

Chess Terms

by Bill Wall

Here are some chess terms to be familiar with.

Absolute pin - A pin against the king is called absolute since the pinned piece cannot legally move out of the line of attack (as moving it would expose the king to check).

Accumulation of Advantages — The gain of small advantages one by one with the object that collectively they may be decisive.

Adjournment — The act of breaking off a game; the period after a game has been broken off and before its resumption. Adjourned games and sealed moves are now rare as chess games now finish in one setting. Nowadays, an adjournment is a pause in the game so that both players can get help from their chess engines.

Adjudication — The decision of an independent expert as to whether an unfinished game should be scored as a win for one of the players, or a draw.

Adjudicator — Usually someone rated higher than you that can render his judgment not in your favor after looking at the position for 10 seconds.

Adjust — The adjustment of pieces. One needs to say, "I adjust," or "J'Adoube" before adjusting the pieces on the chessboard. You can only adjust your pieces on your move.

Advance Point — A square on a player's 5th rank, other than a hole, that is guarded by one of his pawns and can only be attacked by an enemy pawn from only one of the adjoining files.

Advanced Pawn — A pawn on its 5th rank or beyond.

Advantage — Having the better situation regarding one of the factors that are considered when an evaluation of position is being made.

Albino — A problem task. A white pawn, other than a rook's pawn, on its 2nd rank is moved in each of the 4 possible ways (move one square up, move 2 squares up, capture on the left hand side, capture on the right hand side). These moves, each bringing about a different mating finish, may be shown in the variation of the

solution.

Alekhine — A type of battery used in digital clocks.

Alfil — A European name for the piece known to players of Shatranj as a fil. The more modern piece is the bishop.

Algebraic notation - The standard way to record the moves of a chess game, using alphanumeric coordinates for the square. An example would be 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.O-O.

Alice chess — An unorthodox game using two boards and one set of chess men. Every time a man is moved on one board, it is transferred to the other board as if it had there completed its move.

Allies — Two or more players in consultation taking either the white pieces or the black pieces.

All-Play-All — A contest in which each contestant plays every other contestant once or twice (a double-round tournament).

Amateur — Someone who hustles in chess for money. Usually found in major parks and skittles rooms at chess tournaments.

Amaurosis Schacchistica — A complaint commonly known as chess blindness.

Ambush — A composition term for a situation in which a line-piece would command a line if another man, of either color, were moved from the line.

Analysis — Figuring out the best series of moves for a given position. Usually, analysis is proof by a chess engine that you could have won or drawn your lost game.

Anchor Ring — A combination of the vertical and horizontal cylinder boards, used for fairy chess problems. There are no edges: each rank, file, and the diagonal is continuous.

Annihilation — A problem term for a kind of clearance. A piece is moved along a line and is captured; another piece of the same color is then moved along this line after the man that has made the capture has been moved out of the way.

Annotation — A comment on one or more moves of a chess game. It is usually written analysis of the moves played in a chess game and their variations.

Announced Mate — A claim by a player that he can force mate in a stated number of moves.

Arabian Mate — a checkmate given by a rook and a knight, unaided by other men, and when the mated king is on a corner square.

Arbiter — Same as a referee. He enforces the laws and rules in a match or tournament.

Armageddon game - A game that is guaranteed to produce a decisive result, because if there is a draw it is ruled a victory for Black (who had a shorter time control). In compensation for this, White is given more time on the clock. Often White is given 6 minutes, and Black 5 minutes. This format is typically used in playoff tiebreakers when shorter blitz games have not resolved the tie

Arrangement — A chess puzzle. The solver is to construct a position stipulated — there is no play.

Array — The arrangement of pieces and pawns at the beginning of a game.

Attack — An active threat. It can also be a term for an opening variation initiated by White. It can also be a short, sharp-pointed nail that holds up crosstables.

Aufin — An old English term for the bishop's ancestor, the alfil or fil.

Automaton — A machine that appears to play chess.

Back rank - A chess player's first rank (the one on which the pieces stand in the starting position); White's back rank is Black's eighth rank, and vice versa. Also called first rank or home rank.

