

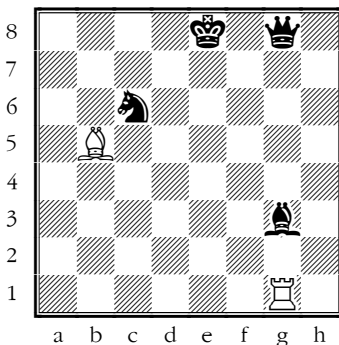
Chess Tactics: Learning to Pin & Skewer!

Part 1: Winning Chess Tactics: Learning to Pin!

Concepts:

- What is a pin and which pieces can make a pin?
- The difference between an “absolute” and “relative” pin!
- ***How to win*** a pinned piece!

Introducing the Pin: What is a Pin, Who Can Make a Pin, and Why Are Pins Good?

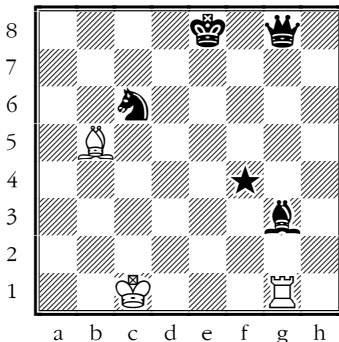


The c6-Knight is pinned to the King, and the g3-Bishop to the Queen!

When a piece cannot move because it is “in the way” or “blocking” a more valuable teammate from being captured by an enemy piece, that piece is pinned. The piece that is applying this pin is known as the “pinning piece”. Pins are a tactical motif that occurs solely on the straight lines of the chessboard – meaning the ranks, files and diagonals.

Because **pins can only occur on the straight lines** of the board, only three types of pieces can make a pin: The Queen, Rooks and Bishops (compare this to a “double attack” that can technically be carried out by any one of the chessmen). The Bishop and Rook are both pinning pieces in this position, with two different types of pins taking place:

The Two Kinds of Pins: Absolute and Relative – What's the Difference?

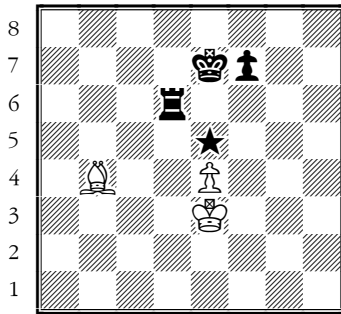


A relative pin, like the g3-Bishop, can be broken – But only for good reason!

The first type of pin taking place is by the b5-Bishop, to the c6-Knight, to the King on e8 is an **absolute** pin. Absolute pins occur only when a piece is being pinned to the King. It would be **absolutely illegal** for the Knight to move, which makes an absolute pin the strongest kind of pin to have.

The second type of pin from our first diagram is known as a **relative** pin. The Bishop on g3 is pinned because it would never consider moving if it meant the Queen on g8 would be captured. However, we have added a white King on c1 here to display that if the g3-Bishop was able to move for something more important than the Queen on g8 (in this case, a check to the King) than the Bishop **could** move.

Ganging Up on the Pinned Piece (Absolute) – The Key to Winning Pinned Pieces!

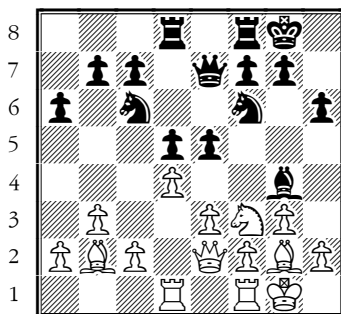


Look to “gang up”
on pinned pieces!

Now that we understand the different types of pins, let's talk about ***what makes a pin successful***. A pinned piece is, well, pinned! It can't move (especially absolutely pinned pieces, and it would be bad to move most relatively pinned pieces as well). So don't ever take a pinned piece without first considering how to bring more pieces to attack it.

