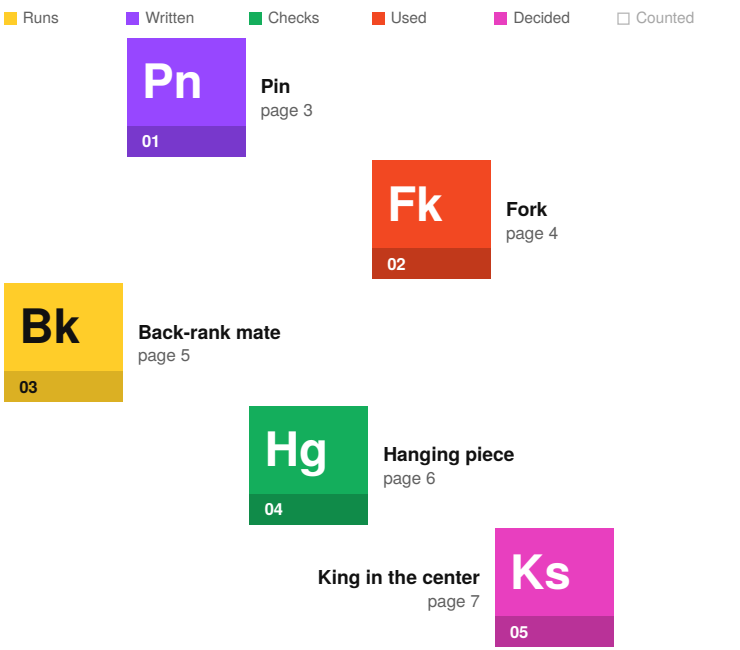
Getting Out of Trouble in Chess

A pocket-sized guide to five common problem positions, and the clearest way out of each.



My friend has a lot of questions.

friend@accidental.info · October 2026 · Version 0.3.0

What are the five problems?

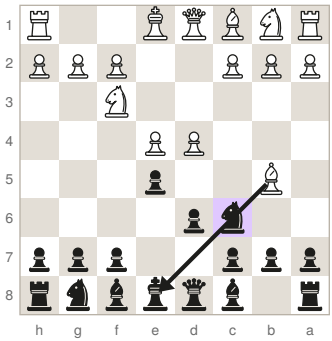
Five problems turn up often in casual games. Each has a usual way out, and a habit that helps you avoid it next time.

Moves are written in algebraic notation, explained in An Accidental Guide to: The First Move in Chess. In 4…Bd7, the dots mark a move by Black. An x marks a capture and + marks check. Each board is drawn from the side in trouble.

Pin	A piece can’t move safely because a more valuable one is behind it.
Fork	One piece attacks two or more pieces at once.
Back-rank mate	A rook or queen mates a king shut in behind its own pawns.
Hanging piece	An unprotected piece is open to capture.
King in the center	A king that hasn’t castled when lines toward it open.

Pin

Pn
01



After 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 d6 4.d4
Black to move. White's bishop lines up the knight on c6 with the king on e8.

Identify by	A bishop, rook or queen lined up through your piece to a more valuable one.
What	**A pin means a piece can't move without exposing a more valuable piece behind it.** The knight on c6 is pinned to the king, so it can't move at all.
So what	**Block the line with 4…Bd7.** Other ways out are moving the king, or capturing or chasing the pinning piece.

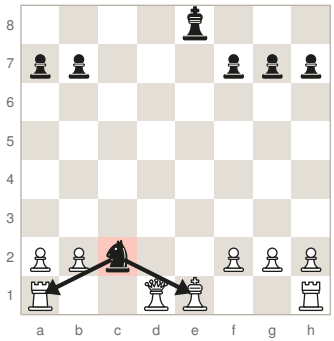
Field marks

Way out	Next time
Block the line.	**Check what is lined up.**

Confused with	**Relative pin** With the king behind, the pin is absolute. In a relative pin, the pinned piece may move, but the piece behind it can then be captured.

Fork

Fk
02



White to move
The knight on c2 checks the king and attacks the rook on a1.