Back-rank mate — A king mated on its back (first or last) rank by a rook or queen on the same rank.

Backward pawn — A pawn that can neither be guarded by, nor be advanced with the

support of, another pawn. A backward pawn usually lives deep in the woods.

Bad bishop — A bishop obstructed by its own pawns. Also a senior member of the Catholic clergy caught in another scandal.

Balance of position — The situation in a game where neither side has significant advantage.

Bare King — A king without any other men of the same color on the board.

Baroque chess set — An unrepaired chess set with the pieces in pieces.

Battery — A problem term for one of the two kinds of ambush. A line-piece would command a line if another man of the same color were moved off that line. It could also mean doubled or tripled line-pieces.

Bind — A grip, usually held by pawns, from which the opponent cannot easily free himself.

Bird, Henry — A near-sighted 19th century chess player who always touched the wrong pawn on the first move.

Bishop of the wrong color — A bishop that cannot assist the promotion of a rook's pawn because it cannot attack the queening square.

Bishops of the opposite color — A White bishop opposed by a Black bishop. It implies that there are no other bishops on the chessboard.

Blindfold chess — A form of chess in which the player is not allowed to see the chessboard while playing.

Blitz chess — Fast chess, usually at 5 minutes per game. It is usually a chess game where the players move faster than they think.

Block — A device that places a piece on a square so that an enemy pawn stationed in front of it cannot advance.

Blockade — A pawn formation that cannot, without sacrifice, be assailed by frontal attack.

Blunder — A bad move. It is usually a decisive error in the game. It is usually a sacrifice made to get a tactical disadvantage, leading to a lost game. If the game is won, however, then it is called a brilliancy.

Board — What chess wives and girlfriends are at chess tournaments with their husbands or boyfriends.

Book — Known information about the openings or the endgame derived from published sources.

Breakthrough — The penetration of an apparently well defended position, often by means of a sacrifice.

Brevity — A short game.

Brilliancy - A combinative sequence of moves that didn't lose and is easy to see once the solution is known.

Bughouse — A popular chess variant involving 4 players and 2 chess sets. Captured pieces are given to your partner who can drop them on the board in his game. It is a game where you can always blame your losses on your partner's play, just like in tennis doubles.

Bullet chess — Chess played where each side has one minute to make all their moves.

Bust — A demonstration that an opening variation is unsound, or a combination is faulty, or that a chess position study has no solution.

Bye — A tournament round in which a player does not have a game, usually because there are an odd number of players. A bye is normally scored as a win, although in some tournaments a player is permitted to choose to take a bye (usually in the first or last round) and score it as a draw (½ point). A bye is usually given to the odd player who has nothing to do.

Caissa — The goddess of chess.

Candidate move - A move that seems good upon initial observation of the position,

and that warrants further analysis. Usually, a player comes up with a few candidate moves before finally choosing one.

Capture — A move that consists of playing a man to a square occupied by an enemy man, other than the king, and removing the enemy man from the chessboard.

Castle — A slang name for the rook. To castle is to make the move known as castling.

Castling — A move in which the king and a rook are moved at the same time. It moves the king from the center to a flank where it usually is safer, and it develops the rook. It is the only time two pieces are moved in a turn. Castling can be done on either the kingside (notated O-O) or the queenside (O-O-O). You should touch and move the king over two spaces first, then move the rook.

Center — The four squares in the middle of the board for normal chess players. For hypermodern players, it is the a1, a8, h1, h8 squares.

Centralization — The act of bringing pieces to the center or moving them so that they control central squares.

Cheapo — Slang for a trap. It is usually played in the hope of swindling a draw or win from a lost position. A cheapo is a trap that is so obvious that only an idiot would fall for it, and he does.

Check — A move that attacks a king or what chess players avoid at a restaurant with friends.

Checkmate (mate) — A position in which a player is unable to move his king out of check. It is a position a novice gets himself in because he doesn't know the words "I resign."

Chess960 — A variant of chess in which the starting position of the pieces on the players' home rank is randomized. There are 960 unique possible starting positions.