Here the Bishop on b4 is pinning the Rook on d6. White could easily capture it and be happy with that “trade”. But is there another way to **gang up on the pinned Rook?** 1.e5!, attacks the Rook a second time and therefore wins material after 1...Ke6 2.exd6. Not 2.Bxd6 after 2...f6, drawing.

Ganging Up on the Pinned Piece (Relative) – The Key to Winning Pinned Pieces!

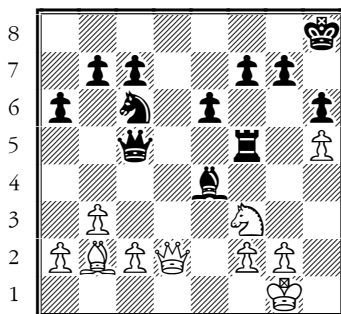


Black played 1...e4!,
attacking the pinned f3-
Knight and winning it.

Here we have another simple example position designed to show how easy it can be to win a pinned piece, if you only gang up on it **before** capturing it. Because the easiest way to make sure you “win the doggy-pile” is to capture with a pawn first (because they are worth the least) – our second example also sees a pawn doing the “gang up” work!

Of course you can also gang up on pinned pieces with other pieces. You can imagine, and will see in some of the worksheet examples, that as long as the piece **stays pinned** – everyone is welcome to join the “gang-up-and-attack-the-pinned-piece” party! Here black wins a piece!

Using the Pin Against Your Opponent – The “Other Way” to Exploit a Pin!



The b2-Bishop may be far
away, but it serves a
mighty purpose here!

The other major **negative point** of having pinned pieces is that they can't **really** defend their teammates. Even when the seemingly guard things, if and when push comes to shove, a pinned piece is **crippled by the piece behind it**. So, besides ganging up on pinned pieces, try to see whether or not they are guarding anything important, and if so, take it!

In this example game, white had just sacrificed a Rook on h8, forcing the black King to a most undesirable square. White can play 1.Qxh6+!, exposing the g7-pawn for what it really is: **A pinned piece!** After 1...Kg8 2.Qxg7 is checkmate. Because Bishops and Rooks, and Queens **operate on long lines**, tactics like this occur often in games!

Chess Tactics: Learning to Pin & Skewer!

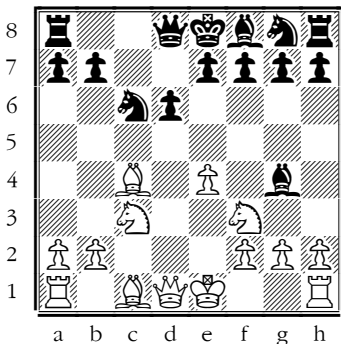
Part 2: Breaking the Pin!

Concepts:

- The *problem* with a relative pin!
- Learning to **break** a pin!

Because it isn't ***necessarily illegal*** to move a *relatively* pinned piece (even if it's pinned to the Queen) – one should always be wary of a pin on the enemy piece turning into a tactic for the opponent. A ***broken*** pin instantly becomes a discovered attack (Lesson 11) for the opponent!

Breaking the Pin – The “Problem” with a Relative Pin!

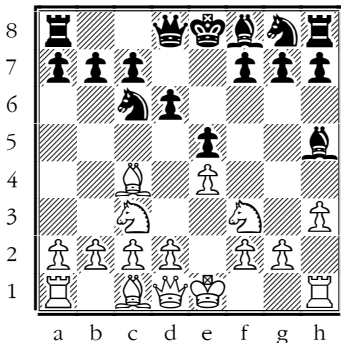


White to play and win!

Here we see a classic example of a “broken” relative pin from the Smith Morra Gambit (an Opening Variation in the Sicilian Defense). In this example, black has just played the move 6...Bg4?, which is a common blunder. Though it pins the Knight on f3, ***the Bishop lacks protection***, and the results of this are devastating!

