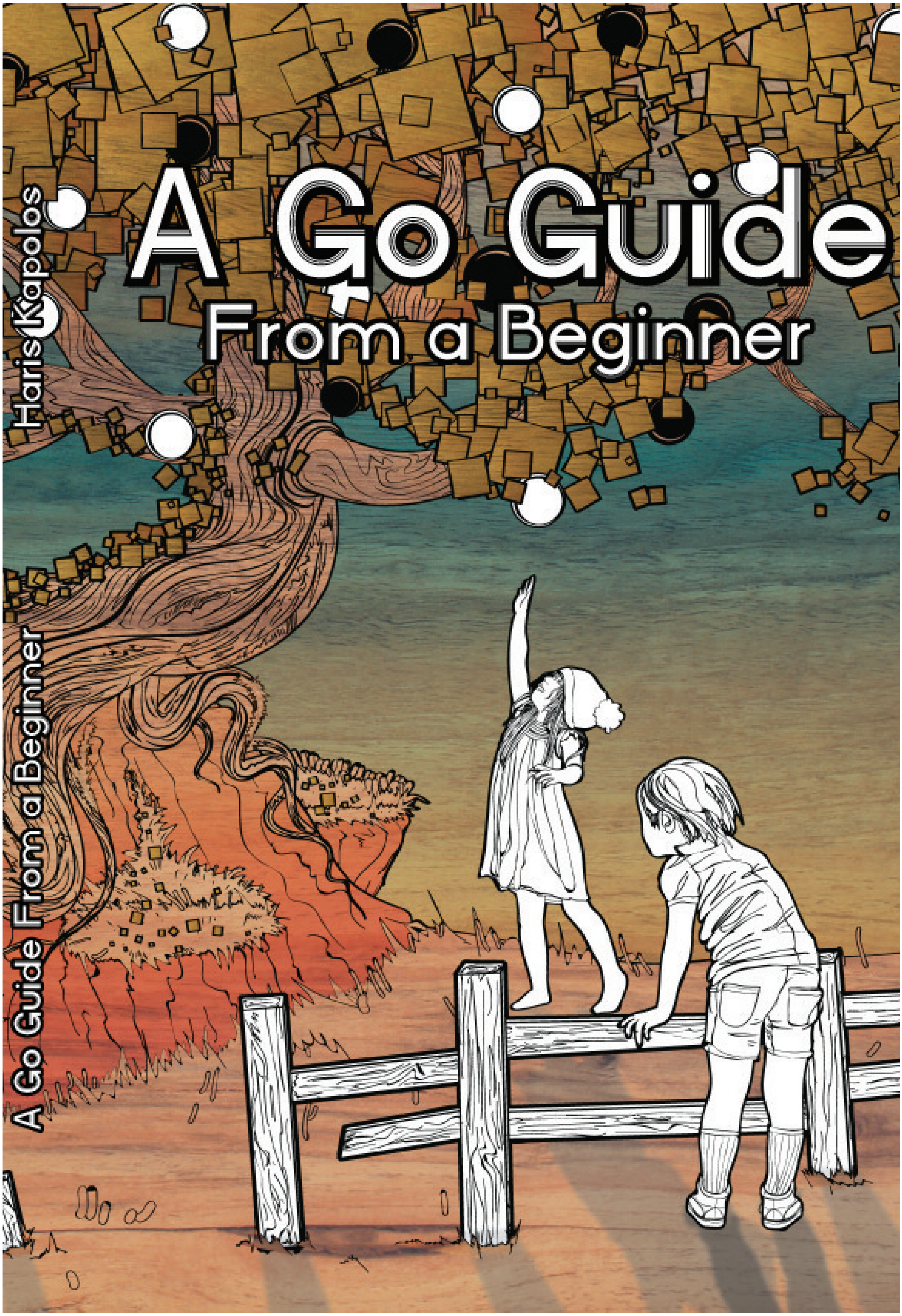
A Go Guide

From a Beginner

Haris Kapolos



A Go Guide From a Beginner

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Dedications

This book is dedicated to **Nick Sibicky** for showing me that you do not have to be a top professional player in order to be useful and spread the knowledge and joy of playing Go.
Whatever knowledge we all have is precious and however small is the service and help that we can provide, it is always better than offering nothing back.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank:
- **All the people that have played Go with me** in the DGS and OGS clients. Without them there would have been no content to write a book and I wouldn't have become a better player.
- The **KGS client** for providing free Go client services and making the creation of all those diagrams a smooth process.
- **My friends** for the support and helping me proofread the first chapter of this book when I wrote it back in 2017. They helped me notice some things that were not aesthetically correct before I blundered on to making the same mistakes for the rest of the 180 pages. Thinking of the corrections I would have had to do makes me shudder (and the first chapter still has a couple of oddly sized diagrams, but the rest of the book is quite fine).
- **Pixlebun** for her amazing and creative cover art and **Ailin Hsiao** for permitting me to use that beautiful photo in page 5.
- And last, but not the least, **all the people that have helped with the project**, since its public launch in December 2018. I really appreciate it.

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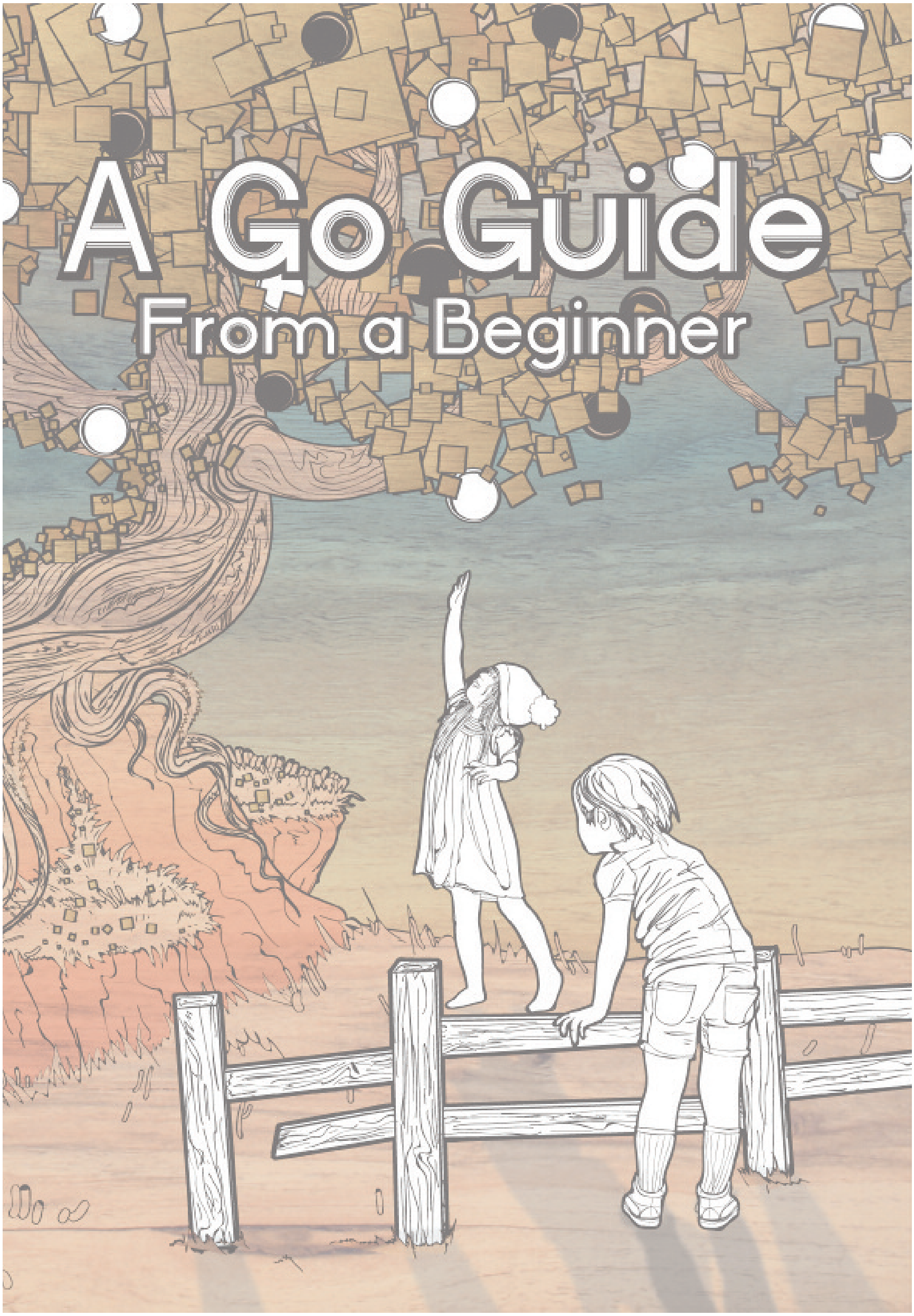


From a beginner for beginners

I feel that I should explain that this book has two main reasons of existence. For its English version the first and foremost reason of existence is that I have never found a book written with a beginner's mindset.

Go has extremely simple rules to learn and memorize, but its complexity is simply mind-blowing. In the same way an art student feels overwhelmed in front of an empty canvas, **a beginner is overwhelmed in front of an empty board**. We feel that we have no clear strategy and no clear reason for playing some moves. We also know that we do not have the skills or the deep thinking or the ability to play a "great move" or orchestrate a grand design across the board. Every new move we encounter (and there are so many of them) makes us nervous. We feel lost and we seek to improve ourselves, but the work is hard, the climb is not guaranteed with "just studying" and the people above us seem to understand so much more than us.

The vast knowledge of a pro or a high-dan seems beyond us and many people “despair” or "burn out" trying to brute force more knowledge of the game. But Go is not that kind of a game, (un)fortunately, so maybe we should occasionally take a step back and review the fundamentals from a more simple/different perspective. In that regard, this book will try and cover as many things as possible and keep them as simple and clear as possible.

So, why should you read this book? It is targeted at two different kinds of people:

a) those that want to initiate their friends who know nothing about the game and present to them a beginner-friendly approach that, hopefully, will not dissuade them from playing and experimenting with moves and playstyles;

b) double-digit kyu players who, I hope, will find within this book some basic ideas on which they can improve, written with a way of thinking similar to their own and, thus, more easily absorbed.

The second reason is that, to the best of my knowledge, there doesn’t seem to be a free book that we can share legally if we want to spread knowledge of the game to new players in every country. I wanted to provide something that could be shared easily and legally. A book that wouldn’t need negotiations and publishers to coordinate in order to translate and distribute.

There are so many countries and so many languages, and not every citizen knows enough English to actually study a manuscript written in a foreign language. But resources and books in every native language are not readily available, so I felt that something needed to be done.

This book is part of a project that aspires to fill that gap. **It is my goal to make it freely available to as many people and as many languages as possible.**

I have to admit that this book is, as far as I know, the only one that is written by a person who is not a professional Go player or a high dan-level amateur, but you do not have to be a professional to write a beginner's guidebook. Hopefully all the aforementioned target groups will find it useful and many other people will attempt to join me and help me with this idea/project.

The state of Go in my home country, Greece, was crucial in creating this project. While I am writing these lines, there is no formal Go "Association" in Greece, not even a single established Go Club in the country. What does exist is 20-30 people that are each year actually playing the game and are actively doing everything they can to represent the game within and outside our country.

We are all doing our best, but *can we spread the word about this wonderful game without Clubs, without an organization, without ways to teach?* **We cannot.** We need a way to teach. A way to bring more people to appreciate this game and participate. I believe the best tool for this job is a book, so I made one, because I think that was the best I could provide to our collective effort. **Outside this context, this book may look vain and might border on blasphemy in what it attempts**, but it was never a matter of vanity. For Go in our country it is just a matter of necessity. And maybe other languages and countries need a book as well. I've noticed the teams in the PandaNet EU championship. A lot of teams, in countries like ours, do not seem to have a lot of young players in them. **Providing young people with a book in their own language might help a lot.**

One last thing before you move on to the actual content of the book. In my line of work as a teacher of programming for school kids, I have noticed something: Kids get bored easily when you tell them something new without explaining to them why this new thing is important, useful and exciting. They find it burdensome or useless. They think it is just "more work" for them. The solution I came up for this problem was to immediately show them **the practical application** of this new idea I just explained them, in a real program. Of course, this means that **for that moment** they cannot fully grasp what exactly happened, but their curiosity is piqued. They realise that what they were just taught is **actually useful** and not something vague and boring. So, I used this exact same idea in the book and when I am introducing something new, I try to immediately provide an example of a real game and the thoughts and decisions that went behind making those moves. I urge everyone reading the more complex examples to try and play out the moves presented in the diagrams in a real board, or a computer Go editor, and I hope that this will have the same beneficial effect as it has to my students. If you do not get it all immediately, **do not worry**. By the end of this book, just like the end of the student's term, everything will be much clearer.

Thank you for your time and faith in this book,

Haris Kapolos, 3 Kyu DGS

Past and present

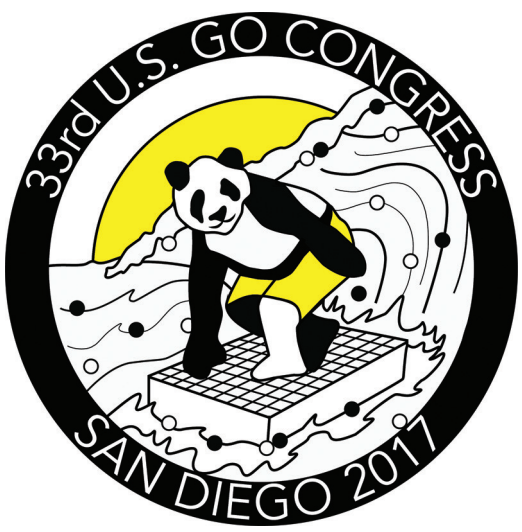
Go (Japanese)/ Weiqi (Chinese) / Baduk (Korean) or also known as "the surrounding game" is a two player abstract strategy game which was invented in China approximately 2500 years ago and thus it is probably the most ancient board game still played today.

Legend has it that it was created either by the ancient Chinese emperor Yao or his counsellor to educate the emperor's heir in the ways of the world and teach him discipline and balance. Others say that it was evolved from ancient warlords and their maps where they used stones to carve out their strategy. Whichever the truth of its origins might be, the fact of the matter is that Go was so important that in ancient China it was considered one of the four cultivated arts of the high class, along with calligraphy, painting and playing the musical instrument guqin.



Ancient Go Board

Go also reached high status in Japan where in the Edo period (1603–1868) the Shogunate established the office of minister of Go ("Godokoro") and four hereditary houses to teach the game of Go. The modern version of the game is mostly based on that period of time and this is why in this book we will mostly focus on the Japanese rules in order to keep things simple for new players. Today, of course, the game does not have ministers, but it is still highly regarded as a game and, in many places, as a form of art and the no longer hereditary Go title-holders are still widely respected.



U.S.A. has held more than thirty Go Congresses

In China, Japan and Korea there are many titles and cups around which the professional world of Go revolves, as well as many international competitions for both pros and amateurs. It was estimated in 2008 that more than 40 million people play the game, mostly residing in east Asia, but since then the game has progressed fast outside its traditional hub, especially in the United States of America, where the American Go Association has begun certifying professional players since 2012, while in Europe the first professional player was certified in 2014 by the European Go Federation.

The game found itself in the spotlight when an Artificial Intelligence, named AlphaGo, managed to defeat two of the best Go players of this decade, Lee Sedol and Ke Jie, causing a significant stir both in the Go and the computer science community which spread the word about the game worldwide.

But why should we be interested in it?



Yasutoshi Yasuda 9p:
A pioneer in promoting teaching Go at schools

Well, why should we care about any games at all?

I think this is the question we need to answer first. In many countries of the modern world, games have been relegated to a past-time reserved for young children and teens, while adults are viewed as immature or uncool when they spend their time learning or playing a game. Even in the case of children, most parents regard games as something the child is supposed to do to distract itself and give the parents some quiet time or something which they play together with their kids in order to bond and have some fun. But are games really a distraction?

Before we go to the science of the matter, it is worth noting that games in nature are still one of the main ways with which one generation of any species can pass knowledge to their younger offspring. So, even without any scientific backup, empirical observation alone should tell us that games are a more serious issue than most people imagine or give them credit for. Introducing science into the equation, there is a plethora of studies that indicate that games can actually improve children's behaviour, memory, concentration, intuition, self-control and their intelligence in general. Of course not all games do **all** that, but Go comes very close in providing most of those benefits at the same time. Training the mind follows the same basic principle as training our body. In the same way that we target our physical growth in flexing some particular muscles, games are flexing our "mental muscles." So, let us see a small overview of what Go does:

- It makes us re-evaluate our behaviour and our character, because it is a game that actively punishes greed, envy, anger and recklessness;
- It trains our memory, because we will eventually have to remember the shapes that lead us to win a fight and those that made us lose it;
- It improves our concentration and intuition, because the Go board and the situations that arise in it are often complex and unique;
- It sparks our imagination, because we have to be able to think ahead.
- It teaches planning, because it is not a game where we can win by accident, so we have to devise short and long term strategy to achieve our goals;
- It challenges our intelligence, because setting the aforementioned goals is not an easy feat;
- It improves our sense of evaluation, because in its vast board the possibilities are many and they have to be constantly re-assessed.

"How does it do all that?" you may ask. Well, stick around and you will see, I promise you that it will be an interesting journey. But wait, are all those things only for kids? **We want in too!**

Why can't we, adults, reap all those benefits, as well? Society tells us that games are for children, but this is not so. It is just a flawed perception on what adults should be spending time doing and what they shouldn't and, apparently, society believes that an adult is done with growing and done with having fun. Well, it is true that we might not be able to grow anymore with the rate and efficiency a child can, be we can indeed improve as human beings at any age, or at least try to conserve what mental acumen we have already achieved.

If a crossword is considered a good enough mental exercise to keep your mind sharp, why not a game as complex and challenging as Go?

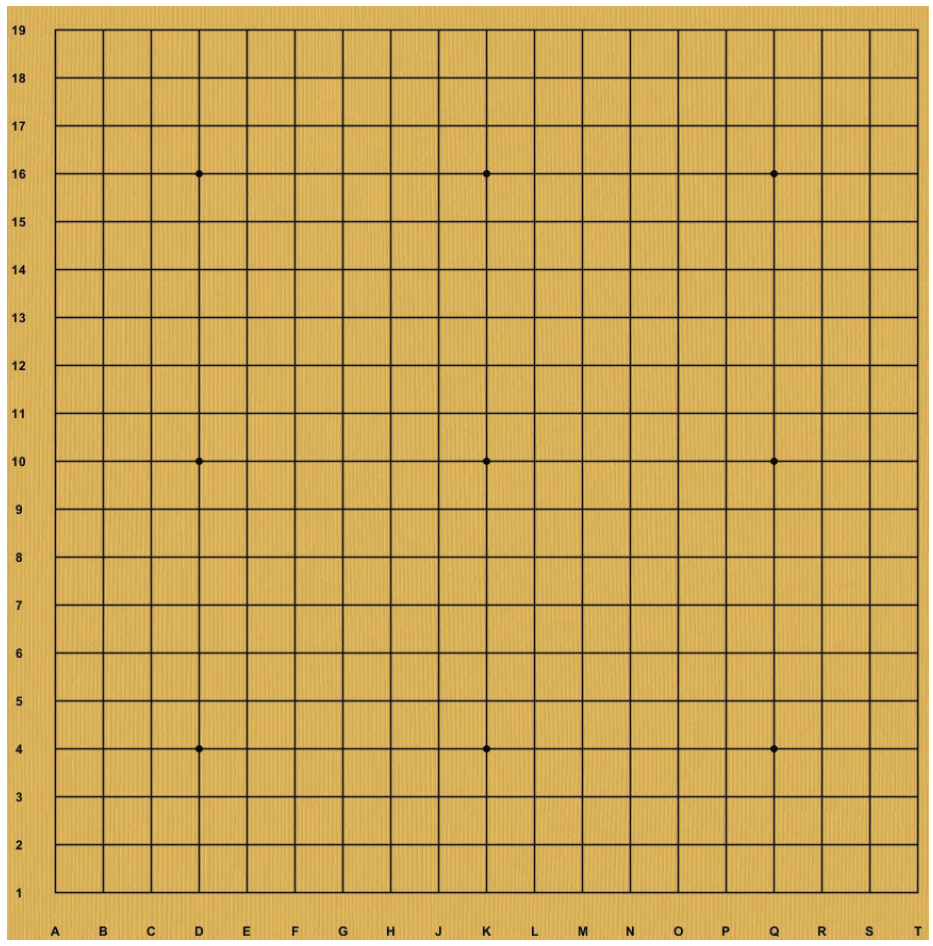
Why not, indeed. But enough talking! Let us see how the game is played.



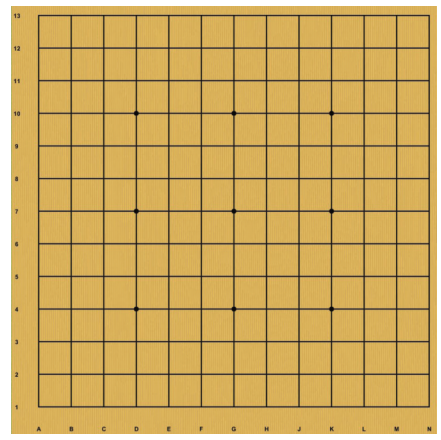
Go travels everywhere and can be played anywhere.
Source : Ailin Hsiao (Taiwanese 2p)

Boards and placing stones

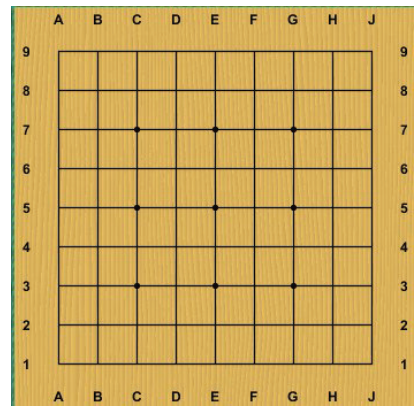
Go is played on a flat surface (usually wooden) which is divided in a rectangular grid of lines, with dimensions 9x9, 13x13, 17x17 and 19x19 being the most common of them in modern times. The horizontal dimension is usually represented with letters and the vertical dimension with numbers.



An empty 19x19 board

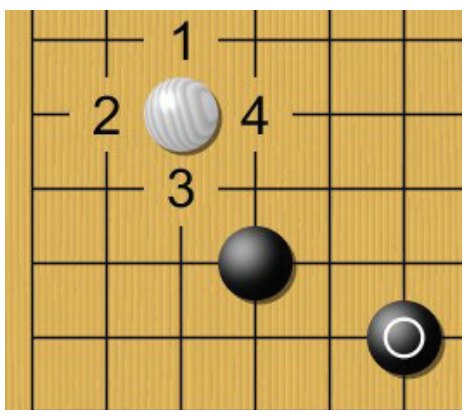


A 13x13 board

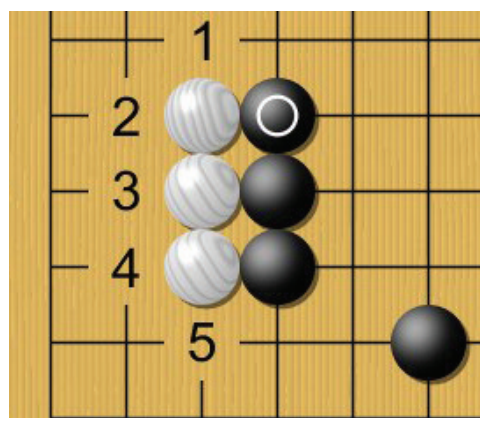


A 9x9 board

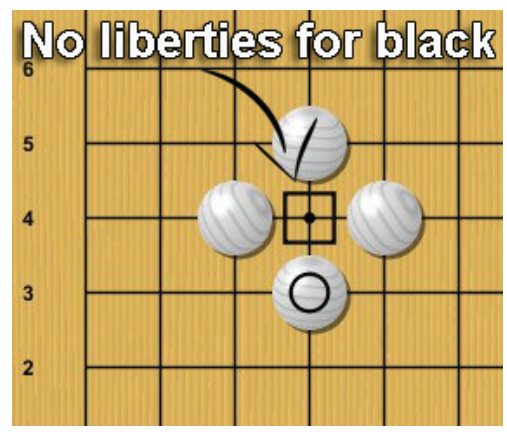
The pieces which the two players use to play are called "stones" and are of two colours, black and white. The stones are played on the intersections of the grid (that is, the points where the lines meet, including the borders and corners of the board) and are all equal with each other. The unoccupied, adjacent grid points which intersect with the position of a stone are called the **"liberties"** of the stone. Also, a stone cannot be moved once it is placed on the board and it cannot be played in a position where it **will** have no liberties. Stones that are connected with a grid line are considered a **“group”** and they all share liberties.



Each single stone has
a maximum of four liberties



Groups of stones share liberties

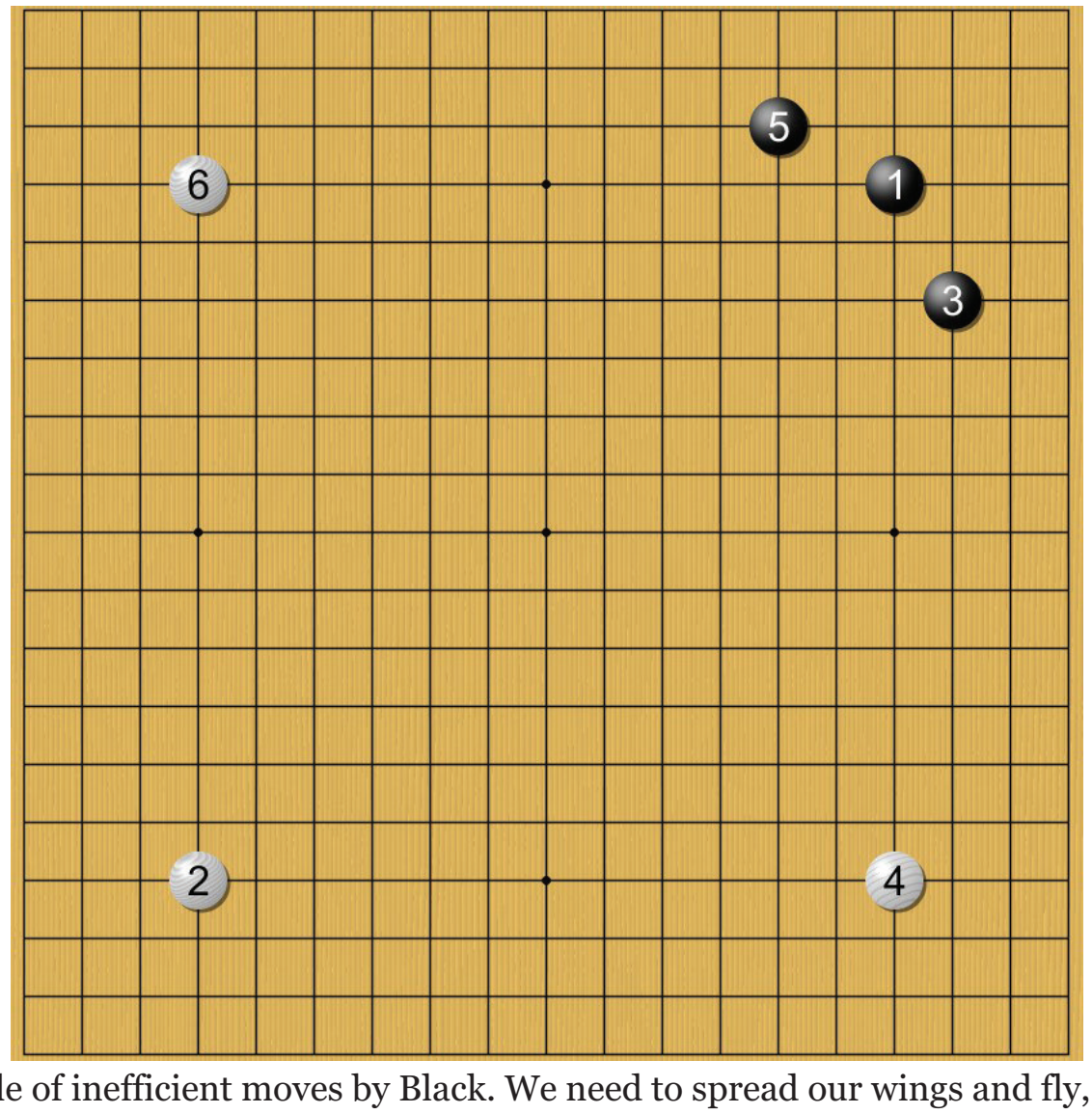


Black cannot play there

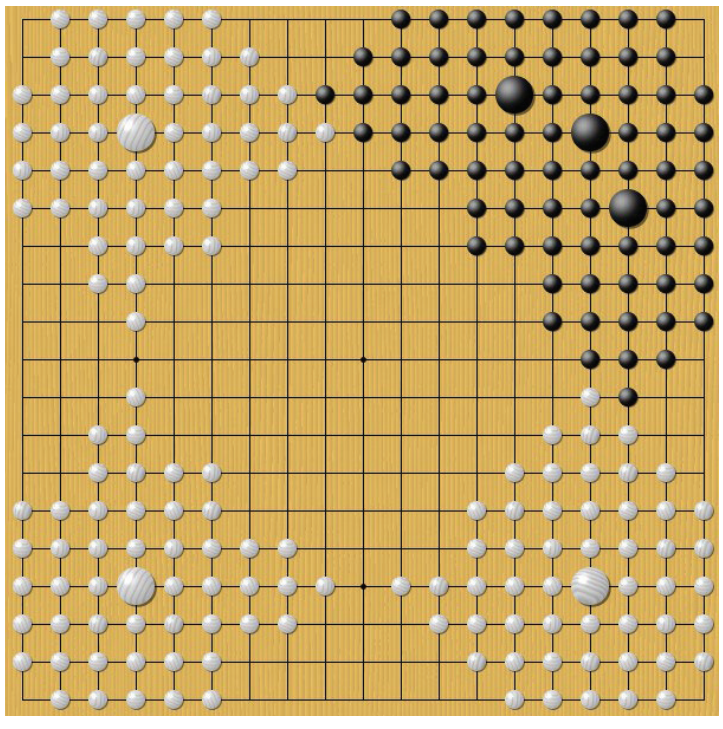
In Go there is no other kind of special game piece and this is what makes its basic rules simple to learn. But each stone can be placed almost anywhere on the board and this is what creates the immense complexity to the game. Each player takes one colour of stones and they play alternatively one stone each, trying to surround as much territory (counted in open grid points, which are called **“points”**) of the board as they can.

The game normally starts with an empty board and the player with the black stones plays first. In order for the game to remain balanced, since the first move is considered advantageous, the white player gets some points as compensation (called **"komi"**). The exact number of komi is decided by the players before the game and it usually varies from 5.5 to 7.5 with the half point being added to avoid a tie (called **"jigo"**).

To sum up, so far we can place our stones almost anywhere we like and the goal of the game is to surround as much as territory as possible. We will elaborate in the next chapter what is the best way to go around and achieve that goal in the various phases of the game, but at the moment let us focus on the obvious idea that we want our moves to secure and encompass as much area as possible with as few moves as possible. Let us look at an example.



A classic example of inefficient moves by Black. We need to spread our wings and fly, like White. Securing a small part of the board is worse than placing the first stones on as many areas of the board as possible.

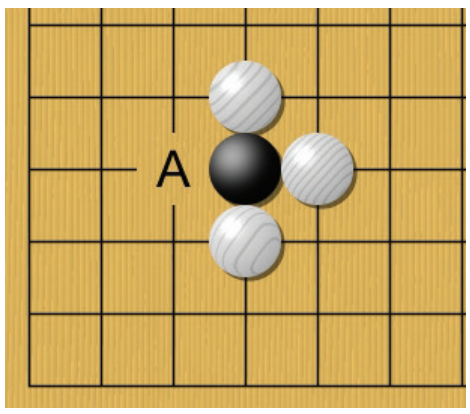


An estimation of points or influence

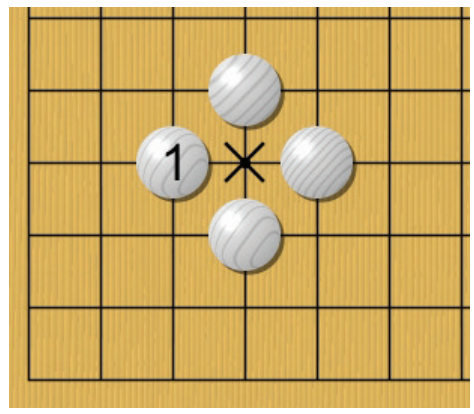
Both players have played 3 moves each and it is Black's turn, but which of the two players is more efficient with his moves? Black appears to have secured one corner, but White has rushed to place his stones first in a wider area, making sure that Black will have to fight hard to wrest back control of that area from White.
Of course, White will not keep all those marked points by the end of the game, but being able to play the first move in an area gives you a great advantage for the rest of the game.

Capturing enemy stones

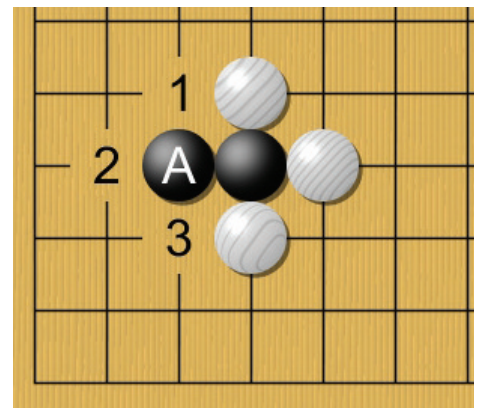
Next rule is capturing the opponent's stones. This is achieved by completely surrounding your opponent stones and filling all their liberties. Once an enemy stone or a group of stones is captured, they are removed from the board. Those stones are considered “**prisoners**” and are added to your final score. When our stones have only one liberty left and they are ready to be captured, this is called **"atari."**



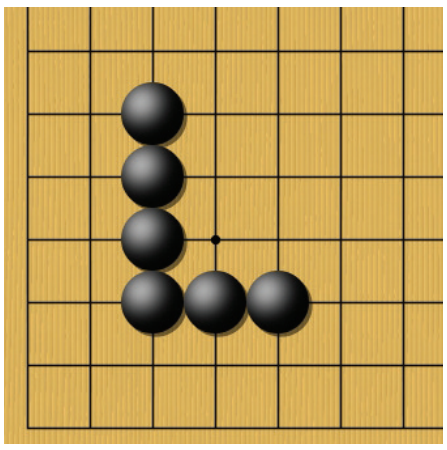
The Black stone has only one liberty at **A** (atari)



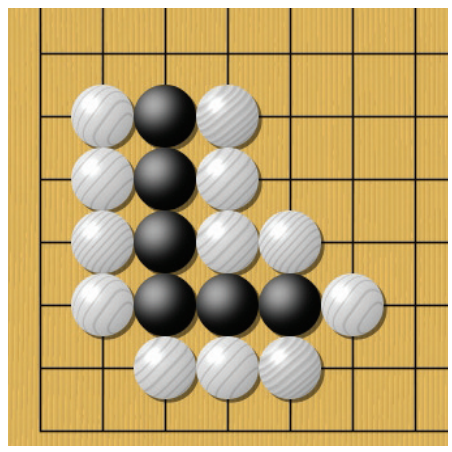
When White plays there, the stone is captured and removed



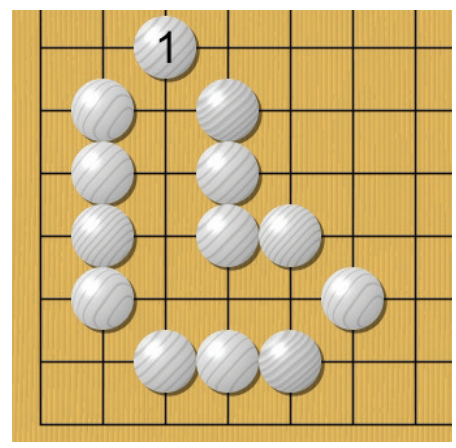
So, usually Black resists by extending and ends up with three liberties



Large groups share liberties...

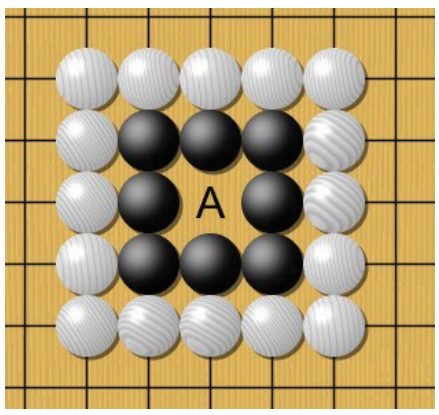


but they can still be captured...



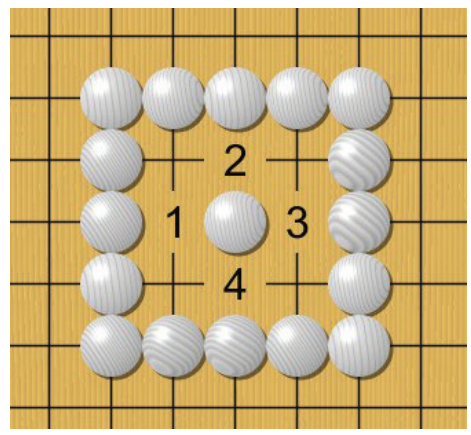
...and removed !

We mentioned earlier that in the Japanese rules a stone cannot be played where it will have no liberties, but since we hadn't talked about capturing yet, it was not possible to explain why. Now it is obvious that something like that would constitute "suicide" for that stone, or the group of stones in which it was added, and it would cause their self-removal. Effectively playing a move like that does not offer us anything (except in some obscure cases) and so it is prohibited in many versions of the game.



Black playing at **A** would make his group have zero liberties, so black cannot play there...

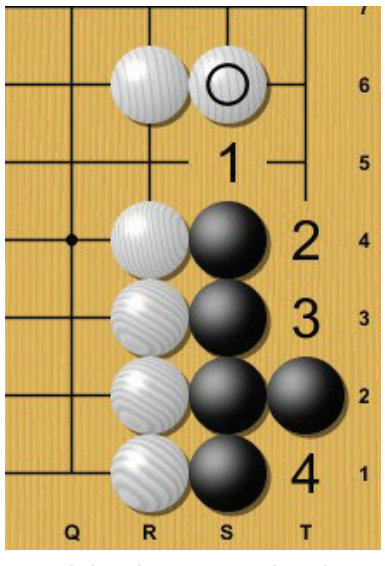
This rule also means that we can play in a position which **had** no liberties when we played it, **but it acquired at least one liberty** by capturing an opponent's stone.



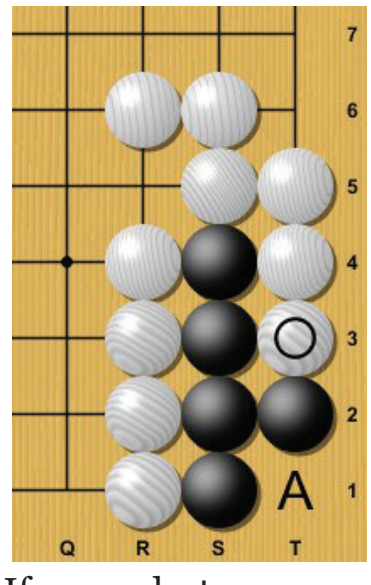
...but White CAN! His stone removes the black group and gains liberties. Capturing is the only way to play a stone in such cases.

One eye is not enough...

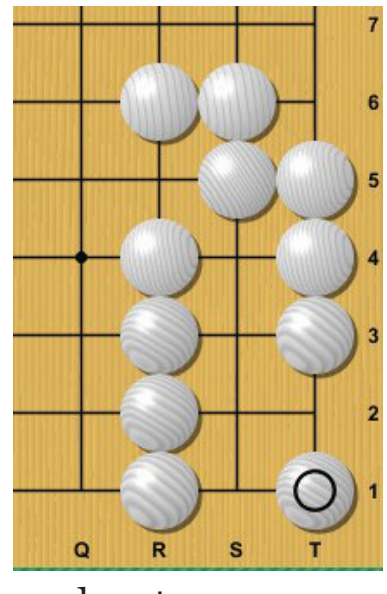
Any liberty which the opponent cannot fill like that is called an **"eye,"** but it is not enough for our groups of stones to simply have one eye to be safe from being captured. Having one eye does give us an advantage, but if our group gets completely surrounded and is in **atari**, then the opponent can play within the eye and capture the whole group. In many situations the existence of an eye or the potential for its creation, gives us a false sense of safety which can lead to the destruction (or **"death"**) of our groups, if we are not careful.



Our black group looks safe with four liberties and one "eye" at **4**. White cannot play at **4** ... Yet!



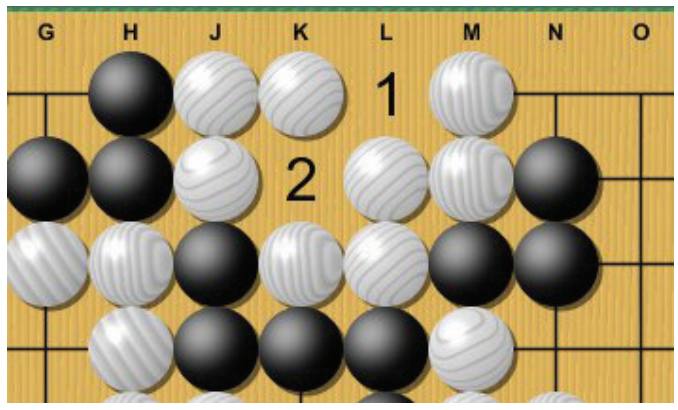
If we neglect our group it might get surrounded. Once reduced to one liberty White can play in the "eye"...

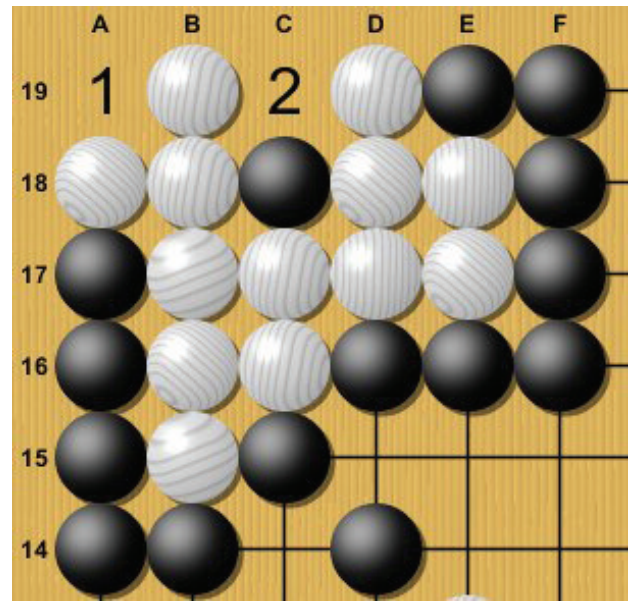


...and capture our group.

... two eyes are needed!

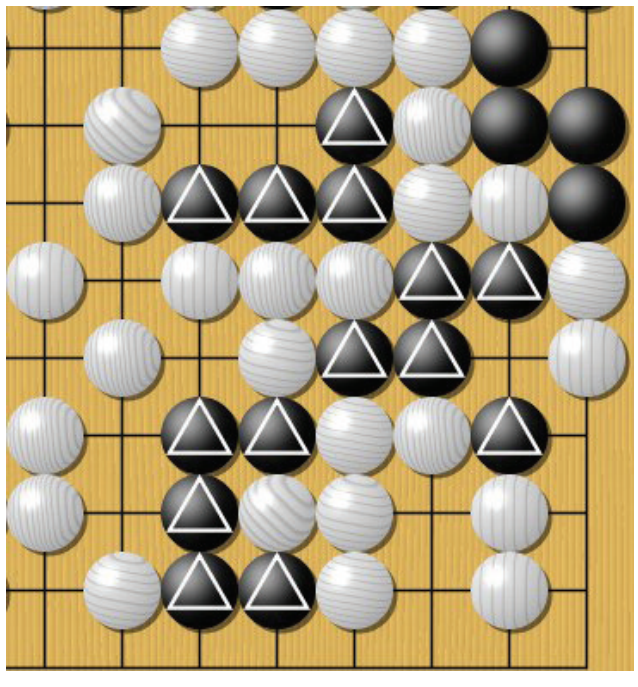
So, in order for a group to be safe when it is getting surrounded it needs to secure two separate liberties which the opponent cannot fill. This way the group cannot be captured with one move and create extra liberties for the capturing stone, like White did in the previous page. In conclusion, **groups with one eye can be captured, but groups with two eyes cannot be captured.** Such groups are called **"alive."**



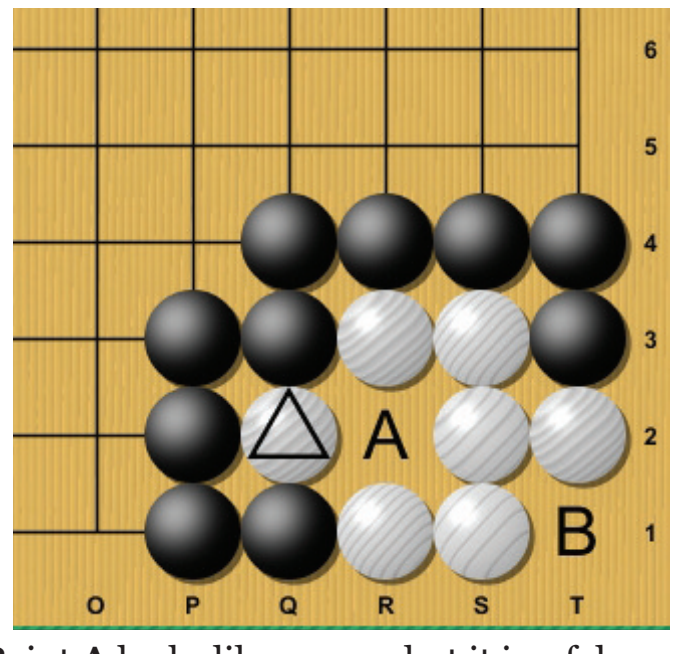


Left and right images: Typical examples of having two eyes. Notice that Black cannot fill the liberties in the points **1** or **2**, so White's groups can never be in atari and are **alive.**

The capturing rule along with the "two eyes", create very interesting situations and fights. As the game goes on, the areas of the two players will collide and depending on how their stones are placed, significant pressure can be applied to them and they might be lost and captured outright. Of particular interest are cases where there are formations which look like eyes, but in fact they have a defect that allows them to be captured. These are called **"false eyes"** and we will delve deeper on their formation in a latter, more advanced, chapter.

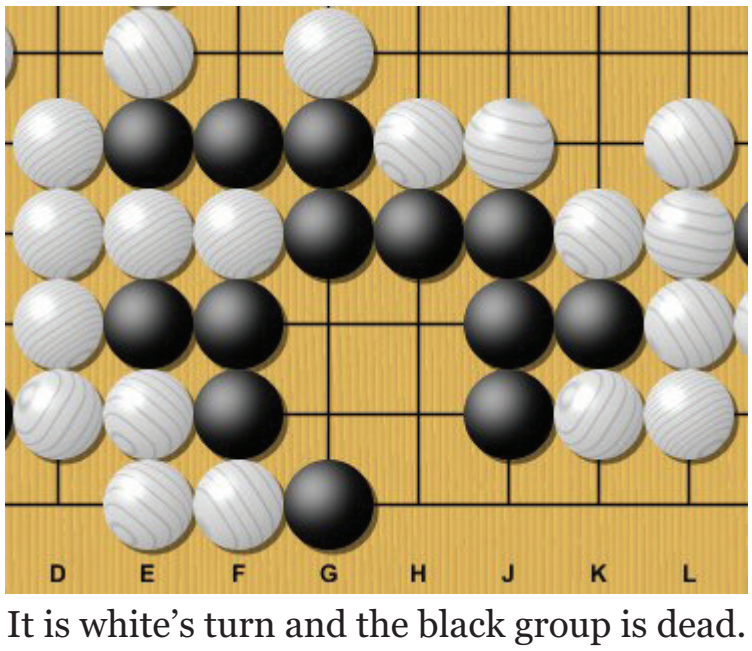


The end result of a corner fight.
All the marked Black stones are dead because there is no room to form two eyes

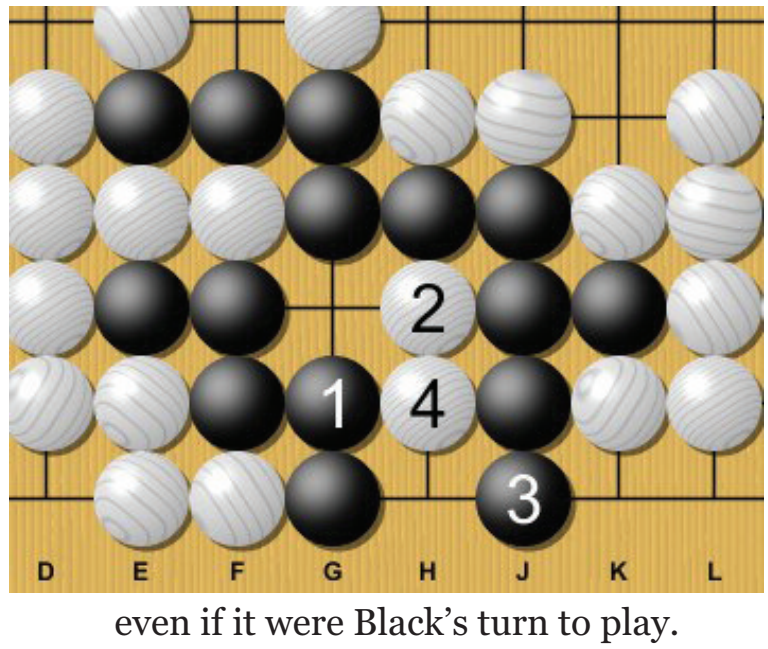


Point **A** looks like an eye, but it is a false eye, since the marked stone can be captured, placing the whole group in atari. Point **B** is a real eye, but one eye is not enough.

Capturing an opponent's group is also called **"killing a group."** The process of killing is often left unfinished, when that group is considered to not have any chance of being saved at that particular moment. Sometimes, as the game progresses, “dead” groups can threaten to be saved from their fate and return to life. Something like that is not easily planned and the best practice is to avoid having your groups fall into such an uncertain state in the first place.



It is white’s turn and the black group is dead.
It cannot form two eyes in any way...

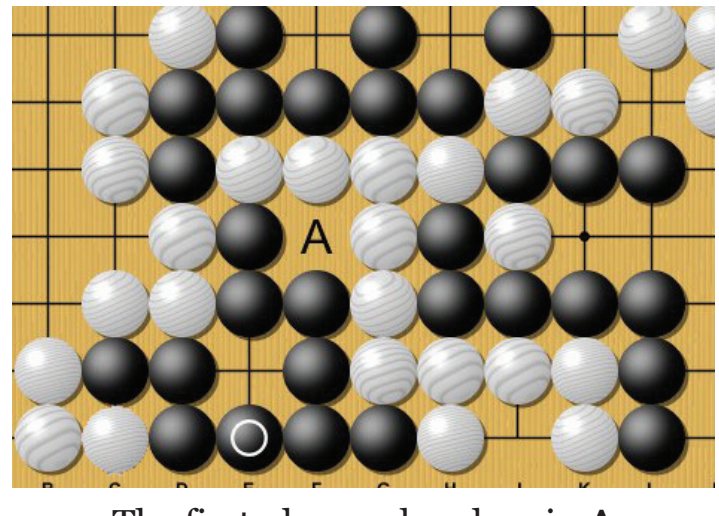


even if it were Black’s turn to play.
Black can try other moves, but none work.

In general, *a group that cannot be saved even if we play there first* is considered **"dead"** and it is not worth spending more effort and moves to try to save it, since we know that the opponent will capture it. Similarly, we also shouldn't waste moves trying to kill groups that cannot be captured even if we play first. As we already explained, such groups are considered **"alive"** and we should invest our moves elsewhere.

The rare case of “dual life”

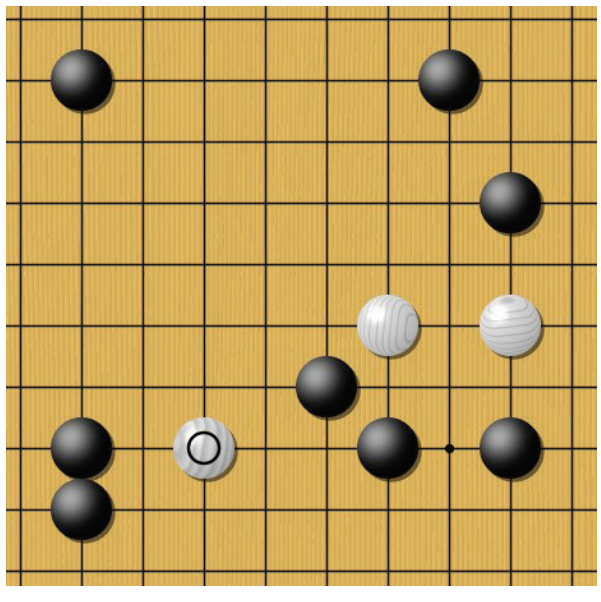
Sometimes both players' groups have two liberties and playing in either one of them would fill one of their own liberties as well, resulting intheir own group being captured instead of the opponent's. This case where no player can practically proceed with the effort to capture a group of stones is called **"dual life"** or **"seki."** Creating such a case in an actual game though, is rare, especially if both players are aware of the possibility and actively try to avoid it.



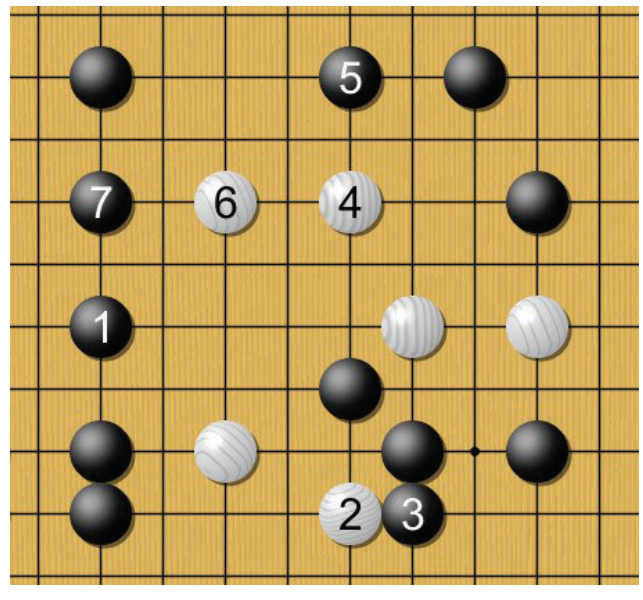
The first player who plays in **A**
will find his own group in atari.
So, neither player is willing to fill that
liberty and neither group can be killed.

Capturing is good, but ...

Despite all that, the main goal of the game is not to capture the opponent's stones, but to secure (surround) as much territory as possible. So, it is usually more fruitful to harass and threaten your opponent's groups with capturing, than actually doing so. This is a more advanced concept on which we will elaborate later, but it is very important to keep it in mind even now, since being **greedy** and **aggressive** to get everything your opponents has is the most common mistake a player can make.



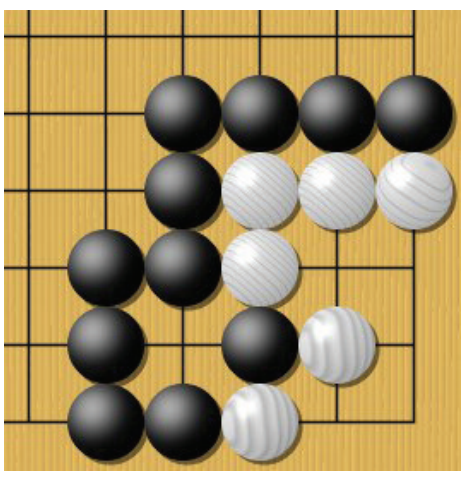
Our instincts might call for severe close combat against those stray white stones inside our territory, but it is often more beneficial to attack them from a distance...



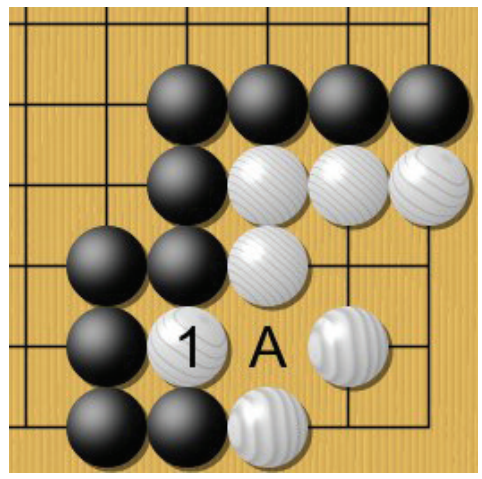
This is a great result for Black. White's stones are NOT alive yet, and he is gaining free moves on the outside.

Avoiding loops

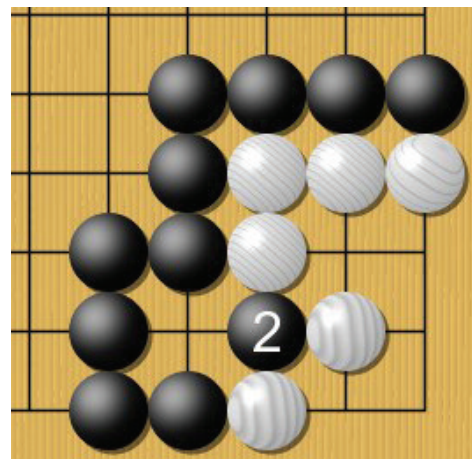
The final rule of the game is that **we cannot place a stone that repeats a board position which has occurred previously.** This leads to the creation of a special situation, called **"Ko"**, where stones could theoretically keep capturing each other indefinitely, but are not allowed to do so.



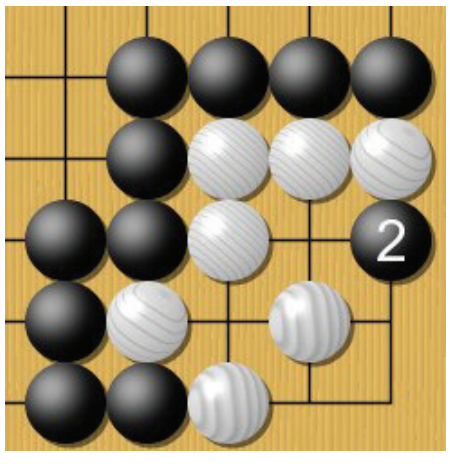
It is White's turn and he can capture a stone...



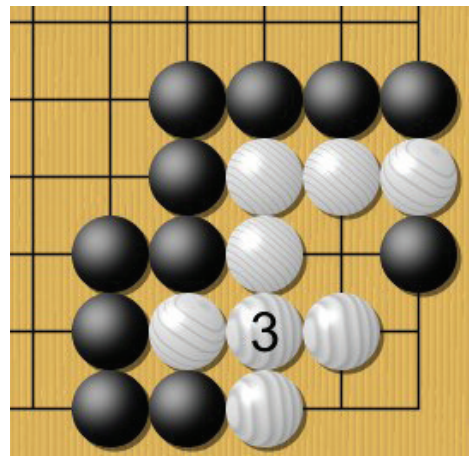
but now his stone is in atari, as well. Due to the rule, however, it cannot be captured right now...



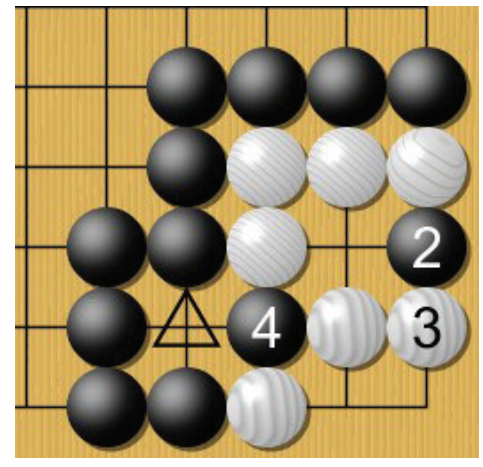
else we would end up back to this situation and it would go on forever. So...



So Black is forced to play one move elsewhere...

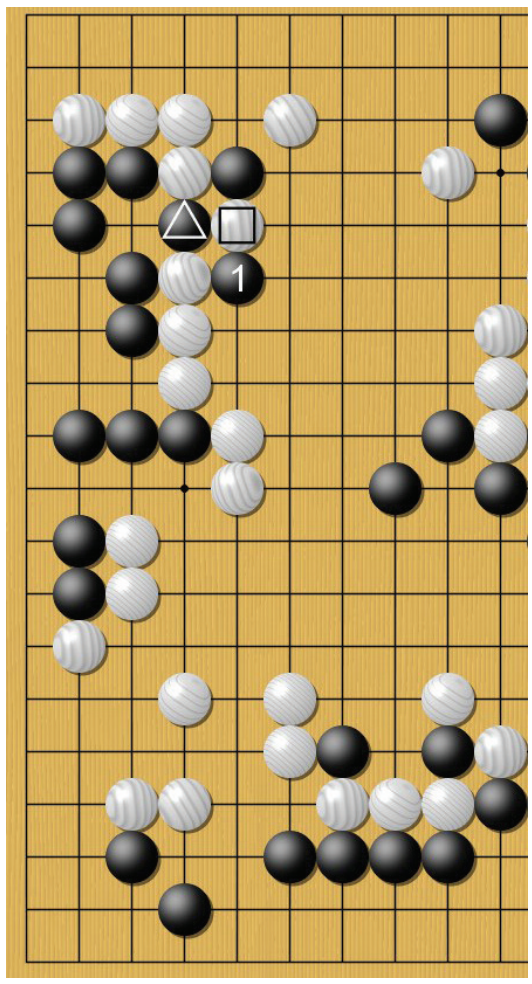


and if White ignores that move then he can fill the liberty and win the Ko fight...

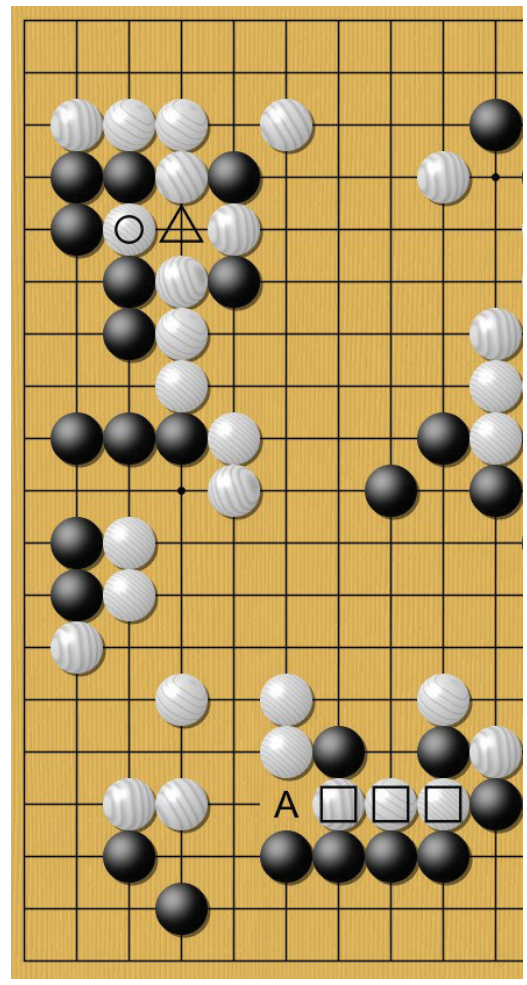


If not, then Black can capture the stone now and it is White who must play a move elsewhere before capturing.

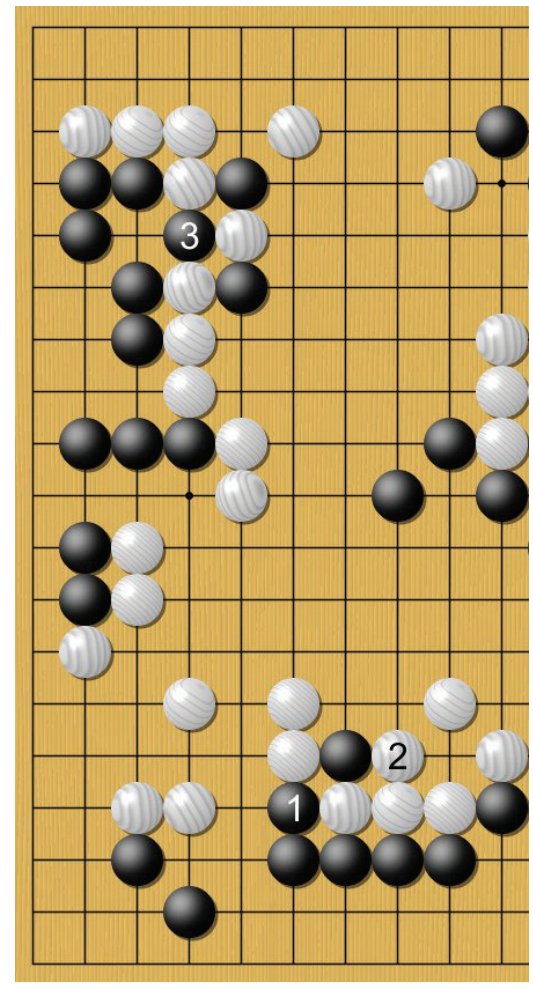
This rule puts a stop to this situation and creates a specific strategic problem of having to play elsewhere. That move must pose a significant enough threat to your opponent to prevent him from ignoring it and fill the liberty of the stone he just captured in the Ko. That move is called a **"Ko Threat"**. Evaluating the worth of the Ko and the Ko threats is an advanced problem which is rarely easy to solve. This might sound complicated, but it is much easier to explain it practically so, to illustrate the idea of a Ko Threat, let us look at an example from a real game:



Black plays **move 1** and it creates a Ko with the two marked stones at stake.
Black is threatening to enter white's area on the right if he captures that stone ...

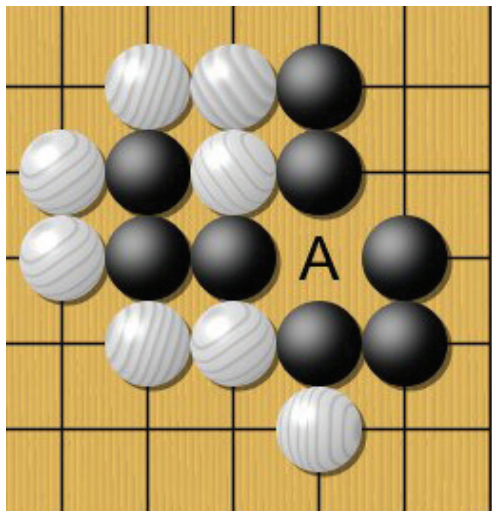


So White captures the stone and starts the Ko. Black can't play in the triangle marked point so he needs a move which white must reply. **Move A** threatens a lot of points...

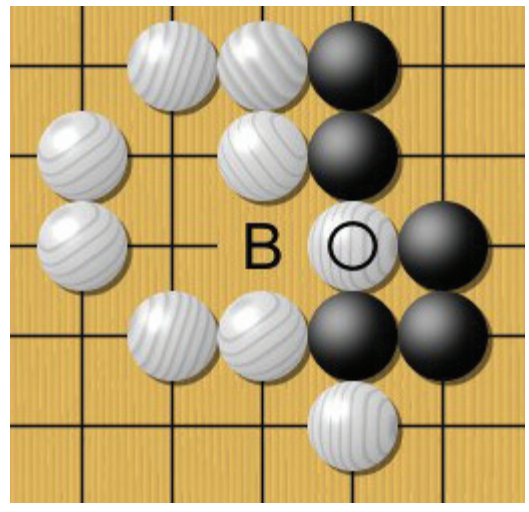


So Black goes with that choice. Sure enough White responds and Black takes back his stone at **move 3**. Now White has to find a threat and the game for the Ko is on.

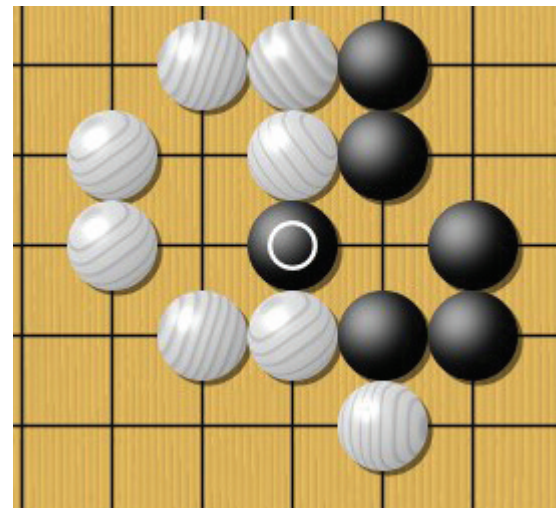
Another thing that is not obvious is that while the rule prevents the whole board positions from being repeated, the rule does not apply where more than one stone is being captured, since the re-capture does **not** create a similar board position.



Playing at **A** may look like a Ko but...



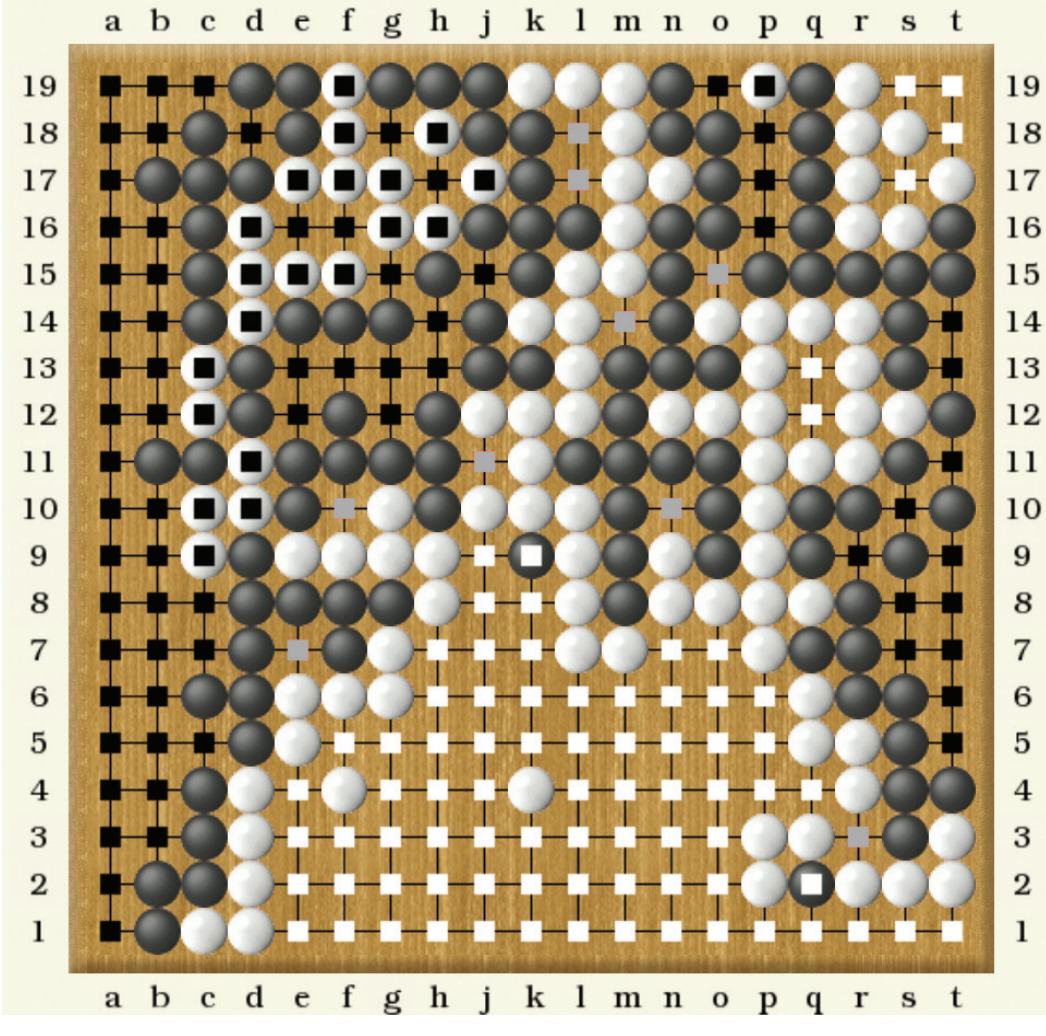
...Black can actually immediately play at **B**...



...because doing so does not create the exact same board position as the first image.

Scoring and winning

Last, but not least, is the matter of scoring. When a player believes that there are no more moves left to play, they can skip their turn (called a **pass**). When both players pass then the game ends and the player with the most points wins the game. As we already explained the whole goal of the game is to gather the most territory and that territory is counted as the number of intersections which the player has surrounded. To those points we add the number of stones captured and any stones that both players agree that are dead, as well as the komi.

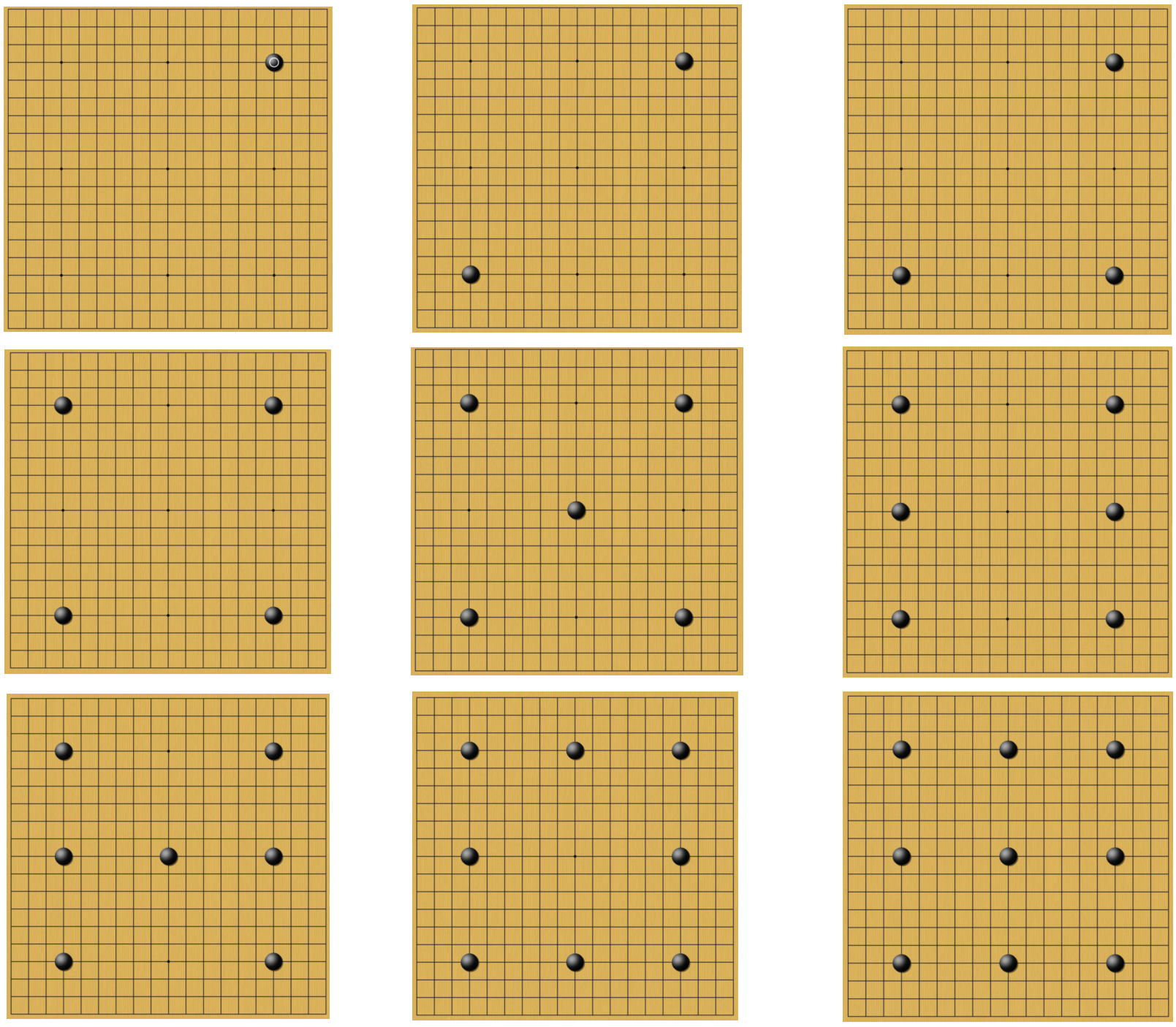


Scoring information Japanese ruleset (Territory scoring)		
	●	○
Territory	+68	+77
Dead stones	(2) +2*21	(21) +2*2
Prisoners	+3	+1
Extra		+6.0 (K)
Score	113	88
Result	B+25	

This is a typical example of a game. The black and white marks are the points surrounded by each player. Stones marked with the colour opposite to their own are considered dead. Gray marks are considered “neutral” points which neither player surrounds. When everything is counted and added, Black wins by 25 points.

Go Ranks and handicap games for all

Unlike many other games where the more skillful player will usually win easily against a weaker player, Go has a very interesting mechanism for balancing out skill difference by giving the weaker player the black stones and allowing him to play some free moves on the board without white playing at all. These are called handicap games and the amount of free moves is decided by the difference between the two players' rank. For each rank difference a free stone is given, at a usual maximum of nine stones.



Typical placement for handicap games from one stone handicap to nine stones

Go ranks are traditionally divided into **"kyu"** (student) and **"dan"** (master) levels for amateurs, while the professionals have their own dan level ranking above the amateurs. The system works in **descending order for kyu ranks and ascending order for dan ranks**, with 30 kyu being the lowest rank and 7 dan being the highest rank for amateurs and 9 dan for professionals.

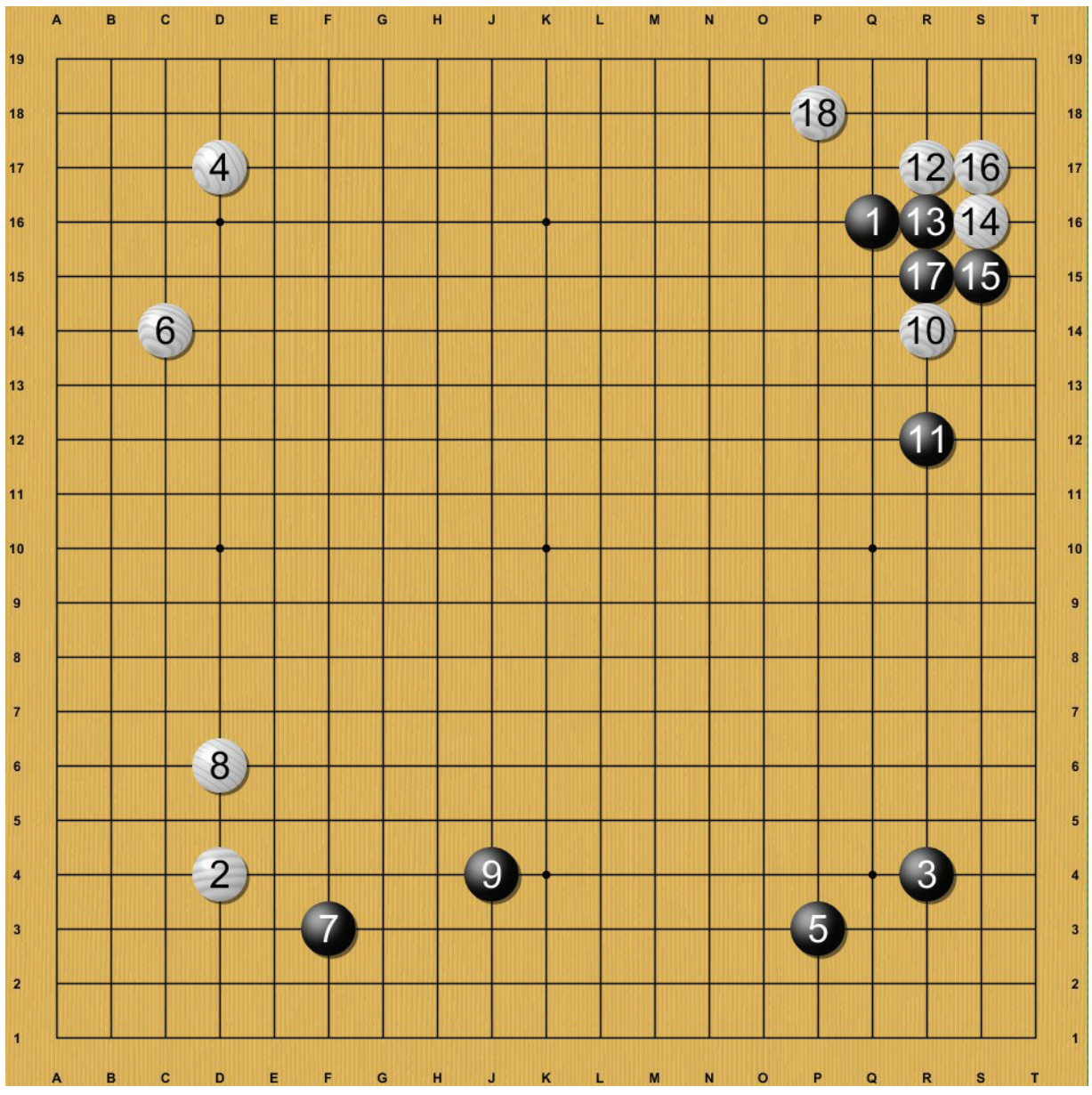
30-20 kyu	is usually the ranking of a beginner player. A player of that level usually simply knows the rules we already covered and little practical application of them
19-10 kyu	is usually the ranking of a casual player who has spent either some time reading about some of the basics of the game or either played so many games and acquired a practical knowledge of the game
9-1 kyu	is usually the ranking of a player who has started studying more seriously about Go and is beginning to explore the intricacies of the game. 9 to 8 kyu is also the rank which this book is hoping to help its beginner readers to reach by studying it.
1-7 dan amateurs	are the people that have broken through the barrier of the casual player and are usually more rigorous in their study of the game
1-9 dan professionals	are above the amateur rankings and you have to succeed in special exams or competitions to achieve it. This rank and the eligibility to participate in professional competitions is awarded only by national associations.

The most common distinction between kyu levels is 30-10 kyu players who are often categorized as "double-digit kyus" (DDKs) and 9-1 kyu players who are called "single-digit kyus" (SDKs).

Between the kyu and the amateur dan levels, the difference between those ranks equals the amount of handicap stones the lower ranked player should receive in order to ensure a fairer game. Between the professional ranks the difference is not so distinct and usually one handicap stone is given per three or four ranks of difference.

So, what now?

The most difficult question in board games is usually “what do I play next?”. Go rules are not many, but their simplicity and the size of the board make that a particularly important and difficult question. “Where do I play on an empty board, any why?”, “Where and how do I respond to my opponent’s moves and why did he play them in the first place?”, “Where is the best place to play and how many stones should I invest there?”, “What do I want to achieve on the board, what is my strategy and my goal?” all these, and many more questions, arise during a game. For example, this is a board after some moves:

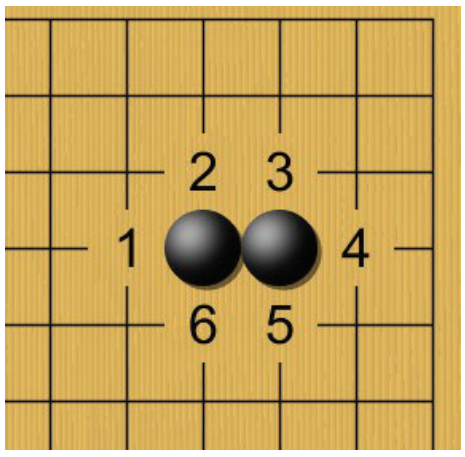


So many moves on the board ... but why? How do we decide on them?

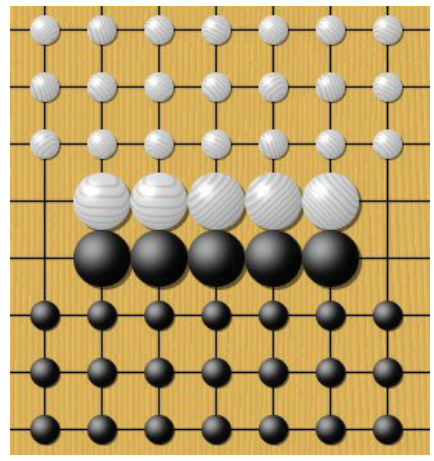
Go has some general **guidelines, shapes** and **relations** between the stones that we can keep in mind and use depending on the situation and goal we want to achieve. We are still in the early stages of learning how to play so, for now, we will present the shapes and how they work in general. Rest assured that we will use those shapes in many instances and cases, so that you can see their pros and cons, but let us first see what those shapes are.

Relations between two stones

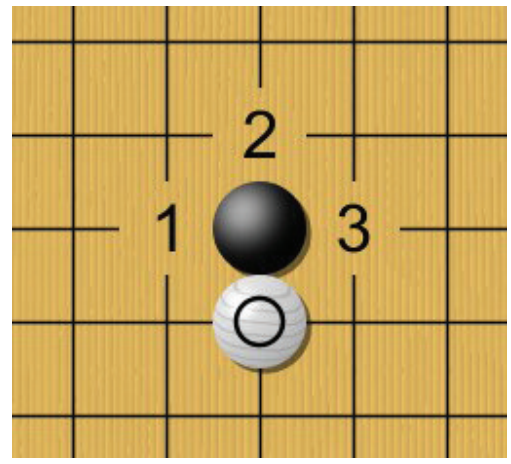
The primary tools in our hands are the most common and stable relations between **two stones**. There are six positions that can be used by both players in relation to a stone. Two allied stones in those relative positions are working in unison, while an enemy stone placed in such a way can be said to be attacking (or approaching) one of our stones. **The first one is the direct connection:**



Two directly connected stones is the most solid and slow move in the game

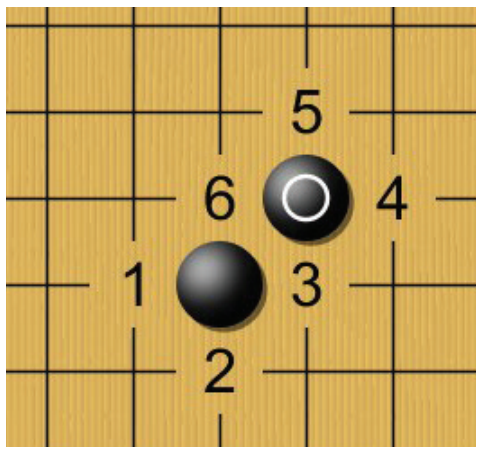


It is usually used to create walls for influence or to surround an area

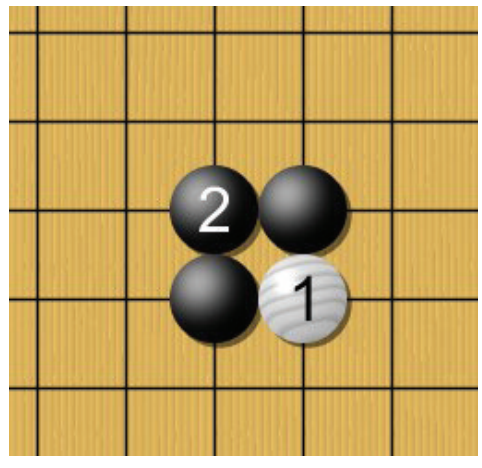


When our opponent places one of his stones besides our own, it is called an **attachment**.

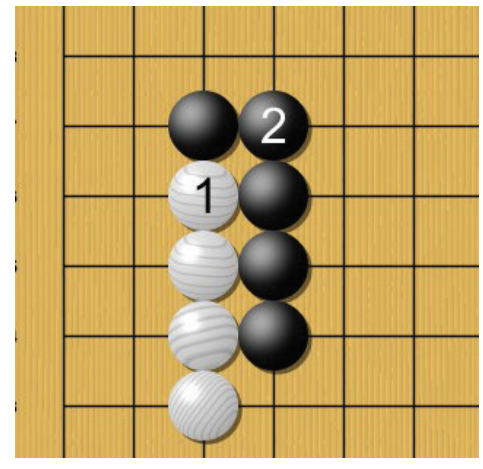
Second is the diagonal extension:



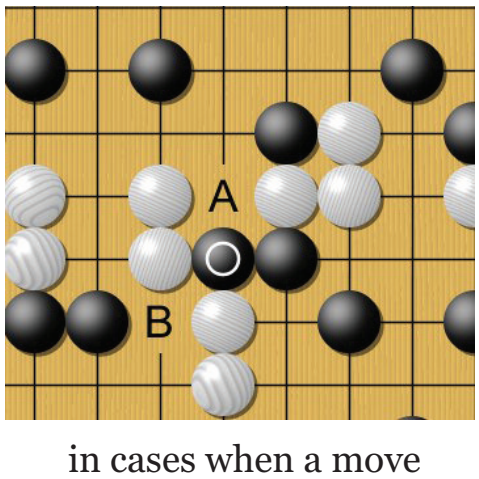
Two stones placed diagonally from one another are considered connected...



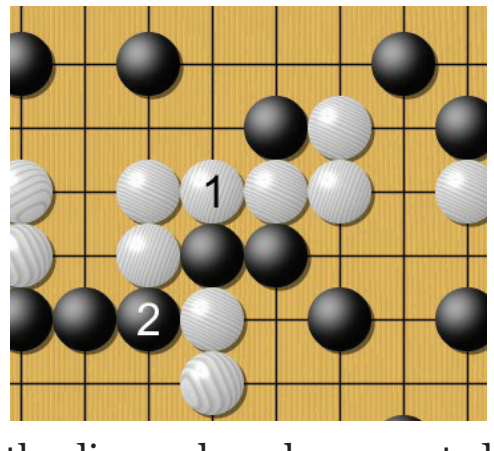
because the opponent cannot really play a move that can separate them...



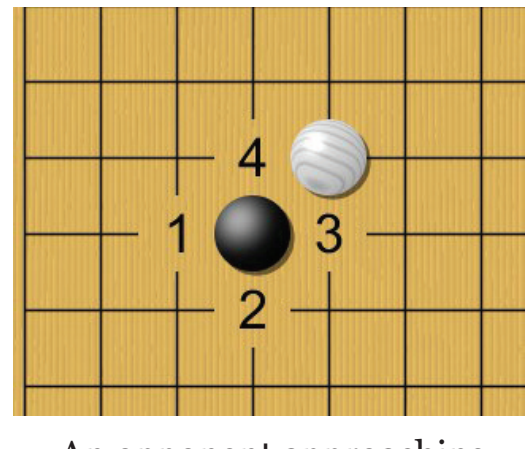
in examples like these where the stones exist in isolated groups and parts of the board. But...



in cases when a move threatens two different positions at the same time...

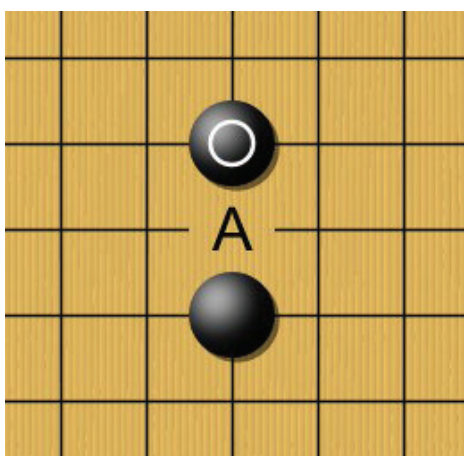


the diagonal can be separated. Choosing between moves with an equal result is called **miai.**

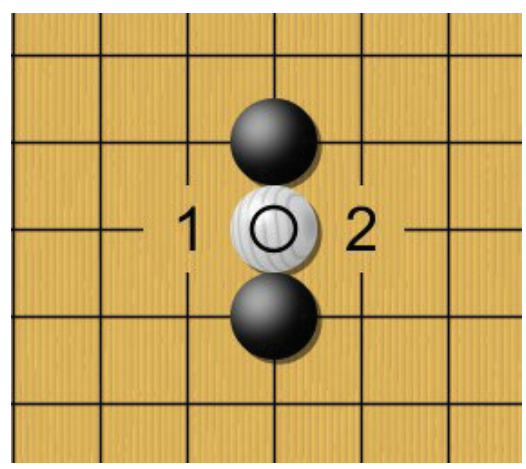


An opponent approaching our stones diagonally is called **a shoulder hit**.

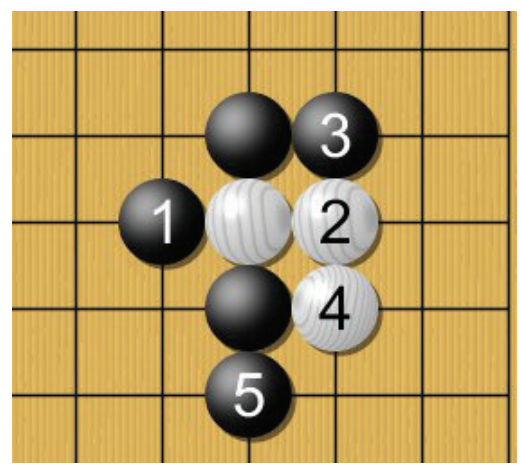
Third is the One space jump which is extending from a stone, by leaving one empty point between them. Unlike the first two relations that are either solidly connected or very rarely broken, this one and all the following relations, can be disconnected (or "**cut**") and are indeed a very usual object of strife within the game. Those fights are either started immediately after those relations are played, or the weak points of those extensions are exposed as the game goes on, and they come to haunt us when we least expect it.



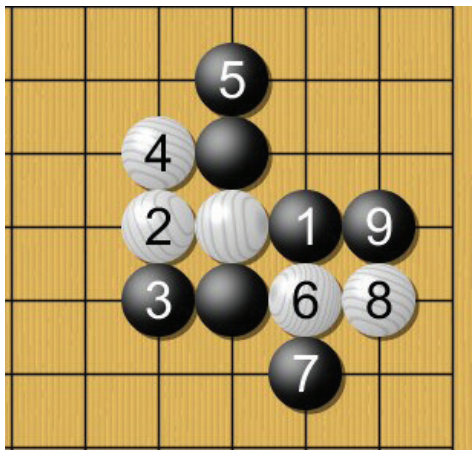
The one space jump seems to be very solid with only one cutting point at **A**...



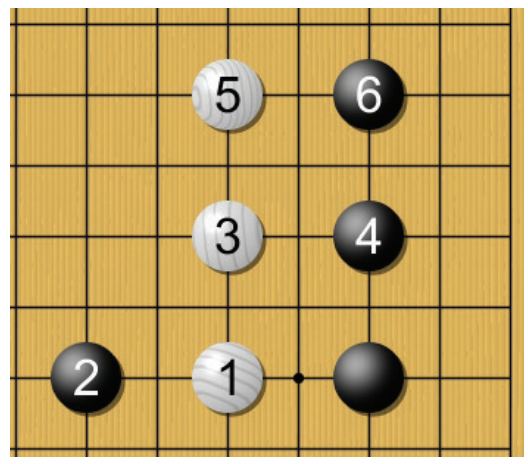
but there is not much space there, so we usually avoid playing there too soon...



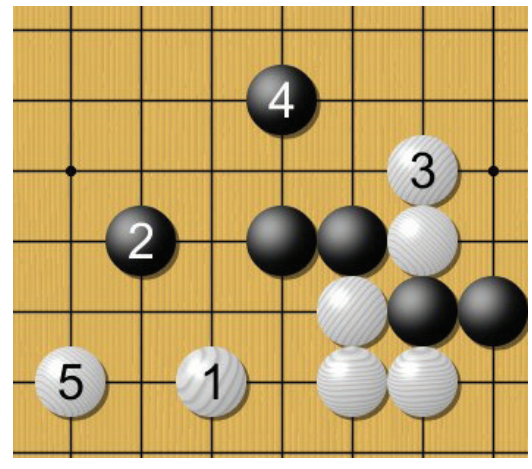
because most variations lead to a bad result, like in the example of this image...



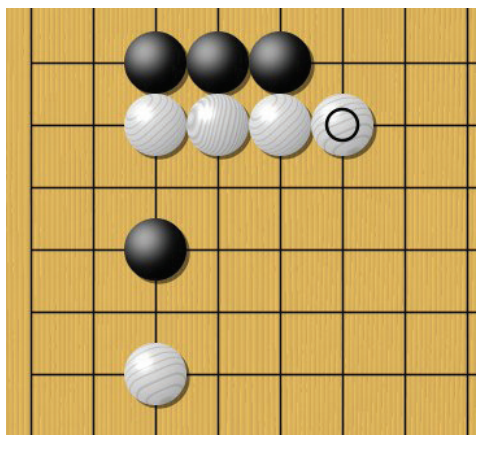
and here is another example of trying to cut, without having helping stones around.



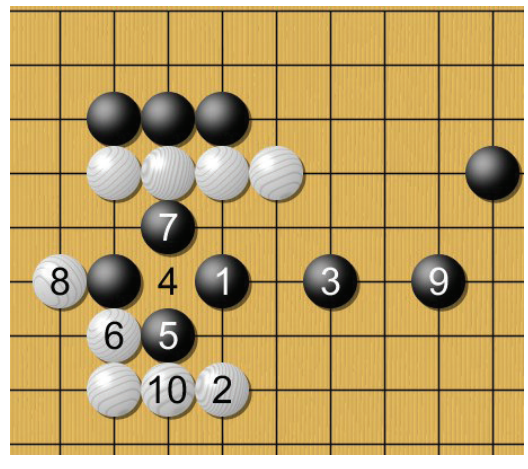
Usually both players chase one another with the one space jumps...



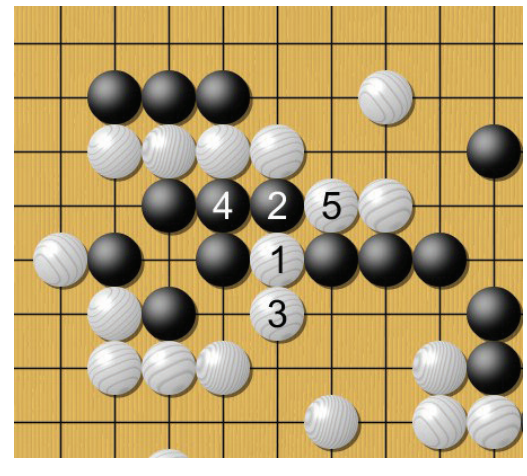
The one space jump can be used many times, in order to expand faster on the board.



One space jumps can extricate stones which are in a difficult situation...

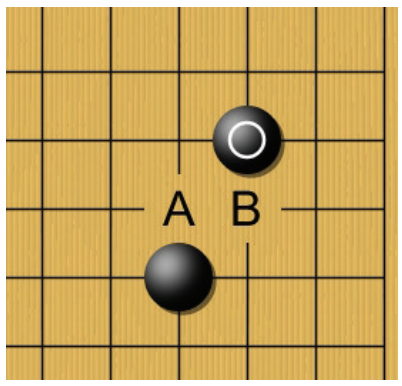


the black stone is in trouble and it needs to run. So, one space jumps are ideal...

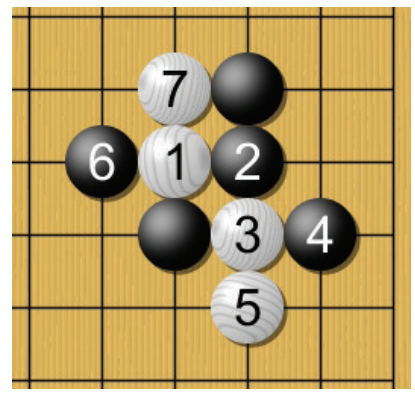


but we should remember that later they can be cut if there are other opposing stones around.

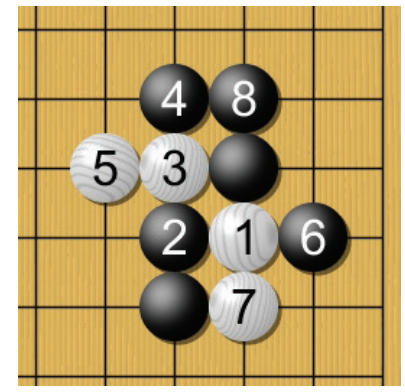
Fourth is the Knight's Move which takes its name from the move being similar with the way the knight moves in Chess. This is an extension like the one space jump, but the stone is placed in a slightly diagonal position. Unlike the one space jump, the knight's move has two weak points where it can be cut. Even though usually one of them is more severe than the other, playing in either cutting point results in heavy fighting, so we must choose carefully when and how to cut.



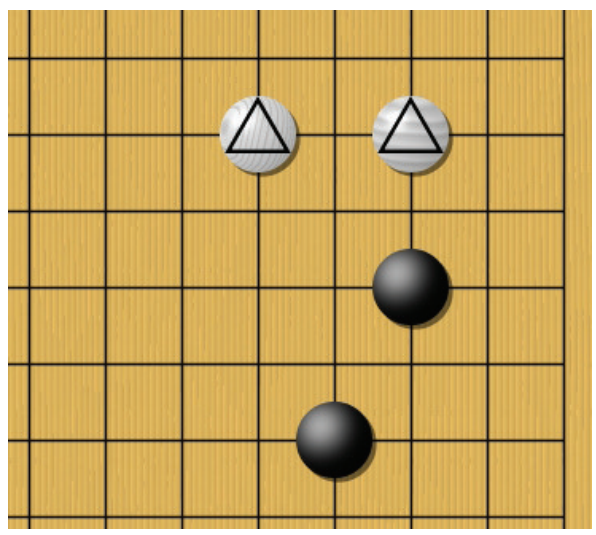
The knight's move has two cutting points in **A** and **B**.

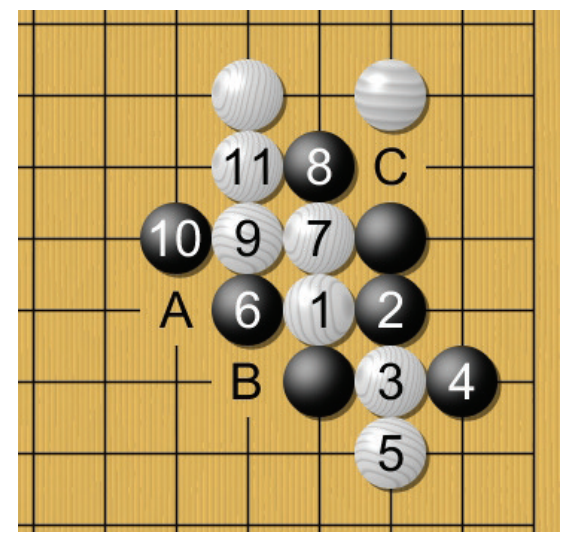


The results of each cut are very different. Here we cut at **A**...

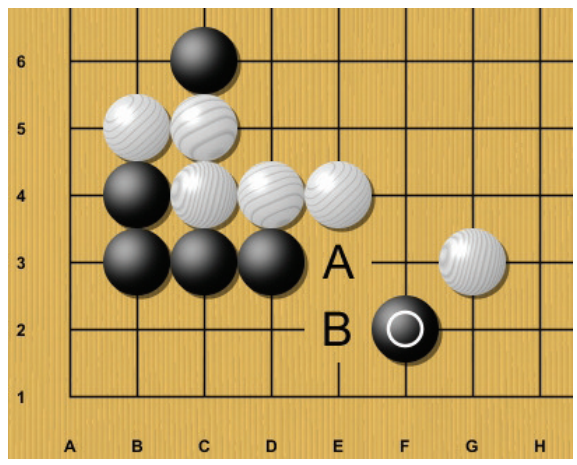


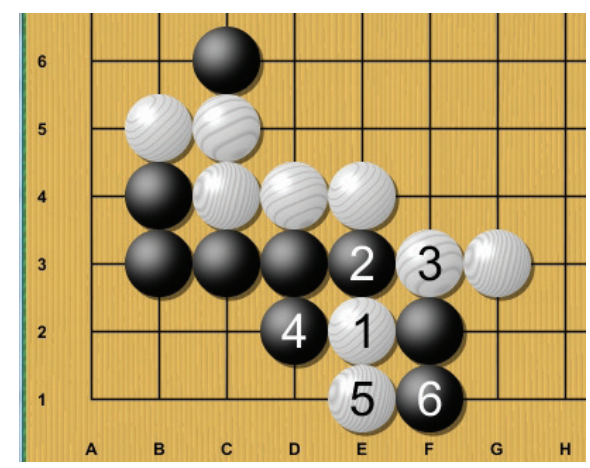
...and here at **B**. Which is the better cutting point is a matter decided by the nearby stones.