Identify by	One piece, often a knight, attacking two or more of yours.
What	**A fork is one piece attacking two or more pieces at once.** Knights fork well because no piece a knight attacks can capture it, except another knight.
So what	**Capture the forking piece if you can, here with Qxc2.** If you can't, answer the check and expect to lose the rook.

Field marks

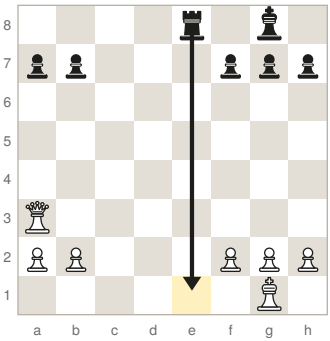
Way out	Next time
Capture the forking piece.	**Watch enemy knight jumps.**

Confused with

Pn **Pin**
A fork attacks two or more pieces at once. A pin stops one piece from moving safely.

Back-rank mate

Bk
03



White to move

Black threatens Re1. The rook would cover f1 and h1, and the king's own pawns block the rest.

Identify by	Your king behind its own pawns, with an enemy rook or queen able to reach its rank.
What	**A back-rank mate is checkmate by a rook or queen along the back rank, the row where the king started.** The king's own pawns block its escape.
So what	**Make an escape square with h3, so the king can step to h2, or keep a rook or queen guarding the back rank.**

Field marks

Way out	Next time
Give the king a square.	**Guard the back rank.**

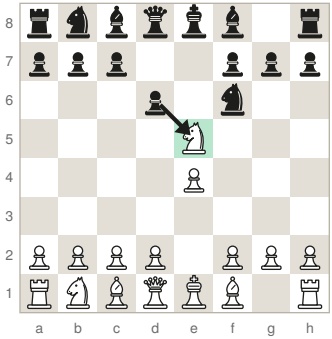
Confused with

A safe castled king

Castling usually makes your king safer. The pawns that shelter it can also trap it on the back rank.

Hanging piece

Hg
04



After 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nf6 3.Nxe5 d6
White to move. The pawn on d6 attacks the knight on e5, and nothing protects the knight.

Identify by	A piece that nothing defends, with an enemy piece attacking it.
What	**A hanging piece is unprotected and can be captured, like the knight on e5.**
So what	**Move the piece to a safe square or defend it.** Here, move the knight back with 4.Nf3, because a pawn attacks it.

Field marks

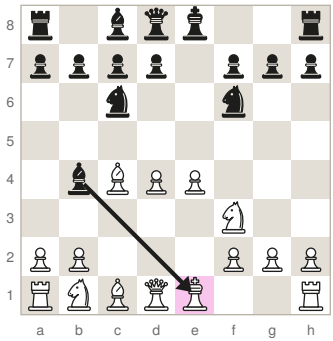
Way out	Next time
Move it or defend it.	**Check what is unprotected.**

Confused with

En prise
En prise covers any piece that can be taken at a loss, including one with too few defenders or one attacked by a cheaper piece.

King in the center

Ks
05



After 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.c3 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 Bb4+
White to move. The bishop on b4 checks the king on e1 before White has castled.

Identify by	Your king still on e1 or e8, with open lines toward it.
What	**A king in the center is a king that hasn't castled when lines toward it open.** With the c-pawn and d-pawn gone, the bishop on b4 reaches e1.
So what	**Block the check with 7.Bd2 or 7.Nc3, bringing a piece into play, then castle.**

Field marks

Way out	Next time
Block, then castle.	**Castle early.**

Confused with	**Castling out of check** You can't castle while in check, or across or onto a square an enemy piece attacks.

Sources

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Pn Fk Bk Hg Ks

An Accidental Guide to…

Getting Out of Trouble in Chess

A pocket-sized guide to five common problem positions, and the clearest way out of each.
Written and reviewed by a person. AI does the grunt work. Set in TeX Gyre Heros and Newsreader.
Leave a star: accidental.info/star

My friend has a lot of questions.

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