White now plays 1.Bxf7+!, temporarily sacrificing the Bishop for a discovered check after 1...Kxf7 2.Ng5+! 2.Ke8 and 3.Qxg4, white wins back the Bishop, remains ahead a pawn, and ***black has lost the right to castle the King.***

Legal's Mate – The World's Most Infamous “Broken” Pin!



Philidor's Opening: 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.Nc3 Nc6 4.Bc4 Bg4 5.h3 & 5...Bh5

Here white is in a good position with a small lead in development. Furthermore, black took big a risk when he decided to pin the f3-Knight, knowing the Bishop had no protection. Combining the ideas of a ***discovered attack*** (Lesson 11), ***breaking the pin***, and targeting black's ***weakest square*** (Lesson 7) – what tactic does white have in this position?

6.Nxe5!! wins immediately (if 6...Nxe5 7.Qxh5 Nxc4 8.Qb5+, white wins back the material and remains ahead by a pawn with a huge lead in development): 6...Bxd1 7.Bxf7+ Ke7 8.Nd5 checkmate! It's amazing that white can sacrifice such a large amount of material by breaking the pin on the f3-Knight, yet the reward is clearly worth it.

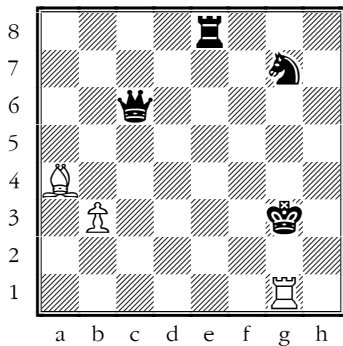
Chess Tactics: Learning to Pin & Skewer!

Part 3: Winning Chess Tactics: Learning to Skewer!

Concepts:

- What is a skewer?
- Skewering is the opposite of pinning!

Introducing the “Anti-Pin”: The Skewer!

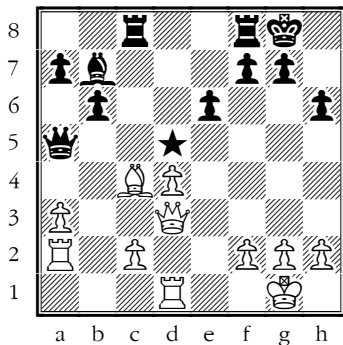


This is not a practical position of course, but it is designed to display the skewer in action!

A skewer is the opposite of a pin, and in many ways a much more **“forceful”** tactic. With a pin, the “lesser valued” piece is in front, shielding the more valuable piece from capture. The piece *doesn’t want* to move because of this, but it usually takes more attackers to exploit and possibly win the pinned piece.

With a skewer, however, the “better” piece is the one being attacked and so it must either sacrifice itself or “move aside”, allowing an undefended or at least valued teammate to be captured. In our diagramed example, the Bishop on a4 is “skewering” the Queen and Rook, which works because the Bishop would be happy to capture the Rook even at the cost of losing itself, while the Rook on g1 is skewering the King and Knight along the g-file.

More Introductions: The Skewer in Action and Making Good Things Happen!

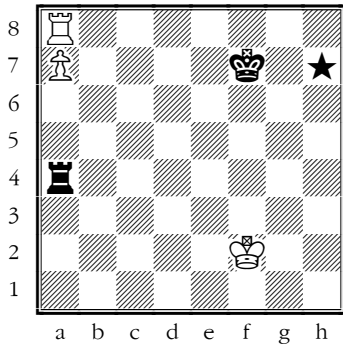


*This famous skewer is a common **tactical pattern!***

Like the pin, the skewer is a “straight lines” tactic (only being possible along ranks, files and diagonals) and so it is only executed by the Queen, Rooks and Bishops. The skewer happens most often in open-board positions (like our example here) and is most effective when the opponent's pieces are loose (undefended).

Here black recognized the chance for a skewer tactic due to the awkward position of the white Rook on a2. Black played 1...Rxc4!, forcing 2.Qxc4 and then 2...Bd5! – skewering the Queen and Rook and coming out ahead a minor piece at the end of the combination.