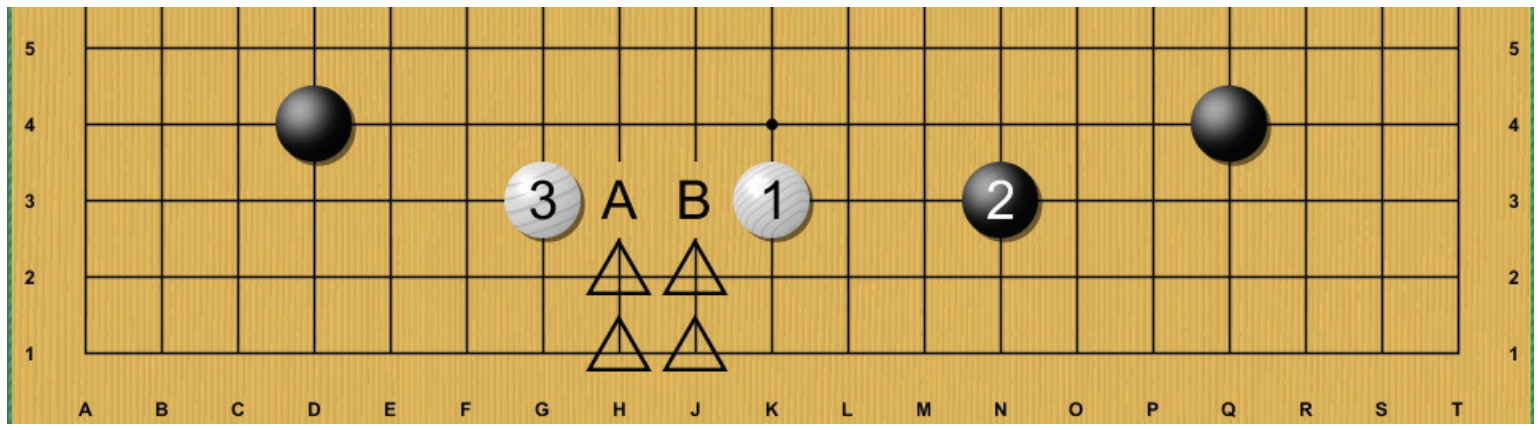
Left image: The previous results are not good for White, so we tend to go for the cut when we have support around us. The two marked stones here make a great difference.
Right image: After the cut White is connected and Black has to defend three cutting points in **A**, **B** and **C** with his next move. That is impossible to do, so White is happy with this result.



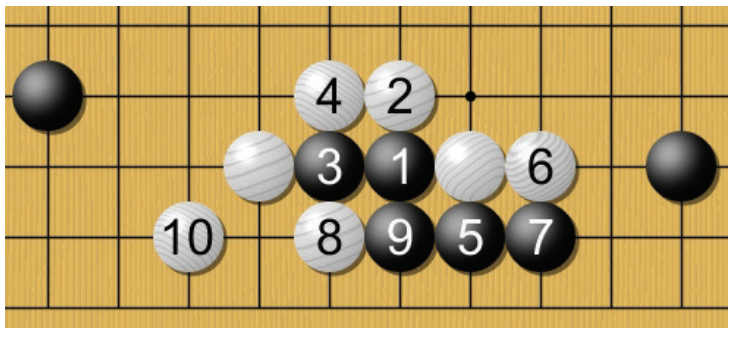


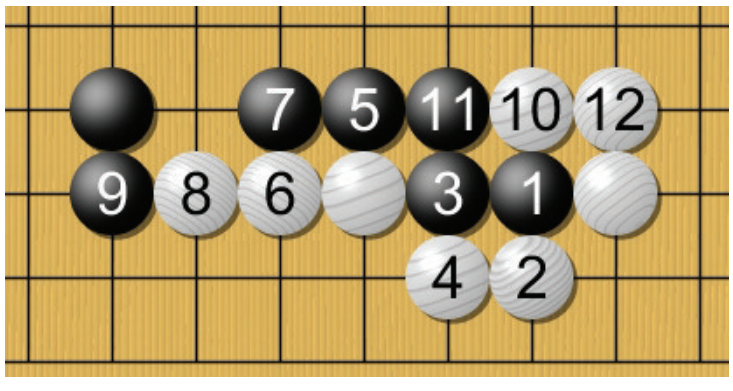
Left image: In many cases, we cannot cut the knight's move, especially in the edges of the board. Here Black plays the knight's move. If White plays **A**, Black blocks easily at **B**...
Right image: Trying the other cutting point doesn't work either. White's stones are dead and Black is safe. We will see later in greater detail how we can judge when and where to cut our opponent's stones.

Fifth is the Two space jump which is a two space extension from a stone. This move is primarily used to create space for a stone to live and create two eyes (also known as **creating a base** for a stone), but we also use it often to extend from our stones in various situations, usually when we want to extend towards the center of the board, faster than the one space jump, but still in a relatively safe way. Of course, the two space jump is easier to cut than the one space jump, but it makes up for this additional weakness with its speed. In many cases, even if our stones do get separated, we get some compensation out of defending that connection.

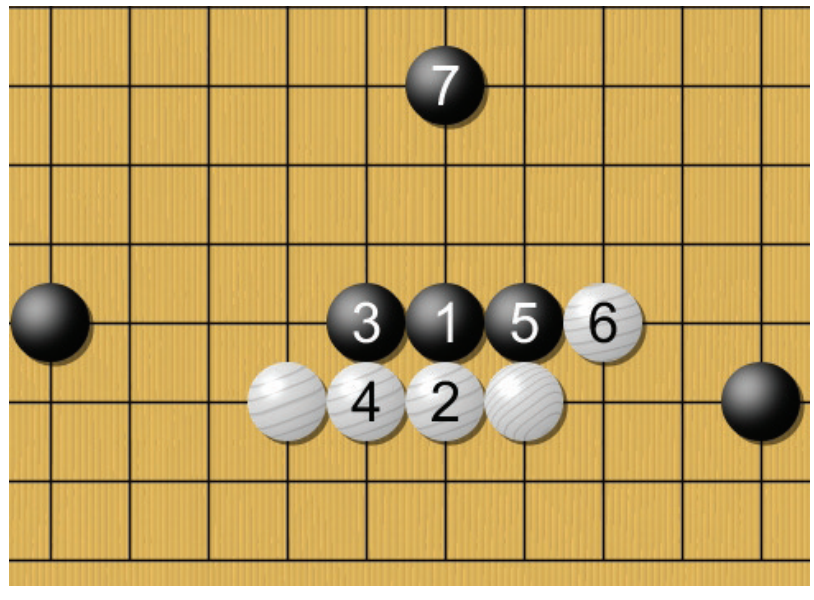


This is the most common case of a two space jump. White playing at 1 wants to prevent Black in playing there and turning all this side to an area where Black has the upper hand. Black tries to take as much as he can in a safe way by playing **move 2** and White does the two space jump, in order to create space for two eyes in the triangle marked space in order to settle his group. Note that even though there are two obvious cutting points at **A** and **B**, in this early stage in the game, Black doesn't have enough stones around to threaten to cut immediately. We will talk about such cases and how they work in the chapter about attacking and defending, but let us see an example for now...



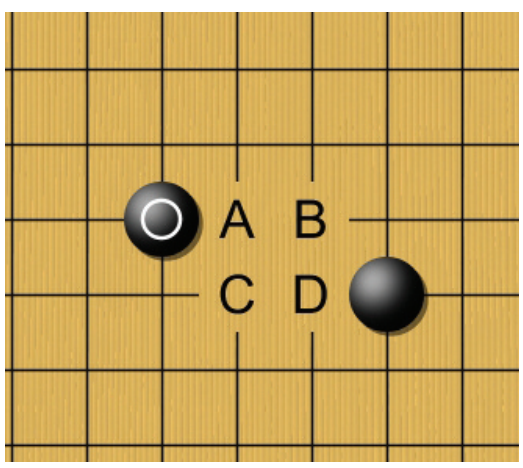


Indeed if Black tries something like that, most possible results are not very good for him. If White blocks from above, he gains both the outside and some territory, and if he blocks from below, White still gets a fine result...

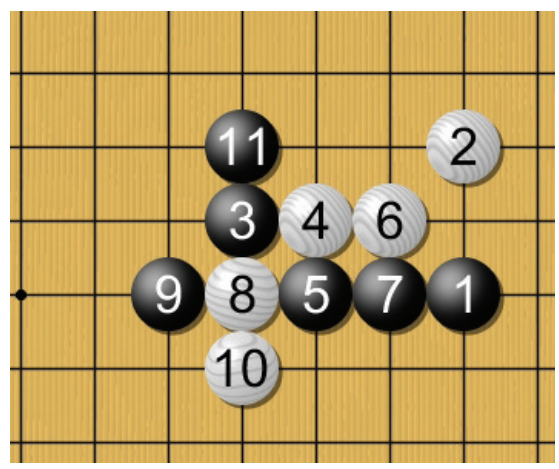


So, usually Black will either leave these stones alone for a later stage of the game, where he will have a clearer goal to achieve in the area and more stones to help him manage such moves, or he will move in immediately with a shoulder-hit on either one of the white stones to keep them low. Black usually uses a two space jump, as well, to extend fast towards the middle.

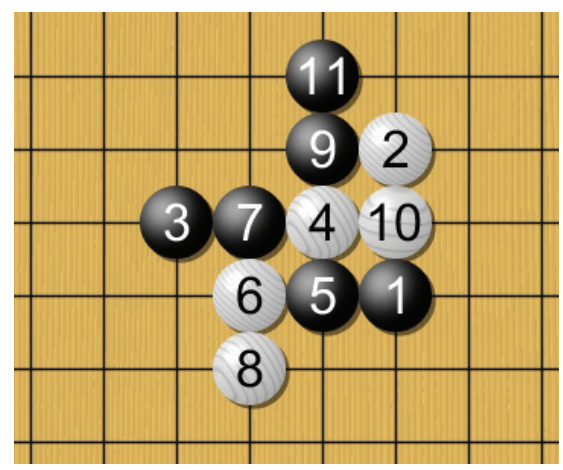
Sixth is the Large Knight's Move which is similar to the knight's move, but with an extra line between the two stones. Out of all connections, this is the weakest and has the most points that can be attacked. It is still useful, though, especially when used to extend on the side, or in setting up the groundwork in order to connect two groups of stones. Our opponent cannot immediately cut this shape, but we should always keep in mind that this might change as the game goes on.



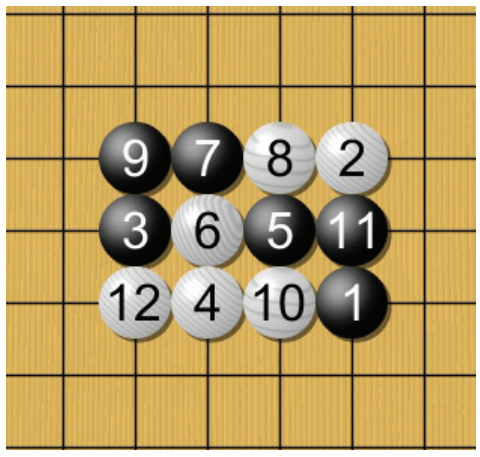
A large knight's move has four cutting points, depending on the surrounding stones



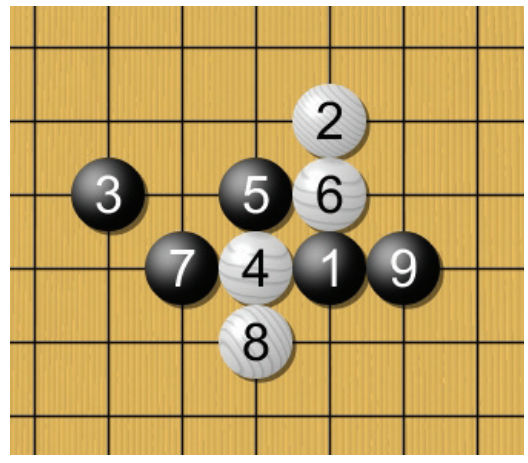
It can almost always be cut, or at least be a point where our opponent will want to attack (here is the cut at **A**)...



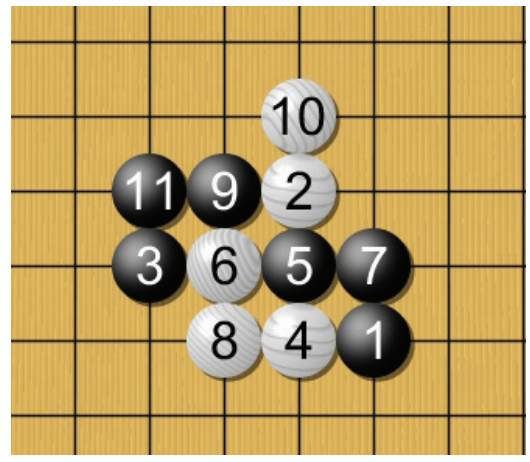
so depending on the case and the possible variations, we might want to avoid that move altogether (cut at **B**).



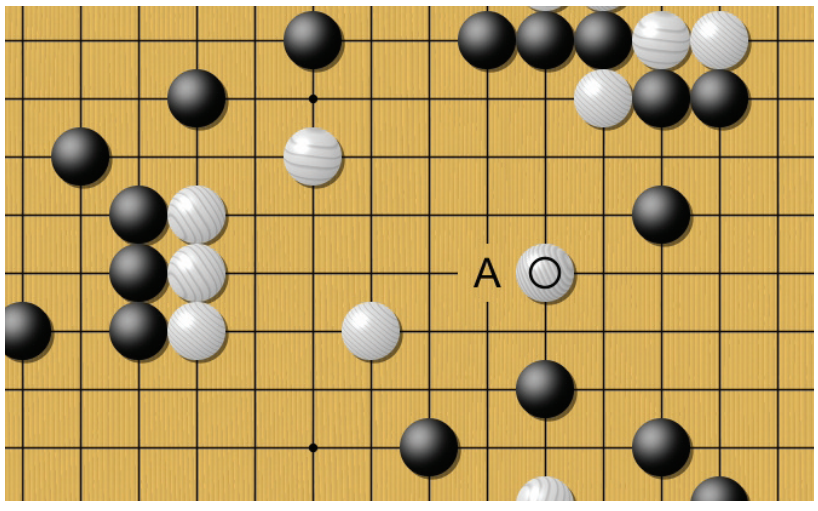
Here is the variation for a cut at **C**...

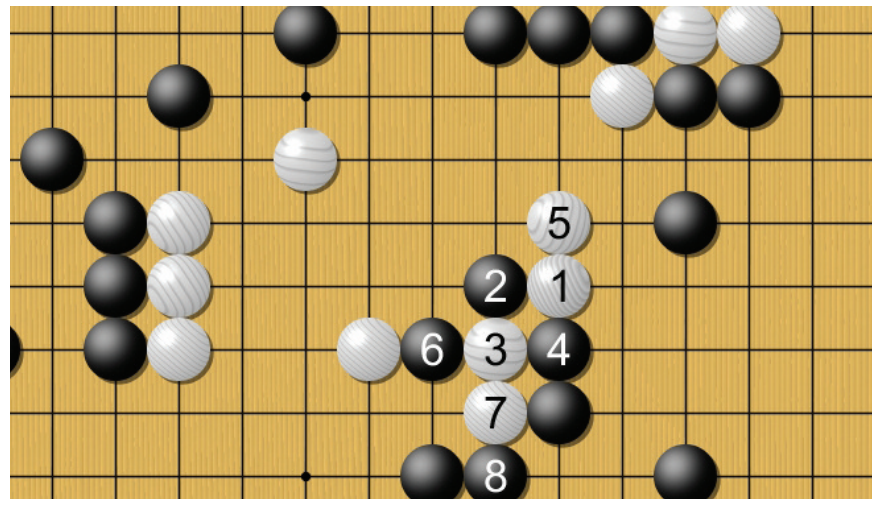


and the cut at **D**...



and there are more possibilities since White's initial helping stone could be anywhere.





Left image: So, the large knight's move can be dangerous. A less greedy move, like the regular knight's move at **A** for White in this example, might be a safer choice in many situations...
Right image: In this case, if we insist on playing the large Knight's move, we can do nothing to prevent Black cutting our stones and suddenly all our groups are in danger of having no eyes and end up dying.

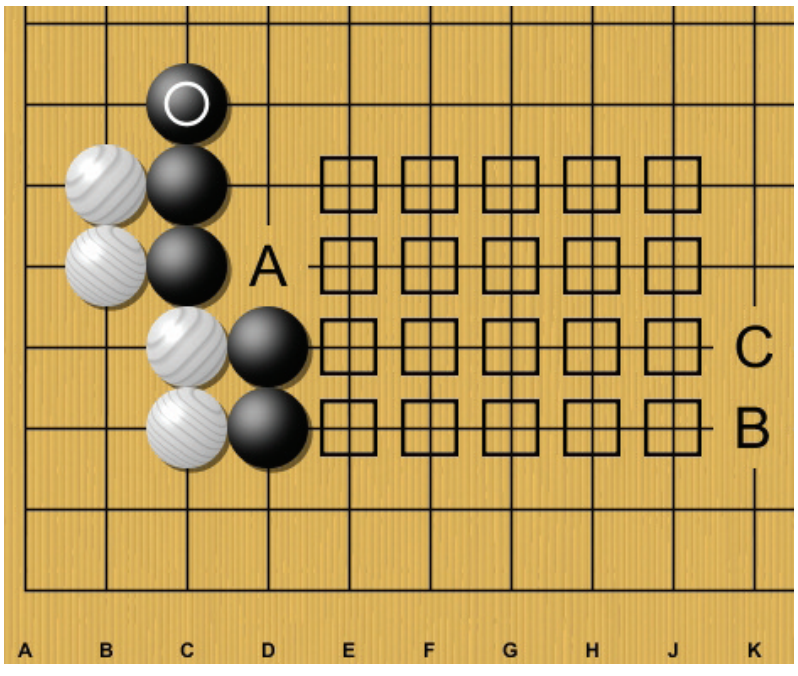
Relations between multiple stones

Having established the main relations and shapes between two stones, we can now use them in order to create more intricate shapes involving multiple stones. Each of these shapes have their own strengths and weaknesses and choosing between them is not only an issue of the local situation, but of the whole board and the goals we, and our opponent, want to achieve.
Let us begin with the most obvious shape: **The Wall**.

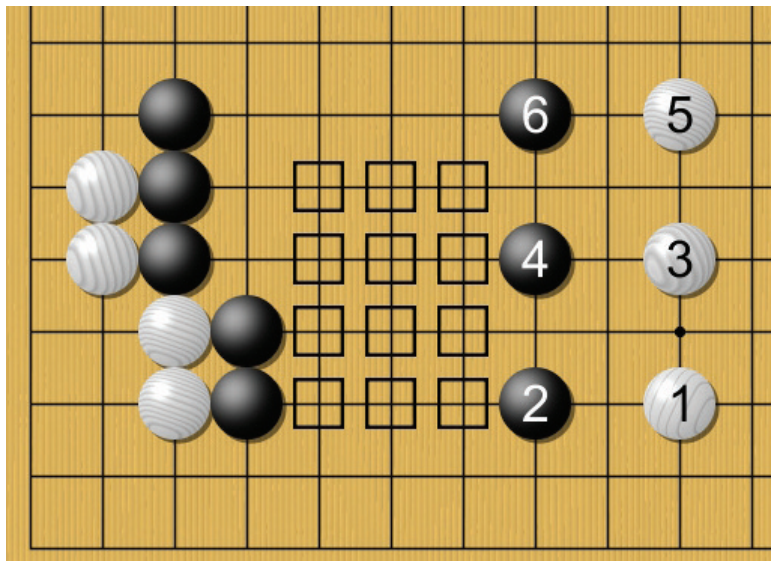
The most immediate image that comes to our minds when hearing about a wall, is many stones connected one after another in a straight line. That is indeed the ideal wall in terms of connectivity and strength, but many times creating something like that can be abysmally slow, so, in real games, walls tend to have flaws or even gaps. The opponent usually will try to manoeuvre his stones into a position to exploit those gaps, but if we are careful this can be avoided. Either way, the conundrum between “perfect wall, but slow” versus “imperfect wall, but fast” is one of the most important things in the game, so we will talk extensively about it later in the book, since we always have to keep it in mind and try to find the right balance.

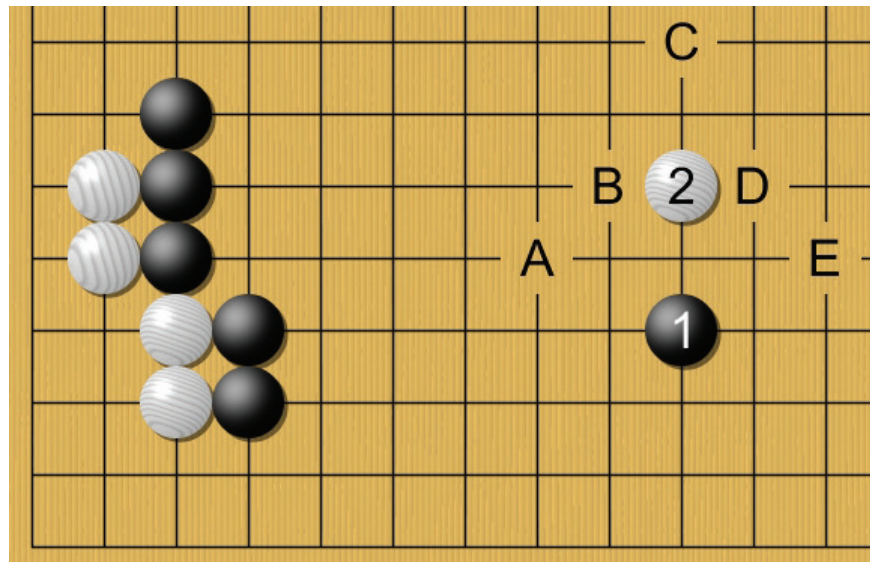
For that purpose, let us introduce the concept of **influence**.

We have already seen that territory is the amount of almost certain points that we have surrounded, that the opponent cannot usually reclaim. Usually territory is easy to spot on the board, but influence is not like that. **Influence is the generated “field” of strength which emanates from our stones and their shapes.** The more solid and wide those shapes, the better the influence. Usually we have to give up territory to acquire influence and it is hard to decide whether it was worth it or not, because the ideal use of influence is not to simply turn it into territory, but to foil the expansion and the moves of our opponents.



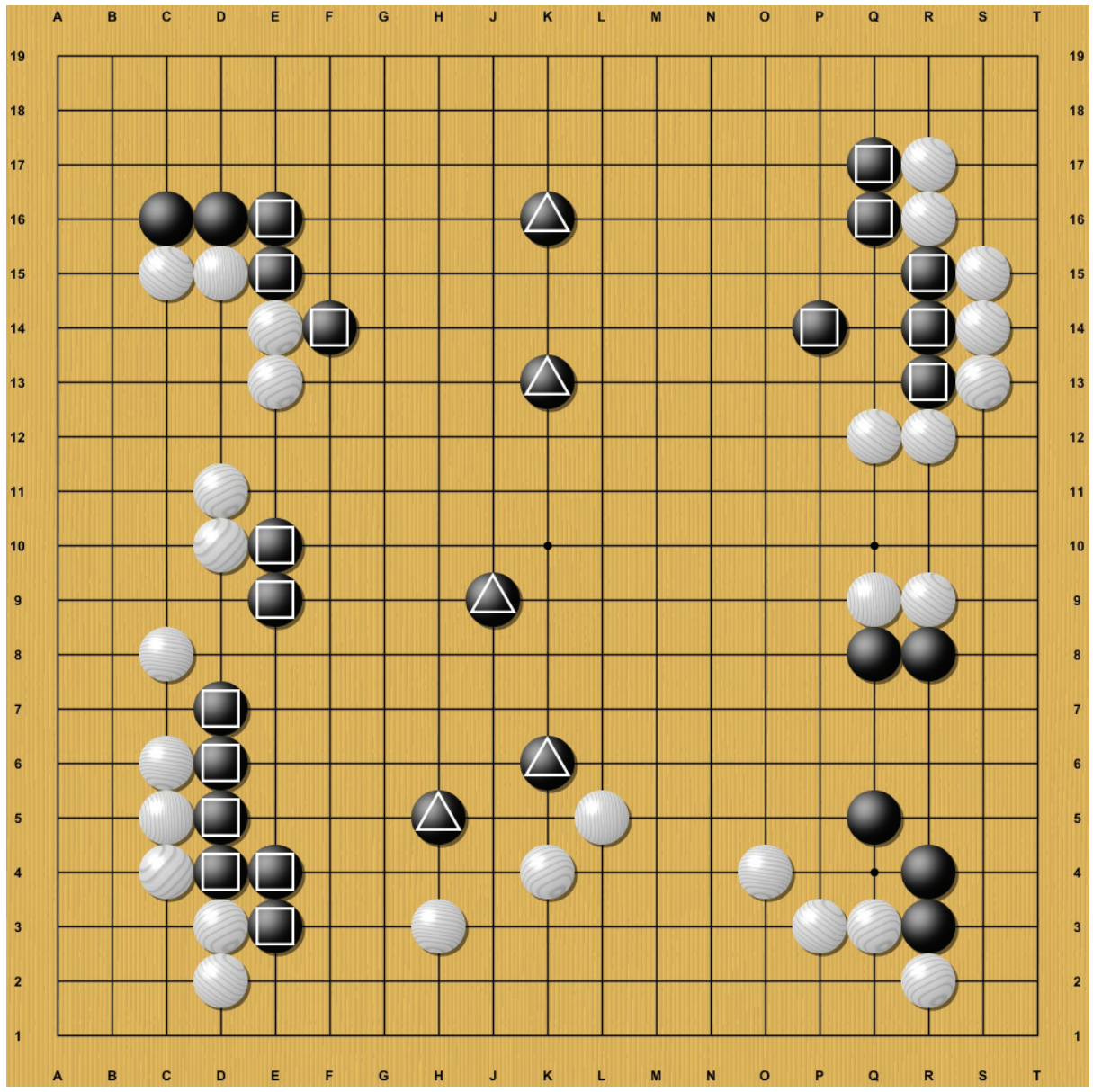
Here we see a wall, with a cutting point at **A**.
Walls project influence not towards the way they are expanding (in this case, up), but towards the empty side they are facing (in this case, right). The rule of thumb is that a wall’s influence, extends roughly for as many spaces as is his length. (In this case, five spaces, marked by the squares). It is obvious then that the next key move for Black is around **B** or **C** and if he manages to play there he will be on his way of creating a framework/box which White will be hard pressed to invade
or reduce. So, since after these moves it is White’s turn, White rushes to play either **B** or **C**, depending on the rest of the board, to foil Black’s plans, making Black lose both the corner territory and a significant amount of the side influence...



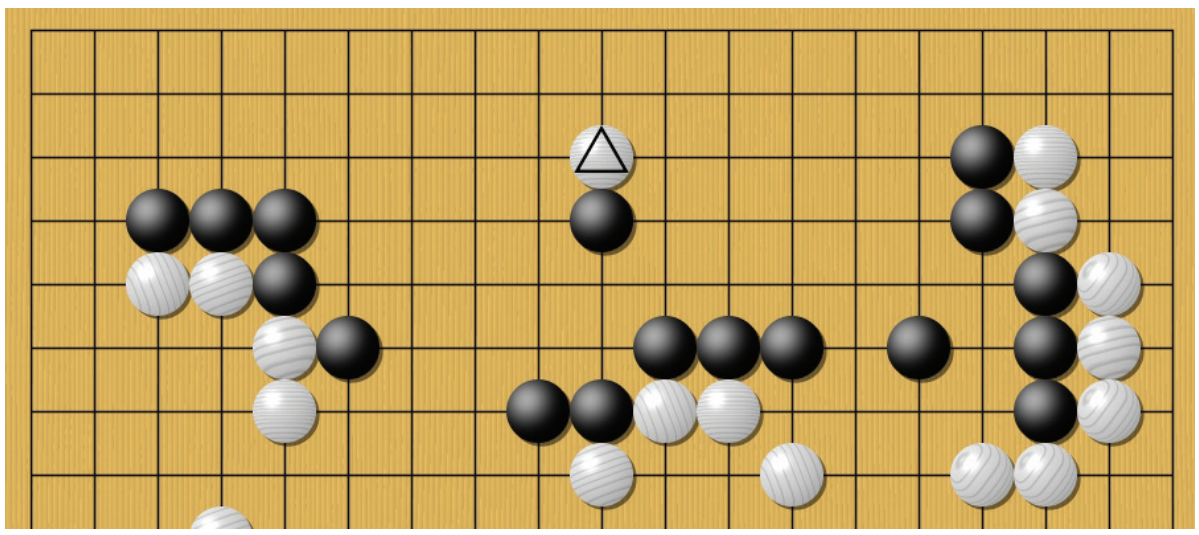


Left image: This is a possible and safe result. White reduces Black's influence and potential gains, while getting a wall on his own.
Right image: If White misses the chance, then Black gets to play there first. Now White has to reduce the influence of Black and, depending on the rest of the board, Black has at least five possible moves to attack that stone.

We should always be aware of chances like these, and we shouldn't miss them, or else our opponent could gain too much influence and turn all of it into territory, without us getting enough in return. For example:

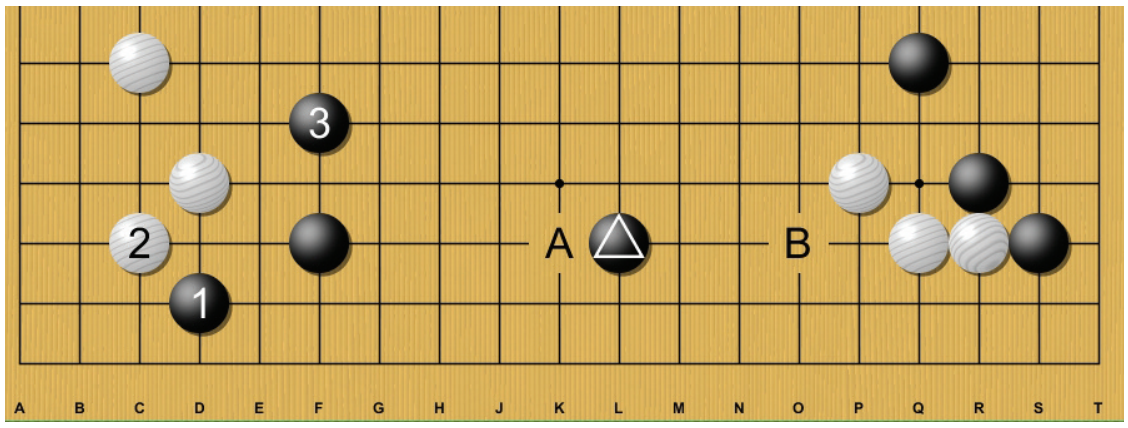


This is almost an ideal scenario for Black. He gave up corner and side territory for three walls (marked with squares). Combined with the five stones marked with the triangles, they created more than enough territory to compensate for that risk. Had white played in those places first though, Black would have been ruined. Playing for influence doesn't always pay off, so it can be a high risk choice.

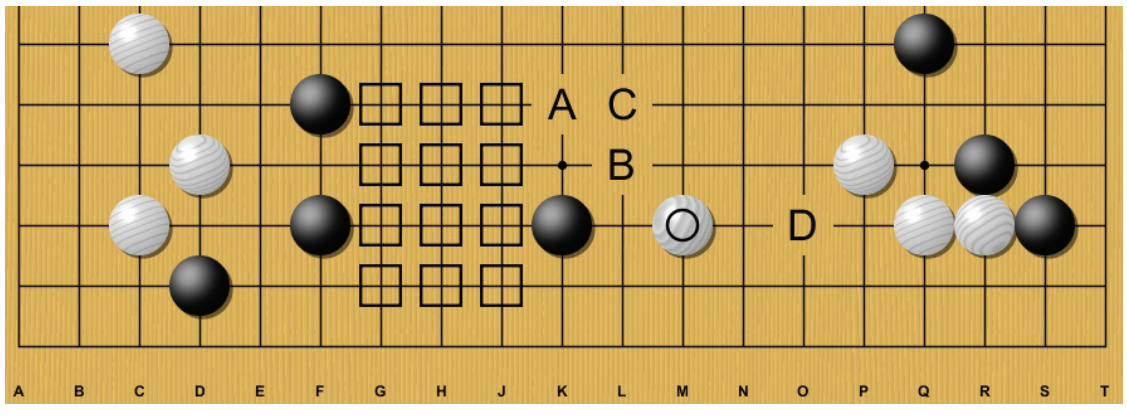


Eventually White will want to take away some of your territory, but as the game goes on, it becomes harder and harder to do so, as more stones come into play. Moves like the marked white stone do not work unless Black makes a mistake. A single stone, among so many opponents, rarely works.

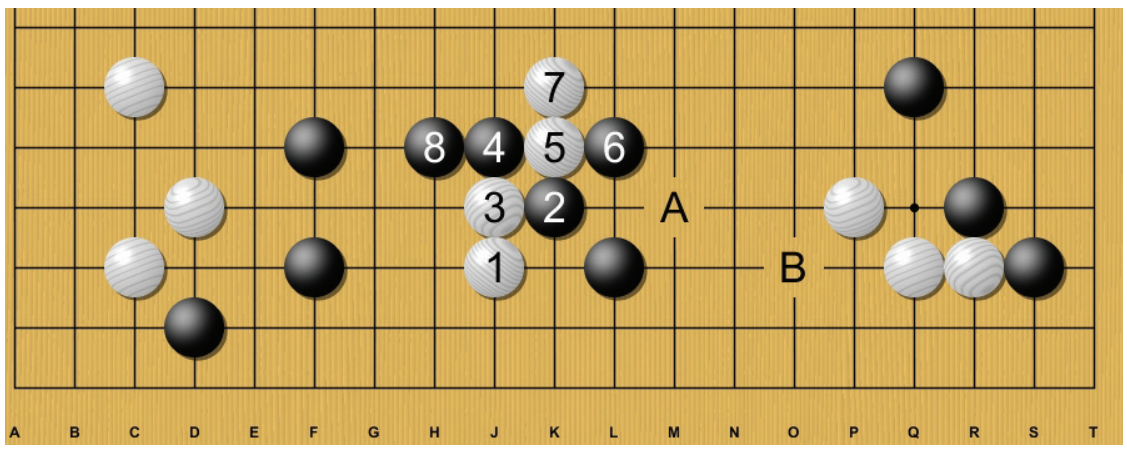
In our eyes, a large wall is just half of a box that can be turned into territory and we usually feel that influence is something we need to defend and eventually turn into territory, so we end up playing too near our walls, or spend moves trying to make our opponent get away from it, **but this is the wrong approach to using influence**. It is a hard mentality to get out of, and it is hard to use correctly, but influence and walls are not there for us to defend them. They are there for us to use them to expand from or lure our opponent or attack other places. This is a more advanced subject which we will talk about later, but, for now, an example:



Black plays **1** and **3** to create a small wall, barely large enough to work with the marked Black stone. If that stone were at **A**, it be "safer," but it wouldn't work with the wall as intended. Now it stands in the ideal place to lure White in and threaten White's base at **B**.

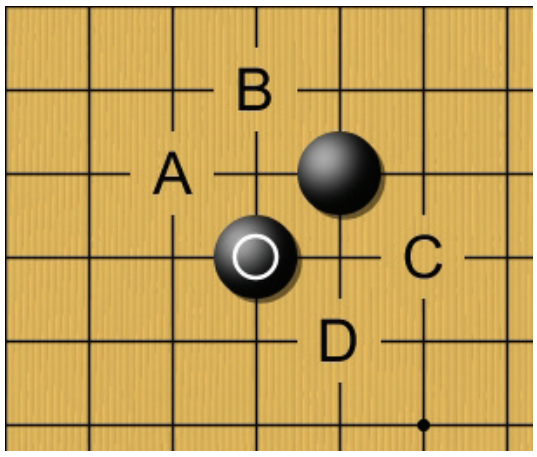


This is what the board would look like with the black stone at **A**.
White would immediately extend from his stones and Black now can play at either **A**, **B** or **C** and is now very restricted. The cut at **D** is still possible, but much less threatening and more difficult to pull off.

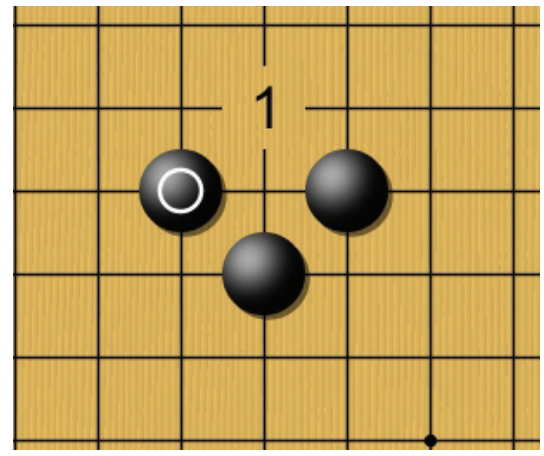


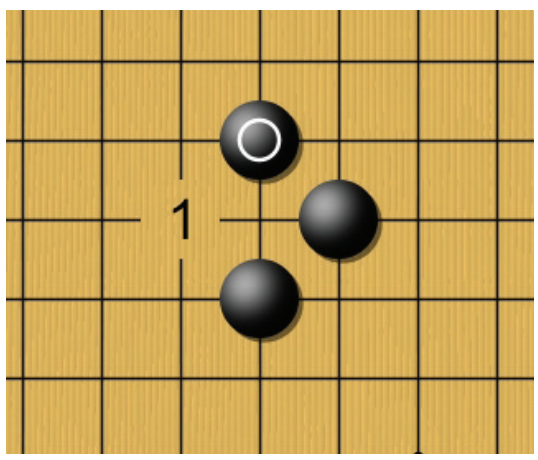
This is the actual game.
White wanted to invade Black's framework, and all his groups got cut off from each other. Black's wall is strong enough for Black to attack aggresively and unless White plays near **A**, the threat of Black playing **B** is still a serious problem, with White's three groups being separated.

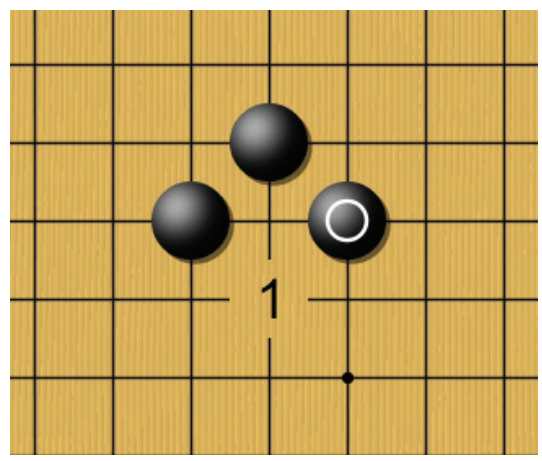
But why playing at A in the previous diagram is a good move?
The answer comes from our second shape with many stones: **The Tiger's mouth.**

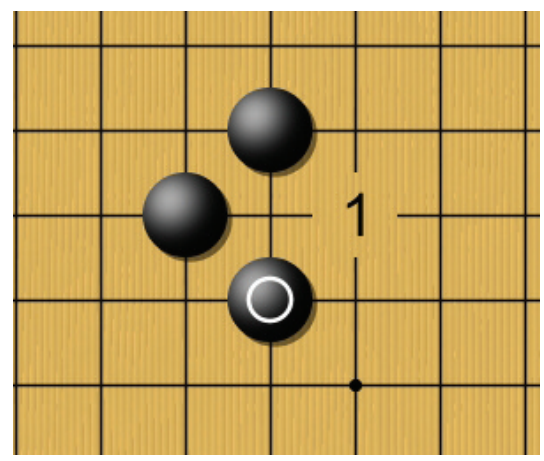


Left image: The Tiger's mouth is the shape created by two diagonally connected stones with the addition of another diagonally connected stone in the **A**, **B**, **C** or **D** points.
In the other four images we can see the result and marked with 1 is the weak point of the tiger's mouth.
Playing there is called a **peep**.

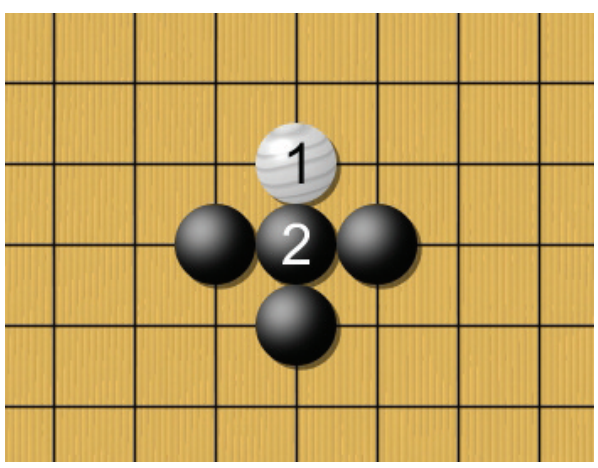


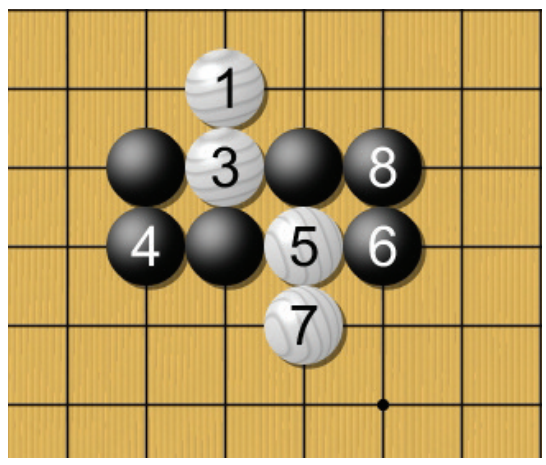


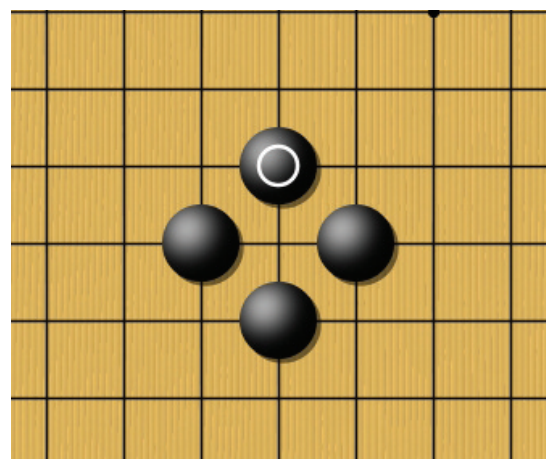




There is a Go proverb that says "our opponents weak point, is our strong point" and this is true for the Tiger's mouth as well. Of course we do not go around the board and make this shape on its own. The shape needs to have some context and to arise naturally from the moves of both players and that is why the weak point is often the main consideration on whether to use the shape or not.

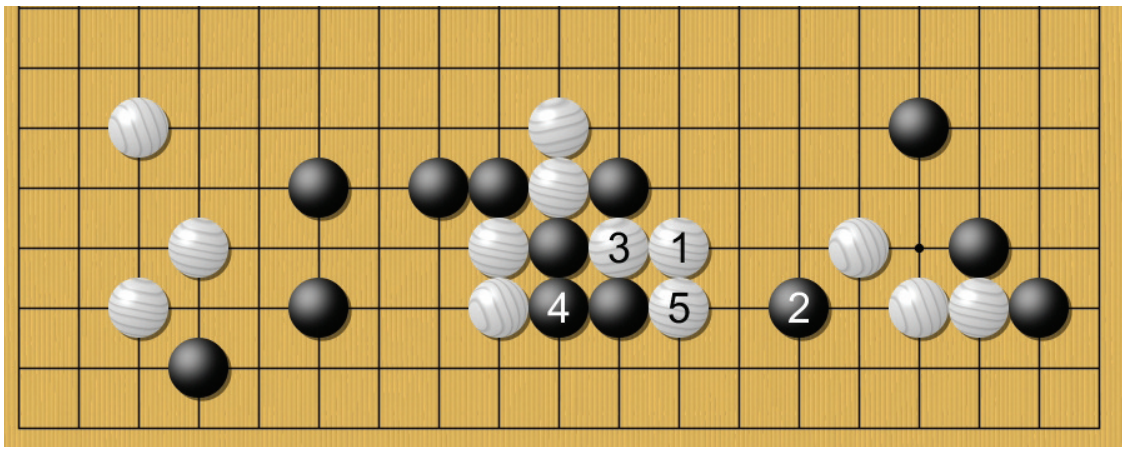






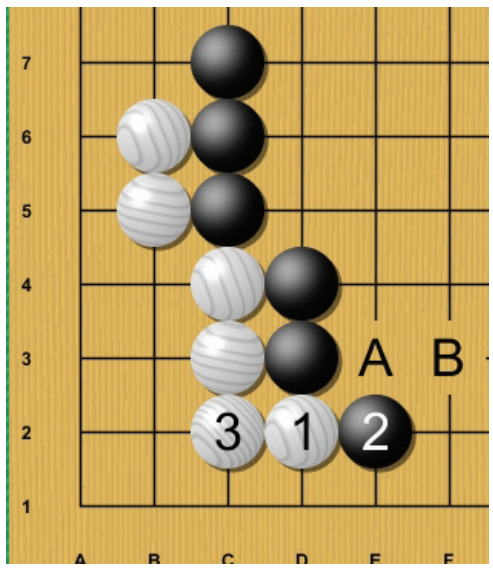
Left image: When White plays on the weak point, Black must almost always reply by connecting his stones. Such **forcing moves** are always good for us to try to exploit if we are White, and they are always a possibility which we have to be careful of, when we are Black.
Center image: If Black ignores the threat and plays **2** elsewhere, this is a possibility of what could happen, but usually Black ends up with his stones split in two groups. Considering that almost always such shapes have surrounding stones, this means that one of Black's groups could be dead.
Right image: If Black decides to play on the weak spot himself, then a shape called **ponuki** is created. Once again, we do not go around the board creating this shape on our own, but it needs to emerge from the exchanges of moves on the board, for it to be really useful.

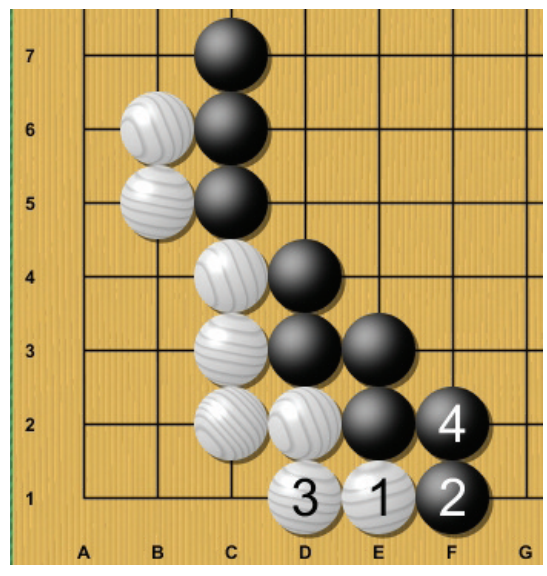
Let us suppose that in the previous real game example, White peeps at the Tiger's Mouth and Black ignores the threat.

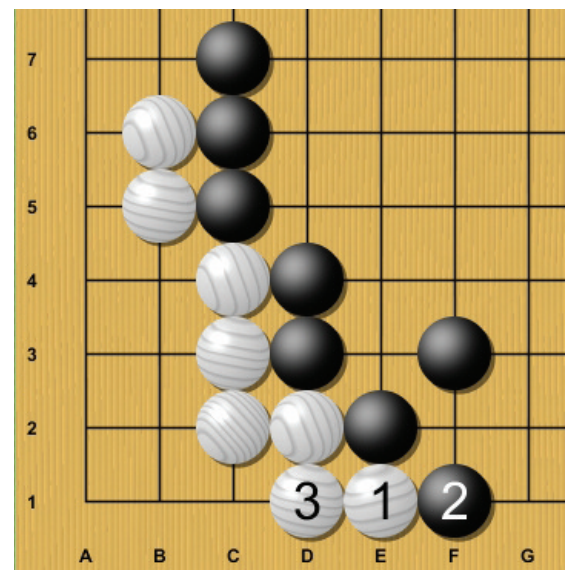


Once Black plays **2** elsewhere, even if that move is nearby, White can immediately cash in on his threat and severely attack Black's stones. **Moves 4** and **5** are unavoidable and Black's three stones are in deep trouble and split from each other.

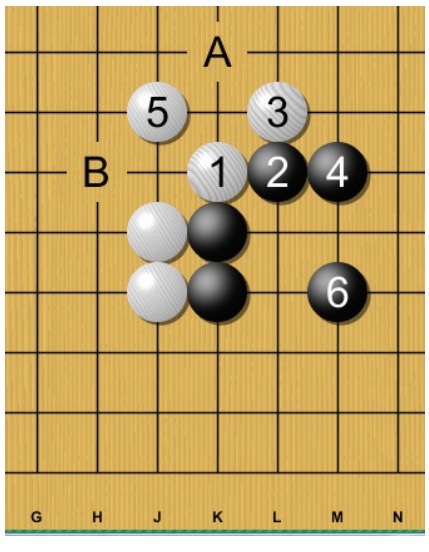
So, usually we apply the Tiger's mouth when it is safe for us to connect our stones indirectly and playing lightly covers more weak points than the Tiger's mouth one weak point creates. This usually applies in the corners of the board, where our opponent cannot usually connect with any peeping stones at our weak points.



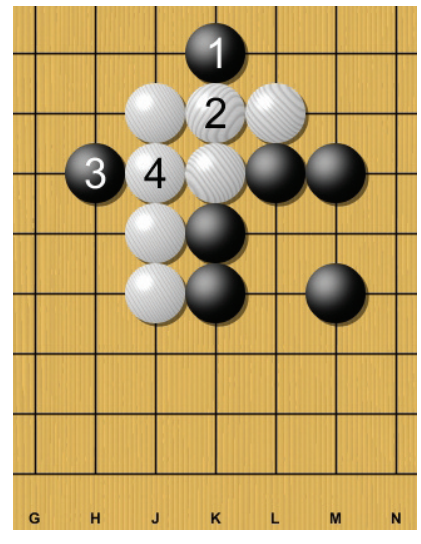




Left image: We saw this common situation earlier. Now White plays the diagonal over Black's stone at **1** (which is called a **hane**). Black blocks and White connects. Now, Black has two choices: **A** or **B**.
Center image: The solid connection at **A** gives this result. Black is safe, but he needed two moves to ensure his good shape and now White gets to play elsewhere first.
Right image: But if Black plays the tiger's mouth at **B**, now he can block by creating another Tiger's mouth, with only one move. Now Black gets to play next. This matter might seem trivial now, but getting and keeping the initiative is a very important matter.

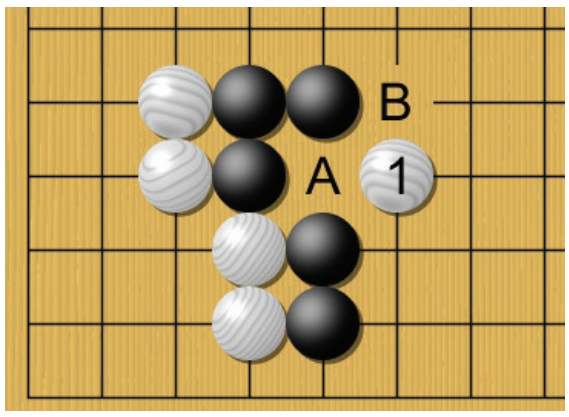


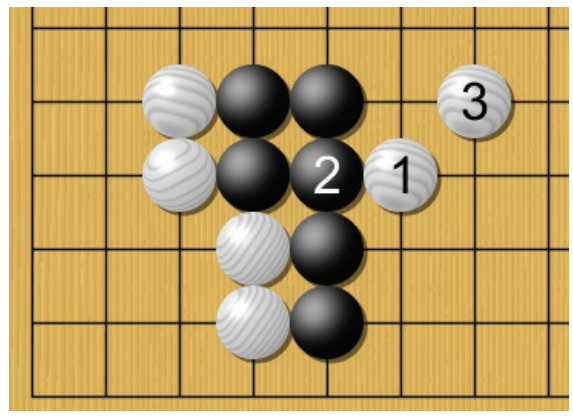
When facing the middle, the Tiger's mouth is weaker, because it gives free moves to Black. Here, White made the **double hane** at **1** and **3** and a double Tiger's mouth at **5**, leaving weak spots at **A** and **B**. Sure enough Black will eventually play those free moves and will destroy the shape of White's stones.
Unlike the corner examples, those two Black stones are facing the center of the board and depending on the rest of the board, they might connect with other Black groups.

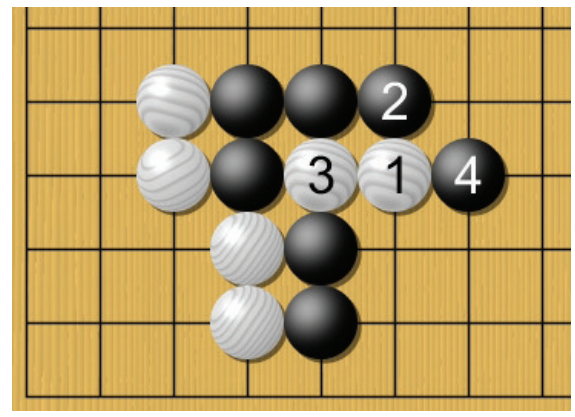


Connecting the stones of the Tiger's Mouth is not the only possible defence. Sometimes we can just extend either one of the "jaw" stones that make up the Tiger's Mouth and defend our weak spot by creating a **ladder**.

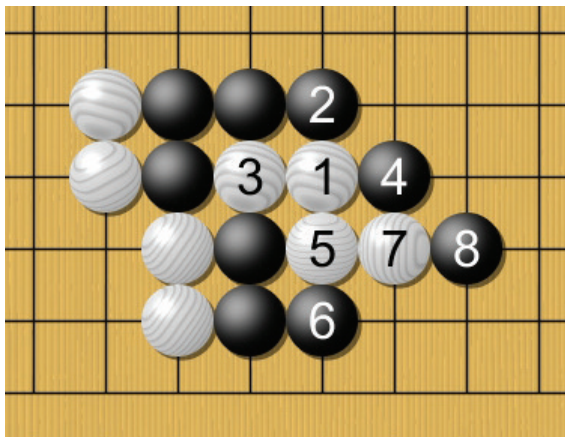
The ladder is not so much a particular shape, but a trap out of which our opponent's stones cannot escape from a series of consecutive ataris, unless a friendly stone (called a **ladder-breaker**) is in the way. Let us see some diagrams, and explain all this in a better way:

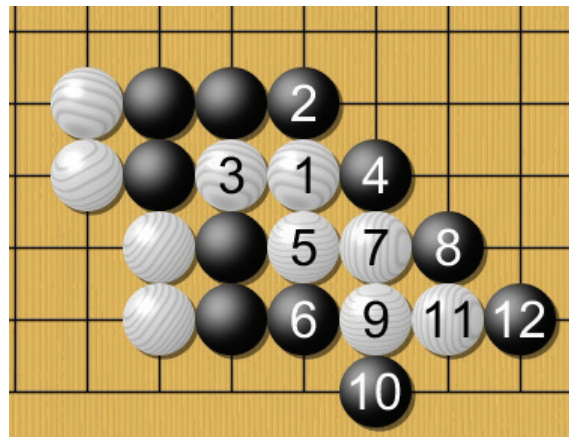


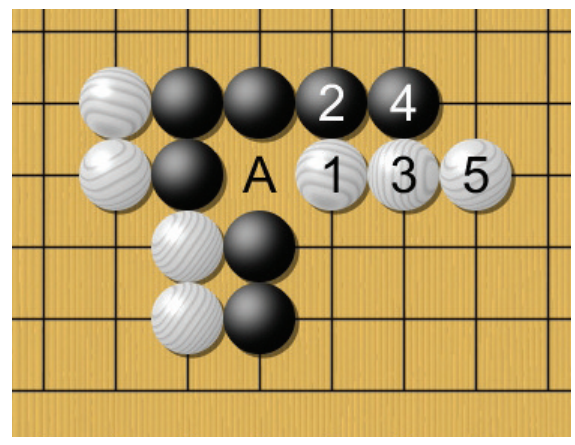




Left image: White threatens to cut Black's stones. **Black A** is the typical choice, but Black can also play at **B** and create a ladder if White cuts at **A**.
Center image: This is what happens if Black just connects. Now Black's shape is just a weird lump and White can run out towards the center or towards the side and there is no way to stop him.
Right image: Now if Black does not connect and White cuts, this is the start of the **ladder.** Playing **move 4**, puts White in atari...





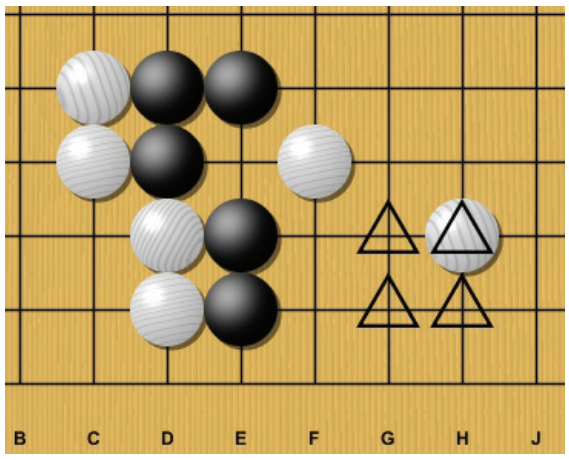


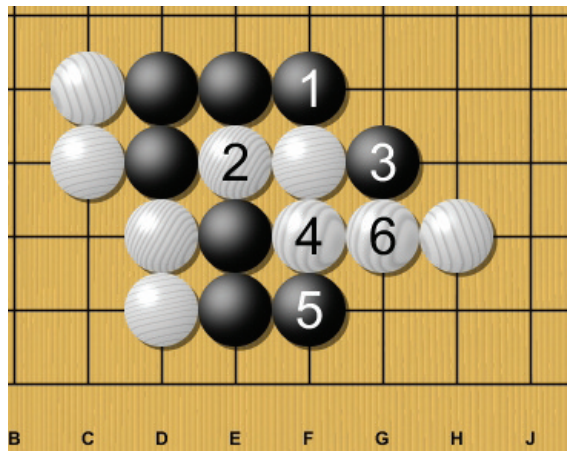
Left image: If White tries to resist, the moves up to **8** complete another "step" in the ladder and White is once again in atari.
Center image: White can persist, but it is all for naught. By **move 12** White is again in atari and he cannot get out of the ladder.
Right image: So, White has to run and the chase is on. Black will eventually have to connect with **move 6** at **A**, but his shape now is much better compared to the typical choice and White is on the run.

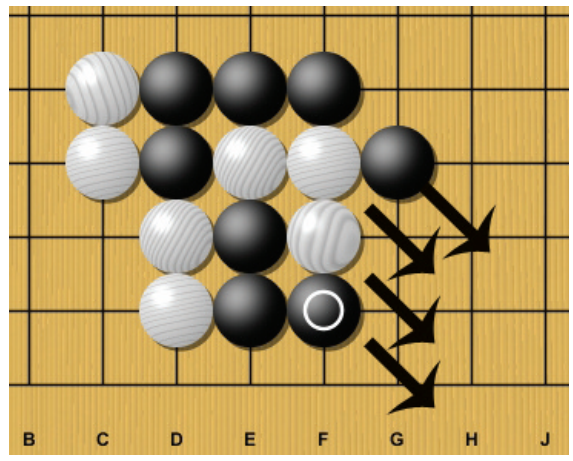
So, a ladder is created every time there are stones trapped in a series of moves that makes them to constantly be in atari, without being able to escape.
It is very important to be aware of possible ladders in Go, because many times if they are in our favour, then we can play powerful and risky moves. Even when they are not, the threat of placing a stone in the path of the ladder and breaking its steps, can give us free moves to develop other positions in the board and gain an advantage elsewhere.

Let us head to the next two pages and see an example from an actual game.

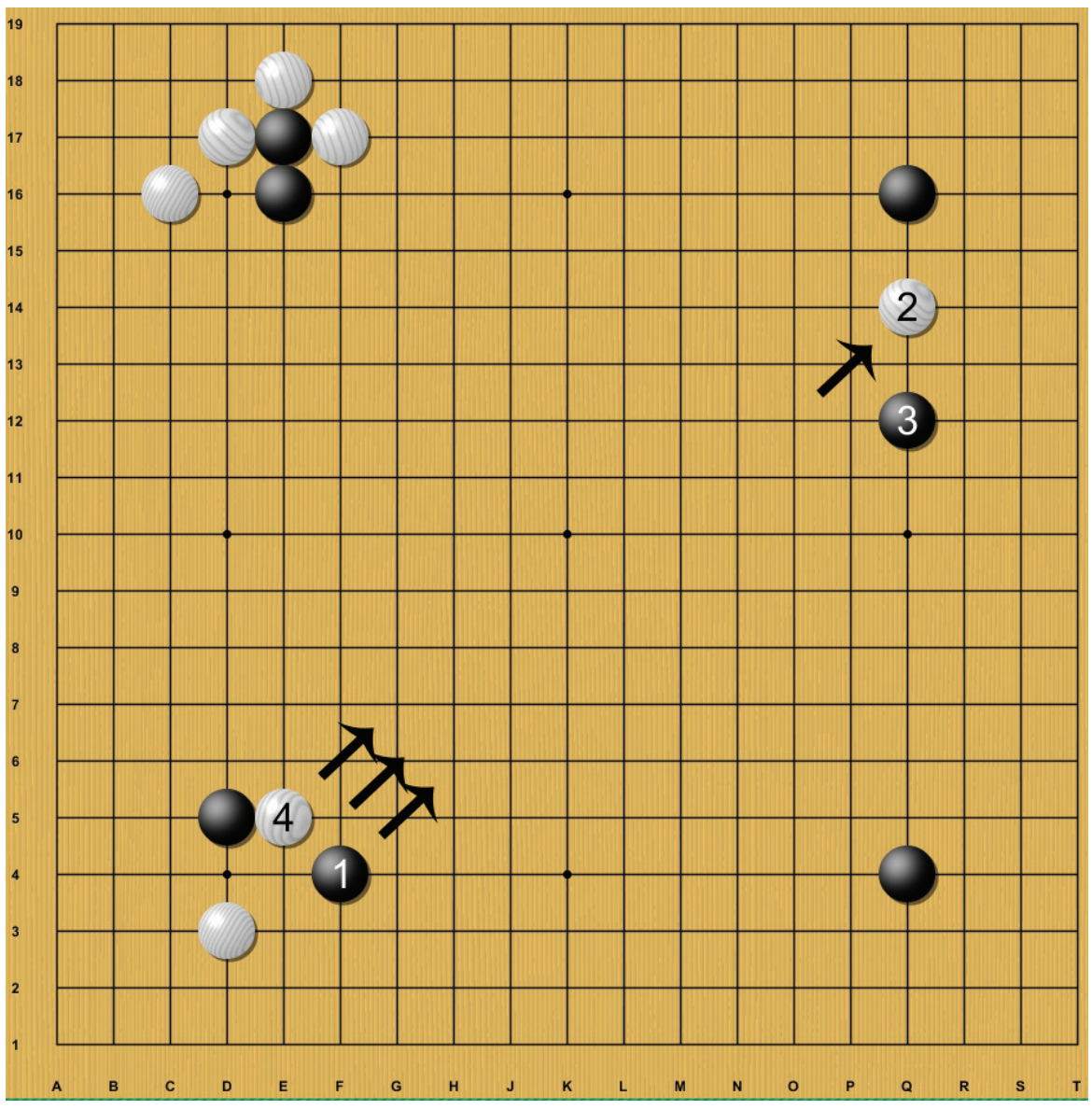
But first, let us see a local example of what a ladder-breaker looks like and why it works. Let us expand the previous image and place an extra white stone and then apply the idea to the game.





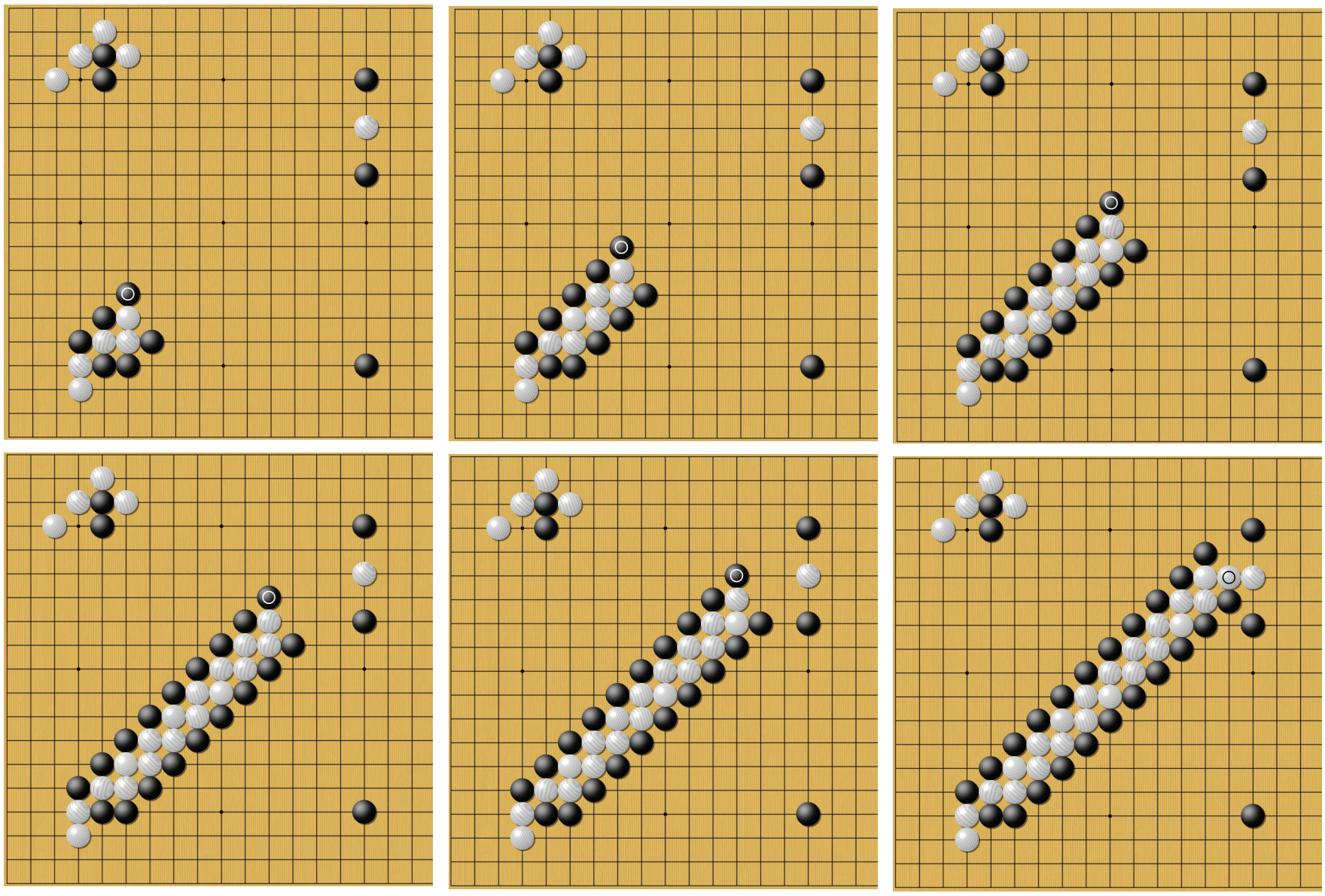


Left image: Any white stone placed along the path of the ladder would change the result from what we saw in the previous page. Let us pick one of the marked places.
Center image: And we will see that the ladder is indeed broken. We played the same moves as before, but now White has an ally to give him extra liberties, making the ladder fail.
Right image: The general rule is that any opposing stone placed along the path of the four diagonals involved with the ladder serves as a ladder-breaker.

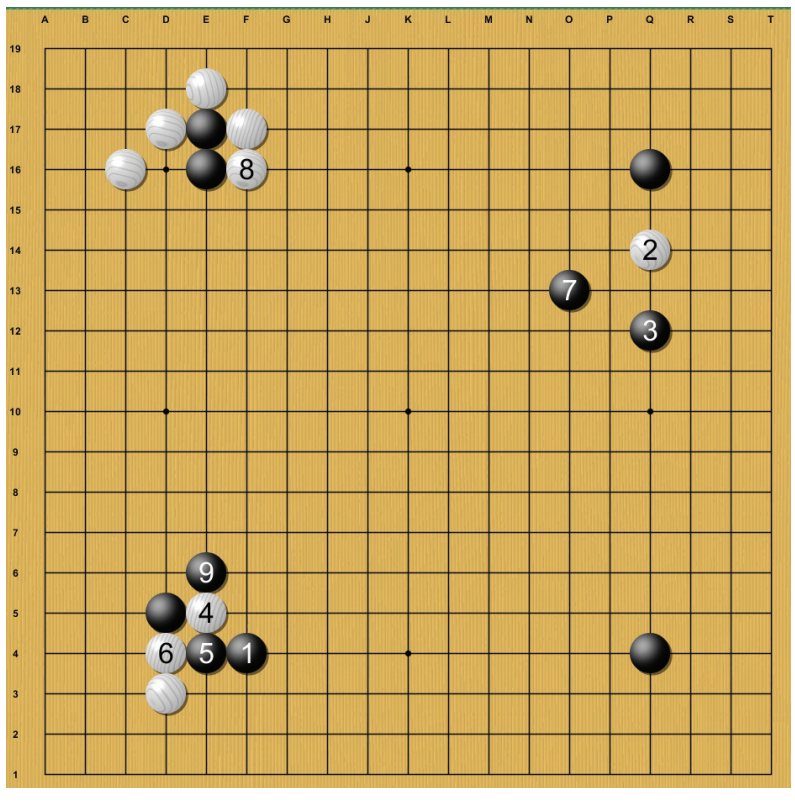


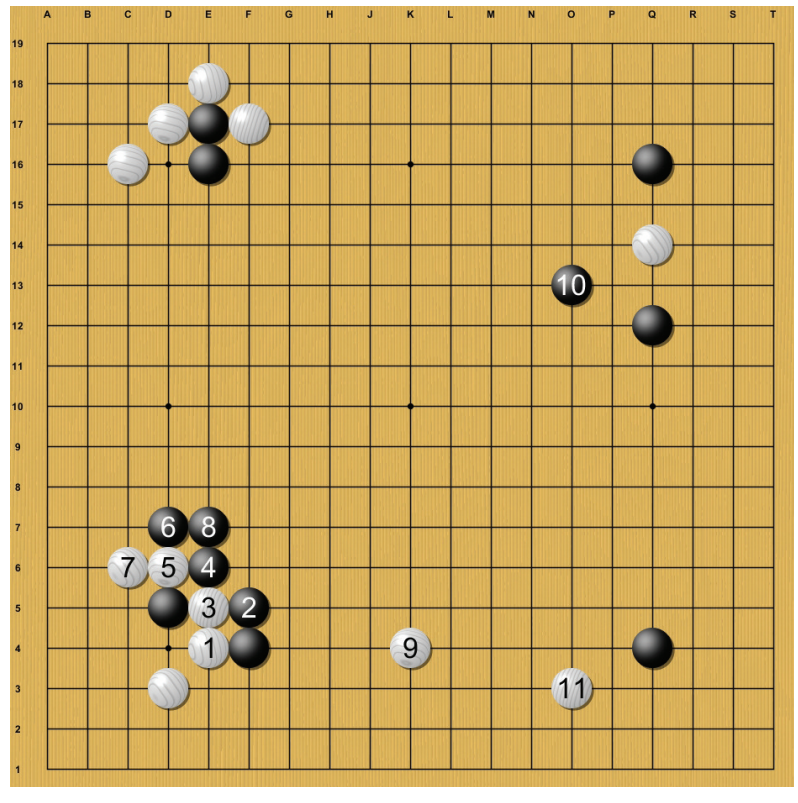
Let us see the real game now. Black plays a **Knight's Move** at **1** to put pressure on White's single stone, but White coolly ignores that move and plays away (which is called **tenuki**) to threaten Black elsewhere, before he responds to **Black 1.**
Black falls for it and responds by playing **move 3,** but he doesn't realise that **White 2** is now a ladder-breaker for a cut on the other side of the board.
White proceeds with his plan and plays **move 4**, and as we can see by the arrows if Black tries to capture that stone, his efforts will be blocked by **White 2**. It is worth noticing that in this game, the author is the tricked Black player. I knew about ladders, but still I made a mistake, but this is the beauty of playing games. **Every mistake you make is a chance to learn something better.**

So, do not worry about understanding everything about these shapes.
Our goal, for the time being, is to learn that those shapes exist. We will, of course, go into more detail later on every subject, but playing the game is what will eventually introduce us to most of their nuances and experience is what will make us look out for them.



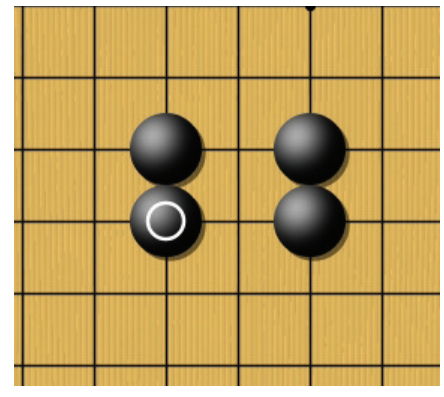
But, just talking about ladder-breakers is not enough. Let us see why the ladder really doesn't work. Had Black ignored the ladder-breaker's existence, then he could never capture that cutting stone and now all his stones are in peril. White can double-atari and capture most of them, which is why almost no one really plays a ladder which can be broken. At least not all its moves, like in this case.



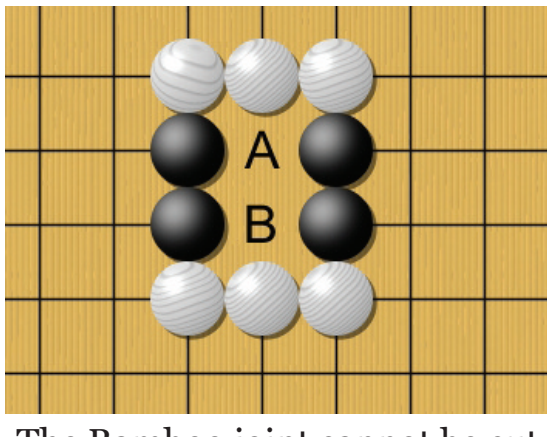


So, what did happen? **Left image:** This is the actual game. Black attacked the white stone to make the ladder work again, White played away again (**tenuki**) almost securing the top left corner and Black rushed to close the deal at the bottom left. I am not sure whether White's choice to tenuki was correct.
Right image: This gives us a look on another possibility for the board which looks better for White and this is what is exciting about Go. One choice can create a whole new game and possibilities.

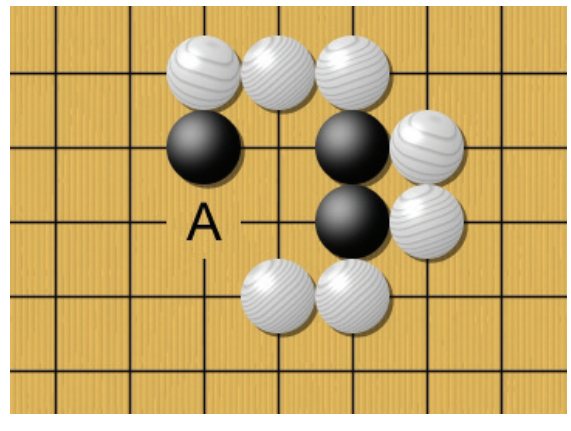
Another important and very common shape is the **Bamboo joint**. A Bamboo joint is composed by two parallel sets of two connected stones and is one of the most stable shapes since it usually cannot be cut once it is formed. There are many cases why we use it instead of simply connecting the stones. The idea behind this is that we wish our stones to be more versatile and influential on the board. Let us see how all this works in practice:



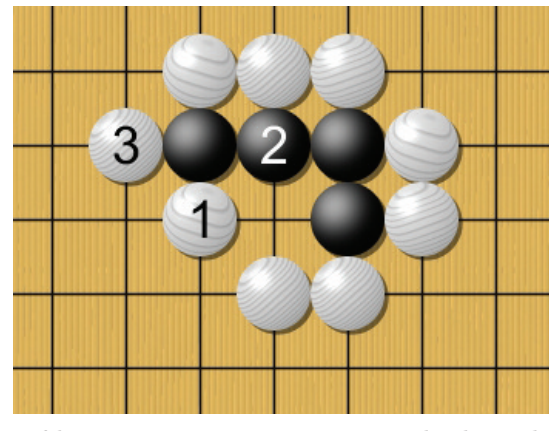
The Bamboo joint.



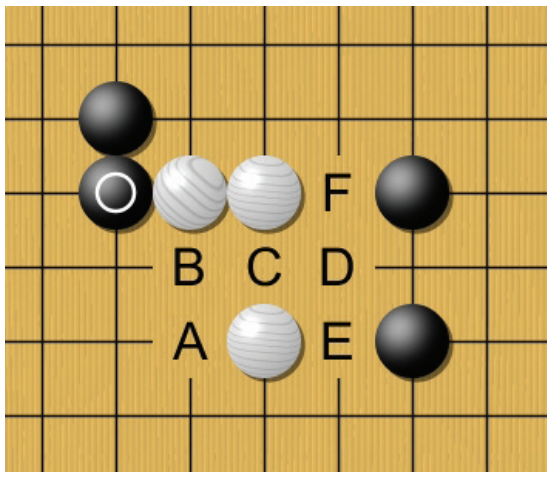
The Bamboo joint cannot be cut after it is formed. **A** and **B** are **miai**. If White plays at **A**, Black plays at **B** and vice versa



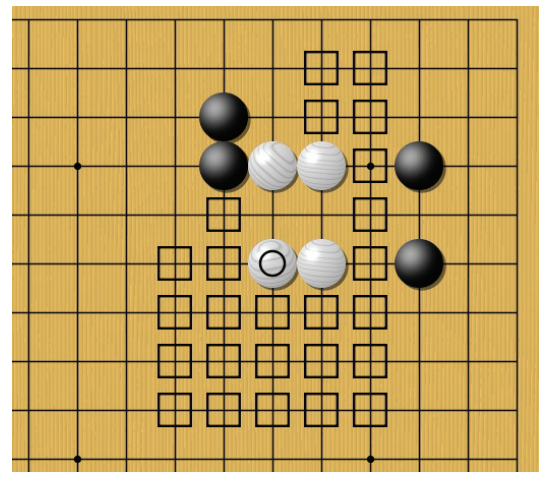
However, the Bamboo joint shape has a weakness if it is not fully formed, at **A**...

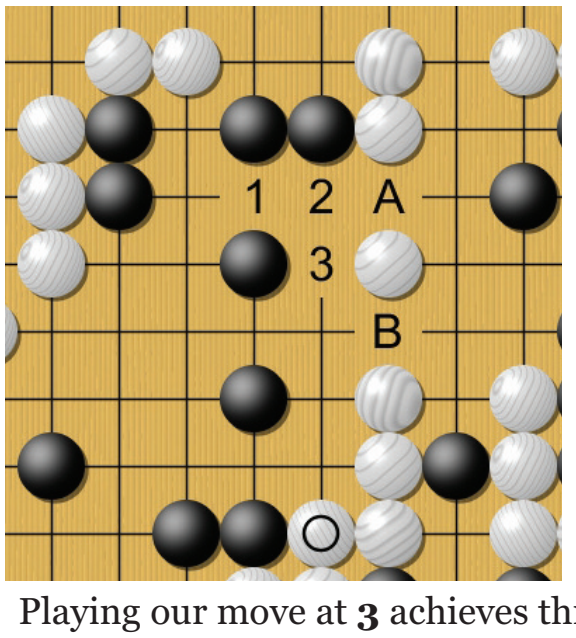


If his stones get surrounded and White plays there, Black cannot save them from getting captured.



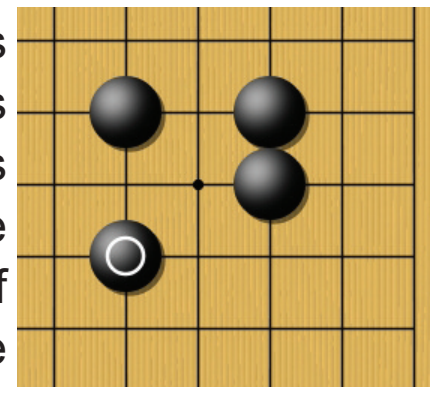
Left image: White wants to connect his stones. Depending on the situation, any move from **A** to **F** is possible. The move that is the most stable, cannot be cut and it radiates strength towards all sides is the bamboo joint at **A**.
Right image: After **A**, every move in the squared points is possible and not easy for Black to respond to.



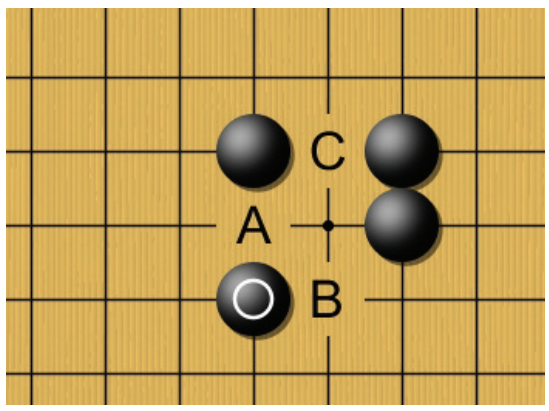


Let us see a practical application of all this. What we fervently want to achieve when we try to find a move, is playing somewhere that achieves **more than one thing at the same time.** Let us see some of our choices for Black connecting his stones in the image on the left. Playing **move 1** connects our stones, but doesn't achieve anything else, so White can ignore our move and take the initiative to play elsewhere and gain momentum at another place on the board. This transfer of initiative is called **taking sente**.
A move which we need to respond to, is also called **sente**.
On the other hand, a move that can be ignored is called **gote**.
Playing **move 2** connects the stones and peeps at White's one space jump at **A**, but it leaves behind **potential weakness** (called **aji**) for White to attack us later and reduce our eye space.
Playing our move at **3** achieves three things. It connects solidly, ensures our eye space, and threatens the follow-up moves of both **A** and **B**. So, since a significant threat is generated then White has to respond to our move and we keep the initiative (**sente**) to play another threatening move, elsewhere.

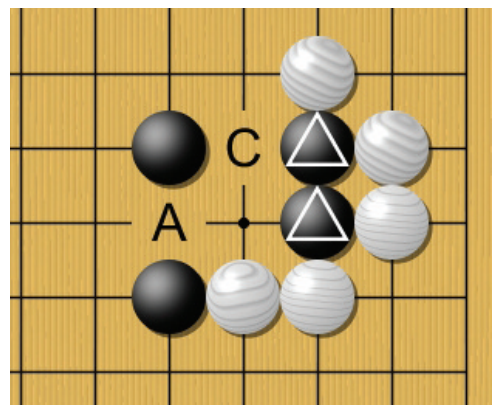
A variation of the Bamboo joint is **the Table shape** which is more diverse and it is created in games more often, due to its stability and the natural way with which sometimes it emerges on the board. Unlike the Bamboo joint, the Table shape can be cut or threatened, but only when the opponent has a lot of stones around it or it can place two parts of the shape in double atari.



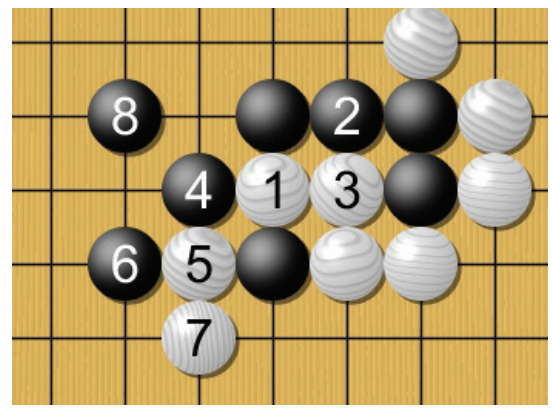
The Table shape



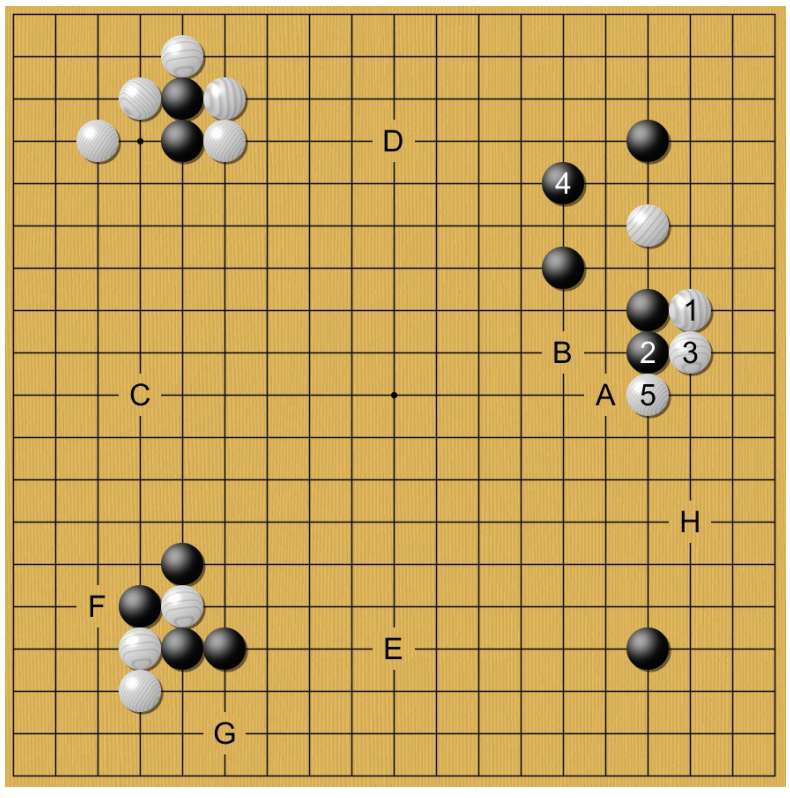
The Table shape has three weak points, with the main ones being **A** and **B**, but it is very difficult to exploit them because...

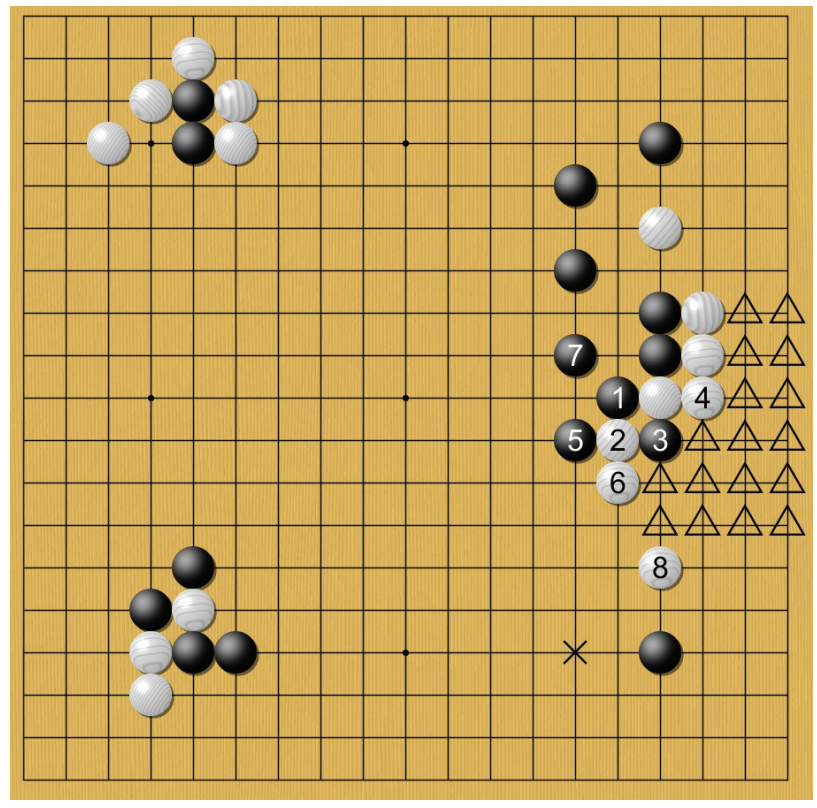


at least half the shape needs to be surrounded in order for the cuts to work. Playing at **C** captures the two marked stones...



while playing at **A**, leads to this variation, where Black's stones are separated.





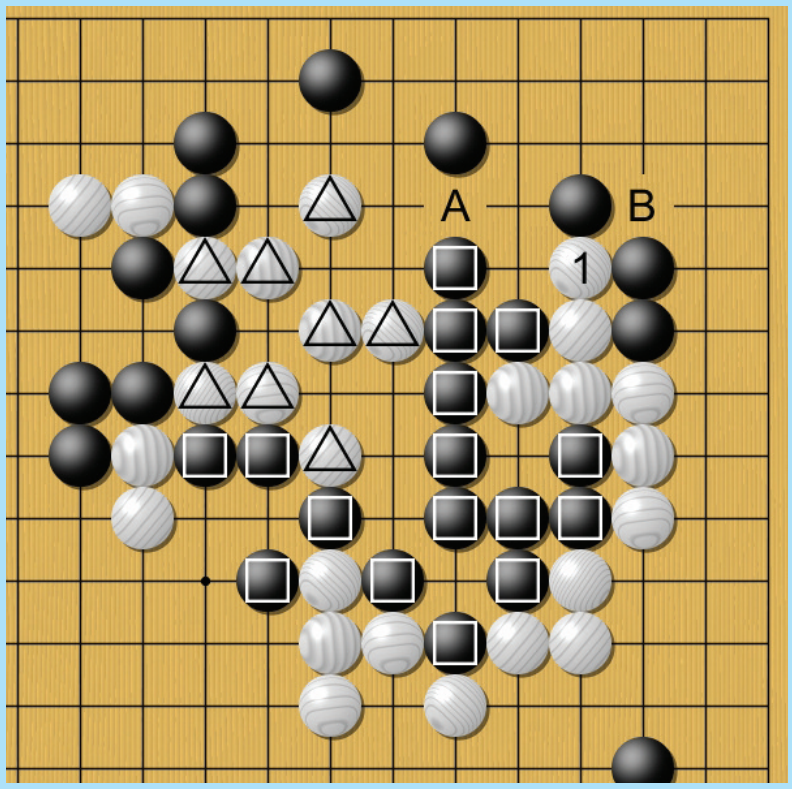
Left image: This is what actually happened next in the game we used in **page 30**. White is trying to live in the right and made the hane on top of Black's two stones. For **Black 6** there are many possible good moves from **A** to **G**, most of them involving playing away from the current situation (tenuki). Black's stones are not in very serious trouble, so he can do that and go elsewhere and grab a large point, but if he wants to play locally, playing **B** creates a table shape and we are even safer. Playing **A**...

Right image: ...could create complications. It is not necessarily a worse move than the table shape (**move 7** ends up creating one in this case, as well), but it is disadvantageous in some cases for Black.

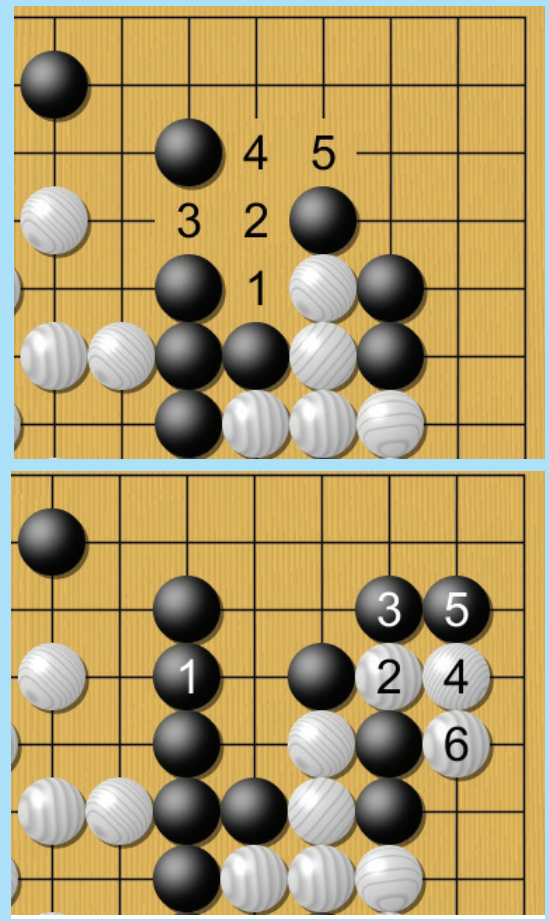
We will explain these moves in more detail in **page 35**, but this is one of the most possible results.

The situation looks balanced. Black has great shape for his stones which are facing the center, but he gave up a lot of territory for it (marked with the triangles) and he still needs to defend against White's **move 8**, possibly at **X**.

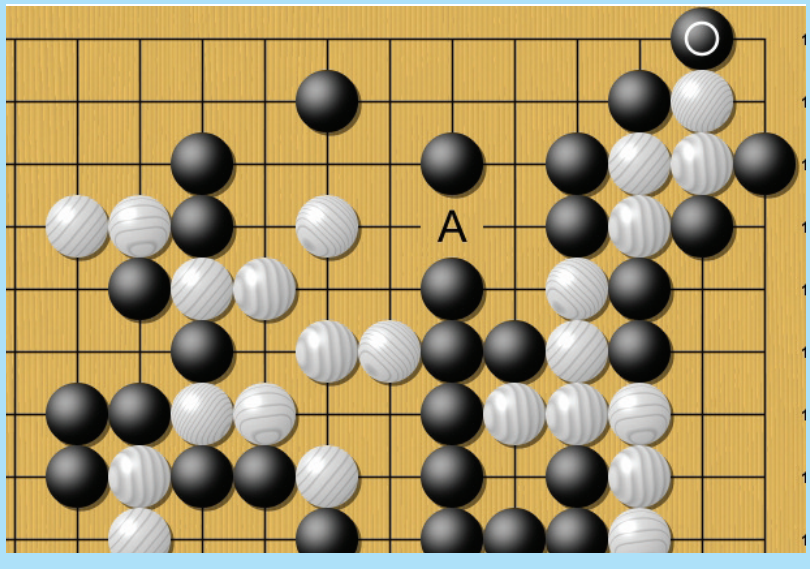
Extra content for future reference

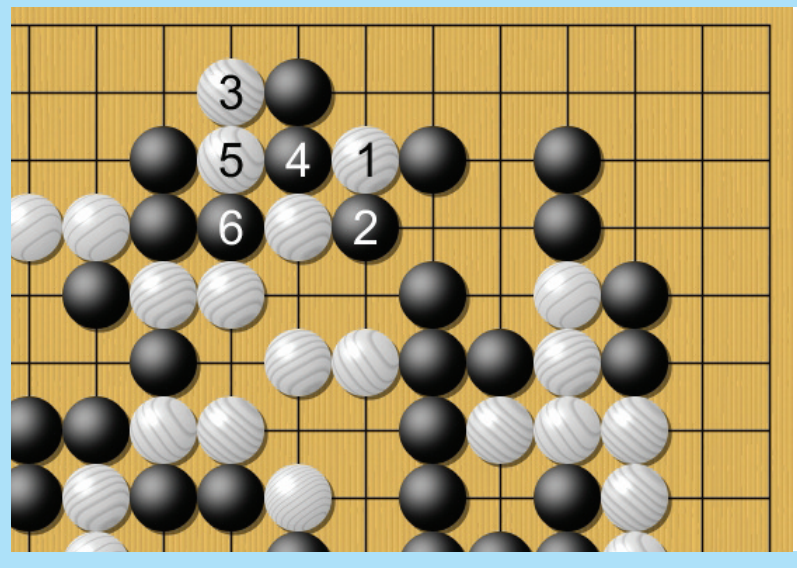


In the actual game, Black played the table shape and considered his stones settled. This led to a complex situation where White tried to surround Black and now both players are fighting to isolate and kill each other's marked groups. If White manages to cut Black at **A**, he will win the fight, so he plays **1** to threaten two things:
The cut at **A** and the cut at **B**. Cutting at **A** is a difficult thing to accomplish, so White will be fine losing his middle group if he can get compensation by taking Black's corner...



Top image: So White found one of those coveted moves that do multiple things at once, so Black has to find a move that can defend both these cutting points at the same time. Black has five choices to defend, but most of them end up with him losing something.
Bottom image: For example playing **3** doesn't work and Black loses a lot of points...

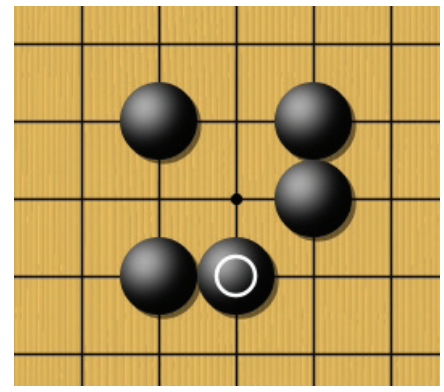




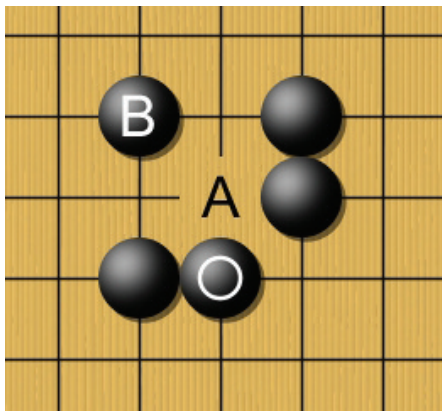
Left Image: However, playing the **table shape** at **5** does work. Not only the cutting point at **A** is reinforced and cannot be cut, but now the previous cut at **B** is leading to a ladder in Black's favour. Black responded to White's double-threat move by finding a move that defended both points, so White cannot play either of these moves. So...
Right Image: He tries again in a last ditch effort to threaten the cut, but Black makes the Tiger's mouth at **2**. White tries to kill the small Black group on top, but due to the Tiger's mouth he fails and White resigns. This was a more complex example than the beginning of a book should have, **but there is an important lesson here, and it is this:**

Making and maintaining good shape matters. Always look for good shape points.

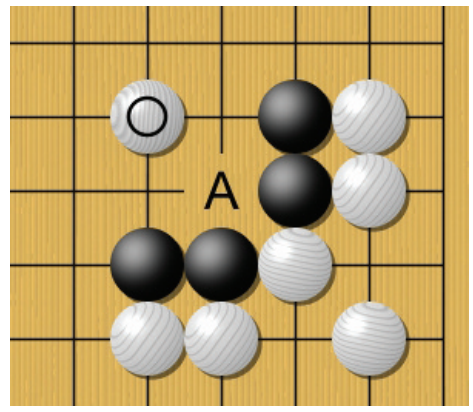
A variation of the Table shape is **the Dragon's mouth** Once again, as with any shape, we do not go around the board creating it on our own, but it must be created out of a reasonable sequence of moves. The advantage of the Dragon's mouth is that it usually guarantees us one eye, so we can keep up fighting effectively in cases where our stones are struggling to survive.



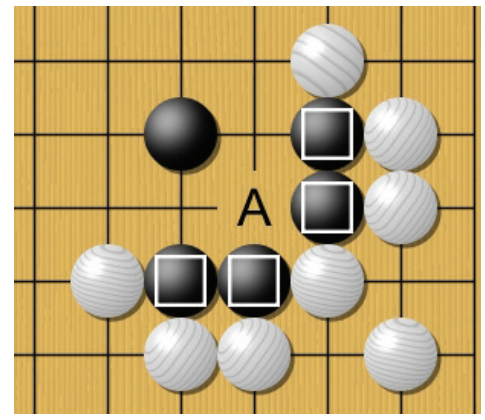
The Dragon's mouth



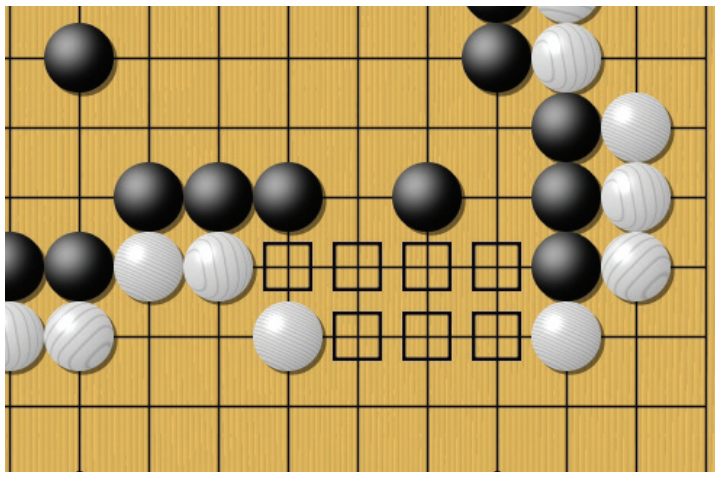
The eye is created usually at **A**. **B** is the main weak spot of the shape when the Black stone is missing...

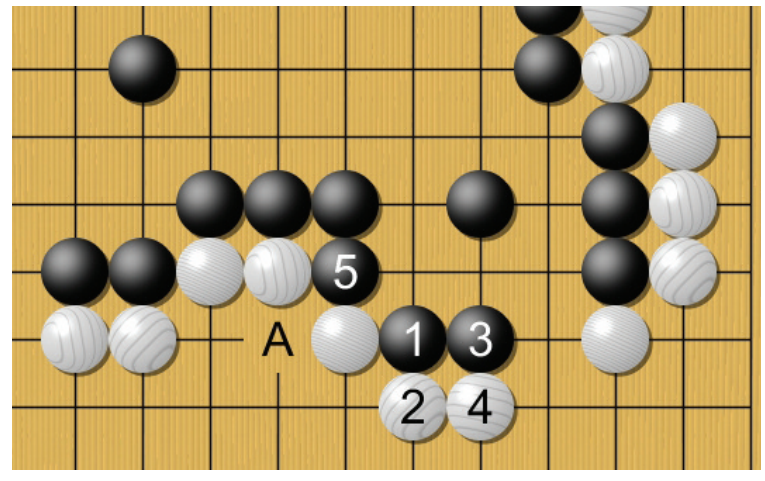


If White plays there first, then Black's stones are ready to cut, so Black has to connect at **A**.

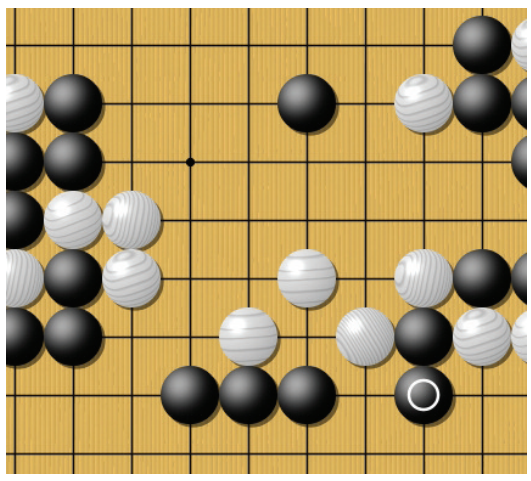


We need to be careful of getting surrounded, or else the opponent will poke our eye with a double atari at **A**.

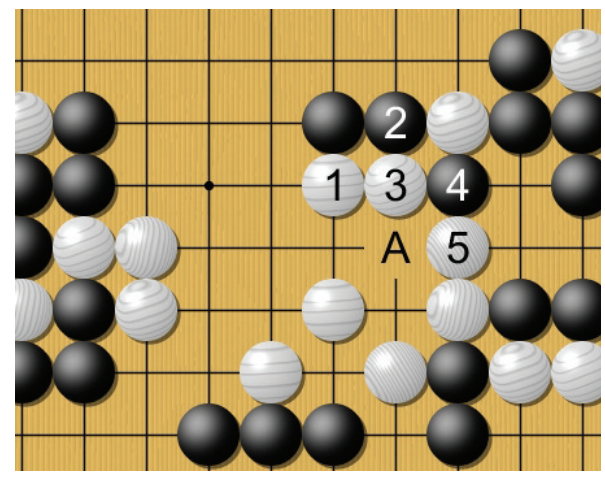




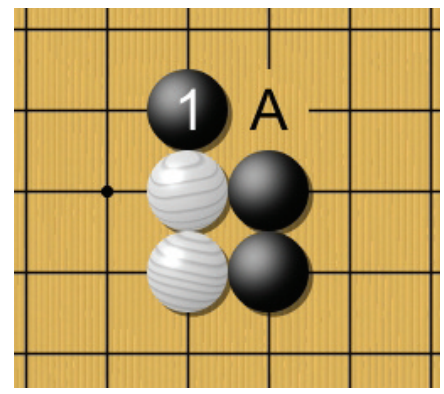
Left Image: Let us suppose that Black wants to settle his shape in the marked area. An easy way to do this is to try to go for the Dragon's mouth...
Right Image: Black plays **move 1** and White has to defend his own shape and area. **Moves 3** and **4** follow the same logic and **move 5** creates the Dragon's mouth and threatens a double atari at **A**, so White has to respond. Black made good shape and kept the initiative (**sente**).



