

Some Chess Opening Tricks

Many of the best openings tricks focus on the squares f2 and f7 so if you want to avoid being tricked, these are the squares you should pay the most attention to. Most of the tricks on this page make use of standard tactical themes but there are a few unusual ideas. I hope that these devious opening lines serve you well.

- The Fried Liver Attack

This is a classic and runs as follows. 1. e4 e5, 2. Nf3 Nc6, 3. Bc4 Nf6, 4. Ng5 d5, 5. ed NxP?!, 6. Nxf7!? KxN, 7. Qf3+ Ke6, 8. Nc3. The position is unclear after 8. ... Nb4. However, white can improve with the line 6. d4 ed, 7. 0-0 when he threatens 8. Nxf7 and is probably winning.

- From's Gambit

Bird's opening is rarely played but the clever gambit with e5 is worth knowing as it is a very playable and tricky response. After 1. f4 black plays 1. ... e5?! with the idea of 2. fe d6, 3. ed Bxd6, threatening Qh4+ winning. After 4. Nf3 (other moves lose) Black replies with 4. ... Bg4, with the threat of BxN and then Qh4+ winning. Although white can escape with 5. e3, (or 5. e4, [other moves are inferior and most lose]), black's position is fun to play and probably only slightly worse. White has to play accurately on moves 4 and 5 and in blitz games this gambit is definitely worth a go.

- The Staunton Gambit

This is in some sense similar to From's gambit running as it does 1. d4 f5, 2. e4 fe. Now the move 3. Nc3 has the idea of 3. ... d5?, 4. Qh5+ g6, 5. Qxd5 (and if 5. ... Qxd5, 6. Nxd5 Kd8, 7. Bf4 black has no good way to defend the c7 pawn) when white is clearly better. If black plays 3. ... Nf6, then white can play 4. Bg5 with the idea that if 4. ... d5?, then 5. BxN ef, (Not 5. ... gf, 6. Qh5+-) 6. Qh5+ g6, 7. Qxd5 QxQ, 8. NxQ when white wins the f6 pawn and has a winning advantage. If black plays the correct 4. ... Nc6 then after 5. BxN ef, (not 5. ... gf, 6. Qh5#) white should avoid the immediate 6. Nxe4 because black can play 6. ... Qe7 winning material after for example 7. Qe2 Nxd4, 8. Qd3 Qb4+ etc. Better therefore is 6. d5 Ne5, 7. Nxe4 with an equal position.

- A pretty trap – Legal's mate

There is a very pretty but rare trap which runs as follows. 1. e4 e5, 2. Nf3 d6, 3. Bc4 Bg4, 4. Nc3 g6?, 5. Nxe5! BxQ, 6. Bxf7 Ke7, 7. Nd5#

Sometimes the mate can be administered by a different piece. This game came from the Petrov's Defence; and is very old: 1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nf6 3. Nxe5 Nc6?! 4. Nxc6 dxc6 5. d3 Bc5 6. Bg5? Nxe4 7. Bxd8?? Bxf2+ 8. Ke2 Bg4#

- Owen's Defence

This is a system which is rarely played which runs 1. e4 b6, 2. d4 Bb7. After 3. Bd3 the 'original' move was 3. ... f5, with the idea that if white plays 4. ef then black wins the rook on h1 with 4. ... Bxg2. However, this is tactically flawed: 5. Qh5 g6, 6. fg Nf6, 7. gh+! NxQ, 8. Bg6#.

In fact black can improve with 6. ... Bg7 but white still gets a winning position after 7. gh+ Kf8 8. Nf3! Nf6, 9. Qg6! BxN, (9. ... BxR, 10. Bh6! RxP, 11. Ng5 winning) 10. Rg1! RxP, 11. Qg3! Be4! 12. BxB NxB, 13. Qf3+ Kg8 14. QxN +- and white can continue his attack with Bf4-e5 etc.

- The Budapest

There is an odd variation of the Budapest which runs 1. d4 Nf6, 2. c4 e5, 3. de Ne4?!, 4. Nf3 d6?!, 5. ed Bxd6, 6. g3?? (Oh dear!) 6. ... Nxf2! 7. Kxf2 (7. Qa4 Bd7, doesn't help white) 7. ... Bxg3+ and black wins the white queen on d1.

The sequence 1. d4 Nf6, 2. Nd2 e5, is a lot like the true Budapest and the continuation 3. dxe5 Ng4, 4. h3 Ne3, winning, illustrates a theme which comes up in other positions. If 5. fe then of course 5. ... Qh4 6. g3 Qxg3# and if white doesn't take the knight then he loses his queen.

- The Modern Defence

A similar queen trap is seen after the moves 1. e4 g6, 2. d4 Bg7, 3. Nf3 d6, 4. Bc4 Nd7??, when white wins with 5. Bxf7! If black takes it with 5. ... KxB?? (which looks superficially correct) then after 6. Ng5 he faces an unpleasant choice. If Kf6 then Qf3#, if Qf8 then Ne6+ wins black's queen, and if Ke8 then Ne6 still wins black's queen!

- The Chameleon Variation of the Sicilian Defence

Another trick which makes use of this trapping pattern, but to even greater effect, occurs in an unusual line of the Chameleon variation of the Sicilian. 1. e4 c5, 2. Nc3 Nc6, 3. Ne2 (This is quite a sneaky move; white waits for black to commit himself to a particular set-up before deciding whether to play an open or a closed Sicilian.) 3. ... Nf6, 4. d4 (This is probably the wrong decision. White should play a closed Sicilian here with 4. g3.) 4. ... e6, (4. ... cd 5. Nxd4 would of course transpose to a main line classical Sicilian) 5. d5 ed, 6. ed Ne5, 7. g3?? (7. Nf4 is better, and quite interesting) 7. ... Nf3#. Quite a shock!

