in 1929 because of a QUEEN FORK on a4.

1. d4 Nf6
2. c4 e6
3. Nc3 Bb4
4. a3 Bxc3+
5. bxc3 d6
6. f3 e5
7. e4 Nc6
8. Be3 b6
9. Bd3 Ba6

Here's the position.



10. Qa4

This time it's not a CHECK but it's both a FORK and a PIN. Black can get out of the FORK by playing...

10... Bb7

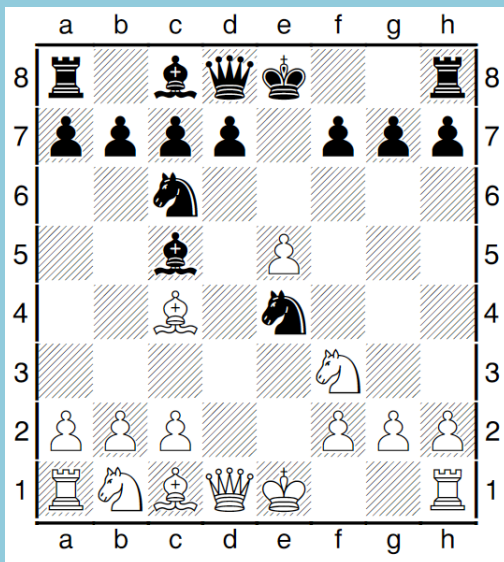
Moving one THREATENED piece to defend the other one. But now White can play...

11. d5. THREATENING THE PINNED PIECE.

White won a piece, and, after 62 moves, he also won the game.

QUEEN FORKS on d5 (for White) or d4 (for Black) are also very common. Take a look at this.

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bc4 Nf6
4. d4 Nxe4
5. dxe5 Bc5



Black's THREATENING a KNIGHT FORK on f2. Even Bxf2+ would stop White castling. But White can ignore the attack on f2 and play...

6. Qd5

White is FORKING e4 and f7 - you'll see that Qxf7 is CHECKMATE. If Black plays Nd6, White will play exd6. If Black plays Ng5, White will play Bxg5. If Black plays 0-0, White will play Qxe4. If Black plays Nxf2, White will play Qxf7#. If Black plays Bxf2+ White will play Kf1 or Ke2, and Black will still have the same problem, Whatever Black plays you will win at least a piece.

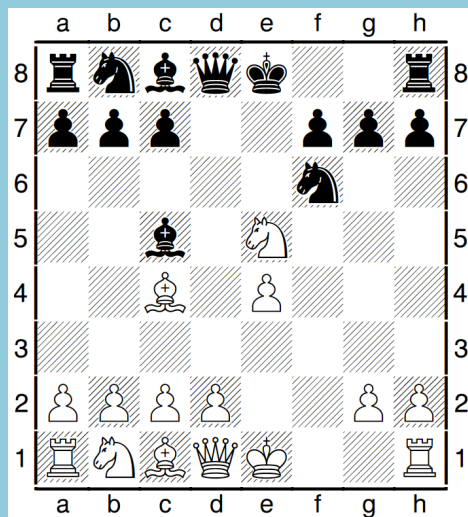
Black can also use the same idea.

1. e4 e5
2. f4 Bc5
3. Nf3 d6
4. Bc4 Nf6
5. fxe5 dxe5

And now...

6. Nxe5

...is a mistake. You know why.



Black plays...

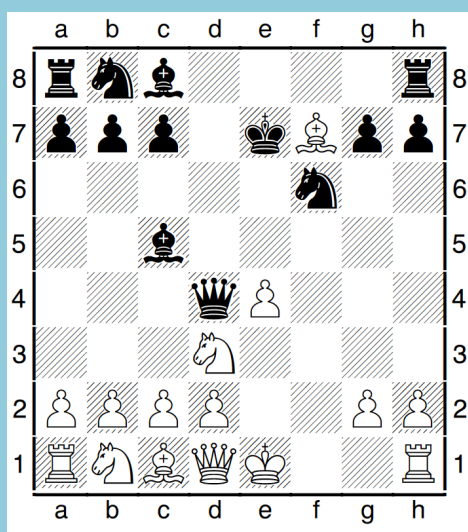
- 6... Qd4

ORKING e5 and f2 (yes, it's still a sort of FORK even though you're THREATENING CHECKMATE rather than a piece on f2).

Now if White plays

Nd3 you can play Qxc4. So White might try...

7. Bxf7+ Ke7
8. Nd3



And now Black can TRAP the white queen

- 8... Bg4

Finally in this section, a quick look at a very strong and popular opening.

1. e4 e5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bb5

This is the RUY LOPEZ or SPANISH OPENING. On move 2 White THREATENS the black pawn on e5 and Black DEFENDS it. On move 3 White attacks the knight defending the pawn, hoping to be able to trade bishop for knight and then capture on e5. But is it really a THREAT? Let's see.

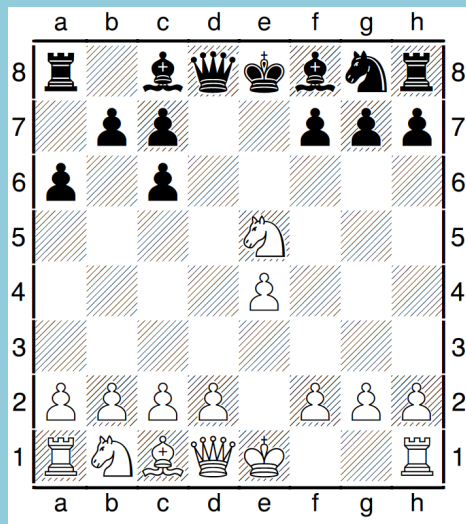
3... a6

This is the most popular move, but you might think it's a mistake. As it happens 4. Ba4 is usually played here, but trading on c6 is also fine.

4. Bxc6 dxc6

Now the most popular move is 0-0. Look at what might happen if White takes the pawn.

5. Nxe5



As it happens Black has three good moves here. Qe7 is a sort of SKEWER of the knight on e5 and the pawn on e4 as well as a potential PIN. Qg5 is a FORK of the knight on e5 and the pawn on g2. But the simplest move is...

5... Qd4

FORKING the knight on e5 and the pawn on e4. The game might continue:

6. Nf3 Qxe4+
7. Qe2 Qxe2+
8. Kxe2

Black has a slightly better position. Black has a bishop for a knight and White can't castle. So in this case the FORK with Qd4 only regains the pawn, but it's still a pretty good deal for Black.