The “Back Door” Skewer – An Infamous Rook Ending Tactic!

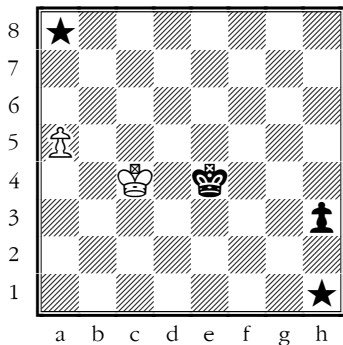


White skewers via the “back door” on h7!

Think of a backyard barbeque every time you think of a skewer! Skewers are used to **cut through** multiple pieces of meat and vegetables for a tasty grilled treat! A skewer tactic ***cuts through enemy pieces*** in a similar fashion.

Our next “tasty skewer” comes at the expense of the black King and Rook. This *common tactical idea occurs as the climax of many Rook ending puzzles*. We have jumped to the end of the position to display the trick clearly: White plays 1.Rh8!, freeing the a8-square and threatening to Queen the pawn. **Black must capture a7** to avoid this, and white wins with 2.Rh7+, skewering the King and Rook!

More Famous Endgame Skewers – The “Double Promotion” Queen Skewer!

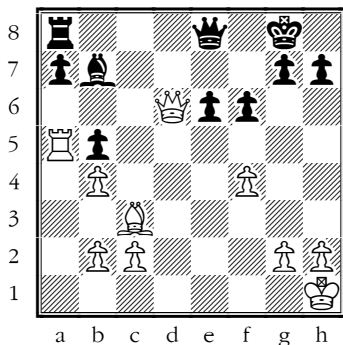


Whenever the King is **lined up** on the same file or diagonal as your passed pawn, **watch out!**

Though the full combination is slightly more complex, you may recognize this tactic from the movie “*Searching for Bobby Fischer*”. The end result of this puzzle is right up our alley! Both sides are going to promote their pawns, but the white player gets the upper hand **in the end by Queening with check** – instantly skewering the King and Queen along the longest diagonal of the board, the h1-a8 diagonal!

1.a6 h2 2.a7 h1=Queen 3.a8=Queen+ black King moves anywhere, 4.Qxh1, winning! Note that the moves were all forced because if black tried to avoid this skewer by moving the King in advance, white's promoted Queen would prevent black from doing the same by guarding h1 along the diagonal. Watch out for this idea in your games!

Skewering “To a Square” Rather Than a Piece – Another Common Way to Skewer!



Skewer pieces to weaknesses, it works!

Hopefully the concept of skewering pieces **to other pieces** has been made clear with our examples. You can also skewer pieces to important squares – such as a threat of checkmate! Our final example reveals exactly that...

There may be several types of important squares worth a skewer, but a back rank checkmate threat has to be right at the top of the list! Here black plays 1...Rd8!, skewering the **Queen on d6 and the d1-square**. White's Queen has no way of retreat that successfully guards the back rank, and must settle on 2.Qc5 Rd1+ 3.Qg1 Rxcg1, where black's material advantage is enough to win the game.

Chess Tactics: Learning to Pin & Skewer!

Instructor's Guide

Pins are arguably the most common tactical “theme” in the game of chess. Though the other tactical patterns discussed in this section (Lessons 9 - 12) all occur with frequency, a pin often takes place early in the game, in many of the most common openings. Teaching your students to recognize pins and, most importantly, the concept of how to exploit a pinned piece (learning not to just quickly trade but instead to “gang up” on the pinned piece) is critical.