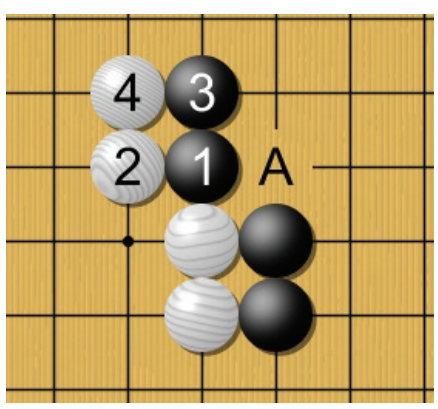
Left image: White is surrounded and needs to survive.
Right image: So White attaches to the black stone threatening to connect with his lone stone on the upper right. Black defends and the moves until **5** give White at least one eye with the Dragon's mouth at **A**, so he can keep his hopes up and fight for a second eye and live.



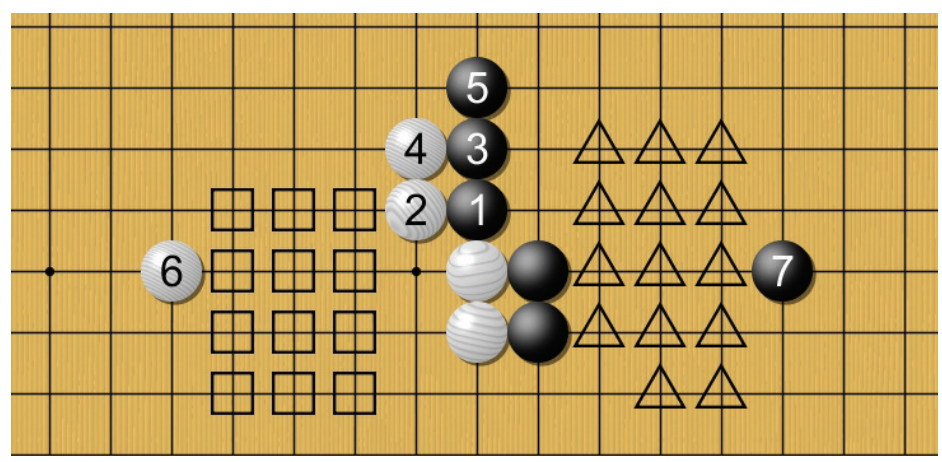
Returning to more simple ideas, we already saw that a **hane** is a diagonal play on an opponent's stone and a **double hane** is obviously two hane in a row. Many beginners are very afraid of playing either of them, due to the obvious cutting points they leave behind, especially the double hane, but as you will see there is usually nothing to be afraid of and getting cut gives us enough compensation.
When we play a hane on the top of two/three stones, it is called **hitting the head** of those stones and from there we either play passively or we go for maximum profit with the double hane. Let us see how both of these ideas work.



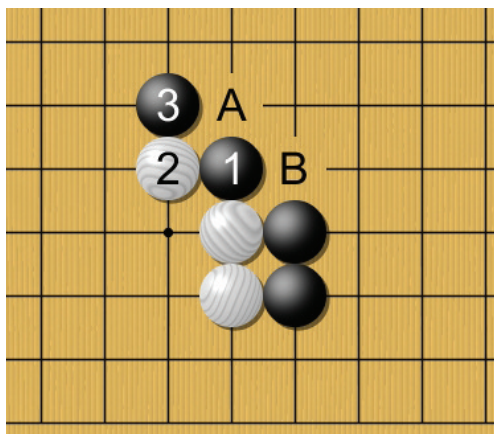
Black is hitting the head of two stones with a hane. The obvious cutting point is at **A**.

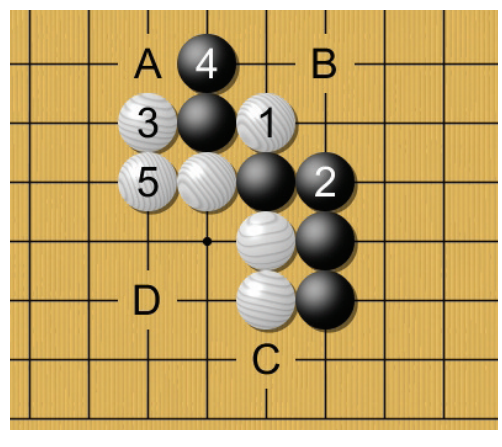


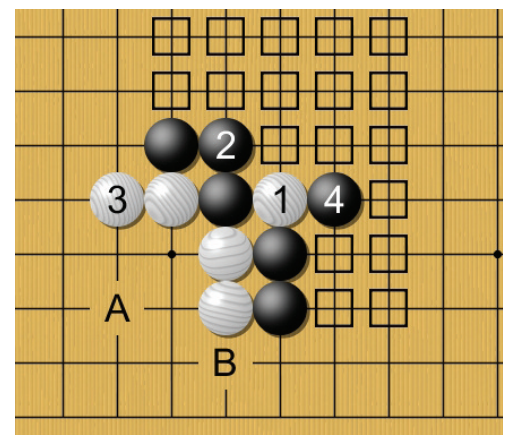
Here is the passive choice. Black is afraid of the cutting point at **A**, so he extends to expand and defend at the same time. As we saw in **page 27**, this is fine when the stones are near the corners of the board...



But when this happens on an open field, White is content by the result since he gains a nice wall from which he can extend, which is just a little smaller than Black's wall. Depending on the whole board, Black might not really benefit from playing safe like that.





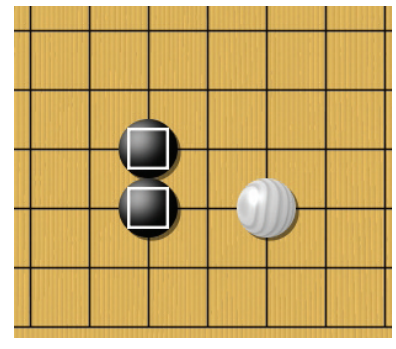


Left image: So, this is the **double hane**. There are now two cutting points at **A** and **B**, but unless White has significant help from other stones in the vicinity, none of these cuts really give him a good result...
Center image: The first cut leads to this result usually. Black is mostly safe and the white stone at **1** is mostly dead. Moves **A** to **D** are key points for attack or defense for both players and depending on the situation, Black gets a nice wall and a lot of possible aji.
Right image: The second cut is more severe since the white stone at **1** is dead only if the ladder is in favour of Black. Even if the ladder is not favourable, Black has two points, **A** and **B** for future attacks and he got a far larger influence than the "safe" version we saw above.

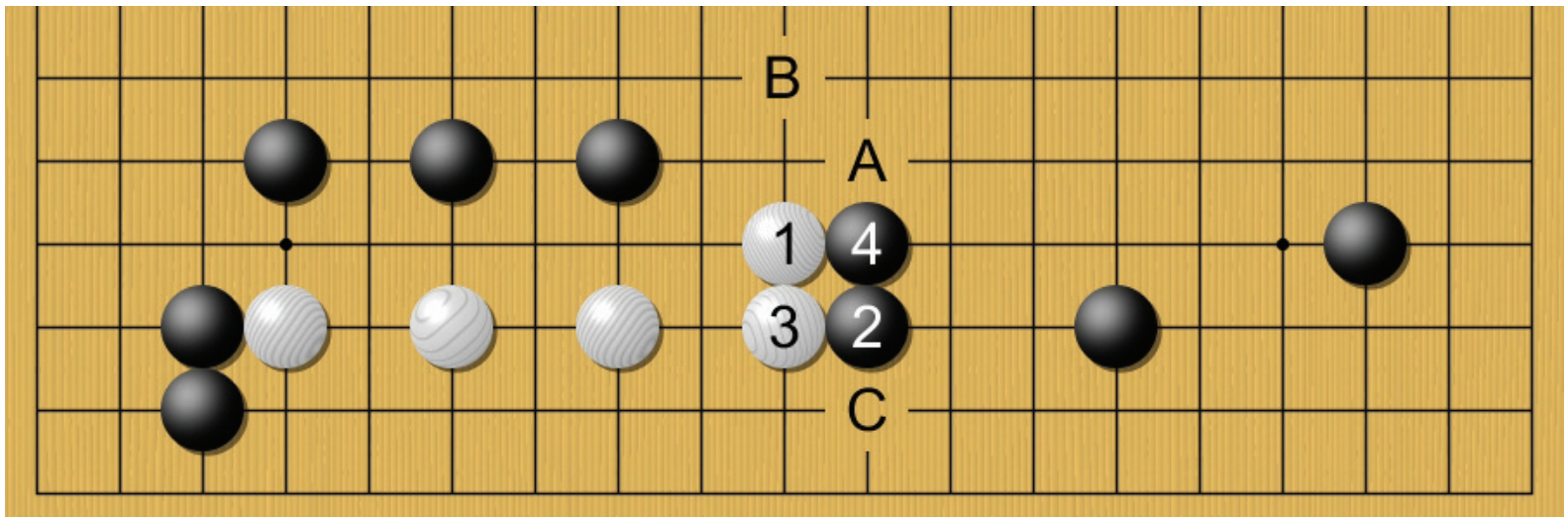
The double hane is a very important arrow in our quiver of moves.

Finishing this chapter we will see some shapes that regularly occur in the game, but we will not analyse them as much either because their pros and cons are more obvious or because they will be explained more when we will showcase when and where they are used.

One of them is the **iron pillar**. Despite its impressive name it is just two connected stones in a line. Its main advantage is its strength, since the stones cannot be separated, and that it can defend the side very effectively. The obvious disadvantage is that it is a very slow move. It is still very useful, though, since you can use its stability to make strong moves like the double hane we just mentioned.

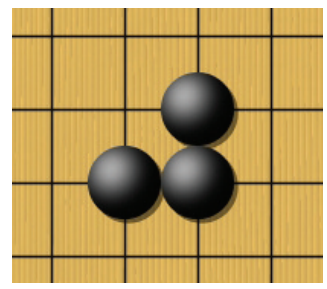


The iron pillar

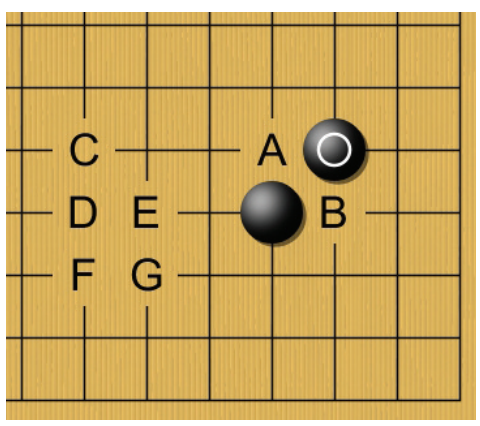


White plays **1** to try and get out or expand towards the side. Black responds with **move 2** to take the side and undermine White's stones. White plays the iron pillar at **3** to defend his expansion and his base and Black plays the iron pillar as well, at **4**. Now it is White's turn and he can go ahead and try to hane at **A** or **C** or jump out with **B**, because the iron pillar is such a stable shape.

Next is the **empty triangle**. This time this is a bad shape which we usually avoid making, because it is not an effective way to use our stones. In most cases forming an empty triangle is just a waste of our moves and we only use it when it is the only available safe choice.

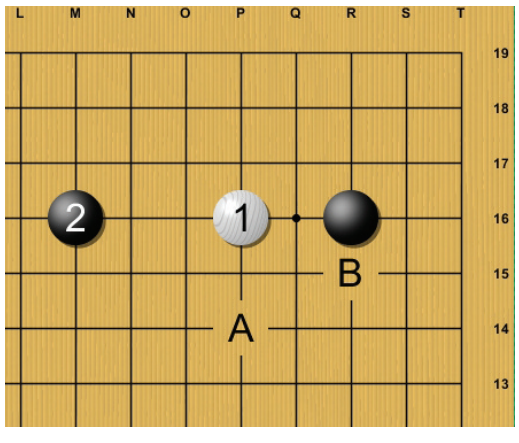


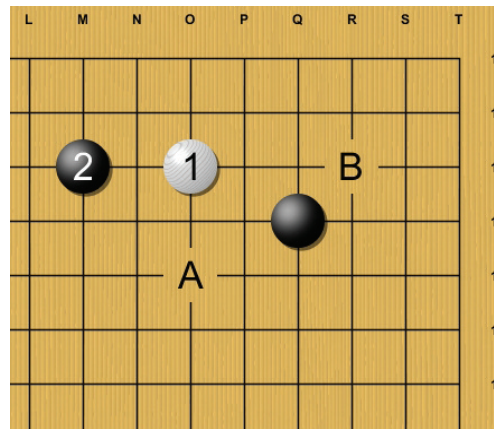
The empty triangle

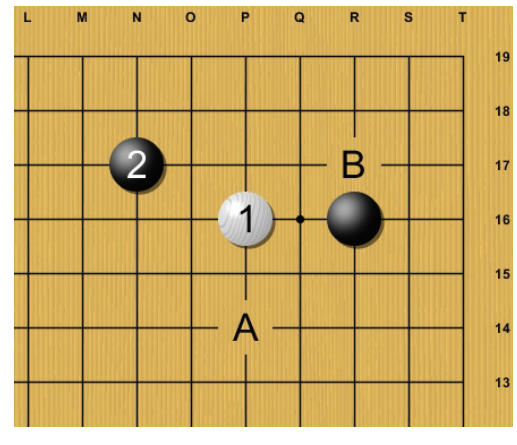


The reason that the empty triangle is considered so bad is that it doesn't really contribute anything to your shapes or your stones in comparison to simply having diagonally placed stones. Placing a stone in **A** or **B** makes an empty triangle, but your stones were already connected, as we saw in **page 18**. So, the empty triangle is usually reserved only in cases when we have to defend our stones and nothing else works.
Another serious problem with the empty triangle is that it is a very slow move. In the diagram, playing any move from **C** to **G** is a much better, faster and efficient place for us to spend a move on.

Next is the **pincer**. The idea of a pincer is pressuring weak stones from both sides and trying to deprive your opponents of the space needed to create a base for his stones and make them live where they are. A pincer is designed to make your opponent run away, so that you can profit while you chase him. Pincers usually occur in the opening phase of the game and we will talk about them extensively later on in the book, but for the time being let us see how three typical pincers look like.

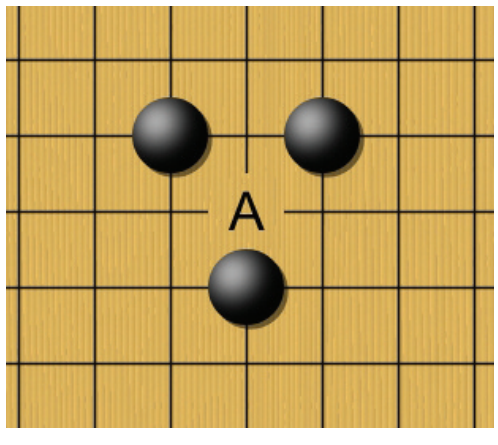




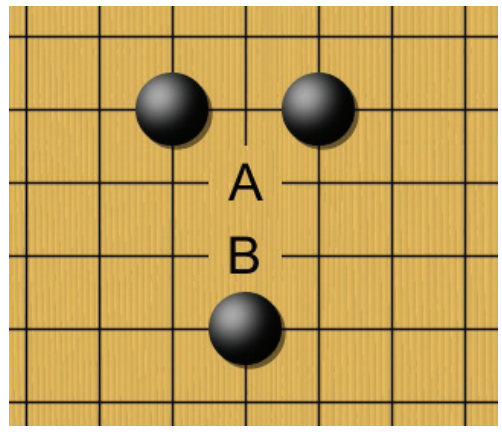


In each diagram, **move 2** is pincering White with the help of the already existing black stone. White usually wants to play around **2** in order to create enough space for him to make a base, but Black playing there deprives him of this safe option, so White usually has two choices: He can either fight (**move B**) or flight (**move A**). Those are obviously a few examples of the possible moves for each choice and depending on the situation, there are usually various moves for running and fighting.

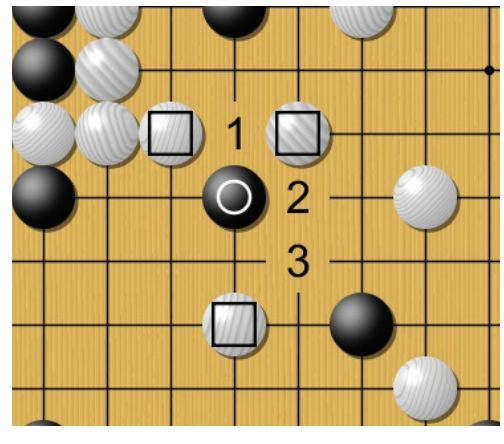
Our last shapes for now are the combinations of two knight's moves, and two large knight's moves. They are obviously stronger than having one of those moves, but they can still be cut. In general, the weak points of most shapes we try to make **are either their center of symmetry** or **any stones that are missing from the completion of the shape**. A proverb we should keep in mind while playing is that ***"Our opponents weak point is our strong point"*** and vice versa.



Two knight's moves combined. The weak point at **A** can threaten to cut the shape in half, on any direction, depending on the surrounding stones.



Two large knight's moves combined. This one has two weak points at **A** and **B** which can be used against us. Again, the surrounding stones decide where the danger is coming from...



For example this situation here. When black plays in the shape's weak spot, White has to defend three points with one move which is impossible. So, White can be cut and Black can connect his stone with one of his nearby groups.

So far, so good, but aren't all those things a bit much? Where is the game? We now know enough to understand what is going on, so it is high time we looked on a whole real game and experience some of the beauty of Go. Before we head in the next chapter, though, I would like to provide you with a small "glossary" of terms we already used, so that you will not have to go looking for them in the previous pages and lose precious time and your concentration on such a task.

Liberties	The amount of stones that are needed to be placed by the opponent in order capture a group of our stones
Territory	The amount of points we have surrounded
Influence	A field where our opponent is hesitant to play in, which is generated when we have many stones (and usually walls) in an area.
Komi	An amount of points given to the White player as compensation for playing second.
Atari	When our stones are one move away from being captured and removed from the game. When we have one liberty left.
Eye	Is a point where the opponent cannot play, unless our group is in atari.
Dead group	A group with one or no eyes, which can be placed in atari and be captured
Living group	A group with at least two eyes. It can never be placed in atari.
Seki	A rare case of two opposing groups of stones which do not have two eyes, but cannot be placed in atari either, so they are both alive.
Tenuki	Ignoring the opponent's move and playing elsewhere.
Sente	A move that cannot be ignored without losing something significant on the board.
Gote	A move that can be ignored or a move that concedes the initiative to the opponent.
Miai	Two moves that "reflect" one another and have a similar result. Whichever the players move, it is usually the same.
Ko	A situation where stones could have been capturing each other infinitely, but are not allowed to do so. Hence immediate re-capturing is forbidden.
Ko threat	A move that poses significant threat to the opponent, so that they cannot save their stone which is part of a Ko.
Attachment	It is a move that is removing a liberty from an opposing stone or group. It is unusual to attach stones to large groups of stones.
Shoulder hit	It is a move that is diagonally placed from an opposing stone or group. We can shoulder hit large groups, but it is not as efficient.
Ladder breaker	A stone that is along the diagonal path of a ladder which prevents the formation of the ladder.

⏩ Let's play - The Opening

Finally we are ready to look at a full real game. We will try to go over most of the moves made on the board and see the way of thinking behind them. For a better result I'd urge you to follow the moves on a real (or digital) Go board and **not to worry if you don't fully grasp some of the content yet**.

The goal is to present the phases of the game, along with as many thoughts as possible, so that you can see what makes Go so interesting. If you are reading this chapter for the first time and things get too complicated for you, I recommend that you ignore all the parts labelled "choices on a move" and return to them after you have finished the book.

The game has three phases: the opening, the middle game, and the endgame. I will discuss and explain each one of them while we go over the game. As mentioned earlier, the game has some guidelines to help us navigate through the immense amount of possible moves. In the case of the opening we have these general ideas to work with:

1) We play moves from the third to the sixth line (counting from the edge of the board). Playing on the third and fourth line initially is the most common strategy. We usually play on the fifth and sixth line only when we are extending from stones we set previously on lower lines.

2) The third line is the place we set a stone when we want to focus on getting **territory**. The fourth line is the place where we set our stones to focus on **influence**. Having only fourth-line or only third-line stones is not considered a good idea: a balance between the two is generally the best option.

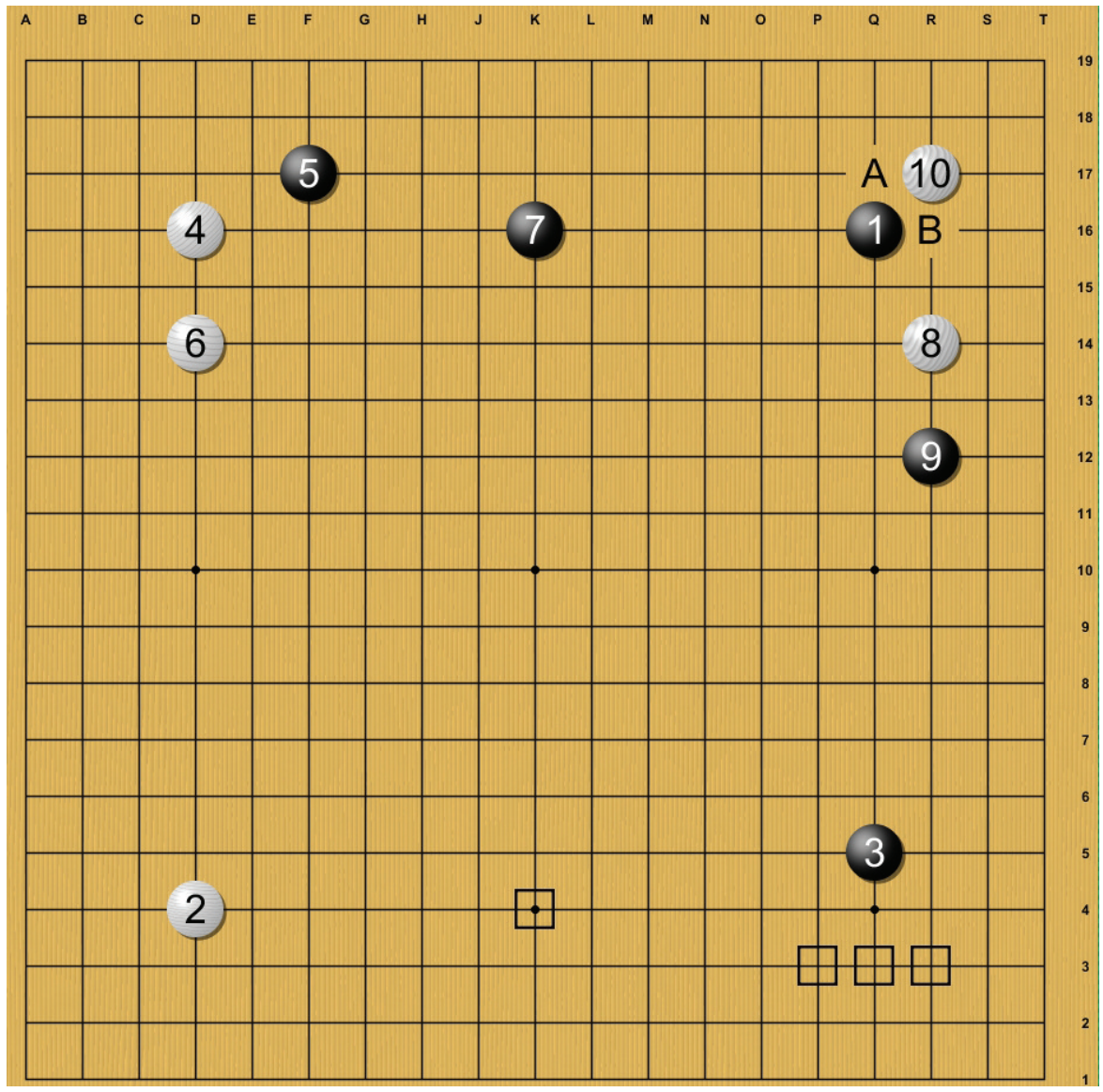
3) Our first moves should be on the corners, around the black dots on the board (which are called **star points**). So, first we play one move in a free corner, trying to lay claim on it. There are many ways to play in the corner and there are set sequences of moves for some plays that produce a balanced result for both players. Those sequences are called ***joseki*** and we will analyse the most common of them after the game. **Always keep in mind that our focus is not on memorizing moves, but understanding how they work and why.**

4) Once the corners are accounted for, we either invest another move on a corner we have claimed, enclosing it, or we approach the corners of our opponent.

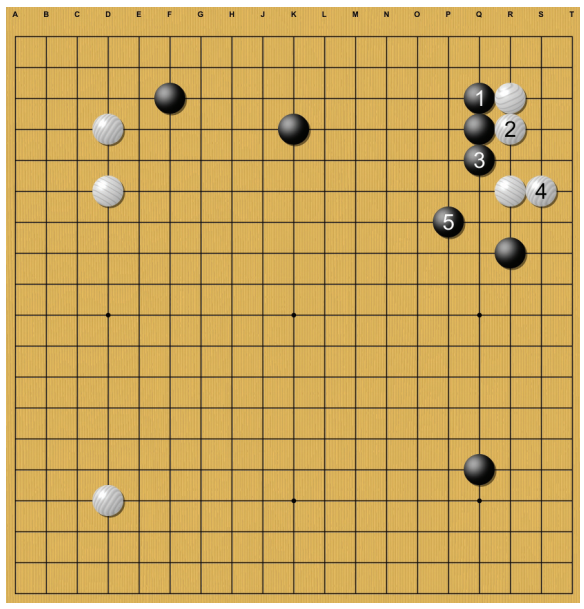
5) After the corners we extend to the sides. Deciding which side we want to focus will depend on the ***direction of play*** created by the moves we, and our opponent, made previously. The direction of play is the idea that we want all our stones to have the best possibly synergy and, at the same time, expand and claim the larger empty space currently on the board.

Keep these five things in mind and let us begin the game!

As with almost every real-game example in the book, the source here is a game of my own, which means you can find this and all the other games used in this book by checking my profile, Jeth_Orensin, on DGS. This game was played in early 2017: Suppenkaspa 6k (White) vs. Jeth_Orensin 7k (Black). The game review was used with my opponent's permission.

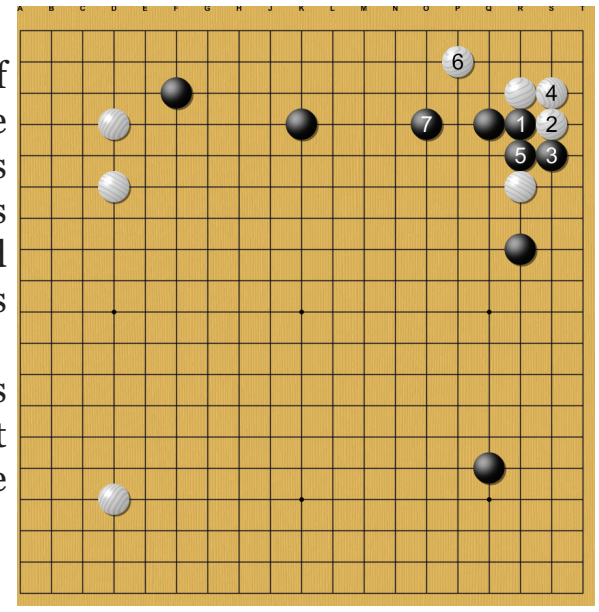


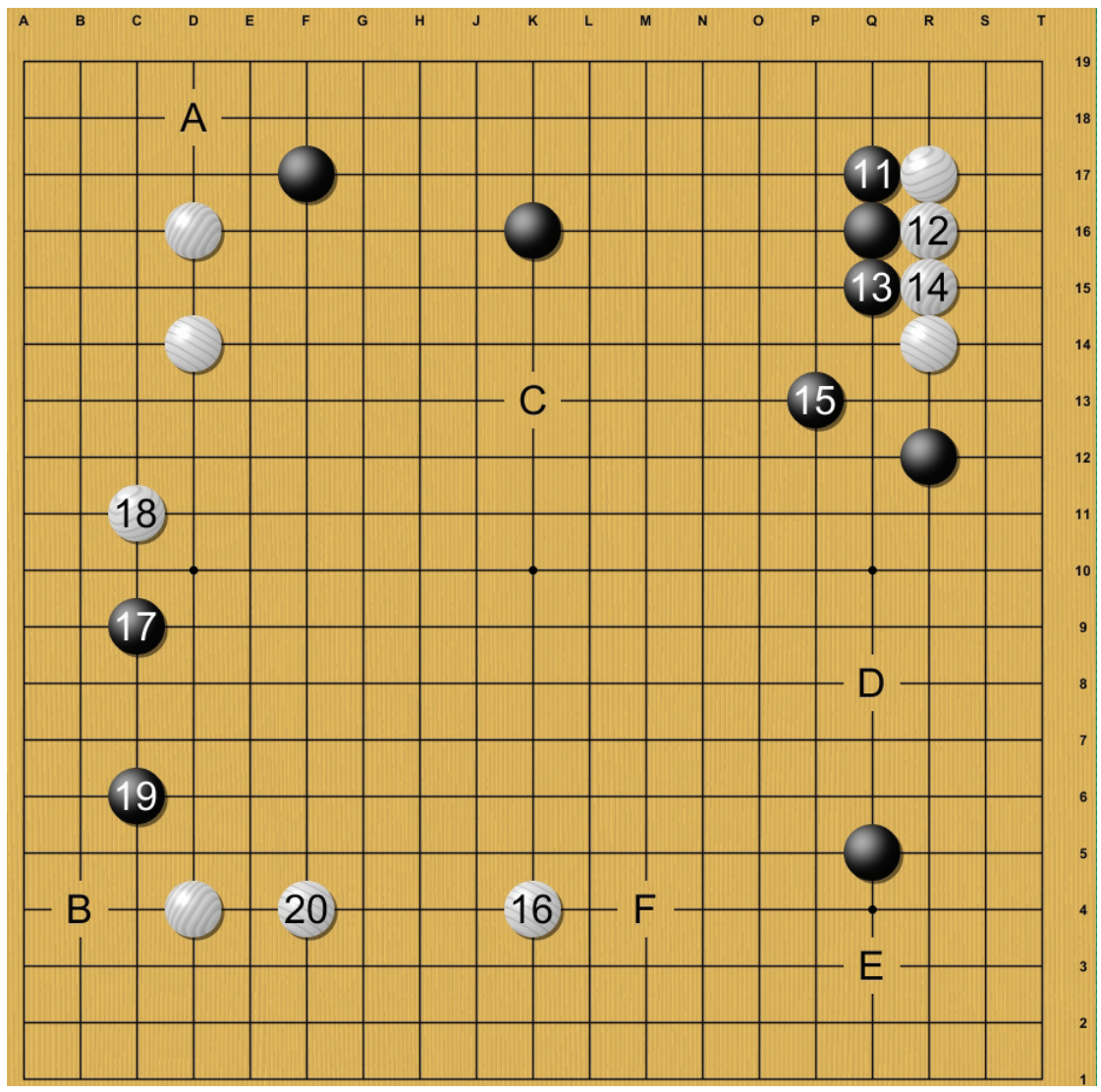
Moves 1 - 4: Both players are following the guidelines of the opening theory. They play on the 3rd and 4rth lines and each gets a corner. Now it is time for Black to use his advantage for playing first.
Moves 5 - 6: **Black 5** is an example of how the direction of play works. Black could have played where **move 6** is, but placing a stone there wouldn't work in unison with the corners he claimed. So, he chooses to approach White's corner by having the backup of the top right corner stone. In a similar fashion, **White 6** expands towards the larger space on the board and his other corner stone.
Moves 7 - 8: **Black 7** defends his stone and extends at the same time towards the side and his upper right corner, but it is a **greedy** move, as we will see in **move 28**. Black's stones are too far apart and they are not connected yet, but, for now, White's stones are all safe. This means that White can take the initiative (sente) and play wherever he wants on the board
From the perspective of the direction of play, White should have chosen a move around the points marked with a square, because they would be using his lower left corner stone and they would be expanding towards the larger area currently on the board. But sometimes we just want to disrupt the plans of our opponent, so White approaches Black's top right corner with **move 8**.
Moves 9 - 10: Black wants the right side for himself, so he plays the pincer at **9**. **Black 9** works well with both Black's corner stones and that is why it is a move with a good direction of play. White refuses to run and chooses to fight with **White 10** and takes the corner from Black. Now Black has two possible responses. **A or B**. Before we see the next move, which do you think is in the right direction? Playing **A** would defend the top side and playing **B** would defend the right side. We need to think which side is larger, but also if all our stones be fine if we favour one side over the other. **Safety is always an issue.**



Choices on move 11

Black has these two sequences of moves in mind. On the left are the most probable moves if he chooses **A,** and on the right if he chooses **B**. Playing **A** seems safer and strengthens the top, but it allows White to connect all his stones. Ideally we want to keep White's stones separated, and the right side is larger, so **B** seems like the best choice in terms of offence. What would you choose?





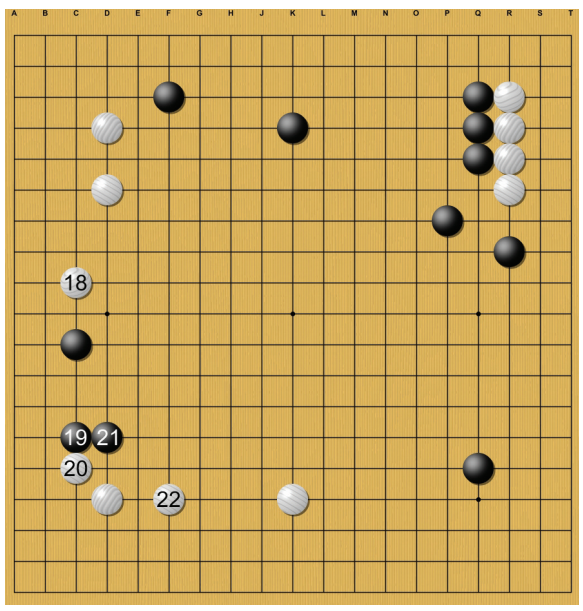
Moves 11 - 15: Black chooses safety. In **moves 5** and **7** he invested on the top and he wants to help these stones. Also, with this variation the right side is weaker, but there is still profit to be made. Both choices had their merits and depending on your own style you can choose to be risky or play safe.

Moves 16 - 17: White retains sente, so he plays another large move by taking a side point with **16**. Black feels that he should stop White from doing the same on the left, so he ignores White's move and attacks on the left side with **move 17**, to reduce White's potential there.

Moves 18 - 20: White has to choose whether to defend his top or his bottom left. On the next page you can see a small analysis of his choices. He has invested more moves in the top, so he chooses to pressure Black from the top, with **18**. Black immediately makes a base **and** approaches the bottom left at the same time with **move 19**. We always want to find moves that do multiple things in order to stay ahead of our opponent. **White 20** responds to Black's approach in the same way he did in **move 6**, only this time he has another friendly stone towards that side, so White also made a move that accomplished two things: Defence and an extension towards the side.

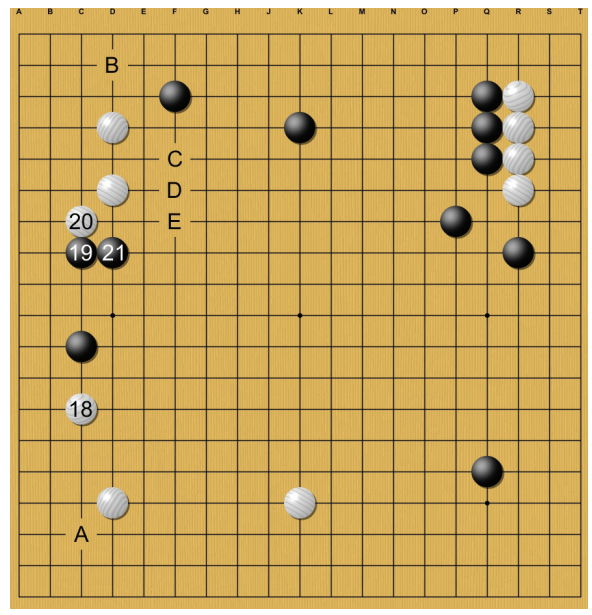
Next move? Black now has many choices on the board (**A** to **F**), but he wants to keep being proactive, so he wants to play **sente** moves which White has to respond to. The next page is about these choices.

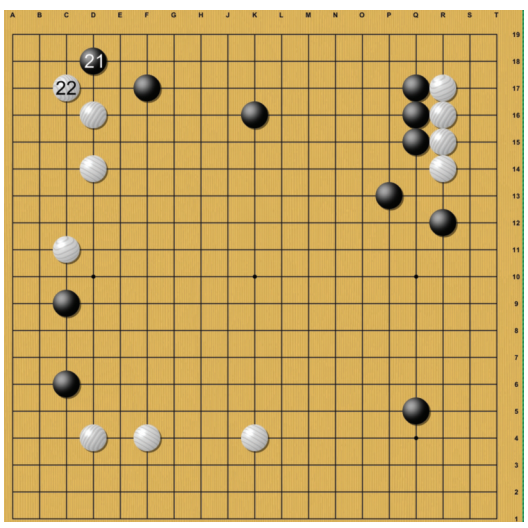
Remember: If you want to keep things simple for now, read the next page **after** you finish the book.



Choices on move 18

White has these two sequences of moves in mind. On the left is another variation of what he could have played, in which he gets the corner. On the right, White playing **18** to defend the bottom left, forcing Black to extend towards the top. White's bottom left is still vulnerable at **A** and the top can be reduced at **B** or threatened to be totally surrounded at **C**, **D** or **E**. White's choice to defend the top left seems correct.





Choice A

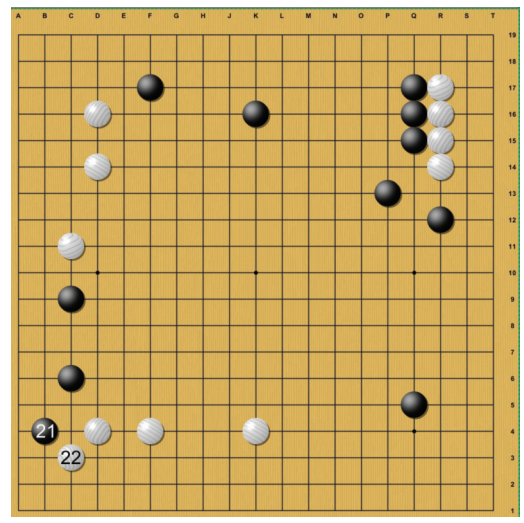
Choices on move 21

Black has these images in mind. Choices **A** and **B** are very similar. Black is threatening to take a corner White has tried to claim for himself. White cannot really abandon his stones and his strategy so far and tenuki and let his corners be lost without a fight, so White usually defends.

Choice **C** is not really threatening White in any direct way, but it does turn a significant amount of influence of Black's wall into free territory (the marked squares) and it strengthens the lone Black stone on the upper left. Despite all that, White doesn't need to respond directly to that move and usually will play elsewhere.

Choices **D** and **E** are similar to **C**. They both extend Black's territory without threatening White, so they are **not sente**.

Choice **F** is a bit risky and greedy. It tries to attack and undermine White on the bottom side, but Black's stones are too far apart and White can actually play in any of the points marked with a triangle and start a complex fight, whose victor cannot be predicted at this stage.



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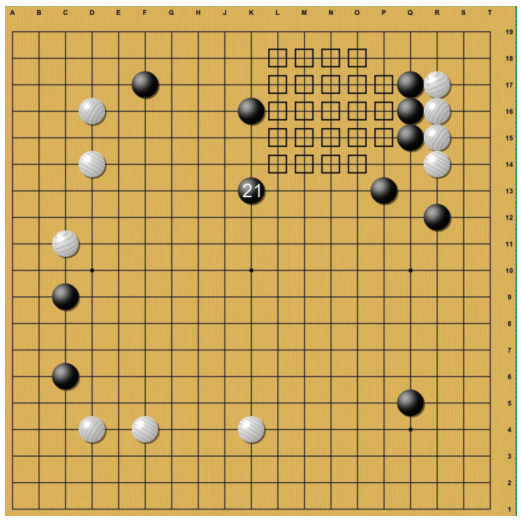

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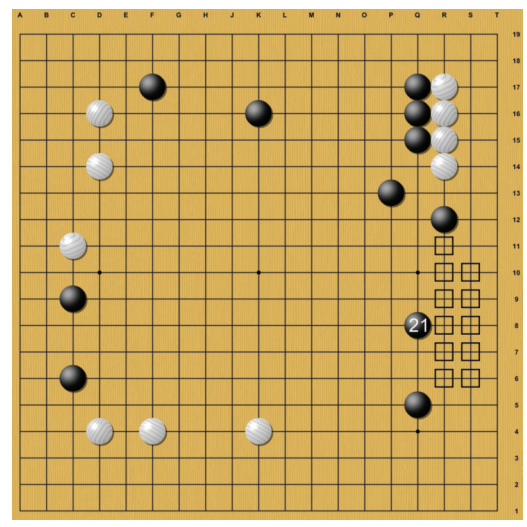

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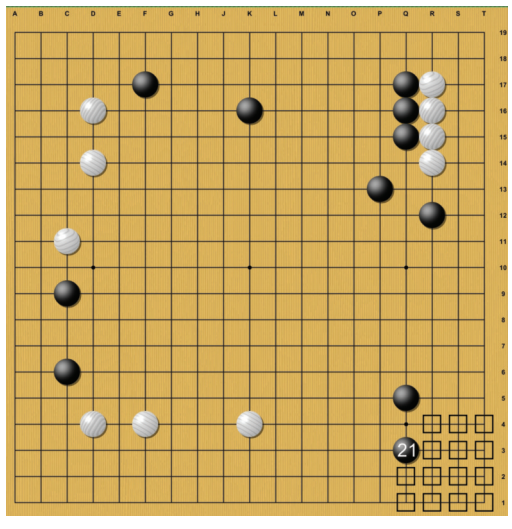
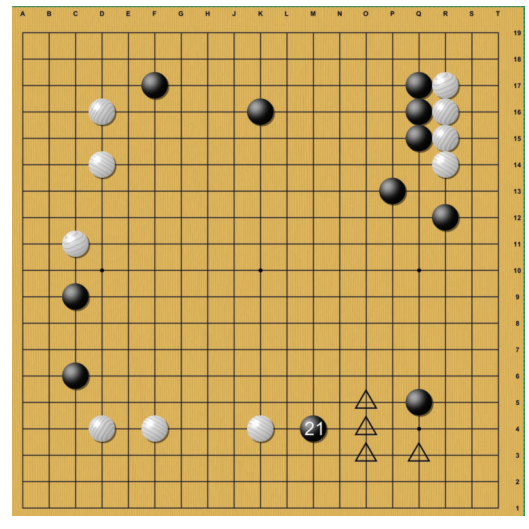
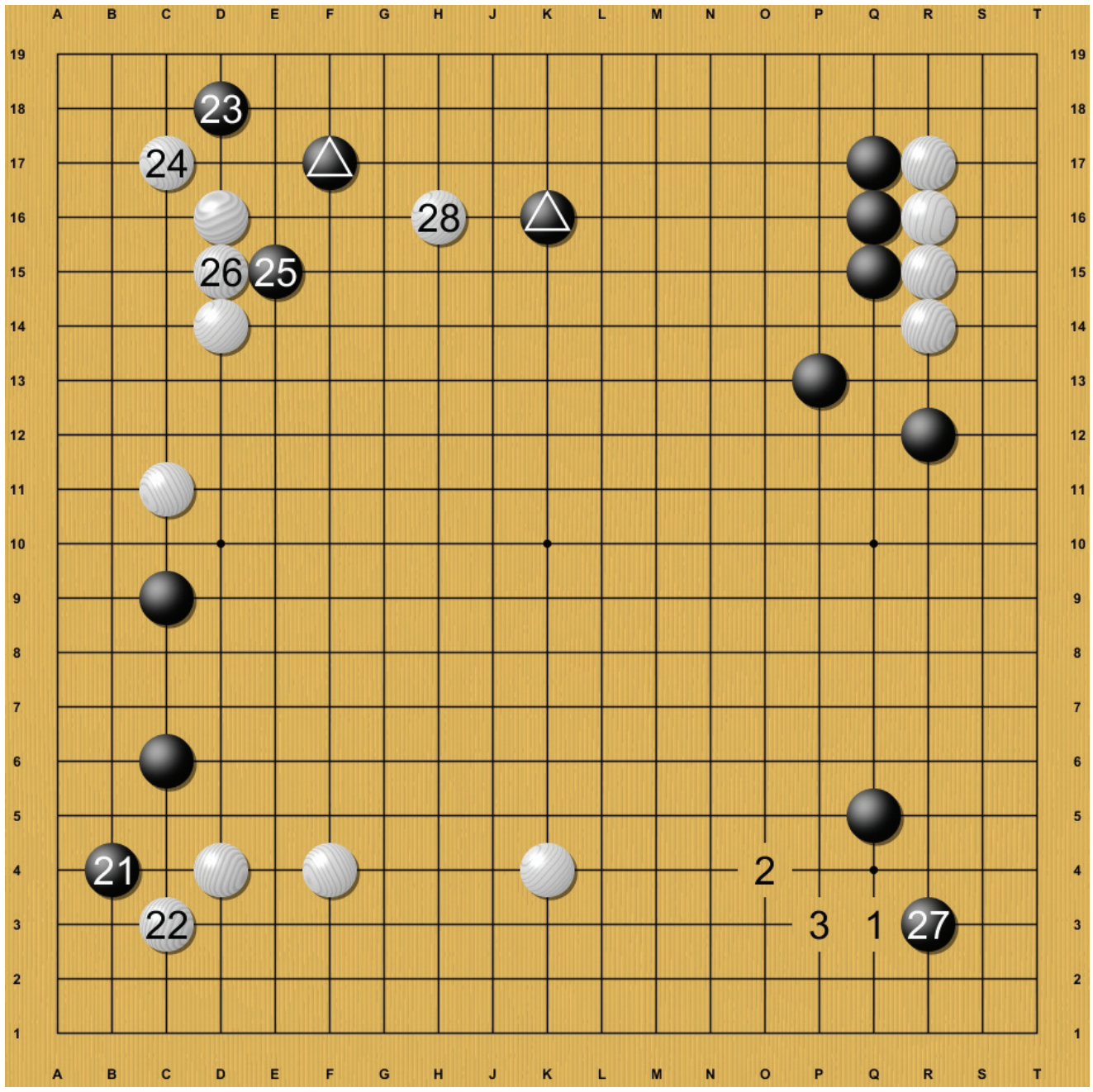


Choice E



Choice F



Moves 21 - 24: Black chooses to try and take as many sente moves as he can from all the choices we described and starts with the corners playing **21** at **B4**. White has to respond at **22** to defend his corner, so Black gets to play again towards another corner resulting in Black and White making another similar exchange with moves **23** and **24**.

Moves 25 - 26: Black got away with two moves and still has the choices we mentioned in **page 41** available. Instead, he goes for the peep at **move 25**, threatening to cut through the only weak point of a one-point jump, believing that this way he strengthens his own group and covers his weak point at **H16.** White does respond by connecting at **26,** since it is rarely a good idea to let your opponent cut your stones, so Black got the sente part right, but as you can see from the diagram, it didn't prevent White's attack.

Move 27: Black **27** is such a misplaced move that it really deserves a page of its own, and indeed the next page will be dedicated to it. Any other choice presented, either **1**, **2** or **3** would have been way better, but Black made a huge mistake which will be causing him trouble for the rest of the game!

Move 28: White is fed up with Black's moves and now that Black gave up sente, he launches an invasion (which we will analyse in **chapter 5**). This is the first time we see something like this and usually the first fight or invasion marks the end of the opening phase and gets us into the **middle game**.

We mentioned that **move 28** was a weak point for Black when he tried to strengthen it with **move 25**, but why was it a weak point? We analysed the different kinds of relations that two stones can have so you will notice that the two marked black stones establish none of them. It looks like an extra-large knight's move and we already explained that this type of relation is the weakest of them all with four weak points, especially if the opponent has friendly stones nearby. And Black extended even further, enlarging that gap, so now the weak point in the middle of the distance between those stones is so severe that it can be invaded, even when the enemy's stones are further away (though the invader still needs some friendly stones around that area to get the best result, as we will see in the next moves).

Move 27 : It looks good for you, but it is actually good for your opponent

(Feel free to skip this page until after you finish the book.)

It is fortunate that I was Black in the game, because I would be hard pressed to explain that move otherwise. It also means that I can point at it and claim that learning from our own mistakes is one of the most effective ways of growing as players and as individuals in general. Avoiding mistakes altogether would have been great, but we all know that this is impossible. **So, what was the idea here?**

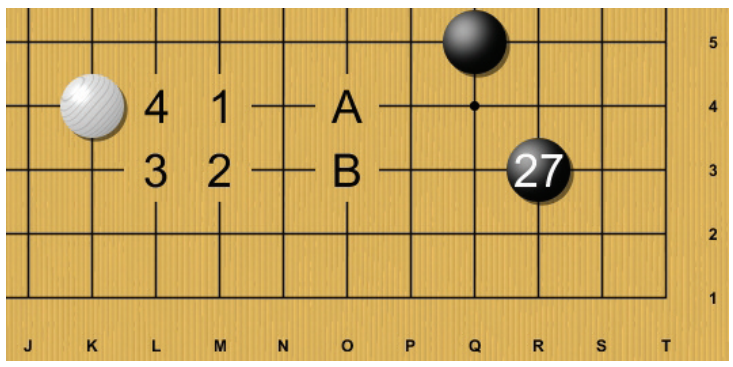
Black was thinking that this move did three things :

A) Securing the corner;

B) Strengthening his lone stone at **Q5** and helping the right side however slightly;

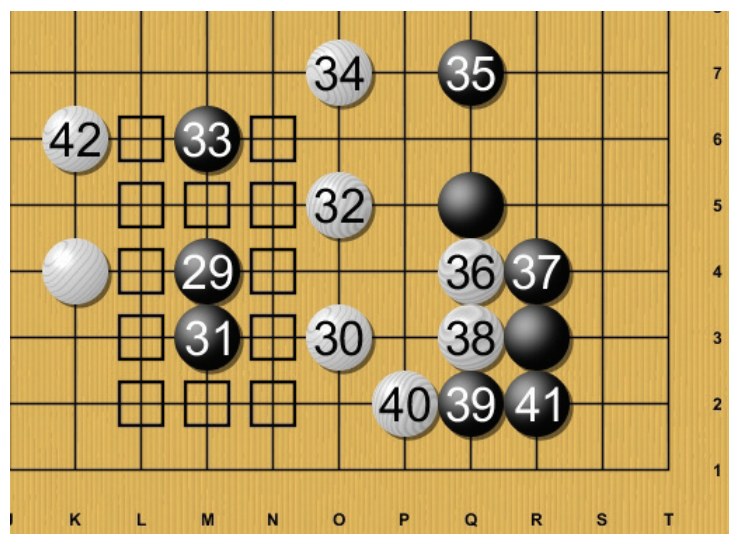
C) Projecting strength towards the bottom for a possible expansion there.

In reality, though, it only manages to secure the corner (and in the smallest, least effective way possible) and fails at everything else that Black believed this move was achieving. Playing at **1** in the diagram in the previous page would have achieved all those things effectively, but Black didn't play that, so let us see what are the problems with **move 27**.

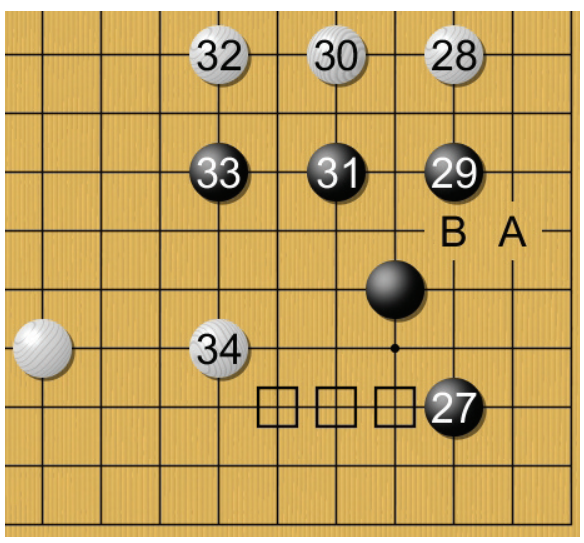


It doesn't help the bottom side

Let us check the image above and suppose that Black plays either **1**, **2**, **3** or **4**. How does move **27** protect those stones from a possible retaliation from White at **A** or **B**?



An example in the image on the right makes clear that it doesn't. Black's marked stones are surrounded because White could invade and threaten Black's **move 27** with moves **36** and **38,** creating room for his stones. There are many possible variations for all those choices, but Black **27** doesn't help as much as playing **27** at **Q3** would have helped Black in any of those variations.

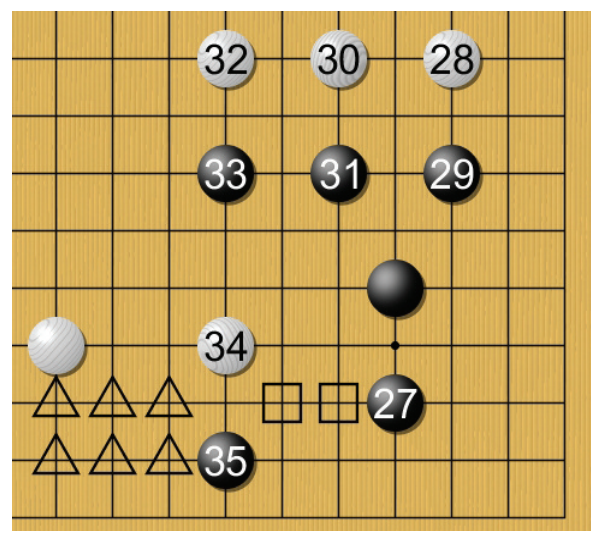


It doesn't help the right side

Compare the two images.

In both cases Black needs to react to White **28**, else White's next move at either **A** or **B** will be causing much trouble.

On the left image, Black **27** is too far away to effectively react to White **34**. Three points of distance is a lot and Black will need to play close to his stone and that is not good enough.



On the right image, the moves are similar, but **Black 27** is in the correct place for Black to immediately counter with **move 35**. Black's stones are connected with a Large Knight's move and now it is White who is in danger. If he doesn't respond, the triangle marked points will be lost in the next move by Black.

⏩ Let’s play - The middle game

Once the first fight breaks on the board and the opposing stones start to mingle, the opening is considered over and we pass to the middle game, where everything starts to get confusing. The guidelines of the opening are no longer as valid as before (though playing moves with good shape is always a valid idea) and all the board is ready to be fought over.

Now, it is worth mentioning that our choices and our preferred strategy during the opening are going to set the tone for the kind of game we are going to play in the middle game. If we played many fourth-line stones during the opening and aimed for influence, we should stick to that theme and try to make it work. If we played third line stones for territory, it is a bit late to fight for influence and we should try to reduce what influence our opponent got and win with the territory we have claimed. In that regard, it is a nice idea to have a mix of all kinds of stones during the first moves and keep our options open, **but every playstyle is valid**.

Feel free to try, experiment and see what you like and what works, what you dislike and what fails. Don’t be afraid of being defeated. Explore and enjoy the game and the knowledge will eventually come, as slowly a preferred strategy and style grows within you.

So many things happen in the middle game. We have ***invasions***, ***reductions***, fights over small and large territories, ***problems of life and death***, capturing races, skilful plays (called ***tesuji***), groups running towards safety or huddling towards the sides trying to survive.

Most of them exist in the game we are currently reviewing, so we will get to have a first glimpse of what all those things are and how they work in practice, but don’t worry: most of those components of the game have their own dedicated parts later in the book, where we will examine them in more detail.

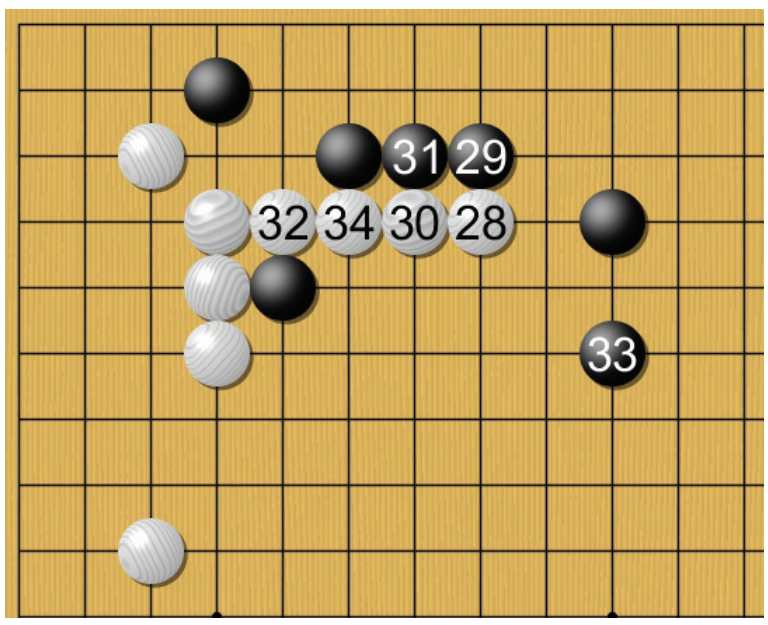
So, since the relatively peaceful opening rules need expansion, what do we do now? We have another, more general, set of guidelines this time:

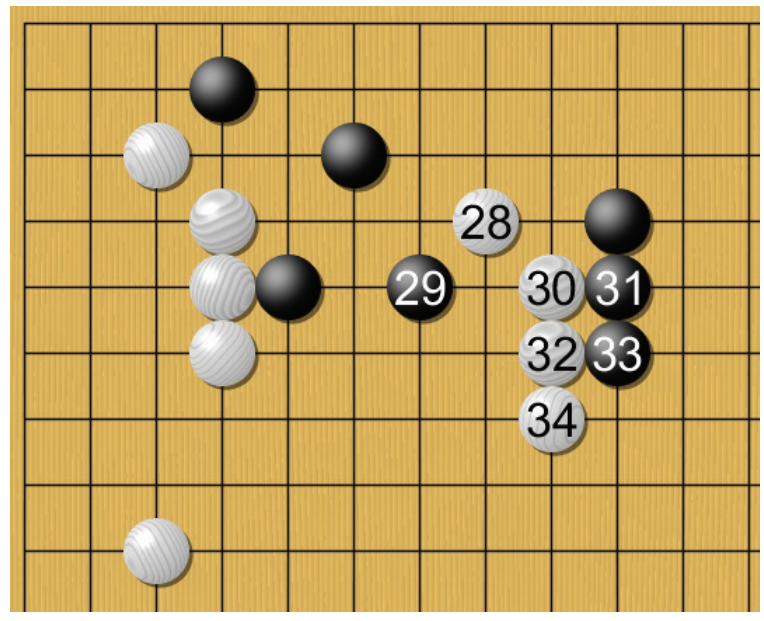
1) Always ask yourself: is my next move **sente** or was my opponent’s move sente? If your opponent played a move you have to respond to, then you should. Playing away (**tenuki**) when our own groups and stones are not safe is not a good idea. When you are safe, rush to take the initiative for yourself.

2) When is our group safe? A group is safe when it either has multiple ways of making two eyes (it has a base) or it can easily link up with another group of our stones. When all your groups are safe, it is your turn to go on the offensive.

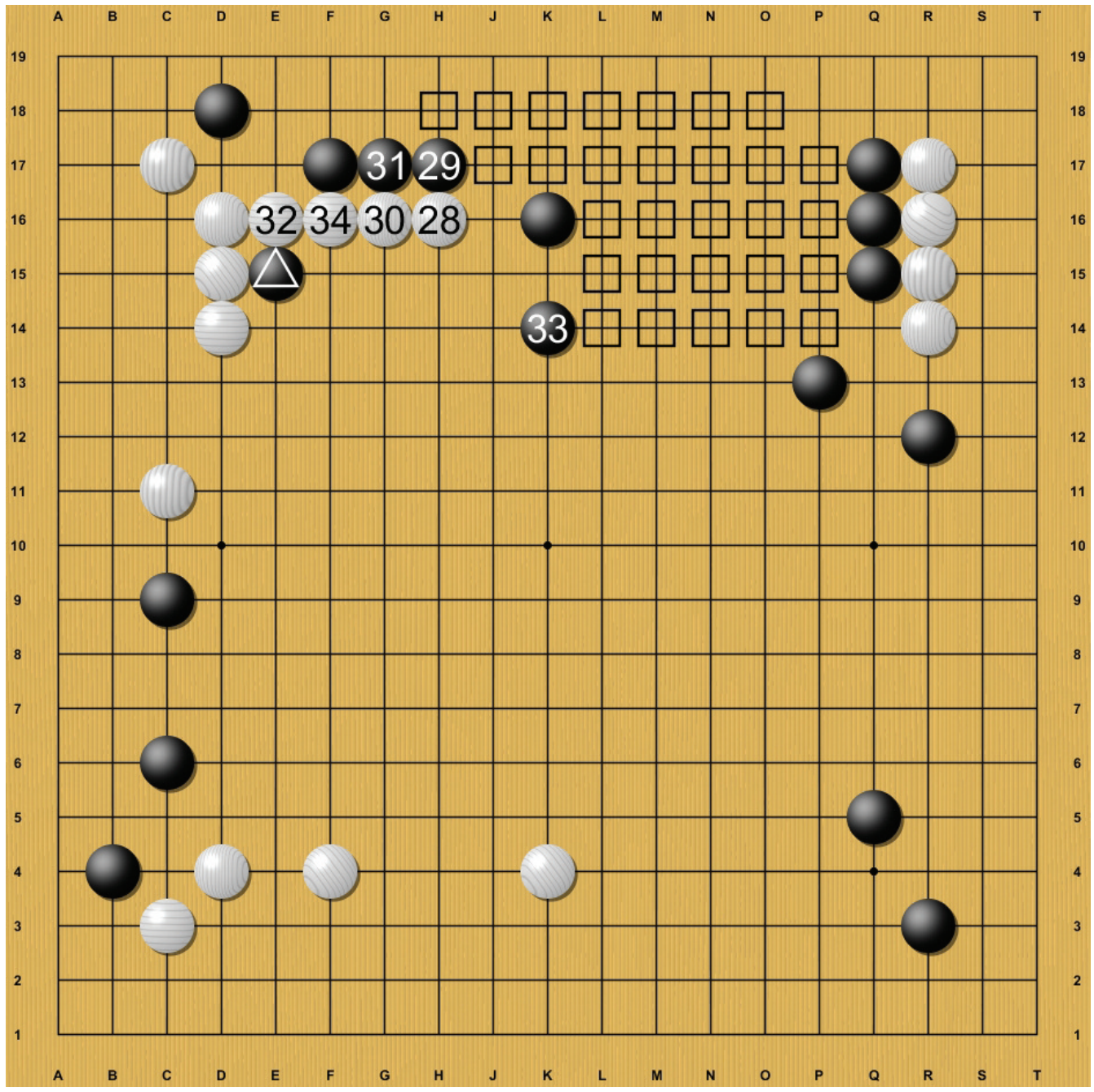
3) Do not create too many groups! Having too many groups makes it difficult to get points. Keep your groups close together or try to connect them. At the same time, try to keep your opponent separated.

4) Stick to your own strategy! Do not be lured by your opponent. Be adaptive to your opponent's moves, but do not panic and try to switch your whole plan in the middle game.
5) Always ask yourself, "where is the vital spot?" It usually is in the center of symmetry between shapes or near the cutting points.
6) Do not forget the direction of play! Target the largest side and and largest areas.
7) Do not fight over petty stuff. Learn to let go. If your opponent spends three moves to capture two of your stones, **let him have them and play large moves elsewhere on the board** that will gain you more than those few points.
8) Count your liberties and play good shapes.
9) Do not be greedy and do not get jealous or afraid over a large area of your opponent's, if you can develop a similar area of your own. You cannot have everything. Go is a game of slightly tipping the balance in your favour, not a game of destructive avarice. It is called **the surrounding game**, not the killing game.
10) Expanding on the previous point, sometimes chasing groups that are weak and have no eyes yet is usually better and more profitable than trying to kill them. Always try to gain free moves from your opponent and harassing weak groups is the easiest way to accomplish that.
11) Last but not least, always play with a purpose behind your moves. Do not just place stones and hope for the best. **Try to plan ahead and read how the moves are probably going to be played out**, just like we do in the examples in this book. Try to imagine the choices, evaluate them and pick the one you think is best.
Now, with all these in mind, let us return to our game :





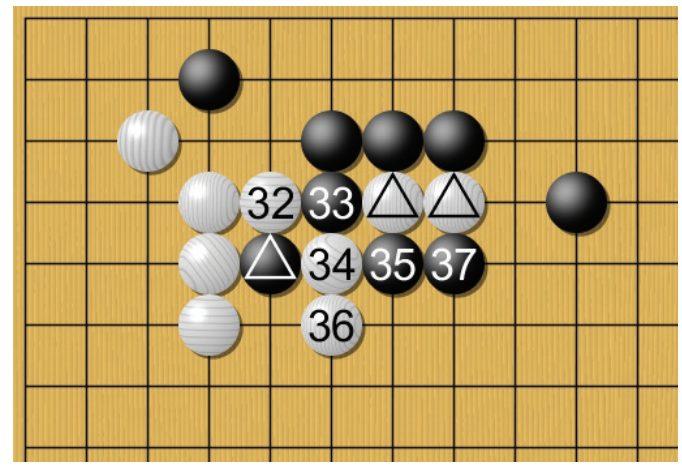
Choices for move 29: White played the invasion at **move 28** trying to split the black stones. Black has many choices here, but his group could eventually get disconnected if he is not careful.
Left image: This is the peaceful approach, in which Black defends, connects his stones, takes the top-right and lets White connect his own invading stone to his nearby group.
Right image: Here we have a running White group. Black tries to keep everything he thought he had claimed and fights to destroy White's invading stones. He takes the top-right again and White runs away, separating Black's stones. After all we talked about, which one would you choose?



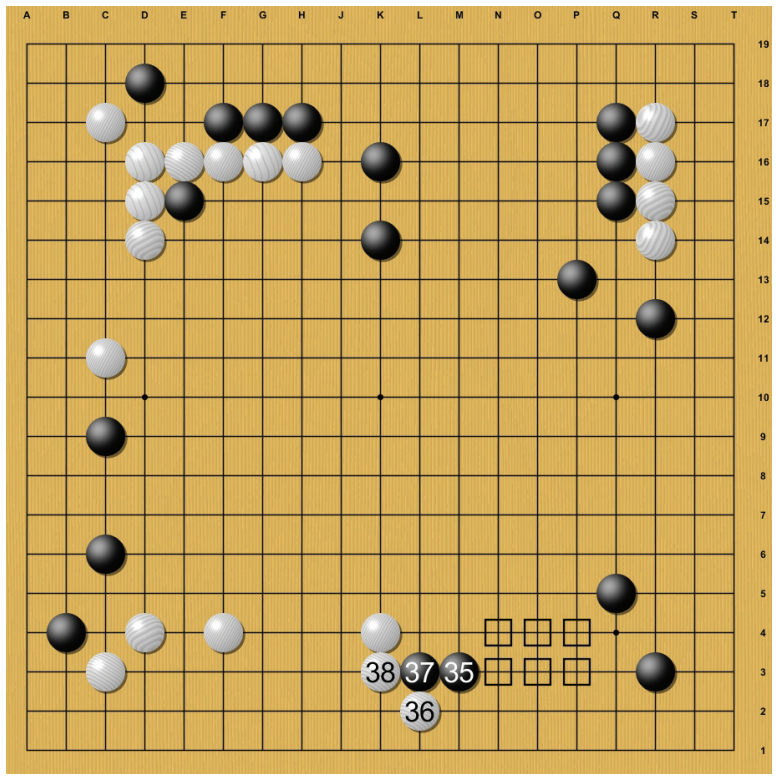
Moves 29 - 31: Black chooses safety first. Both variations were playable, but Black thought that creating a weak group that could get surrounded and killed was not a safe idea. If he could chase the white stones across the board he could have gained a lot, but the risk was not worth it, because White would have to strengthen only his running group, while Black would have to be playing moves on both sides of White's group to keep chasing it, and that is not always practical.

We should always remember that there are many other moves and variations we could play, not to mention the ones our opponent could surprise us with. This means that a good rule to follow is that: **"When in doubt, stay safe and connected."** We can be aggressive when all our groups are strong, but when one of them is weak, we should be more reserved.

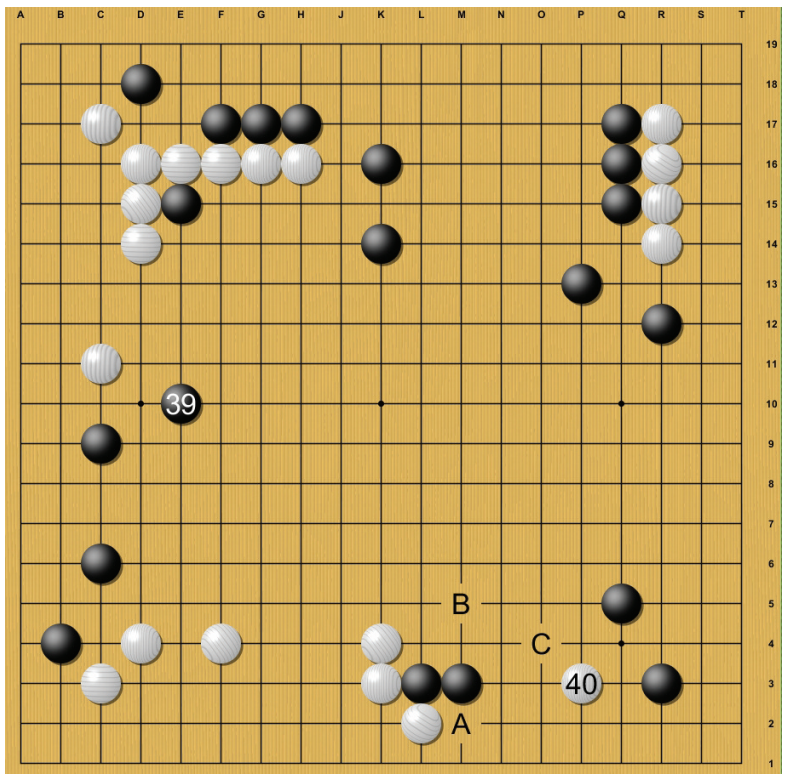
Moves 32 - 34: White threatens to cut through the small Knight's move and wants to connect with his stones. Black takes his idea of safety a bit too far and thinks that playing the larger move at **33** and securing the square-marked top-right points is more important. Sacrificing the triangle-marked stone at **E15** is not really as important and indeed that is consistent with letting an unimportant stone go and not worry, instead of fighting over every little thing on the board.



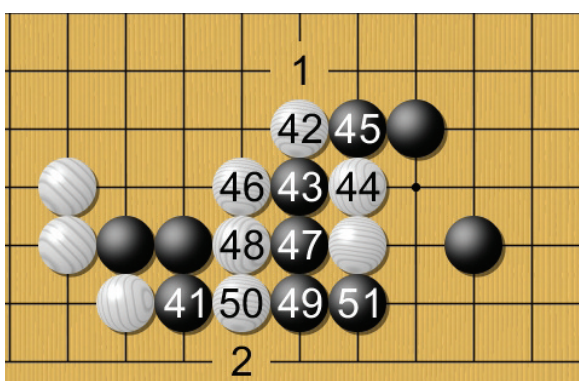
But maybe there was better move? Black forgot that we should strive to keep our opponent's stones disconnected and didn't think of the variation shown on the image on the right. Black resists the connection, White captures one black stone and Black captures both of White's stones, creating a nice side area for him and making him stronger on the top, but now it is White's turn. What tips the balance towards the first move is that Black keeps sente and sometimes **it is worth gaining less, locally, if we get to keep playing sente moves on the board.**



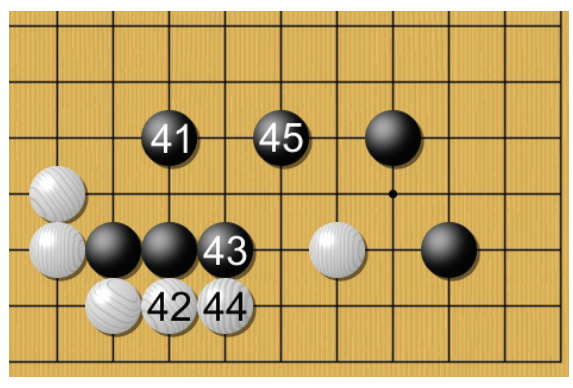
Moves 35 - 38: **Black 35** extends three spaces from his stones, but the distance is too large and the shape is off. The wrong position of **move 27** makes **move 35** seem awkward. If **move 27** was in its correct position below the star point, that extension would have been ideal, but now the marked points are a place of danger for Black.
White 36 defends White's area and sets the stage for White to counterattack and punish Black for his bad shape. Black realises that his stone is in significant danger and seeks to reinforce it with a **sente** move, so he plays **move 37**, threatening to cut White's stones and capture them.
White 38 simply blocks Black's threat for a cut and connects and strengthens his stones. So, Black still has sente.



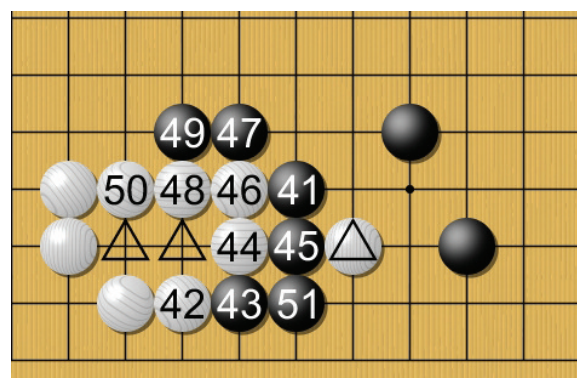
Moves 39 - 40: Black thinks that the bottom right is safe, so he decides to play elsewhere to try and stay in sente. He changes his field of focus and plays **move 39** on the left side. Normally such a move would threaten to reduce White's potential area or even threaten a direct invasion. But after the exchanges in the top left, White has a very strong wall there and his stones and area cannot be effectively attacked.
So, Black made a common mistake here. **We should never try to threaten or attack strong stones.** White is strong enough to be able to ignore Black's move and he finally gets sente for himself.
The invasion of **White 40** is the result of Black's series of small misplays. White invades between Black's stones in the area we marked as dangerous previously and Black has three choices. **A**, **B** and **C**.



Choice A
Here Black tries to cut White's stones and directly defend his area with **move 41**.
After this variation White has sente and can either extend at **1** and head for the center, further reducing Black, or extend at **2** and capture Black's three stones.

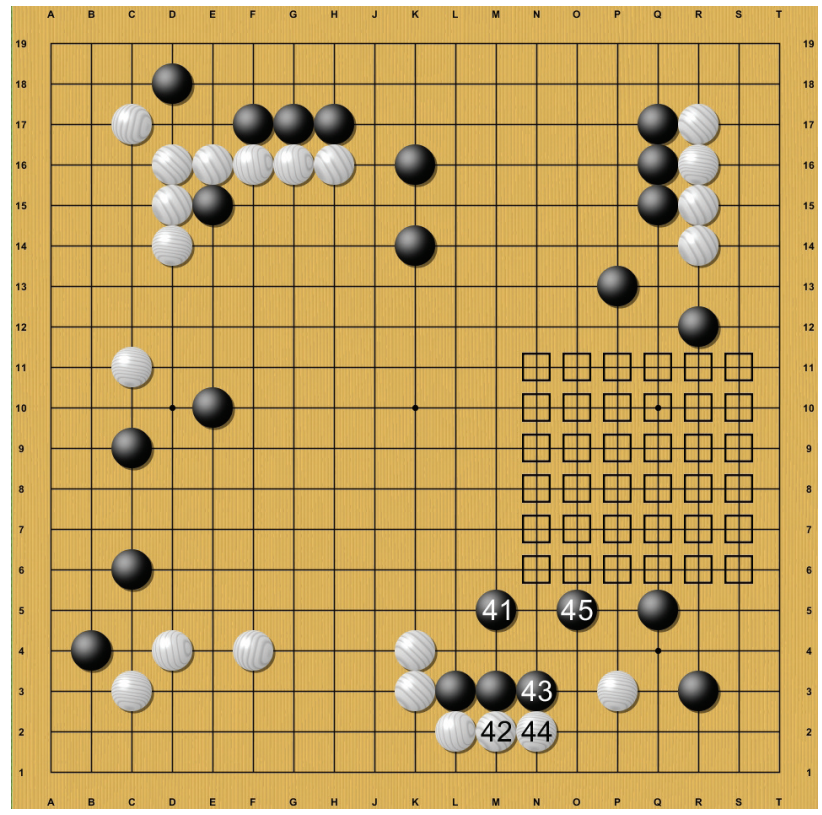


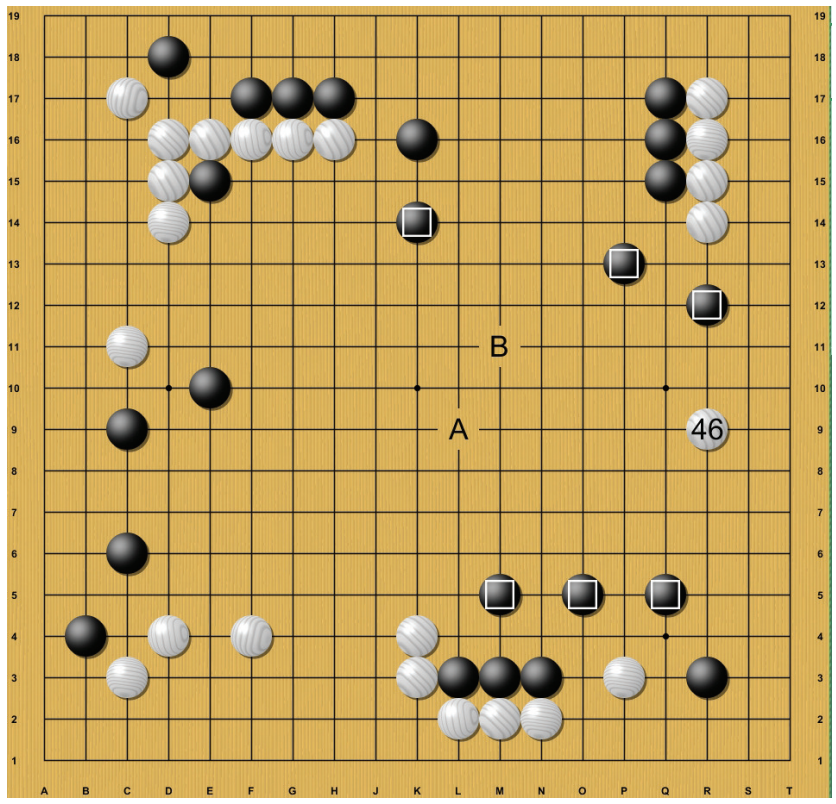
Choice B
Black tries to engulf the white stone, forcing White to play **42** on the second line or else Black could play there next and reclaim all his area, surrounding White's invading stone. In this variation Black gains side and center influence.



Choice C
Here Black tries to block White's access to the center. He loses his initial stones in the process (marked with the triangles), but captures White's invading stone and gains a large corner while sealing White out of the right side and the center.

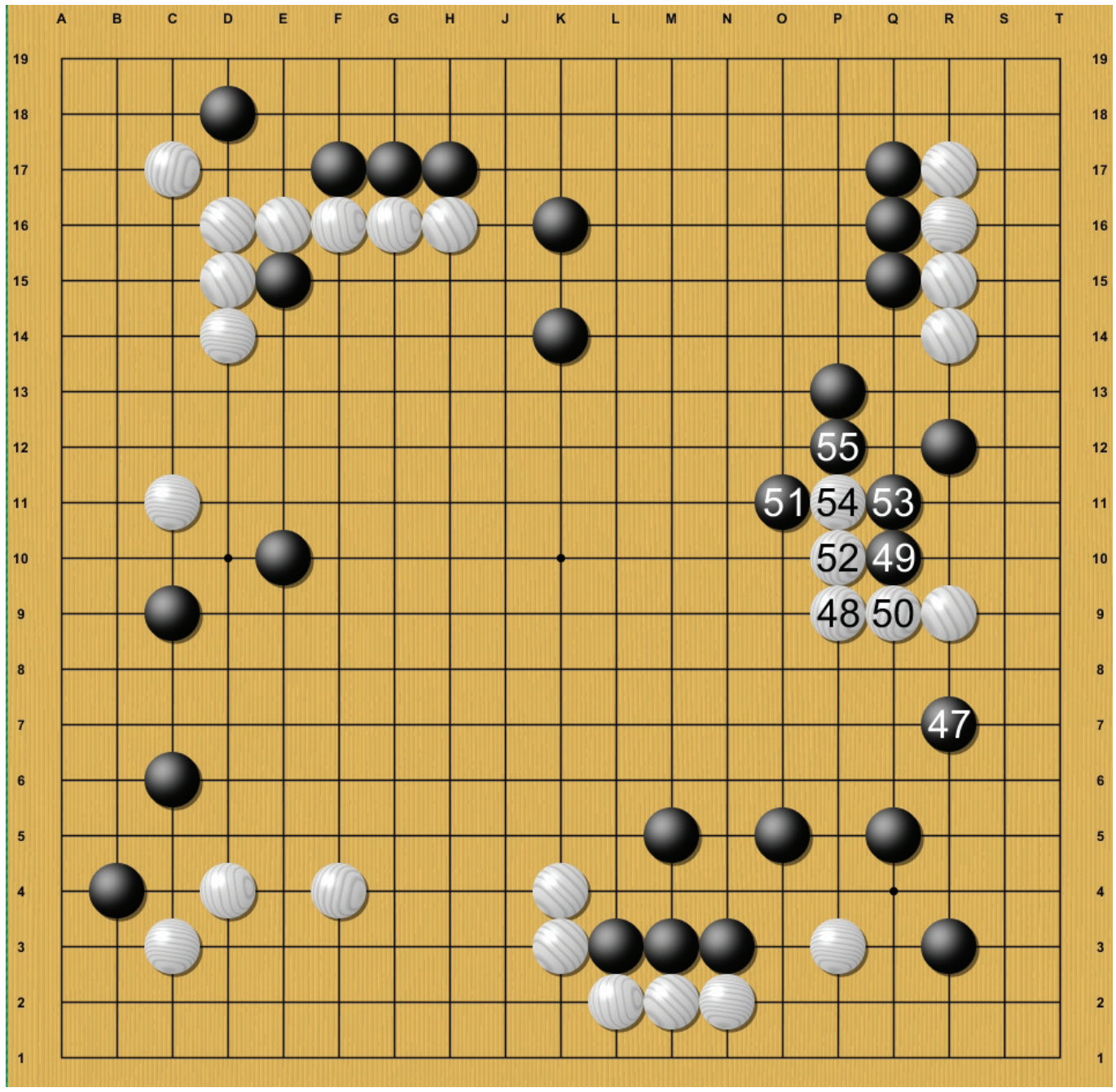
Moves 41-45: Black chooses **B**. The result at **C** seems arguably better for Black, but the moves in that variation are not all sente and Black is rattled by the invasion and afraid that White has some move up his sleeve which Black hasn't thought of. **That is not an unreasonable cause for worry.** The instances where we cannot predict our opponent's next move are going to be quite a lot while we are learning the game, so it is not a bad idea to be careful. In the variation that was chosen, all moves are sente, meaning that White has to respond to them exactly where he played, else risk losing his invading stone. Imagine in each White move, White playing elsewhere and Black placing a stone where a White stone was placed. It would have been a disaster for White. So, Black chooses what he believes is the safest and predictable variation, plus **moves 41** and **45** create a light wall. The marked points illustrate Black's influence, which is only a few moves away from turning into territory.





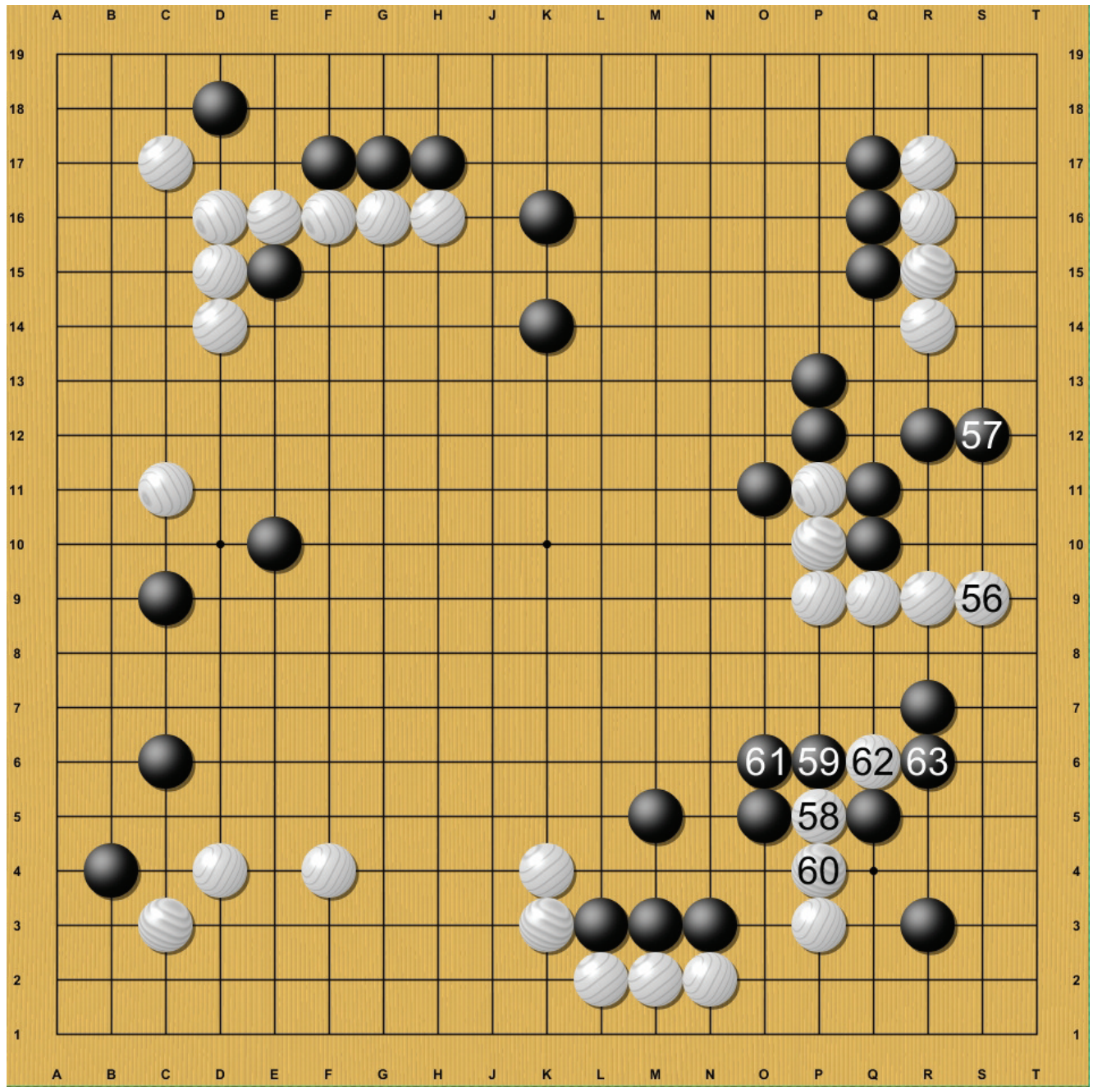
Move 46: Black lost some points but he got influence towards an area he was already trying to develop. White, who was forced to play **moves 42** and **44** on the second line, is not very happy now with his initial decision to invade Black. He has to break that huge area apart. In such cases we usually have two choices. Either another invasion deep in the opponent's area or a light reduction above or around the opponent's influence. We will discuss these two options extensively in **chapter 5** and how we can choose when to reduce and when to invade, but for now the short story is that when our opponent has many strong stones in an area, then we should tread lightly and try to reduce from afar, instead of rushing in and trying to live forcefully around enemy stones. So, a reduction by playing around **A** or **B** is a good choice where White can either live or connect his stones with another group. But White is afraid that Black's potential points on the right side are too many to ignore and might cost him the game, so he takes the risk and plays another invasion at **46** even though his previous invasion had strengthened Black in the area. **White 46** is totally surrounded by the marked Black stones.

Beware! Invading one part of the board, might make it difficult to invade another nearby part, because usually while we are taking away points from our opponent, we are forced to exchange these for outside influence, making our next moves less effective.



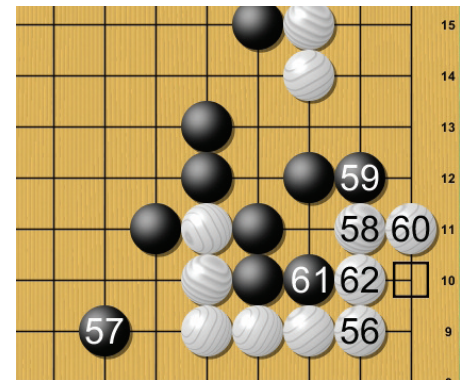
Moves 47 - 48: Black is still unsure about what is going on and he still tries to stay on the safe side. So, Black plays the attack at **47** to prevent White from possibly creating a base and living within Black’s stones. White is under a severe attack and jumping out towards the center with **move 48** is almost the only choice when a stone is under attack from both sides.
Moves 49 - 50: **Black 49** tries to sneak in a free move and make White’s group heavy (see below for the definition). **White 50** is almost an automatic response, since White cannot afford to be cut while under attack.
Moves 51 - 52: Black jumps out with **move 51** as well, trying to keep the white group surrounded, and **White 52** threatens two things: to head for the White group on the top right or capture **Black 49** thus making White’s invasion gain an eye and possibly succeed.
Moves 53 - 55: Black resists the capture with **53**, but White insists in his effort to reach the safety of the top right White group with **54**. **Black 55** stops that possibility from that direction and ensures the good shape of the black stones. Now White is slowly getting more and more surrounded and he has five heavy connected stones and no eyes. Things are looking grim for White.

Light group is a group of stones which are not directly connected and can be cut without us having to pay a heavier price than the loss of the cut stones. You could think of a light group as a group that contains disposable stones which we can sacrifice for the greater good of the whole group or our strategy.
Heavy group is a group of stones that are connected together, but is not alive yet and it can have one or no eyes at all. All the stones are connected, so we cannot abandon a small piece of it behind and escape with a part of it, as with light groups. A heavy group lives or dies as one, so it is to our interest to make an opposing group heavy before attacking it, forcing our opponent to save all of it and invest a lot of moves to bring it all to safety.



Moves 56 - 57: White plays **56** threatening to try to connect with his top right group or create the space for an eye and strengthen his position, if Black ignores his move and plays elsewhere. Black wants to keep White separated so he plays **57** on **s12** which ends the possibility of White connecting that way and he threatens the group on the top right, as well.

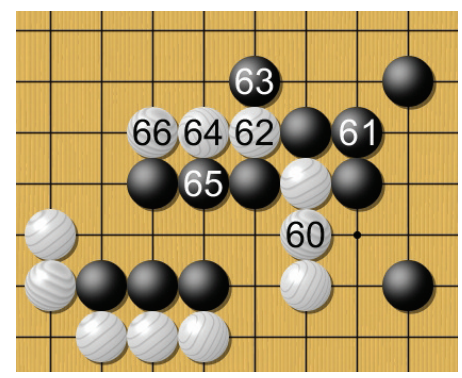
Right image: One variation can be seen here, where Black plays **57** to surround White and gives him the opportunity to play a lot of sente moves and create an eye in the squared marked point.

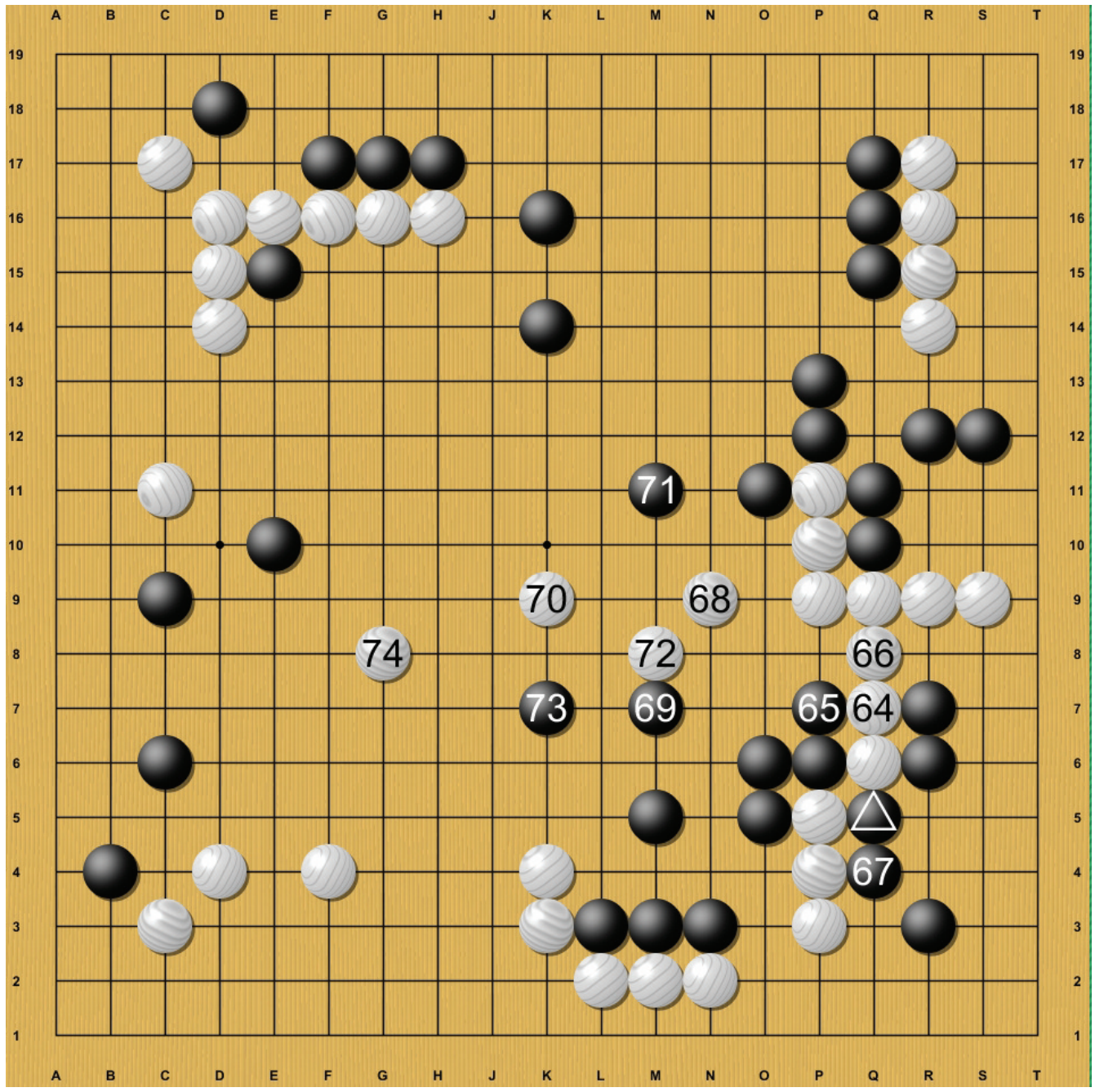


Always keep in mind: Preventing our opponent's groups from connecting with each other is often an important objective in the game. Even if we have to sacrifice some points, it is usually worth trying to keep the opponent's groups separated and weak, so that we can profit from attacking them later.

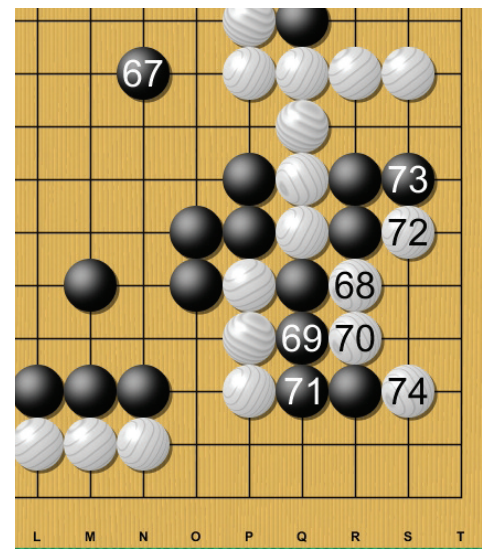
Moves 58 - 60: White cannot spend a move to strengthen his top right group since his invading group is in critical danger, so he tries to break through the one point extension of Black, with **move 58**, but that doesn't work. **Black 59** places White's stone in atari, so White has to extend with **60**.

Moves 61 - 63: Black needs to connect his stones, but how to decide between playing in **o6** and **q6**? In those cases we reinforce the stone that is in more danger if attacked. If Black plays **move 61** in **q6** then the variation on the **image on the right** is a possible result. White would surround and kill Black's six stones and win a huge fight. Black cannot allow this, so, back in the main diagram, he plays **o6** in move **61**. White tries to cut anyway with **62**, but Black's stones are not in danger in this side, so **Black 63** places White in atari and seems to settle the matter.



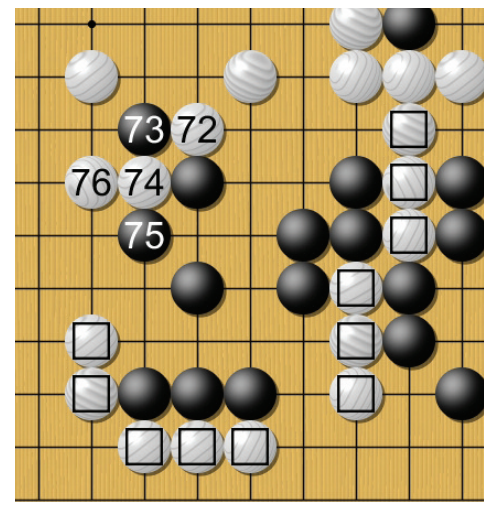


Moves 64 - 67: White extends with **move 64** trying to save his cutting stone and **Black 65** places him in atari, so **White 66** is inevitable. White's stones are now connected but almost totally surrounded and with no eyes. Black's triangle marked stone though is in deep trouble, so Black cannot finish off White's group and needs to go back and defend with **move 67** or his stones would get captured instead with a variation like in the **image on the right**. If something like that were to happen Black's stones would have been captured and White's invasion would have immediately be transformed from a weak surrounded group, to a strong alive group.

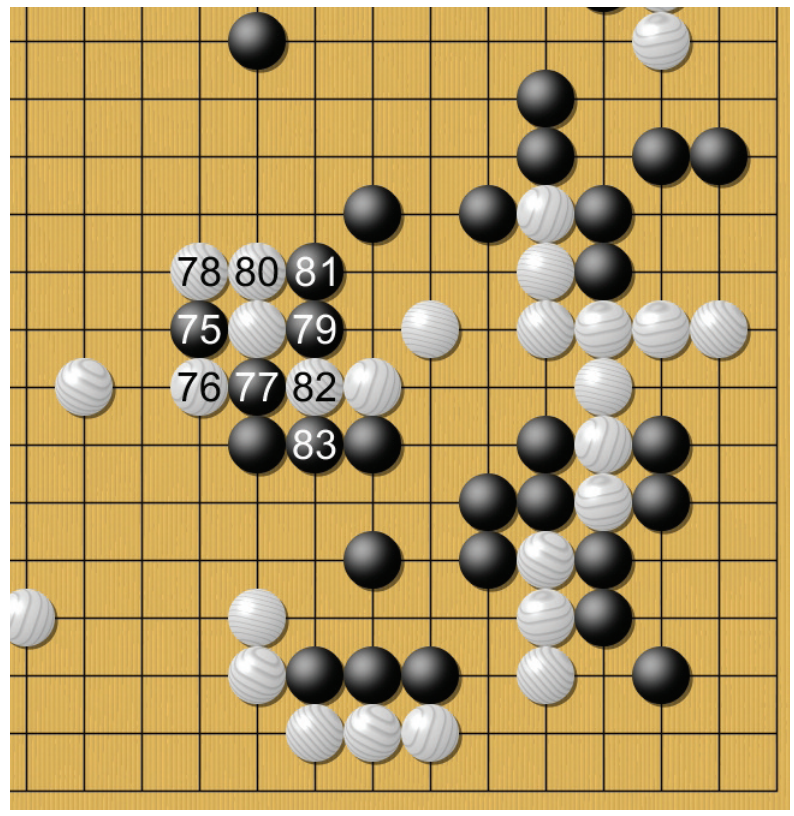


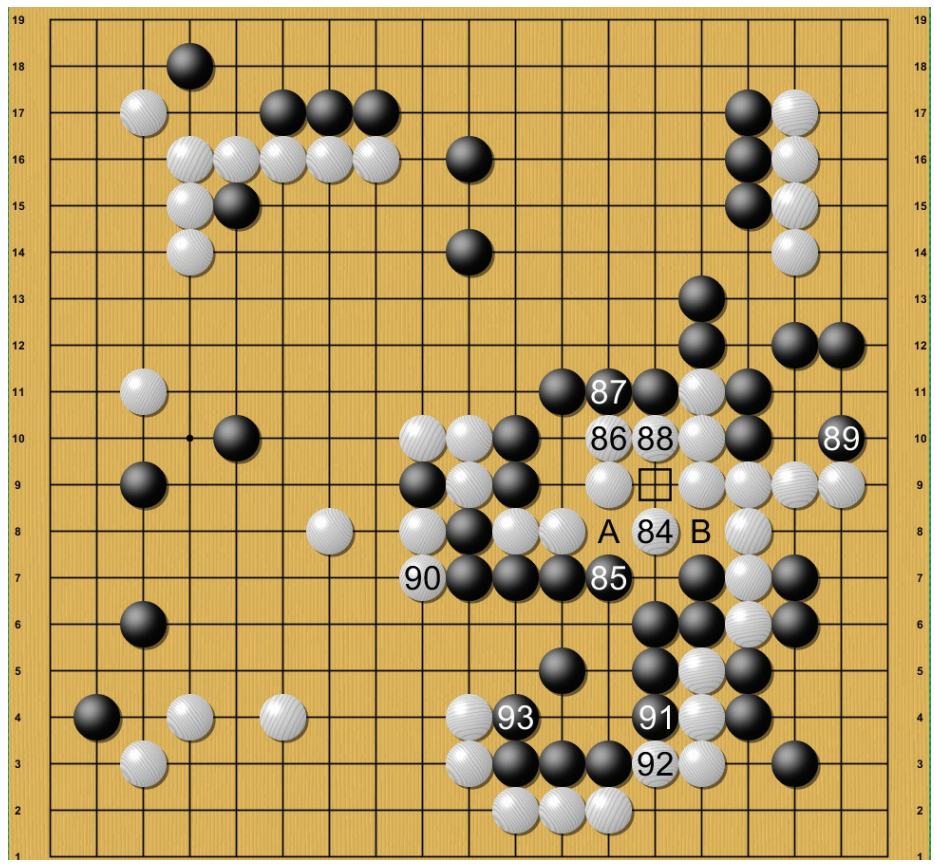
Attacking is fun and satisfying, but if you do not pause to defend your own weak points, your attacks will be meaningless.

Moves 68 - 74: With another option gone, now White can only run away to the center, so he jumps with **68**. Black tries to follow him and keep the pressure with **69** and White jumps even further with **70**. Black plays **71** to keep White from turning towards the top, so White plays **72** to defend his two space extension and to try to lure Black in making an overplay, like the one on the **image on the right** which would result <u>again</u> into a Black group getting surrounded! Black is worried that White is escaping, but there is nothing else he can do at this moment **than play safe and maintain good shape**. So, Black plays **73** to keep up the pressure and give his own group some breathing space. White gets bold and jumps even further with **74** with a large knight's extension this time.