Chess Life magazine — An American chess magazine that comes out late once a month about tournaments that occurred 6 months ago.

Classic chess book - A chess book that people praise but don't really read. Usually written in descriptive notation.

Clean score — The winner's score in a match or tournament in which he wins every game.

Clearance — Removal of a piece from a square, rank, file, or diagonal so that another piece may use it.

Colle — An opening for dog lovers.

Combination — A series of forcing moves with a clear start and finish grounded in tactics. It usually involves a sacrifice. A combination is usually a series of moves that is too long for the average player to understand until pointed out to him.

Column — A vertical file on a chessboard.

Compensation — Advantages which balance those by his opponent. One may lose material but gain positional advantage as compensation. Compensation is really a lie that masters tell you when you are a pawn down to make you feel good.

Composition — A position other than one which occurs in a game, usually composed for solving.

Connected pawn — A pawn that can guard or be guarded by a pawn on an adjoining file. Connected pawns are a group of two or more such pawns.

Consolidation — The stabilization of a 'loose' position.

Consultation game — A game in which one or both sides consist of 2 or more players in consultation.

Cook — A composition term for an alternate key not intended by the composer. It could also be a solution in fewer moves than stipulated. A cook in chess problems is an unintended duplicate solution, or a refutation.

Correspondence chess — Chess where the check really is in the mail. It is a method of play to see who has the strongest chess engine.

Counterattack — An attack mounted by the defender or by a player who is defending. It could also mean an opening variation initiated by Black.

Counter-gambit — A description of an opening in which Black offers a gambit.

Counter-play — The active maneuvering by a player who is on the defensive.

Cramped position — A position in which the mobility of a player's men is restricted.

Crosstable — A table showing the result of every game in a chess tournament.

Danish Gambit — An opening for pastry lovers that can get you in a jam with a fork.

Decoy — To entice an enemy man from its defensive role.

Deep Blue — Grandmaster Joel Benjamin's favorite color.

Defense — A move or moves played to counter an opponent's treats. It could also be a description of an opening or an opening variation initiated by Black.

Desperado — A trapped piece that is used to inflict as much damage as possible before it is captured.

Develop — To bring one's pieces into play during the opening phase.

Development — The process of developing the pieces to effective squares.

Directmate — In a chess composition, White to move first and checkmate Black within a specified number of moves, against any defense.

Discovered Attack — An attack made by a line-piece (queen, rook, or bishop) when another piece or pawn has been moved out of the way.

Discovered check — A check from a line-piece when another man has been moved out of the way.

Distant opposition — A kind of opposition in which the kings stand on the same file or rank with three squares between them instead of on square in normal opposition.

Double check — Check given by two pieces simultaneously while attacking the enemy king.

Doubled pawns — Two pawns of the same color on the same file.

Duffer - Any chess player who beats you 3 times in a row, and won't play you again.

Dual — In a study or mate problem, an alternative move for White, on his second move or later, that fulfills the stipulations in a manner not intended by the composer.

Duplex — Two problems in one. Either White or Black can fulfill the stipulations.

ECO — Encyclopedia of Chess Openings.

Elo — A rating system developed by Arpad Elo and used by FIDE to rate tournament players.

En passant — A move in chess for a special pawn capture. It can only occur immediately after a pawn moves up two squares from its starting square, and it could have been captured by an enemy pawn had it advanced only one square. The opponent captures the just-moved pawn "as it passes" through the first square. The result is the same as if the pawn had advanced only one square and the enemy pawn had captured it normally.

En prise — A piece or pawn other than a king that is under attack.

Endgame — The phase of a chess game after the middlegame where there are few pieces left on the board. Endgame is the punishment for missing a win in the opening or middlegame. The endgame is your last opportunity to miss a draw or win.

Equalize — To arrive at a position in which equilibrium or balance of position is established.

Equilibrium — The situation in a game when neither side has significant advantage.

Ethics on chess — Undefined or does not exist.

Exchange — The capture of material. "The exchange" refers to a capture a rook by one player and a minor piece by his opponent. The player who captures the rook 'wins the exchange.'

Exposed king — A king unprotected by its own pawns.