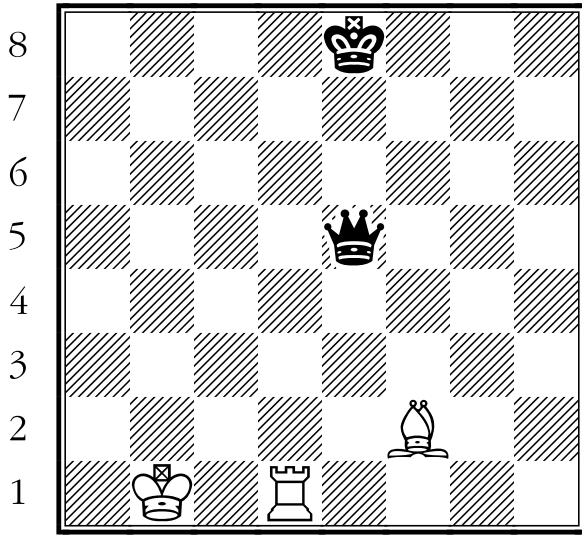
The concept of breaking a pin is a tricky one because you don't want your students constantly looking for ways to sacrifice their Queen for a discovered attack by the Knight, yet at the same time you want your students aware that a relative pin should not be taken for granted. One perhaps more *practical way* of breaking a pin (not discussed in detail) is simply the idea of going after the enemy's “pinning piece” with other forces in your army. Attack a “pinning Bishop” with a pawn, chase away a “pinning Rook” by attacking it, etc.

Practical Notes and Advice – Lesson 10:

- **Like the other lessons discussing tactical themes, we recommend having your students point out every time a pin and/or skewer occurs during their games. Ask them to tell you whether each is relative or absolute.**
- **Skewers are easy and fun to teach! Many combinations end with a skewer as the final blow to win material. Reference Part 2 of Lesson 6 again (the diagram that shows the importance of considering every “Queen Attack”) to show the students a position with multiple skewers that repeat by the Rook and Bishop.**
- **Emphasize that a chess player can never solve enough tactics! From forks, to skewers, to the upcoming lessons on discovered attacks and deflection tactics – we could have provided hundreds of worksheets for your students to solve – with no effort wasted. However, our selections are designed to instruct on the basic versions of these tactics.**
- **As coaches ourselves, we strongly recommend having a decent sized library of tactics books and puzzle-solving exercises on hand for your students to further explore the themes listed in our curriculum, as well as the many other more advanced tactical patterns in chess.**

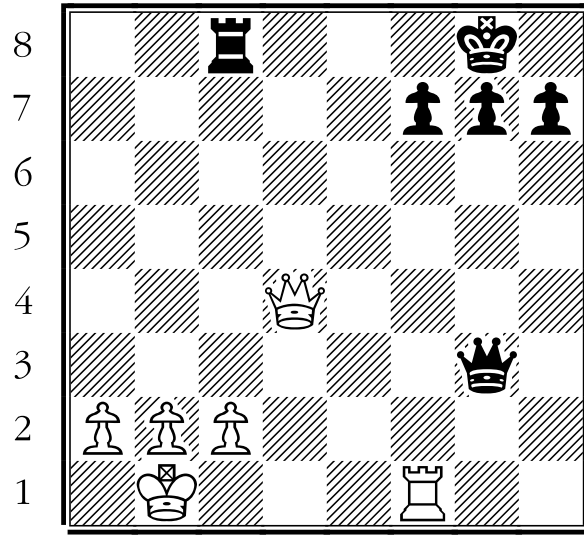
Lesson 10: Pin 'em & Skewer 'em!

In the following diagrams there is a chance for white to either pin or skewer black. **Circle the piece that can do the tactic**, then circle which type of tactic it is beneath each diagram.