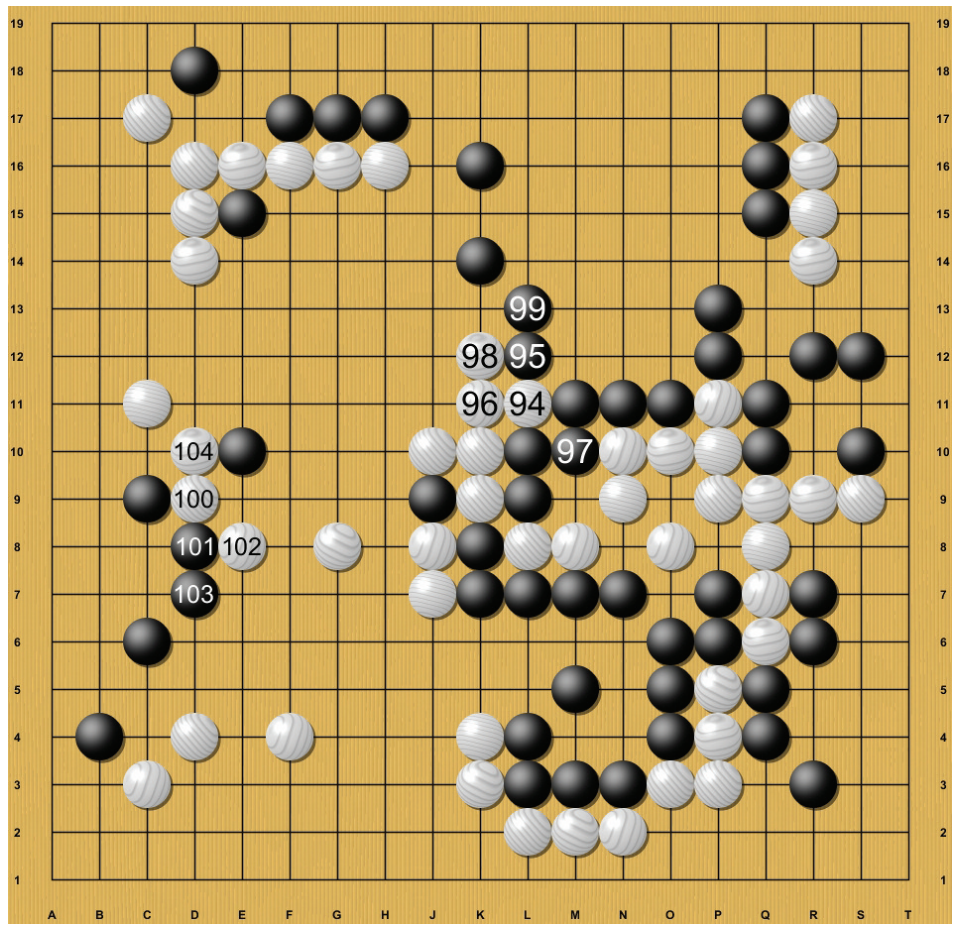


Moves 75-83: But as we have already seen, a large knight's move can be cut, especially if there are nearby stones to help us do it, and this sequence of moves manages exactly that. **Black 75** cuts and White has to respond at **76** to try to connect his stones, but **Black 77** severs their connection. **White 78** tries to capture one of the cutting stones, but **Black 79** cuts White's stones from every side and places the White stone in atari, forcing **White 80**. White cannot defend both sides at the same time, so Black extends with **move 81** to connect his cutting stones. **White 82** makes another attempt to split Black and reconnect the stones, but **Black 83** denies that possibility. Now the White group on the right is cut off and completely surrounded and without any eyes.
It looks dead, but such large groups are always dangerous to be around and sometimes as the game progresses they can threaten to return to life.



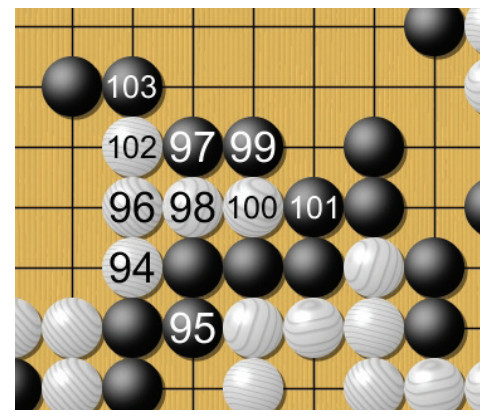


Moves 84-85: White keeps on trying to create potential weaknesses to exploit (called "**aji**") and lead his group to live or safety. So White plays **move 84** threatening to cut in Black's middle group which has also been slowly getting surrounded while it was attacking White. Black blocks with **85** and hopes that he is alive. If White kills his group then the game is lost, so Black is also feeling the heat and it is by no means an easy fight for him.
Moves 86-88: **White 86** is threatening to cut Black again and Black has to connect with **move 87**, but by doing so it allows White to play **move 88** and create an eye in the square marked point, since **moves A** and **B** are **miai**, which means that if Black plays in either position, White will respond in the other and still create an eye.
Moves 89-93: Black has failed to prevent White from making an eye, but we know by now that **two eyes are needed** to make a living group, so he plays **move 89** to use his move to prevent any possibility, however small, of a second eye in the only area the White group has enough space for it. White sees his eye-making options depleted so he is switching goals and he tries to kill the Black group by trying to surround it with **move 90.** Black responds with **move 91**, threatening to create two eyes in the next move. **White 92** tries to prevent him from playing there again, but **Black 93** succeeds in making enough space for two eyes anyway. **Black is alive and seems safe**...



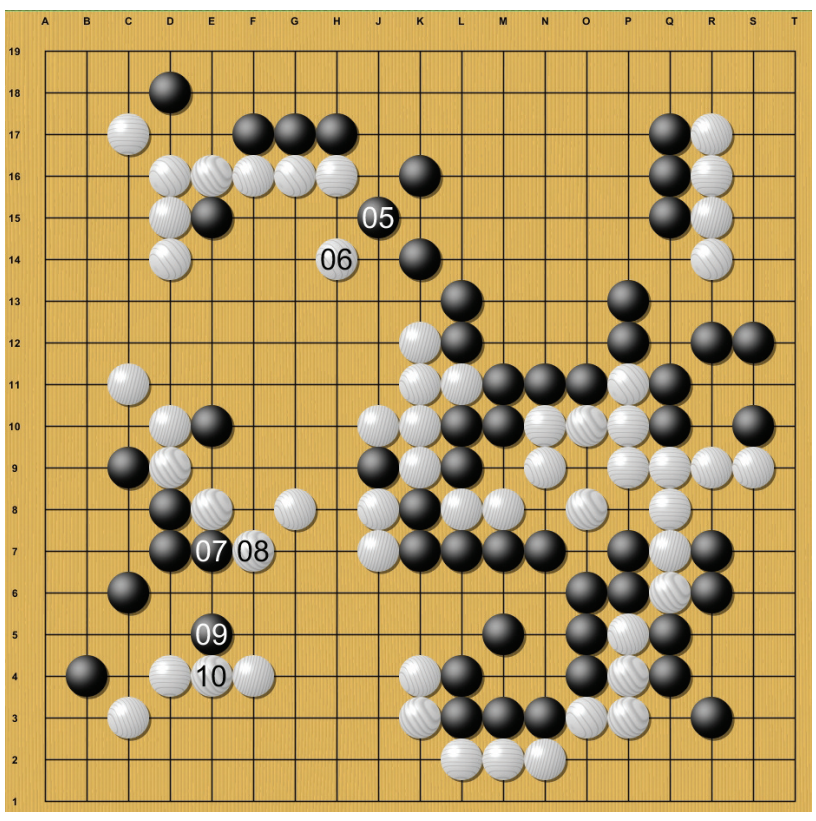
Moves 94-99: White makes the final effort to cut Black with **move 94**, which forces Black to atari White with **move 95** in order to defend.

Right image: If Black tried to simply connect his stones, as he eventually did later, he would have lost some territory without reason, as we can see in the diagram.



Back in the main diagram, White **96** simply extends and connects his stones, so Black now has to defend his stones and connect as well, with **move 97**. White extends with **98** threatening Black's territory and creating a small wall. Black has no other choice other than defending his cutting points and territory, by extending to **99**.

Moves 100-104 : White now tries to utilize the wall he just made, so he cuts the small knight's extension with **move 100**. Black sees that White has many stones nearby, so he decides to give up his stone and not resist the cut, so he plays safe at **101**. **White 102** threatens to atari the black stone, so **Black 103** keeps defending the group. White completes the cut with **move 104** and he seems to have created a nice box of **potential territory** (called **moyo**) in the middle and the left.



Moves 105-106: Black doesn't like White's development, so he tries with **move 105** to get inside White's territory in the safest way possible, while slightly enlarging his own box of potential territory on the upper side and middle. **White 106** is preventing Black from doing so in a large scale, but it does leave further moves of possible reduction for later.

Moves 107-110: Since the top is safe, Black moves to the bottom left and he threatens to atari a white stone with **move 107**. White plays **move 108** at a pivot making the tiger's mouth and manages to defend all his stones at the same time. **Black 109** threatens to cut white's stones, so the obvious response by White is the connection at **110.** With that move the middle game ends. Most of the large territories and major fights are done, and so we move on **to the endgame phase**, where the players usually fight over smaller areas and second line territory in the edges of the board.

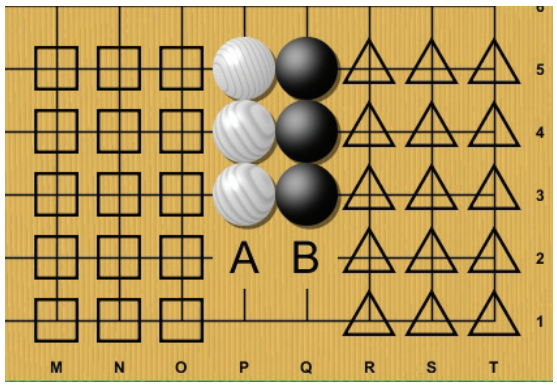
Let's play - The endgame

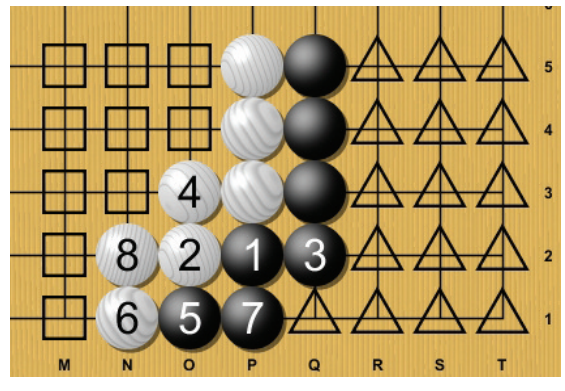
The borders between the middle game and the endgame are not really well defined and many times you can play endgame moves in the middle game and vice versa. As a general idea though, when the corners, sides and the middle of the board is mostly claimed and the only thing left is small moves that reduce an area slightly or moves along the first and second line of the board, then we can say that we are in the endgame phase of the game.

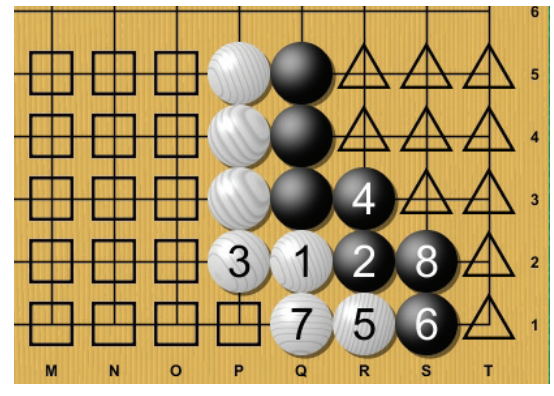
Many players do not regard the endgame as really important since the moves seem to be small, but it is a phase of the game where the outcome can indeed change hands, since small gains, in various places of the board can amount to a significant amount of points. Also this is the phase of the game where aji or dead groups can play a very significant part and you will find yourself in games where even the last move could be the one that eventually cost you the whole game. We will see such examples of such skillful moves (called ***tesuji***) later, in a chapter reserved for that purpose, but for now let us lay some guidelines for the endgame, as we did for the previous two phases.

Two things are the most important in the endgame. Locating the **larger moves** and playing the moves that are **sente** (moves which our opponent cannot ignore and must respond to), even if they are not the largest ones. Let us see why and how each of them are important.

So, how do we evaluate the possible moves and decide which one is larger?







Left image: Let us see this common example. If Black and White were to keep extending their walls, they would each get the marked points. The squared for White, the triangled for Black. But usually players try to get the most out of the end-game so Black would play at **A** and White at **B.**

Center image: So, something like this sequence of moves is possible. In this case, Black's moves, cost White **five points** which were squared in the first diagram and Black won **one extra point** in one of the previously neutral points. So, this sequence was worth **six points.**

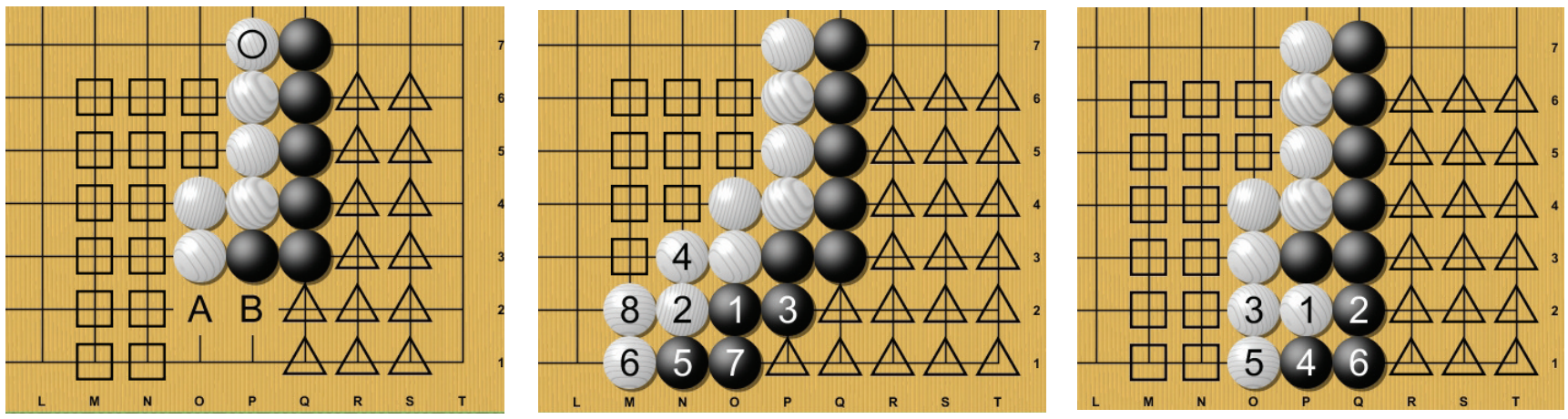
Right image: If it had been White's turn to play and the same sequence of moves was followed, then Black is losing **five points** compared to the first diagram and White is gaining **one point**.

So, the player who has sente and plays first, swings the game by **six points and keeps sente!**

Counting and evaluating the worth of our moves in the early or middle game is not easy, but the endgame areas are smaller and easier to calculate. Acquiring this good habit can help us start learning how to evaluate our moves on the board at every stage of the game.

In the previous example we should make clear that playing first is not really worth twelve points, but it is a swing of six points. The difference seems small, but it is quite important. If White and Black at that moment were tied at 60 points each, someone playing out that endgame sequence wouldn't result in a 66-54 score, but in a 61-55 score.

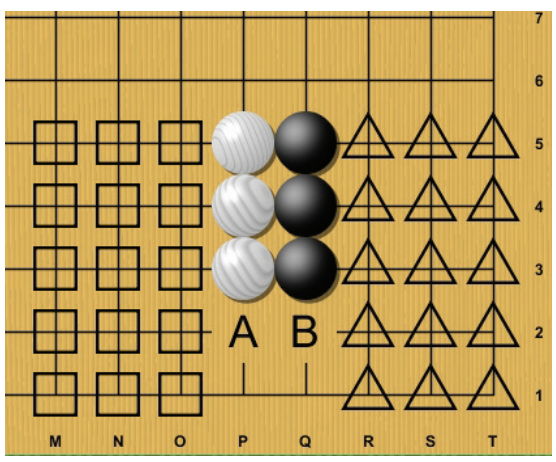
Of course there are many examples where the gains of one move are greater for one player and quite less for the other, making an endgame move urgent for one side and un-important for the other. For example, a common variation of the previous position is this one :

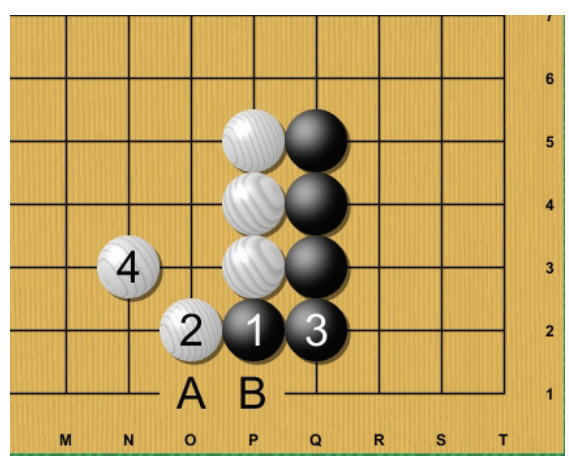


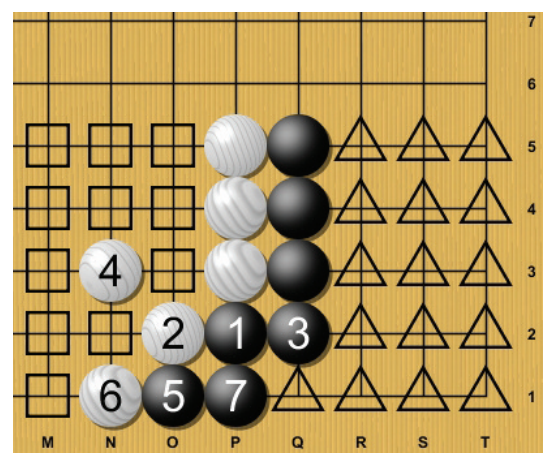
Left image: In this position Black had already made a hane during the middle game, so he has the advantage during the endgame. If we were to suppose again that both opponents just extended towards the edge of the board, the marked points would be the end results for both of them.
Center image: If Black plays first here we see the same familiar pattern from the previous example. Black destroys five of White's potential points and he gets one point for himself, while **keeping sente**. This exchange is, again, worth **six points**.
Right image: If White plays first, Black simply blocks and White has to connect at **3**, as well. Since it is Black's turn he can continue the sequence ending with **White keeping sente**, but Black only losing **two points**. So, the endgame for this case is **not** worth the same for both players.

Finding the largest move is important, but keeping sente, can be said to be more worth than points. Think about it. What is a better choice, to play a large endgame move that will give you a swing of ten points, but which gives sente to your opponent so that he can start reducing your territory, or playing smaller moves worth two or three points, but which let you keep sente and keep playing more and more of these moves? More often than not, the latter choice is the most profitable one. The only cases where this is not true, are when your opponent will not have any good endgame moves left or he has endgame moves that will force him to give up sente, as well. Always remember, **an endgame move you play, is an endgame move your opponent can no longer play**. Winning the swing of points consistently for your side can alter a game significantly and with minimum effort, compared to the middle game. The endgame is, comparatively, the least complex part of playing Go, which makes it an ideal phase for us beginners to focus and improve on.

Last, but not least, for the moment is the fact that despite our calculations, we shouldn't expect out opponents to oblige us and play exactly what we expect them to play. For instance, let us return to the first example:







Left image: We start again from this position as Black and we happily play **A** thinking that we are going to get a six point swing and keep sente. So, we ask White "can we please do the simple sequence where you lose so many points?" and...

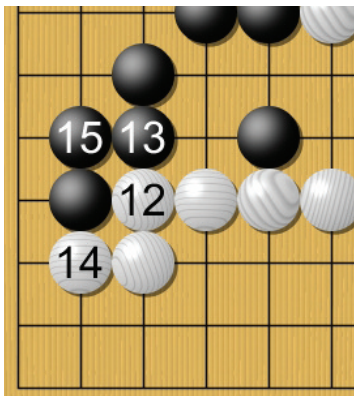
Center image: White, this time, says : "**No!**". By playing the tiger's mouth at **4**, White made the next exchange in the sequence, not sente for either player and he is losing less points than before. If Black continues with his previous plan...

Right image: Then Black finds out that he won **one point** again, but White now lost **four points** and **got sente**. This is not a good result for Black so, after the previous diagram, Black usually plays elsewhere and leaves this position as it is, for later.

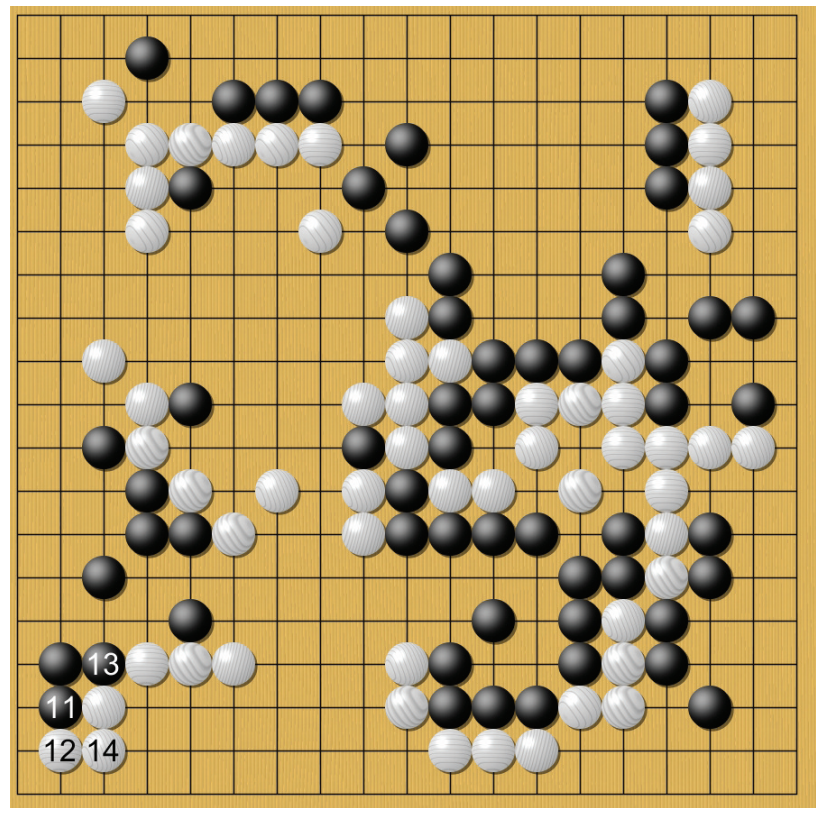
Having sente is not something that is easy to evaluate, so we usually want to play as many sente moves as possible, before playing an endgame move that would give sente to our opponent.

We will talk a lot more about the intricacies of the endgame and the fights which happen on the low lines of the board, later, in chapter 6 about **life and death** and the sub-chapter about **tesuji** (skillful moves). For now, having covered the basic ideas of the endgame, we can return to the game and see the practical application of all these ideas.

Moves 111-114: Black begins the endgame so he has sente and tries to find a move which White needs to respond, so he plays **move 111**. White cannot ignore this move or the threat for a follow-up atari of Black's **move 113**, so White needs to defend with **112** and **114** in order to protect his corner. How many points are those moves worth?



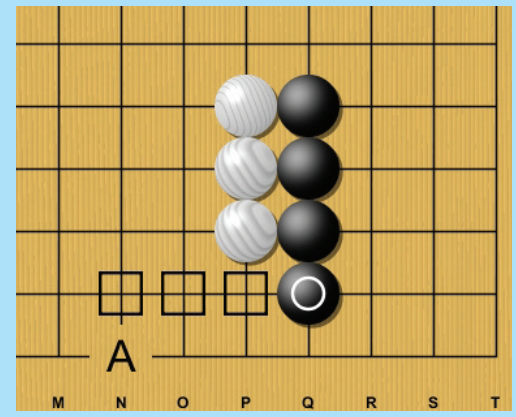
Left image: Here we see the result in the corner if White had moved there first, so the swing in points is not very impressive. Just **two points** but Black doesn't mind that, because it is his turn again, so he kept **sente** and with it the ability to play another endgame move.

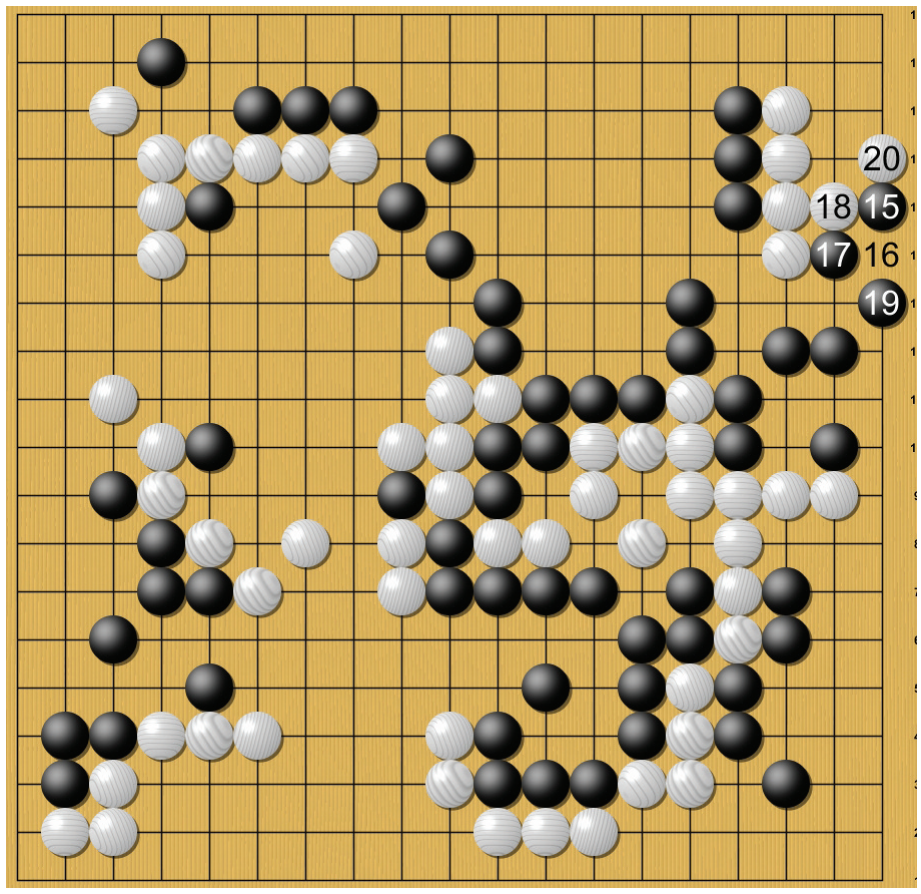


The monkey jump

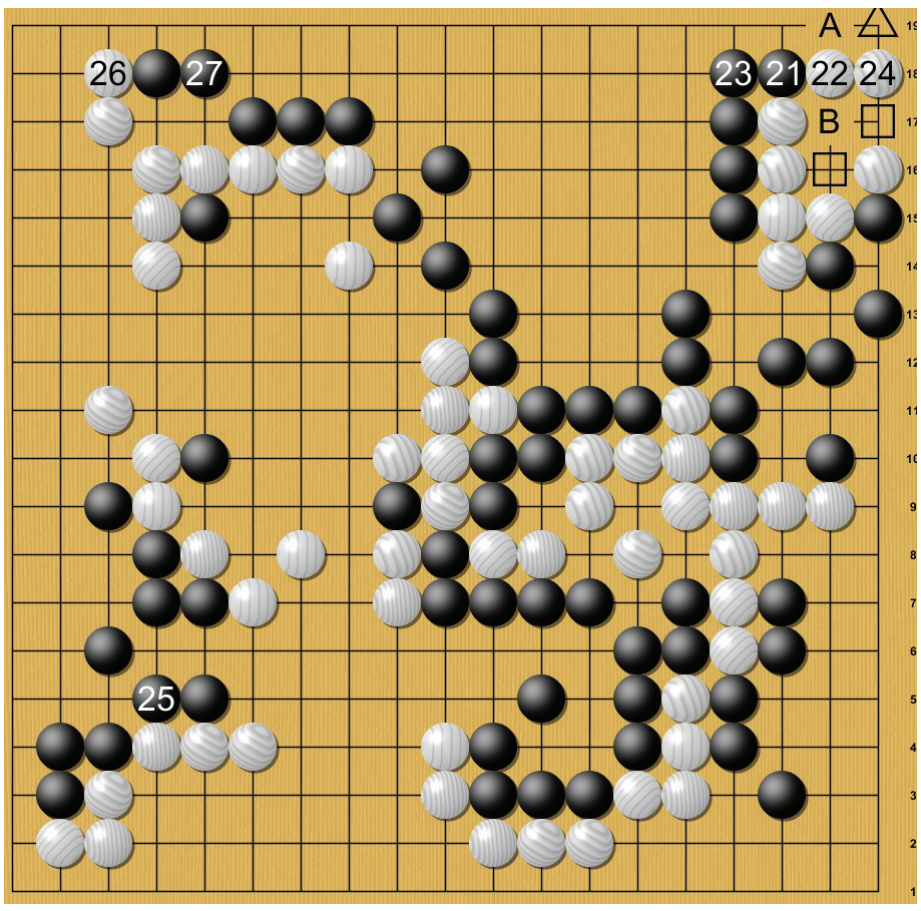
An endgame skillful move (tesuji)

The monkey jump is an endgame large knight's extension played on the first line, which can be executed only when you have a strong group of stones which extends to the second line and your opponent does not have a stone in the second line to block you. In the example on the right, White is missing a stone at the marked points on the second line, so Black can play the **monkey jump** at **A**. White cannot cut this move in any way and unless there are other helping stones, Black will reduce White by around eight to ten points and retain sente after White defends.

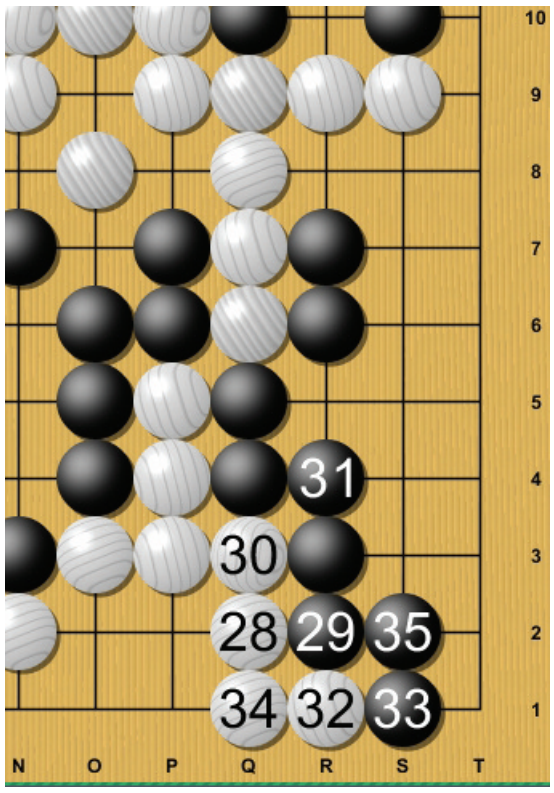




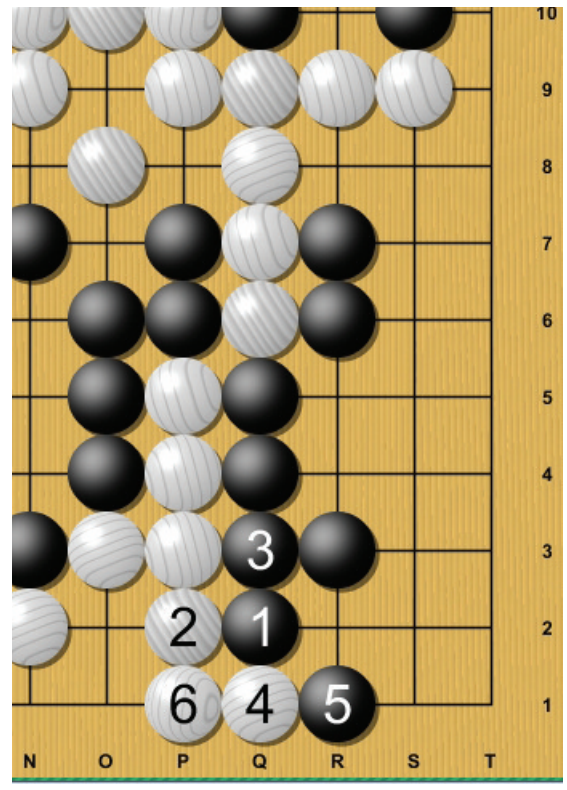
Moves 115 - 120: Black keeps up the pressure by playing the **monkey jump** at **115**. Not only such a move usually ends up with Black retaining sente, but White's group is not totally alive yet, so the monkey jump is threatening to kill it, if White plays the wrong sequence of responses.
White responds with the cut at **116**. White knows that he will lose that stone, but he is doing it on purpose to stop Black from playing any other moves under White's group.
Black 117 places White's stone under atari and White's **118** places Black's stone in atari in response, so Black is forced to capture a white stone at **move 119** in order for his group to live. **White 120** concludes the defence against the monkey jump and White's group seems to be alive.

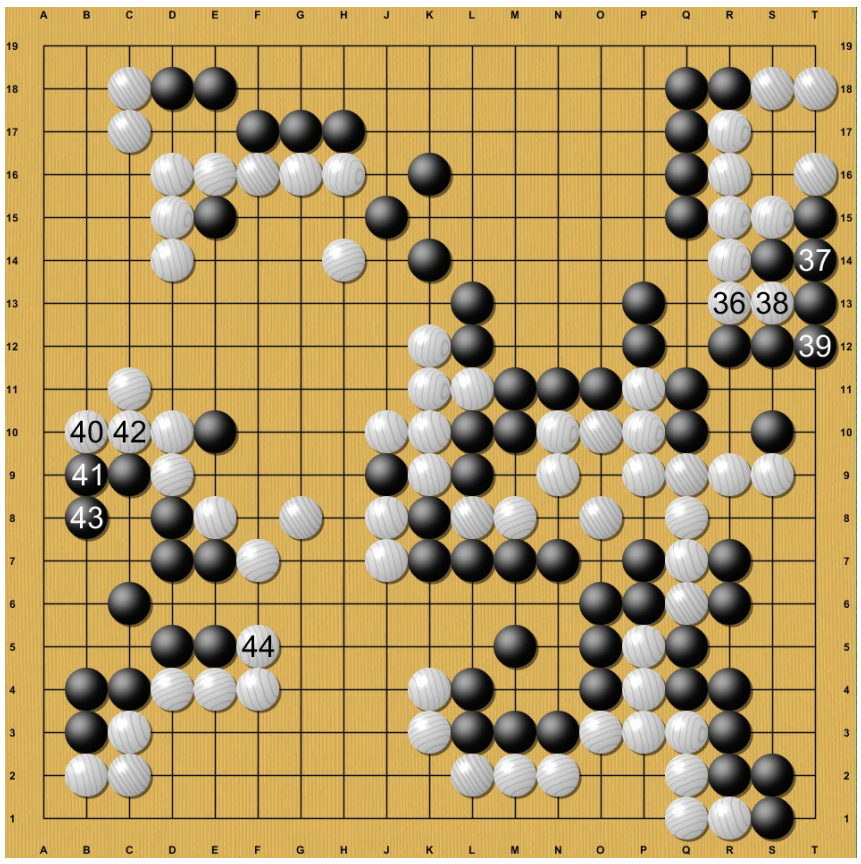


Moves 121 - 127: Black however sees that there is still some possibility for killing White and plays the hane at **121**. **White 122** is the only move that can defend and Black connects with **123** and is ready to attack White. But White plays a very smart move by extending at **move 124**. Now the moves **A** and **B** are **miai**. If Black plays at **A**, White plays at **B** and has **two eyes** in the marked squares. If Black plays at **B** then White plays at **A** and will have **two eyes** in the triangle and one of the squares. **A magnificent move indeed!**
Black's plan had crumbled, so he leaves that area and decides that it is time for him to defend at **125** which doesn't threaten White at all, **so it is not sente**. That proves to be a bad idea, because White immediately plays a sente endgame move at **126** which Black missed. Black is forced to defend at **127** and now it is White's turn again.



Moves 128-135: White continues, in the left diagram, with the sente endgame moves and finds a great chance in the bottom right with the sequence starting with **128** in **q2** which ends up with White still having sente because Black's group is not strong enough due to the defective **move 27** we mentioned in **page 44**. In the right diagram you can see that it was a good endgame move for Black as well, but Black missed his chance to play this sequence in sente. The result was a six point swing in favour of White (try to compare the two images and confirm this).
A great endgame move by White.

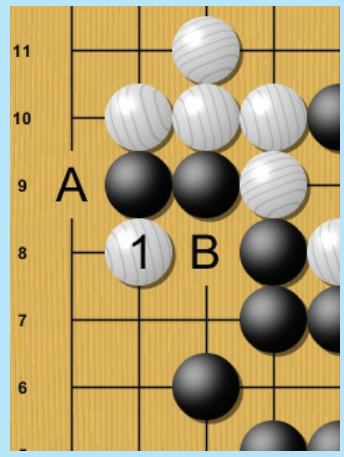




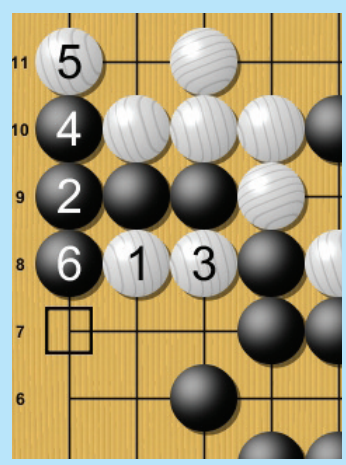
Moves 136-139: White finishes top right position with Black's monkey jump in a way that lets him keep sente. through a series of small threats and ataris.
Moves 140-143: Having finished with most of the endgame in the corners, White turns to the sides and finds **move 140**. Black predictably blocks with **move 141,** but when White plays **move 142** it is not so obvious to see why Black feels that he needs to defend with **move 143**. The situation is a bit complicated, so a small analysis on what Black was thinking about, can be found on the box on the right.
Move 144: White cannot find another important sente endgame move and he plays **move 144** to secure more territory in the middle. Now it is Black who has the initiative again.

Choices for move 143 - The clamp tesuji

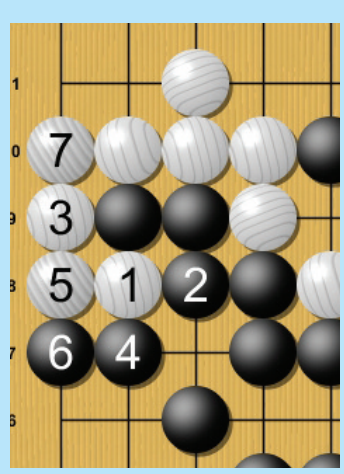
(more information at page 160)



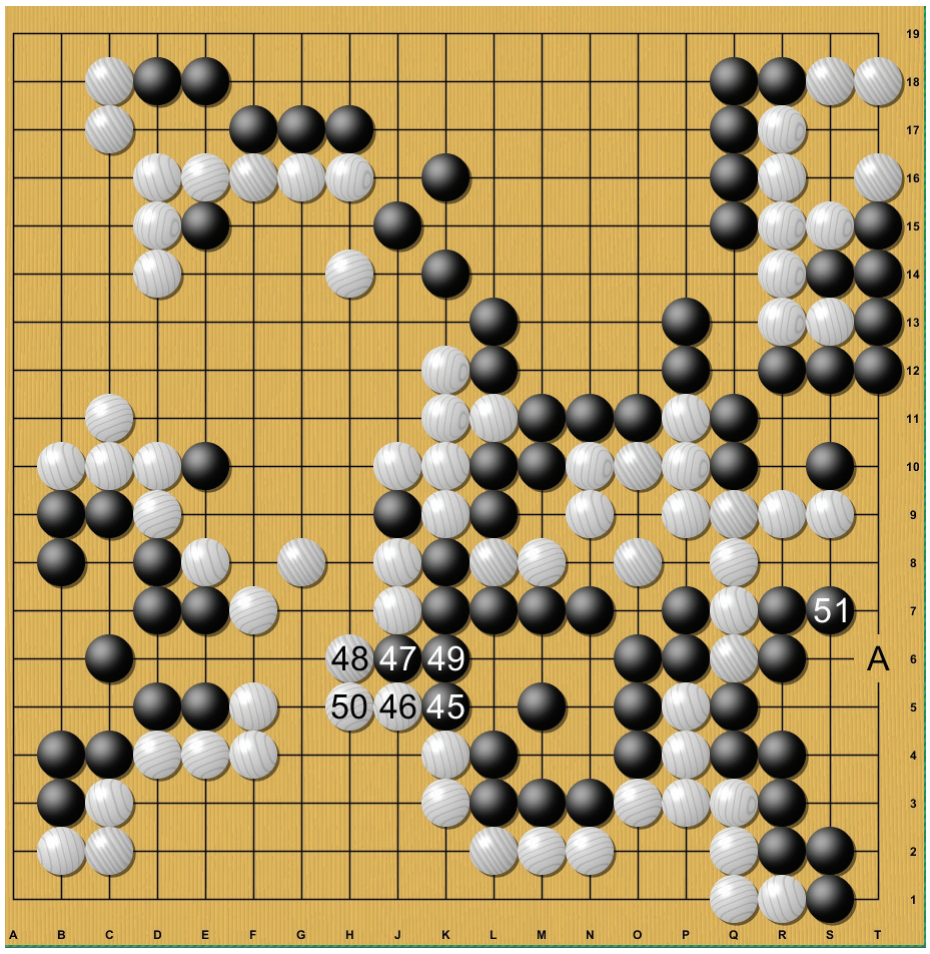
If black plays elsewhere, White can play this move called the **clamp** (we will see more examples of it in the tesuji chapter). This move is possible when Black is missing a stone at **B**, so he cannot play **A**.
If Black insists on playing at **A...**



then this sequence is inevitable for Black. His group will be in atari and since it is White's turn he can capture it by simply playing on the marked spot, making this a huge loss for Black. The best case scenario is for Black to defend at **B**...



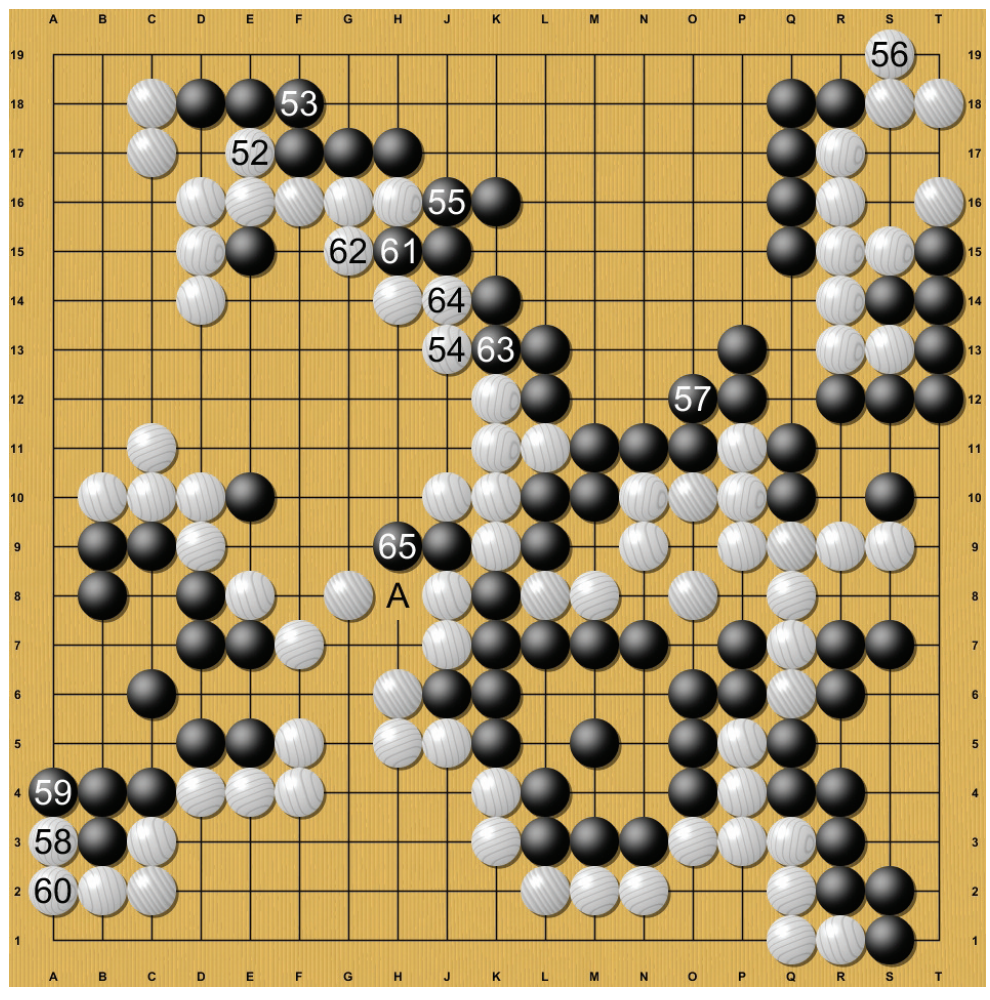
but such a move is making Black lose a lot of points as well, so it is not a good idea for Black to tenuki for **move 143**, unless he has a great sente move worth more points than this, which White has to respond to.



Moves 145 - 151: Having sente is one thing, but having sente moves is quite another and Black is struggling to find some, so he plays **move 145** to threaten to enter White's territory. White simply blocks with **146** and Black insists with **147**. White responds with **move 148** which places the Black stone in atari, so Black defends at **149**. White ends up having too many stones on the verse of being in atari, so White defends all of them with **move 150** and Black ends up with sente again.

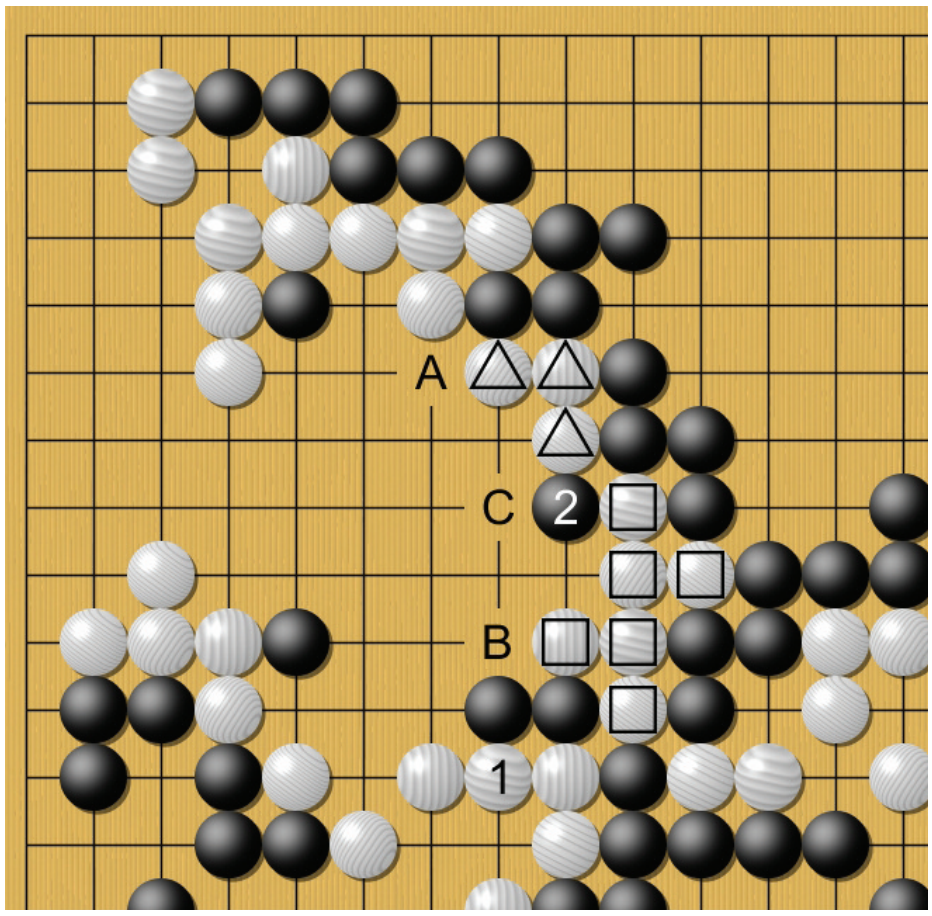
Black cannot find a good endgame move, but he thinks he sees a good move for his opponent: the **monkey jump** at **A**. White is dead, but Black is afraid that White's group might find a way to make a second eye there, so he gives up sente to defend with **move 151**, which is a mistake.

Our opponent's key move can often be our key move, as well. **Defending and maintaining shape should never be underestimated.**

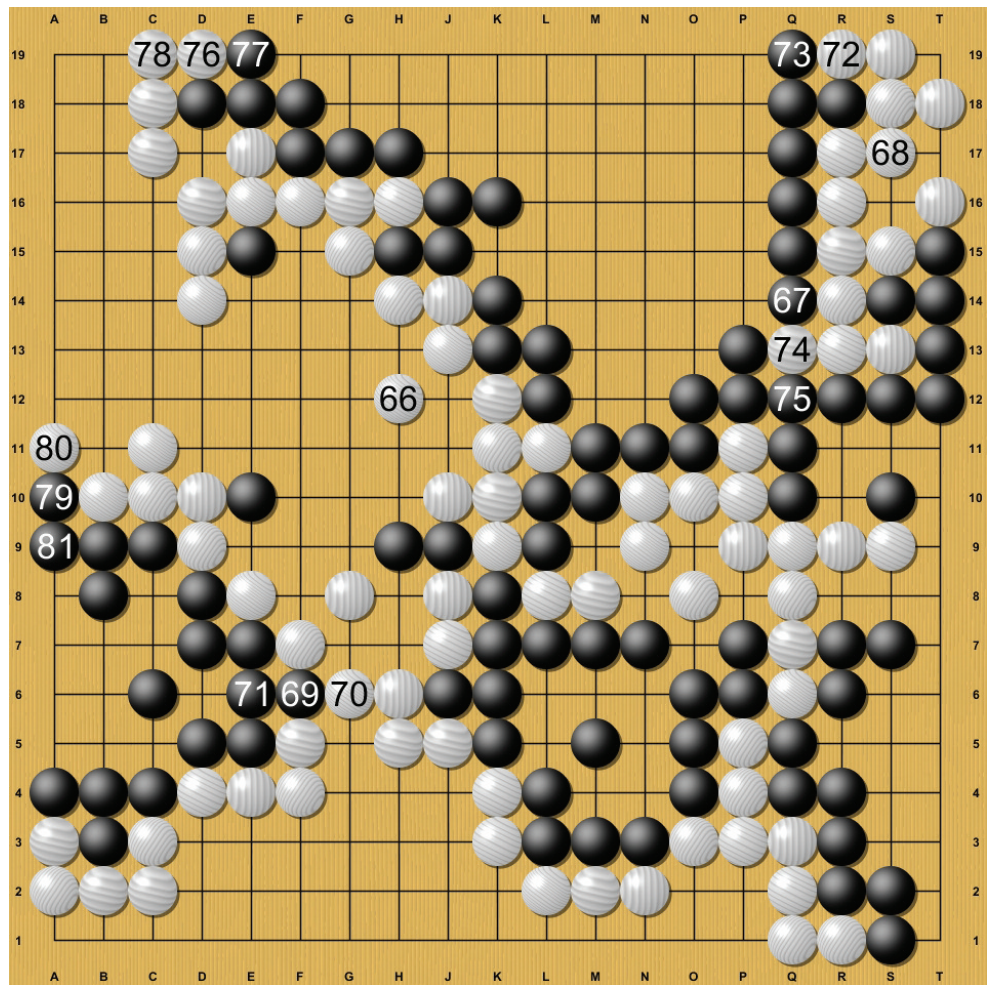


Moves 152-160: White cannot find any large endgame moves either, so he plays **move 152** to threaten Black, who simply defends at **153**. The rest of the moves up to **160** seem to be either moves where both players fix possible defects in their groups and shapes or small moves that are worth one or two points, **but do not be lulled by this peaceful interlude.** Many games have been lost in the endgame where filling small points here and there, ends up revealing a shortage of liberties or a cut which was previously unnoticed. As it stands, Black has got a plan.

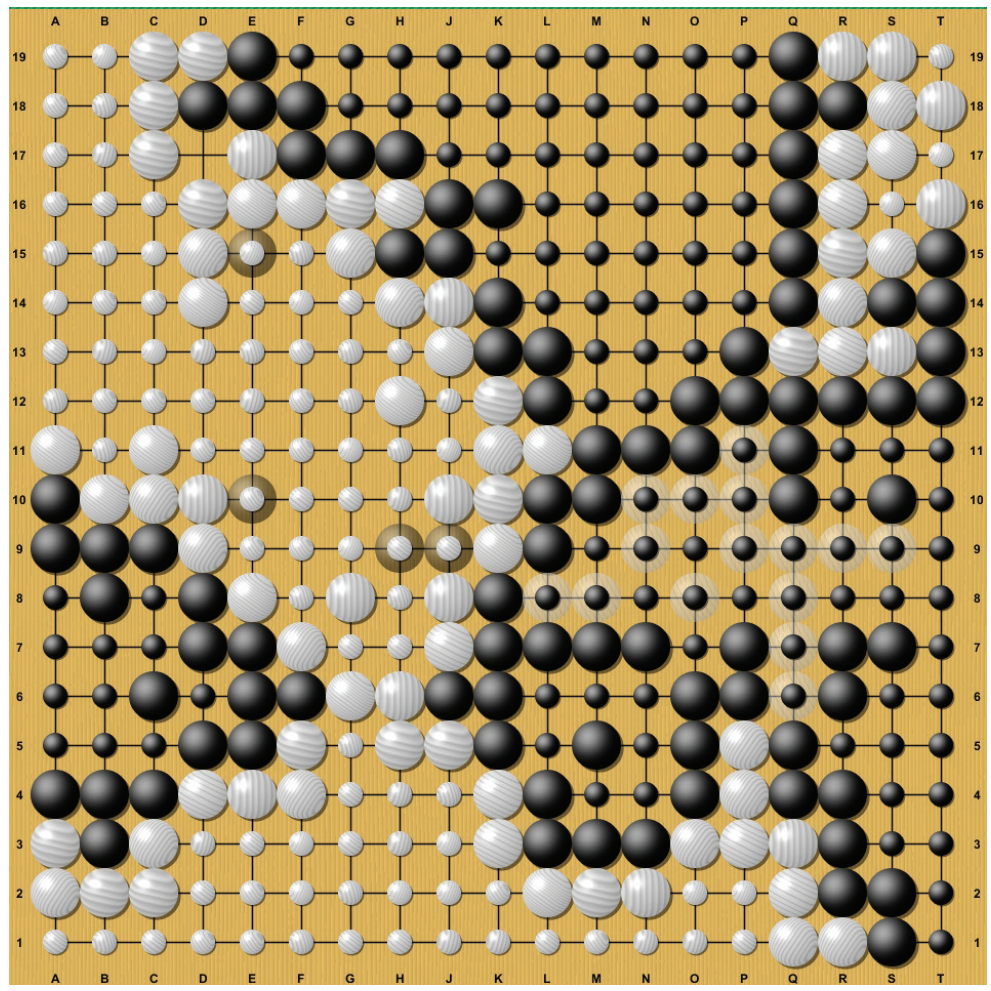
Moves 161-165: Black plays the obvious move at **161** trying to appear that he is just continuing playing small moves to close off his territory. White defends at **162** and Black plays **163** still pretending to be closing off his territory and White responds with **move 164**. Now Black is ready to try to execute a large endgame play, so he makes **move 165**. If White has been lulled by the slow rhythm of the past moves he might believe that Black's target is playing at **A** next. But that is not what Black has in mind.



This is Black's plan, if White plays **1** to defend his two stones. Black will play in the cutting point between the two newly created White groups who have this weird shape due to Black's poking and White defending against the pokes.
If Black plays there then **moves A** and **B** are **miai** in setting either of those marked groups in atari and starting a long and delicate fight in which Black has nothing to lose since the fight doesn't occur within his own territory.
White cannot easily defend both groups at the same time, even if he plays at **C**, once the black stone in **move 2** is in place first.
If this sequence is allowed there are too many variations that are possible. White has too many stones surrounding this area, so in all of the variations White eventually kills the Black stones and retains his territory, but it is a very complicated fight and one mistake could spell doom for White. So...



Move 166: White ignores Black's feint and plays **move 166** immediately, stopping any fights Black might have wanted to start.
Moves 167-181: Both players are out of large endgame moves, so they are simply closing off their gained territories, gaining one or two points in each exchange. Most of these swings in points cancel out each other, so in these moves the score doesn't change significantly. For example, White gains a **swing of one point** with move **172** and another swing of **one point** with moves **176 -178**. Black gets a swing of one point with moves **169-171** and another swing of one point with moves **179-181**. So, unless a group is rendered weak by closing off the territories (like we saw with Black's plan at **move 165**) , the score doesn't change much, once the large and sente endgame moves have been played. With **move 181** both players cannot find any other move, so they pass and the game ends. Can you guess who won before the final counting in the next page?



This is the final position of the board. All the dead stones are marked and removed from the game, so the points that have dead stones on them are practically counted twice in the score. One point for being a captured stone and one point for the territory they used to occupy.

White has 89 territory points + 2*4 points for dead stones + 6,5 komi = **103,5 points**
Black has 91 territory points + 2*15 points for dead stones + 1 captured stone = **122 points**
Black wins by 18,5 points.

This concludes the chapter and the review. Hopefully you are now more acclimated with the flow of the game and its three phases.
Once again, I want to advise to read this chapter again, after you have finished the book. For now, if you didn’t understand every move or every explanation, do not worry. The purpose of this chapter was mostly to explain the three phases of the game and provide the guidelines which apply to each phase, with immediate and practical variations arising from an actual game to serve as an example.

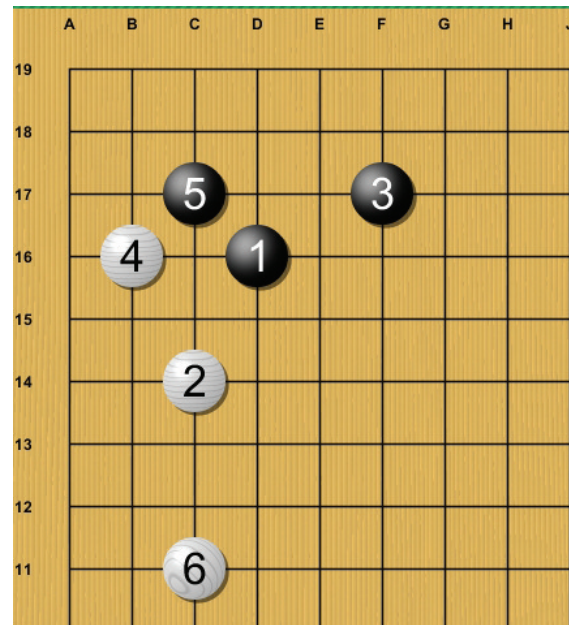
So, now we will move on to the specific concepts of each phase, dedicating separate chapters for each one, starting, of course, from the beginning and the opening phase. The first of these chapters is about ***joseki*** and ***fuseki***.

What are joseki and fuseki?

As with the previous chapters, the concept of some guidelines and ideas that can help us evaluate which moves are good and which look dangerous, is something that applies to every phase of the game. In the middle game and endgame the board has too many stones for any rigid set of moves to be useful. We simply cannot predict how the board will look, in order to create a prefabricated variation in such a large scale and only some skillful sequences of few moves (the aforementioned **tesuji**) exist there to help up, along with the correct **direction of play** and the more simple, but all-important, concept of **good shape**.

But the opening is different. The board is empty and the strategy of each player is still in the making, so here we can anticipate moves and we can create and predict possible sequences of moves. Well, everyone likes the idea of forming a strategy and playing a series of moves that would give him an advantage over the opponent, but unlike what our first impression of such a set of moves might be, Go is a game of relative balance and we cannot obliterate our opponent utterly, nor claim to have a complete advantage in every possible fight in an area, while exchanging moves with our opponent. Every move we play is designed to have a purpose, but that stands true for our opponent as well, that is why it can be said that fighting starts practically by our first move on the board.

So, what is a joseki? Joseki literally means “set stones” and is a sequence of moves played in the corners of the board by both players, designed to give each player’s stones a particular result. In a joseki one player will probably take the territory and the other the outside influence, or vice versa, or they might split the corner. The possibilities are many and it is in the hands of the players to decide which one they desire. **The result of a joseki is considered to be balanced, at the time that the joseki is played.** Whether the players will be able to utilize their stones correctly and “cash in” on the advantages they tried to gain with a particular joseki, is a matter that cannot be predicted at that moment.



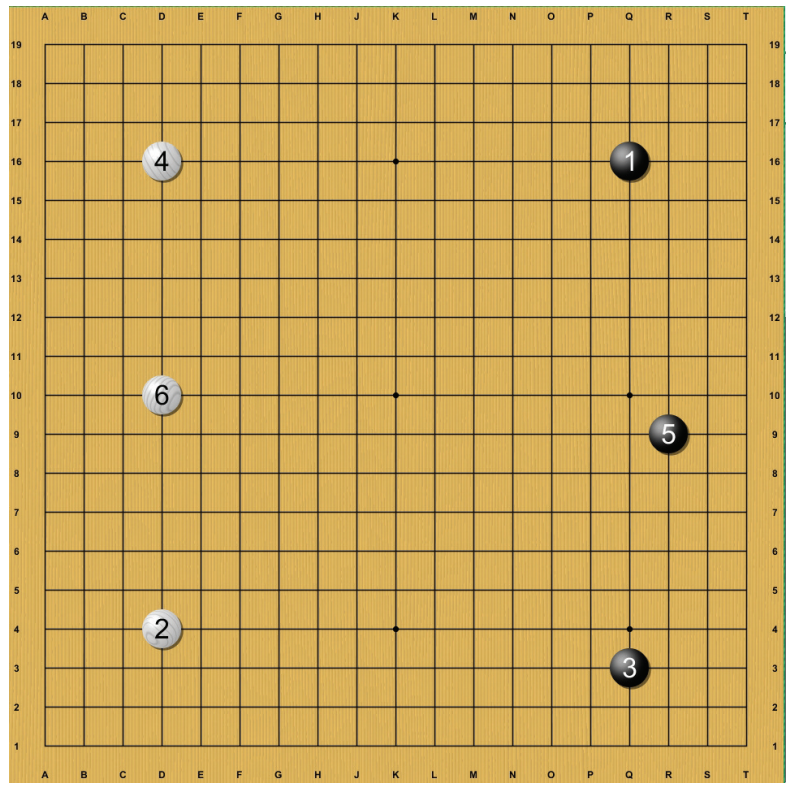
One of the most balanced and easy to understand joseki. Both players get almost half of everything they were aiming for.

Our goal is **not** to learn and memorize joseki, but to understand them and how they came to be created. **This way we can understand what we are playing and why.** There is no “path to victory” in any joseki. Just lessons in **purpose, good shape** and **good direction of play.**
A joseki is a tool and depending on what you want to achieve you should apply the right tool for the job. Choosing a joseki is not a simple matter and **the whole board should be considered.**

Contrary to that idea of both players exchanging moves in the corners, we have the concept of **fuseki**. A fuseki (literally it means “arraying stones”) is a whole board opening strategy for **only one of the players**. Unlike joseki where both players fight over advantages in the corners of the board, a fuseki involves placing stones across the whole board. Obviously the opponent might want to disrupt that process if he recognises the possibility of the formation of a fuseki, but that usually ends the fuseki. This is the reason why fuseki are mostly composed of three or four stones, despite their impressive scope of purpose. The maximization of the efficiency of each stone involved in a fuseki is indeed amazing and many times they can be very frustrating to play against.

In this chapter we will discuss joseki first, since we will need that knowledge to explain how to deal with fuseki and what are the main “traps” which fuseki have in store for the unwary players. As far as joseki and fuseki are concerned you should keep in mind that the topics themselves are so extensive that there are specific books written for them, so we obviously cannot cover all the hundreds of joseki that exist, nor all the fuseki, but we will go over the most important ones. **We are here to learn and understand the game and have fun.** Blindly memorizing sequences is rarely fun, so we want to keep this to a minimum. Understanding the sequences though, and pondering on how and why they came to be, can be fun and important, so this is what we are going to focus on.

For the joseki we will analyse sequences for the two opening moves which are mostly used in modern Go: The **4-4 star point** and the **3-4 point**.



Two very popular fuseki in the recent history of the game. On the right side Black has played the **Chinese fuseki** and White on the left has played the **San-ren-sei fuseki** (which literally means “three star points in a row”)

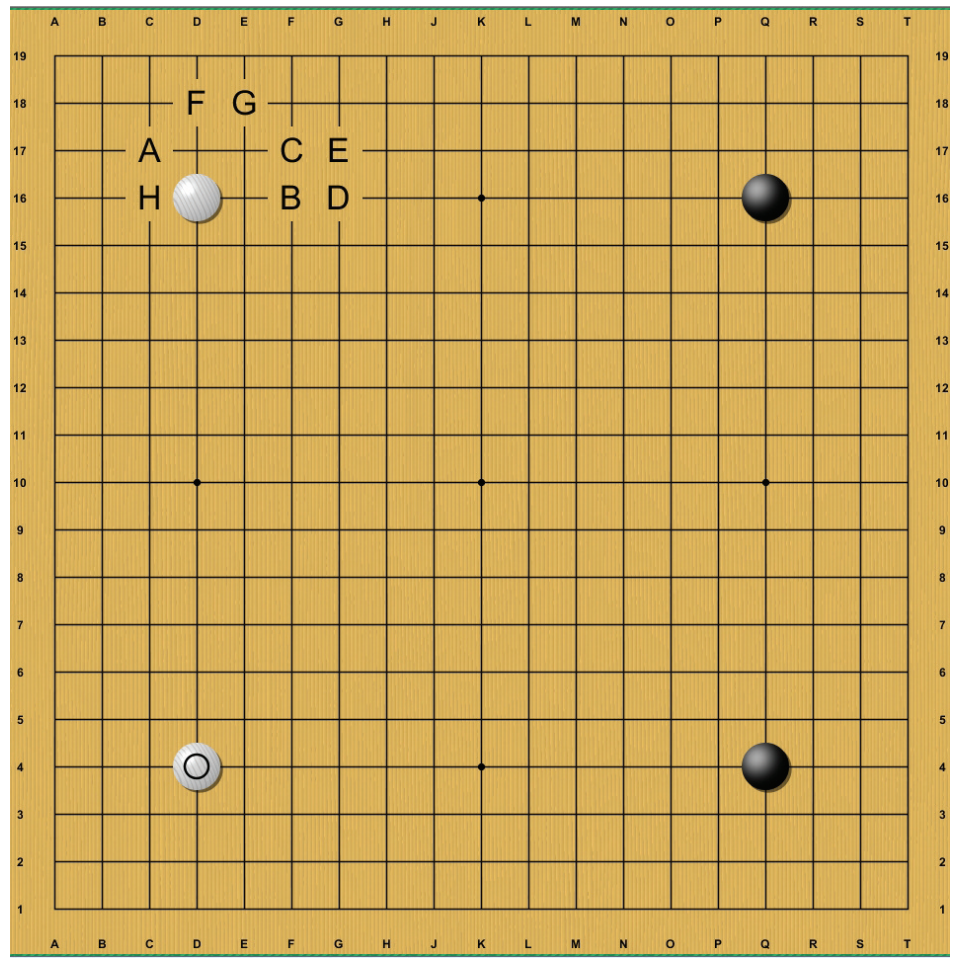
4-4 star point joseki

One of the most usual moves in the opening is playing in the 4-4 star points. This choice is showing mainly a desire for influence and spreading towards the side and center, but the 4-4 point is one of the most diverse opening moves in the game, so you are not really constrained much by this choice, though usually your opponent will be able to take away quite a bit of the corner where you played in the 4-4 point. Let us see some of the choices your opponent has, when he wants to approach your corner:

Possible ways to approach 4-4 point

Black has all these choices if he wants to approach White's corner. Among all these choices **A**, **B** and **C** are the most common, while **E** and **D** are very rare due to their distance from the 4-4 point and **F**, **G** and **H** are usually played as invasions in the middle game, if White is strong around the corner and Black wants to reduce his territory.

As far as joseki analysis is concerned we will focus on choices **A** and **C** in this chapter and we will see **F**, **G** and **H** in the chapter about invasions and attachments.
Keep in mind that Black could approach the corner from the left side instead of the top, but it is not the best direction of play, since Black doesn't have any stones on the left side. We want to maximize the synergy of our stones, not reduce it.

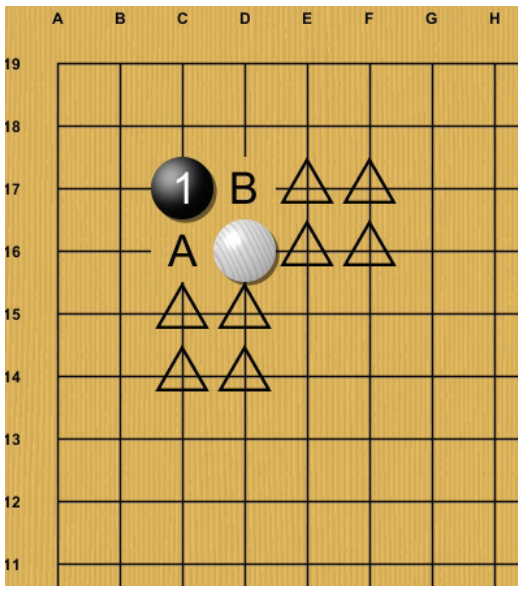


The main issues around our joseki review will be:

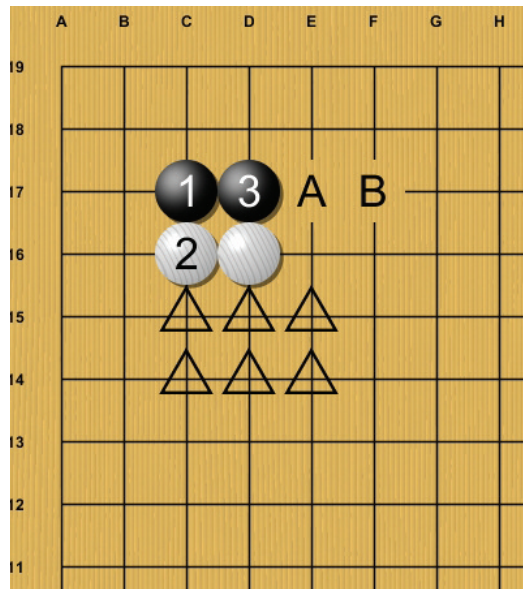
- Why were those particular moves chosen and played?
- What do they do exactly?
- What are their possible variations?
- Is the order in which the moves were played important and could we change the order in which we play each move?
- How do the other stones on the board and the direction of play influence our choices in order to make our stones work in unison?

There are many proverbs advising against new players learning joseki, but, in my opinion, those proverbs are actually advising **against the mindless memorising** of joseki. Our goal is to study the joseki, not merely learn them and in this process we will become better and stronger players who choose their next move with care instead of blindly following a set path decreed by the joseki. Another positive thing about studying joseki is that it is least likely to be surprised by other opponents who will have mastered some joseki and will try to confuse us by playing them. **Knowledge is strength.**

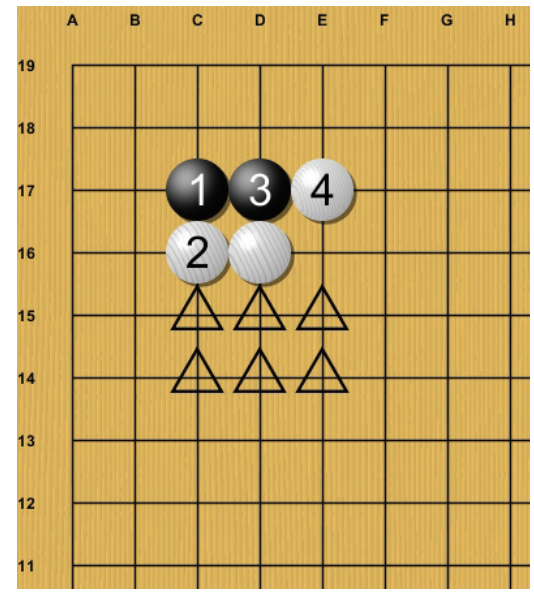
Let us begin with the easiest choice of the two and the one with the fewer variations. **The invasion at the 3-3 point**. Let us see the main joseki choices of this move:



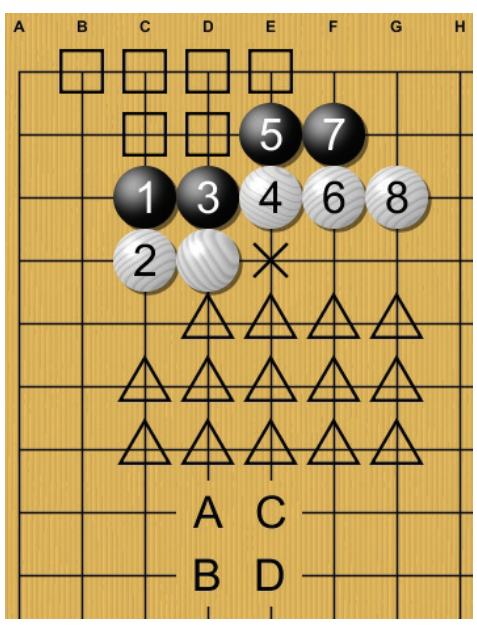
When Black plays **1**, White can either choose **A** or **B**, depending on which marked side he wants to defend and develop.



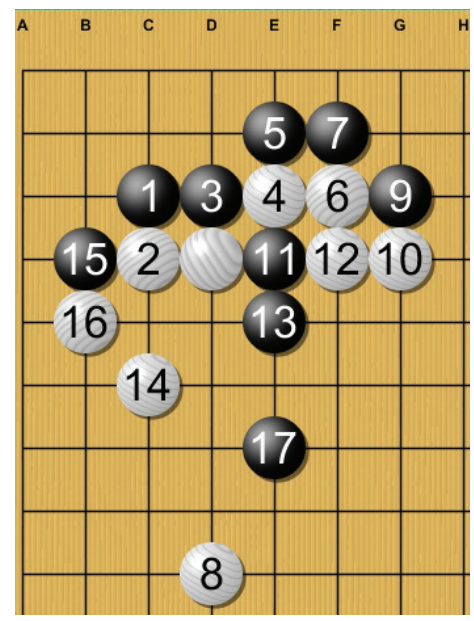
Usually White chooses the side which is facing towards the corner which he has stones in. White can now choose **A** or **B**. Choice **A** is the most usual joseki, choice **B** is designed to take sente. Let us begin with choice **A** which is a hane on top of two stones.

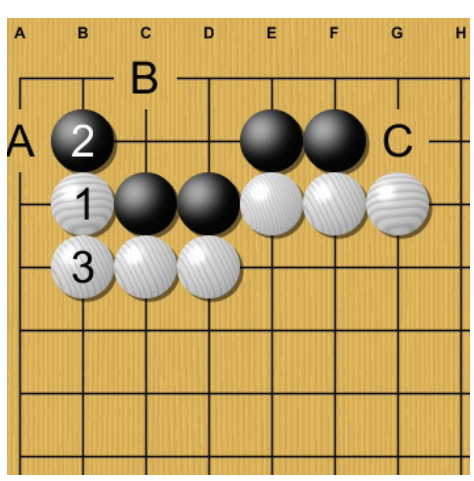


A hane on the top of two or three stones is usually a good shape. There is a proverb that urges us to "always" play that move, but as usual with most proverbs, there are cases where they do not really apply, as we will see soon. Reminder: Such a move is also called "hitting at the head of two stones".

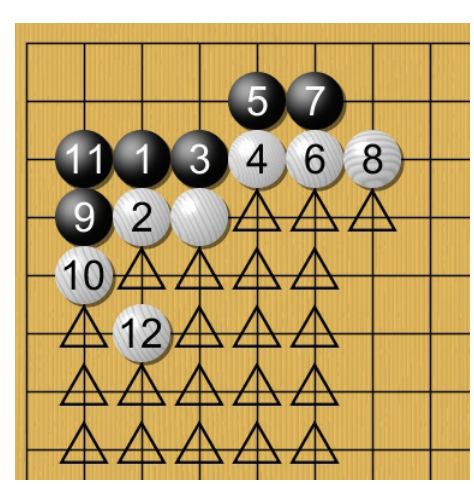


Left image: Black's only viable choice is to keep going at **5** and extend again with **7** when White plays the obvious moves at **6** and **8** to keep Black low while protecting his own cutting point at the **X** marked spot. Now Black is alive, so he can play **9** away at **A**, **B**, **C** or **D** to reduce White's influence and threaten the marked cutting point. If White refuses to play move **8** in this sequence and rushes to play on the side first, then...
Right image: This shows what could probably happen to White. His stones will get split and his move on **8** is now not useful.

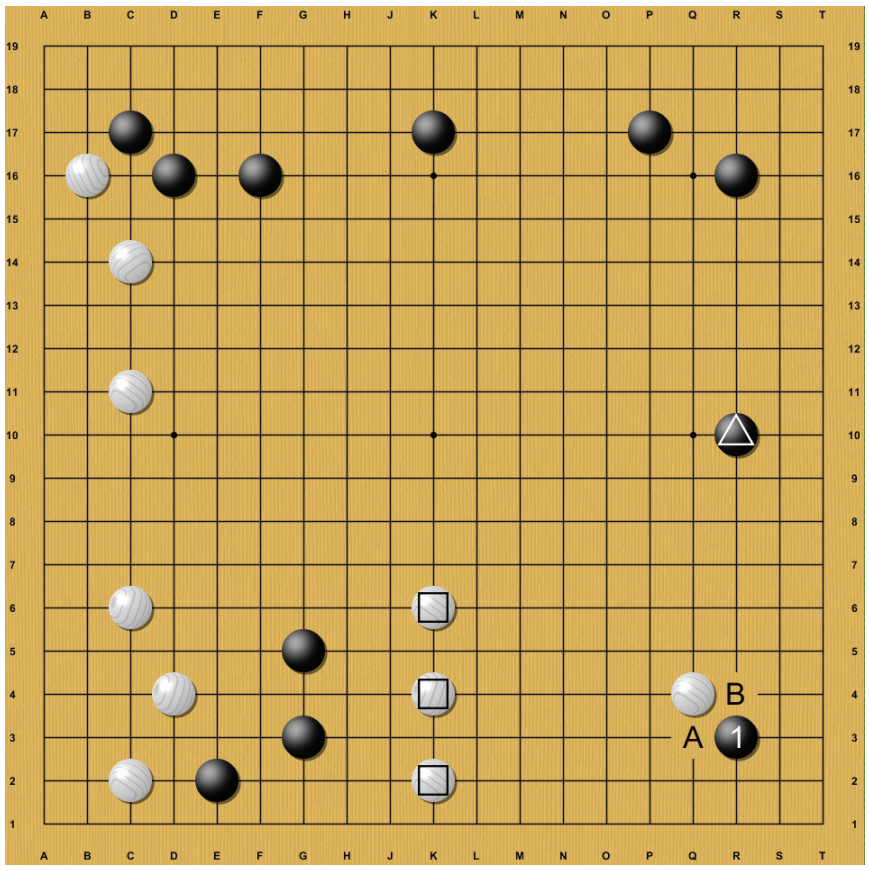




Left image: We can see why Black is alive at move **7** in the joseki. The sequence of moves **1 to 3** is the most reasonable attack White can mount, but it is not enough. Playing **A**, **B** and **C** ensures Black two eyes and White cannot attack all three points with his next move.
Right image: This is an older version of the joseki, rarely played nowadays. If Black keeps playing in the corner, he just helps White get a great wall and influence.



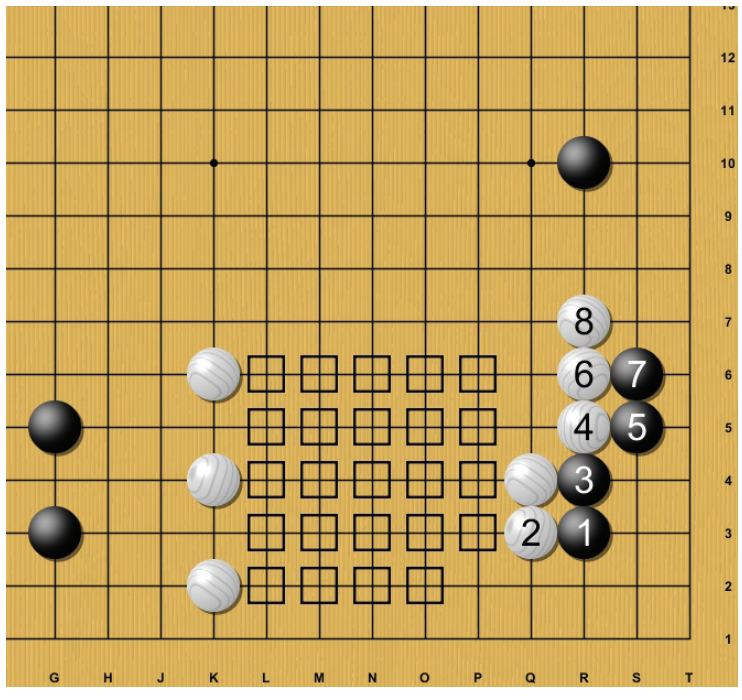
Before the "AI revolution" of AlphaGo playing the **3-3 point** was not very popular in the early game, because humans hadn't fully explored the idea of Black playing away at **move 9**, but now it is a very popular move which can be played even after a few stones on the board were just placed. It is a playstyle you should definitely explore when you feel more confident in your abilities to manipulate shape and influence. For now we will see how do we pick which side to defend, according to the direction of play:



Another real game example. Black doesn't like White's bottom right expansion and he wants to stop it from turning all to territory, so he invades the 3-3 spot. Now White has two options to defend himself **A** or **B**.

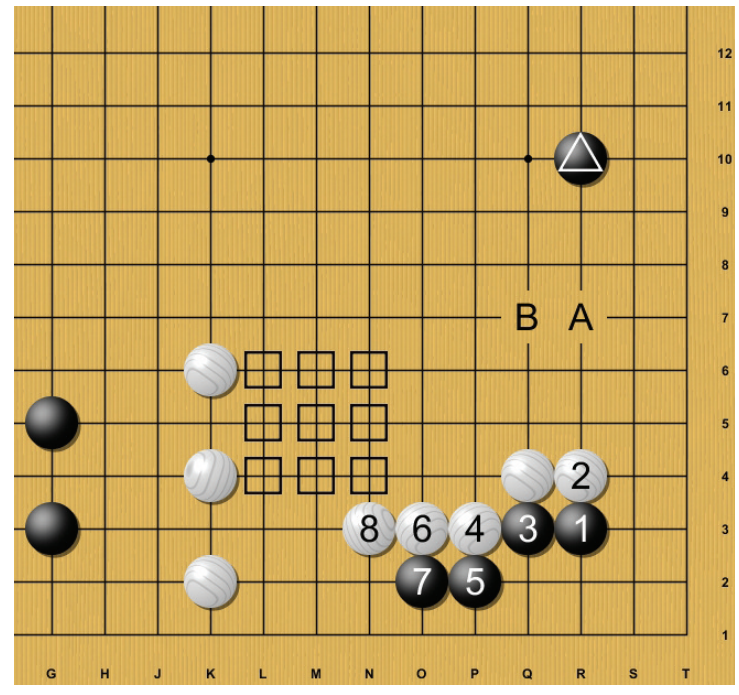
How do we choose which one is the best?

Now that we know the joseki and the most possible outcome of each choice, all we have to do is envision how each choice would play out on the board and compare the results. This is similar to what we have been doing when analysing the game in the previous chapter and it is called "**reading a sequence**". In the case of joseki, though the reading has already been done for us, we shouldn't be complacent, because our opponent is not guaranteed to follow the joseki moves and we should be able to read variations to punish his moves.



Choice A

In this choice, White will create a wall which will be facing his other wall in the middle creating a nice moyo which Black cannot invade easily.



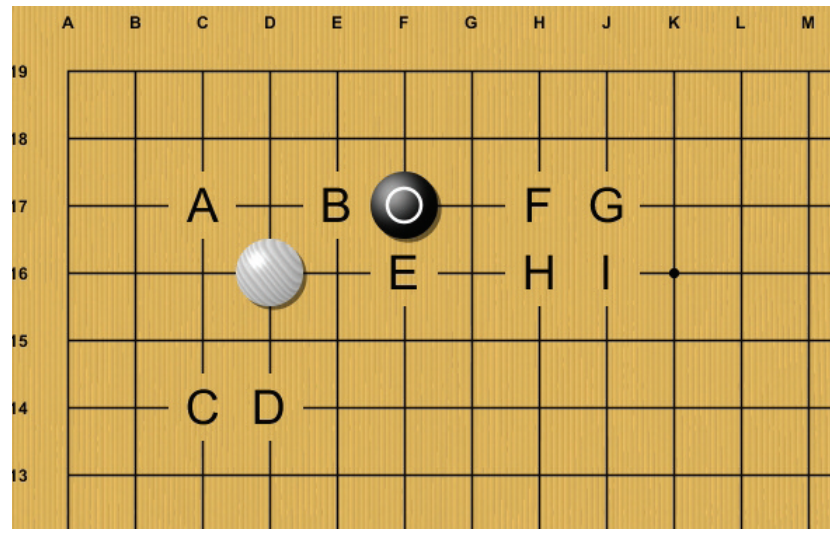
Choice B

In this choice, White's wall will be facing towards Black's marked stone. It is Black's turn and he can play **A** or **B** to make that wall pointless.

So, choice **A** is now obviously the move with the right direction of play in mind. When one move option helps you make a **moyo** and the other does not, then the right direction of play is easy to discern.

After the **3-3 point invasion**, which has the most simple variations, the other ways to approach the **4-4 point** which we will explore are a lot more complicated and have many choices and possible results. So, the next move in our analysis is **the knight's move approach**:

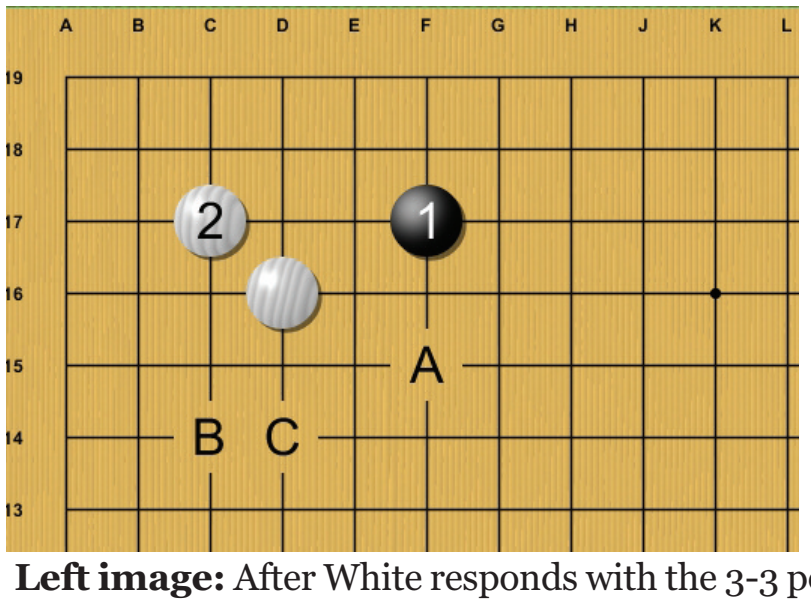
When Black approaches the 4-4 point with a Knight's move, then White has many options to choose from. **A** and **B** aim at taking up the corner territory, **C, D** and **E** aim at developing the left side, as well as keeping half the corner and **F**, **G, H** and **I** are called **pincers** because their main goal is to focus on the top side and deprive the Black stone of the possibility of making a base and developing.
By far the most usual responses to the knight's move approach are **C** and **F.**

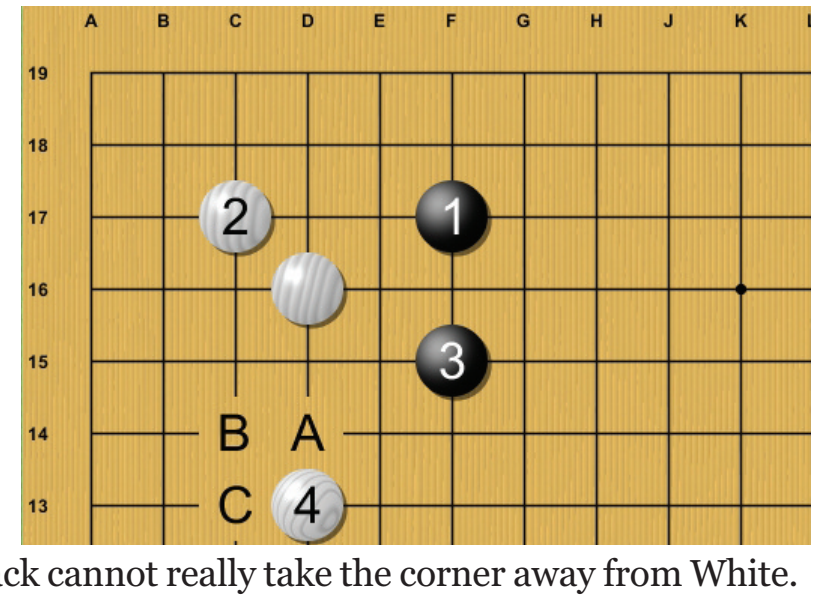


Out of all these choices we will review choices **A** to **F**. Choices **G**, **H** and **I** are rarely encountered in our level and the goal of this book is not for it to replace a joseki manual, but to provide knowledge and context for the most common and most used joseki.

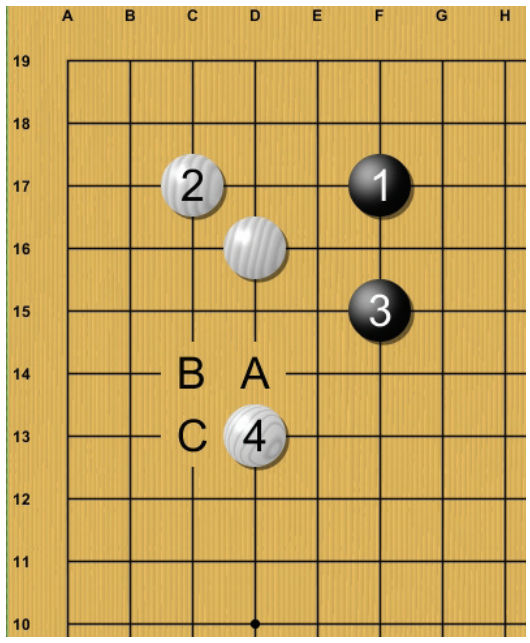
Choice A - Respond at the 3-3 point

This move is mostly seen in double digit kyu games and it is going out of fashion even there, because it gives a nice result for the player that makes the approach.

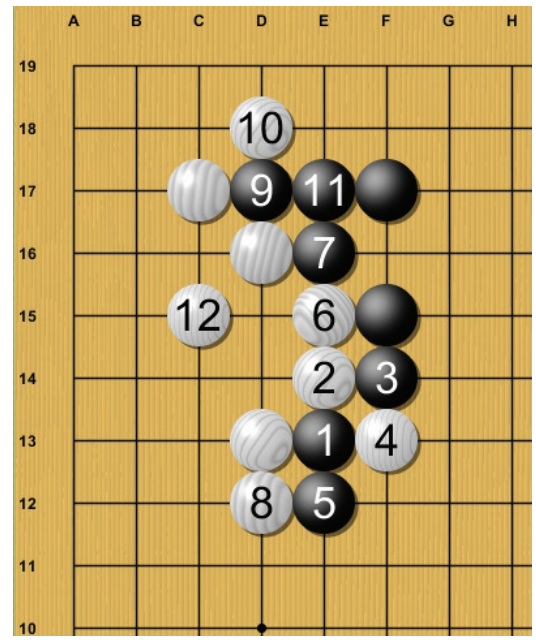


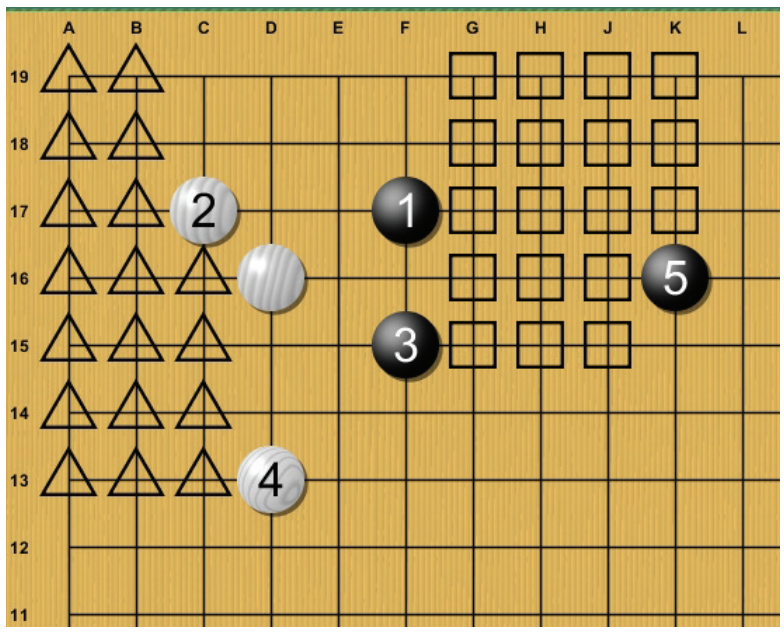


Left image: After White responds with the 3-3 point, Black cannot really take the corner away from White. Black's only choices are **A**, **B** or **C**, but since the corner is almost certainly secured by White, playing **B** or **C** can be an overplay. We always want to avoid having many disconnected groups and playing at **B** or **C** creates a new group of stones which we will have to lead to safety, so...
Right image: Black 3 is almost a certainty. Now Black can play on the other side of the White stones since he will be able to connect his stones, so White needs to respond. White can play **A**, **B** or **C,** but all those moves are too passive, compared to **move 4** on the diagram, which secures the corner territory and defends as much of the side as possible. A two space extension might seem too large, but White is safe...

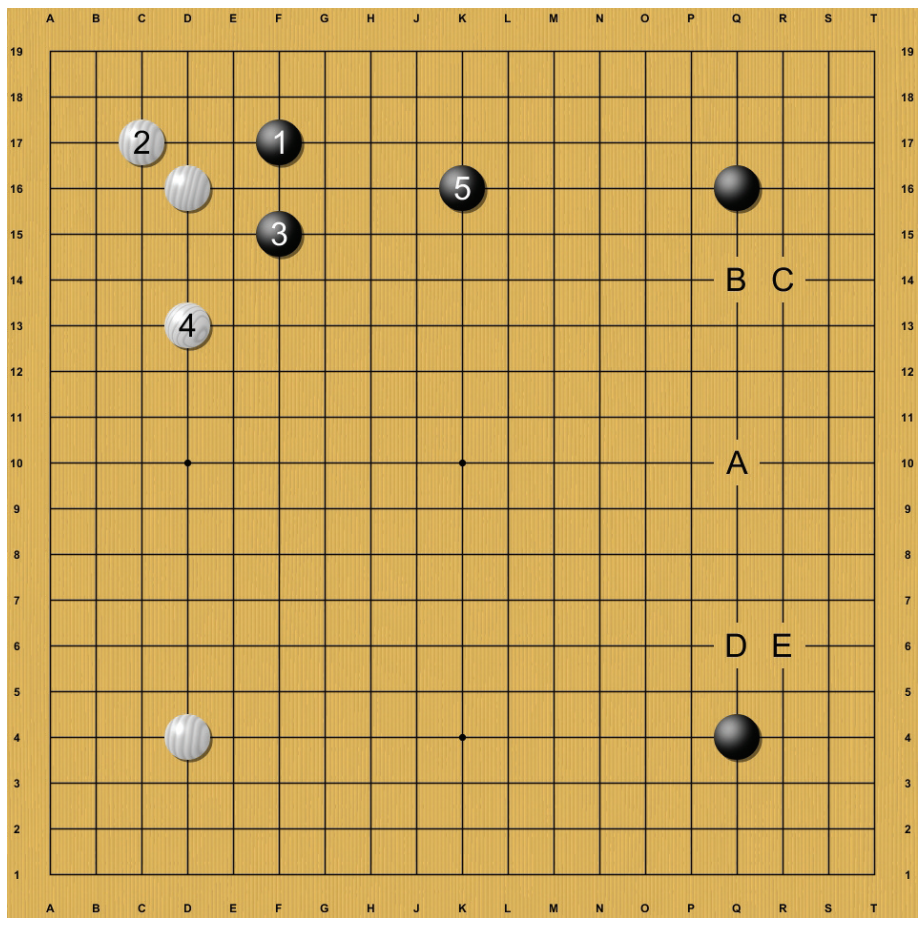


Left and right images: Black can try different moves and sequences, but White can successfully defend against all of them. There is no reason for White to play a passive and safe move, so he can aim for maximum profit. When your stones are strong you shouldn't be afraid to spread your wings and fly.
Despite its safety and stability, **move 4** for White still has one important problem: It doesn't threaten Black's stones. So...





Black gets to open his own wings, so since he is shut out from the top left corner and side, he extends with **move 5**, from both of his stones with a very large knight's move. That is a stable move when played on the side of the board and White cannot invade in Black's area, in the same manner Black couldn't break into White's area. White might be thinking that he got the best deal, but if we were to actually count the points that these moves seem to have secured for each player, we will see that they are practically the same! What is different is the shape and the whole board situation. Usually Black's shape is now easier to expand from, assuming that he approached from the right direction...

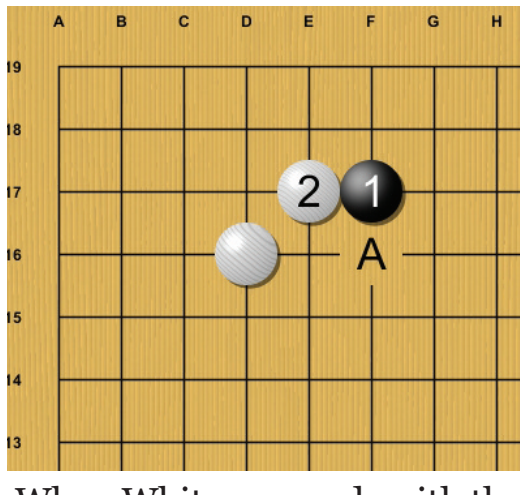


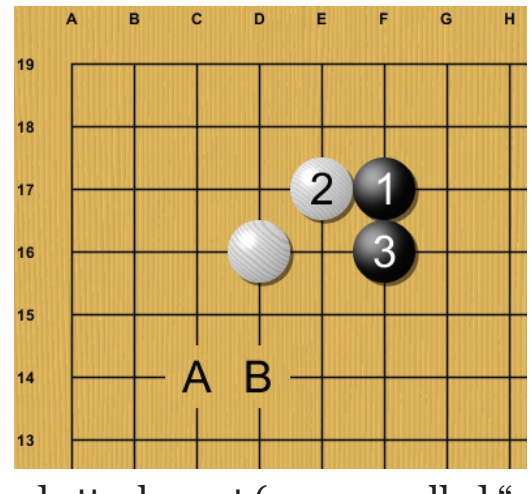
This is a very possible board where Black played the knight's move approach and White opted for the 3-3 defense joseki. Black's stones now are all one move away from forming a large framework spanning half the board, if Black ever gets to play a move around **A**.
Fortunately for White it is his turn to play a move but he is now forced to deal with this problem by either playing at **A** or any point around it, or approaching Black's corners at either **B**, **C**, **D** or **E**, which are directions where White has no corresponding stone in the corner. White is almost forced to move in an area of the board and from the wrong direction, due to his choice of joseki in the top left corner. Every choice we make **should take into account the whole board** and not only the local area around which the move was played.

Conclusion: You should usually avoid responding to a knight's move approach with the 3-3 defense. The result is not so good for you, but you can be quite happy if your opponents play it against you.

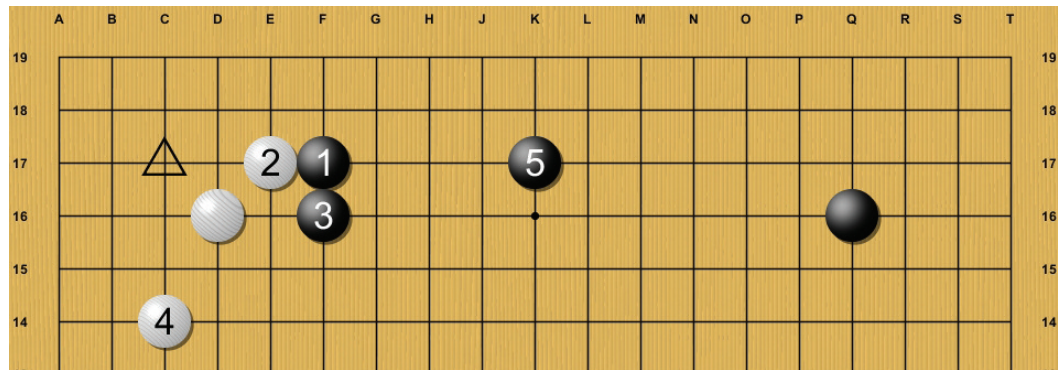
Choice B - Respond at the 3-5 point

This move is aiming to give a nice result in the corner, but it leaves a lot of defects open for a counter-attack later on. This makes it usually be played when the defender has another helping stone. First, let us see what happens if you play it without any helping stone:

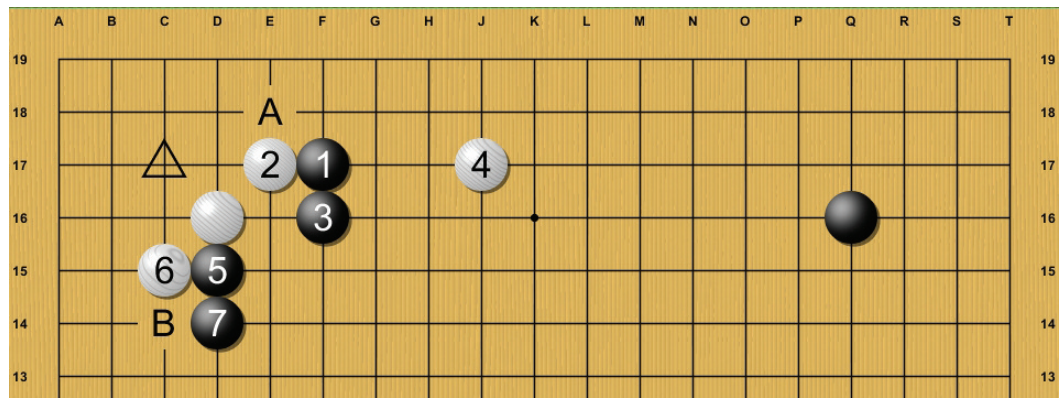




Left image: When White responds with the diagonal extension and attachment (a move called "**a kick**") in 3-5, Black has no real other option but play at **A** or abandon the stone. If Black plays elsewhere and White plays at A, then it is a severe attack.
Right image: After Black responds at **move 3** to save his stone, White has two choices, **A** or **B**. Move **A** aims for more corner protection and move **B** aims for more a wider expansion towards the left side and center of the board.

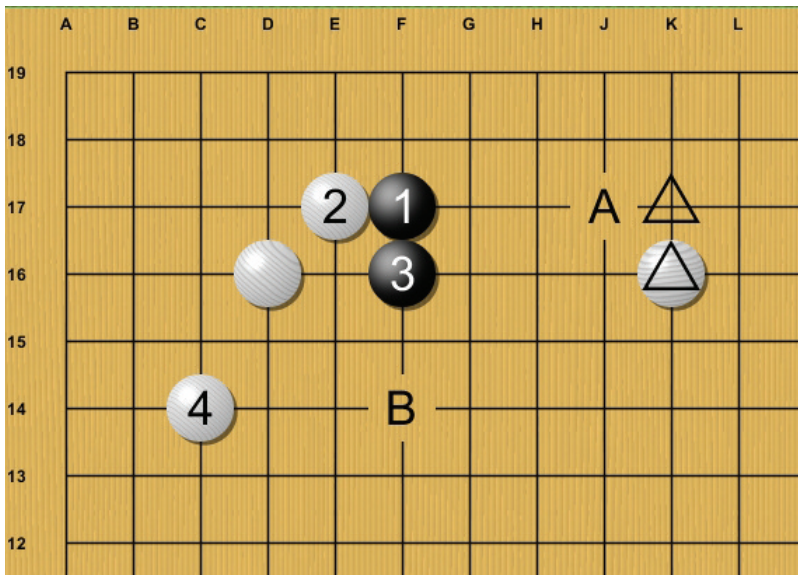


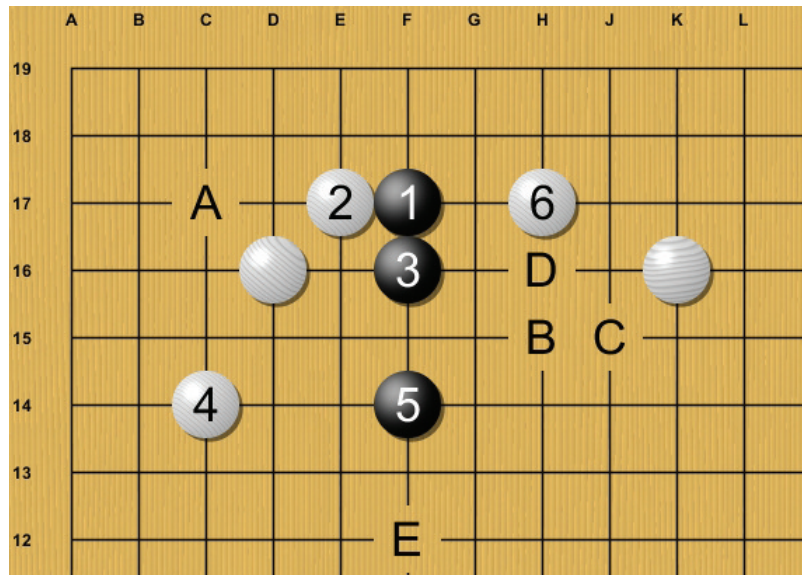
Even if White chooses the safer move **A**, his corner can still be invaded at the marked 3-3 point later in the game. Also, White's choices didn't threaten Black, so now he can extend comfortably three spaces away from his solid group of stones, creating a very large base and gaining as much potential territory and influence towards the center as White. Add to all this the benefit of Black's having approached the corner from the right direction, as shown in the image, and the result is very good for Black.