Family check — A fork that gives check and attacks the queen at the same time.

Family fork — A fork that targets a queen, king, and possible other pieces, such as the rook.

Fianchetto — The development of a bishop on the b2 or g2 square for White, and b7 or g7 for Black. It derives from Pinocchio's last name, who lied about playing chess.

FIDE — The world chess federation. FIDE is the acronym for Fédération Internationale des Échecs.

Fifty-move rule - A draw may be claimed if no capture or pawn move has occurred in the last fifty moves by either side.

File — A column on the chessboard.

Fish — A very weak player that falls for all your traps, and still wins.

Five-minute chess — A chess game in which each player has a fixed time of 5 minutes for the whole game.

Fool's Mate — The shortest game ending in checkmate. There are 8 possible ways to mate in 2 moves. Also known as a chess player's spouse.

Fork — A direct and simultaneous attack on two or more men by one man. Any man may fork. The knight is the most common piece that forks other pieces.

Gambit — An opening in which one player offers to give up material in expectation of gaining positional compensation.

Good bishop — Your opponent's bishop and you cannot block it.

Grandmaster draw — A short game in which both players are afraid of each other.

Greco Gambit — A favorite opening among wrestlers. It relies more on the pin than the fork.

Half-open file — A file on which only one player has a pawn.

Hanging pawns — A pawn island consisting of two united pawns on half-open files.

Helpmate — A type of problem where Black moves first and helps White checkmate Black. It can also be a spouse when you are too sick to get out of bed.

Horizontal line — A rank.

Hole — A square on a player's third rank or beyond that cannot be guarded by one of his pawns.

Hypermodern — A style of play that indirectly controls the center such as with a fianchettoed bishop.

ICCF — The International Correspondence Chess Federation.

If-Move - A method of predicting the next move to shorten a correspondence chess game from 12 months to 11 months and 3 weeks.

Illegal — A sick bird.

Initiative — The power to make threats.

Isolani — An isolated queen's pawn.

Isolated pawn — A pawn that has no other pawns of the same color on the adjoining files.

J'adoube — A verbal warning given by a player whose turn it is to move that he intends to adjust a piece or pawn. One can either say "j'adoube" or "I adjust." The word is French for "if I move this piece, I may lose the game."

Key — The first single-move of the solution to a direct mate problem.

Kibitzer — An onlooker on a game of chess, you usually makes comments about the game. The comments are usually good advice for your opponent and bad advice for you.

King's Indian Reversed - naɪdnɪ s'gniK.

Knight ending — Dawn.

Knight's tour — A tour of a knight on an empty chessboard that moves like a knight and visits every square only once.

Knock-out tournament — A tournament in which the losers of each round is eliminated.

Leaper — A piece that is moved a fixed distance in a single leap and that cannot be obstructed on its way.

Lightning chess — A chess game that is played much more quickly than the normal time control. It usually describes 5-minute chess.

Line — All the squares on any one file, rank, or diagonal.

Line-piece — A piece that can be moved any distance along a line. The pieces would be the queen, rook, and bishop.

Living chess — Chess played with human beings taking the part of chessmen and moving on a giant chessboard.

Long diagonal — A diagonal on a chessboard that extends from a corner square, such as from a1 to h8 or h1 to a8.

Lost game - Something your opponent had for the past 5 moves, before he won.

Lost the exchange — To lose a rook for a minor piece (knight or bishop).

Master — Generally a strong player. In the United States, a player with a United States Chess Federation (USCF) rating of 2200 to 2400 is considered a master.

Middlegame — The part of a chess game which starts after the opening. There is no clear line between the opening and the middlegame, but typically the middlegame will start when most pieces have been developed.

Miniature — In chess compositions, it is a composition of 7 or fewer men, including

the kings on the board. It is also a short game, perhaps 25 or 20 moves or less.

Mobility — The freedom of movement for the pieces and pawns.

NN - Traditionally used in game scores to indicate a player whose name is not known.

Notation - Any method of recording chess moves, allowing games to be later published, replayed and analyzed. The most common notation today is algebraic notation. Formerly descriptive notation was standard in English language publications.

