Protecting Pieces

When one piece is able to capture onto a square where a second piece of the same color already is, then it is protecting the second piece. If the opponent takes the second piece, you can capture the opponent’s piece right back. Sometimes a piece is protected by more than one other piece at a time. (Because the king doesn’t get captured, you don’t need to protect the king in this way.) It’s not always bad to leave pieces unprotected, but watch out for them if they’re not. In the case that a piece is left unprotected AND can be taken by the opponent, then the piece is said to be left hanging or en prise (French). That means the piece is out there, completely unprotected, without any penalties attached to taking it. Needless to say, it’s not good to hang a piece. If the opponent captures an unprotected piece it is said to have been dropped.

In the diagram, black’s bishop at c5 is protected by the pawn at d6. What is protecting the black pawn at e5? Are any pieces unprotected? Are any pieces left hanging?

More detail about the diagram: Set up a board and start the game this way: 1. e4 e5 (white pawn moves to e4, black pawn moves to e5) 2. Nf3 Nc6: The black knight is protecting the black e5 pawn. 3. Bc4 Bc5 4. c3 d6 5. d4: Look how the white pawn at d4 is protected. If the game continues with: 5...exd4 6. exd4 Bxd4 7. Nxd4 Nxd4 8. Qxd4, then white has won a bishop, a knight and a pawn – 7 points – for two pawns and a knight – 5 points. Black sees this and plays instead: 5...exd4 6. exd4 Bb6; this is a fair trade, though white now controls the center.

Trading Pieces

A trade is when pieces are taken by both sides. An even or fair trade works out equally for both sides, say one side captures a bishop and the other gets a knight, both of which are worth 3 points. Don’t trade a queen for a rook unless your have to, a queen is worth 9 and a rook only 5! As long as the trade is equal for both sides, it is fine to do. In fact, the fewer pieces on the board, the easier it is to consider the situation. If you win something in the trade, where you get more pieces or more valuable pieces out of the trade, then it is especially good to do. IT’S OK TO TRADE as long as the trades are even or in your favor.

Look at the diagram on the right, with white to move. Suppose white’s bishop at b5 captures the black knight at c6, and black responds by capturing the white bishop with the black bishop at d7. Black loses a knight, white loses a bishop. This is a fair trade – a bishop and a knight are both worth 3 points. Note that if the black pawn at b7 took the bishop instead, then a doubled pawn would be created. Doubled pawns are usually bad because they can’t make pawn chains and are weaker, so it’s better to use the bishop.

More about the diagram on the right: The game starts with: 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Nc3 d6 4. Bb5: the black knight at c6 is now pinned, but it’s nothing to worry about. 4...Bd7 takes the pin off, but it’s not necessary to play this move unless black wants to move the knight, since the b7 pawn protects the knight. Then the trade above happens.

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