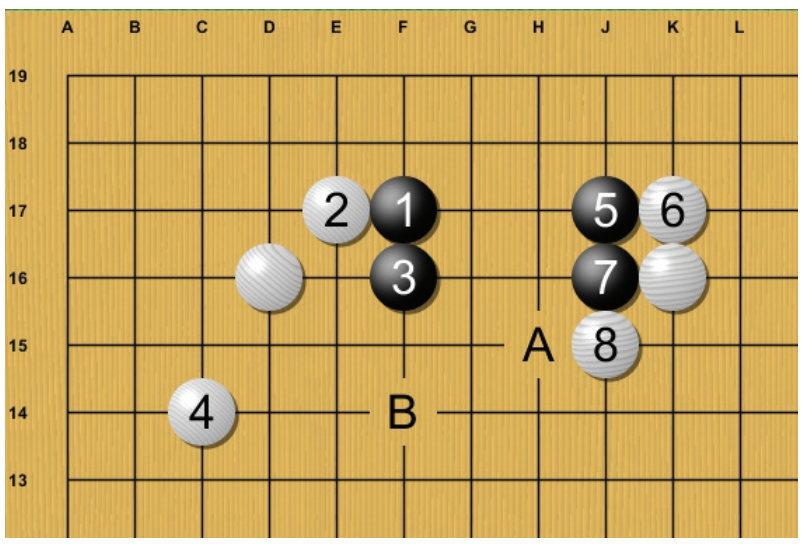
If White wanted to resist Black's extension and threaten his two stones, that is not a very good idea, because White's two corner stones are not strong enough to withstand Black's counter- attack. One of the possible variations can be seen in the image. White's corner is still not secure, his stone at **move 4** is isolated and with his next move White cannot defend properly both of his weak points at **A** and **B**.

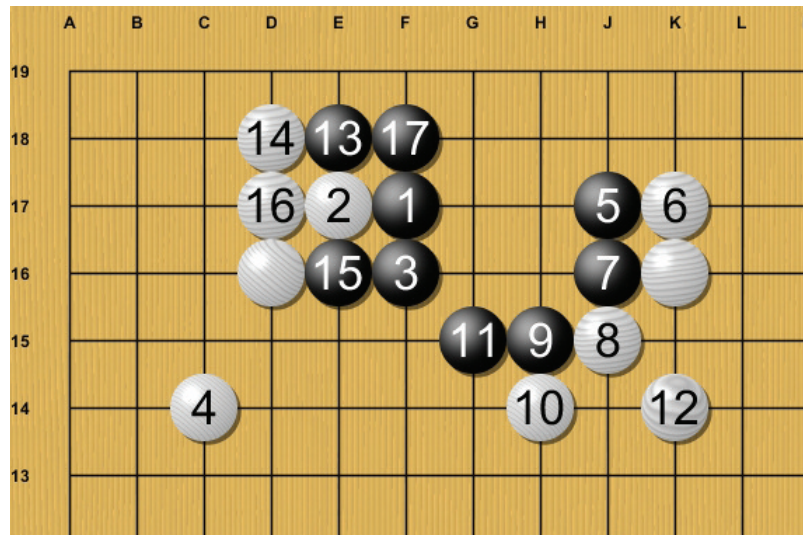
So, when our stone in the corner is approached from the right direction by our opponent, the response at the 3-5 point is not very effective, but what happens if our opponent approaches our corner from a side in which we already have some helpful stones?





Left image: If Black tries to approach our corner with the marked White stone already in place (or one line above it), then the choice of the 3-5 point response joseki, suddenly becomes very favourable for White. Supposing that we follow the joseki up to **move 4**, now Black has only options **A** and **B**, with option **A** being very limited in comparison to the previous page.
Right image: If Black tries the one space jump, White can pincer him and deprive him of any chances of getting a base. Black has a lot of options to proceed, including the possible corner invasion in the future at **A** and the various extensions at **B**, **C**, **D** and **E**, but all of these choices lead to a hard time for Black, since he has no eyes.



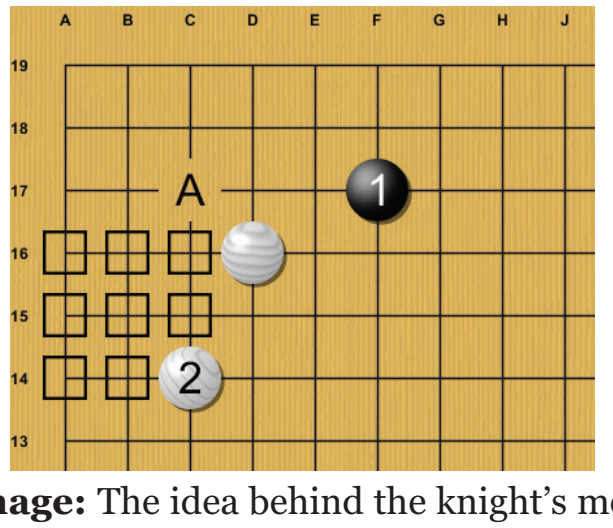


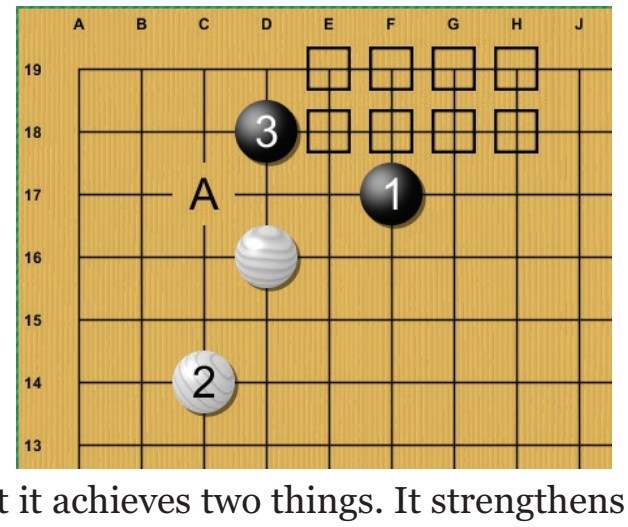
Left image: If Black chooses to form a base first, which is a much more reasonable idea, the enclosed space is forcing Black to play much closer to his stones and get into the uncomfortable shape of White playing a hane on top of his stones. Black can jump away at **B**, like before, or keep trying to live with **A**.
Right image: If Black tries to live and form two eyes, this is one of the most common results. Black is alive, but he is completely surrounded by White, the possibility of a corner invasion is gone and White has territory in the corner and influence in the left and top side and the center.
This is a very good result for White.

Conclusion : The response at the 3-5 point is a very effective move, if there is a helping stone on the other side of the approaching stone of our opponent. If you are the one defending, this move should be in your arsenal of choices. If you are the one approaching, you should be wary of your opponent responding with this move. If the helping stone is missing, this move is losing most of its efficiency.

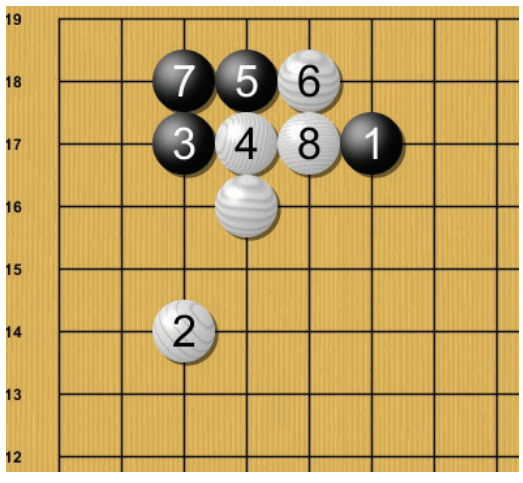
Choice C - Respond with a knight's move

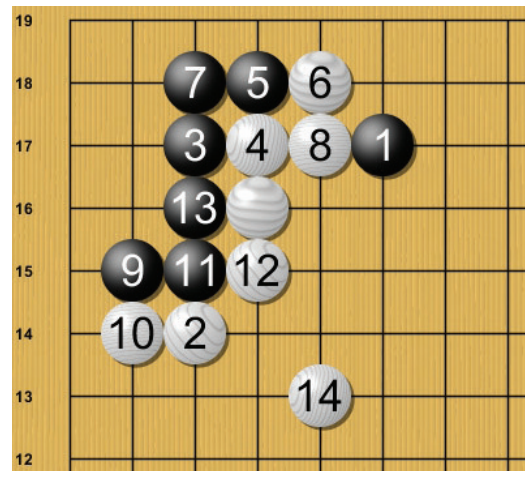
This move is aiming to create a balanced result where both players get nearly half of everything they want and the only big advantage for the player who was approached is that he now gets sente and the ability to gain the upper hand elsewhere. The most usual outcome is the joseki example we saw in **page 63** and it is a sequence that you will encounter very frequently in your games. Let us look at it in more detail:



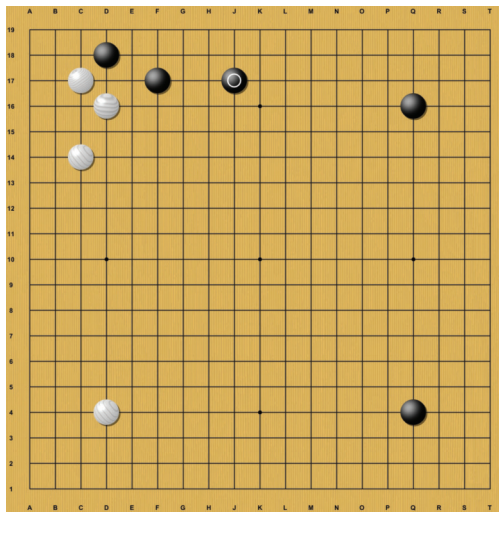


Left image: The idea behind the knight's move defense is that it achieves two things. It strengthens the corner against a direct 3-3 invasion at **A** and it expands White's territory and influence towards the side.
Right image: So, Black's most usual response is this, because such a move makes **A** a point of contest and it also expands Black towards the side and the direction he made his approach.





Left image: If Black jumps into the 3-3 point, he gets immediately separated from his initial stone and White's knight's move at **2** is in the perfect place to intercept Black's expansion…
Right image: Black will eventually manage to live in the corner, but he has given up, both the top and the left side for it. White has perfect shape and Black's original stone seems redundant.

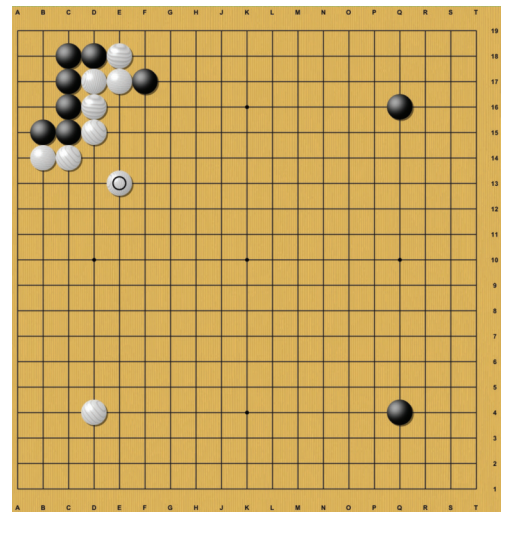


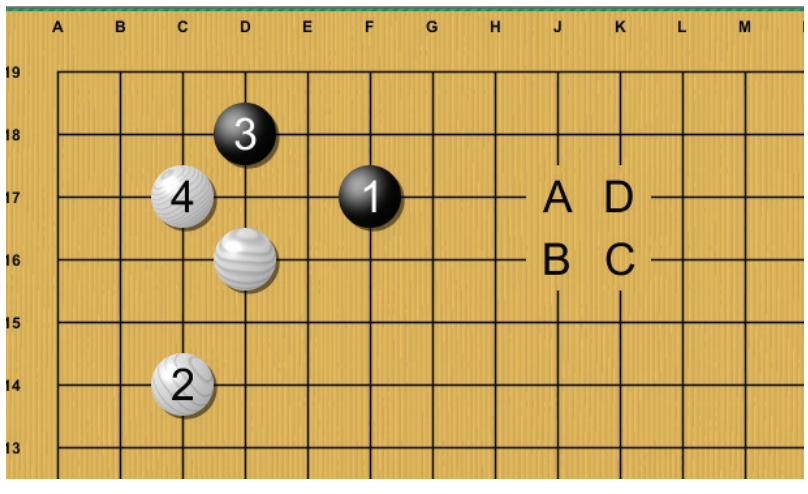
Let us pause and imagine the end results of both choices on the board.

Compare the two images.

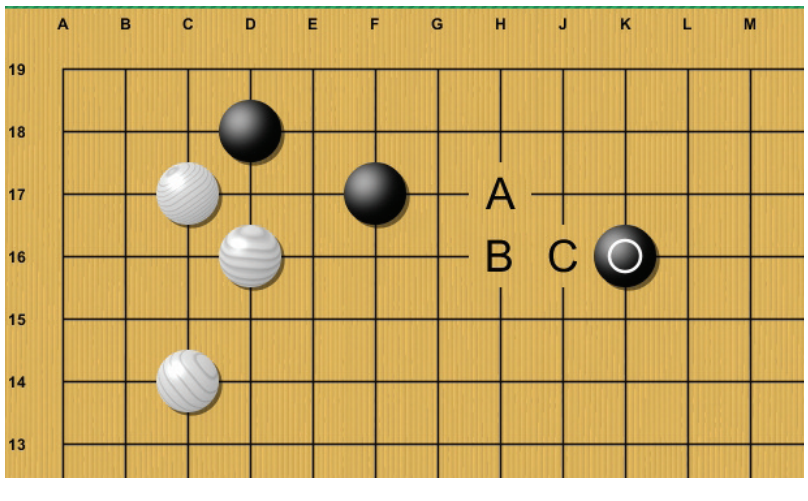
Which do you think is best for Black? On the right image, Black initiated the attack, but he ended up being locked on the inside, while on the left image the result is balanced and both players got almost exactly half of the corner and they both expand towards the side.

The left image is better for Black…

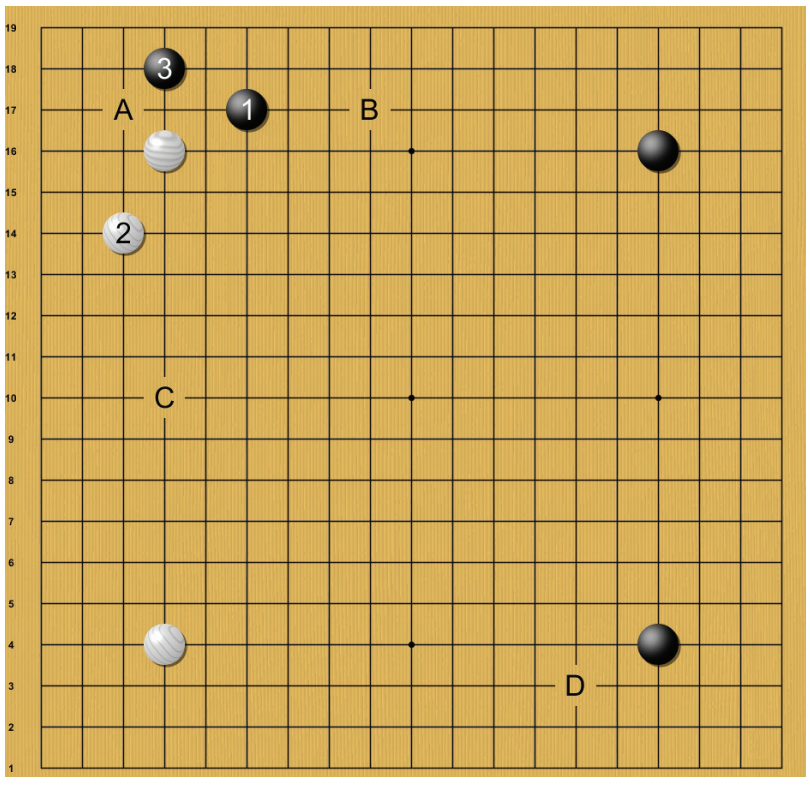




So, Black tries to keep the balance and plays **3** on the second line. White has various choices now.
The most usual one is to take the point of conflict for himself and play **move 4** at the 3-3 point.
Black wants to avoid getting surrounded, so he cannot afford to let White play any move around **A**, **B**, **C**, or **D**, so Black usually plays in one of those points, with **A** and **B** being the most safe and thus the most common choices that conclude the joseki.



For example, playing on the side star point seems to be a faster and more powerful move, but it has three weak points for invasion at **A**, **B** and **C**.
None of those invasions totally destroy Black's group, however, and we will see in the invasion chapter that Black is fine with those moves, but many players when they begin learning are afraid of getting invaded, so they play mostly the safe variations. I would propose starting by playing safe and then experimenting with the more dangerous choices. **Try, learn and have fun!**

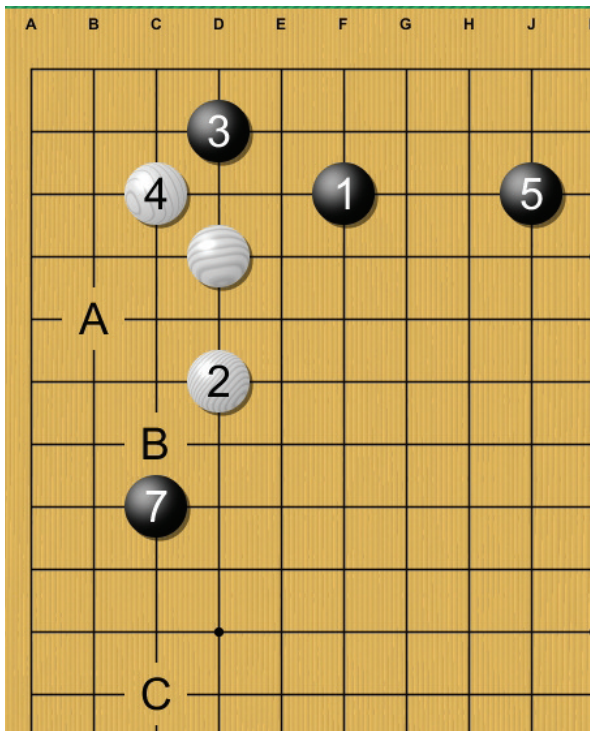


The simplicity of the joseki makes it one of the few sequences which a lot of people leave unfinished after **Black 3**. The idea is that playing **White 4** at **A** is "too slow", so since White's stones are safe, White can **tenuki** (play elsewhere), usually at **C** or **D** in this example.
After White plays tenuki, Black can tenuki, as well. His two stones have two ways to make a base, since **A** and **B** are **miai** and the joseki can be finished at any time. If White plays **A**, the normal joseki is completed. If White plays **B**, Black can take the corner with **A**. This flexibility in ways to save his group means that Black is safe and so he is free to respond to White's tenuki or attack again at another place on the board. So, if you or your opponent don't finish this joseki, both players are safe.

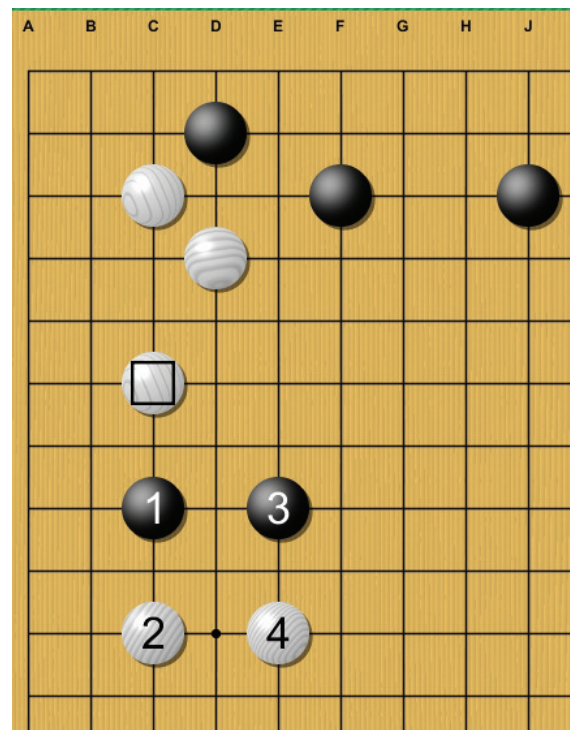
Conclusion: The small knight's move response is one of the smallest, easiest and balanced joseki in the game. Not only does it give a balanced result to both players, but it is also forgiving enough in case a player does not complete all the moves of the joseki. You will encounter this joseki very often and you will be inclined to use it, equally often. The fact that each move of the joseki is easy to comprehend make it easy to use, but also easy to tweak, in case your opponent tries to play a totally different move that the one you are expecting, makes this joseki extremely beginner friendly.

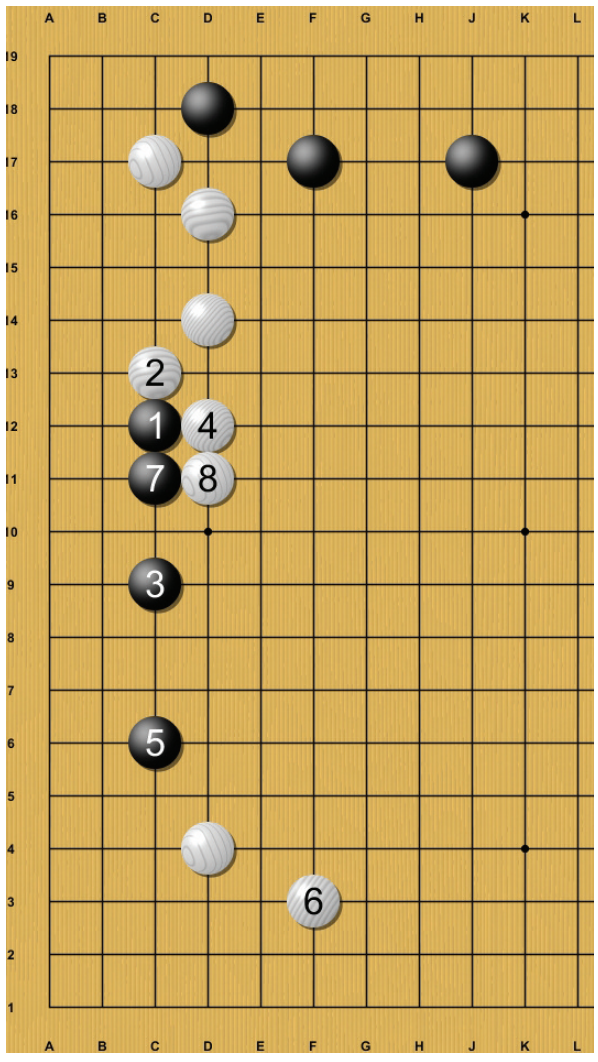
Choice D - Respond with a one space jump move

This move has the exact same idea behind it like the Knight's move response, but it gives more emphasis to the center instead of the corner. Indeed most of the variations we just analysed for the Knight's move response could remain the same, apart from the fact that now Black can threaten to attack White's formation directly.



The previous joseki sequence is still reasonable with **move 2** being a one space jump, but if Black later plays on the opposite side like in the left image and threatens to play **A** or **C**? If White Blocks at **B**, Black simply extends to **C** and makes a base. If White takes away Black's base by playing **C**, then Black slides at **A**. In the right image you can see that the Knight's move joseki doesn't offer the same double threat for Black due to the marked stone being on the 3rd line.



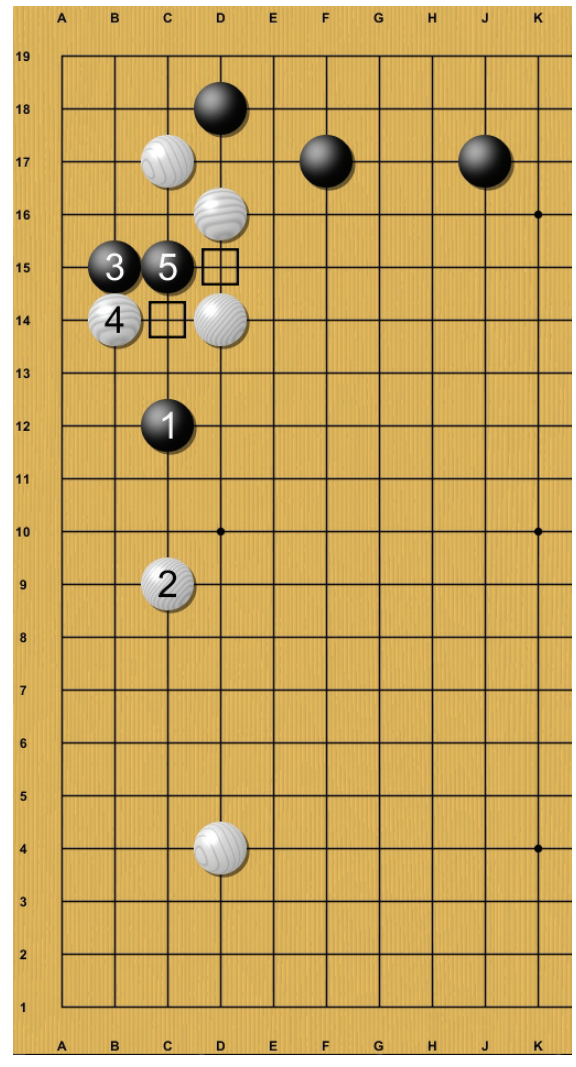


White blocks at B

In the left image we see a possible variation in case White tries to defend his corner. Black gladly extends two times along the side, while White is struggling to contain him.

White blocks at C

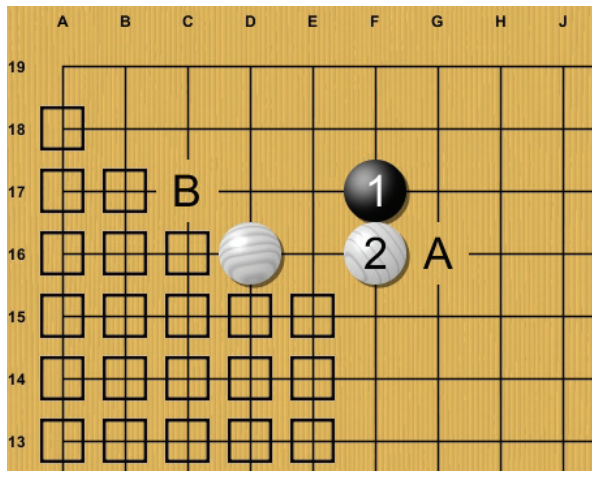
In the right image we see a possible variation in case White tries to take away Black's base.
Black slides to **3** and is on his way to reduce White's corner.
If White tries to resist, as we see in this sequence, **Black 5** leads to a double peep at two one space jumps. White cannot defend both of them at the same time, so he is forced to choose one and give up the other.
Both choices appear to be unpleasant for White.

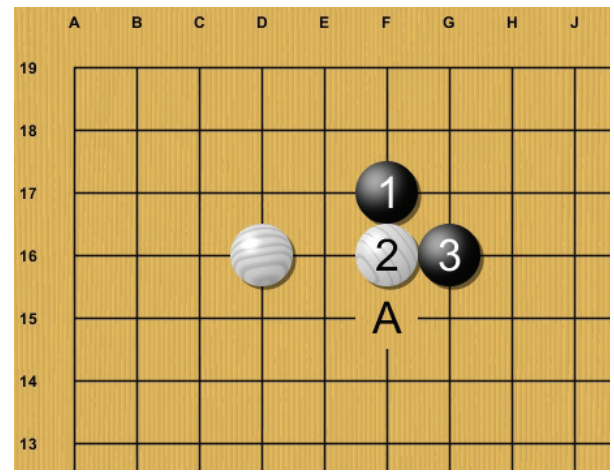


Conclusion: The one space jump response seems inferior to the Knight's move response, on an empty board. The only time it is more advantageous is when we already have some stones on the side we try to jump towards. Those help us cover the one space jump response main weakness, which is the 3rd line attack we analysed. If White has a stone around the star point in that side, then this joseki is better than the Knight's move response. If not then you should avoid playing it or strive to exploit it.

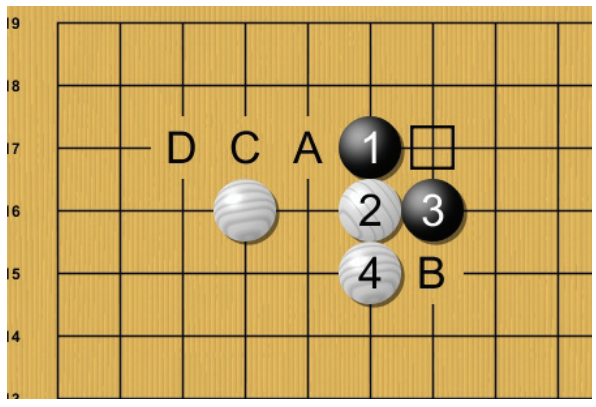
Choice E - Respond by attaching on the approaching stone

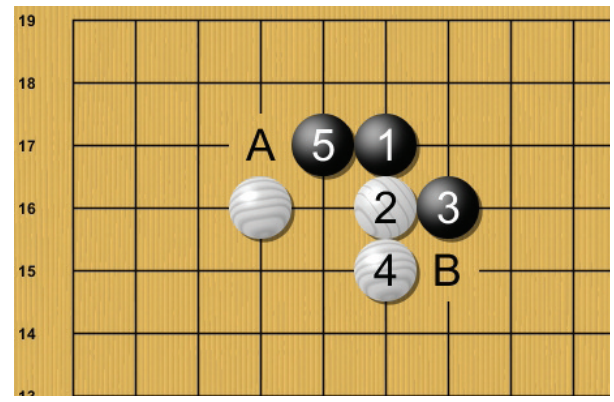
This move is aiming to keep the corner as well as expand towards the side. This is a very lofty goal, so it is no surprise that it is a move that can be played only if we have an extra stone to help us, just like with the one space extension.
Let us see the most common variation and how, why and when it works :



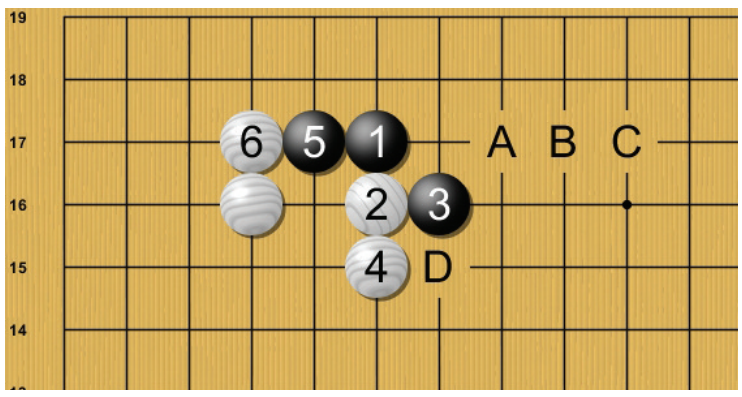


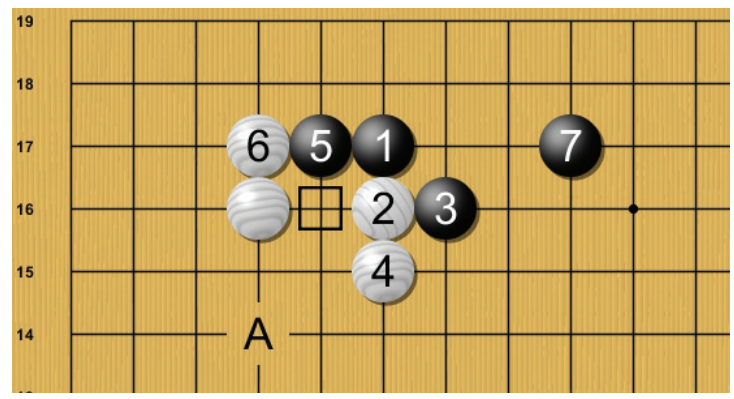
Left image: White attaches on the Black stone to apply the most pressure, in order to defend the side and most of the corner. Black can play the hane at **A** or dive for the corner at **B**, with **A** being the most usual move.
Right image: Once Black makes the hane, White needs to help his stone and avoid the atari at **A**. The reason why we should be careful of attaching to other stones is that we put our stone in danger of getting surrounded.



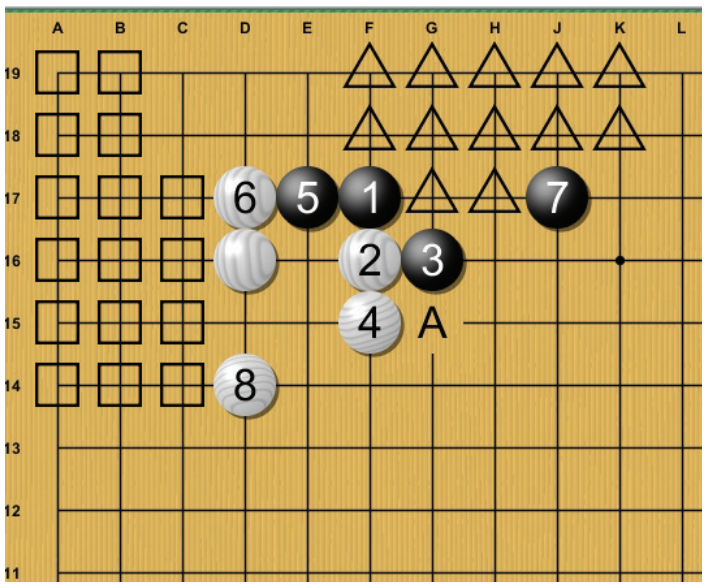


Left image: Black wants to protect his own weak point at the square mark with either **A** or **B**. Black can also choose to leave it unprotected and go for the corner with **C** or **D**. The most usual choice is **A** since it is the safest...
Right image: In which case now it is White's turn to decide what he wants. White can defend his corner and side with **A** or go for the side and center with **B**. Choosing **B** is rare after investing all these moves to protect the corner.

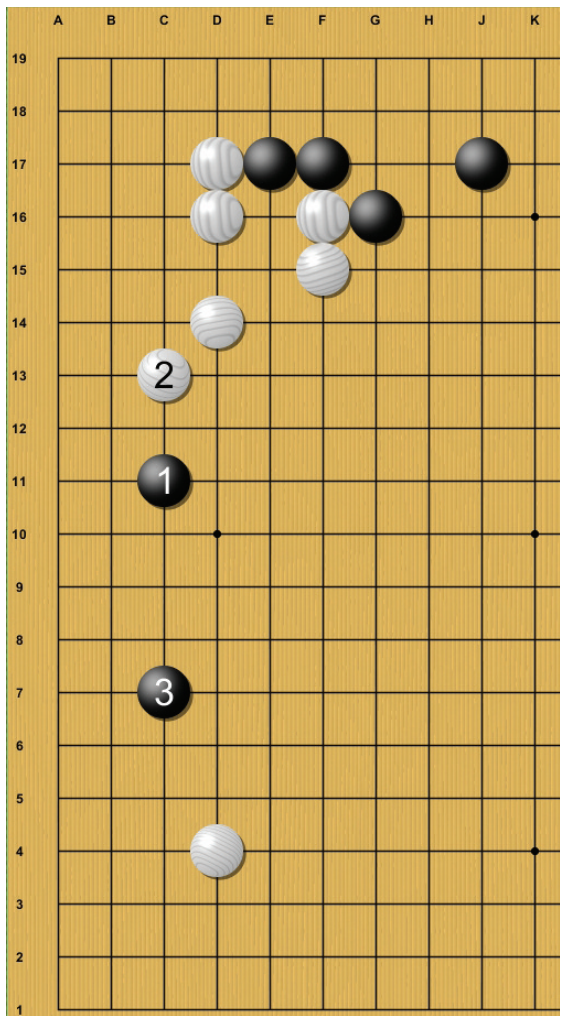




Left image: Black wants to expand now, while still protecting his cutting point so **A**, **B**, **C** and **D** are the obvious moves towards the two directions left for Black to expand. Choice **B** is a usual choice, as a concession between the safe **A** and the bolder **C**.
Right image: White is left with a cutting point in the marked spot. White could play there, but it is a bad shape (two empty triangles) that just defends, so the table shape at **A** is a better move that protects the cut and expands at the same time.

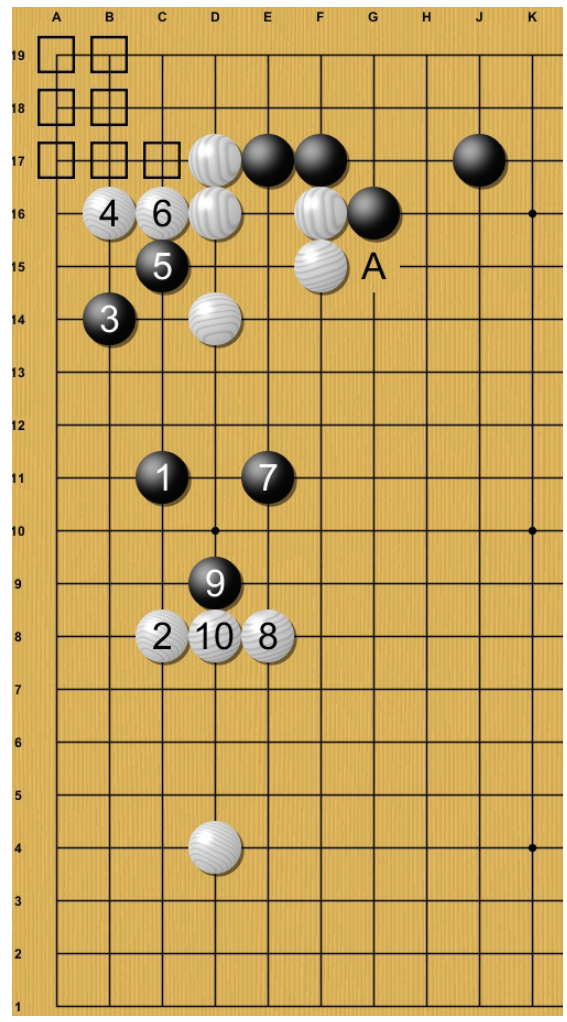


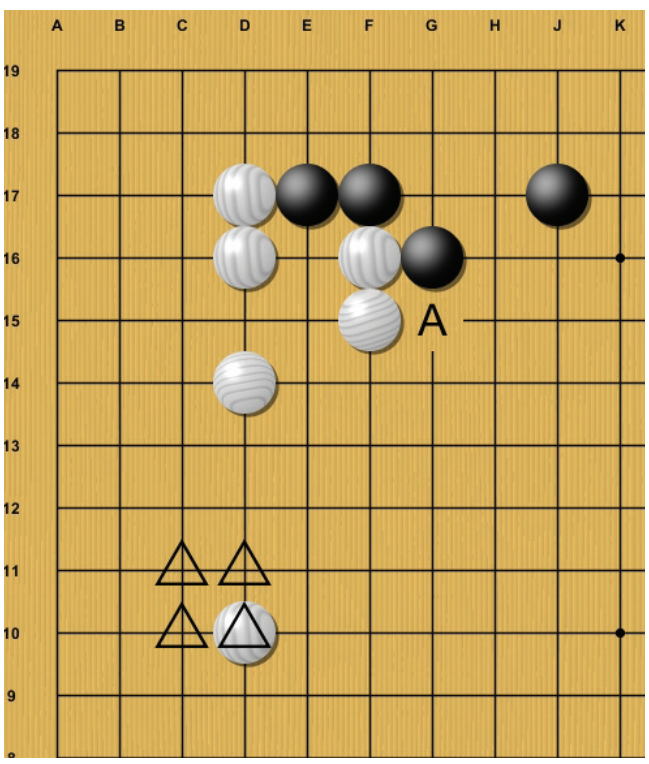
Now the joseki is complete with **White 8** and things seem to be fairly good for White. He got most of the corner and there is little Black can do to break up White's formation and he has the ability to expand on the left side or the center side at **A**.
Black, on the other hand, got some points on the top side and he can keep expanding towards the right side or go out in the center at **A**.
The point at **A** is a central point of focus for both players, so sometimes you might see either one of them try to play there as soon as possible.
So, Black is fine and White seems happy with his result.
What could possibly be the problem for White?



The problem is that Black has sente and that we need to consider the whole board situation and the possible direction of play. The problem is Black playing on the 3rd line on the side and threatening to expand on either way.
On the left image, White defends his top corner and his gains from the joseki, but Black takes most of the side and White has to respond on the bottom left corner as well.

On the right image, White blocks from the other way and Black slides underneath White's 4th line stones reducing the corner to almost half, creating space for him on the side and retaining sente for himself in order to play at **A** first !
This joseki needs helping stones in order to work well...



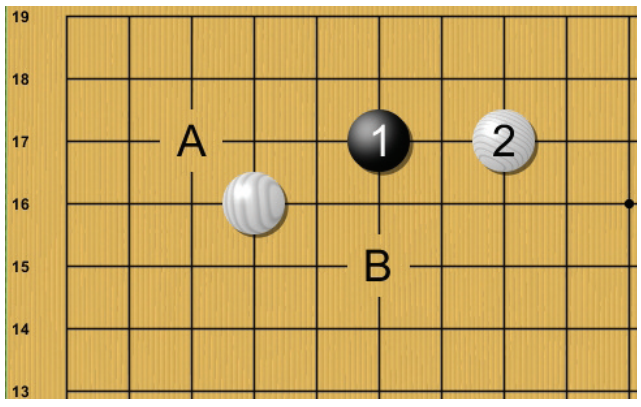


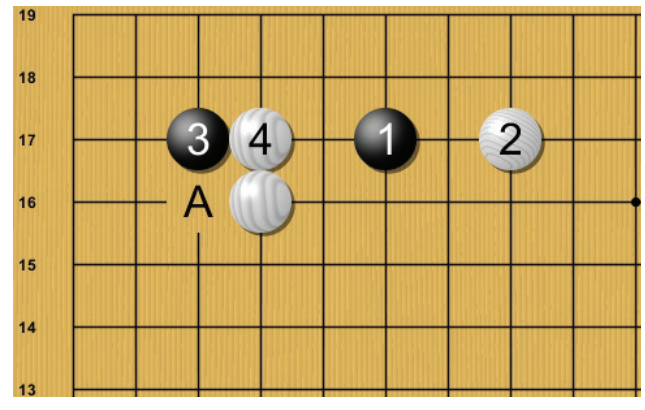
If there is a White stone in the side star point or in the marked points around it, then Black loses the ability to jump in the side and create havoc with a double threat. Black is left only with the option at playing **A** for the time being and while it is a good move, it is not as good as the previous cases we just mentioned. With a helping stone for White, the attachment response joseki is delivering to White a very nice result indeed. Black is not unhappy with the result either, he is just not getting everything like before.

Conclusion: The attachment response joseki is good for White if, and only if, he has another helping stone on the side. In any other case avoid playing it, else your opponent will have the advantage. If your opponent plays it without a helping stone, then jump into his open side and exploit it to gain the upper hand.

Choice F - Respond with the one space pincer

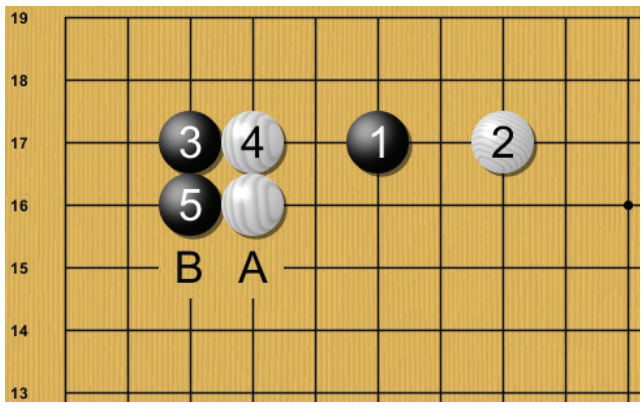
This move is aiming to emphasize the side from which your opponent is trying to approach you. It gives your opponent the choice to either take the corner and give up the side from which he originally approached, or give up approaching the corner and focus on that side as well. The first choice is the most effective for the person trying to approach, but sometimes the side is so important that he needs to stop the approach and defend the side. Let us see how and when these choices work:

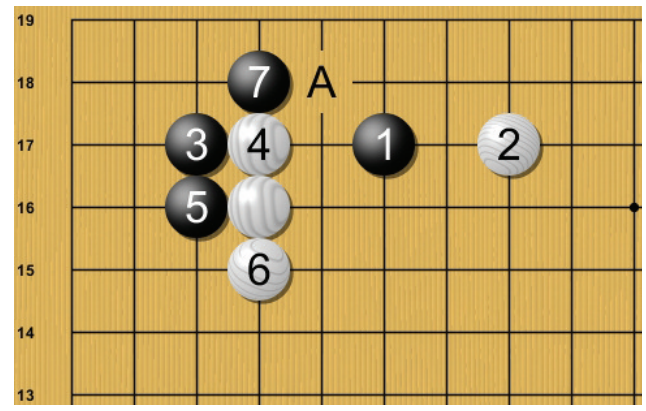




Left image: After White's pincer at **move 2**, Black can either invade the corner at **A** or jump out at **B.** Let us see choice **A** first...

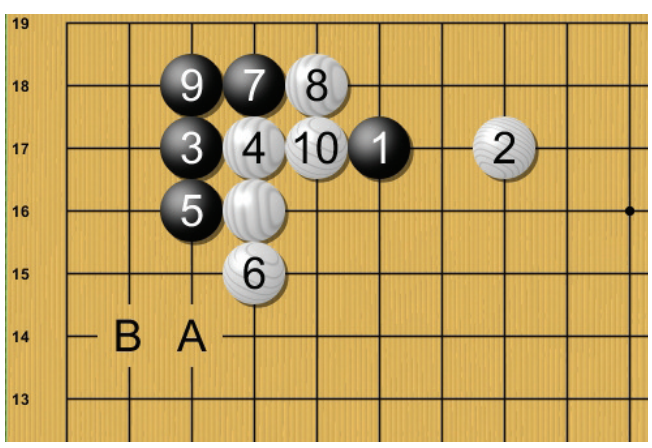
Right image: White could play at A if the left side is more important, but the most reasonable choice is **move 4**, which splits the Black stones...

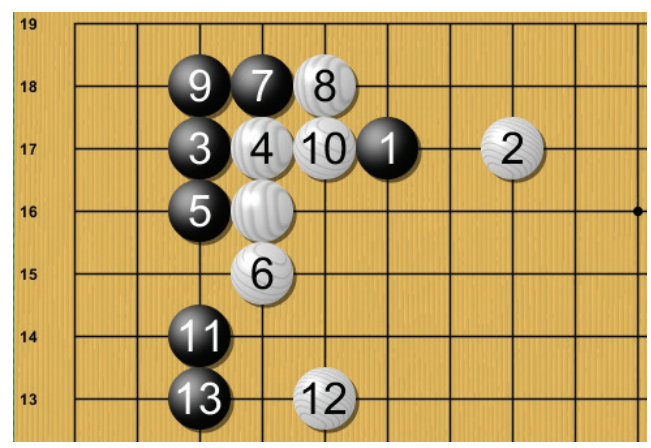




Left image: Black 5 tried to extend the stones and create a base in the corner. White can either extend at **A** or **hane** at **B**, like in the joseki in **page 66**, but in this case, due to the **Black 1** the hane is a mistake, as we will see in the next page.

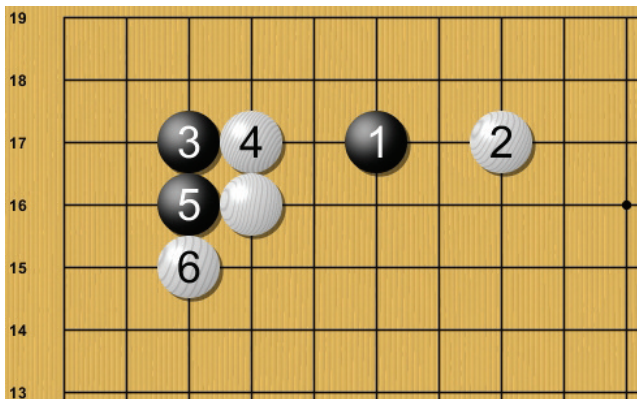
Right image: After White extends, **Black 7** uses his **move 1** to threaten to connect underneath White's stones. White, of course cannot allow that to happen so playing at **A** is a certain move without any other practical alternatives.

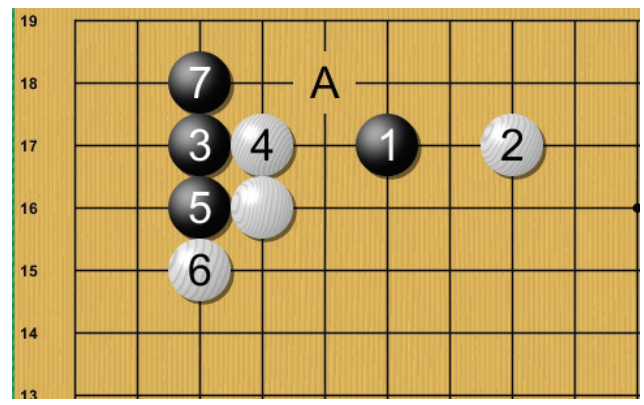




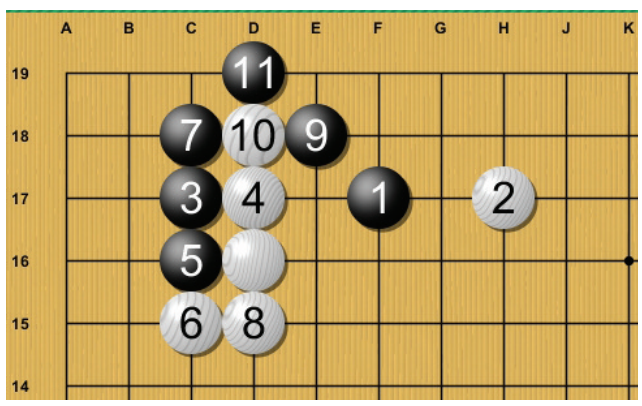
Left image: White 8 defends and **Black 9** connects Black's group. **White 10** also connects White's stones and now Black can easily make two eyes and live in the corner by either playing **A** or **B**...

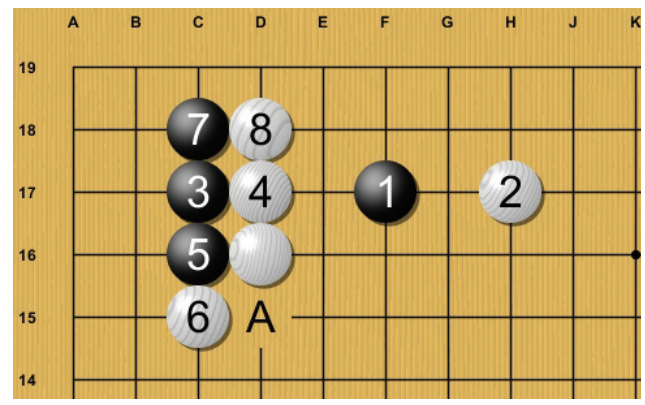
Right image: If Black plays the more aggressive choice in **move 11**, White usually creates a large wall with **move 12**, while minimizing any chances of Black's stone **1** to run away later. **Move 13** solidifies Black's group concluding the joseki.



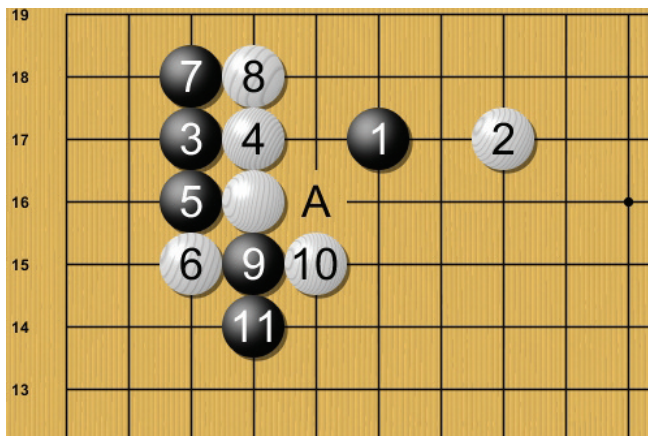


Left image: But let us return to **move 6**. We mentioned that White playing the hane was a mistake this time. What changed from the joseki in **page 66**? Is the stone at **1** so important?
Right image: It turns out that it makes a lot of difference. The usual move to take advantage of White's overplay is simply extending to **7** and threatening to connect underneath with **move 1** at **A**...

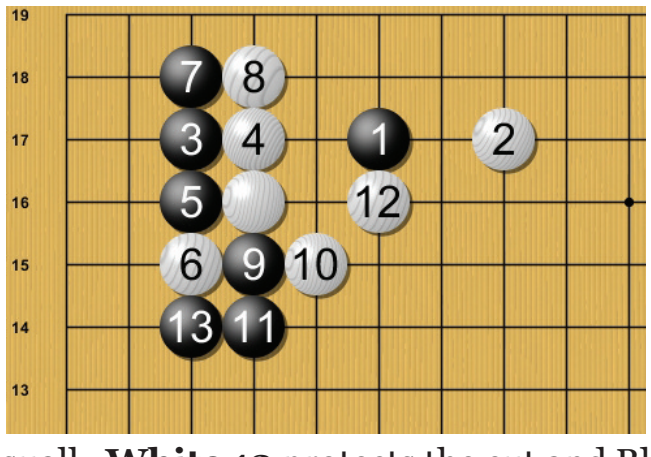




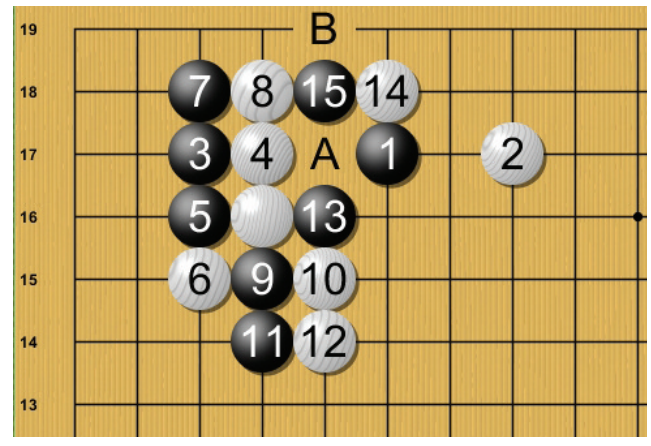
Left image: But how does that move work exactly? If White ignores the threat, then **Black 9** connects both of Black's groups. It is a disastrous result for White so...
Right image: White usually responds to **Black 7** by blocking the way, believing that he still has a good shape with a hane on top of Black's stones. But the cut at **A** is dangerous due to **Black 1**...



Black cuts at **9** and White cannot ignore the chance to atari the cutting stone at **10**. Black extends at **11** and he is safe and now White has another cutting point at **A**, due to **move 1**...



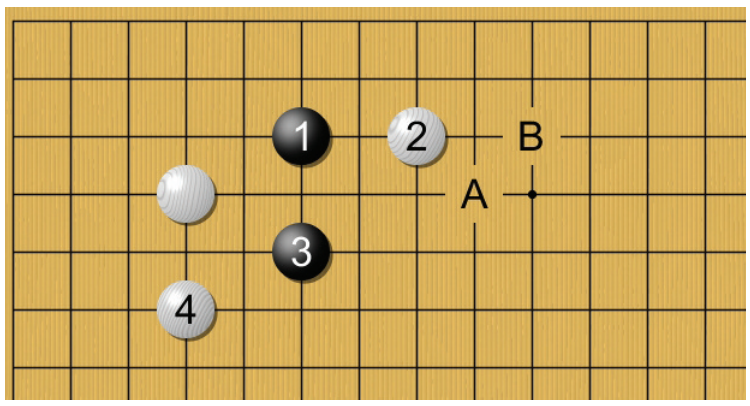
So usually **White 12** protects the cut and Black captured White's stone gaining a large corner.

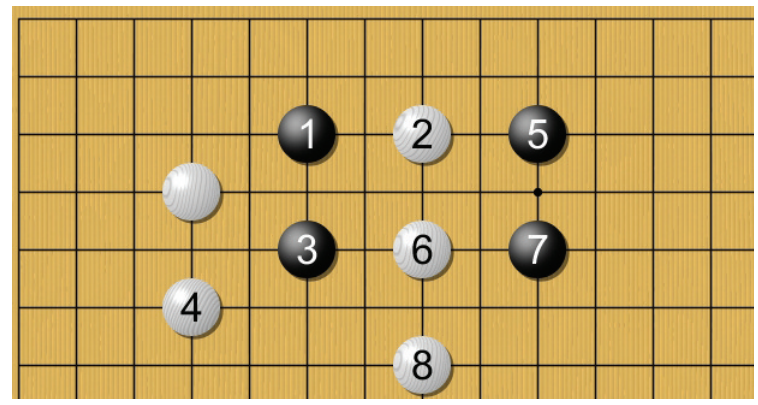


If White ignores that cut, the word disaster describes the result for White.
If White doesn't address the cut with **move 12**, then **Black 13** cuts White in half. If White tries to run away with **14** and possibly connect his group with **White 2**, then **Black 15** kills the White stones. White cannot play at **A**, because it would place his group in atari and he cannot play **B** either, because Black would play at **A**, placing White's stones again in atari. White's group is dead and Black got a huge lead by totally dominating this corner.

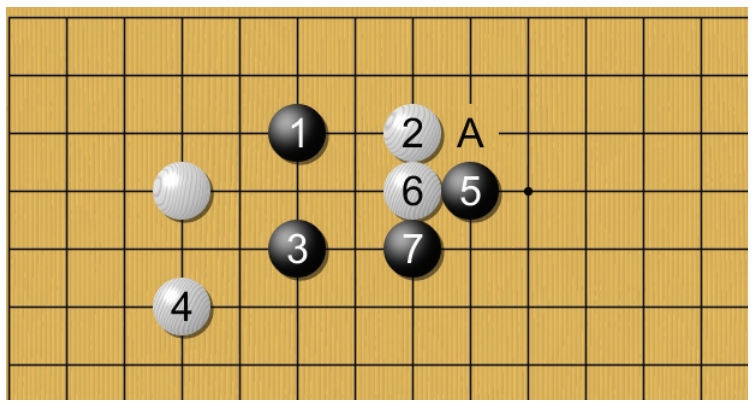
Be careful: When playing a sequence one extra stone can make a huge difference. **Always beware of your cutting points and do not be greedy.**

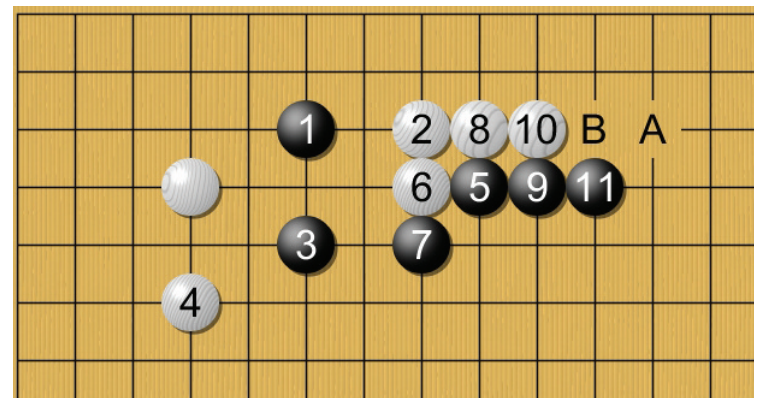
But what happens if Black decides to jump out when pincered?
Usually Black chooses to do that when the side from which he approaches is very important to him and he has invested some more stones there. Let us see how this idea goes usually:



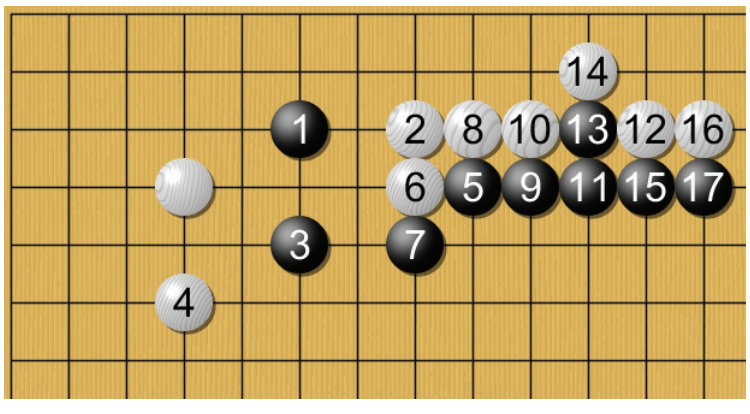


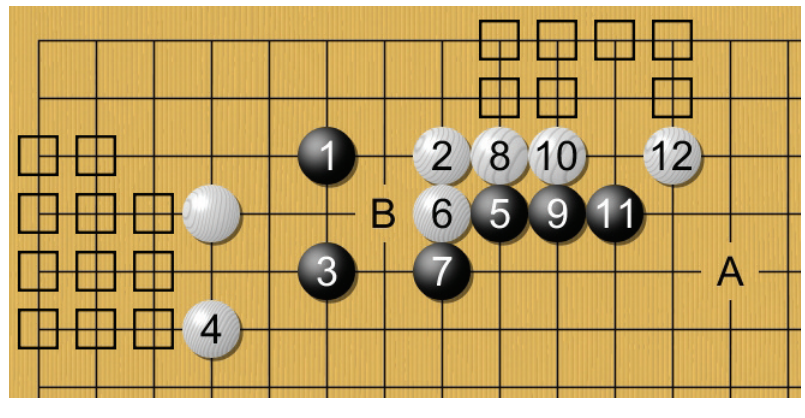
Left image: Black jumps out with **move 3** and White usually follows with **move 4**, to claim the corner and left side influence. Black can either play **A** or **B**, to pincer the White stone and gain some space, but **B** is a mistake…
Right image: If Black tries to pincer the White stone, White just jumps and now Black has two groups with one getting surrounded really fast.





Left image: So Black almost always shoulder hits the White stone at **move 5**. White tries to disconnect Black's stones at **6**, but **move 7** solves that problem. White is getting surrounded, so White has to run with **A**.
Right image: White is running along the third line creating a base for himself and Black follows. After having three stones solidly connected, White can jump at **A**, instead of continuing to push one point at a time at **B**. If Black cuts there…

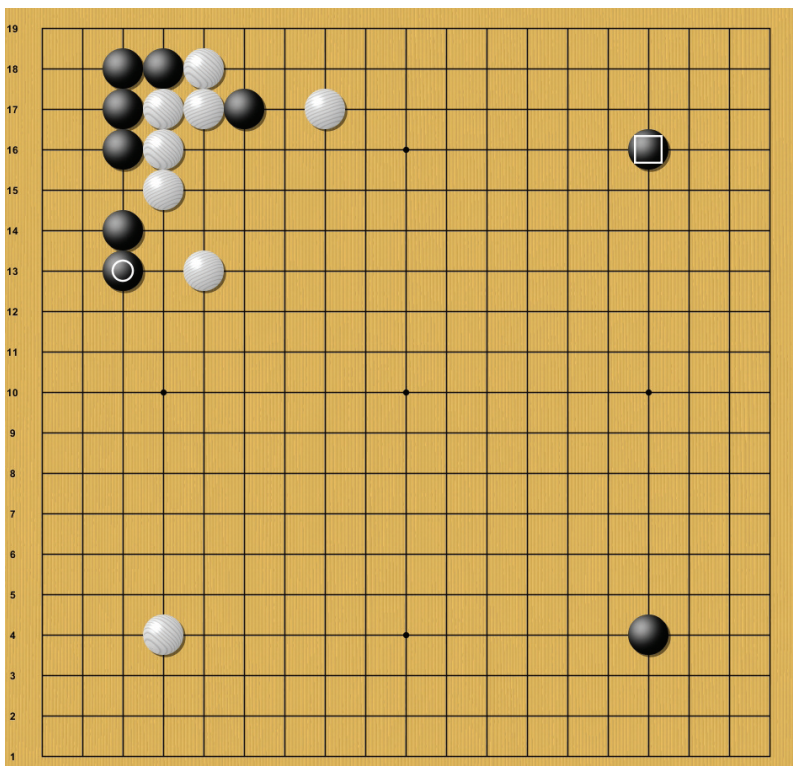


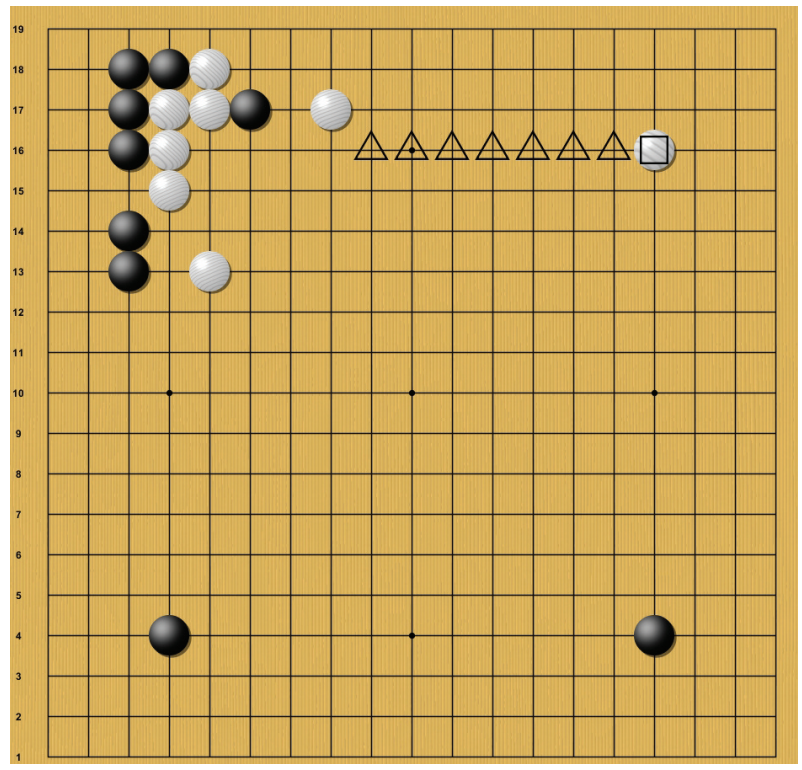


Left image: Black's cut doesn't work, because all of White's stones (**moves 2**, **8** and **10**) were solidly connected and Black cannot atari any White stone and push through and separate White's stones…
Right image: So, after White jumps at **12**, the joseki is considered finished. Black can either play at **A** or **B** or tenuki, depending on the whole board.
White is usually happy with this result since he got points on the top side, most of the corner and left side influence in exchange for Black gaining a wall and no territory.

But when do we pincer? When is it the right direction to use a pincer?

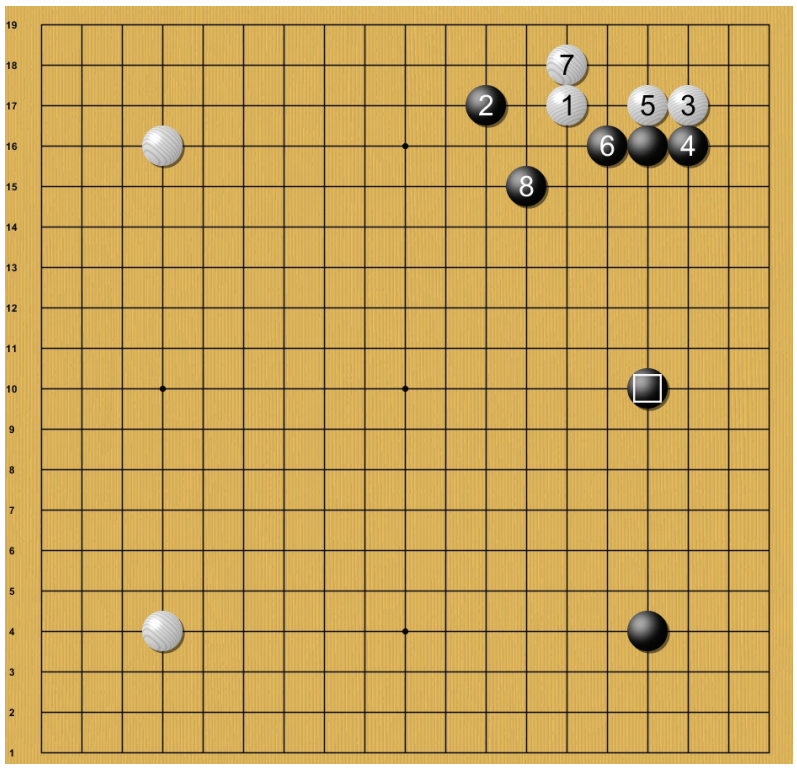
Let us remember that the goal of the pincer is to emphasize the side from which the opponent's attack is coming, so we usually pincer when we have stones we want to develop there. For example compare these two situations:





In the **left image** White pincered with the marked Black stone being on the corner from the direction of the attack. In the **right image** White pincered with a White stone being in that position.

Even by looking at the two boards, the right image seems much better. On the left image the marked Black stone is setting a barrier to White's expansion, but on the right image all those marked lines are within White's influence and any move Black makes there will be instantly in a disadvantage.



Sometimes the defender will choose to block from the other side and allow the attacking stones to connect, in order to gain side influence. The image on the left shows a typical example of a joseki that is used when the marked stone is on the side and we want to develop that area instead of the top.

It is all a matter of which direction we want to build, which direction we feel we are stronger, **which direction is larger for us**.
The image on the left is a usual result of our subject after the joseki: **Fuseki**. Black's stones on the right side will dominate the direction of play decisions maybe for the whole game. We will revisit this exact sequence later, so, for the time being, just keep in mind the possible result.

Conclusion: Pincers are very strong moves, but we should be very careful and consider the whole board when we are using them. For this particular pincer, when you are approaching and you are pincered like that, the most profitable response is to jump into the opponent's corner. When you are being approached, you should always keep in mind that if you pincer, you will most probably lose your corner. The original approaching stone is very tricky to handle and it has a lot of **aji**, even in the late game.

3-4 point joseki

The other most popular move in the opening is playing in the 3-4 point. This choice is showing mainly a desire for territory and unlike the 4-4 point which is symmetrical and unique for each corner, in this case there are two 3-4 points in each corner and choosing between one or the other is not a trivial issue. Some thought on the whole board situation and the **direction of play** is needed and even from the first moves we are forced to think about what we want to do on the board and where. Let us see first some of the choices your opponent has, when trying to approach the 3-4 point and that will help us decide which of the two points is better suited for us and when.

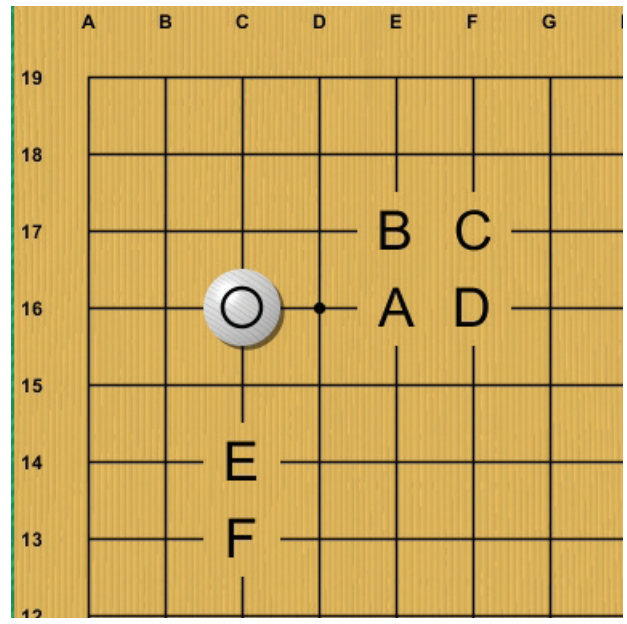
Possible ways to approach 3-4 point

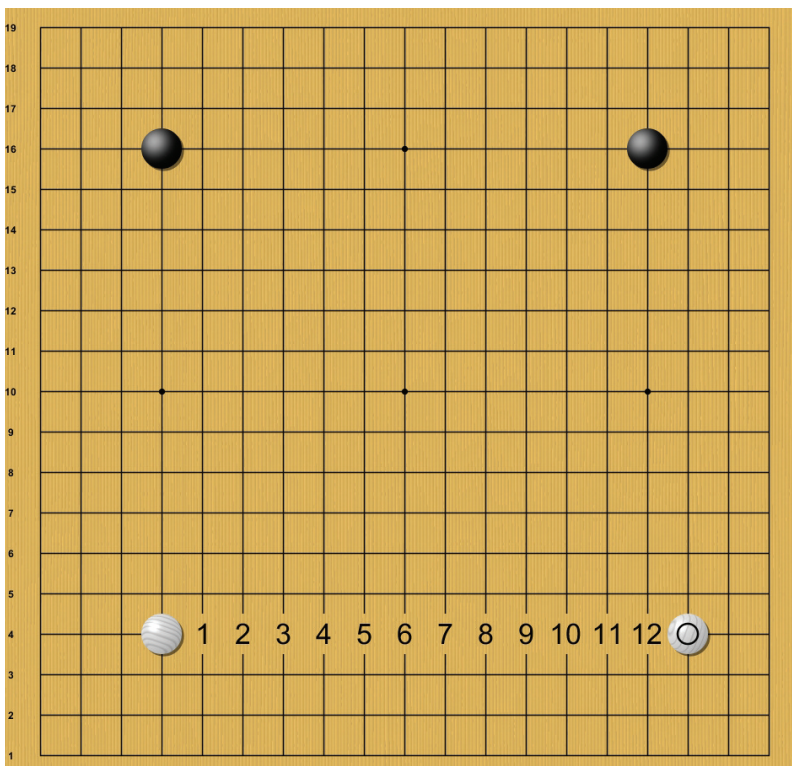
These are the most probable ways players can approach the 3-4 point and expect to have a good or balanced result.

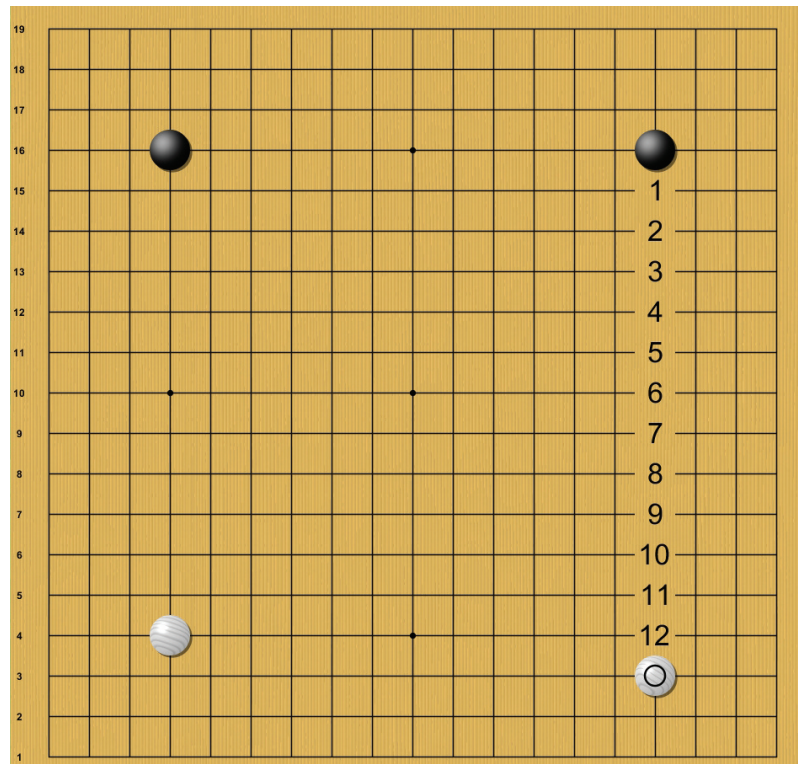
A and **B** are the most popular approaches with dozens of variations and joseki springing from them, since they are moves that have been around for thousands of years. Those variations are worth studying, but in this book we will study only three joseki for **A**, which is the most modern and usual move played on almost any level of play.

C and **D** are wider and safer ways to approach the 3-4 stone in case we want our approach to be more flexible.

E and **F** are moves that are chosen when we want to avoid approaching the 3-4 point from its usual side, at all costs.





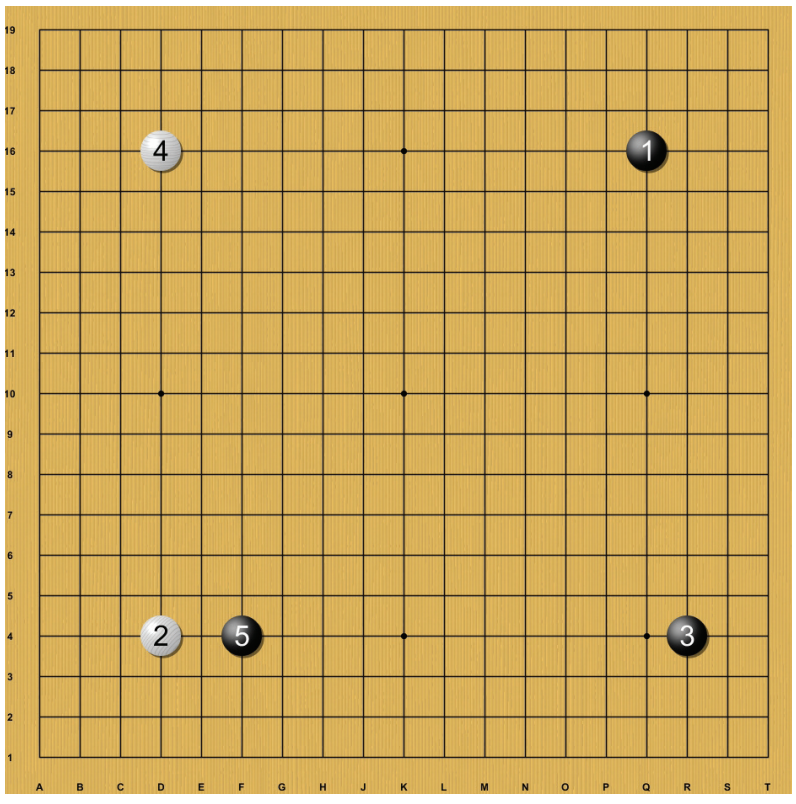


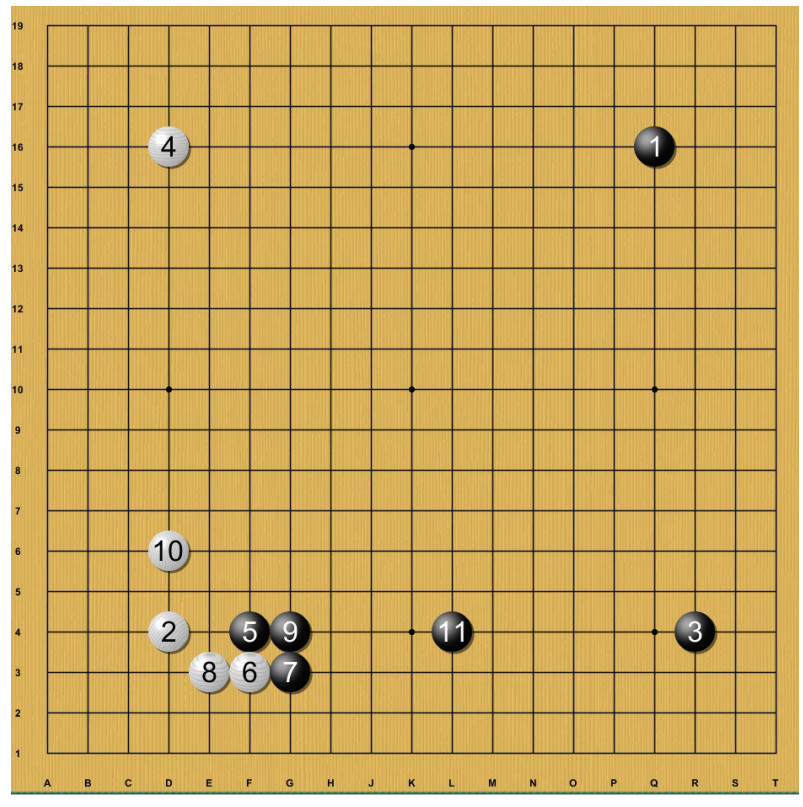
Which 3-4 point is better?

In the **left image** White's 3-4 point stone is facing a White stone and it is Black's turn.

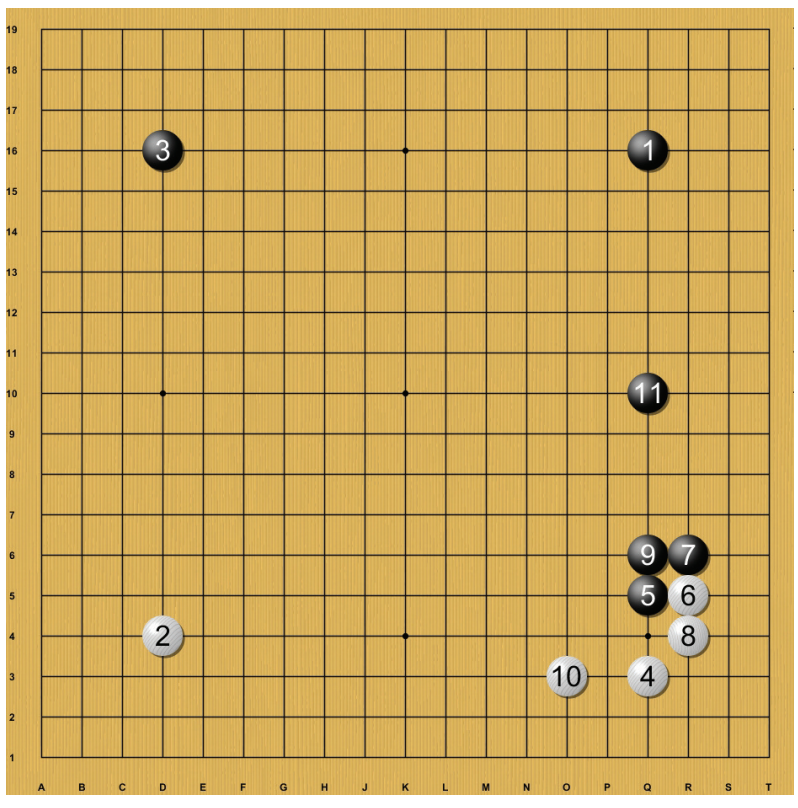
In the **right image** White's 3-4 point stone is facing a Black stone and it is Black's turn.

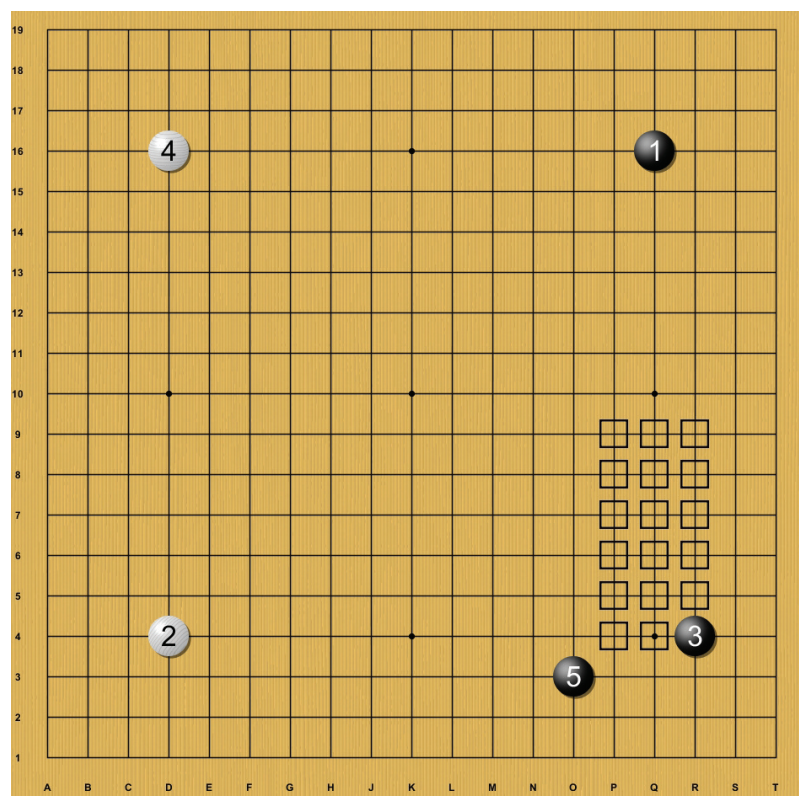
In both cases this is the larger side for both players (12 points/spaces wide) and the **direction of play** dictates that Black would love to approach White on the larger side, while having a friendly stone on his back. So the right image is in favour of Black and not White, because it is Black's turn...





One of the advantages of Black playing first is that he can have a 3-4 point stone facing a White stone because he will most probably be able to use it to expand on the larger side. In the left image, Black can play **move 3** there, creating the largest side towards the White stone, because it is his turn to play after White usually plays **move 4** in the remaining corner. In **Black 5** and the continuation we see in the right image (which is a joseki we will analyse shortly), Black can be very happy with the result indeed with his nice framework on most of the bottom side and his stone in the top right corner, complementing it.



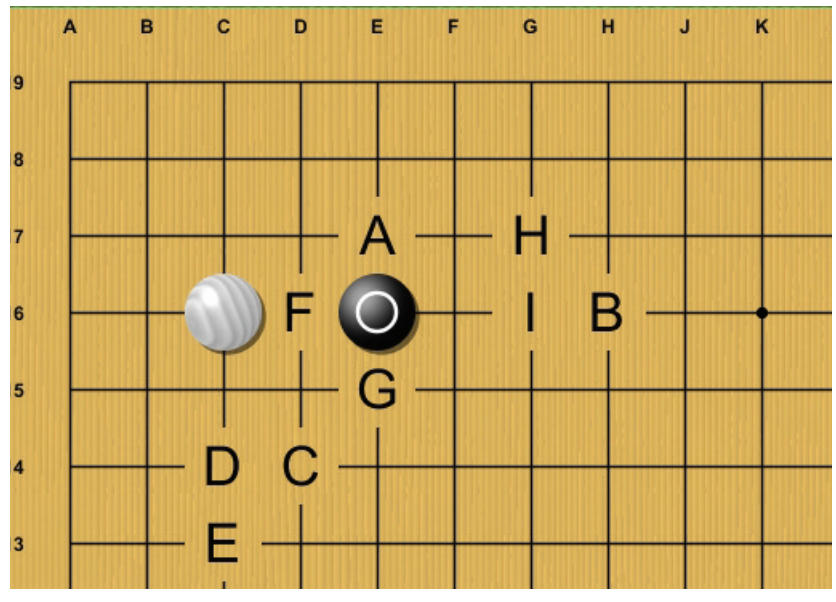


Left image: White cannot do the same opening as Black. Once White's 3-4 stone is set with the larger side facing a Black corner, then Black can immediately use his move advantage to approach White's corner. In this case if, for the sake of comparison, the exact same joseki is played like in the previous case, Black is again very happy with the result. This board is almost the same as when Black actively tried to set this in his favour, so White rarely plays that way.

Right image: **<u>Be careful:</u>** The 3-4 point creates a larger side towards one direction, but its real direction of play is towards the side! This seems initially counter-intuitive, but with the visual aid of the image above, it becomes easier to discern. In the image, Black, instead of approaching White's corner, enclosed his corner instead. Black's **moves 3** and **5** create a loose wall facing towards the top and right side, creating influence towards the marked points, instead of the left side.

So let us see what happens when we play a **3-4 point** and the opponent approaches our corner from a **one space jump relation**. There are many ways to respond to that move and the possible results are too many to cover, but after analysing all these moves in the previous joseki it is now a lot easier to imagine what these moves aim to do, so let us at least see what these possibilities are:

When Black approaches the **3-4 point** with a one space approach, then White has many options to choose from:
A, F and **G** aim at starting a fight and usually aim at taking the corner territory.
C, D and **E** are peaceful options that aim at developing the left side, as well as keeping part of the corner, without engaging the approaching stone.
B, H and **I** are the most usual **pincers** and their main goal, just like before, is to focus on the top side and deprive the Black stone of a possibility of making a base and developing.

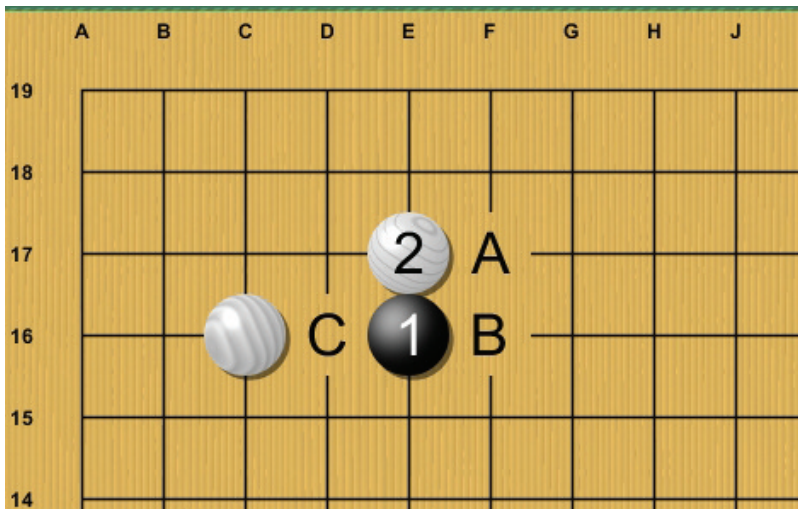


Out of all these choices we will review choices **A**, **B** and **C** for various reasons. The main reason is that these moves cover the most common responses for this joseki and another important reason is that while it is impossible to cover all variations, we could at least represent all the “categories” of the ideas behind the joseki. So, choice **A** represents the option to fight for the corner, choice **B** is a very severe pincer in most cases and choice **C** is the most usual peaceful option to expand towards the side.

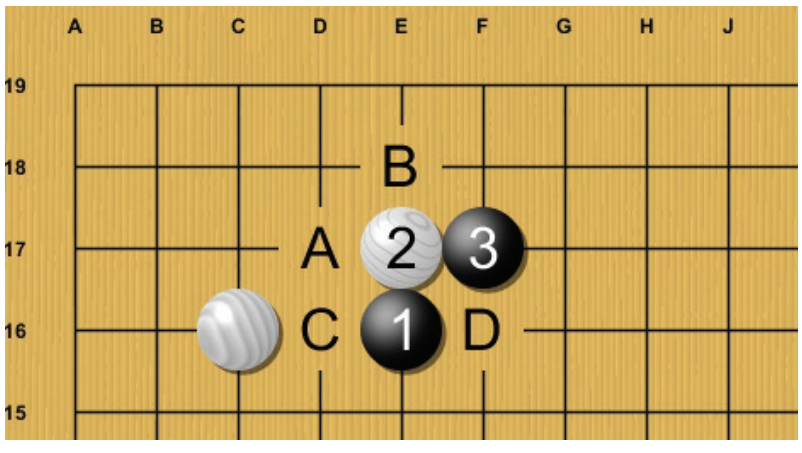
Choice A - Respond at the 3-6 point

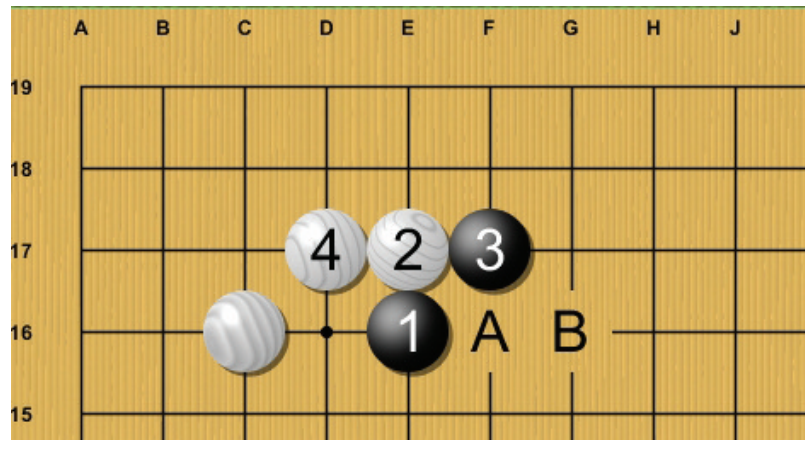
This move is a classic and it can be seen at any level of play and at almost any historical era of the game. White aims to force Black to defend his stone and work his way into securing the corner, while Black is occupied with making good shape for his stones. The amount of moves that has been tried in this situation during all these centuries is beyond the scope of a beginner’s book, but we have already seen the most common variation in the previous page, so now we need to analyse the ideas and thoughts behind each move and when it is to our advantage to choose this variation which we will present.

In Go, when a choice of moves is so commonly accepted, it is usually because the moves are fair and balanced for both players, so we should point out once again that even if you are the one approaching the corner or you are the one defending it, the ideas behind a joseki are useful to be in your arsenal of thoughts which will help you decide on your next move, not only in the corners, but in similar fights, later, elsewhere in the board.

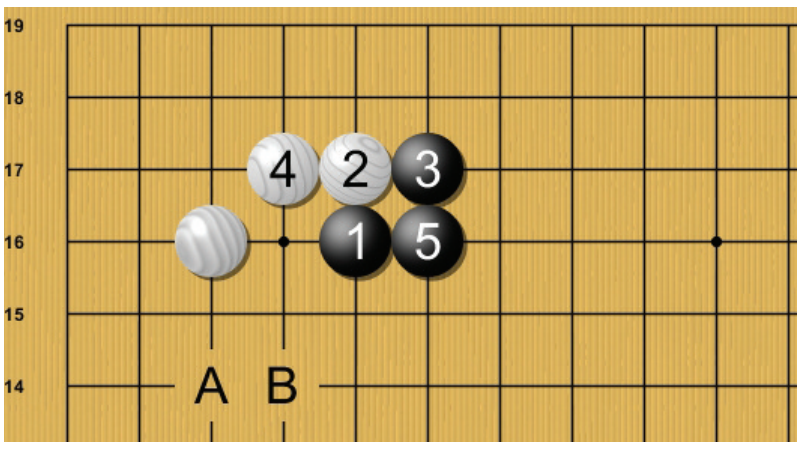


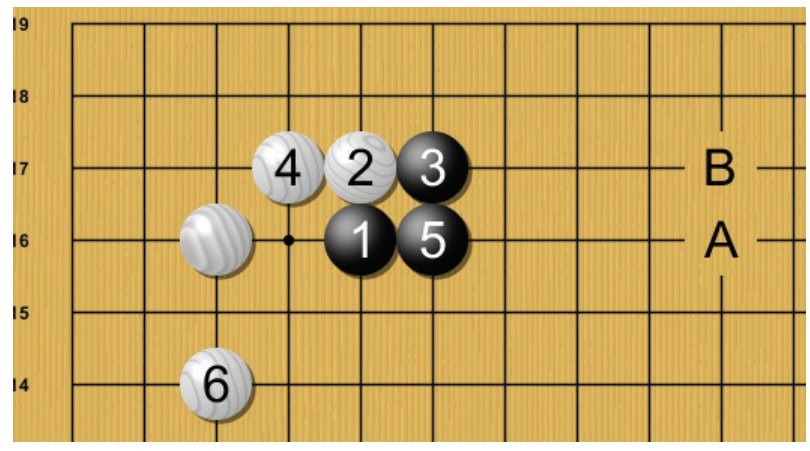
After Black approaches and **White 2** responds to the **3-6 point** (or **E-17** in the image, since we are using the top left corner), Black wants to take advantage of the fact that White attached to his stone, so that he can put pressure on it and reduce its options or liberties. In the image, both stones have three liberties and it is Black's turn so Black has the upper hand locally and his usual choices are **A**, **B** or **C.** Choices **B** and **C** do not reduce White's liberties so they are less severe and give White more choices. We will be looking at choice **A**...





Left image: White cannot ignore **Black 3**, because if Black gets to play at **A**, White's stone is in atari and it will be in trouble. This means that flamboyant moves like **C** and **D** are not a safe option and White has to strengthen his stone by extending it at either **A** or **B**. Both choices are similar in strategy and strengthen White's corner. Once again we will be looking at choice **A**...
Right image: Now that White's stones are strong after **move 4**, Black's cutting point at **A** is exposed and it needs to be strengthened or White can play there and separate Black's stones. Black's choices are limited now. He can either directly connect his stones by playing at **A**, or play the tiger's mouth at **B**, connecting his stones indirectly and creating more space for himself...



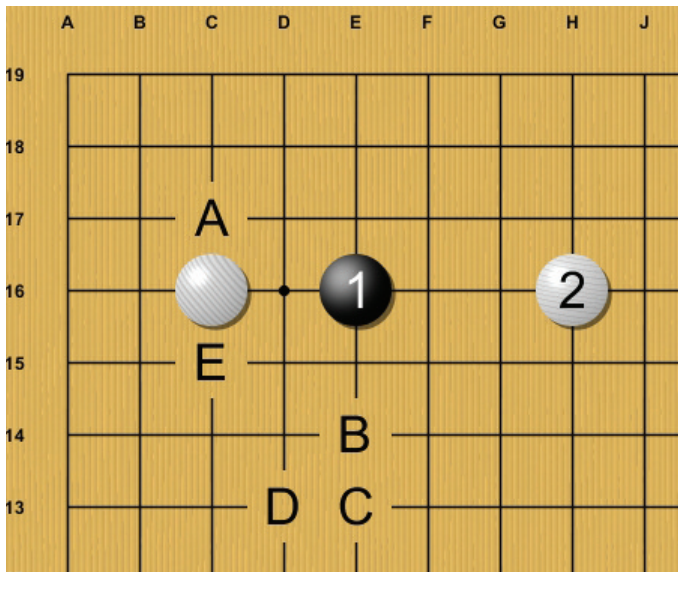


Left image: Both choices are similar so let us pick the direct connection for **Black 5**. White's corner is very secure and if he wants to he can tenuki and take the advantage on another area of the board or he can play either **A** to secure territory towards the left side, or **B** to focus more on influence.
Right image: When White takes the left side, Black is left with only the top side to expand, so he jumps three spaces to either **A** or **B**, depending on what Black wants to focus more. Like White's choices previously, the third line is more territorial and the fourth line choice is for influence towards the center.

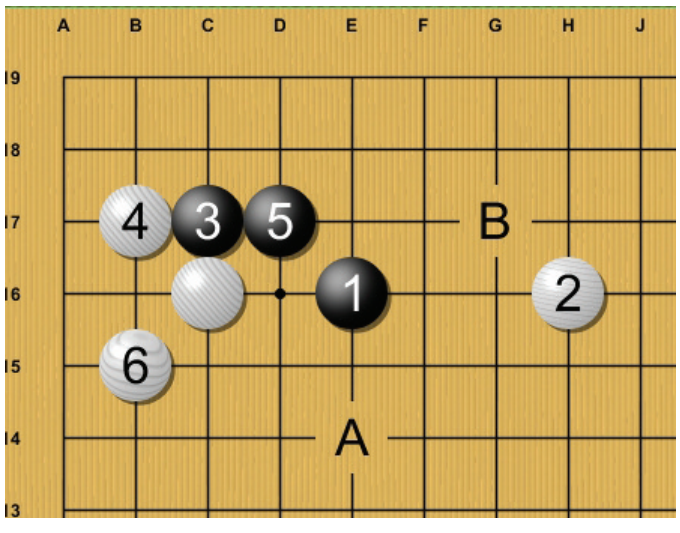
Conclusion: This is a very stable and fair joseki for both players. White gets a corner and extends a bit towards the side while Black gets a nice framework of stones in the side from which he approached. As we saw in **page 82**, when the player who is approaching the 3-4 point has a friendly stone to back him up in the corner from the direction of the approach, then this is a splendid result for him. But even if he does not and the direction of play is not ideal, the result is still very balanced.

Choice B - Respond with a two space pincer

This move is very common in the game and you should expect to encounter it a lot at the single digit kyu level, because it is a response that is viewed as very annoying for the player who approaches and it is used in the Kobayashi fuseki which we will see later. The main problem created by this response is that the defending stone is standing exactly on the spot that the approaching player initially hoped to develop, as we saw in the previous joseki. Here the situation is very different:

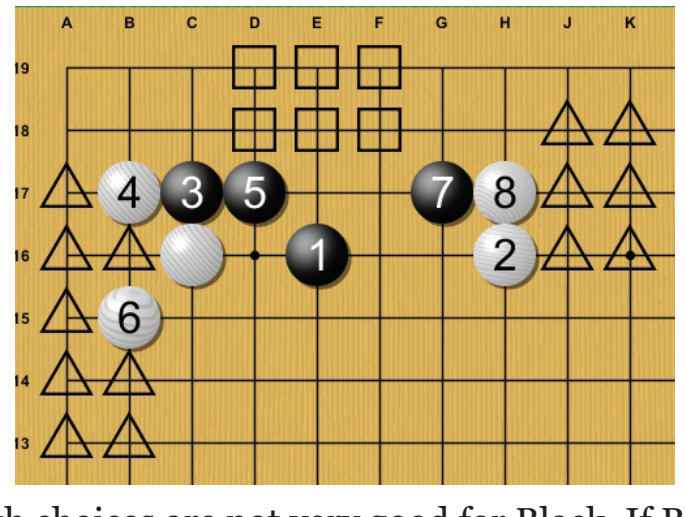


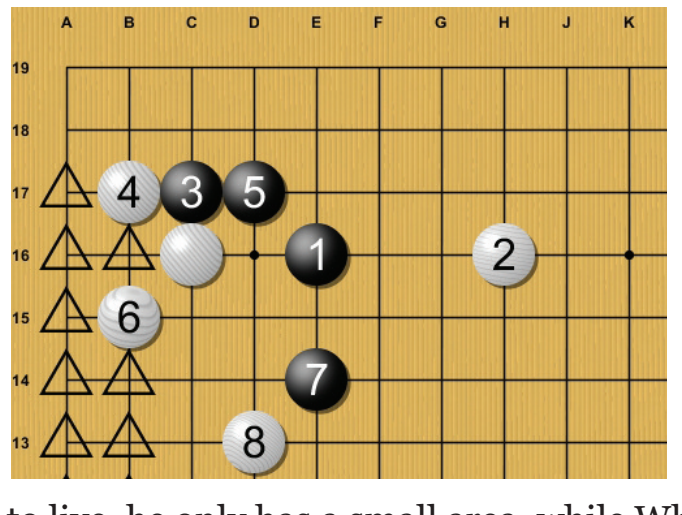
After White's pincer at **2**, Black cannot really extend or develop towards that side for the time being. His stone is now weak and without a base so, before Black can deal with White's move at **2,** he needs to strengthen his own stone. For that exact reason, Black **A** is not the best **joseki**, but, despite that, it is a move that you will encounter many times. Black's most effective choices for that goal are **B, C, D** and **E.**
Choices **B**, **C** and **D** are jumps that aim to give more space to Black's stone so that he can launch an attack to White **2**.
Choice **E** is usually played when Black has a favourable ladder and it leads to joseki that has so many variations that it has the illustrious name the "magic sword of Muramasa".
We will see the results of **A** and **B** because they are the most common and they will be useful to know for later chapters.