Opposition — A position in which the kings oppose each other by an odd number of squares.

Over-the-board (OTB) — A description of a chess game in which the players meet across the board in person.

Overloading — A piece is given more defensive work than it can handle.

Passed pawn — A pawn is passed when no enemy pawns on the same or an adjoining file stand in its way. An enemy pawn cannot prevent the advance of a passed pawn.

Patzer- A weak chess player.

Perpetual check — A special case of draw by repetition. A player continues to give check. If there is a three-fold repetition of a position, the game is a draw.

Piece — A queen, rook, bishop, knight, or king. Technically, the pawn is not a piece. It is more generally used for any chessman.

Pin — A situation in which a line-piece (queen, rook, or bishop) holds down an enemy man. A piece is pinned when it cannot move off of the line on which it is attacked. A pin is a sharp move.

Ply - Term mainly used in computer chess to denote one play of either White or Black. A ply is half a move.

Poisoned pawn — An unmoved pawn whose capture subjects the capturer to a

strong attack.

Postal chess - This is the same thing as correspondence chess, or chess played by mail.

Premove - This refers to a player making his next move online while his opponent is thinking about his move. After the opponent's move, the premove will be made, if legal.

Promotion — Promoting a pawn to another piece once it reaches the 8th rank. The pawn usually becomes the queen, the most powerful piece on the board.

Rapid chess — Chess games between 10 minutes and 30 minutes per player.

Rank — The horizontal squares. It is the row of 8 laterally-adjointing squares from side to side of a chessboard.

Round robin. A type of paring or a fat type of bird.

Sacrifice — A move that gives up material to gain positional or tactical advantage. A sacrifice is usually any piece that was accidentally left unprotected and taken for free.

Sandbagger — A person who helps out during floods and hurricanes.

Second — A player's attendant in a match or tournament.

Selfmate — A problem in which White moves first and forces Black to give mate.

Siesta variation — Taking a nap before noon.

Simultaneous Display — A number of games played simultaneously by one player.

Skewer — A pin against an unprotected piece. It is also known as an x-ray attack.

Skittles— A casual or friendly game of chess, usually played at a fast rate and without a chess clock. It is also a great fruit-covered candy.

Smothered mate — A mate given by a knight to a king surrounded by his own men.

Stalemate — A position in which a player whose turn it is to move is neither in check nor able to make a move. Stalemate ends the game and the game is considered drawn. A stalemated can also be a spouse who keeps repeating the same old jokes.

Sudden death — A chess time control in which each player has a fixed amount of time available to make all the moves. It is also what happened to Jose Capablanca, Alexander Alekhine, Paul Keres, and Emory Tate.

Swindle — A trick played from a position that is inferior that may lead to a won game.

Swiss System — A system used in tournaments to determine pairings. In every round, each player is paired with an opponent with the same or similar score.

Tactics — Combinations, traps, and threats. Play is characterized by short-term attacks, perhaps a sacrifice, requiring calculation by the players, as distinguished from positional play.

Tempo - A unit of time considered as one move. A player may gain a tempo in the opening when the opponent moves the same piece twice.

Threat — A move that creates the possibility of an advantageous capture or maneuver. A threat is made when, on the next turn, a player can make a move that results in a position that is better than the one you had before.

Transposition — Arriving at a position using a different sequence of moves.

Trap — A move that may tempt the opponent to play a losing move. A trap is usually something you saw over the board but forgot about until you fell into it and lost.

Underpromotion — Promoting a pawn to something other than a queen.

USCF — United States Chess Federation.

Windmill — The repeated use of a discovered check to win material.

Woodpusher — A weak chess player.

X-ray - When the power of a piece, either to attack or to defend, seems to pass through an intervening enemy piece. Also known as a skewer.

Zugzwang — A situation where one player is put at a disadvantage if he makes any move. Zugzwang is German for "constipated." The term is used when it hurts to move.

Zwischenzug — A chess tactic in which a player, instead of playing the expected move, first interposes another move posing an immediate threat that the opponent must answer, and only then plays the expected move. It is also known as intermezzo.