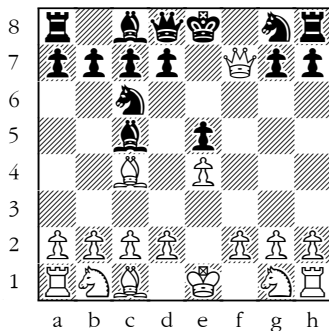


How to Avoid Scholar's Mate

By Steven Craig Miller

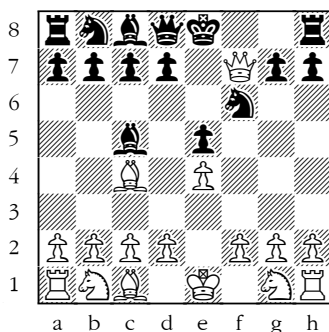
A mate given early in the game by a queen capturing an opponent's unmoved f-pawn is known as "scholar's mate," and it comes in various forms. For example:

1. e4 e5
2. Qc4 Qc5
3. Qf3 Qc6
4. Qxf7#



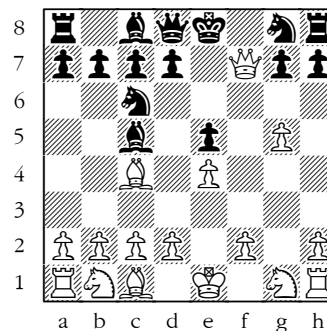
How could have Black avoided falling for this scholar's mate? Black should have played 3... Qf6, the knight on f6 would have broken the line of communication between the queen on f3 and the square f7. Here's another example:

1. e4 e5
2. Qc4 Qc5
3. Qh5 Qf6
4. Qxf7#



What went wrong this time? With the queen on h5, placing a knight on f6 will not break the line of communication between h5 and f7. After 3. Qh5 Black should have played 3... Qe7. Now look at our last example:

1. e4 e5
2. Qc4 Qc5
3. Qf3 Qf6
4. g4 Qc6
5. g5 Qg8
6. Qxf7#



What did Black do wrong this time? After White pushed the g-pawn to g5, Black needed to take evasive action. For starters, Black could have played 5... Qd4 attacking White's queen. Now White shouldn't move the queen to h5 because Black's knight attacks that square. The best move for White is simply 6. Qd1, back to its original square!

While the "scholar's mate" can catch a beginner off guard, it really isn't a good opening to play, since it prematurely brings the queen out and she can subsequently be chased around by minor pieces.