- The Caro Kann Defence
After the standard 1. e4 c6, 2. d4 d5, 3. Nc3 de, 4. NxP Nd7, White can find out whether Black is paying attention by playing 5. Qe2. If Black plays the normal looking 5. ... Ngf6??, then White wins instantly with 6. Nd6#. This has caught out a lot of people in early morning games!
- The Traxler Counter Attack
This is one of the most outrageous openings. It runs as follows; 1. e4 e5, 2. Nf3 Nc6, 3. Bc4 Nf6, (the two knights defence which you should recognise from an earlier trick), 4. Ng5 Bc5!?. Black completely ignores the threats against f7! The idea is that after 5. Nxf7 Bxf2!?, 6. KxB Nxe4+ white's king will be in more danger than black's. There have been quite a few monographs written on this system and some of the complications are barely comprehensible. Basically black can bring his queen to h4 and will threaten all sorts of terrible things against white's king.
- The Albin Counter Gambit
Another well known trap runs as follows. 1. d4 d5, 2. c4 e5, 3. de d4, 4. e3? (4. a3 is better) 4. ... Bb4+, 5. Bd2 dxe3, 6. Bxb4? (6. Qa4+ is possible although the complications that arise after 6. ... Nc6, 7. Bxb4 [7. fe Qh4+, 8. Kd1 {Not 8. g3? Qe4!} 8. ... Qf2! is better for black] 8. ... ef+, 9. KxP Qd4+ probably favour black, especially over the board.) 6. ... ef+ 7. Ke2 fxg1=N+!!, 8. RxN Bg4+ and Black wins white's queen on d1.
- The English Defence
Some players, when faced with the English defence, try to steer the game into calmer waters. The sequence 1. c4 b6, 2. Nc3 Bb7, 3. e4 e6, 4. Nf3 Bb4 5. Qb3 is not uncommon. Black may set a trap here with 5. ... Na6, 6. a3 Nc5! when 7. QxB? loses the queen to 7. ... a5!, 8. Qb5 c6!. 7. Qc2 is better but doesn't promise white much. Note that black doesn't (immediately) win a pawn after 7. ... BxN 8. QxB Nxe4 because white can play 9. Qxg7 and after 9. ... Qf6, though the position is probably slightly better for black. Things would be different if white could find a way to play Bh6! (i.e. by having moved his d pawn earlier).
- The Queen's Gambit
A bad line which inexperienced players with the black pieces play time again is the following: 1. d4 d5, 2. c4 dc, 3. e3 b5?!, (3. ... e5, is better) 4. a4 c6?!, (dubious because black cannot safely retain his pawn this way) 5. ab cb??, 6. Qf3! which wins at least a knight. Black's best move here (to save the rook on a8) is 6. ... Nc6, and after 7. QxN Bd7, white can retreat his queen and will be simply a knight up for nothing.
Elephant trap: 1. d4 d5 2. c4 e6 3. Nc3 Nf6 4. Bg5 Nbd7 Black has set a trap; if White tries to win a pawn by 5. cxd5 exd5 6. Nxd5?? White thinks that the black knight on f6 is pinned to the queen and cannot be moved. 6... Nxd5! 7. Bxd8 Bb4+ 8. Qd2 Bxd2+ OR the equally good 8...Kxd8, intending 9...Bxd2+. 9. Kxd2 Kxd8 Black comes out a minor piece ahead.
- The Grob
The 'Grob gambit' loses after 1. g4 e5, 2. f4?? Qh4#. The virtually identical 1. g4 e5, 2. f3?? Qh4# is known as fool's mate.
- The Petrov defence, Marshall trap
it starts with the moves: 1. e4 e5, 2. Nf3 Nf6. Black plays Petrov's Defence. 3. Nxe5 d6, 4. Nf3 Nxe4, 5. d4 d5, 6. Bd3 Bd6, 7. O-O O-O, 8. c4 Bg4, 9. cxd5 f5, then if 10. Re1? White should play 10.Nc3 instead. 10. ... Bxh2+!, An unexpected blow. 11. Kxh2 Nxf2, Black forks the white queen and bishop, forcing the queen to move. 12. Qe2 Nxd3, 13. Qxd3 Bxf3, 14. Qxf3 Qh4+ followed by Qxe1 winning a rook.
- The Fred
This (gambit) is dubious. 1. e4 f5?!, 2. ef Nf6, 3. Bg5 (threatening BxN and Qh5) +-.
- Scholar's mate
For the sake of completeness (which is also why the last two are here) I should mention scholar's mate. 1. e4 e5, 2. Qh5 Nc6, 3. Bc4 threatening Qxf7#. If 3. ... g6 then 4. Qf3 threatening Qxf7#. If 4. ... Nf6 then 5. g4?! threatening 6. g5 and if the knight on f6 moves then, (you guessed it), Qxf7#. Of course, this is a rubbish opening but it is surprising how many people fall for this trap, especially on Internet chess servers.

These chess tricks make use of tactical motifs which occur in many other positions. As well as trying to integrate these specific tricks into your openings repertoire I recommend that you try to find similar lines in the openings you already play. You should remember however that if your opponent plays the correct lines you will probably not achieve more than equality. These are only tricks and traps; you can't force an advantage in chess if your opponent plays accurately.