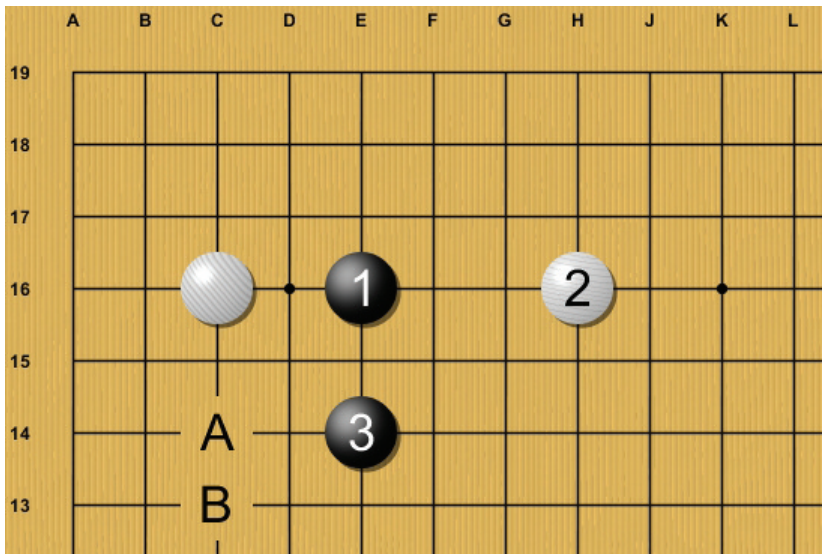
Move 3 at the 3-3 point (choice A)

By now it is probably easier to notice the reason behind the moves in the diagram. They are what most people call "natural" because they feel like the obvious response:
White 4 is threatening to atari the Black stone and defends the corner.
Black 5 extends to avoid the atari threat and to connect all his stones.
White 6 is stabilizing White's group, making it alive and giving it the ability to expand towards the bottom side.
Now Black can either jump at **A** or live at **B**...



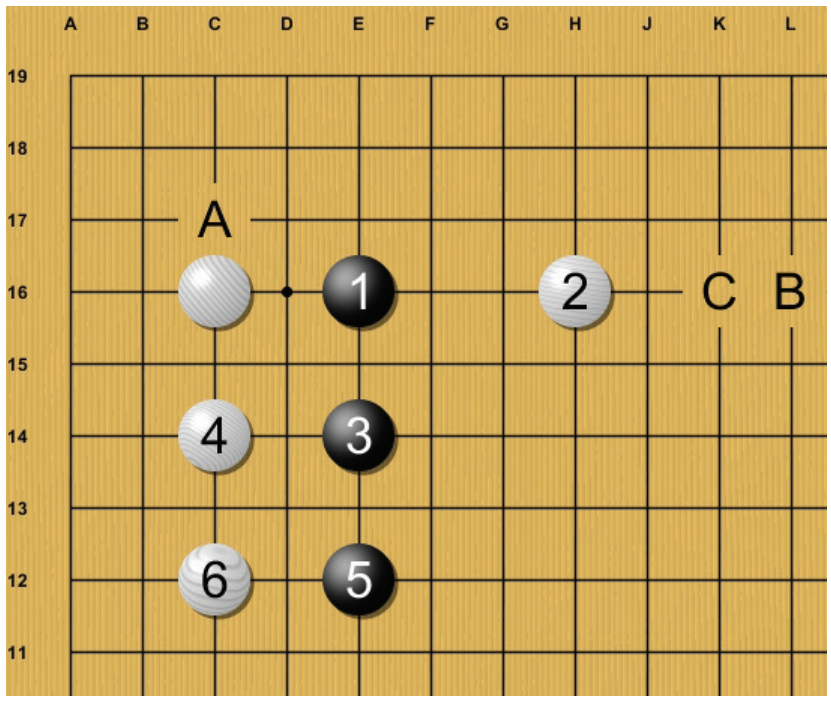


But both choices are not very good for Black. If Black tries to live, he only has a small area, while White is expanding in both sides and can still harass and threaten Black's group later.
If Black jumps, now White has a stable corner from which to expand and can jump all the way to **move 8**. Black still has no eyes and White's stone at **2** is still a thorn at his side.

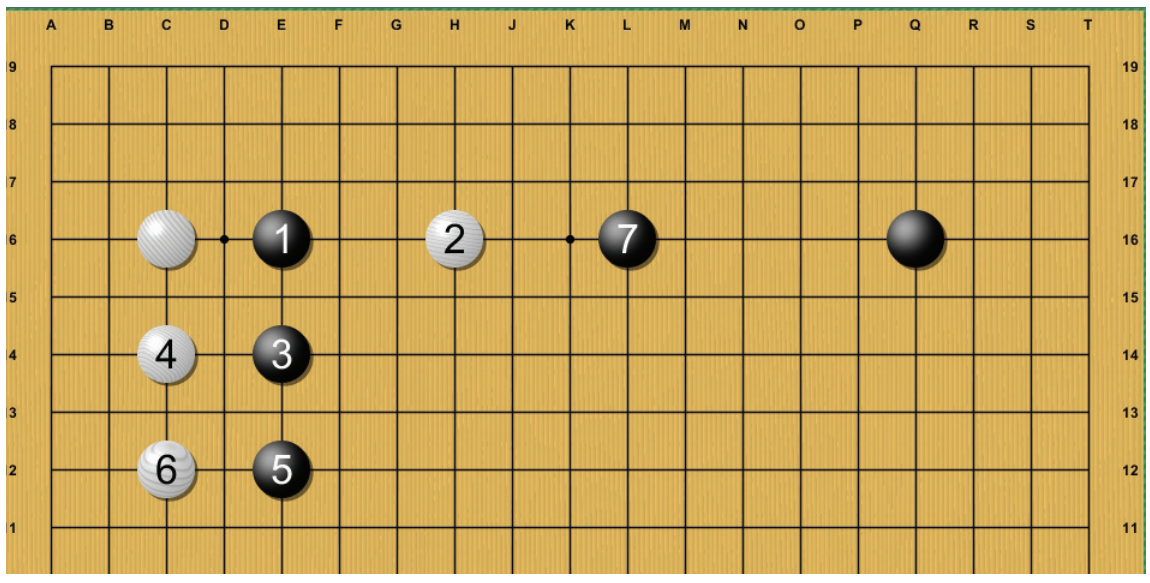


A one space jump for move 3

Black chooses to jump out first in order to threaten to get away from the pincer from either side.
White must defend his corner stone first since White's stone at **2** is still very flexible, but a corner stone cannot be left without help since its proximity with the edge of the board makes it less flexible than a side stone. So, White has to jump as well and follow Black. Both **A** and **B** are possible, but **A** is more stable and safe as a choice, in order to strengthen the corner and the left side.



After White jumps, Black repeats the one space jump with exactly the same idea in mind. If White ignores him, Black can get away from both sides.
White has the same problems as before and he has to defend the corner and the left side at the same time, so he jumps again.
Now Black has three choices, **A**, **B** and **C.**
Choice **A** aims at the corner, but is not considered enough of a threat now that White jumped twice, so White can ignore it and play a move to strengthen his stone at **2**.
So, Black usually plays either **B** or **C** to pincer the White stone against his wall and profit by attacking White's weak stone

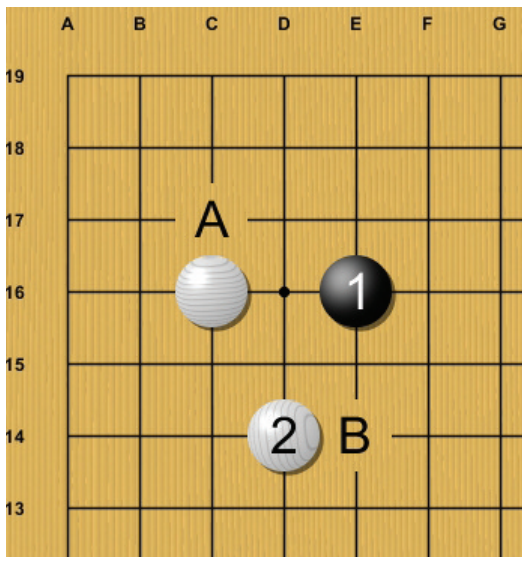


Black usually plays at **B** and, once again, the whole board situation is the only way to judge if a joseki was suitable to use or not. With a Black stone in the upper right corner, this is a nice result for Black despite the amount of territory he gave away to White on the left side. Black's stones create a huge framework within which the White stone at **2** feels very lonely indeed, which is why White rarely chooses to play the pincer at **2** in such an arrangement.

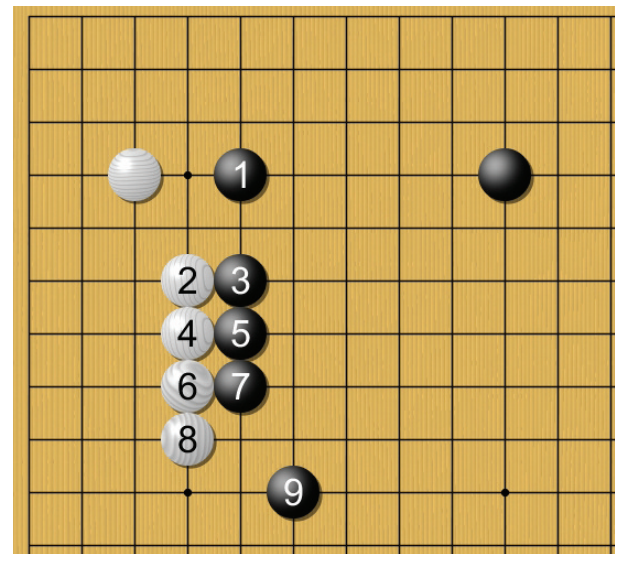
Conclusion: The two space pincer is a very strong move for the defender even if the whole board is more or less empty and the player approaching the 3-4 stone should always be aware of the possibilities.
If there are helping stones for the defender, this move becomes even stronger and its potential has been used to create situations where approaching the 3-4 point can be considered a trap, as we will see in the Kobayashi and Chinese fuseki later on.

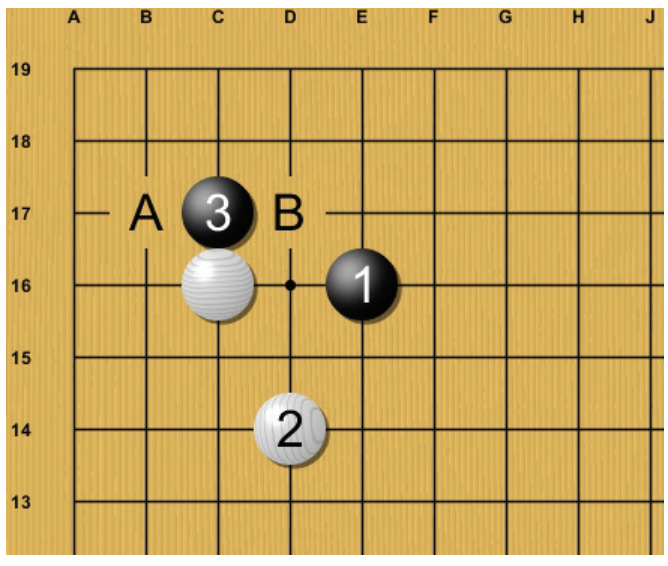
Choice C - Respond with a knight's move extension

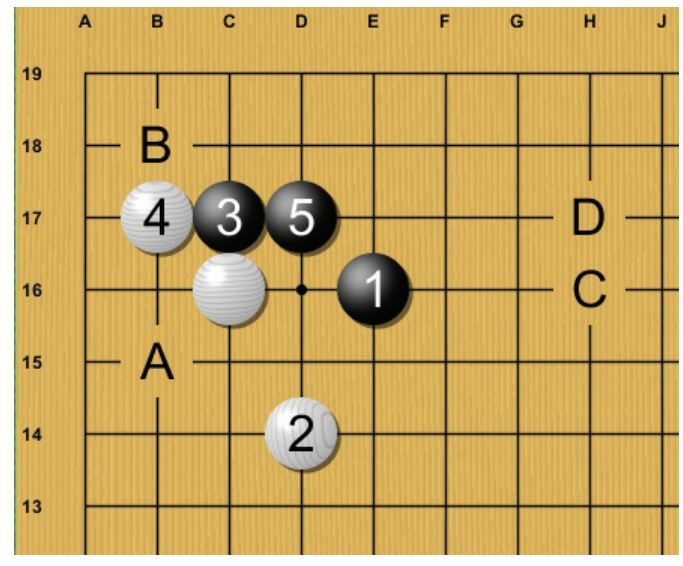
This move is another very usual choice among players of every level and it emphasizes the side opposite from the direction of the approaching stone.
This choice is considered among the most peaceful responses by the defender and it avoids fighting and complicated sequences in favor of both players getting a balanced result. Let us see how it usually works:



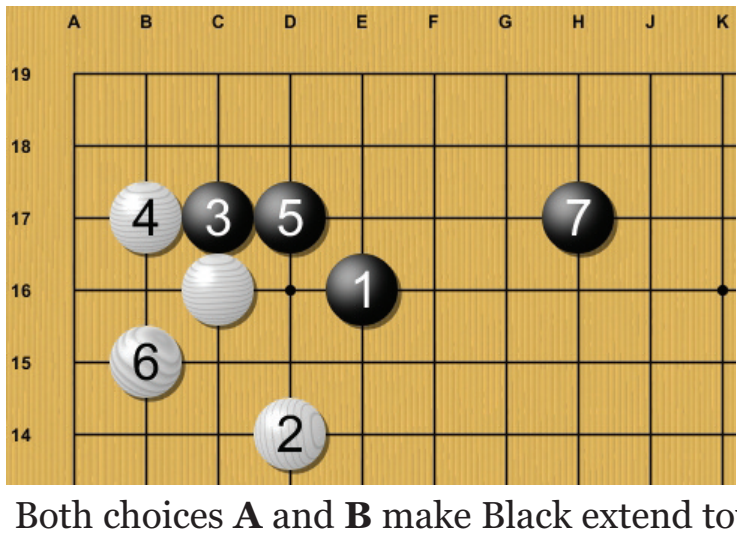
Left image: After White responds with **move 2**, Black has two main choices. **A** to get a base and a large portion of the corner or **B** in order to emphasize the side he approached from.
Right image: We see that choice **B** makes sense only when Black already has a helping stone on that side, but this is rare, so **A** is the usual choice...

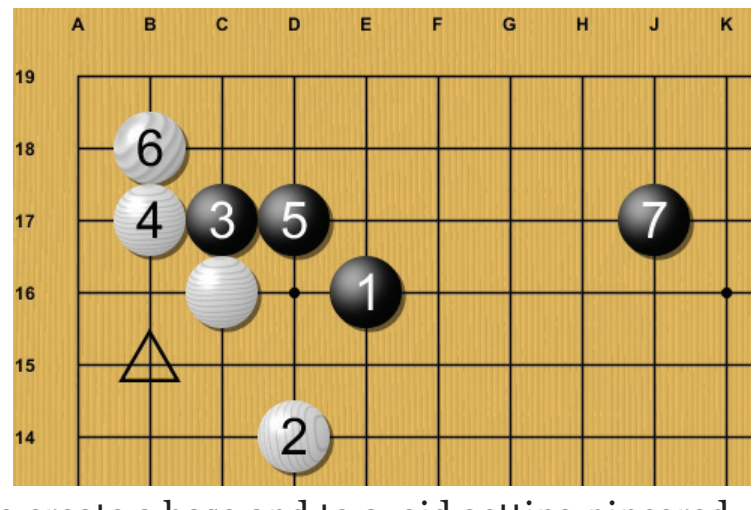




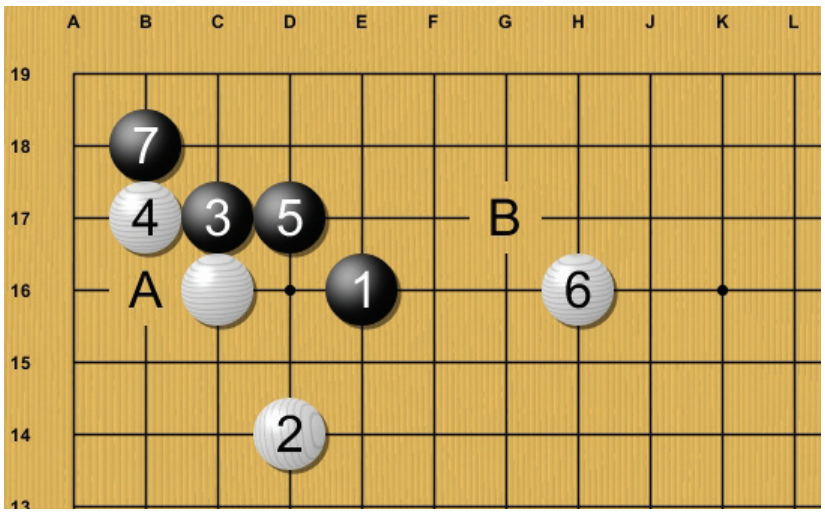


Left image: So after **Black 3**, White can either defend with **A**, or resist with **B**. Choice **B** leads to heavy fighting and it is a far cry from the peaceful idea of the joseki, so **A** is the usual choice again.
Right image: Black 5 is natural to defend the stone from getting into atari, so now White has many choices.Choices **A** and **B** aim for the corner and choices **C** and **D** pincer Black to take away his base...





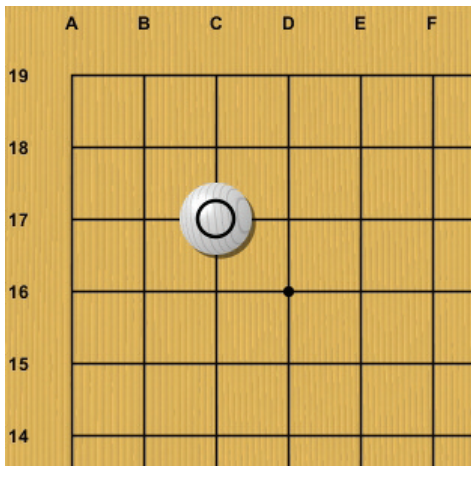
Both choices **A** and **B** make Black extend towards the side to create a base and to avoid getting pincered, but choice **B** leaves **aji** behind for Black to exploit at **B-15**, so **A** is the safest choice...



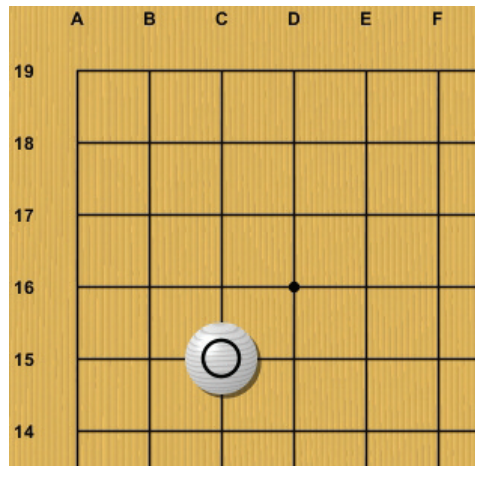
The pincer choices are not so popular at our level and are rarely seen. After **White 6** pincers the Black group, **Black 7** ensures the group's base, since **A** and **B** are **miai**. If White insists on the top side, Black gets the corner. If White defends the corner then Black lives on the top side, so White's next move is either those choices or extending very far towards the left side ignoring the problem.
All of these choices are not really easy to process and evaluate, so most kyu players avoid them.

Conclusion: The knight's move extension is a peaceful joseki choice to settle the corner without many complications. When used in normal situations it is very balanced, but when the defending player has other stones nearby to help him, then it can become a trap for the approaching player, as we will see in the fuseki that will follow.

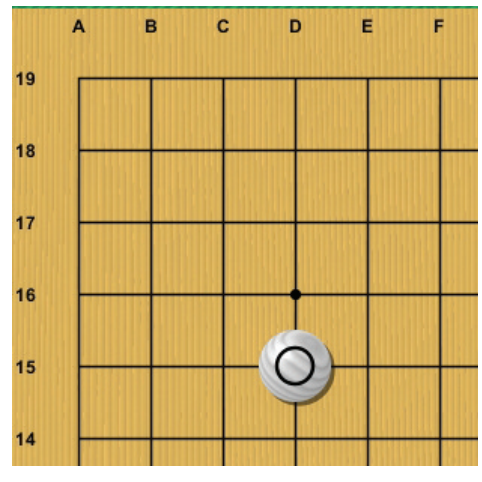
Those were the most usual and useful cases of opening moves and the joseki that accompany them. As we already mentioned there is an immense amount of possibilities for the opening moves and the proper responses and it is strongly advised to later explore them with the use of a joseki dictionary like the ones offered at online-go.com or josekipedia.com for free. For the time being you should have a visual idea of the possible openings and these are the most possible cases that you might encounter, since many players will try to confuse you by playing opening moves you might have not encountered before.



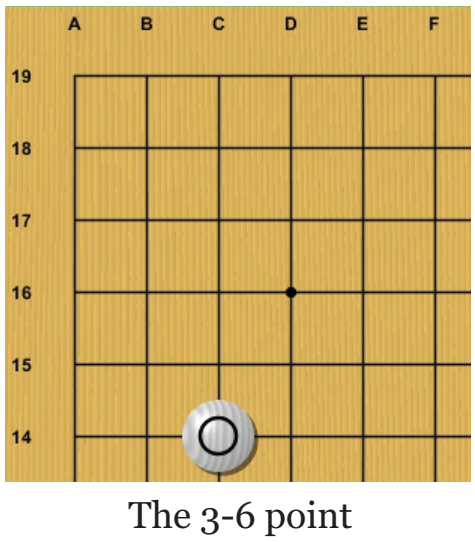
The 3-3 point



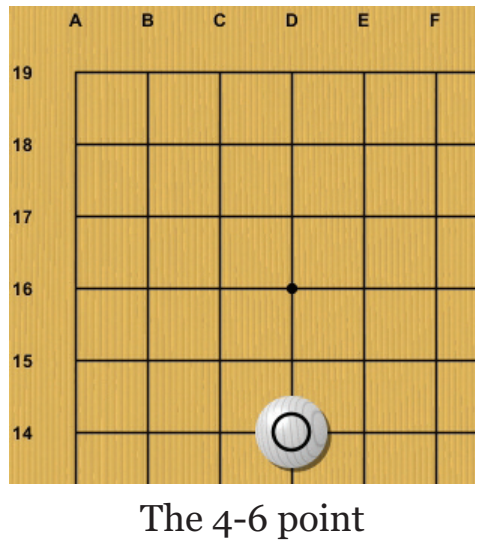
The 3-5 point



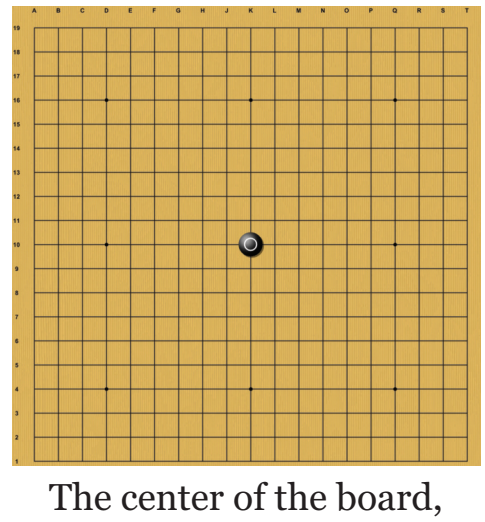
The 4-5 point



The 3-6 point



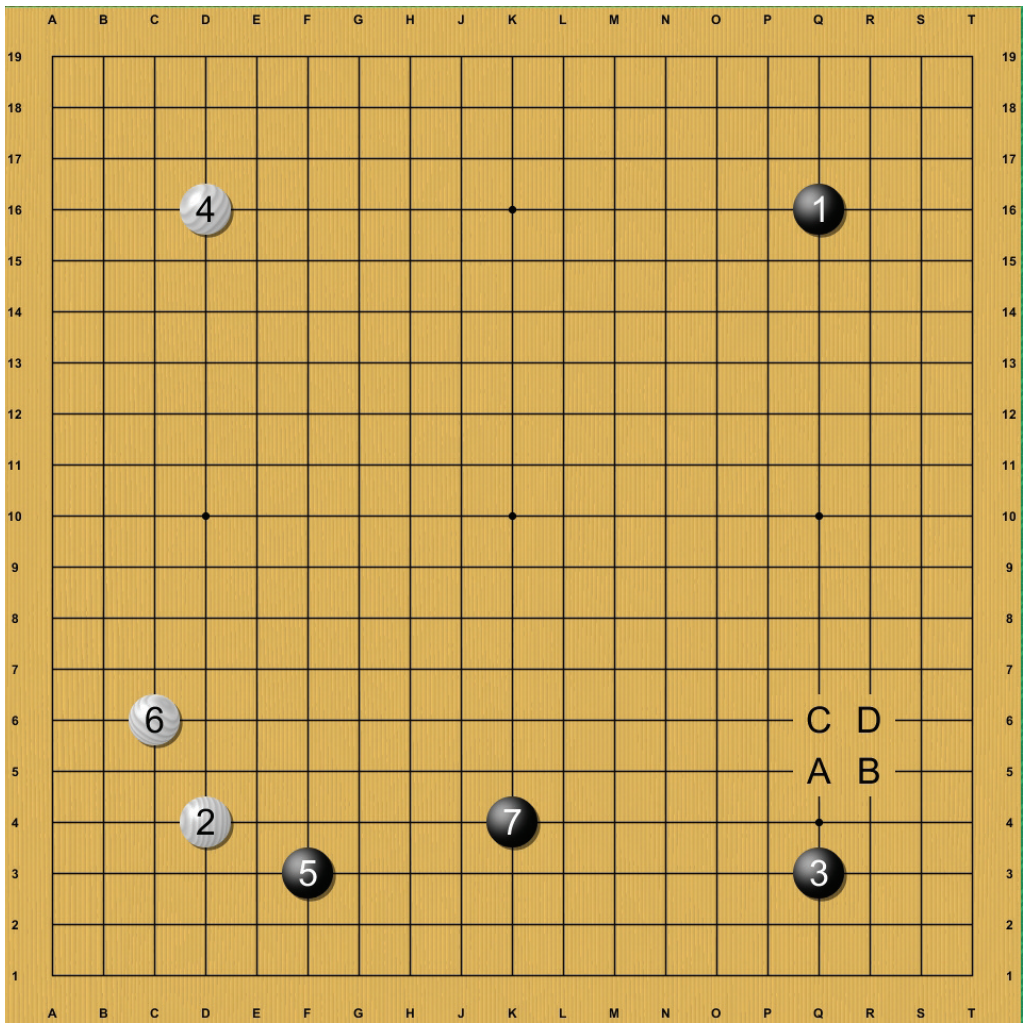
The 4-6 point



The center of the board, called **tengen**

The Kobayashi fuseki

As we explained in the beginning of this chapter, **fuseki** is a whole board strategy, usually composed by three or four stones. Now those sound like very few stones to influence or implement a whole board strategy, but such is the beauty of the game. We will examine three of the most common fuseki and we will begin with the **Kobayashi fuseki** which was invented by the Japanese professional player Kobayashi Koichi 9-dan and it looks like this:

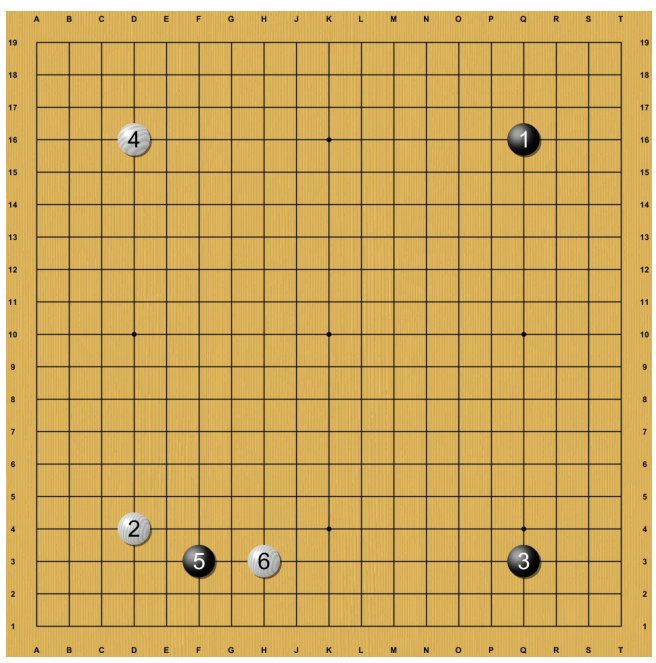


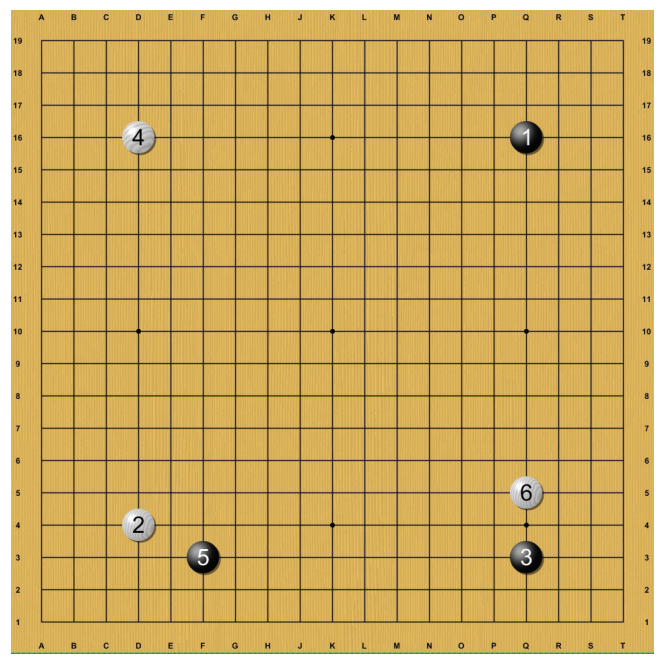
All the moves played during the fuseki by Black look very normal and there doesn't seem to be anything special about them at first glance, but the "trick" of the Kobayashi fuseki lies with **move 7**. That particular Black stone stands in the right place to be a problem for many known joseki concerning the approach of the **3-4 corner** played in **Black 3**.

As we mentioned earlier in the joseki we already examined, any extra helping stone for the defender would usually alter the situation to his favour.

With the Kobayashi fuseki the normal, more aggressive approaches of **A** and **B** actually become traps for White, if he has never seen the fuseki before and he is unaware of the danger.

To avoid complications White plays one move further from the usual at **C** or **D**, which is already a small victory for Black.



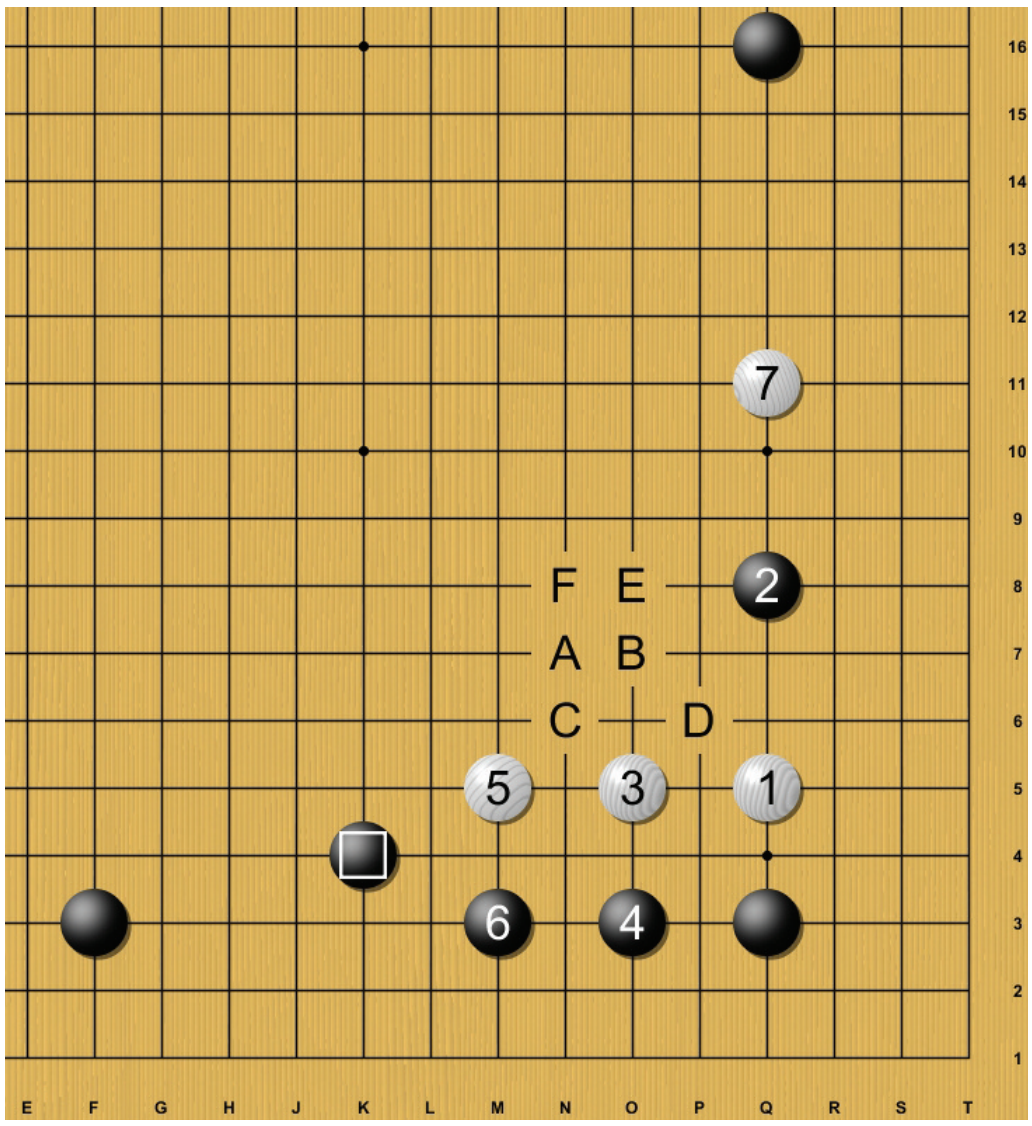


There are of course ways to stop the formation of the Kobayashi fuseki.

One is on the **left image**, by pincering Black's approaching stone instead of backing off for **White 6**.

Another one on the **right image** is to approach the 3-4 corner before responding to Black's approach on the left corner, but the easier way to prevent this fuseki remains the simple strategy of **not playing two 4-4 points during the opening**.

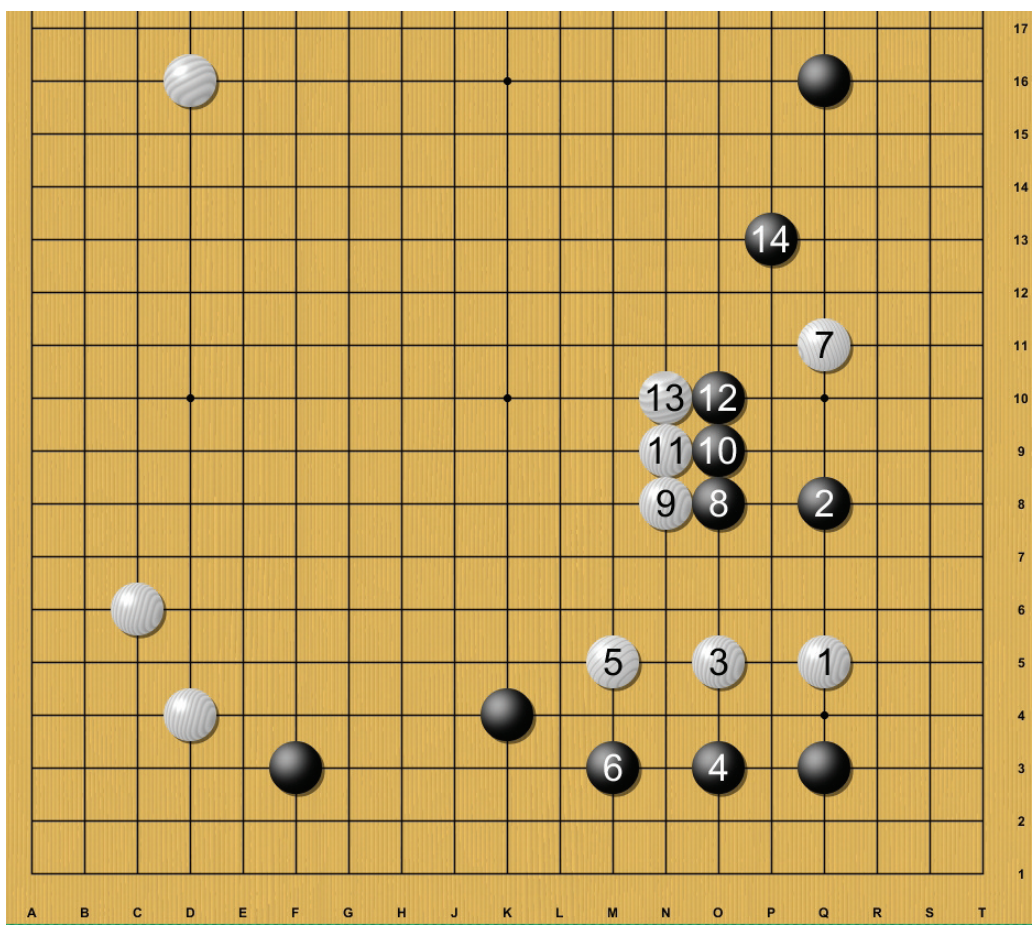
So, we mentioned that the Kobayashi fuseki creates a trap for the unwary opponent that wants to follow the usual joseki of approaching corners, **but why?** It is important that we understand the danger and the possible gains if we are to play a fuseki ourselves, or if we are forced to play against it. Let us see then what happens if we simply try to play the joseki we just learned:



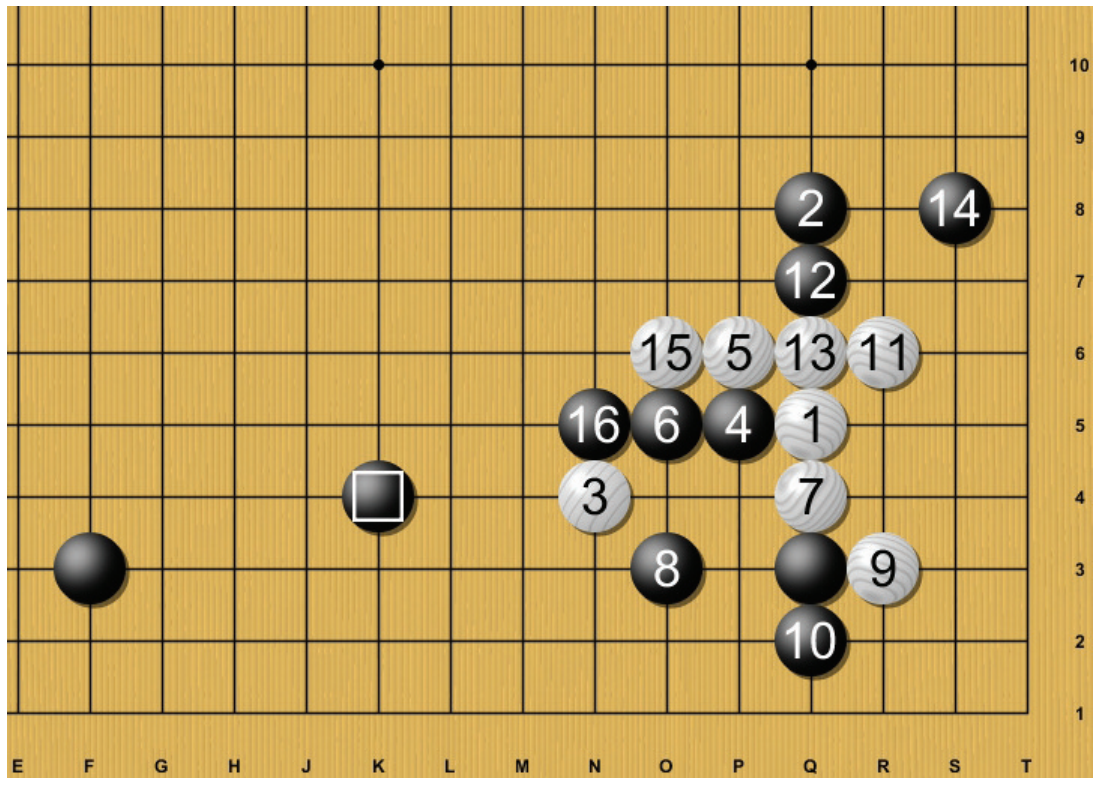
Once White does the regular approach, Black immediately pincers White's stone with a two space pincer.
If White chooses to follow the joseki blindly he finds himself in the situation seen in the image.

Please go back to **page 86**
and compare the two results.

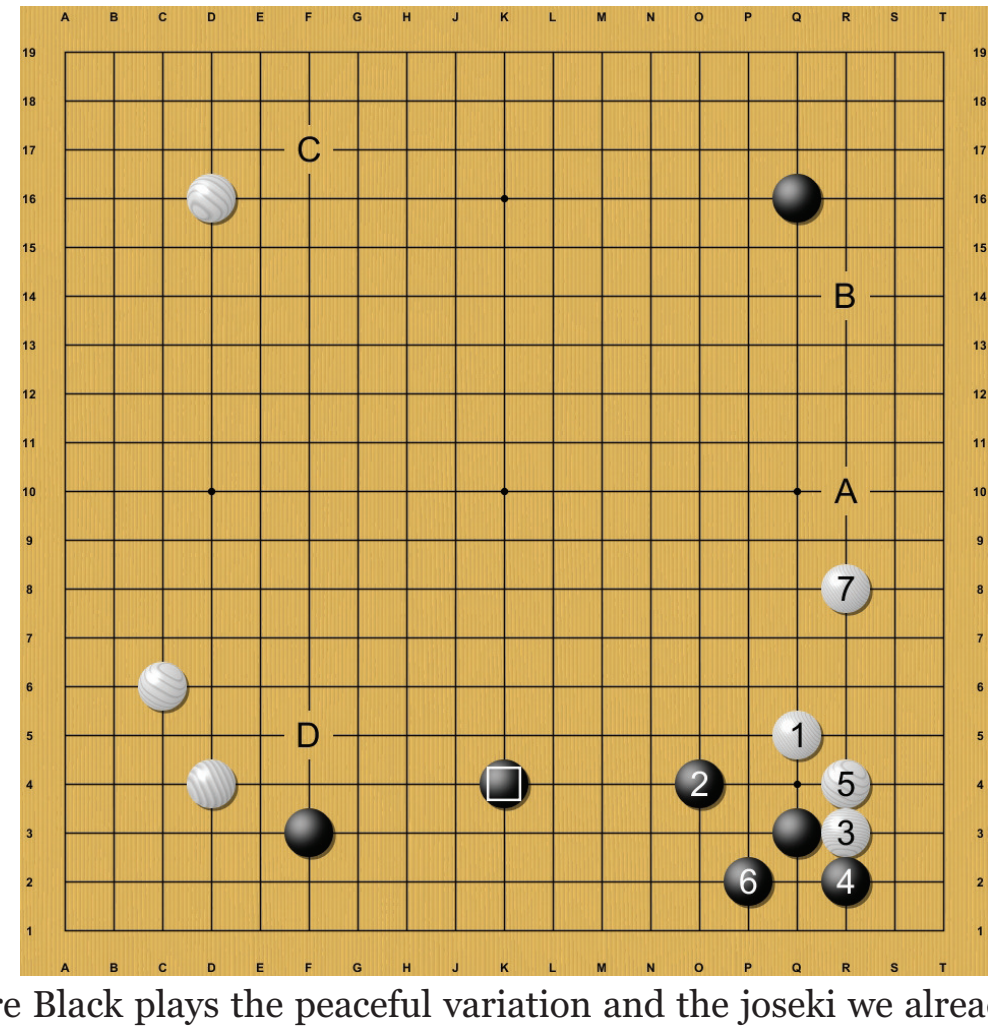
In the normal joseki result, White's stones would have created a wall and **White 7** would have applied pressure to Black's now lonely stone at **move 2,** so Black would have had to do something to help his stone, without actually endangering White's stones, **but here the marked Black stone is in the way**. Any of the presented choices for **Black 8** would put White's wall in danger, because White has no base and the marked stone is preventing White from running away. White's stones could die and **White 7** will be the next White stone to feel pressured when Black gains strength while attacking White's three stones...



Even if Black plays the safest, least threatening moves possible for White's wall, he still gets a great result.
Notice that Black doesn't play anything elaborate (just a one space jump, extensions and a large knight's move) and that both players maintain good shape, but Black's position is clearly superior to White's.
Even if White's wall got out in the center that wall didn't provide any compensation for White, while Black was getting solid territory with **moves 4** and **6**. Also **White 7** is now in serious trouble and it will either be captured, or be forced to live in a very small group.
The fuseki was a success!
Ok, I hear you thinking "maybe another joseki would have done the trick for White". Let us explore that idea...

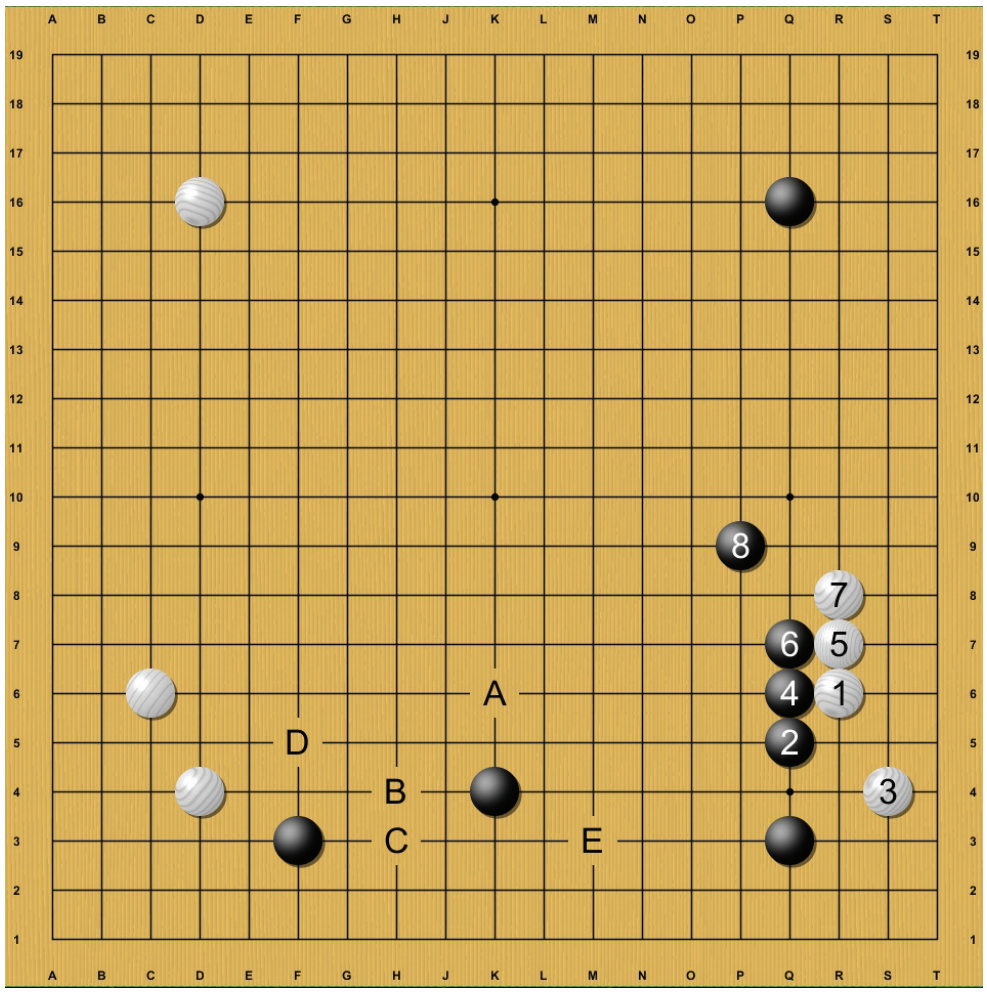


So, let us suppose that White dives into a complex joseki, way beyond the scope of this book, trying to make the best of the situation. White hopes that maybe that will do the trick, but if you look up this joseki you will notice that it is considered a balanced result **only if the square marked stone is absent**.
As it is now, even to our untrained eyes the White group seems surrounded and contained, while the White stone played at **move 3** is desperately alone and almost dead.
So, a more complex joseki doesn't seem to help, and we need to remind you here that Black has more choices for his defense, other than the two space pincer. The only way for White to get a semi-balanced result out of the one space approach, is if Black allowed it. For example...

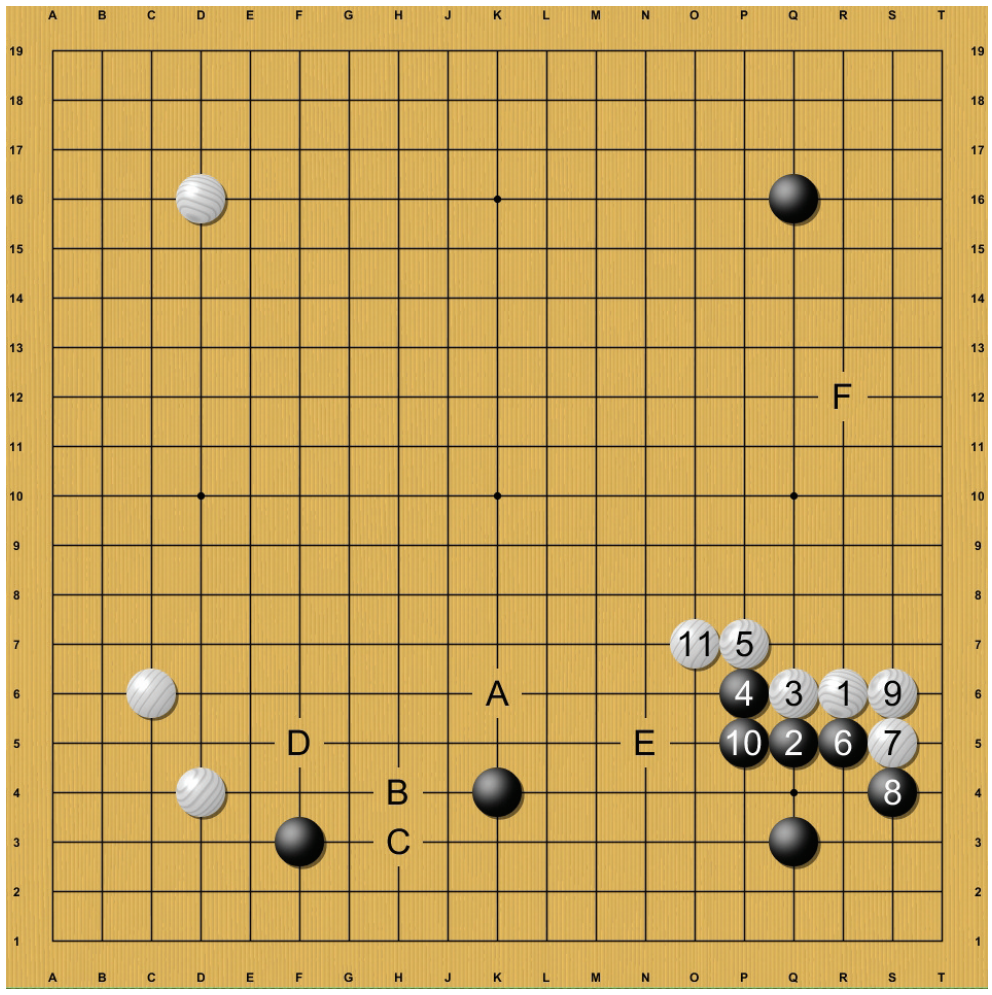


This is the case where Black plays the peaceful variation and the joseki we already analysed in previous pages. Black almost never does that, since the very point of the Kobayashi fuseki is to be aggressive on the approaching stone, but even if White finds an opponent so accommodating, notice that the marked stone, once again, turns the joseki in favour of Black and that Black also has sente. Now Black can either play **A** to keep up the pressure, **B** to enclose a corner, **C** to approach a corner and expand or **D** to enlarge his framework. Black is not unhappy with the result, even in this case.

So, what do we do? The Kobayashi fuseki does have weaknesses and we should avoid the trap while preparing to exploit those weaknesses in the future. Let us see two simple examples and try to analyse the joseki moves like we did before. The first example aims to the side and the second towards the center:



This is from a real game in which I was Black, while White was a 2-dan opponent. When playing this joseki Black has every right to feel happy about the result and the whole board situation, but White has sente and Black has all those marked spots as weaknesses. We will explain reductions and invasions in the following chapters, but for now let us notice that **A** and **D** aim at reducing Black's framework and **B**, **C** and **E** are directly invading that framework to destroy it.
It should be noted that White doesn't have to play those moves for them to be dangerous. He could threaten to play them, by playing near those moves and thus force Black to waste some of his moves to defend the weak points.
By the end of the actual game, White had used those points/threats to reduce Black's area to almost nothing!



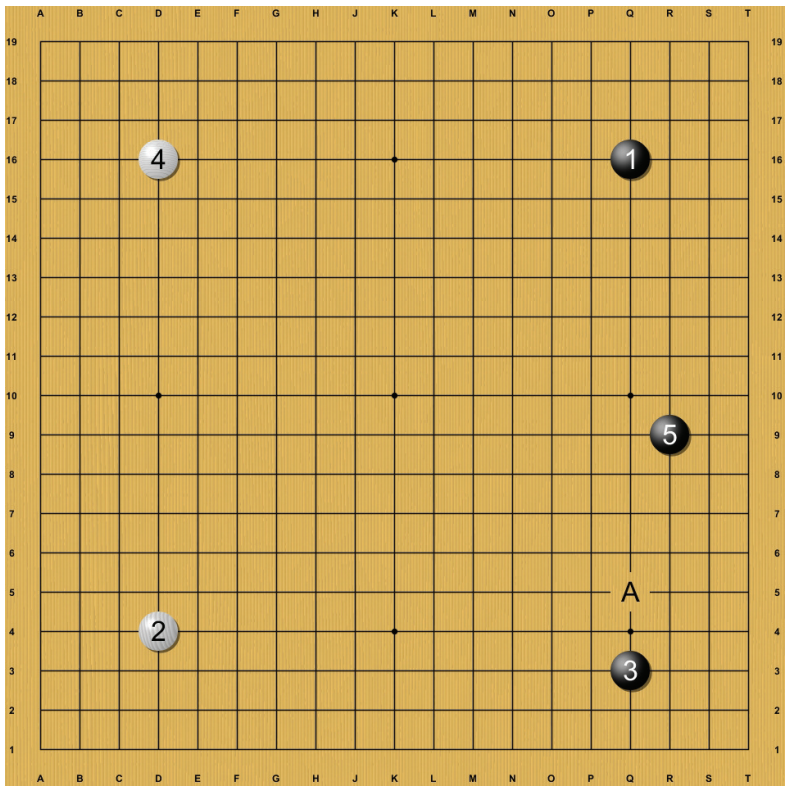
Alternatively White could aim to expand towards the center, after Black's response at **2**. By the end of this joseki Black has a very solid lower right corner and White has a wall, but Black cannot be complacent despite the territory he gained. Almost all the weaknesses from the previous image still persist, even though **E** changed to a reducing move, rather than a direct invasion. Now White can also play **F** and try to capitalize on his wall and later approach Black's corner. Still, the fuseki delivers in both cases a slightly advantageous position for Black. Even when there are weaknesses in shape, when one player has the most potential territory and the opponent has to reduce or invade that potential territory, that can present chances that could help the defending player gain the needed strength and stones to launch a counter-attack of his own.

Conclusion: If you have a chance to use the Kobayashi fuseki it is a strong tool to have in your arsenal and you should definitely experiment with it. If you think that your opponent might use it against you and you are not confident with all the usual possibilities, just disrupt its creation and avoid it altogether.

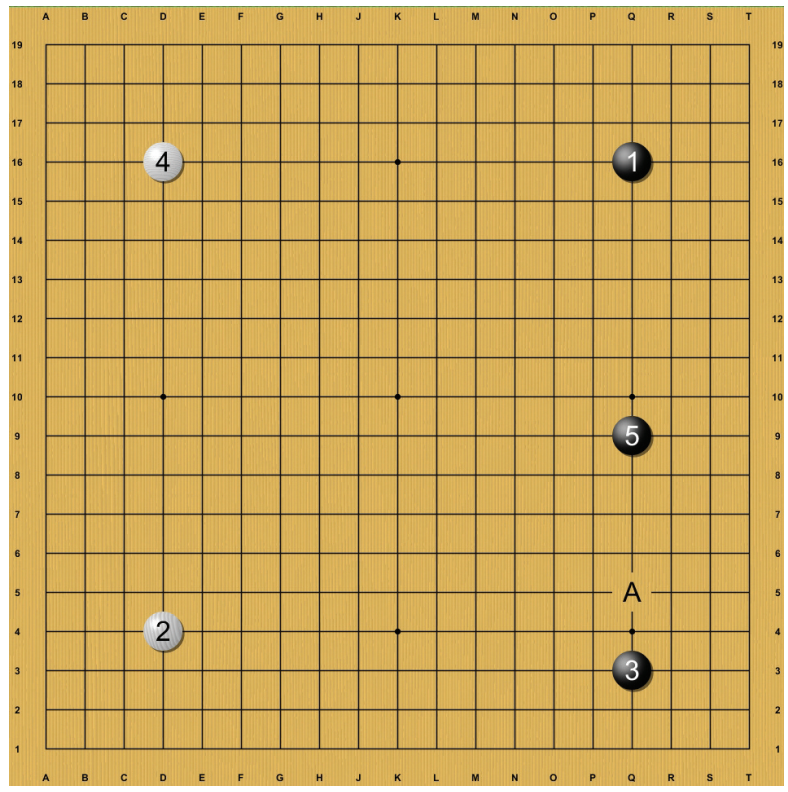
The Chinese fuseki

The Chinese fuseki is another very popular fuseki whose main goal is rapid expansion and creating a trap with a lightly protected 3-4 corner. When it first came out it was considered innovative, so it is no surprise that, excluding the original, this fuseki has three variations of the same idea. We will only analyse the original version, since this is the one which is played frequently at our level.

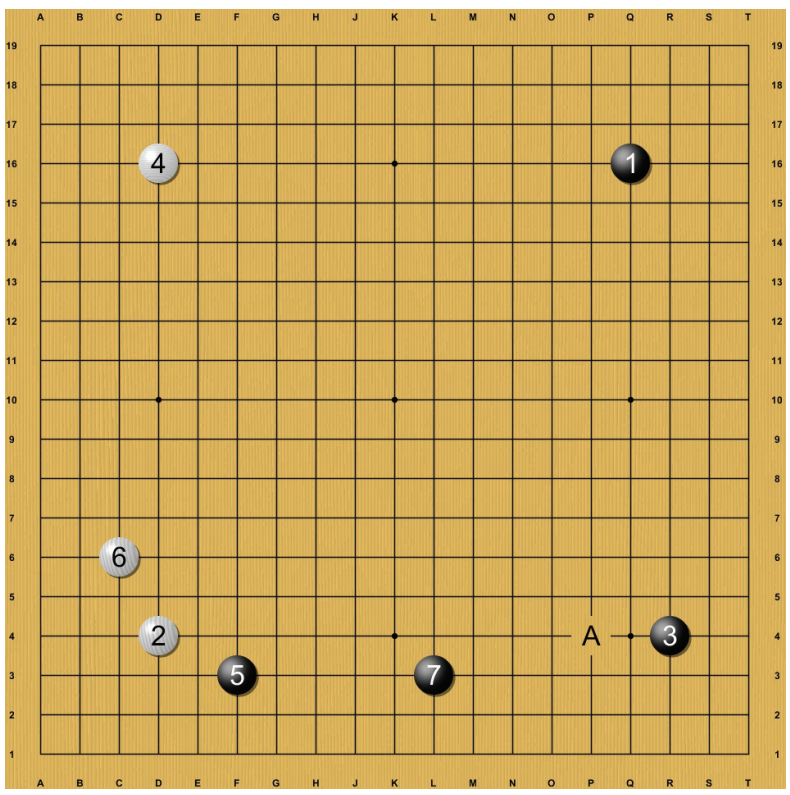
Here are the four versions with the “trap” marked with **A** in each case:



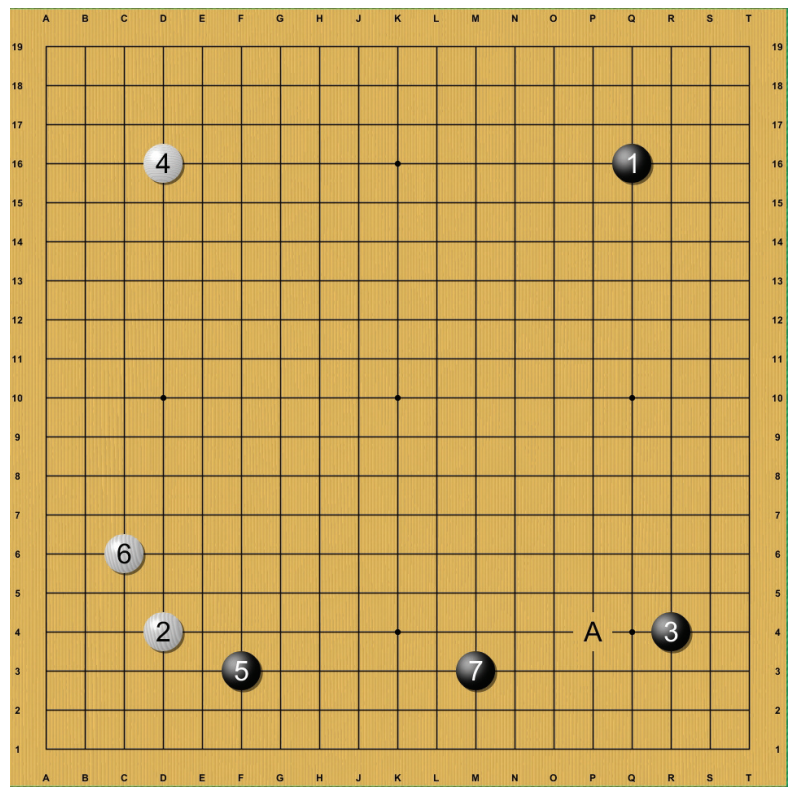
The original Chinese fuseki



The high Chinese



The mini Chinese

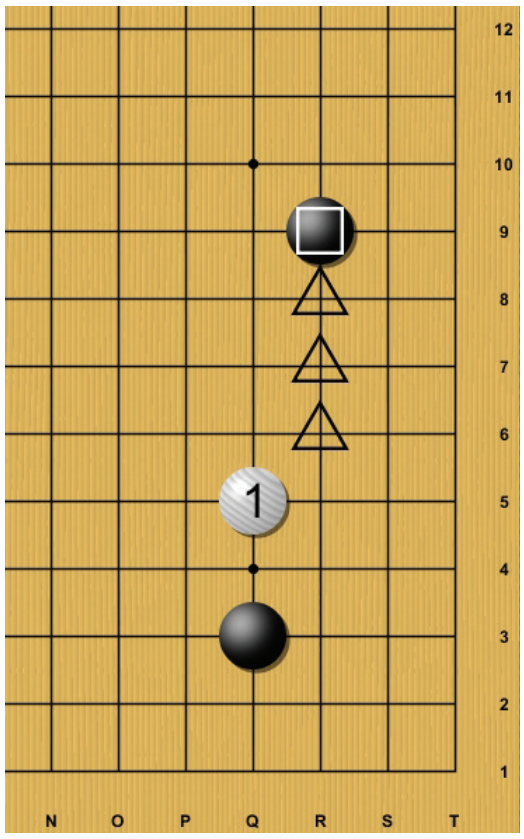


The micro Chinese

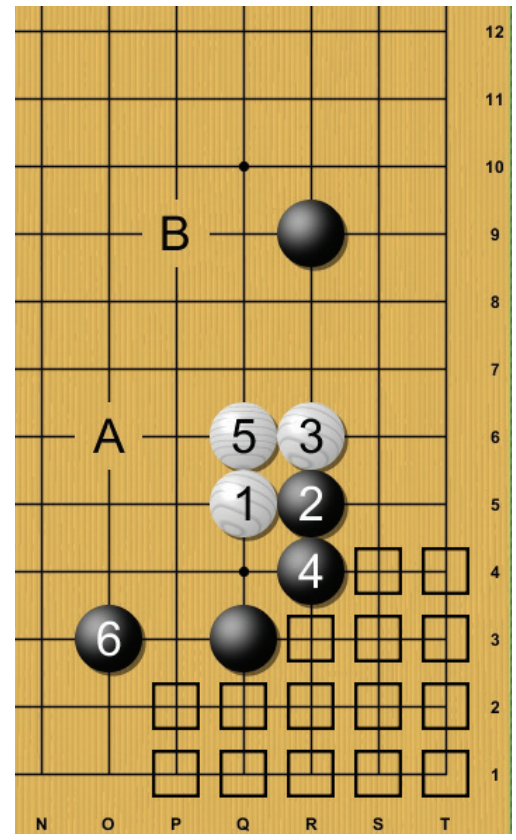
Someone playing the mini or micro Chinese at our level is a rare sight indeed, but I think that it is good to be aware of their existence, just in case.

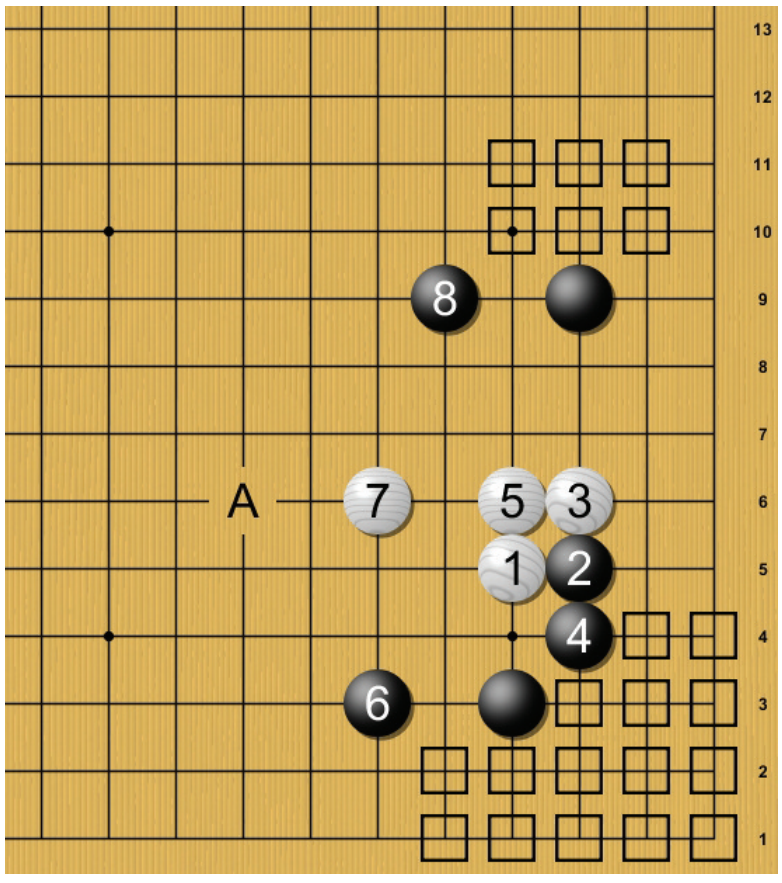
So, how does it work? The idea is similar to the Kobayashi fuseki, but the execution is different due to the different direction of the trap. This time the approaching player is setting his stone in a position that has been practically already pincered and this, once again, makes the normal joseki not work for him.

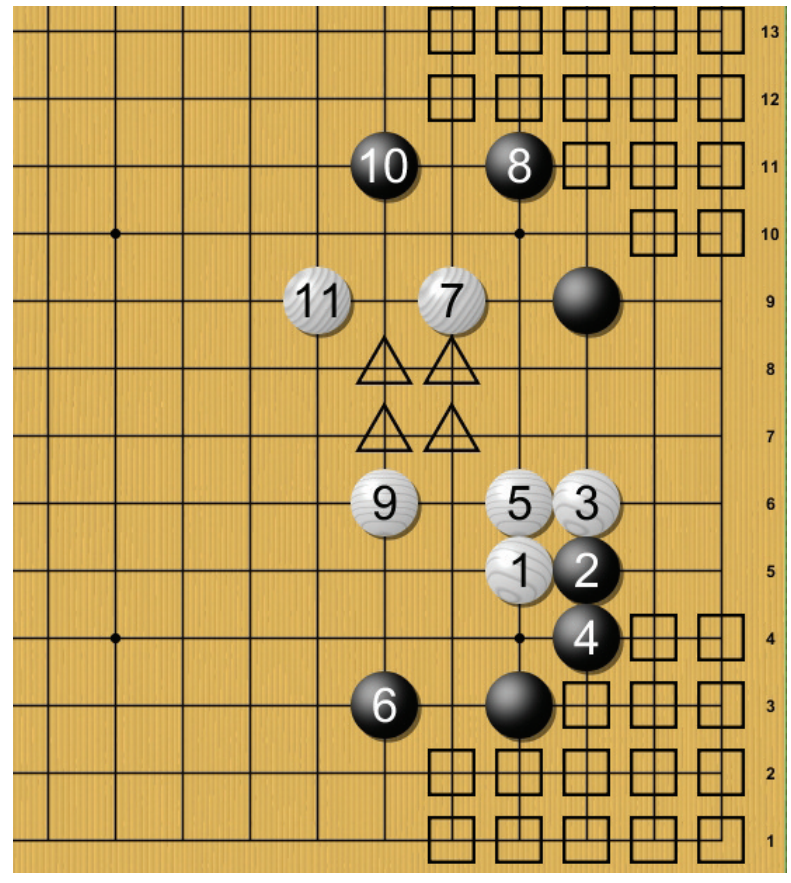
Let us see what happens if White plays into the trap:



On the left image we see that White follows the directive for approaching the corners first and plays a usual approaching move. This time though the marked Black stone is limiting White's ability to make a base.
Let us try one of the two joseki we learned and see what happens. The result is in the right image and now it is White's turn. He should have been playing towards the right side next, but now the Black stone is cutting his development there, so White can either jump away at **A** or try the right side anyway with **B**. Meanwhile Black secured a very large corner and White's group doesn't have a base yet...

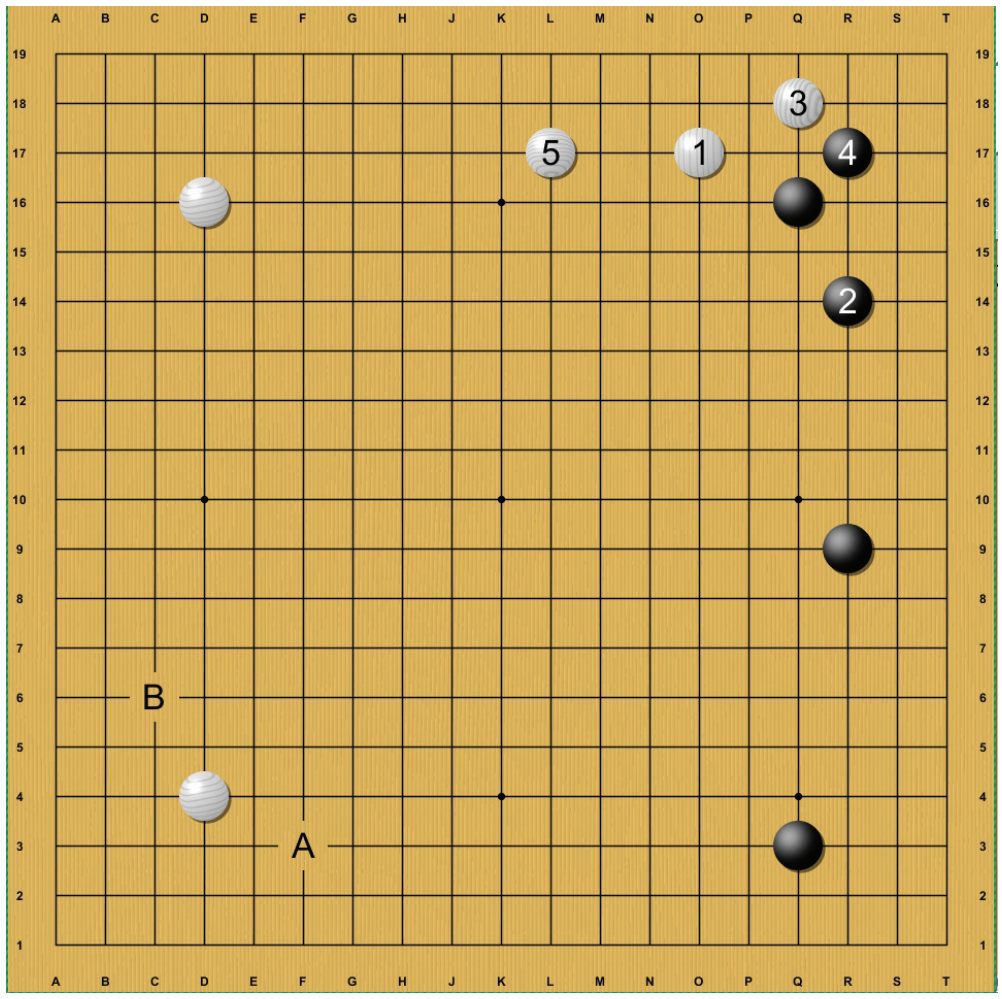




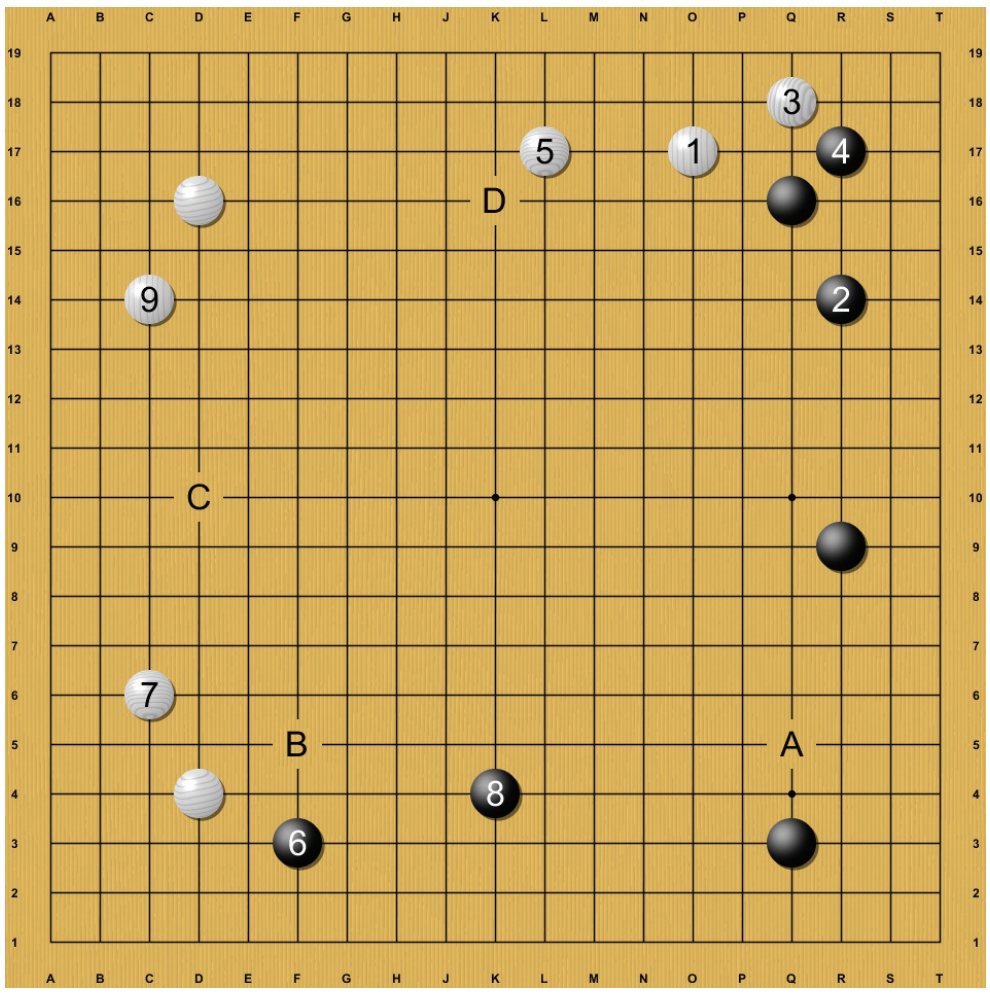


Left image: Both choices are bad for White, compared to the result Black gets. If White jumps, then **Black 8** follows that jump and now Black is developing the right side as well, while White still has no base and will have to jump again at **A** to be safe. Black is expected to keep chasing and harassing that White group and gaining points without much trouble.
Right image: If White goes for the right side, even if Black plays passively and lets White make some shape, the result is not good for White, compared to the result Black gets out of these exchanges.
Compared to the left image White is now safer, but Black's development is also wider and worth more than White's weak group.

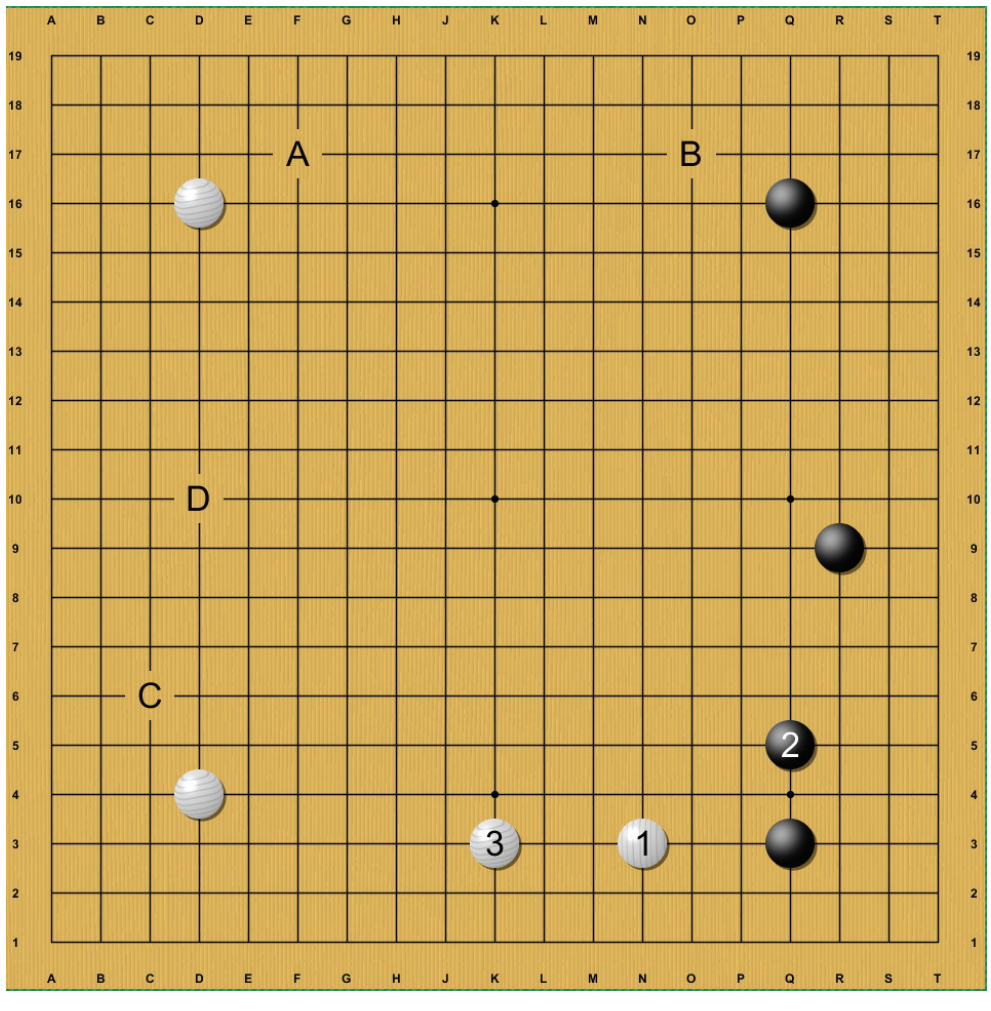
Playing into the trap is considered so severe and dangerous that, when I was trying to find a possible ingenious solution which I wasn't aware of, I wasn't able to find even one single game where such a move was played so early in the game, until AlphaGo changed that. So, the usual approach didn't seem to work for humans. What did work, then?



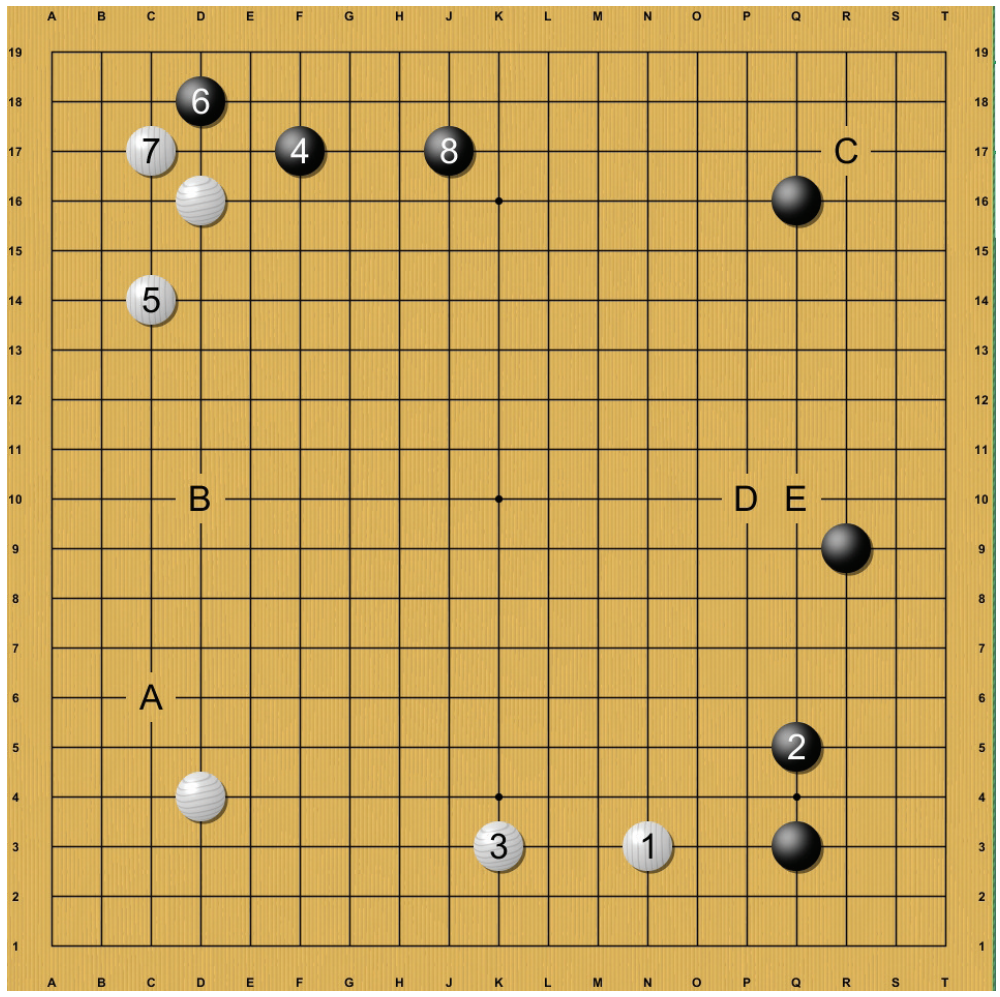
Sometimes the simple ideas are the best. If approaching the bottom corner is not feasible at the moment, White can always approach the top right corner. Black usually plays the simple joseki we analysed some pages ago, since it ensures that Black gets a nice result in his corner and left side and he gets sente.
White is also content because he is slowly expanding and creating a framework across the board.
After this, Black will usually play at **A** trying to expand his own framework, since this is the most obvious and beneficial direction of play for him. If Black dislikes the idea of having a framework vs framework game, then he can approach White's corner from the opposite side, at **B**. It is a valid strategy, but it happens rarely compared to **A** because...



...approaching the corner from the correct direction gives Black the chance to play the Kobayashi fuseki as well, reinforcing the trap at his lower right corner. After such a move White usually plays **move 9** to defend his own corner and then the opening is drawing to an end. Both players seem to have one half of the board and their frameworks must eventually clash.
Black can play at various places:
He can play at **A** to take the last corner of the game.
He can play at **B** to cover the weak point of the Kobayashi fuseki.
He can play the invasion at **C** to split White's stones and disrupt White's framework.
Or he can play at **D** to reduce White's influence (we will talk in detail about invasions and reductions in the next chapter).



Another idea is to approach the lower right corner, but in a non-standard way, at **move 1**.
Usually Black will just enclose the corner with **move 2** and take the territory as profit, since the trap he tried to set was evaded and would no longer work.
White 3 is a standard two space jump designed to give a base to White's group. After that, it is Black's turn to choose what will happen on the board (Black has **sente**).
Choice **A** is creating a framework vs framework game like in the previous page and it is the correct direction of play, trying to make all of Black's stones work together.
Choice **B** secures the corner and focuses on Black gaining most of the right side.
Choices **C** and **D** are designed to disrupt the creation of large frameworks and split the board in smaller groups...

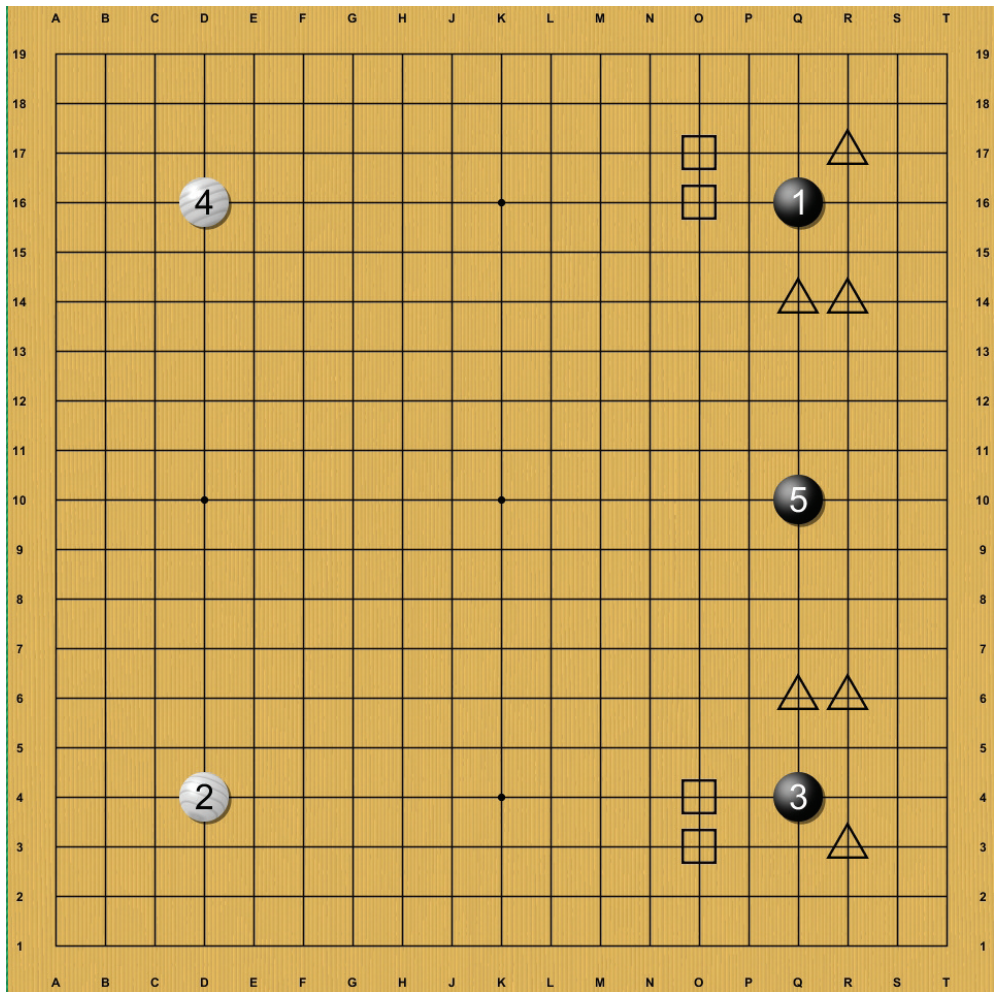


The most usual choice is to create a framework, so assuming that the players use one of the balanced joseki we are familiar with, the board will look like this, with White having **sente**.
Choices **A** and **B** strengthen White's framework and gives sente back to Black and gives him the responsibility to decide when the two frameworks will clash and how.
Choice **C** is a standard corner invasion like we saw in **page 66**. White gets the corner and breaks into Black's framework while keeping sente. It is a very tempting choice and many play it eagerly.
Choices **D** and **E** are reductions, which, as we said, will be analysed later.
Of course there are many other choices, but these are the most usual which you will encounter in this case.

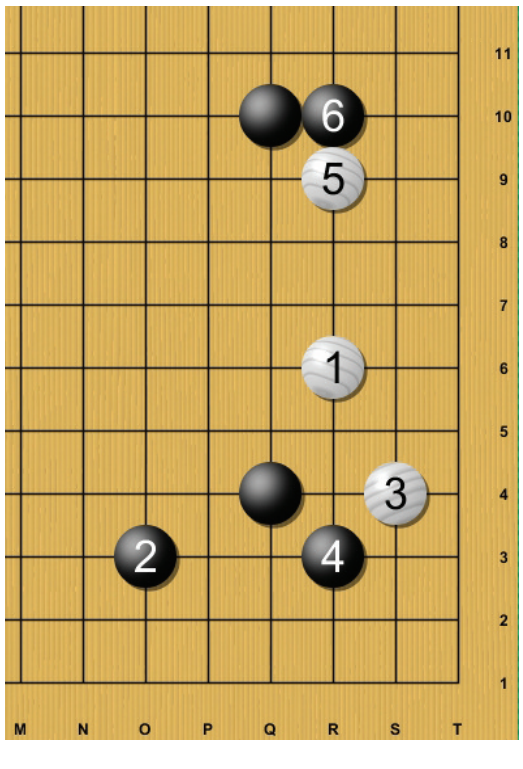
Conclusion: The Chinese fuseki is a powerful choice, but it usually leads to games that are played out with huge frameworks battling each other to gain even the smallest profit at their points of contact.
Many players dislike that play style even though it is a good strategy to lead to their victory, so they avoid playing the Chinese fuseki or do something to prevent its formation (just like with the Kobayashi fuseki).
My suggestion is that you should definitely try it and see for yourself if it fits your style and your idea of fun. If you like it, the Chinese fuseki is a lovely tool for your way of playing. If not, then it is still a good idea to study it and try it from time to time, in order to know how to play against it.

The San-Ren-Sei

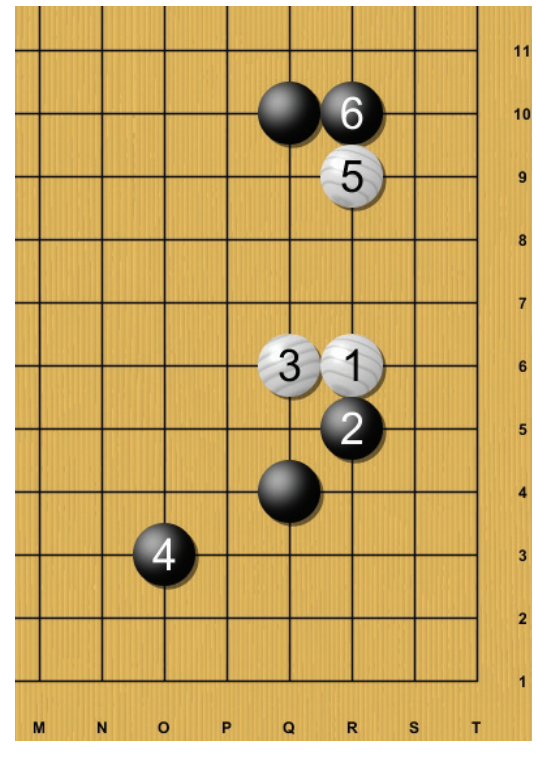
Last, but not the least, for our fuseki analysis, is the San-ren-sei. It means “three star points in a row” and it is very different compared to the previous fuseki we mentioned. Its main difference is that the San-ren-sei does not create any sort of imbalance between our stones and it is perfectly symmetrical. The second, and very important, difference is that it does not create any sort of trap either. It is, as the name implies, three stones in a row, but those stones complement each other perfectly. Let us see what it is and how it works:

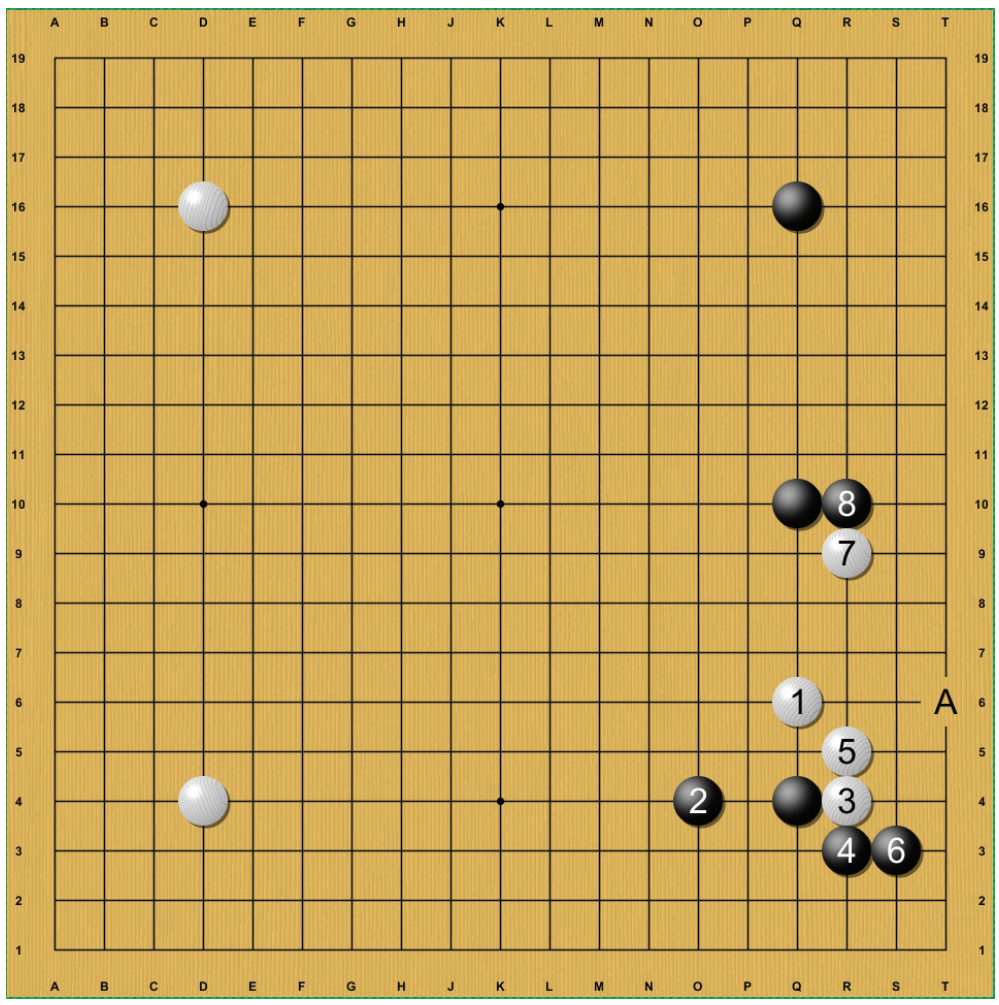


This is the San-ren-sei. It doesn’t look very complicated and it is a fairly obvious fuseki in its idea. Three star points in a row with the middle one in **move 5** providing backup to the corner star points. This backup is not trivial. In the image we can see with the triangled marks which corner approaches do not give a decent enough result for White to be considered playable. The squared points are now the only decent options.
Corner approaches from the wrong direction were not a great idea to begin with, but they were worth playing when you didn’t want a framework versus framework game. Now with **move 5** in place, those approaches give a great advantage to Black and manage to provide a very potent defence for the **4-4 point**’s main weakness: The **3-3 invasion**. Let us see first what happens if White plays on the triangled points...



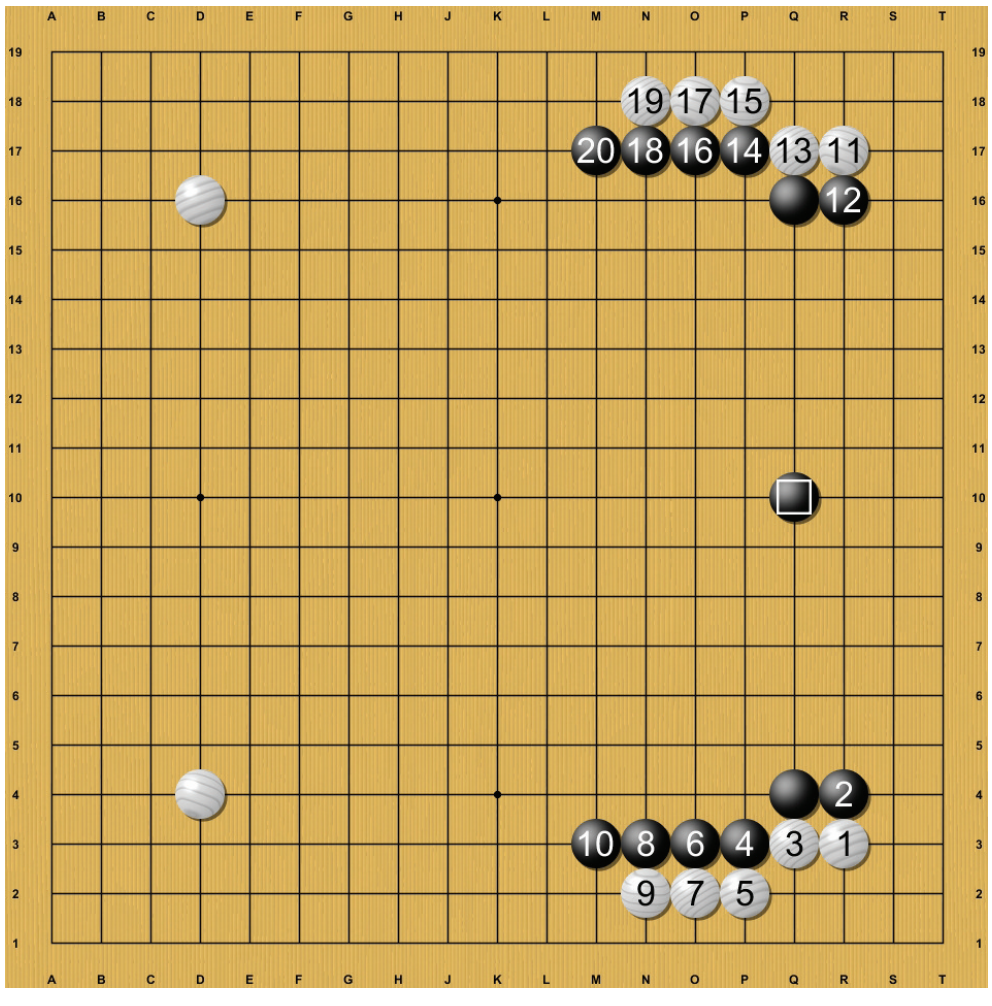
Left image: If White tries to approach the corner from the wrong direction, even if Black is magnanimous and he just plays the usual joseki we analysed earlier.
The existence of the side star point allows Black to play the iron pillar at **move 6** and box White in.
Right image: There is another option where Black plays aggressively with the kick joseki we saw earlier.
Now White is even more pressured from both sides. In both cases White is so cramped in that small space that he is not alive yet and needs to fight to survive...





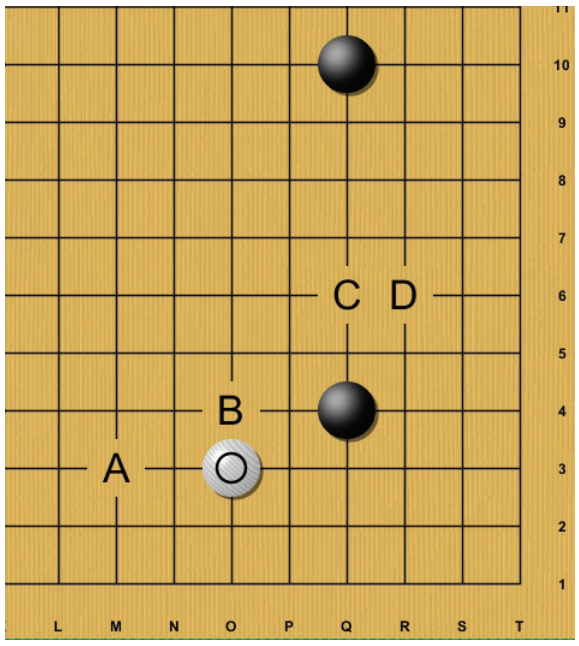
If White approaches on the fourth line, few things change. White appears to have more room to breathe, but it is an illusion.
Move 6 provides to Black the ability to play the monkey jump at **A** and destroy most of White's eye space.
The iron pillar at **move 8** is still looming on the side of the White group and the only solution to avoid being surrounded is to start jumping out towards the center, giving more influence and territory to Black.
This is a terrible result for White and this time the image depicts the whole board to emphasize that point.
Look at Black. He already has a secured corner and all his stones are either connecting or facing each other, working together. White in comparison has two corners ready to be approached and a weak group that needs to run.

Lately, due to the innovations of AlphaGo, the very early invasions at the 3-3 points have become quite the fashionable move, but the San-ren-sei makes such a choice a lot more difficult to yield a good result. Let us suppose that White invades both corners and see what happens:

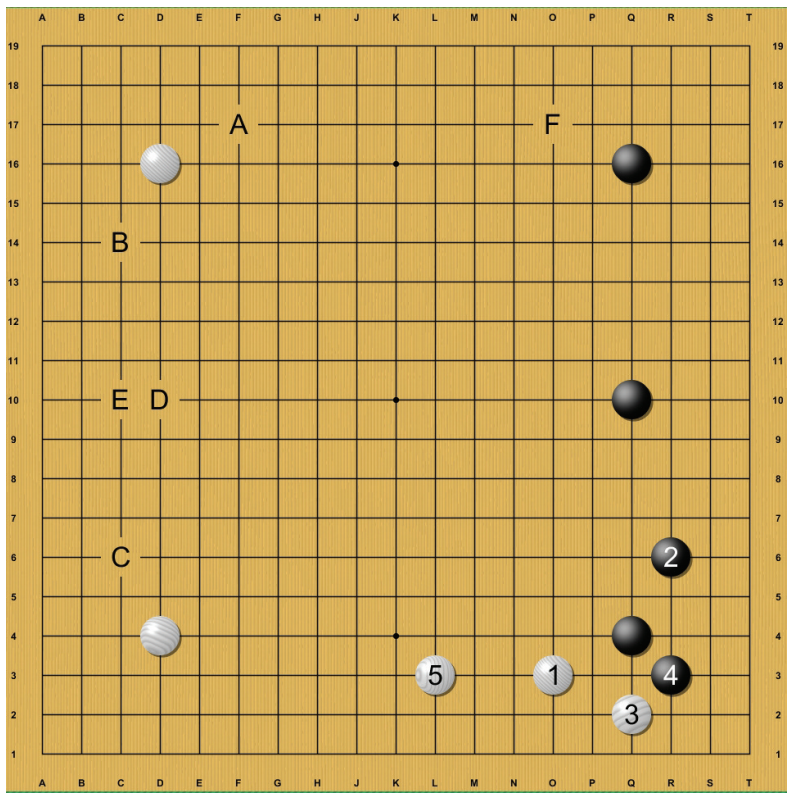


Once again the marked side star point is the center of the great result of the San-ren-sei fuseki.
White has successfully invaded the corners one after another and Black, dutifully, completed the joseki to make two huge walls facing each other, with the side star point as a basis to bind together the strength of those walls. The gap is wide enough for White to possibly reduce that area or even invade it and live, but if White sets stones deep in that framework, he is going to be in a difficult situation.
Black will be expecting to make an even larger profit by attacking the weak White stones, while he is using the influence of his walls. We will explain how influence and walls are used effectively in the next chapter, but for now, I think that it is obvious that White is not very happy with this result.