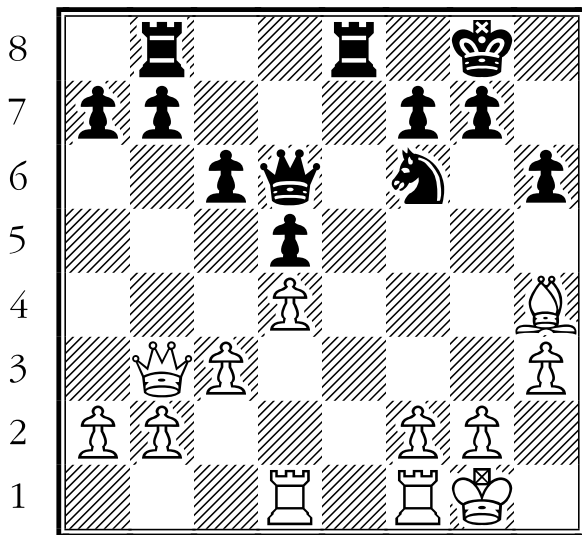
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Circle the correct answer:
Pin? OR Skewer?



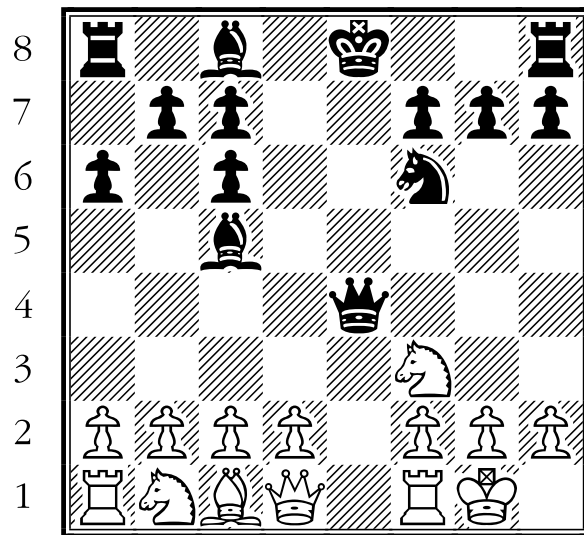
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Circle the correct answer:
Pin? OR Skewer?



a b c d e f g h

Circle the correct answer:
Pin? OR Skewer?