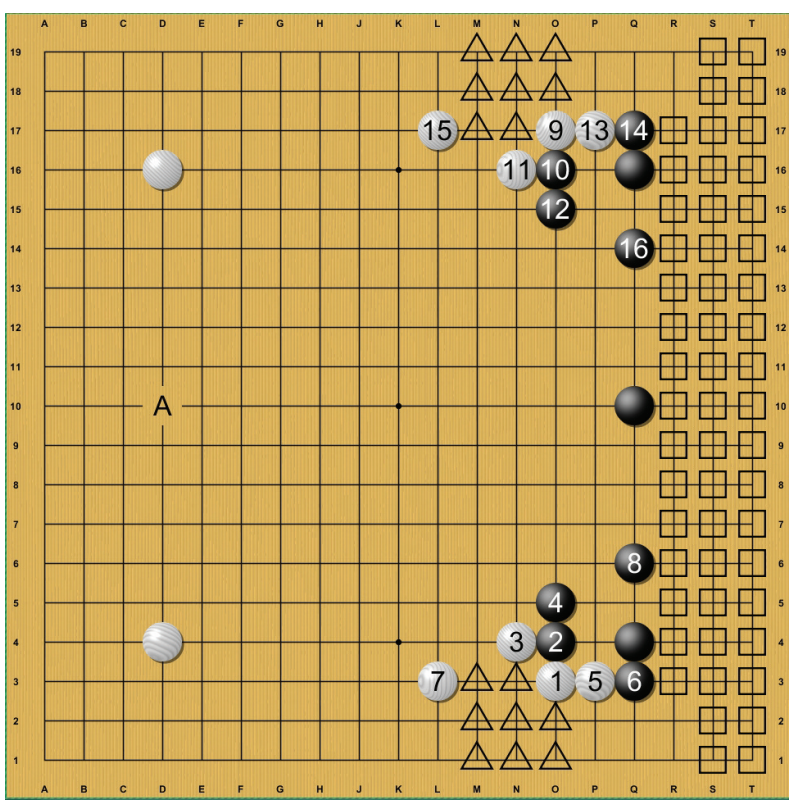
Having established which ideas do not work, let us see what happens if we approach the San-ren-sei from the correct direction:



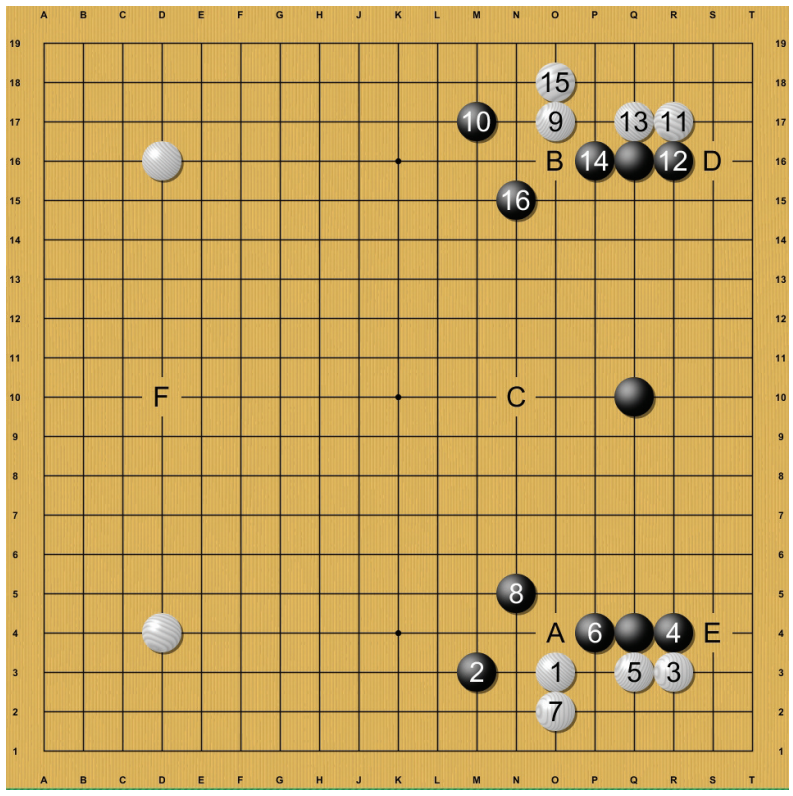
Once we approach one of the corners of the San-ren-sei from the correct direction, Black has four usual choices.
Choice **A** is the pincer and it leads to Black losing the corner, but gaining a wall, which, as we saw in the previous page might be a good idea, but White keeps sente and can approach the other corner of the San-ren-sei immediately.
Choice **B** the attachment joseki we saw in **pages 75-76** which is aiming to gain the corner and a small wall, but White also keeps sente.
And choices **C** and **D**, which are similar, designed to secure as much territory as possible and lead the game to a framework battle which, at this point, would be in favour of Black, since he would end any variation of those joseki in sente for him...



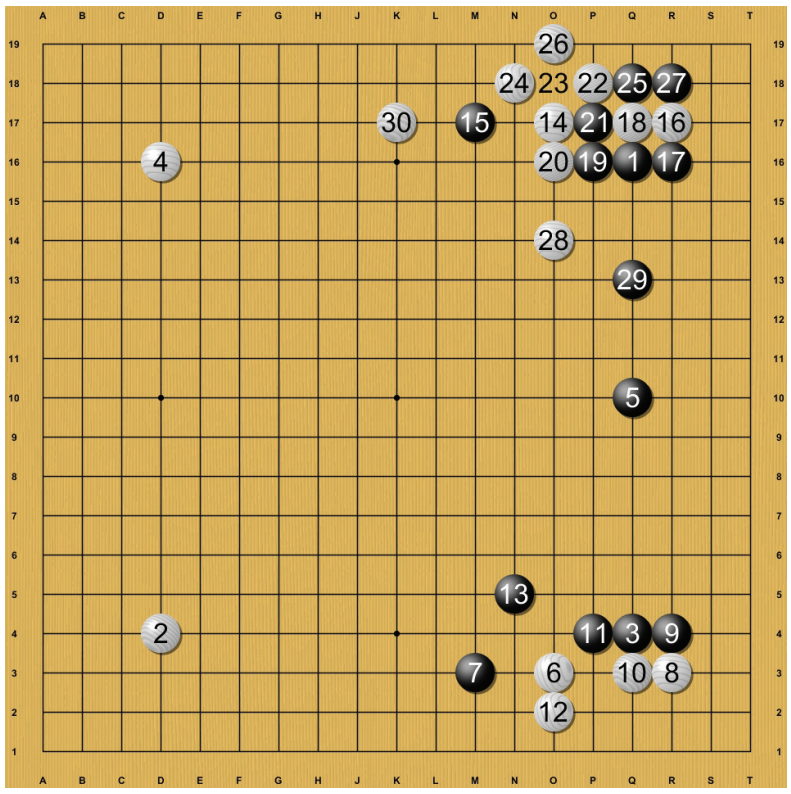
Let us see how it works. This is one of the most usual choices for Black, even though it doesn't create the huge framework of the other options, the fact that Black takes sente is crucial to the value of Black playing this way. After both players finish the joseki, Black now gets to decide what kind of game is going to be played.
If Black chooses **A** or **F** then this game is going to be a framework battle for the sides and the center, with Black being slightly ahead due to the San-ren-sei.
If Black chooses **B**, **C**, **D** or **E**, then the frameworks are being split and the game is going to be oriented more on local battles, with a focus on invasions and heavy fighting.

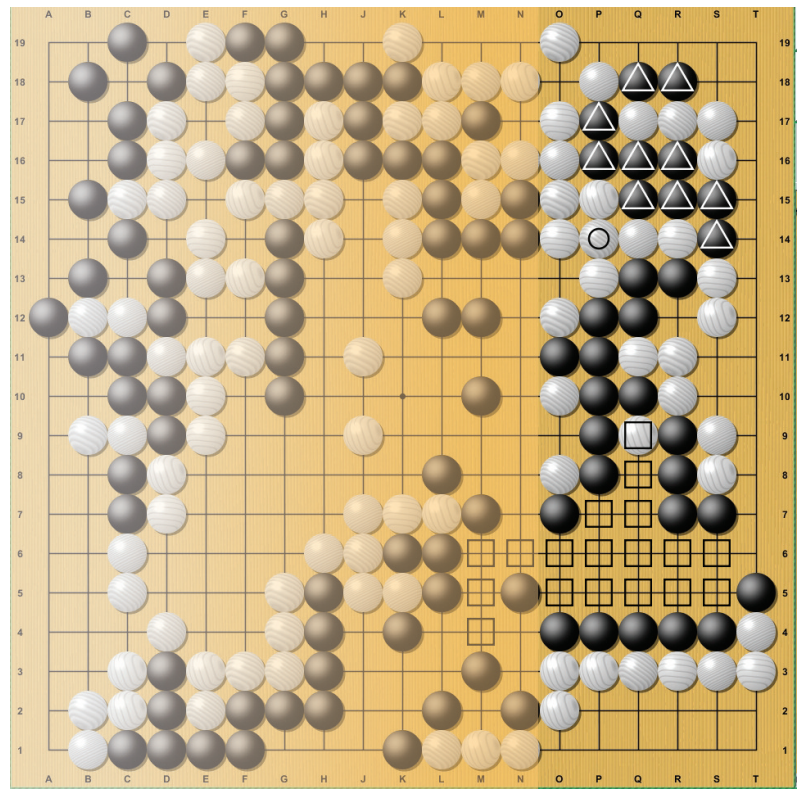


If Black plays the attachment joseki White keeps sente and he can approach the other corner of the San-ren-sei. If Black plays the same joseki again, then we can see the end result in the image.
The square marked points are what Black can consider as almost solid territory, since his stones are very thick and invading seems daunting. On the other hand the triangle marked points are what White got out of this exchange.
At first glance this seems like a great result for Black, but since White still has sente, the effect is diminished because White can play a San-ren-sei of his own at **A** now, placing the pressure on Black to attack that same fuseki. Unlike the huge walls of the last image in the previous page, this result for black has much less influence for him and Black seems confined in only one side of the board...



Since the attachment joseki is not as good as it seems, a lot of players opt for the pincer. When White predictably jumps into the corner, Black blocks from the wrong side (unlike the correct direction joseki we analysed in **pages 77-80**) in order to utilise the side star point stone. This is a nice idea trying to combine the huge walls of the result of a 3-3 invasion and the stable territory provided by the attachment joseki.
The sequences shown in the image are joseki, as well, but due to the wrong direction of the block, this joseki ends up with some weaknesses for Black, as well as sente for White. So, White can poke at any moment those weaknesses at **A**, **B**, **C**, **D** or **E,** but those are usually left as **aji** for later. As more immediate choices White can reduce Black's potential by playing around **C** or simply going for a San-ren-sei as well, at **F**.
This seems like a balanced result, but...





It is worth pointing out, now that this chapter comes to its end, that **we can never be certain that we know all the joseki and that we can foresee every idea our opponent has**. Go is not such a predictable game and it would have been disappointing if such a thing was possible. **Be careful with your plans and try to understand your moves and their goals, without presuming that the opponent will play what you want or expect**. Such an example is the **image on the left**, from a real game. Black played the San-ren-sei and White approached the bottom right corner and the pincer joseki was played out. Having seen this White approached the top right corner ready to be pincered again, but this time he played a different joseki, aimed at breaching Black's wall, by surrendering the corner **for now**. And I emphasize "for now", because **on the right image** we have an endgame snapshot of the same game (focus on the right side of the board). The triangle marked Black stones are dead, White reclaimed his corner and even managed to invade and totally destroy almost all the points Black was hoping to gain. Out of his huge framework only the few square marked points were left at the end.

Conclusion: The San-ren-sei is a strong yet simple and flexible fuseki in the way it works and interacts with the whole board. It is a nice fuseki to begin experimenting with the concept of a full board strategy and that is why I reserved it for the end of the chapter. My suggestion is that you should try all the different play styles that can arise from it. Be it a framework battle or building huge walls or creating chaotic games full of fights, the San-ren-sei will provide you with a stable groundwork for your strategy.

On fighting in general

It is no surprise that fighting with your opponent is the most thrilling part of most games. Go is no exception to this and the ways of fighting within the game are quite varied and interesting to learn. Some of them seem very simple, but most things in Go that appear simple to understand, turn up to be very hard to master. The depth of this game and the excitement of the fights that can come up in a game cannot be underestimated.

There are books exclusively dedicated to each of the most usual ways: Invading an area directly, reducing an area lightly, attacking a group by using your influence or straight up trying to kill a group that was surrounded. So, why not have different chapters for all of them or, at least, one chapter for “attacking” and one for “defending”? Because those processes are intertwined with each other. For example, you cannot analyse how an invasion works, without establishing how it could have been prevented or defended or why those efforts to defend would not work.

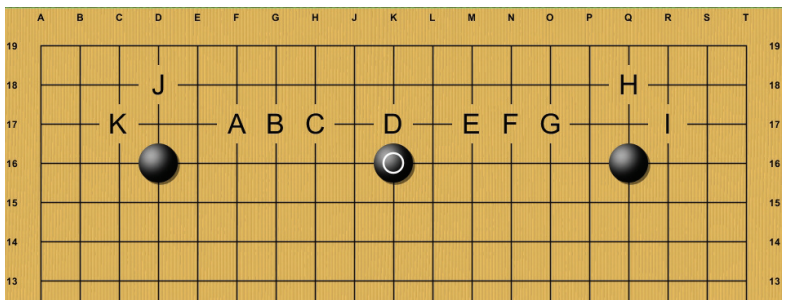
This means that there will be a huge chapter of attacking and defending which will have subchapters for each main subject: One section for invasions, one section for reductions and one section for attacking by using influence.

The only relative section which will have its own separate chapter will be the one for trying to kill groups directly (life and death problems), because we must present **living shapes** and **tesuji** (skillful plays), before we go into the life and death problems. In order to achieve a goal, one must first know what that goal is. So, if we do not know what are the living shapes we must aim to create and what are the tesuji that might help us make them or destroy them, then we cannot fully grasp the subject.

Here we should mention that *the main difference between an invasion and a reduction is that an invasion is directly trying to **take away** a whole area from the opponent, while a reduction is simply trying to **minimize** it***.** The main question we need to answer in order to choose whether to invade or reduce is *“can I live in the space between my opponent’s stones?”***.**

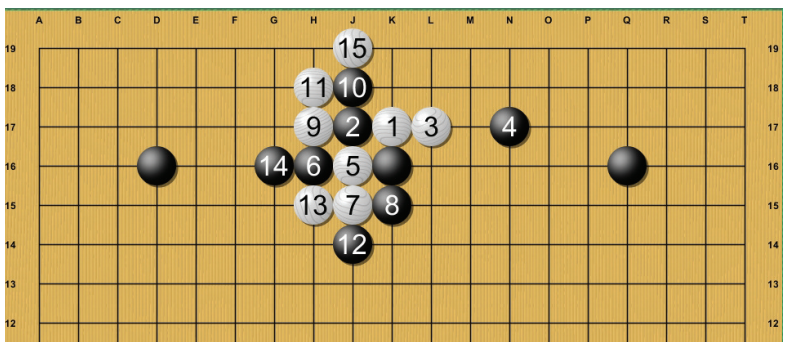
If the answer is “**yes**”, then we can invade. If the answer is “**no**”, then the best we can do is reduce. But sometimes this is not an easy question to answer and we try an invasion anyway. Most of those cases end up creating quite severe life and death problems whose outcomes usually decide the whole game. So, for the invasion chapter we will try on focusing on how to make the correct decision and analysing examples of invasions that would work without creating a huge fight which could go either way. First we will learn what is safe and then we will learn what is more risky (and possibly more rewarding).

Let us see a quick example of each category, to get the general idea behind each one, how they look on the board and what are they all about:

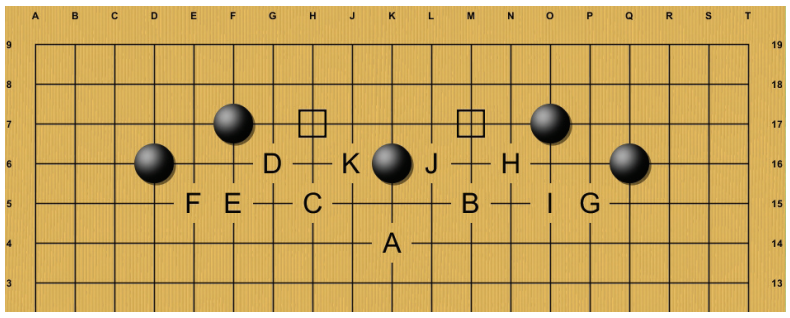


Invasion example

This is the San-ren-sei fuseki. In the opening there are larger places to play than invasions, but with all Black's stones being in the fourth line, this means that there is space for an invasion. Eleven invasion points are marked on the diagram and those are actually not all of them!

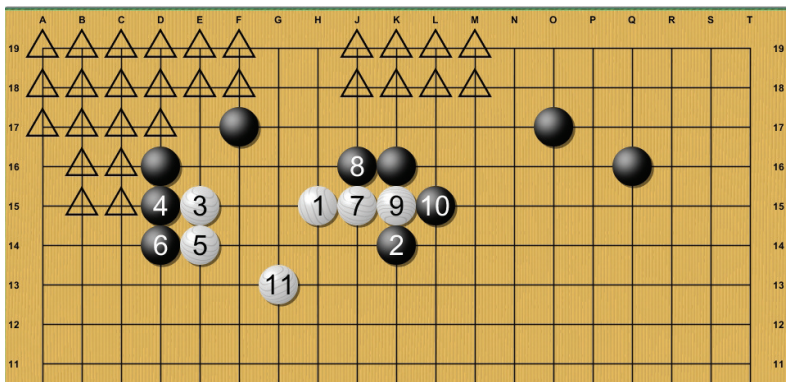


For the sake of symmetry let us say that White chose to invade at **D** right under the central stone of the fuseki. Black cannot kill the invasion and one possible result can be seen in the image on the left. The possible responses and sequences are too many to cover, but most of them end up with a similar result. White alive and Black getting the areas around White's stones.

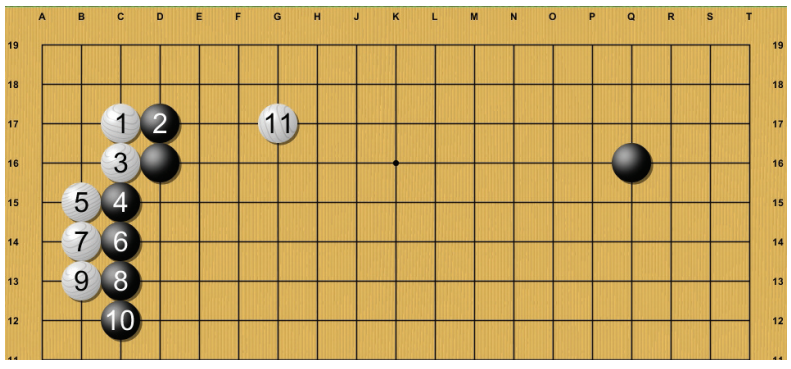


Reduction example

Let us suppose we add some third line stones in the mix. Now an invasion is almost impossible in the center of the formation, even though those square marked points seem inviting. So White should keep Black from enlarging his territory by choosing to play above or around Black's stones.

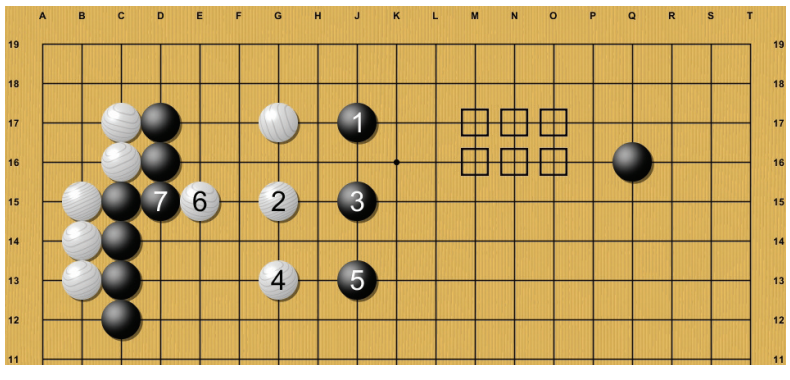


For our example White chooses **C** and this is only one of the many possible results. Black gained all the triangle marked points as almost certain territory, while White managed to reduce Black's potential expansion towards the center. Black is very happy, but a reduction is the best White could have done with so many Black stones in that area.



Example of using influence to attack

Here is another familiar image. White invaded the 3-3 corner and both players played the most usual joseki in this case. For **move 11** White is supposed to play somewhere behind Black's wall to reduce Black's potential territory, but White went too close to Black's wall.
(**remember**: The longer the wall, the farther we must play away from it).



Black takes advantage of it and takes away the base of the White stone, pressing it against his wall. White has to jump out or lose his stone. Black happily follows and while White is thinking that he rendered Black's original wall useless, Black is building a new wall, making the square marked points very hard for White to invade.

Invasions

As we saw, an invasion is placing our stones deep or totally behind enemy lines with the aim of taking as much of it as possible. This is a form of attack that usually ends up in heavy fighting and even if we win the opponent will usually get some form of compensation out of our invasion, unless he totally fails to defend himself. **An invasion is deemed successful if what we gained is worth more than the compensation our opponent got while defending.** We should be aware that after an invasion, the board will have changed significantly and that all those extra stones mean that our next invasion just became more difficult or even impossible to succeed, so be careful when you are choosing an invasion point. But we have been talking so much about the vague concepts or attack and defense, that maybe it is time to give them a definition.

What is attacking?

Attacking is either the process of reducing the liberties or surrounding a group of stones directly and applying pressure to it, or trying to take away its base and its ability of making two eyes.

What is defending?

Defending is either the process of giving a group more liberties or extending its eye space potential or covering the possible invasion points. A group that cannot be killed is called **stable** and it doesn't need to be defended, but it can be used as a staging point to launch attacks from.

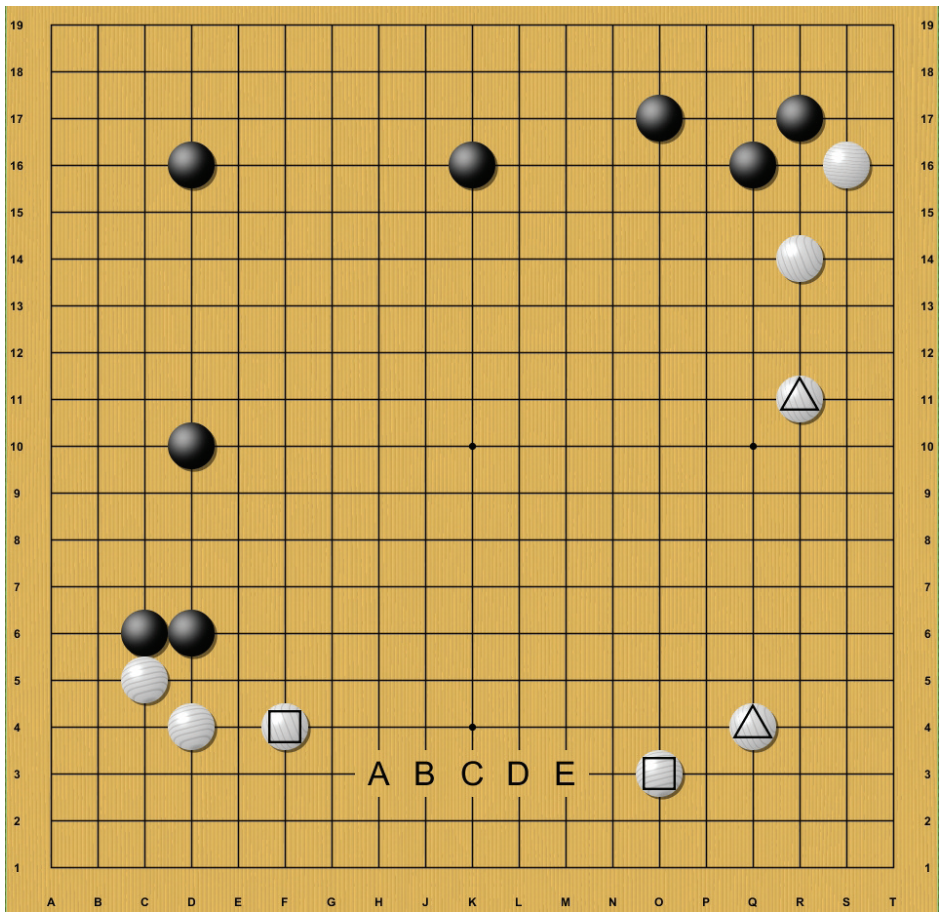
As we said both of these concepts are very deeply connected with each other. A group that is under attack, once defended correctly, can be used to launch attacks of its own and vice versa: A player that is using a group for an attack should always be wary of playing aggressive moves that might endanger his own group's stability in the future. So, what are the questions we need to ask ourselves in order to decide on an invasion?

When and where do we invade?

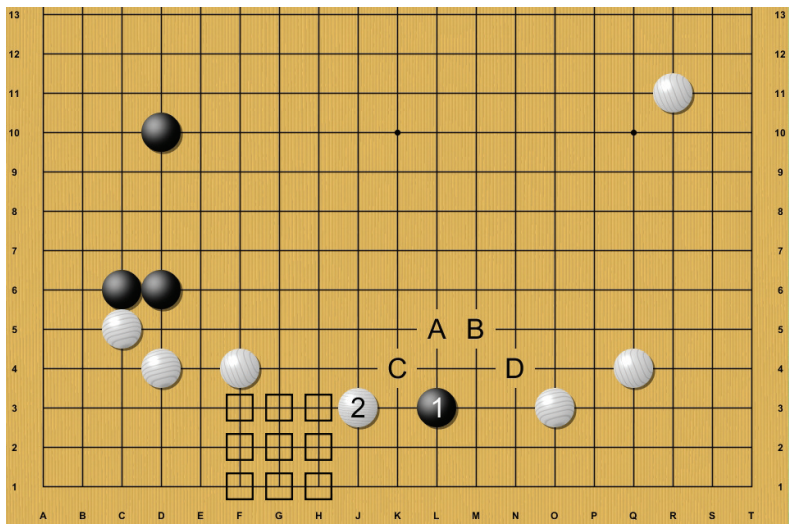
- Are there groups of enemy stones that have large gaps between them? If so, then there are bound to be points where we can split our opponent, especially if some of his stones are on the fourth line.
- Are we certain that we can survive in the points of invasion we identified?
- Which of these points seem to give us a better result for us or more trouble for our opponent?
- If we do invade and manage to survive inside the enemy territory, is the territory we gain worth the outside influence our opponent will get for compensation?
- Does the invasion destabilize another group of our opponent's or does it provide enough of a threat to offer us a good follow-up move that will give us the upper hand elsewhere?
- Do we REALLY need to invade to win the game? Invading is not mandatory after all.

Well, this doesn't look easy, so it is bound to be interesting. Let see how it all works, so that you can try invasions in your own games or defend against them. Do not be afraid of losing. **Experiment, learn and always try to have fun.**

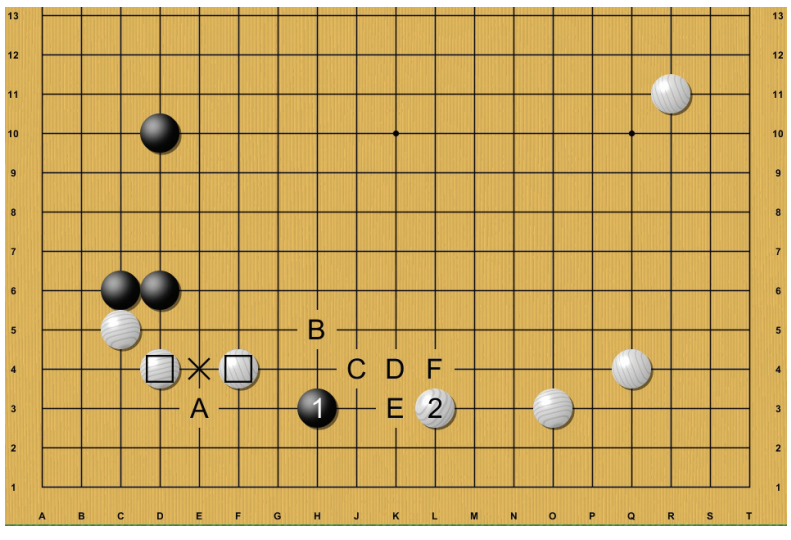
The most simple guidelines that can encompass all the previous questions are that *"the wider the gap between the opponent's stones, the better"* and that *"if the opponent's stones are on the fourth line, then an invasion is easier. If they are on the third line, then a reduction is easier"*. Let us see the first example of an invasion:



The image on the left depicts a very simple and common opening. Black played the San-ren-sei on the top side. White approached on the top right corner, then Black approached the bottom left corner. Both players finished the joseki in each case and White played the enclosure on the bottom right corner to defend from a possible 3-3 invasion, by Black. Now it is Black's turn and he wants to invade White's framework. Black notices that the gap between the triangle marked stones is **six points**, while the gap between the square marked stones is **seven points**.
So Black chooses the wider space to invade. He has five possible points of invasion, without attaching to White's stones. How can he choose between them? **The point closer to White's fourth line stone is better.**
It gives Black room to threaten White, but why?

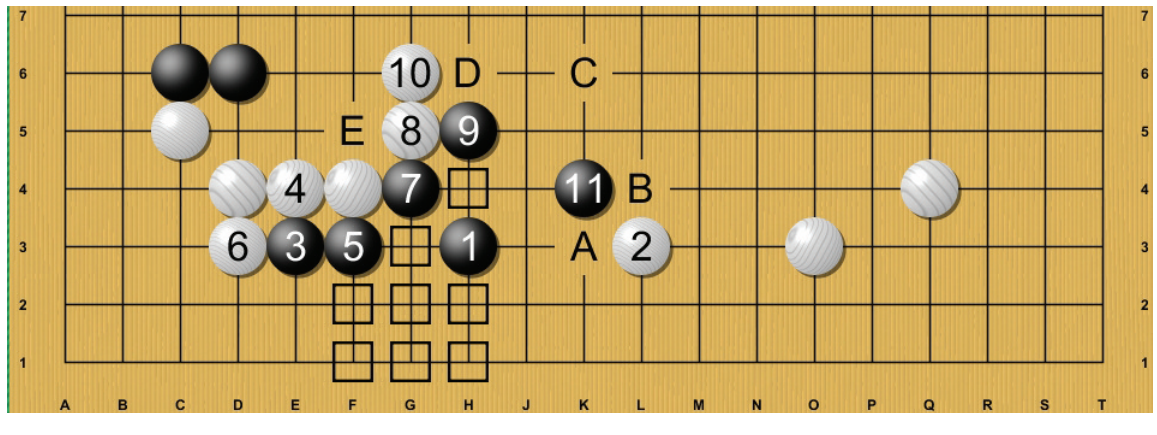


Let us suppose that Black ignored the aforementioned idea and played choice **D** in the first image.
White's **move 2** takes away the Black stone's **base** (its space to possibly create two eyes) and now the Black stone is in a tight spot and has to run away with choices **A** and **B** or fight with **C** or **D**.
White's stones are much stronger and safer than the single Black stone. Also, White almost certainly gained the squared marked points, as territory.
So, White defended by attacking the Black stone and Black only helped White gain more territory...

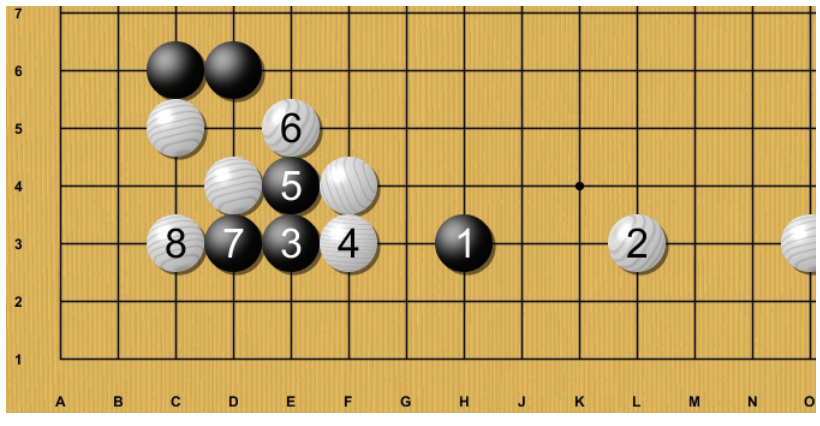


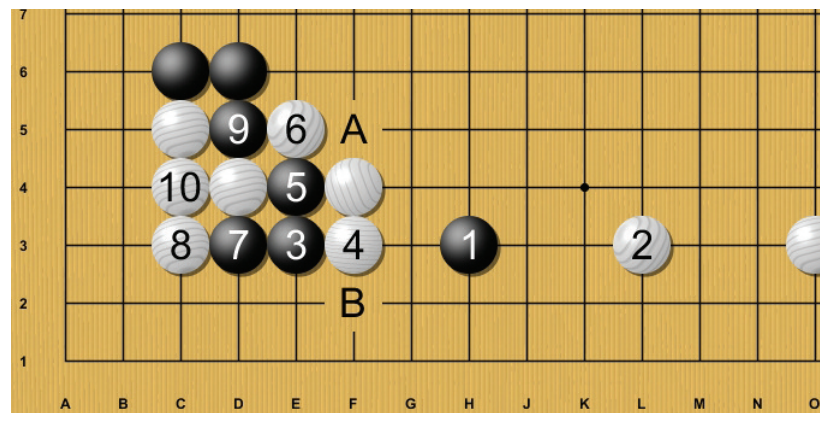
Now let us see what happens if Black plays choice **A** in the first image, an invasion closer to the fourth line stone.
White's **move 2** rushes in to take Black's base again and things appear similar with the previous case with the flight or fight choices ranging from **B** to **F**.
But in this case, Black can play at **A**, below the White stones and threaten the cut at the weak point of the one space extension marked with **X**.
White, once again, took some territory by extending on the third line with **move 2**, but this time he is not safe on both sides and that creates problems...

The reason why we usually avoid invading near third line stones is becoming more apparent now. It is because they do not leave too much room for us to live underneath them or threaten them in some way, unlike the fourth line stones. Let us see how our example works out after Black threatens the cut:

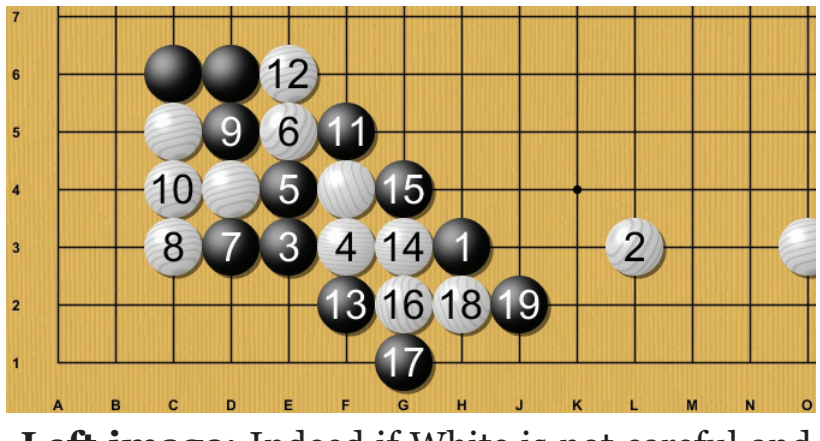


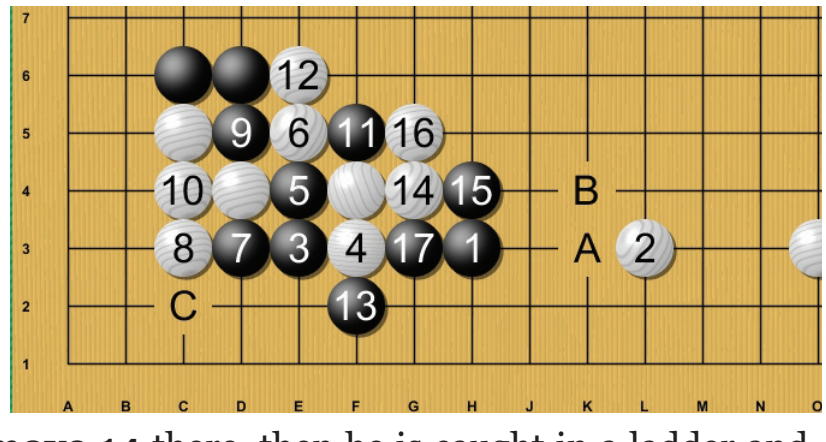
When faced with a cutting threat, it is almost always the best choice to defend against that cut.
Usually most people would just connect at **4**. Black extends at **5** to connect his own stones and create his base. **White 6** closes off the corner and **Black 7** makes more eye shape for Black. **White 8** tries surround Black, but **Black 9** creates two tiger's mouths for Black. White extends to defend his stone and with the shoulder hit at **11** Black solidifies his base marked with the squared points. Black's group is safe and stable so White needs to defend his cut at **E** or be in more trouble in the future. Black can continue expanding or attacking with **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**. So, **the invasion was a success!**
I can hear you thinking though that maybe White was cowardly and that he should have fought back instead of just safely connecting at **move 4**. Let us think this idea over...





Left image: Let us say that **White 4** tried to disconnect Black's stones. **Black 5** cuts, **White 6** finally defends, **Black 7** tries for the corner and **White 8** blocks. Now what?
Right image: Black 9 places the White stone in atari, so White has to connect at **10** and now White has two weak spots. The atari at **A** and the follow-up threat of the ladder at **B**...

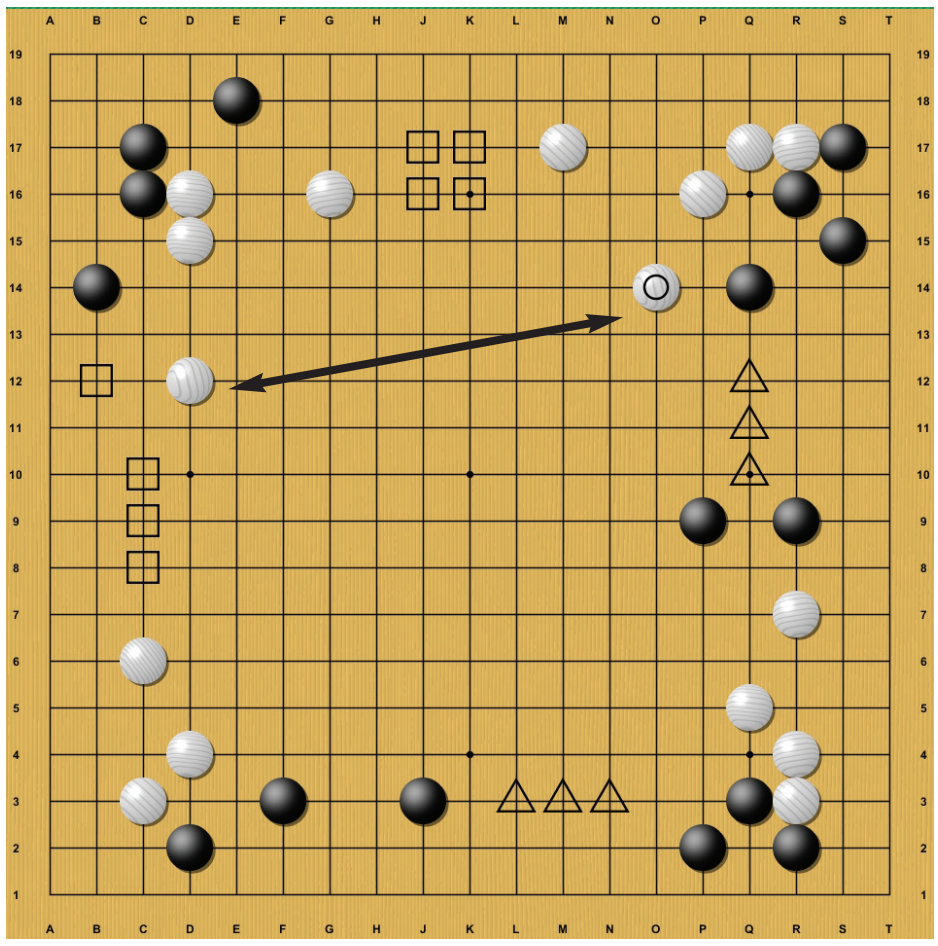




Left image: Indeed if White is not careful and plays **move 14** there, then he is caught in a ladder and Black's invasion is more successful than he could have ever imagined.
Right image: Even if White is careful with **move 14**, Black still gets a lot of free moves and a base and keeps sente. Now Black can expand with **A** or **B** or even attack again with **C**.

So, there are two things to remember here:

The first one is that when we are attacking we need to exploit the opponent's weaknesses and open spaces, which are usually found under fourth line stones. The second one is that we always need to take care of our shape and that we shouldn't shy away from "cowardly" moves. *We cannot attack or defend efficiently if we don't have good shape and take care of our weaknesses.* Keeping this in mind, let us see another real game example and introduce some other important ideas we need to be aware of before, and during, an invasion:

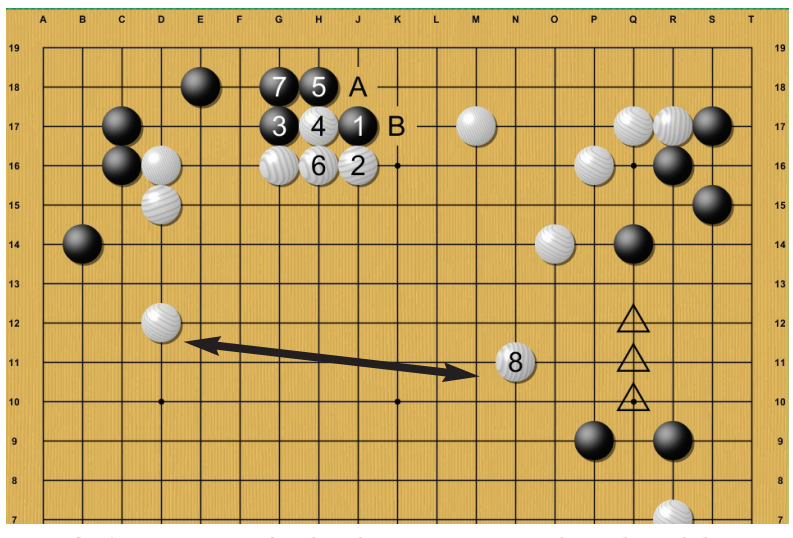


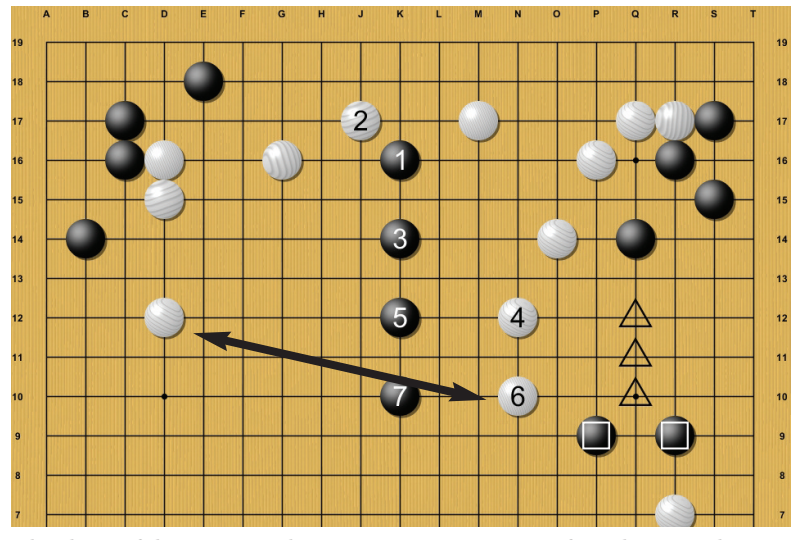
This is an example of a game that is just getting out of the opening stage. White makes the first move to enlarge his very wide framework in the top and the left side of the board, while Black has two corners and the bottom side.

The square marked points are where White's formation is thin and far apart. The triangled points are the spots where Black's formation is thin and White has some helping stones around in case of an invasion.

It is Black's turn to play and he decides that while those marked points are good for an invasion, his invading stones will need extra help, because White has too many stones around, especially in the top.

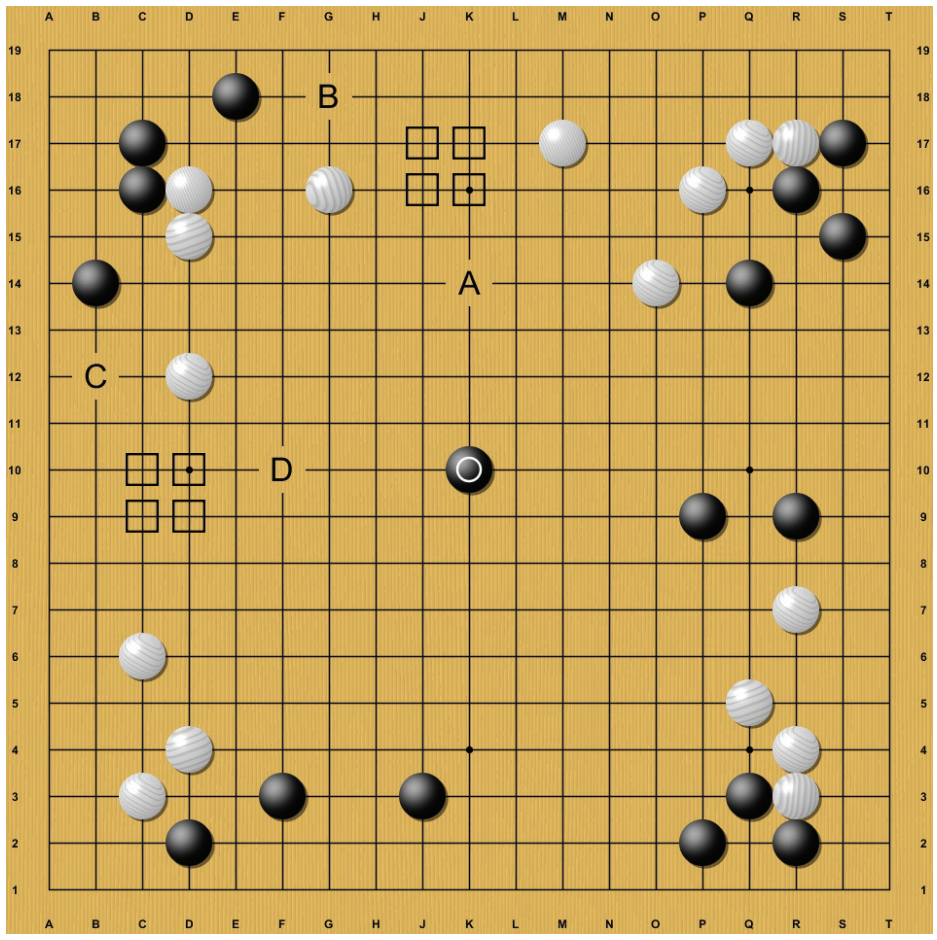
The line we drew on the image is called the **sector line** of White's influence and it is easy to imagine, since it is just the line between the edges of White's framework. Placing a single stone there could be problematic for Black...





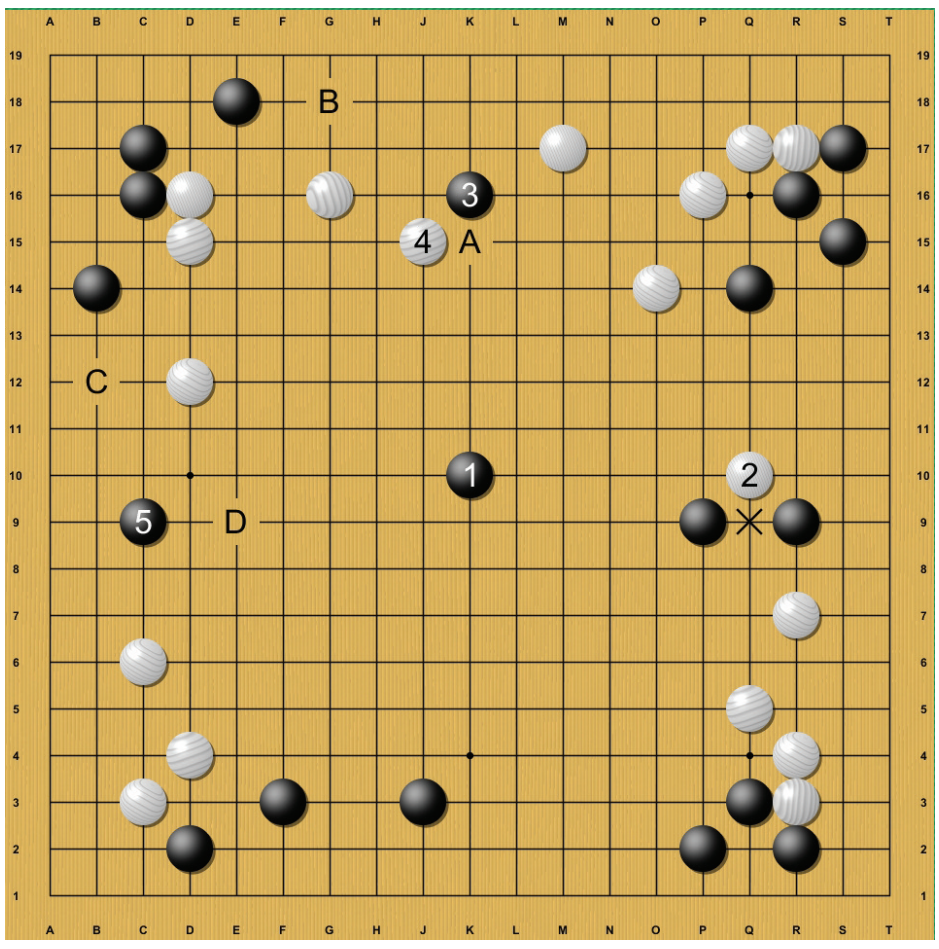
Left image: If Black comes in the third line and uses the help of his nearby stones, even if White plays passively, Black only gets a small amount of territory, which White can still fight for with **A** or **B**. Meanwhile White's sector line moved even deeper into the center and his groups got stronger. Also the triangled marked spots are even easier to invade now and Black has to defend there or perish.

Right image: If Black comes on the fourth line and White blocks his connection with the corner stones then Black jumps out to get over the sector line with **move 3**. White extends the sector line again and, finally by **move 7** Black is eventually out, with a stick made of stones. The invasion seems successful, but it is White's turn and the square marked stones can now be surrounded and killed. An invasion that hurts our stones elsewhere is not good enough...



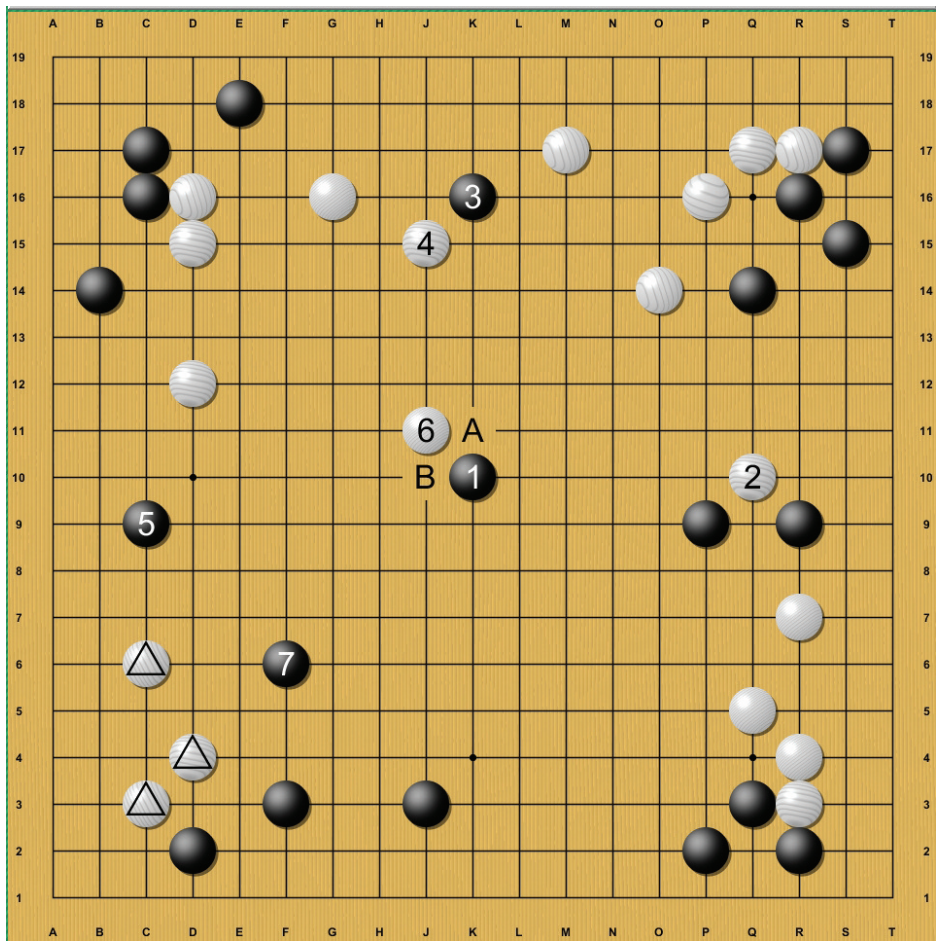
Black considers all the issues we presented in the previous page and decides on a very good idea: He will **place a stone that will help his future invasions.**
For this case he chooses the absolute center of the board (called **tengen**) which is a very interesting choice. Look at the whole board. Black's stone not only seems to synergize with his stones on the right and bottom side, but they create **two** huge holes in White's defense.
If Black invades at the top squared points, then depending on White's response he can either jump out at **A** towards his stone on the tengen or connect underneath at **B**. Moves **A** and **B** are practically **miai**, so both issues presented in the previous page were solved with one move and as an added bonus the exact same situation is mirrored in the left side as well with points **C** and **D**.
A magnificent move for Black. Defending four different points with one move seems quite impossible...

Practical rule: When you are trying to invade, the more helping stones you have, the better chances you have to get a good result out of the invasion. Moves that create multiple threats or miai situations are usually crucial in a successful invasion.

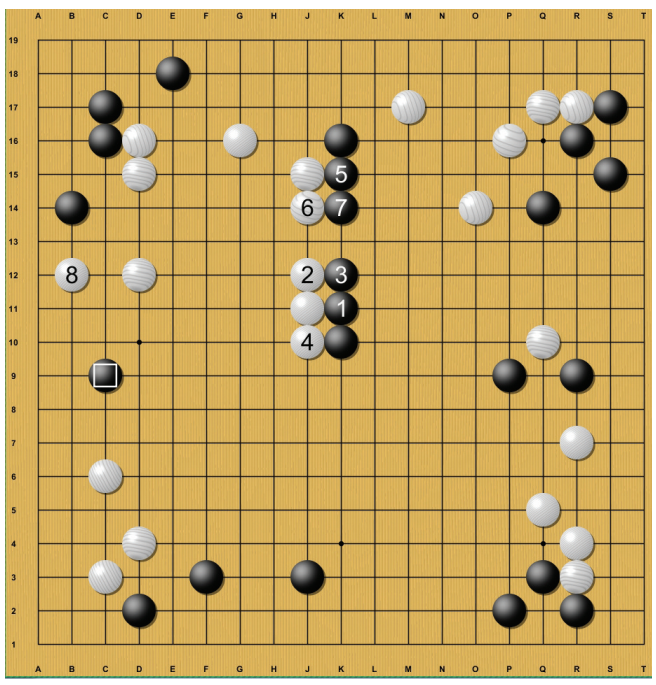


White cannot decide what to do, so he delays any response on that problem and tries to play somewhere else and threaten Black in some other way, trying to change the board in his favor before he deals with the whole situation.
White plays **move 2** to distract Black by threatening the cut at **X** and trying to see if he can get some compensation in case Black goes in for an invasion.
Black ignores White and invades at **move 3**. White tries to expand his group on the left and cut off the Black stone with **move 4**, but despite White blocking the one space jump, Black **A** and **B** are moves that would bring some gain for Black. So, since Black has two options he gets greedy and invades at **move 5** as well. In this side both moves **C** and **D** are capable of leading the Black stone to safety or at least deliver a significant gain to Black. White is in trouble, invaded in two sides and his left group seems to be slowly getting surrounded ...

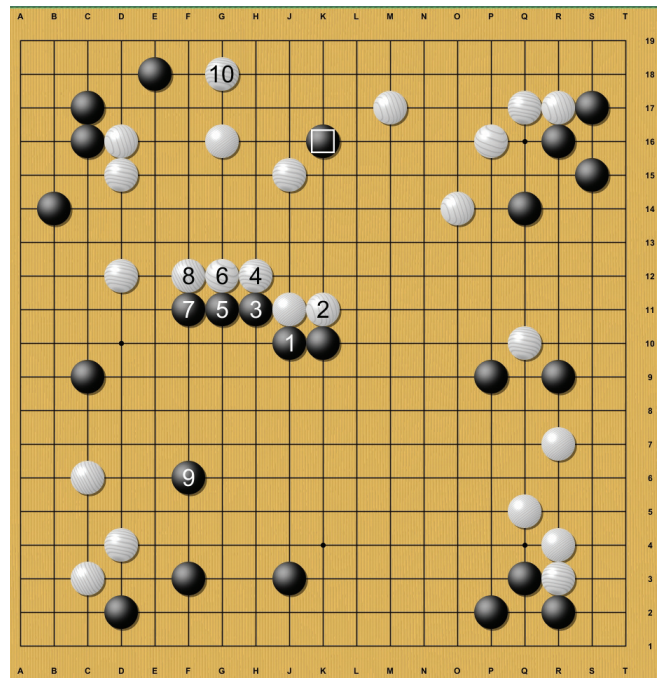
Practical rule: When you are in doubt about what to do next in a situation, try to **tenuki** (play elsewhere) and change the situation on the board. Maybe later, with more stones around things will become easier to handle and a solution might be presented to you.



The symmetry of the situation is oddly the key to a good solution. White chooses to shoulder-hit Black's stone at **move 6**. This creates a choice for Black as you can see in the two images below. Black will have to choose which of his two stones to help. If White plays **A** or **B**, Black will be in trouble since he will have to either help his stone in the middle or the corresponding invasion stone. This problem is similar with the one White faced earlier and Black cannot help every stone with one move, so Black probably follows the same strategy as White and plays **move 7** to surround the marked White group, enlarge his own framework in the bottom and help his stone at **move 5**. Achieving so many things with one move is great in normal situations, but, in this case, **White can choose which Black stone to surround!** You should never defer such decisions to your opponent!
We will return to this game in **page 118**, in the reduction section to see what happened next.



These are the two choices that White had mainly in mind when he played the shoulder hit on Black's stone.
Both results end with White attacking one of the two invading stones, but Black is getting compensated for losing one of his two invasions.
The right image looks a lot better for Black.



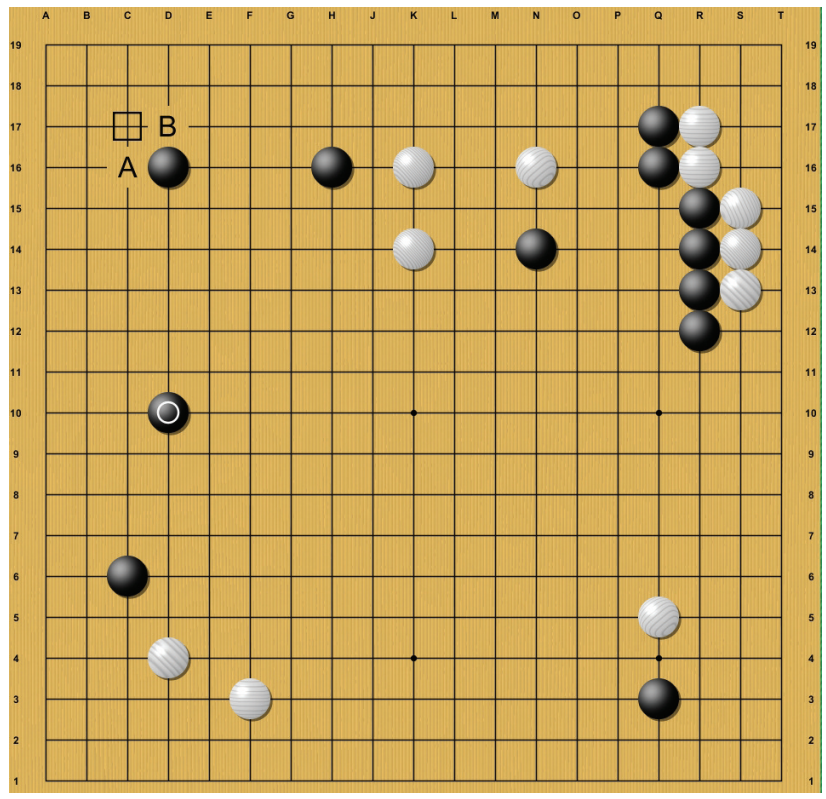
Definition and practical rule: The **sector line** is the imaginary line that connects the edges of a player's framework. Invading behind that line could be very difficult to work, so you should always try to have nearby stones to help you achieve that goal, if you are going to try it.

Practical rule: If you cannot deal with an invasion directly, try to first destabilise the opponent's helping stones. If you can alter the board around them, then the invasion might be easier to fend off.

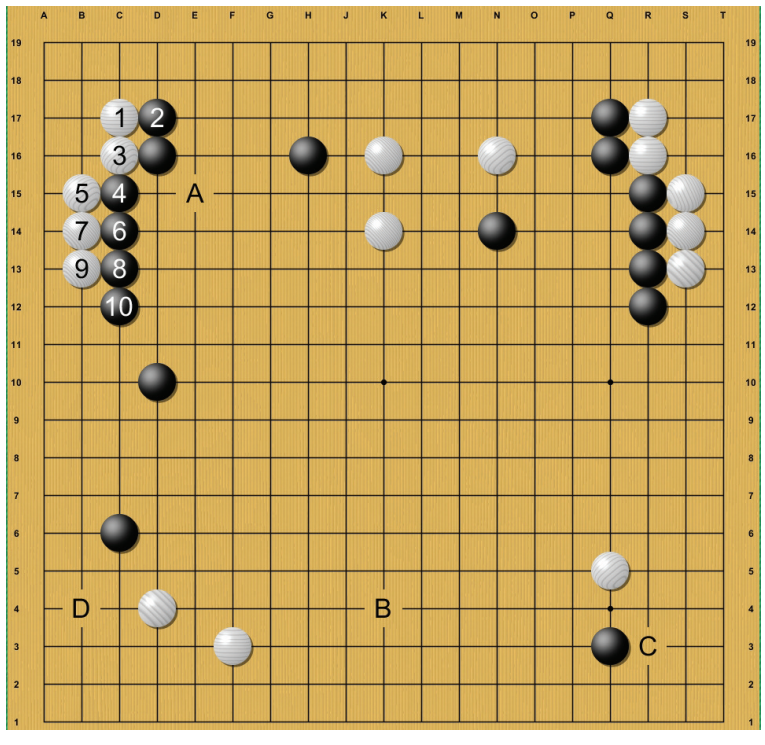
Practical rule: Avoid creating many and small groups here and there on the board. A big successful invasion that results in a strong group for you, is usually better than many smaller ones that get chased around the board, by your opponent.

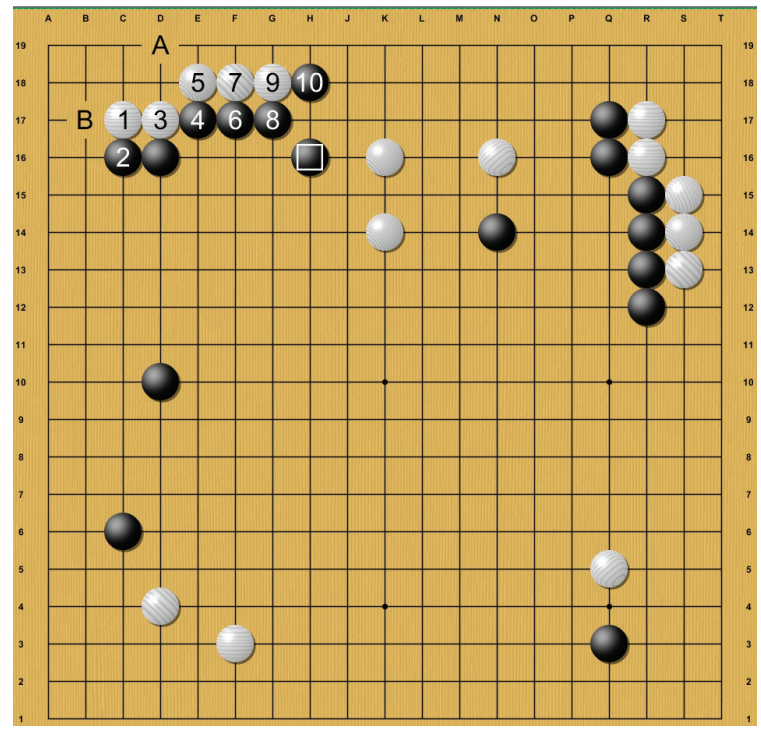
Practical rule: **Do not be greedy!** Until you have enough experience to know when your groups and stones are safe, try to make certain that your stones are safe before moving to the next area of interest. A group that is in danger is a much worse problem than your opponent getting some points uncontested.

A very interesting kind of invasion are **contact plays**, where a player is directly attaching the invading stone on the opponent's existing stones. As we have already seen we usually like to give our stones room and a space to make eyes and live, but sometimes when such space is either abundant or there are many helping stones around us, we can attach directly to threaten multiple things and steer our opponent in the response and direction that is in our favour. For example:



Black seems to be utilising his top left corner in a very efficient way. He has just extended towards the left side and he already has a stone towards the top, so White wants to put a stop to that, by taking away Black's corner with the 3-3 invasion on the square marked point and Black blocking at **A** or **B**...

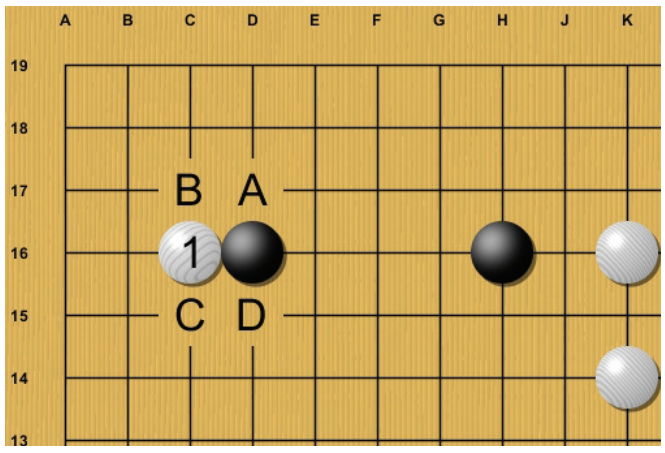




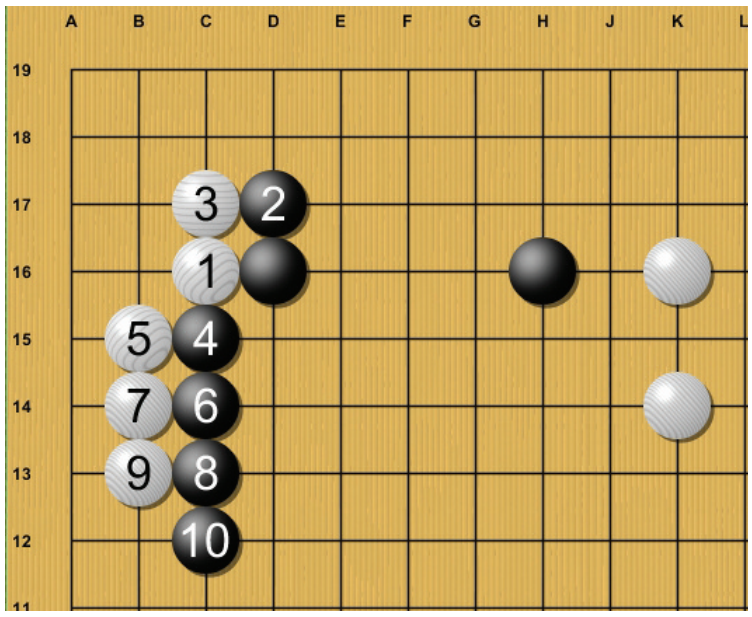
Left image: If Black blocks at **B** this is the usual joseki that we have already seen and it is pretty much in favour of White, because White gets the corner and keeps sente to play at another interesting point on the board like the ones marked here.

Right image: But if Black blocks from the other side, the marked stone means that Black can break away from the joseki. In this variation White needs to defend at **A** or **B** so Black possibly gets sente, a nice framework on the left side and he can now threaten White's stones on the top side.

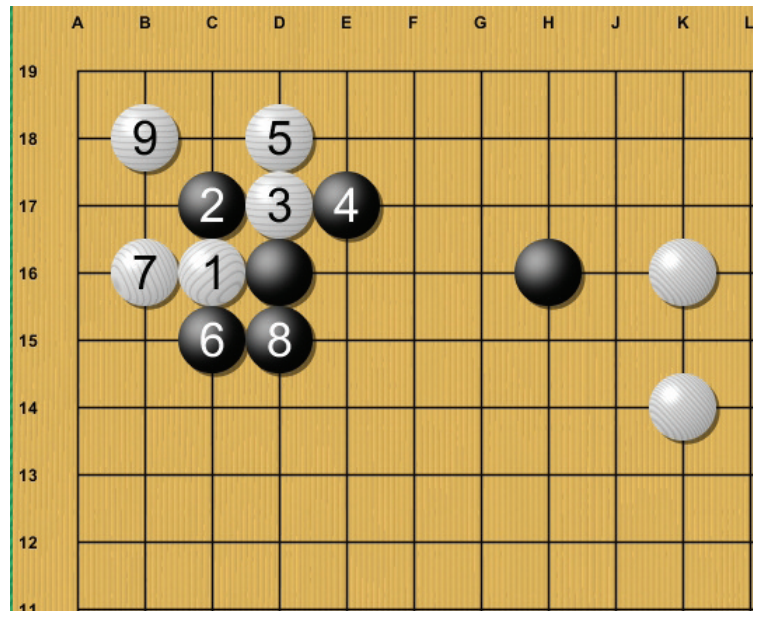
How can White avoid this result and make Black choose the result in the left image?



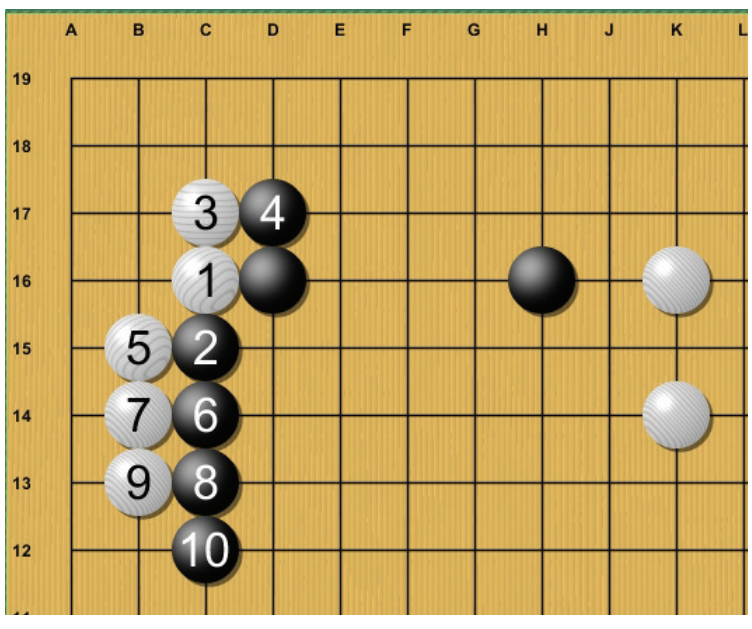
The way for White to force Black's direction of blocking is to deny him the possibility of choice, by playing his invasion stone directly attached to Black's 4-4 stone.
Black has four choices: **A**, **B**, **C** and **D** but none of them can push the White stone towards the top side, which was exactly the result that White wanted to avoid.
Also, all four choices cost Black the corner, as we will see in the following images, so between the choices that give uncertain continuations and the choices that just revert to the joseki, Black usually picks the safest ones.



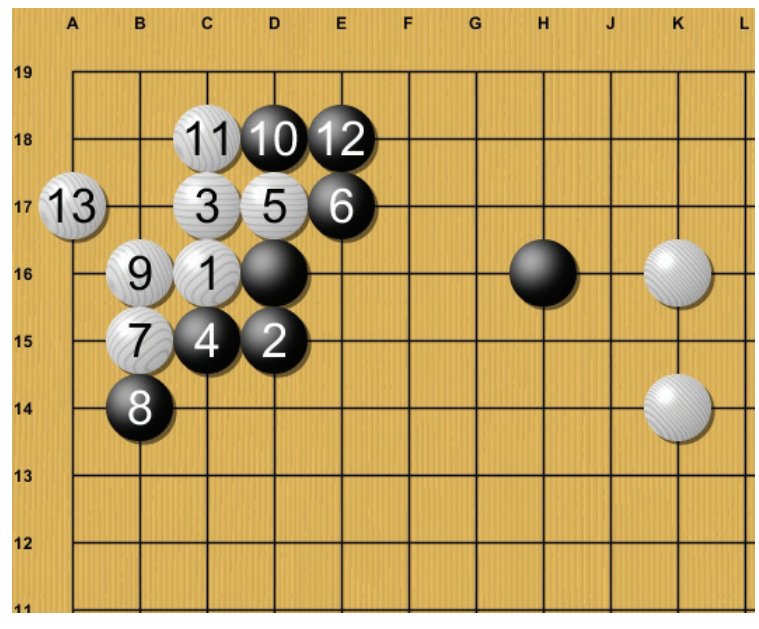
Choice A
Exactly the same as the joseki. Only the order of the moves changes.



Choice B
This is a possible result. Cutting at **2** leads to heavy fighting rarely favorable for Black.



Choice C
Exactly the same as the joseki and choice **A**. Only the order of the moves changes.

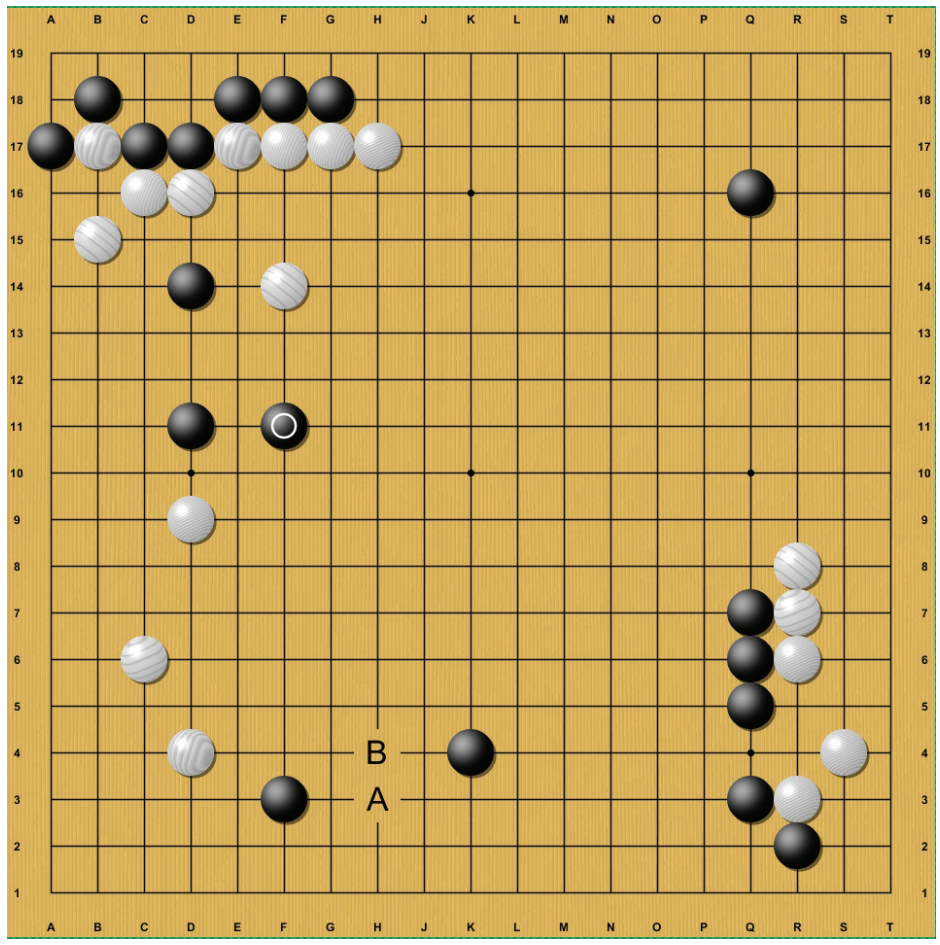


Choice D
Black loses the corner again and he has worse shape than in choices **A** and **C**.

Practical rule: When your opponent is attaching a stone directly to one of your stones, making a contact play, the safest choice is to extend instead of playing the hane and giving the ability to your opponent to hane as well and cut your stones, like in choice **B** in the example above. Unless you have many stones to help you with such a brass move, playing the hane could mean more trouble for you than your opponent. This also means that when you play the contact play, you might be happy if he is too aggressive and plays the hane against you.

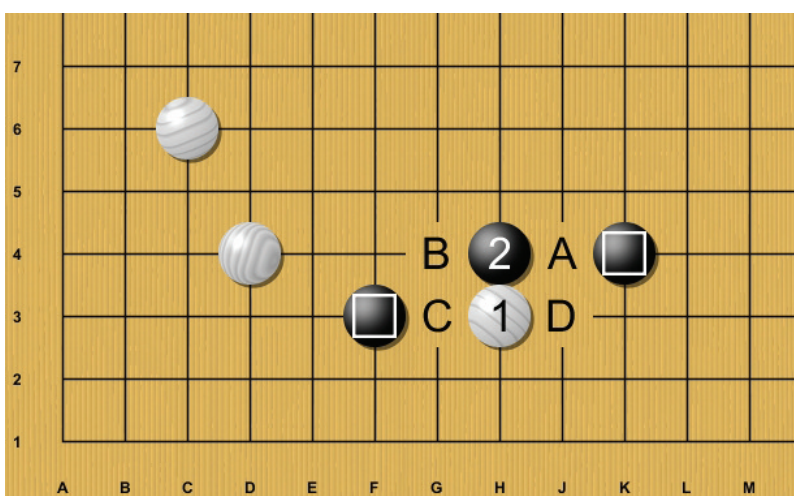
Earlier when we were talking about the types of connections between stones we mentioned that when stones get to be to wide apart then they have so many cutting points, that cannot really be considered to be practically connected.

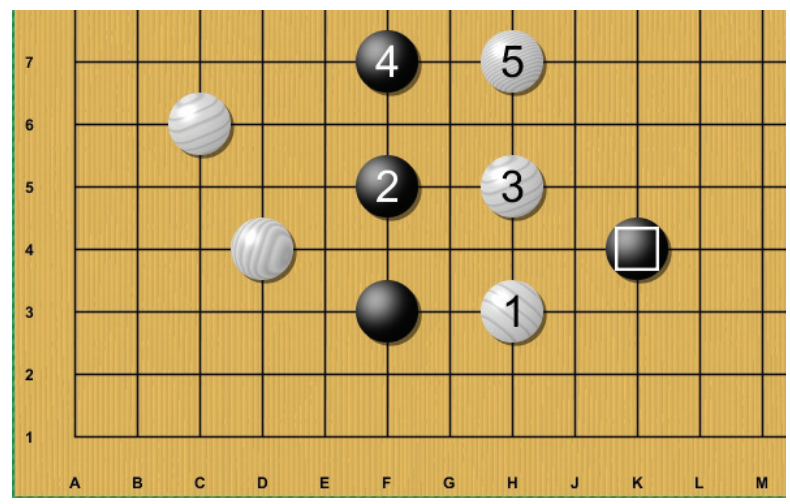
A practical application of that was the invasion point at the Kobayashi fuseki which we mentioned earlier. Now is the perfect time to see what happens in the case of a knight's move extension with a three points gap:



As usual, we will review an example from a real game. In this case Black has played the Kobayashi fuseki and the game progressed around twenty moves more before White decided that it is time for him to attack at the Kobayashi's weak point at **A**.

Point **B** is also a weak spot, but it is more of a reduction than an invasion since Black usually gets to keep his territory and White gets the outside, and it is a classic example which showcases the difference between those two concepts. For now, let us see what happens in the invasion at **A**.

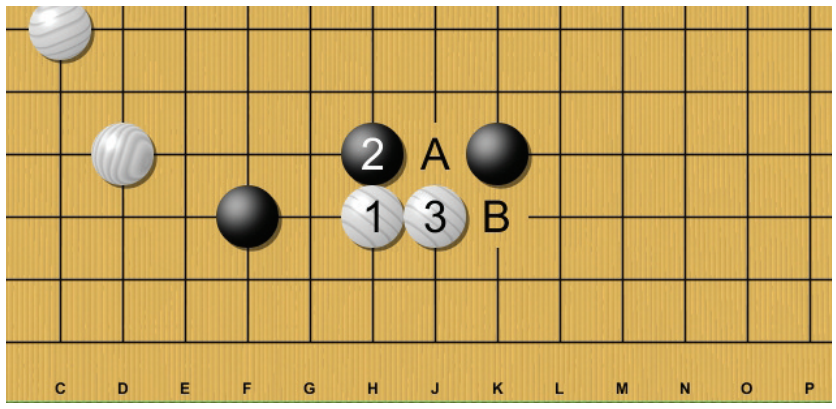


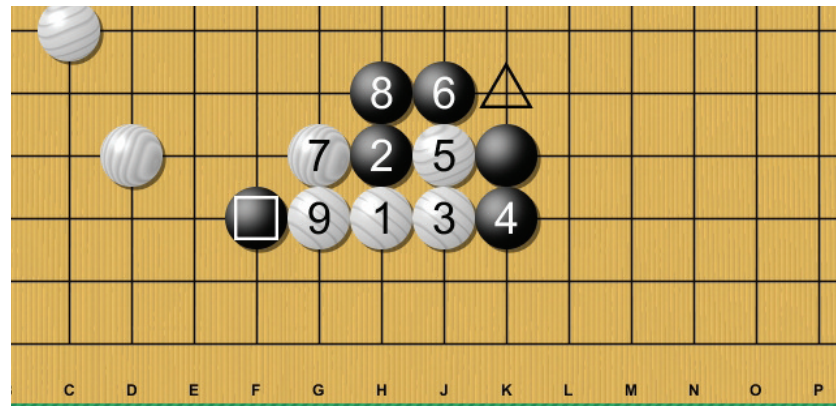


Left image: Once White invades at **1**, Black has almost no other choice other than play at **2**, if he wants to fight and keep his marked stones connected. White's stone is very hard to be captured and it has four choices to respond now.

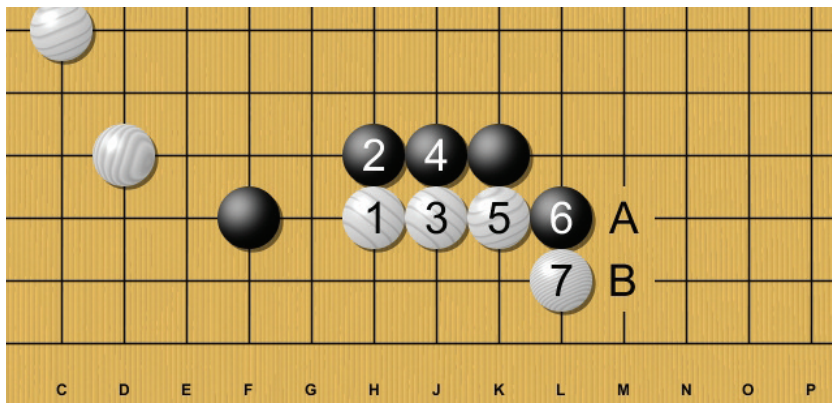
Right image: This is not a good idea. Black jumps away again and again and White simply follows. This is not very good for Black since he doesn't have two eyes, his stones are definitely split and the marked stone is now alone.

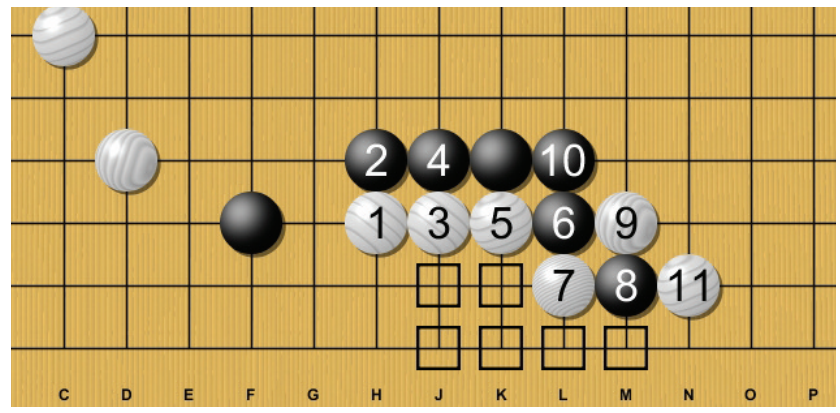
Depending on how many stones White has around or across the board, which can help with the invasion, the result can be better for White and easier to achieve, but even without many stones to help him out, White can survive after invading in the weak point of the Kobayashi fuseki, by playing the most safe variations by choosing to extend instead of hane. Let us see how and why:



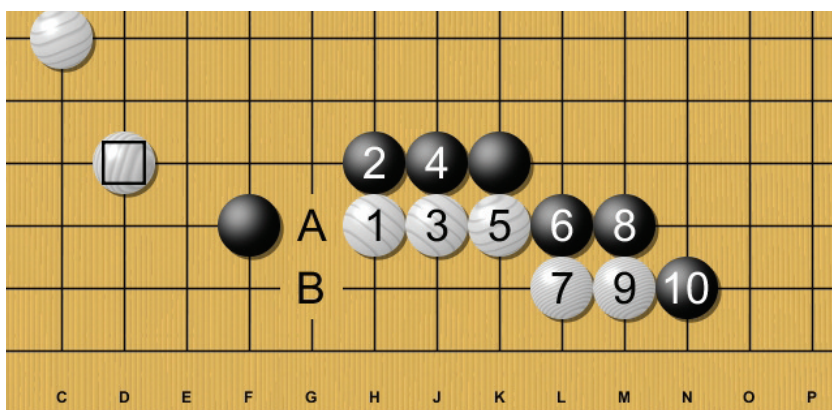


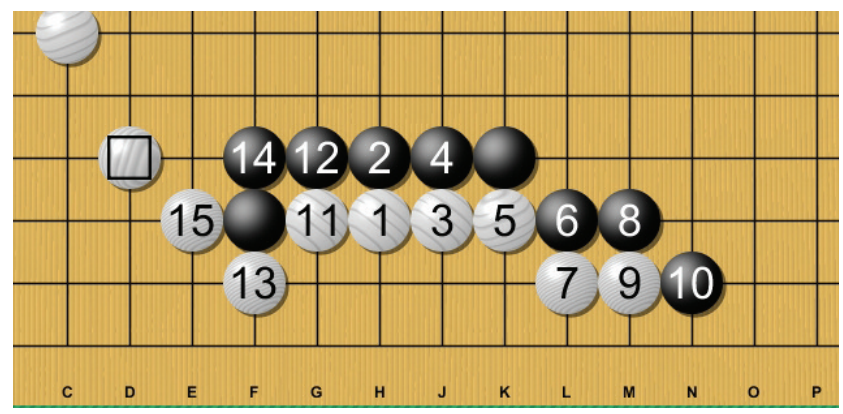
Left image: After **Black 2** caps White's stone, White extends with **move 3** and threatens to either cut through Black's stones at **A** or keep extending his own stones at **B**.
Right image: Letting White cut is not really an option for Black, as it can be seen here. If **move 4** blocks White, then all the moves above are natural and the marked Black stone is almost dead...





Left image: So Black almost always connects at **move 4**. White extends at **5**, Black plays the hane at the top of the head of three stones with **move 6** and White plays another hane to crawl out. Black seems to have a choice of either **A** or **B**.
Right image: But the aggressive double hane at **move 8** doesn't work, due to it being too close to the edge of the board and White with the consecutive atari in **moves 9** and **11**, captures the Black stone turning all the marked points to eye-space for White...

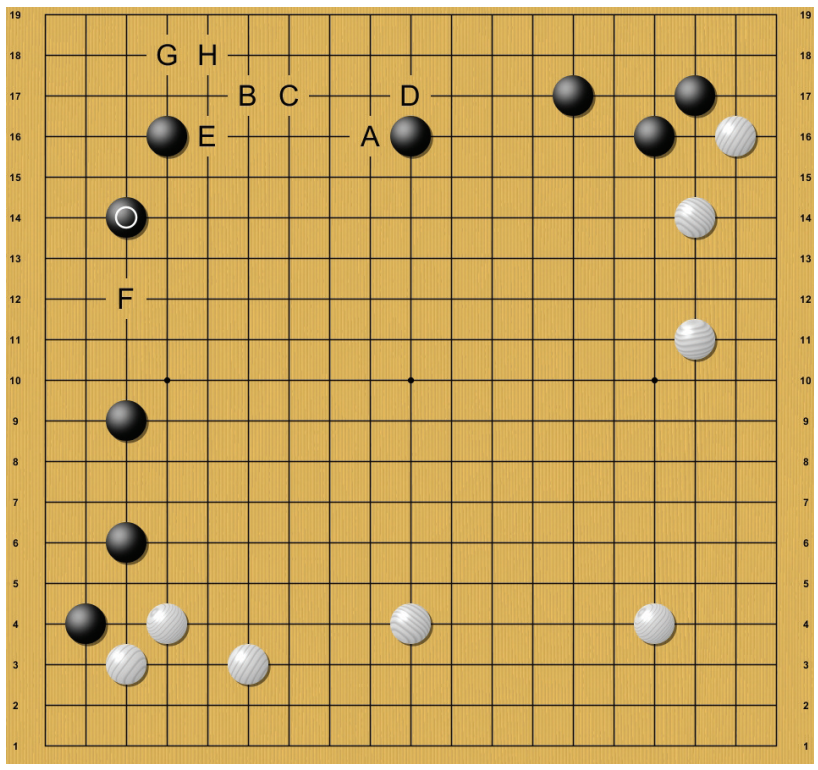




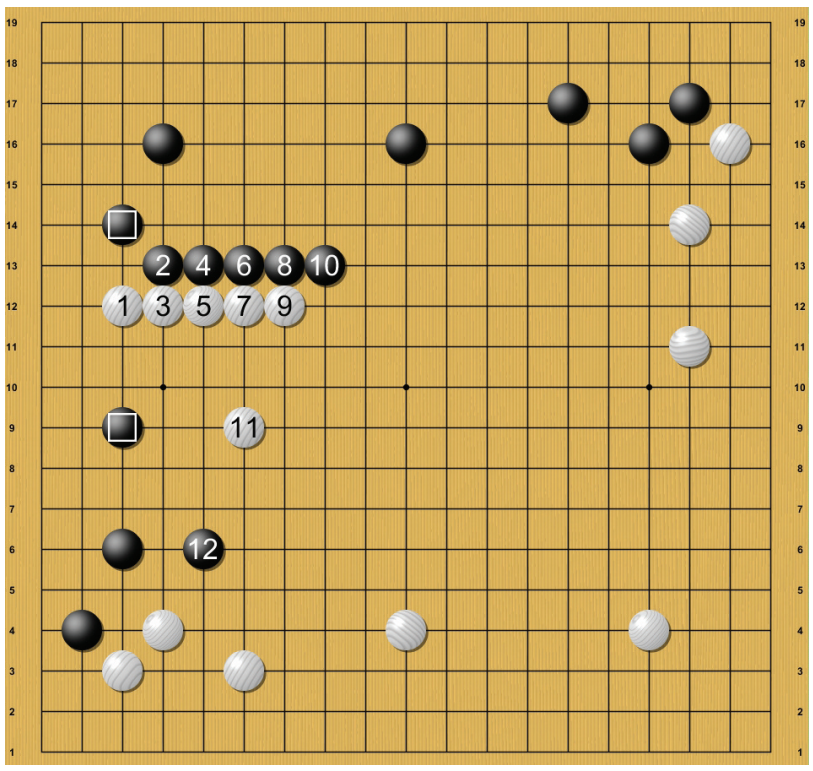
Left image: So, Black's **move 8** can only be the extension. White will also extend with **move 9** and now that the atari threats are gone, Black can finally hane with **move 10**. Now, with the help of the square marked stone White can either live locally at **B**, or push along the edge with **A** ...
Right image: Black usually connects against the threat of the cut and he cannot really stop White reaching his helping stone. Black doesn't want his stones to be split and have a result similar like the one we mentioned in the second image of this page. So, White's invasion is successful!

Reductions

As we mentioned, a reduction is the idea of minimizing the points our opponents will eventually gain from an area that he is highly influential in or is almost secured. We already talked about how important the position of the opposing stones is and that when the opposing stones are on the third line, then it is generally a better idea to try to reduce, instead of invading, because there will probably not be enough space for our stones to survive. This means that we would have to run in order to survive and our opponent would profit from chasing a weak group. But just stating that idea is not enough, I think. We need to see practically **why** this idea is correct, so let us see an example:



This is a possible game where both players just followed along one of the simple joseki for approaching the 4-4 corner. Eventually Black played the knight's move on the top left corner to secure it, giving sente to White. Normally White could do a similar move in his lower right corner or the sides he controls or he could opt for some sort of invasion in the spots marked from **A** to **G**, since both Black stones in the area are on the fourth line and they are very wide apart.
But let us suppose that White wants none of that and for reasons unknown he sets his aim to invade point **F**. This point is not good for an invasion since Black's stones are on the third line and both groups are alive, so separating them is not gaining White anything.



Indeed, once White jumps in with **move 1**, Black simply plays the diagonal **move at 2**.
The marked Black stones on the third line ensure that White cannot make a base and live in that tight area, so White has to run away.
But White cannot run fast. If he were to make a one space jump then Black's **move 2** is in the perfect spot to cut him in half, so White slowly crawls out and Black happily follows while enlarging his wall facing his top left side, while White ends up with a wall that is facing nowhere after **move 12** by Black.
Not only White didn't gain anything, but he helped Black and destroyed most of the invasion points on the top left, since Black's wall is there to provide cover.

Generally a successful invasion is much more impactful than trying to reduce, but a failed invasion can mean that the game is now very much in favour of our opponent.

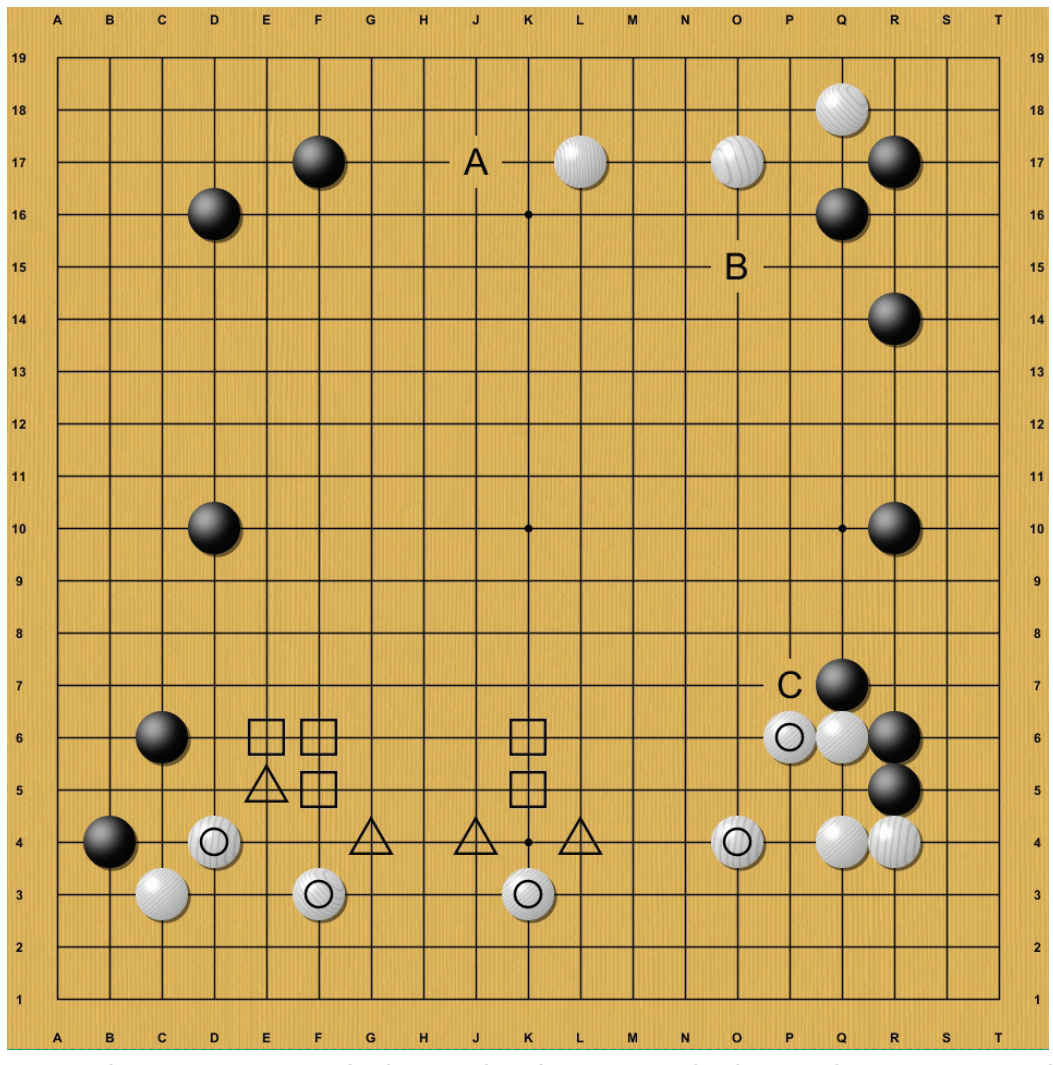
When and where do we reduce?

- Are there groups of enemy stones that have started to form large frameworks with some of the stones on the third line? Then those are points to consider for a reduction
- Are we certain that we can survive or connect with our nearby stones in the point of reduction?
- Which of these points seem to give us a better result for us or more trouble for our opponent?
- If we do manage to reduce our opponent's territory, is it worth more than ignoring the reduction and focusing on building up our own framework?
- Does the reduction and the possible fight that might ensue destabilize another group of our opponent or does it provide enough of a threat to offer us a good follow-up move that will give us the upper hand elsewhere?
- Do we REALLY need to reduce to win the game?

The lines of thinking behind reductions are similar to the ones we used for invasions, but in this case things are easier and less complicated than the choices and the fights we have to face in an invasion, because the possible reduction points are fewer and almost always safer than an invasion.

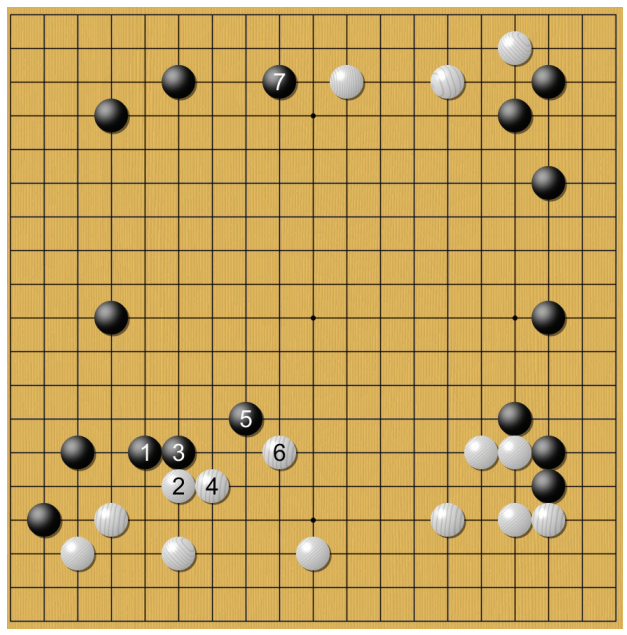
For a reduction there are two main ideas : A **shoulder hit** (a diagonal attachment) or playing above an opposing stone located on the third line, usually at a one space distance from it. This is called **"capping"** that stone.

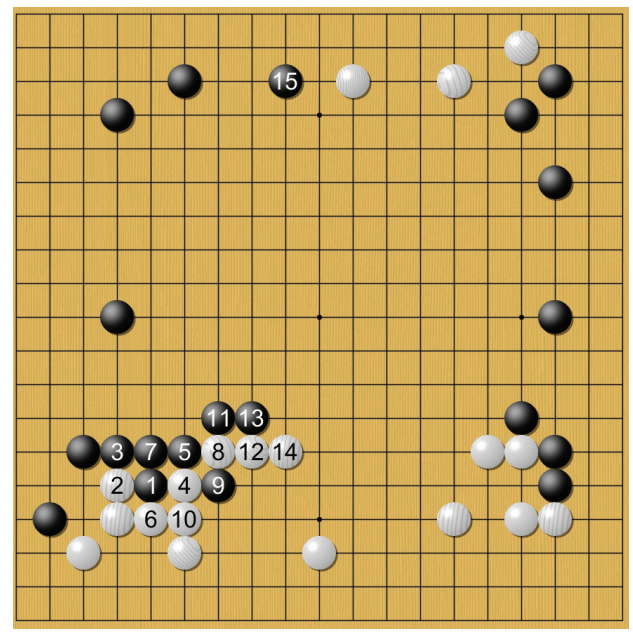
Let us see what they look like before going into more detailed examples :

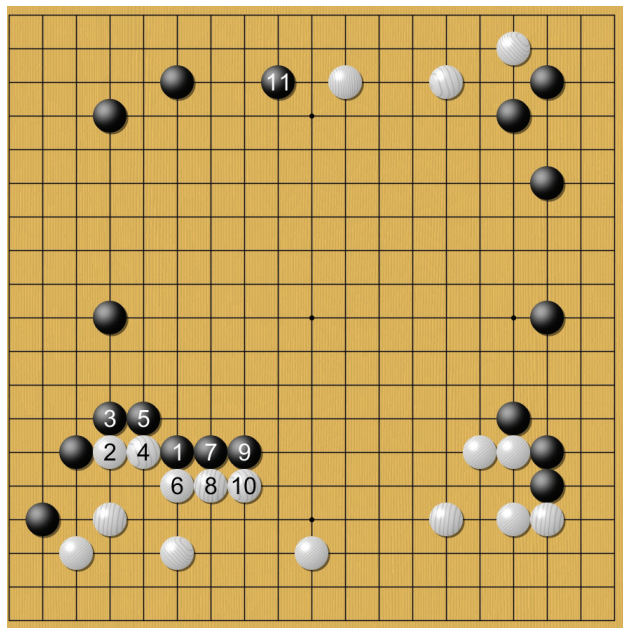


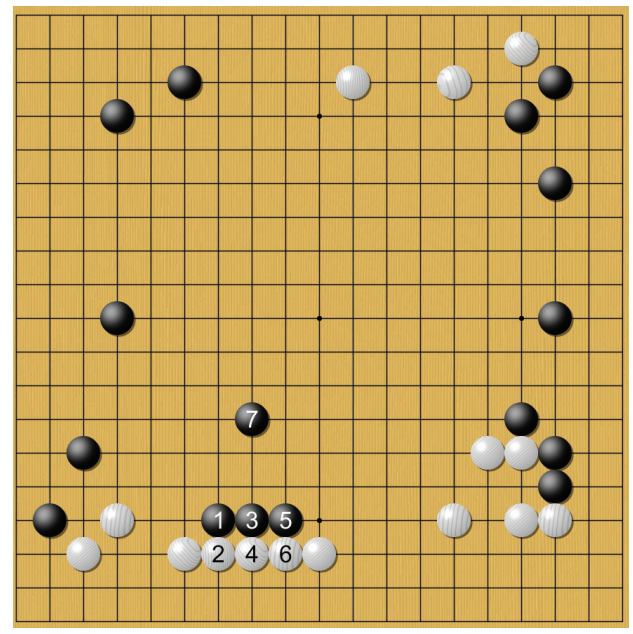
In this board Black has started to get worried about the framework that White is started to build with the circle marked stones. Black can't easily invade such a close knit formation, but he can reduce it with the capping moves marked with the squares or with the shoulder hits at the triangles. Of course Black could also ignore White and build his own framework at **A**, **B** or **C**. So, **how do we choose?**

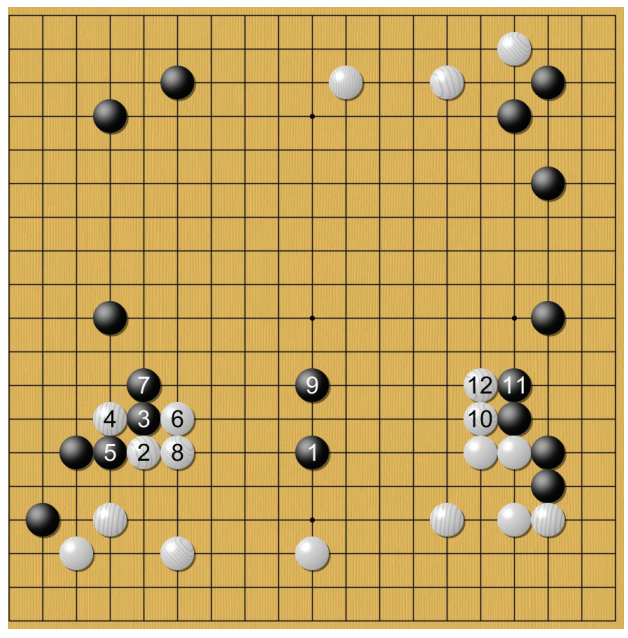
A lot of imagination is needed to visualize the possibilities waiting for us some moves ahead. This process is called **“reading”**. Using our imagination and then judging which result seems to be the best, could be one of the most difficult and valuable skills someone can acquire in the game and the more you play, the more experienced you will be in evaluating what is best for you.