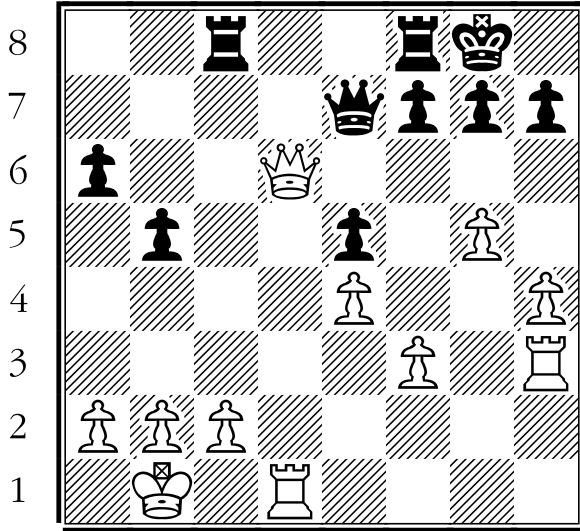


a b c d e f g h

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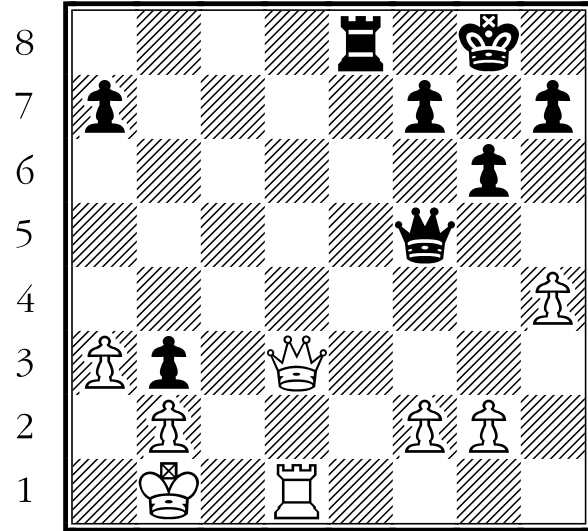
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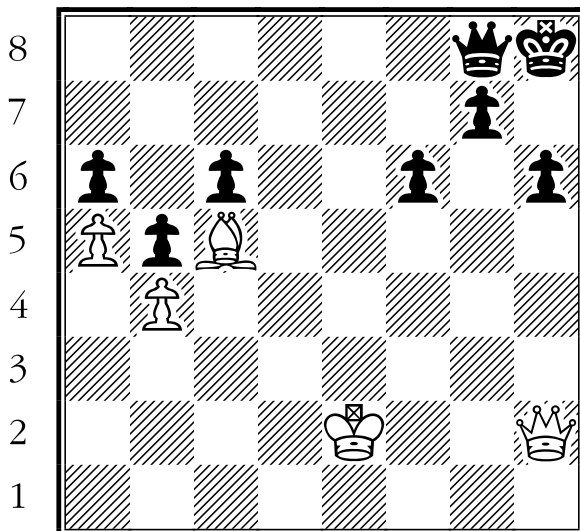
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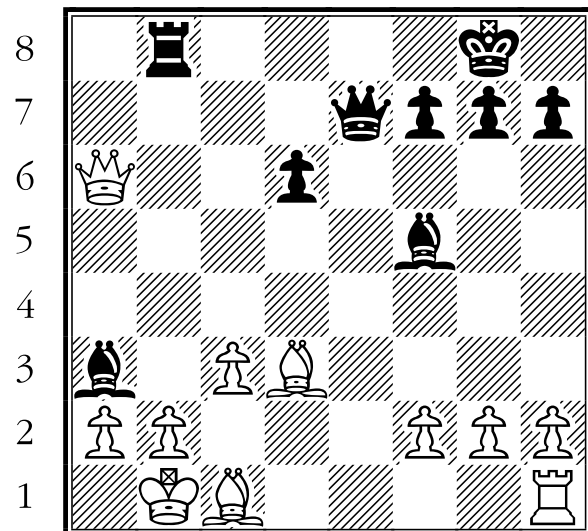
a b c d e f g h

Circle the correct answer:
Pin? OR Skewer?



a b c d e f g h

Circle the correct answer:
Pin? OR Skewer?



a b c d e f g h

Circle the correct answer:
Pin? OR Skewer?

Pin 'em & Skewer 'em!

Answer Key

Worksheet Page 1:

Diagram #1 – 1.Re1! – Pinning the black Queen to the King. Circle the d1-Rook. Circle Pin.

Diagram #2 – 1.Bg3! – Skewering the Queen and Rook. Circle the h4-Bishop. Circle Skewer.

Diagram #3 – 1.Rg1! – Skewering the Queen and the g7-pawn (threat of the white Queen capturing the g7-pawn, checkmate). Circle the f1-Rook. Circle Skewer.

Diagram #4 – 1.Re1! – Pinning the black Queen to the King. Circle the f1-Rook. Circle Pin.

Worksheet Page 2:

Diagram #1 – 1...Rfd8! or 1...Rcd8! – Skewering the Queen and Rook on d1. Capturing on d1 will also lead to immediate back rank checkmate. Circle either black Rook. Circle Skewer.

Diagram #2 – 1...Qa2+! – Skewering the King and Queen. Circle the Queen. Circle Skewer.

Diagram #3 – 1...Rd8! – Skewering the Queen and the d1-Rook. Capturing on d1 will also lead to immediate checkmate. **NOTE:** This tactic also uses a Pin. White's d3-Queen is pinned along the b1-h7 diagonal by black's Queen, which makes 1...Rd8 possible. Circle the e8-Rook. Circle both Pin and Skewer.

Diagram #4 – 1.Qe2!! – Pinning the d3-Bishop to the white Queen on a6. **NOTE:** This is a “**double** pin” tactic. The d3-Bishop is pinned along two diagonals: The b1-h7 diagonal and the f1-a6 diagonal. Circle the black Queen. Circle Pin.