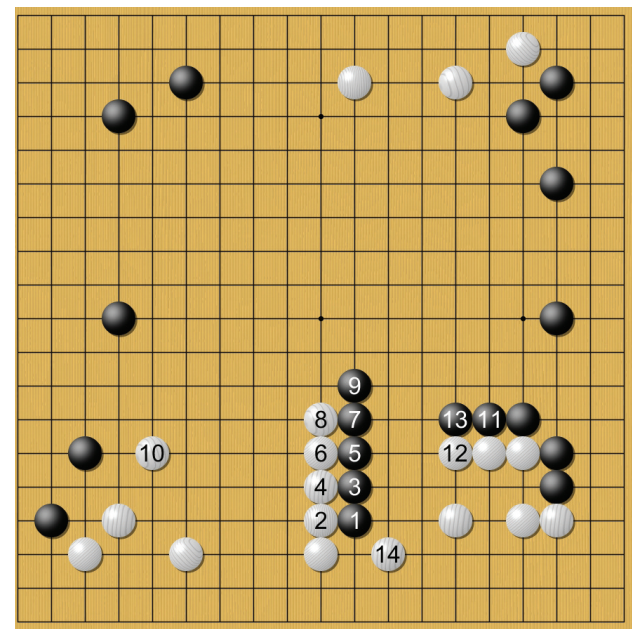






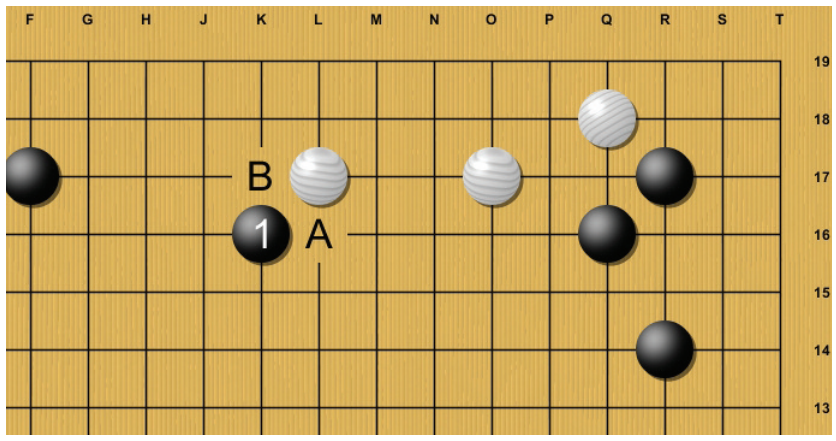




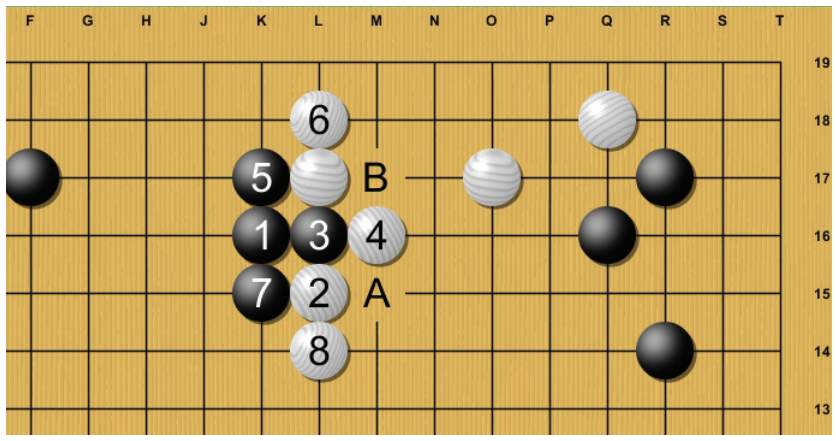


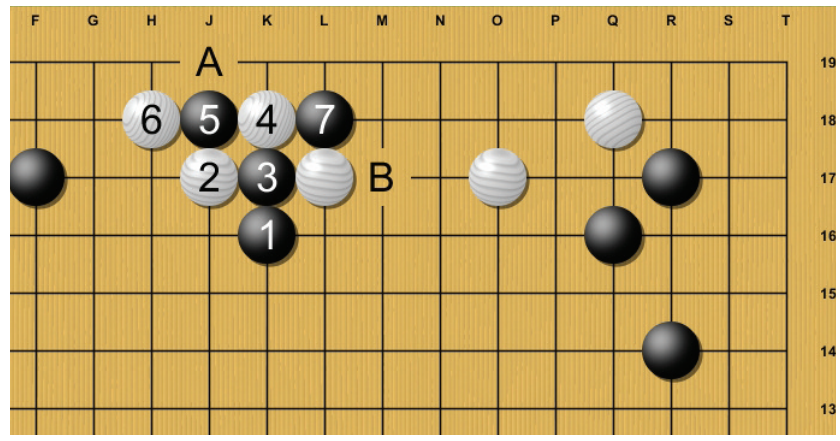
On the left we see three possible reductions made from capping and **on the right** we see three possible results from shoulder hits. There are many more variations, but we cannot predict everything, so we estimate what our opponent more likely to do, in order to decide which choice is better. In this case, the two first capping results seem to be in the right direction by helping Black to create his own framework.

Our main tool in envisioning the possible outcomes is understanding how the moves we employ usually work and what is the most likely area which our opponent will wish to protect. Let us start with the shoulder hit and see what are the possible responses of our opponent:

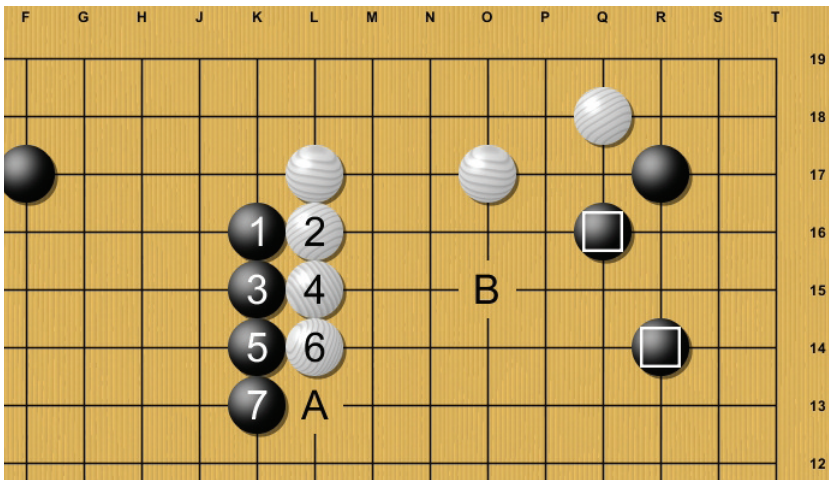


Let us suppose that in the board of **page 114**, Black chose to shoulder hit on the top side, instead of expanding directly there on the third line.
White has two practical choices: **A** or **B**.
Choice **A** will give both players a wall running towards the center, but White's wall is less useful due to the Black stones on the right.
Choice **B** will ensure White's territory, but will give a lot of influence towards the center to Black.

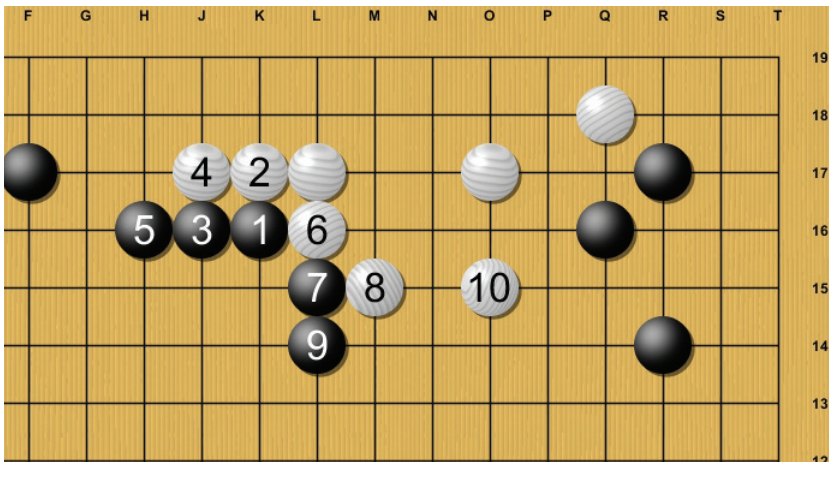




Left image: Playing faster moves like **one space jumps**, instead of simple extending is usually impractical for White. In this case, Black gets his wall again, plus two cutting points at **A** and **B.**
Right image:And in this case, White gets split. If White plays at **A** to capture Black's stone, Black can play at **B** and capture the White stone in a ladder, splitting White to two groups that are not alive yet...

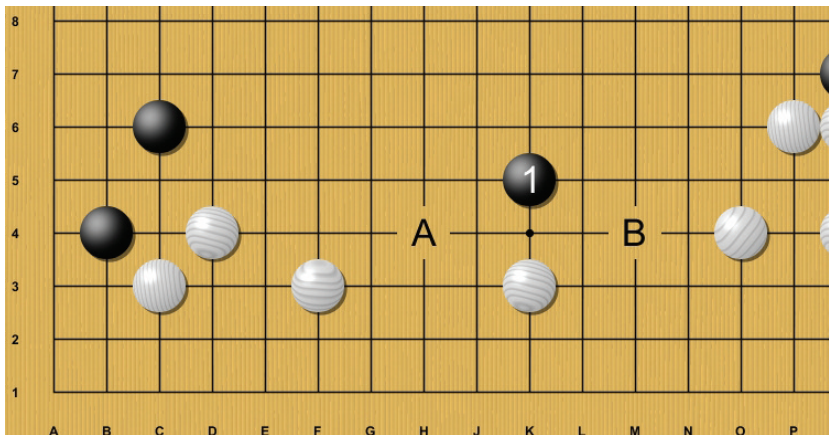


So, let us imagine how the most reasonable choices would look in this case. If White blocks towards the center Black is more than happy to keep ahead of White. If White follows that is considered as a bad shape and it is called "pushing from behind" since our opponent is getting a larger wall than we do.
In this case things are even worse. If White keeps pushing at **A**, then Black can render White's wall useless with a play at **B**. If White plays **B**, the Black caps White's wall with **A**.

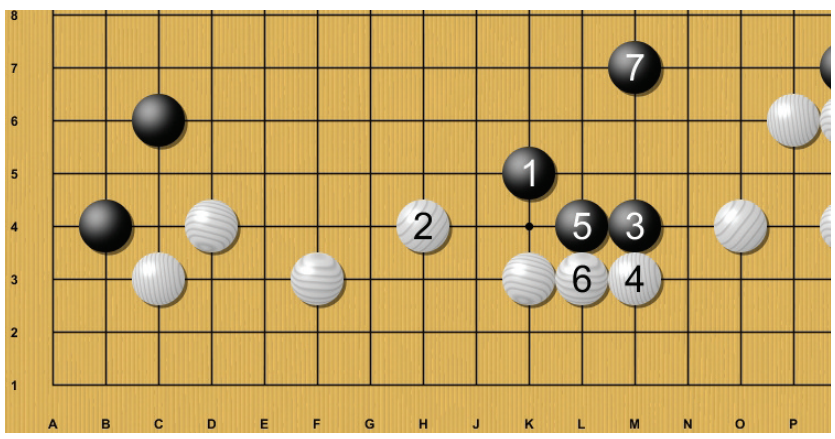


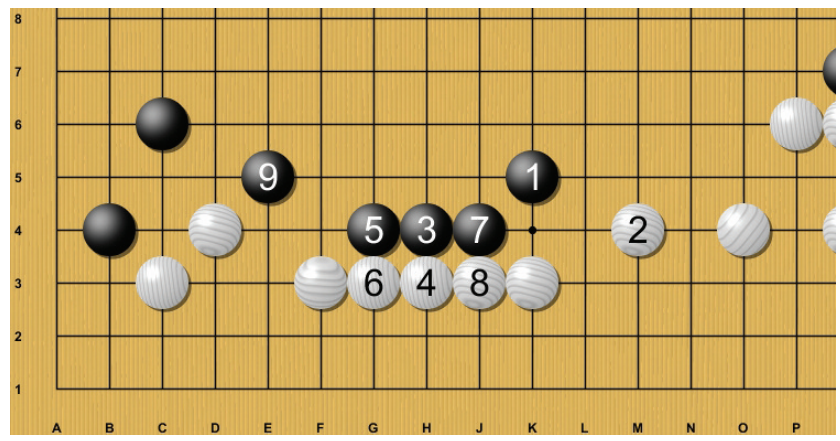
If White extends towards the side then he seems to get a more balanced result. Black gets a lot of influence towards the center, but White gets a lot of safe territory as a compensation and with **move 10** he is positioning himself to attack Black's stones on the right.
So, **in this case**, blocking towards the side seems better. In other board arrangements blocking towards the center is better. Envision the two cases and depending on the whole board you can judge which choice is better for you each time.

As far as capping is concerned things can be more complicated, especially if your opponent has too many stones in the area, but in the most common cases, capping has two usual responses, as well:

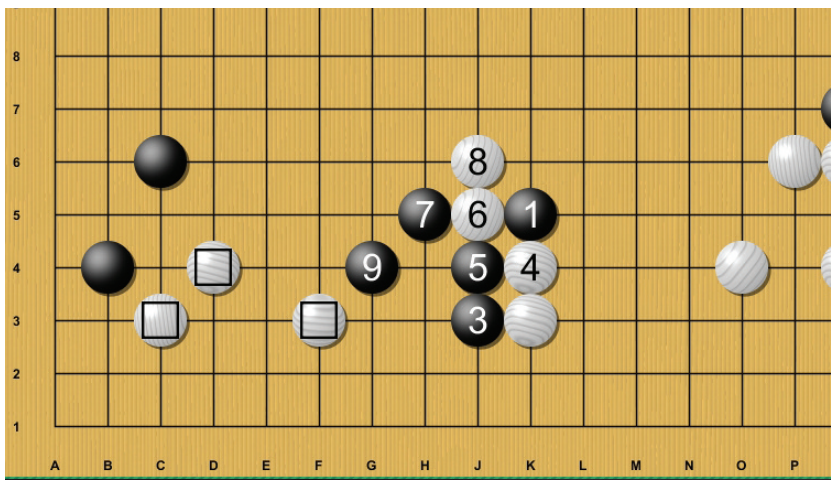


The most usual move used for capping reduction is the one space approach. When Black caps the White stone on the third line, the most common moves for White are **A** and **B**. Those moves usually are **miai** and when White chooses one of them, Black goes for the other point.
Depending on the situation and the stones around the area, White can read out the possible result and choose the one that fits his plans best...

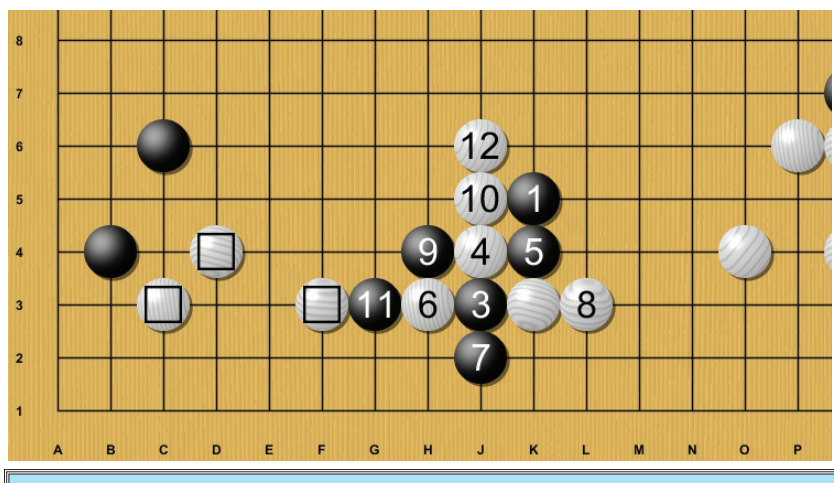




Left image: In this case, once White plays **A**, Black goes for **B**. White defends his territory at **move 4** and Black continues his threat with **move 5.** White blocks at **6** and Black is done with reducing, so he can now jump towards the center with **7**.
Right image: If White plays **B**, Black goes for **A**. The moves in this case have the same reasoning as before, with the only difference being that Black can play **move 9** instead of jumping towards the center, since he has helping stones nearby.



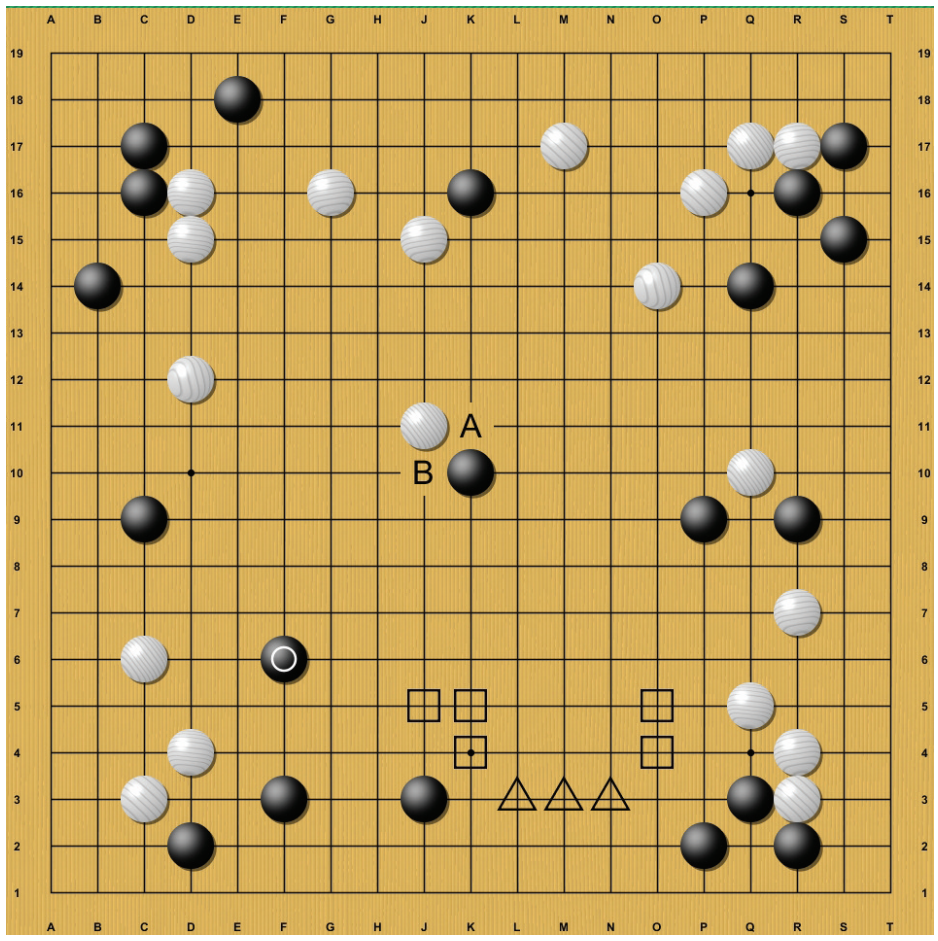
Unlike a shoulder hit, capping sometimes seems like a move which we can ignore. This is not always the case, since we can get punished for ignoring the capping of our stones. If White plays **move 2** elsewhere, the usual punishment is the attachment at **move 3**. The most natural move for White is to extend with **move 4**, but with **Black 5** that immediately creates the bad shape of getting your two stones hit on the head. In this case, in the following moves White's marked stones seem to be in danger...



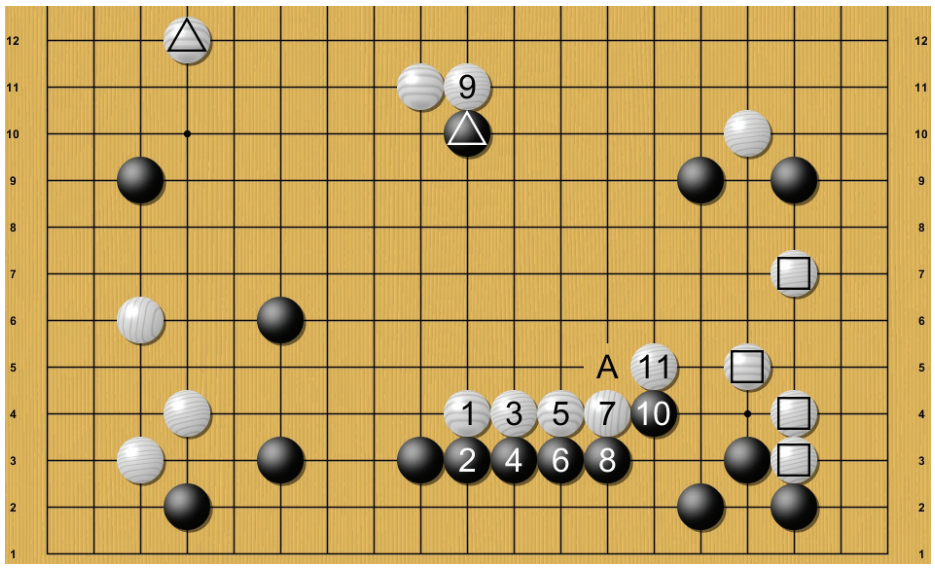
White might instead try to cut through Black's stones at **move 4**. This is not a very good idea in most cases. **Black 5** threatens to cut White instead. **White 6** goes for the atari and **Black 7** extends to save that stone and threaten White. Now White needs to extend at **move 8** or lose his stone and all his territory. **Black 9** is an atari that cuts both White stones and if White saves his cutting stone like in the image, then he loses his stone he played at **move 6** and his marked stones are in even greater danger now.

Remember: Mind your shape! Do not be too aggressive without a clear goal in mind.

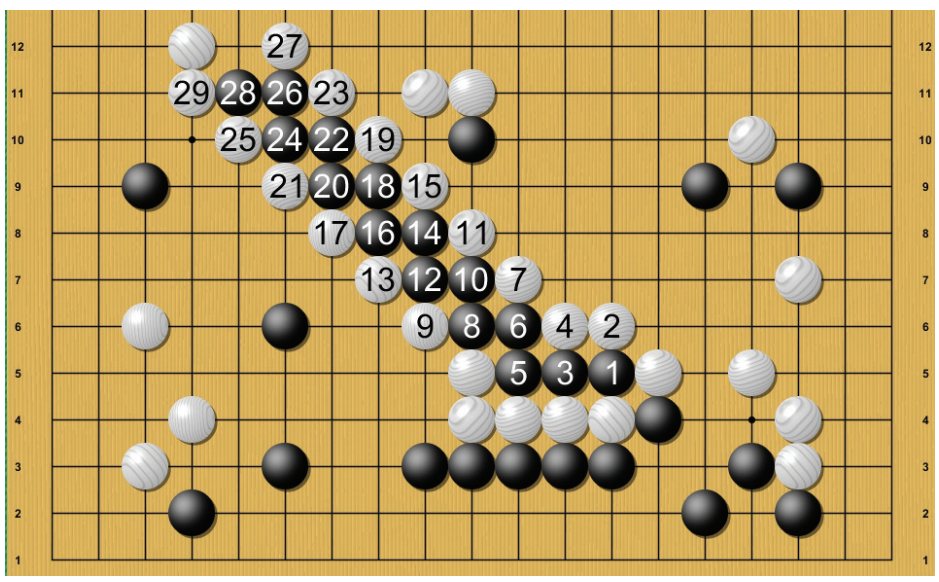
Let us see a practical example of a reduction, from a real game. In **page 108** we had left the board in a situation where White could choose two different directions for the game and presented both choices. Now that White knows that he has the upper hand in one part of the board, he can play elsewhere:



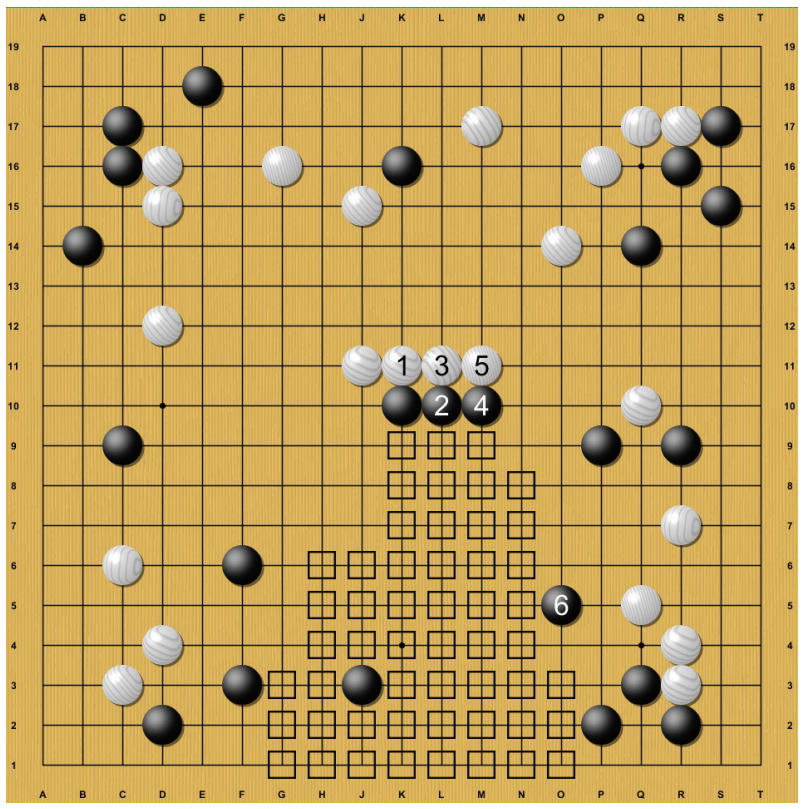
We have already checked choices **A** and **B** back in **page 108** and in the part about invasions we had talked about how at some point the triangle marked points were good candidates for an invasion for White. Unfortunately after all those moves were exchanged on the board, the prospects of a successful invasion seem to be fewer than they were ten moves earlier.
Now that we talked about reductions we can put them under consideration as well, especially now that we started to be less confident about an invasion.
The square marked points are the most likely candidates for a reduction. Some of these points are a bit dangerous while others are not large enough, but are presented here just to get used to the idea that a reducing move is generally on the fourth or fifth line, while an invasion is usually on the third line.
White picks the shoulder hit to ensure a response from Black...

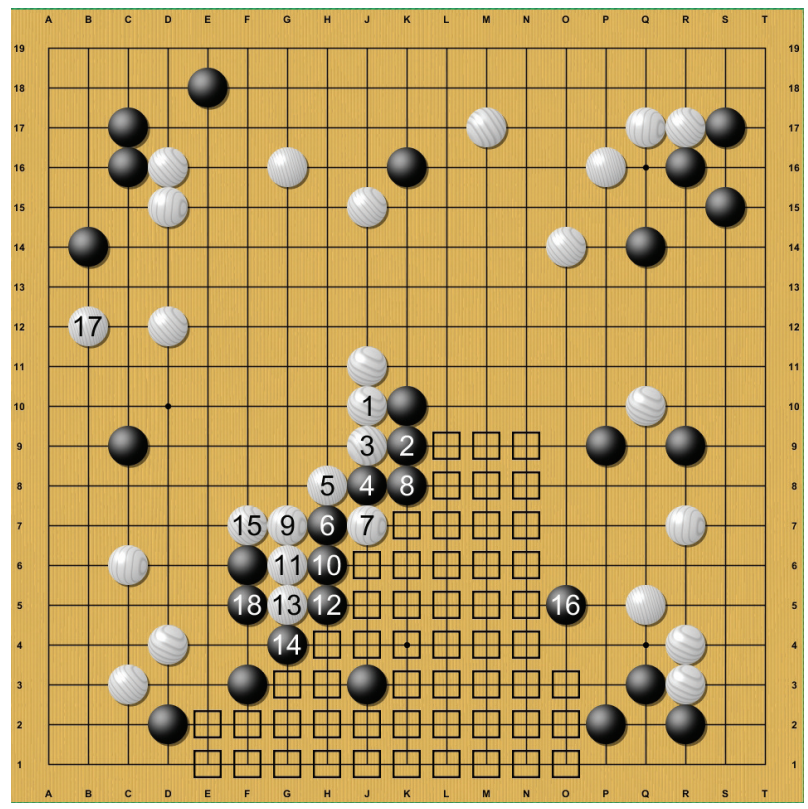


Black goes for the certain territory gain and extends along the third line pushing White from behind until **move 8**. White is slowly but surely moving towards his square marked helping stones and he feels safe enough to tenuki and play **move 9** at one of the crucial points we had analysed earlier.
Black now realizes that there is a problem and he tries to cut White off at **move 10**, but White plays **move 11** and connects his stones.
There seems to be a cutting point at **A** for Black since the triangle marked Black stone serves as a ladder breaker, but White's triangle marked stone on the left side is also a ladder breaker in this case.



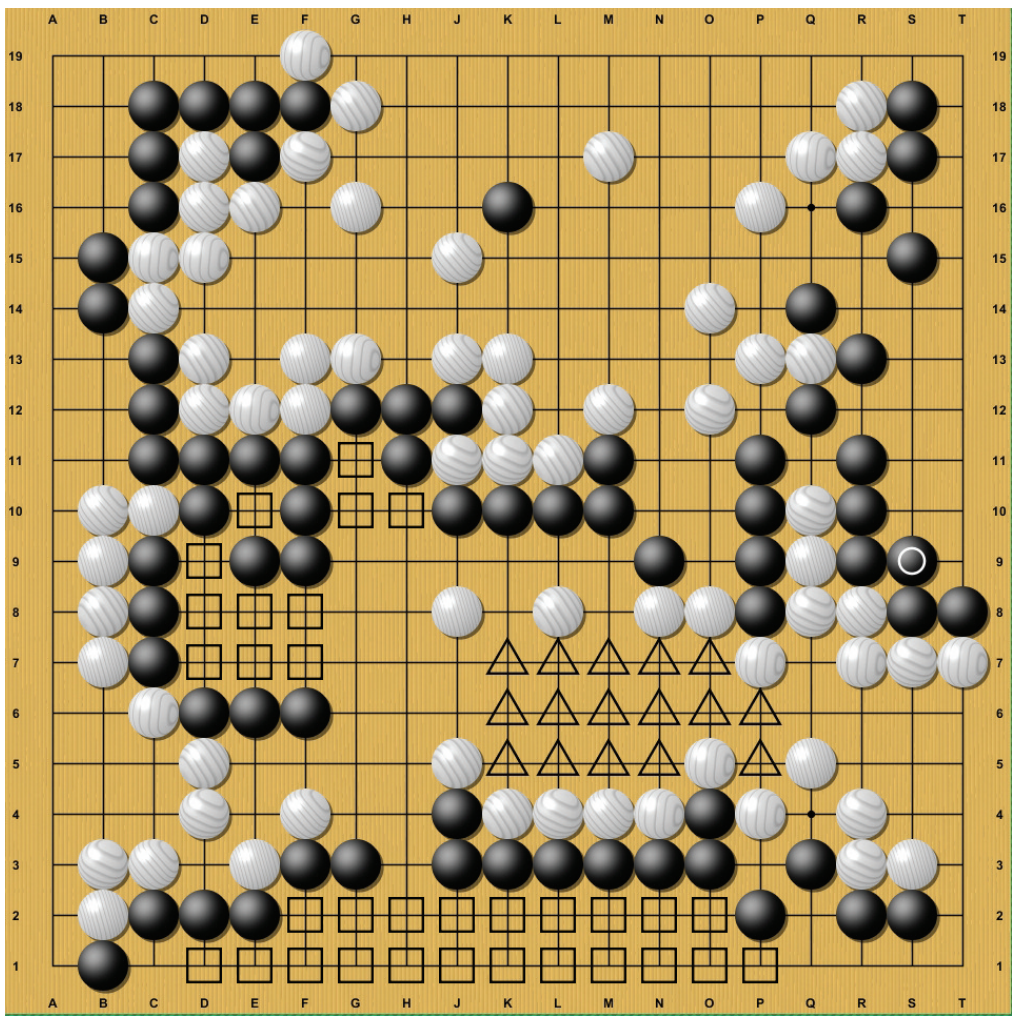
White has four points on which he can atari the Black stones and steer the ladder away from Black's stone and make the ladder hit White's stone instead, killing the Black cutting stones.
Black realized this and never played at **A**.
The reduction was successful since White not only reduced Black's territory safely, but he also got to play first into one of the original key points he wanted to occupy...





The idea of reducing seems initially underwhelming to many players when compared to an invasion. Sure, an invasion is more fun and interesting and creates exciting battles and if it works it can be greatly beneficial, but **playing a reduction in sente**, like we saw in the previous page can be far more beneficial than it meets the eye.

In the images above we see two possible outcomes of the next moves in the game, in case White had gone directly for the important points in the center. Black could eventually find the time to play **move 6** on the left image or **move 16** on the right image, and use the walls he is creating effectively. This would have lead to all the square marked points to become almost certain points for Black...



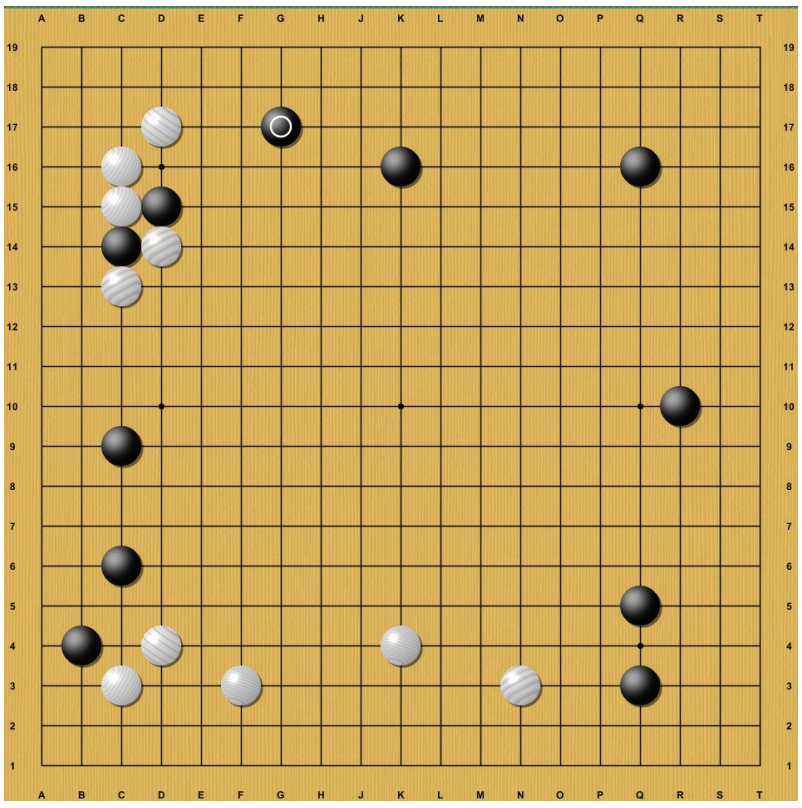
Compare the area of interest in the images above, with this one. This is the actual game at **move 141**.

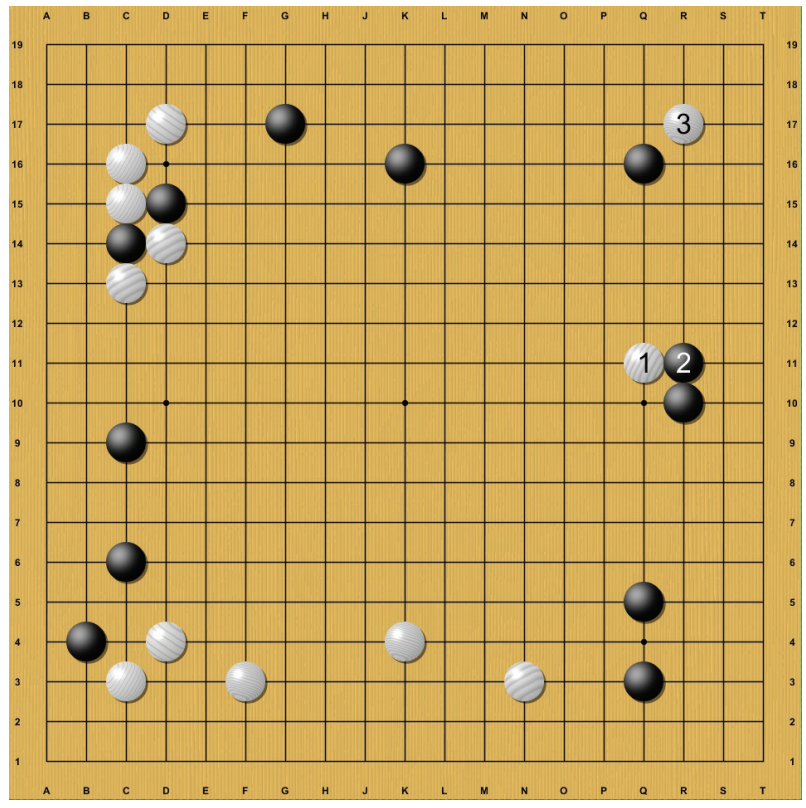
The squared marked points belong to Black, just like in the images above, and the triangle marked points belong to White. On the images before the reduction, Black could have gained around 50 points from that area, in each case. After the reduction he will gain around 30 points, while White will gain around 16 points. So, the real number of points in favor of Black in the actual game is 30-16 = only 14 points, instead of more than 50 points!

This is a swing of 36 points between reducing in sente and not reducing at all. Of course this figure is an approximation and at the time you are playing the game you cannot know the exact numbers, but you can judge that a reducing move like this will produce a huge swing of points in your favor, even if you cannot tell exactly how many.

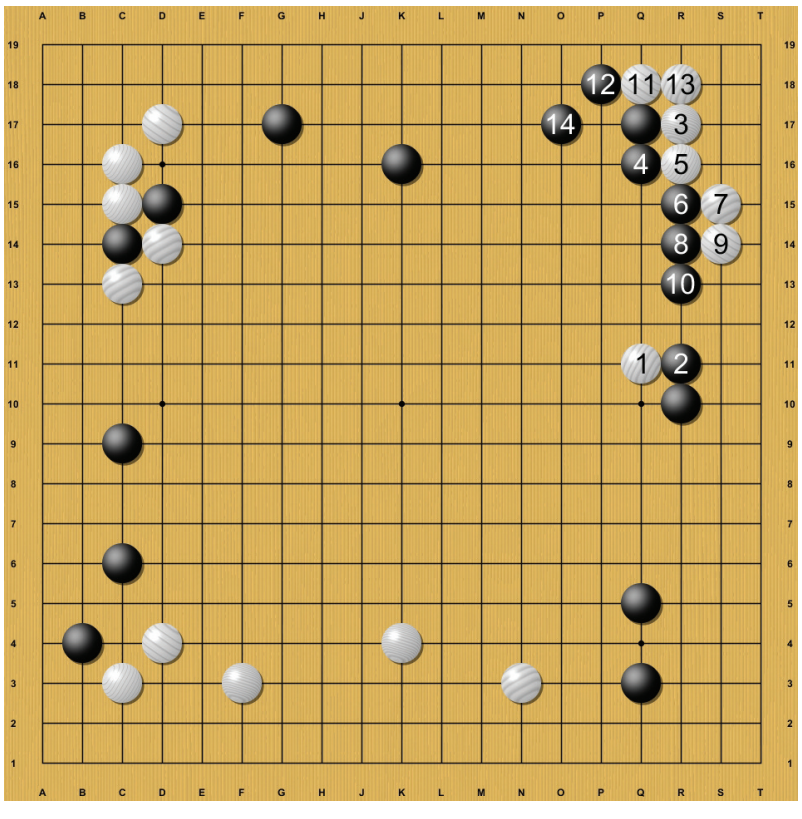
Remember: Reductions might seem like the weaker choice compared to invading, but it is still a very powerful weapon in your arsenal. When the opponent tries to build large frameworks which you cannot find a safe way to invade, then reduce them.

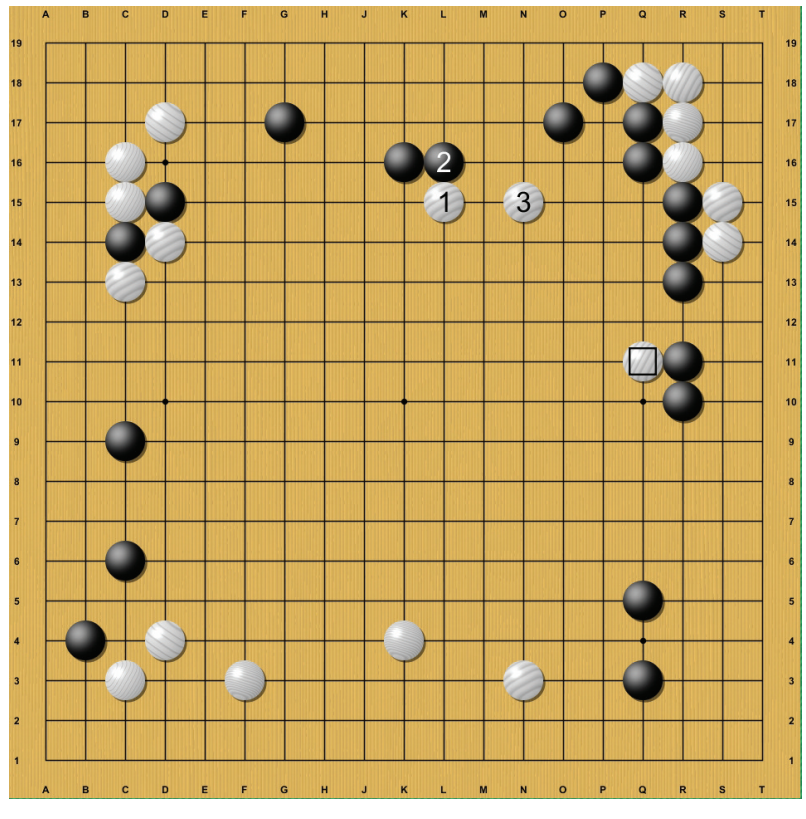
What is usually difficult with both invasions and reductions is deciding the right moment to go ahead with them. Unfortunately there is no easy answer to this question, but **usually the best time to invade/reduce is when your opponent has made clear which are the areas that he wants to develop**. When you can see your opponent's plan on the board, then you can go ahead and disrupt it with an invasion, a reduction or both. For example:





Left image: In this game, Black is heavily investing to the top and right of the board, so now that White knows this, he can take countermeasures for it.
Right image: **White 1** tries to disrupt Black's huge framework. **Black 2** tries to keep everything connected, so **White 3** invades to make Black choose sides...

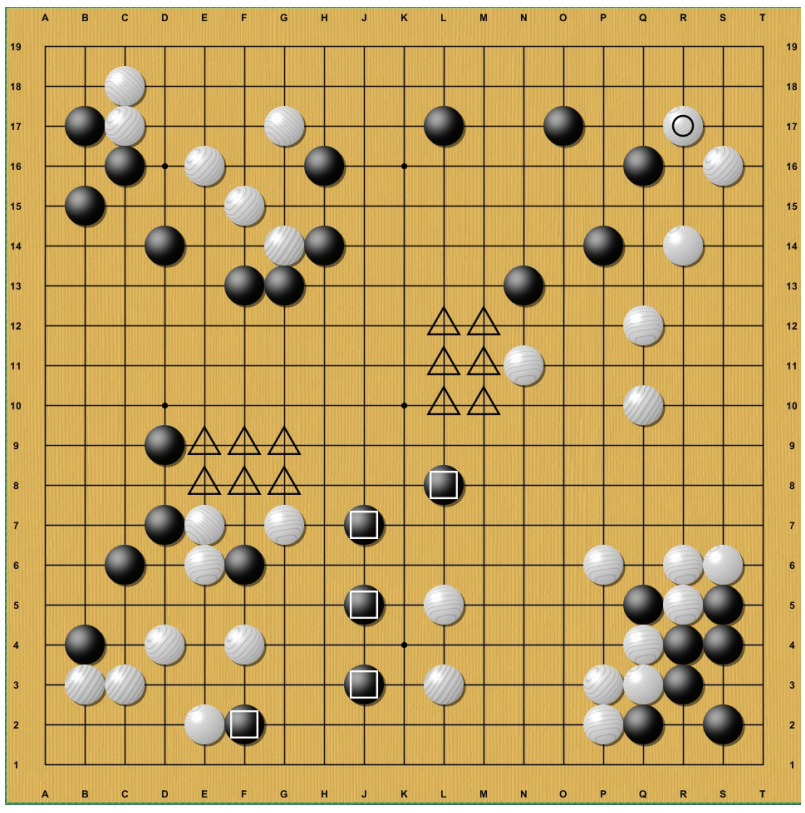




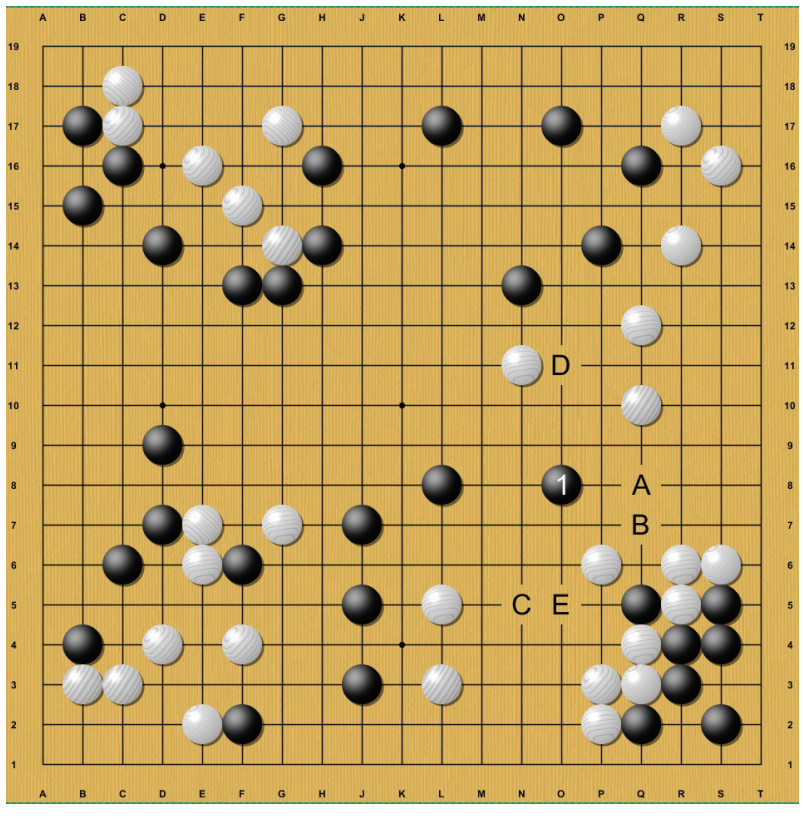
Left image: Black chose to keep the top and sacrifice the side, playing along the usual joseki that we have seen. The existence of White 1 made Black uncomfortable of choosing to block towards the right side, but White is not done.
Right image: Now that Black invested in the top side, White is reducing that too. Black started feeling good about his great framework and is left with neither the corner, nor much outside influence!
Be relentless like White.

A good advice concerning attacking and defending is that the best moves are the ones that do **both things at once**. Those moves are hard to find and they do not always exist, but trying to find them or invent them is one of the beauties of the game. A good rule of thumb is that such moves eventually appear when you cannot clearly defend, so you attack your opponent to change the board to your favour.
If you cannot defend, do not declare defeat. Attack and change the board and make your opponent not know where to defend.

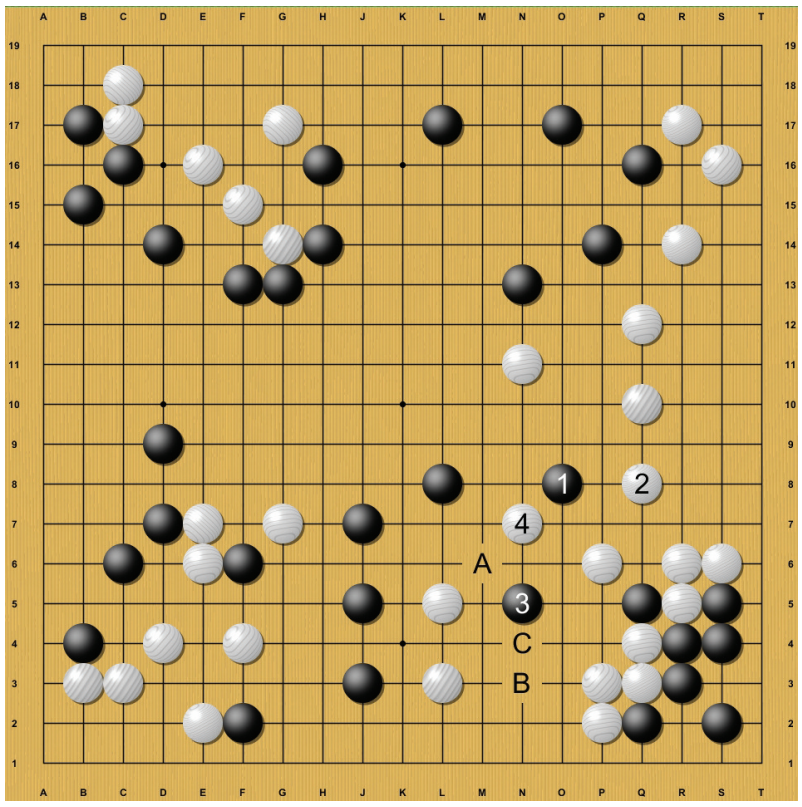
This might create a chance for you to rise on top of a local situation elsewhere on the board, since a move anywhere on the board might have implications everywhere, even by changing who wins the ladder or by making an invasion threat possible. Initially you will be making these moves by accident, but it is something that you will eventually learn to plan ahead for. Let us see how this works:



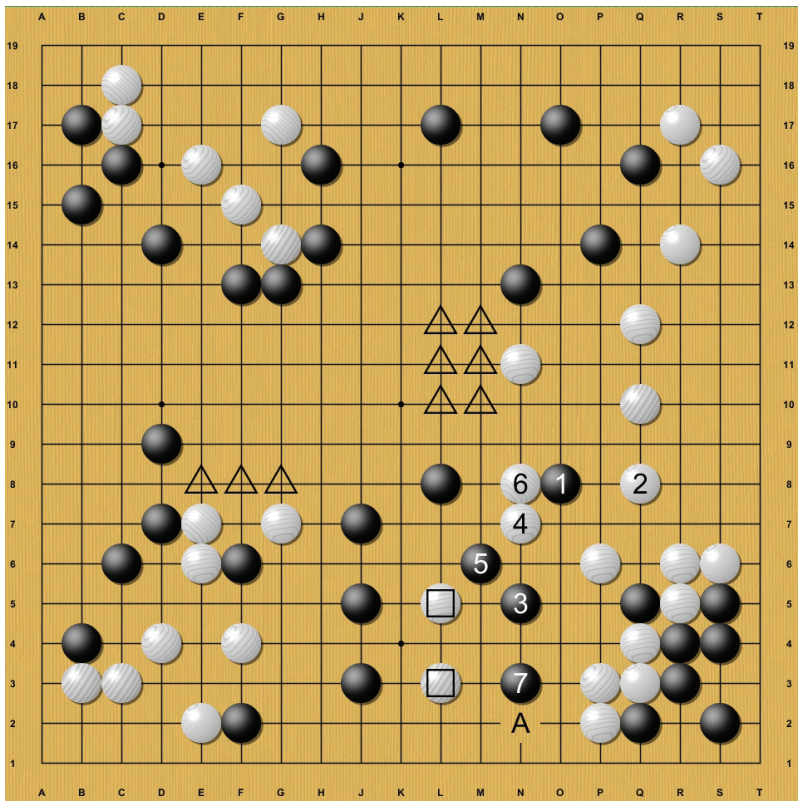
While all the previous examples were from my games, in this case I am pointing out that I am Black because I was playing horribly at this point and I want to strongly dissuade you from playing like that.
Black has invested heavily into building one huge area, which is rarely a good strategy, and he has failed to defend it properly. The triangle marked points are the breaches in his defense. If White plays any stone there Black will lose 15 to 20 points and the game, because he has no other areas in which he has any potential. To add to Black's woes, the square marked stones are almost totally surrounded by White and do not have a base. A classic mistake for our ranks, to be avoided at all costs.
Black needs to steer White away from those marked points and save his stones at the same time. But how?



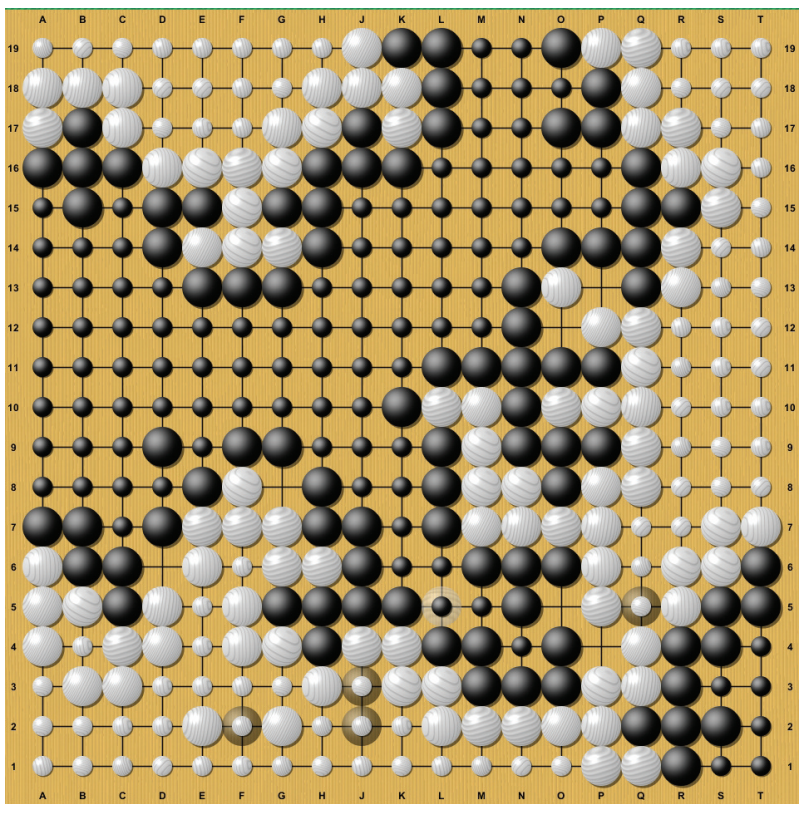
Black cannot defend two points and save his stones with one move, so he has only one choice: Charge forward! Threaten White and make him defend. Only by changing the board can Black hope to create any chances to rectify his previous mistakes.
So he plays **Black 1**. A multi-purpose move, which exists only because White, in his own effort to thwart Black's "one huge area" strategy, has left a lot of **aji** behind. Speed and expansion usually comes at a cost of leaving defects behind. In this case, Black can play **A** or **C** to reduce White's territory, and **B** or **E** to try to revive that Black captured stone and gain some free moves by White being forced to capture that stone. As an added bonus, Black can play **D** and capture that White stone that is a key to many of his problems. If he captures that White stone, Black will gain a lot of territory and he obviously won't have to defend that way, at all...



White could have totally ignored Black's move or he could have directly attacked it with a move like **4**, without playing **move 2** at all, but he chose to risk nothing of his profit and defend on the right side and not the bottom, because White thinks that even if Black attacks there he can connect his stones with a move on **B** or **C**. As you will see **move 2** didn't really help White in any way and it is what is usually called a **"slow"** or **"over-concentrated"** move, which is a move that only does one thing, usually slightly expand your area or secure an area that was never in danger.
Black makes good on his threat and plays **move 3** trying to reduce White's area, but White realized how many stones he has to help, decides to attack Black's flimsy invasion force with **move 4**, forgetting that **A** is a very important cutting point, since the White stones there are not connected...



Black wastes no time by playing on the cutting point with **move 5**. Now Black cannot be really cut so the invasion is already a success. Black's stones still have no eyes, but their situation has improved significantly, since White's marked stones have no eyes either and are getting surrounded.
White, on the other hand, happily engulfs Black's stone with **move 6**, but in his haste to take profit, he decides not to connect his two square marked stones, because he believes that even if Black plays **move 7**, which he did, White can play at **A** and save his stones. That was an unnecessary risk though, and it is never a good idea to let your stones get almost completely surrounded to gain points elsewhere. They are rarely worth it.
White might have a lifeline, but so does **Black 1** which is still not dead and has a lot of **aji**. In the end of the game...

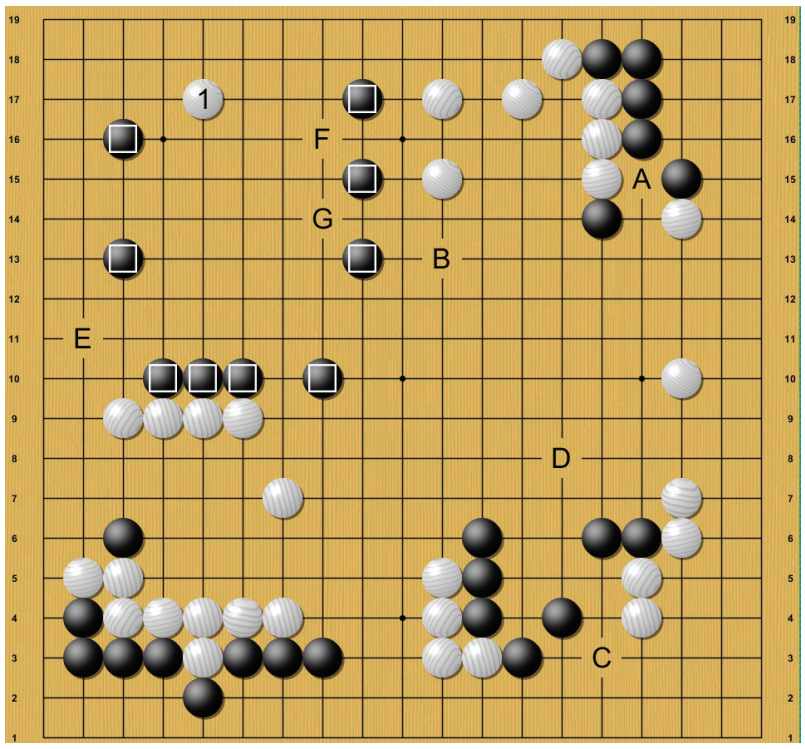


As you can see in this image, White saved only one of his surrounded stones in the bottom and got compensation by capturing some of Black's stones as well, but Black saved his stone from **move 1**. As you can see, White got invaded at the bottom right and Black managed to defend both of his huge defects in his large framework, by making threats around the board and making White be reactive instead of active (we will talk about that in the coming pages).
Apart from the main point of invading and changing the board when you cannot defend, there are two extra things that we need to keep from this example:
a) Do not stray away from your goal. It is better to incur a small local loss and be faithful to your overall strategy, than following along and responding to any threat, however small.
b) Avoid placing your faith in one huge area. It is a hard strategy. One mistake and the game is over.

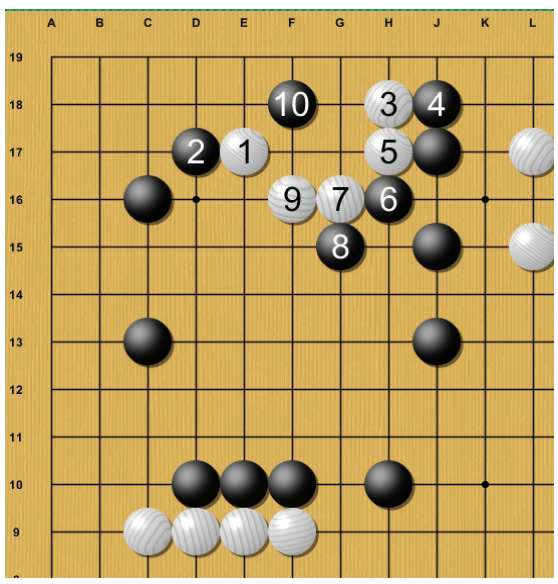
Another good advice is to resist the urge to over-extend and invade in an area which your opponent has been meticulously growing and fortifying, unless you have enough stones around that area to help you out. This jealous attitude of wanting to strip your opponent from every single area of territory, no matter how well defended that area might be, can sometimes get heavily punished in the game of Go.

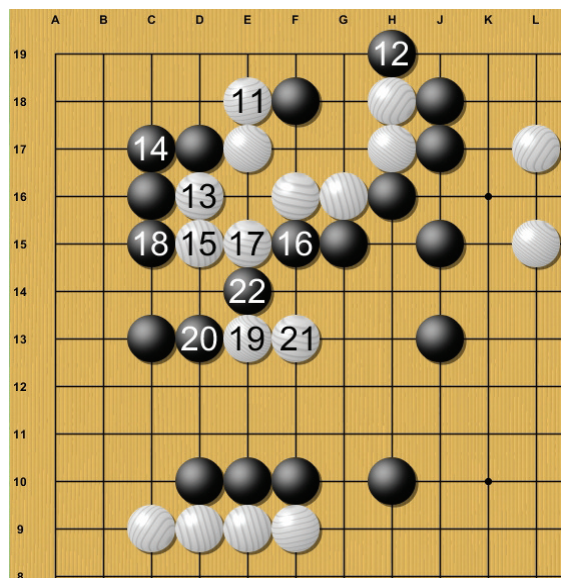
You need to be able to accept it when an invasion is going to be too hard for you and choose to reduce instead. Sometimes the areas that the opponent is building might look intimidating or extremely valuable, but maybe you can invest your moves in growing your own similar area full of points, instead of diving in the opponent's potential territory and trying to swim through his stones to safety.

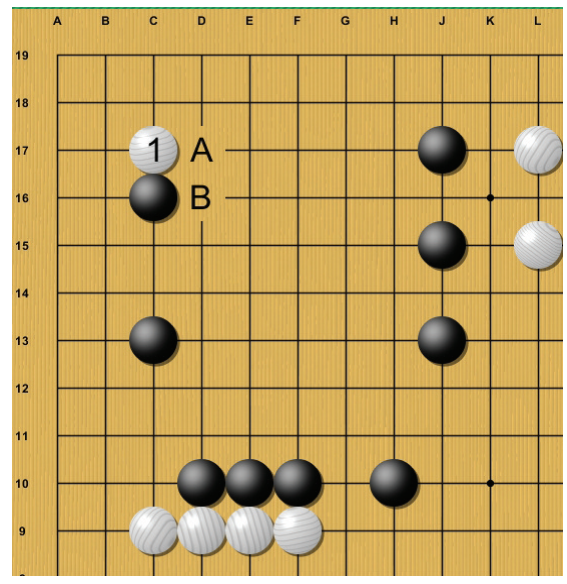
You might even manage it, but while doing so, your opponent will have gained immense influence elsewhere on the board, making such an endeavor a lost cause. Let us see two examples of this problem:



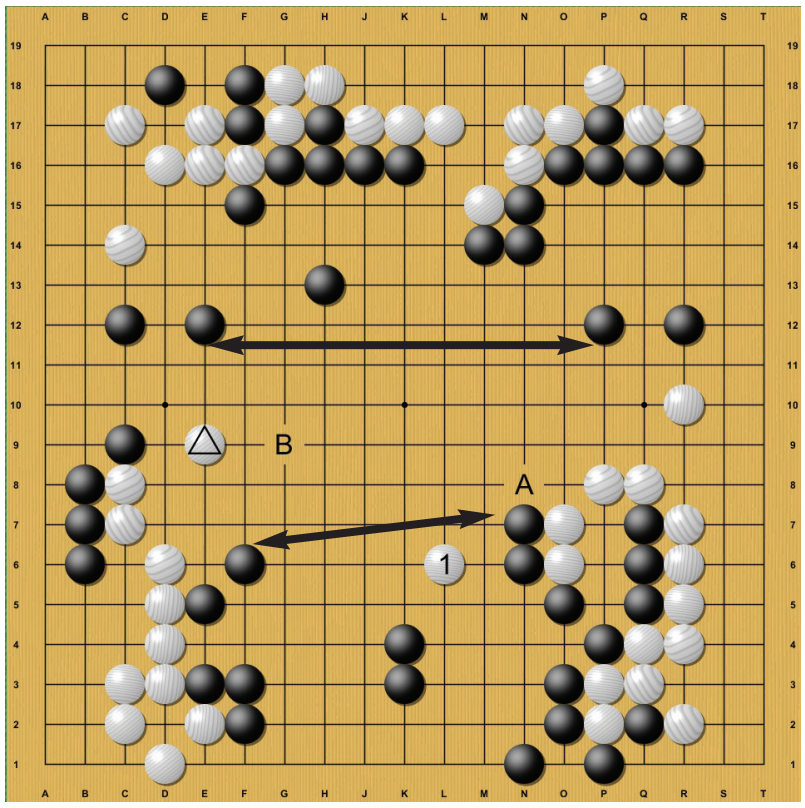
This game seems to have clearly defined areas and only the center is left to be contested. It will probably be a close game. White is playing next and he has a lot of choices to pick from: Choice **A** for threat towards the upper right corner and to split Black's stones.
Choice **B** to expand his framework towards the center.
Choice **C** to expand his lower right corner area.
Choice **D** to expand his framework on the right side and expand towards the center while capping Black.
Choice **E** to expand his area in the left and reduce Black's area at the same time.
All of these are valid choices, but White is afraid that the large framework created by the Black marked stones is going to cost him the game, so he directly invades Black's totally enclosed area at **move 1** without any preparatory moves like the peeps at **F** and **G**...



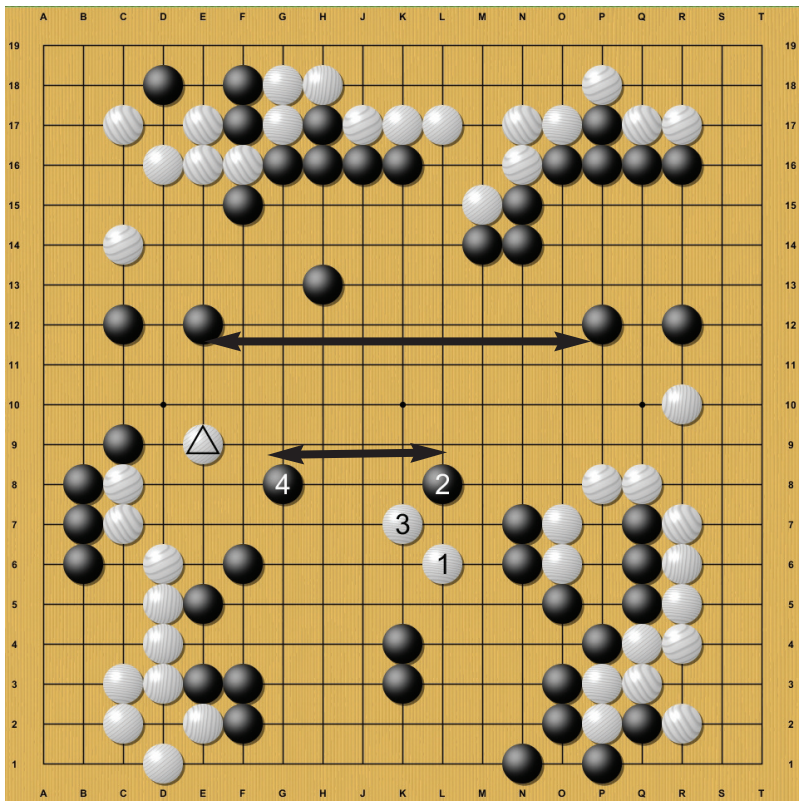




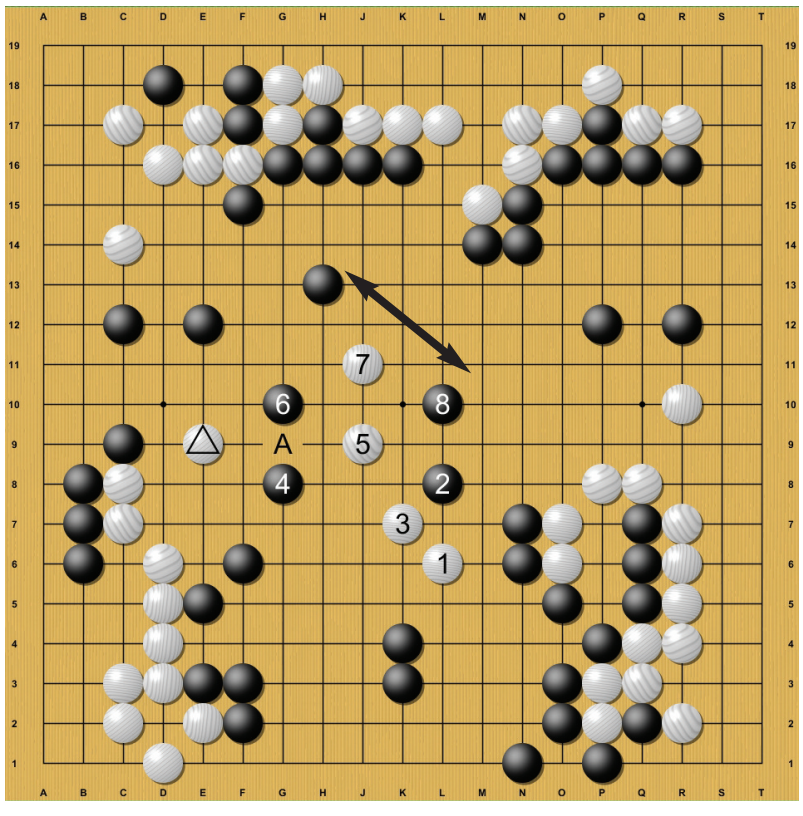
The left and center image depict the rest of the invasion. After **Black 10** on the center of symmetry of White's shape, the invading stones are dead. White tried to reach for more space and create two eyes, but every available space was surrounded by Black stones and White resigned after **Black 22**.
In the right image we see that in such cases, the contact play is usually better, as we saw in **page 110**, because Black playing **A** is perilous. Black will usually play **B** and keep most of his area after White's invasion, but at least White's stones will be alive and the invasion will succeed.



In this game we see another example of the “one huge area” strategy. Black has invested in controlling the center, while White has all the corners and most of the sides. Black’s framework is impressive, but White has a lot of certain points in the edges of the board, so all he has to do is to even partially disrupt Black’s central area and he will win the game.
Black’s frameworks are creating two sector lines that are separated by quite a lot of points, as you can see in the image. This is a very large gap to defend, so White can either play at **A** or **B** to prevent those sector lines of meeting and merging successfully, so Black’s “one area” strategy seems to be in peril. His bottom area however looks impressive, so White decides to go the extra mile and do something between an invasion and reduction behind the sector lines at **move 1**, with only the triangled marked stone as a possible helping stone...



As Black you need to resist the urge to directly attach and hit that White stone with a close-range attack. Having a lot of Black stones around is great, but attaching to weak stones usually only helps them in slipping through the cracks.
The most efficient way to attack such deep invading stones is from afar and simply extending your sector line to engulf them again and again.
This way, even if the invading stones live, you will have extended your influence to new places across the board. In this case, Black calmly plays **move 2** to prevent White from joining with his stones on the right. White’s **move 3** predictably moves towards the only help left, the triangle marked stone, but **Black 4** extends the sector line and engulfs White’s stones again.
White is slowly drowning in a sea of Black stones and Black’s sector lines only come closer and closer...

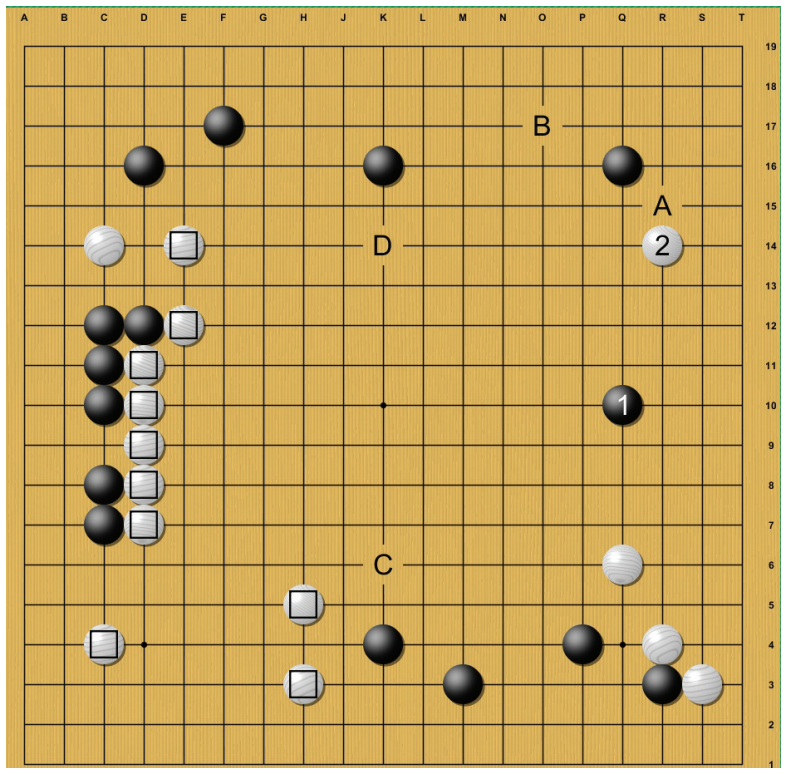


Next White tries **move 5** to give him more space and jump out of Black’s sector line. **Black 6** blocks the path to the triangle marked stone again, so White plays **move 7** and jumps again, but towards where? Only Black stones wait towards the top. Black plays at **8** and totally surrounds White’s stones, effectively combining both sector lines, making the center a huge sea of points, surrounded by Black stones! This is **move 99** in the whole game. White didn’t give up and at **move 100** of the game he played at **A** and started a complicated fight spanning **51 moves** (which is beyond the scope of this chapter) which filled most points in the bottom half of the board and almost succeeded in creating two eyes. Black, having defended correctly in the early moves by avoiding attaching at White’s stones and simply expanding his sector line, was able to hold to his advantage: keep things simple and expand with your stones, to **surround your opponent**.

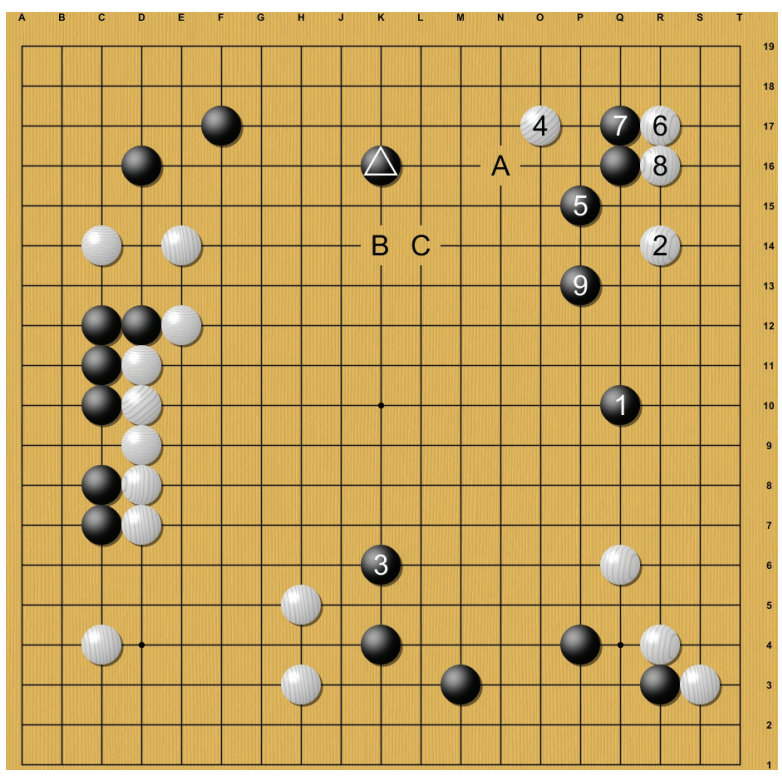
Whatever you might be doing on the board, attacking or defending, you should always remember that you must be on the lookout to play important moves and regain the initiative in the game (sente). You must always try to find the balance between keeping your groups safe with being the playmaker in the game.

Try to be active, not simply reactive. Do not simply follow and respond to your opponent's moves. When your groups are safe, play your own game, create chances on the board. Threaten! Expand! Grow!

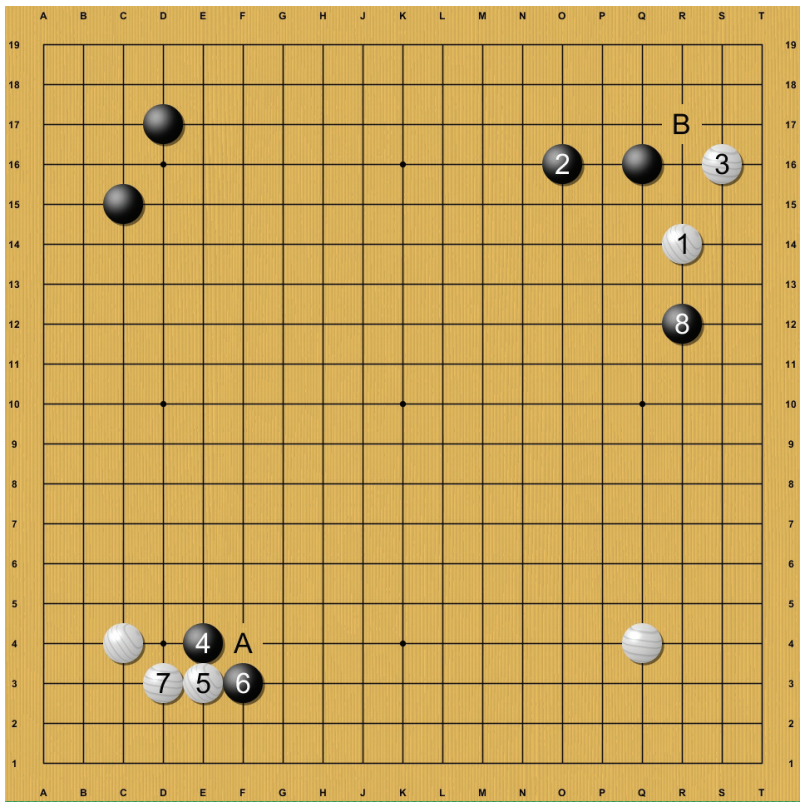
Ignoring your opponent's moves and playing your own offensive moves can be dangerous and can have repercussions, but when you know what is the usual repercussion/punishment for ignoring a particular move then you can judge if playing somewhere else is more urgent or more important or larger than simply playing a predictable response to your opponent's threats and letting sente in his hands. Let us see some examples of such a decision:



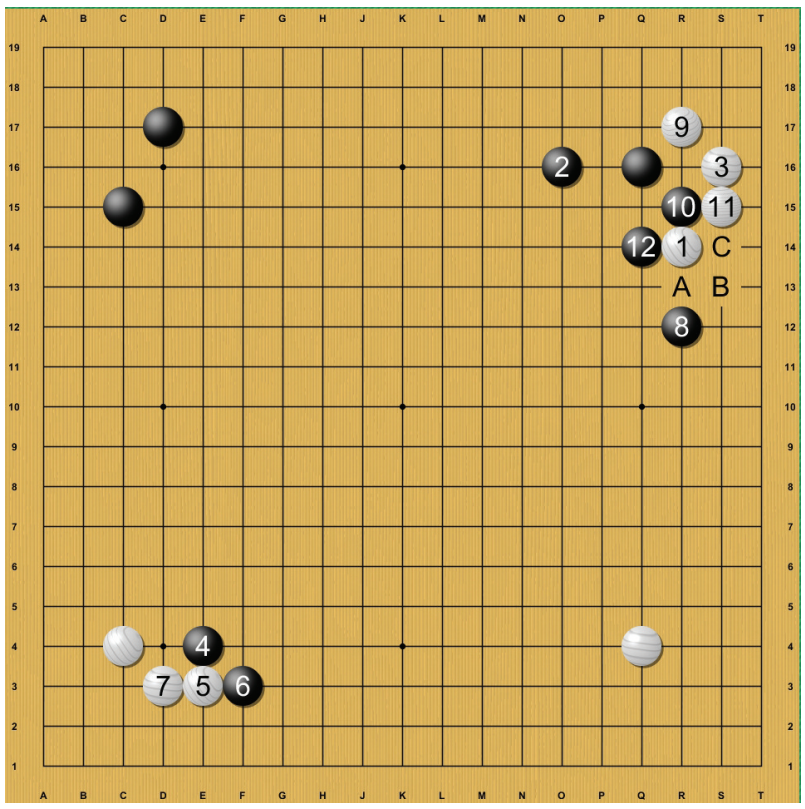
Black played **move 1** and is trying to create a large framework on the top and right. White doesn't like that prospect so he played **move 2** and approached Black's corner, despite **Black 1** being a wide pincer attack already in position in relation to the White stone.
The normal response in this case for Black is to play **A** and defend his corner while also putting pressure on the White stone or play **B** if he wants to be passive (though with so many Black stones around that is definitely not the best choice).
But Black is concerned about White eventually getting to play **C** and **D** and utilise the framework made by the marked White stones. Black doesn't want to let White play there and he already has a stone pincering **White 2** and another Black stone on the top side to help. Black also knows that if he ignores **White 2**, then the punishment is White playing **move 4** at **B.**



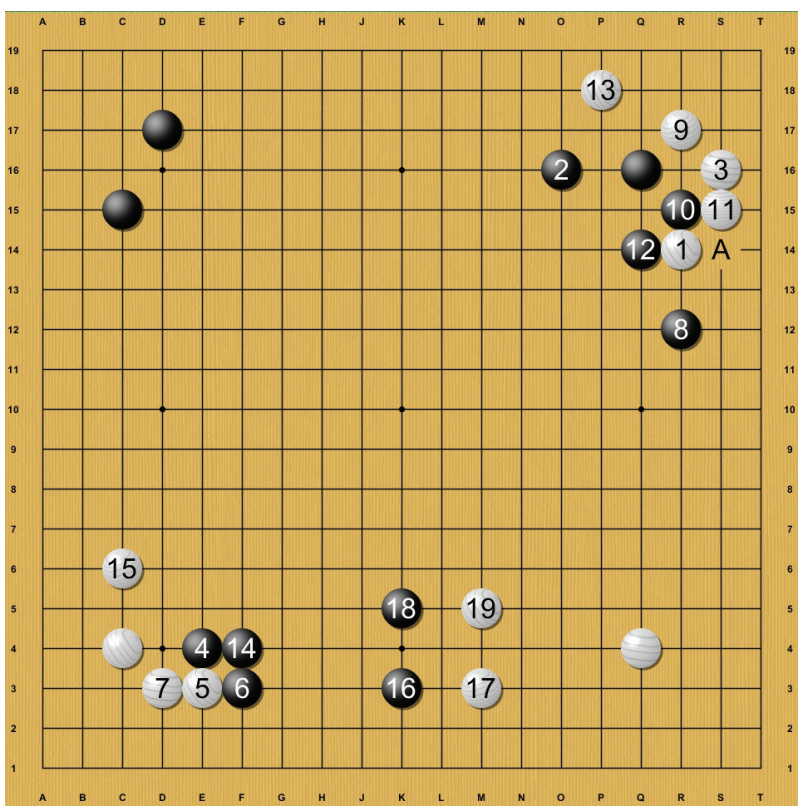
Black knows that the usual punishment for ignoring **move 2** is the double approach from both sides, so he plays **move 3** into one of the two spots he considers most dangerous if White gets to play there first.
The moves from **4** to **8** are considered joseki and usually Black's next move is at **A** to capture the White stone, but with the triangle marked stone in place and **move 1** on the board, Black knows that he has a more powerful move than **A** and plays **move 9** which expands his framework, surrounds the White stone at **move 4** and threatens the three stones on the top right, at the same time. Black knew his options and he knew that he could ignore White's advance and still get a decent result, so he made an important play for himself instead of simply following along. White does the same in the next move and plays in either **B** or **C** to use his framework and the fight is on**.**



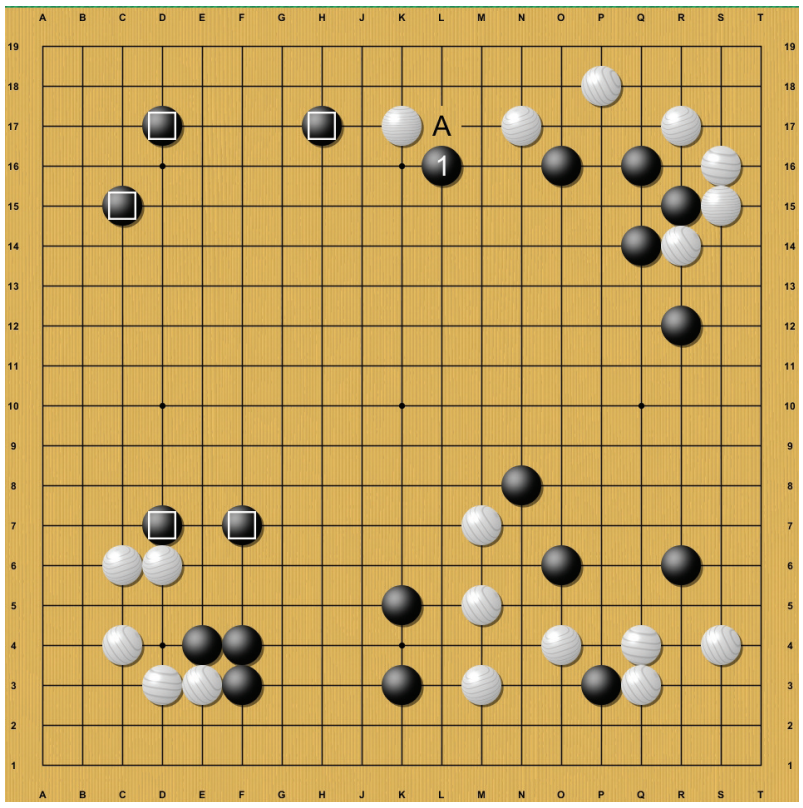
This idea can be applied at any phase of the game.
In this example game both players seem to be more than happy to ignore each other and threaten totally different places on the board, so we will follow it in more detail.
Let us take things from the beginning:
White 1 is the usual Knight's move approach we saw in the previous example and it appears in most games at any level. **Black 2** is a usual response and **White 3** is the next move in the joseki, as we saw in the relative chapter, but Black wants to play fast and strike fear into White, so he plays **move 4** and approaches another corner. The **moves 5-6-7** are the usual joseki, but Black leaves the joseki incomplete again and plays **move 8** to put pressure to White's stones. White cannot play **A** and punish Black for not connecting his stones, and he has to play **B** to ensure that his top right group is alive...



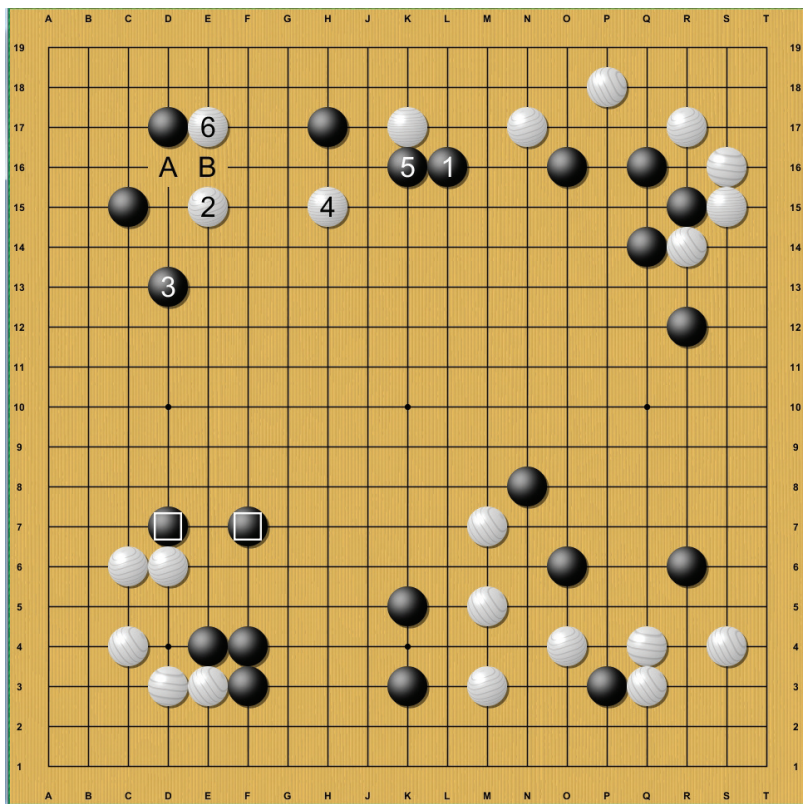
This kind of fast play by playing sente moves and creating emergencies that your opponent will need to answer is a great tactic that you have to try out for yourself as you will be getting stronger and more confident in your plays. **It is not only effective, but also very fun**, which is always a very important thing. Black keeps on with his aggressive moves to deny White any possibility of taking the time of playing in the bottom left. **Move 10** is sente since it threatens to cut White in half and deny him eye space. White cannot allow that so he is forced to play **move 11** and defend his stones. Black plays **move 12** to keep on with the attack, but with **move 11** White has eye space now and the only thing that Black is threatening is the single stone of **move 1**. The usual response for White is **A**, **B** or **C**, but none of them are good enough and one stone is not important so early in the game...



So, it is time for White to ignore Black's moves and he plays **move 13** in the top, to ensure that his stones are alive and threaten Black's potential in the top side.
Black knew that his **move 12** was essentially a bluff and he was never going to waste his time to play **A** and just capture one stone when he has his bottom left stones to care for. This is another reason that White chose to ignore **move 12**. Remember, creating too many weak points for your stones means that the opponent can start ignoring you and press you on those weak points, so Black plays **move 14** to defend his stones and continue on with the normal joseki up to move **16** ending the previous imbalance he had created earlier. **White 17** aims for a possible invasion in the Black group and expands White's potential territory. Black is having none of that and defends and expands at the same time with **move 18** and White follows with **move 19**...



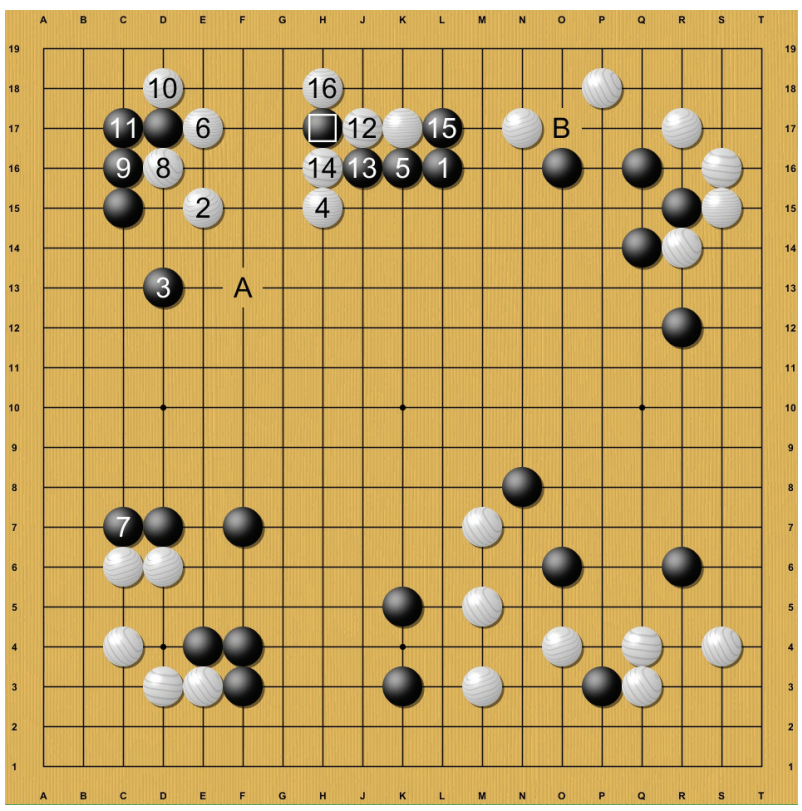
Later in the same game Black has a nice framework on the left and top with the marked stones and on the right he is slowly creating an equally large area. In that regard Black plays the shoulder hit at **move 1** to expand his framework and push White to stay low along the edge of the board.
The threat of the shoulder hit is that if White ignores it, then Black can play at **A** and capture the White stone.
This is usually a significant threat and the usual thing is to respond to a shoulder hit, but in comparison to the huge areas that Black is slowly building, this threat is comparatively much smaller.
White can be reactive and lose more ground in the game or be active and have a chance.
So White is going to tenuki and try to reduce Black's frameworks...



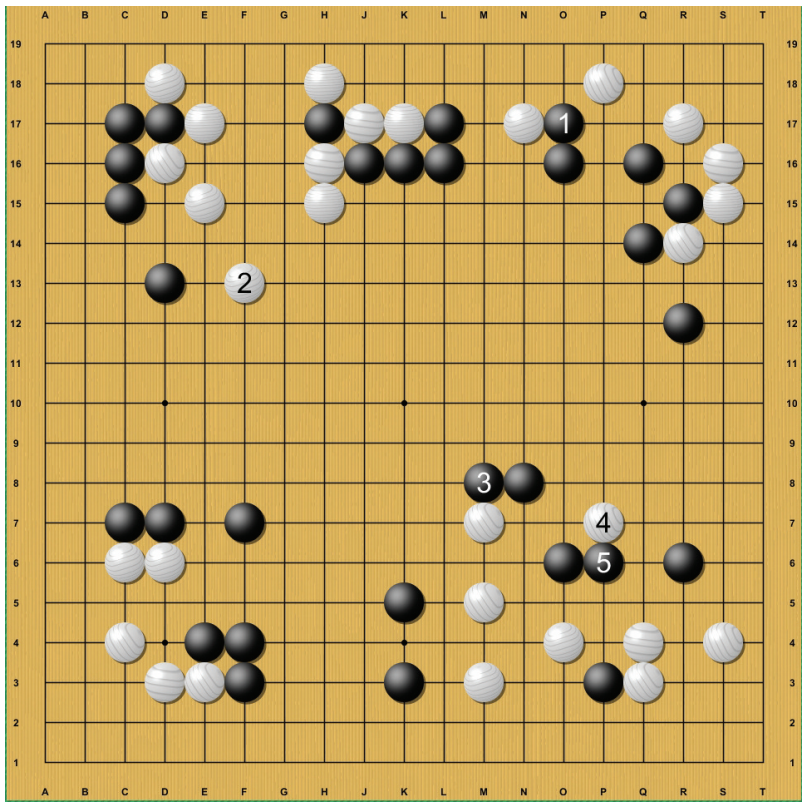
White 2 is one of the usual reduction spots against this particular corner enclosure. Black is not very unhappy for this move. His initial threat of the shoulder hit remains on the board and now he can also respond to a threat by expanding his own framework on left with **move 3**.

> **Remember:** You usually cannot have everything.
> Go is a game that regularly punishes greed.

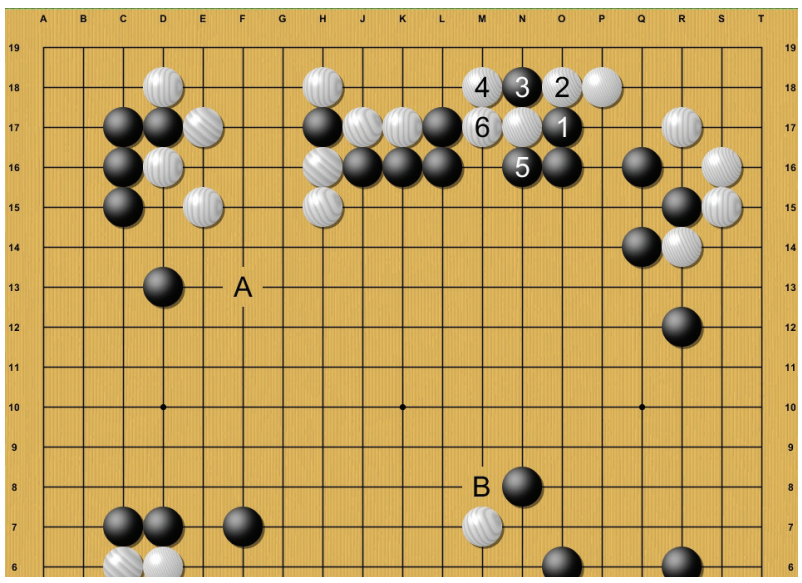
This is usually the best defense. You take a local loss at one point of the board, but you are building more points with your defensive moves in another nearby area. Wide defensive moves aiming to surround are usually a good choice. White plays **move 4** to try and connect to his only helping stone, but **Black 5** stops him. **White 6** tries to start a fight and usually Black responds at **A**, to threaten the cut at **B**...



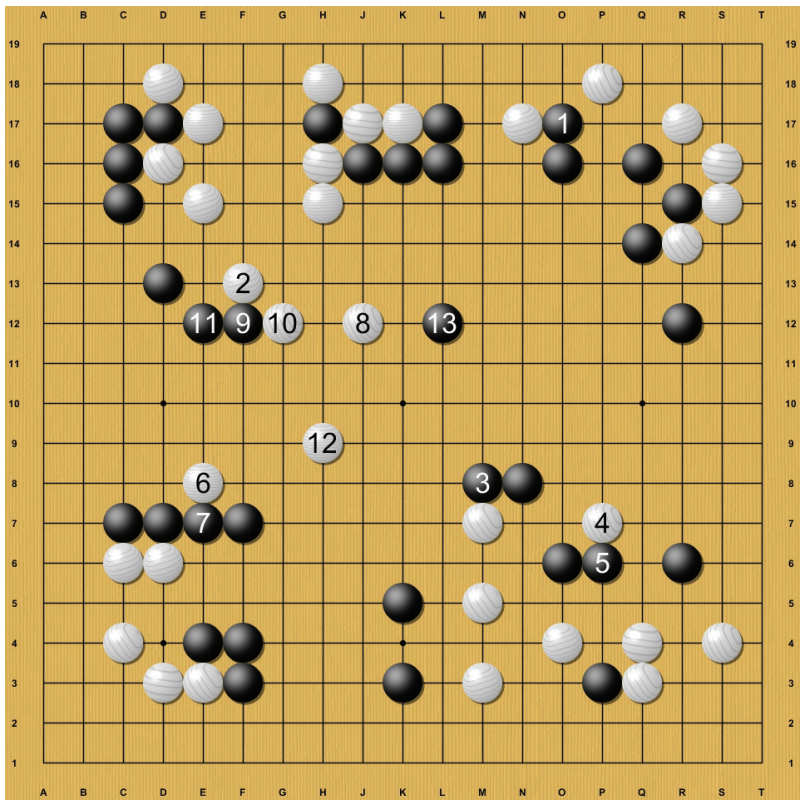
But not in this game. Both players are keen on being active and playing towards their own goals. Black invested in the left side, so he doesn't care much for the local loss at the top, if he can secure all the left side for himself, so he plays **move 7** and blocks White chances of invading in that area.
White wanted to play there at some point, but, as we said, you cannot have everything, so he proceeds to make the tiger's mouth at **move 8**. Black defends at **move 9**, White makes the atari at move **10** and **Black 11** connects. Now that his position is stronger White tries to connect his stones again with **move 12**. Black extends with **13**, White cuts off Black's marked stone with **move 14** and **moves 15** and **16** finish the sequence with White managing to live on the top. Black now can play at **A** to enlarge his territory and concede sente or **B** to threaten White and ensure that his four stones on the top are safe...



Black believes that he can get to play both moves, so he begins his plan with **move 1** that threatens White, with every intention to play on the left, once White simply responds to his threat.
Once again though, the opponent refuses to follow. In the next image you will see what would have happened if White had defended. White correctly decides that responding to **move 1** is not the most important move in the game, so he plays **move 2** to disrupt Black's plan for a huge framework on the top and left side.
Black in turn, takes that loss at a stride and ignores White as well and plays **move 3** to block White and enlarge his framework in the right side, since his **move 1** was not answered, the right side is looking very promising now.
White is scrambling to attack both the left and the right, so he plays **move 4** on the right and, finally, one of the players defends with **Black 5**...



Let us see why White ignored Black's **move 1**.
If White defended with **move 2**, his stones would have been connected, but in the natural sequence shown in the image, Black would have gotten **move 5** for free and sente at the end of it all.
Not only does the difference in point by losing that stone is not significantly large at this point, but if White does play away and Black pushes further in to capture that stone, this means that White could have gotten **two free moves** and he could have played at both **A** and **B**, something that Black would never allow and indeed such a thing didn't happen in the actual game...



Next White peeps on the one point jump and Black defends at **move 7**. A peep is rarely a move that someone can ignore, even in a game such as this where both players seem to be going their own way.
White needs to reduce both the left and the right so he plays **move 8** in the center. Black ignores the threat towards the right side and defends the left at **9** and threatens to cut off all White's stones in the center. **White 10** is the natural defense connecting all groups and making good shape, so **Black 11** defends as well, leaving White enough time to make the large knight's connection with three stones at **move 12** a good shape as we saw earlier, that will allow him to connect at least some of his stones despite any attack Black come up with. As you can see, most of the moves are defending and attacking at the same time. **Try to find moves that threaten while building and try to avoid moves that your opponent can ignore.**

Remember: Always keep your groups safe. Respond to the sente moves your opponent makes that threaten your groups, but always keep your eyes open for possible slow or low threat moves your opponent makes and take sente away from him!

Using influence to attack

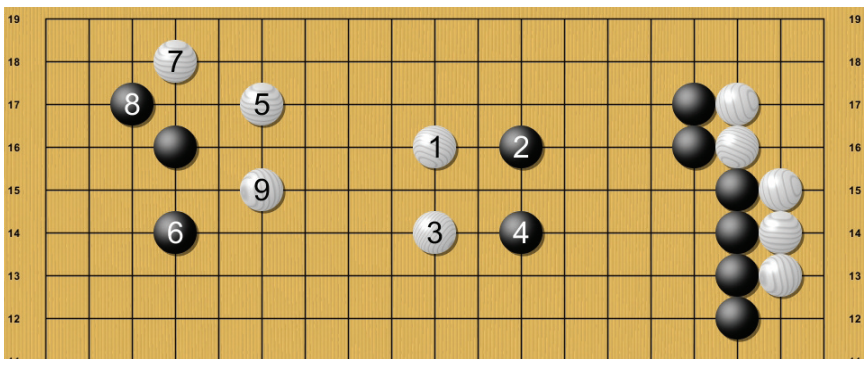
During our exploration of the reductions and the invasions we have already encountered the concept of attacking using our walls and influence (e.g. like we saw in **page 124**), but it is time to explore the specifics of this matter.
The most important thing to remember is that **walls are not meant to be defended**.

If you find yourself defending a wall and trying to make it survive, then you most probably failed to use the wall correctly, because in order to create a wall, you usually end up giving territory to your opponent. If your opponent managed to get certain territory in exchange for that wall and later on managed to erase that wall's influence and made it run for its life, this means that your opponent got everything he could dream of and all those moves you invested in creating that wall were, in fact, wasted!

In the beginning you might find yourself many times in such situations, but do not despair. With practice and the help of the following rules and examples, you will learn to avoid that calamity more often than not.

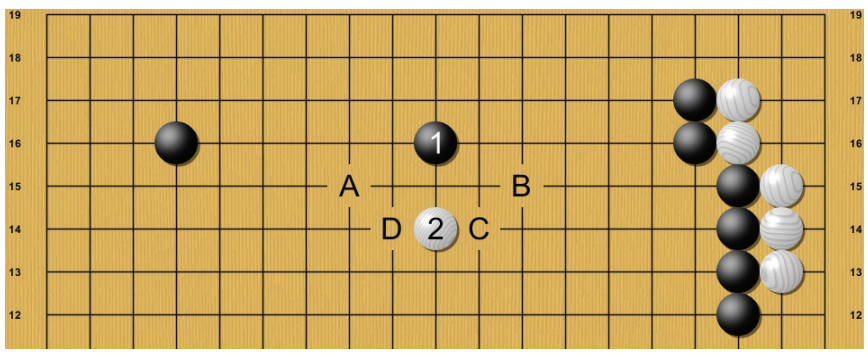
The first thing to remember when you have a wall is to extend sufficiently far from it, in order to use it to its full potential. The rule of thumb in this case is to *extend away from your wall, as many points as is the length of the wall, plus one*. Of course this applies only if your wall is solid without any possible cutting points. If that is not the case then you should restrain yourself and play closer to your wall or first defend your cutting points and then extend.

Similarly, if you want play against the walls of your opponent, you need to be careful to not play too close to them, or you will be under immediate attack, just like in the example in **page 102**. Another general rule is that *the key point for my opponent is my key point as well*, which means that if you want to disrupt the influence of a wall, you should play around the point where your opponent would have extended if he had the opportunity to do so.



Move 1 is the key point for both players

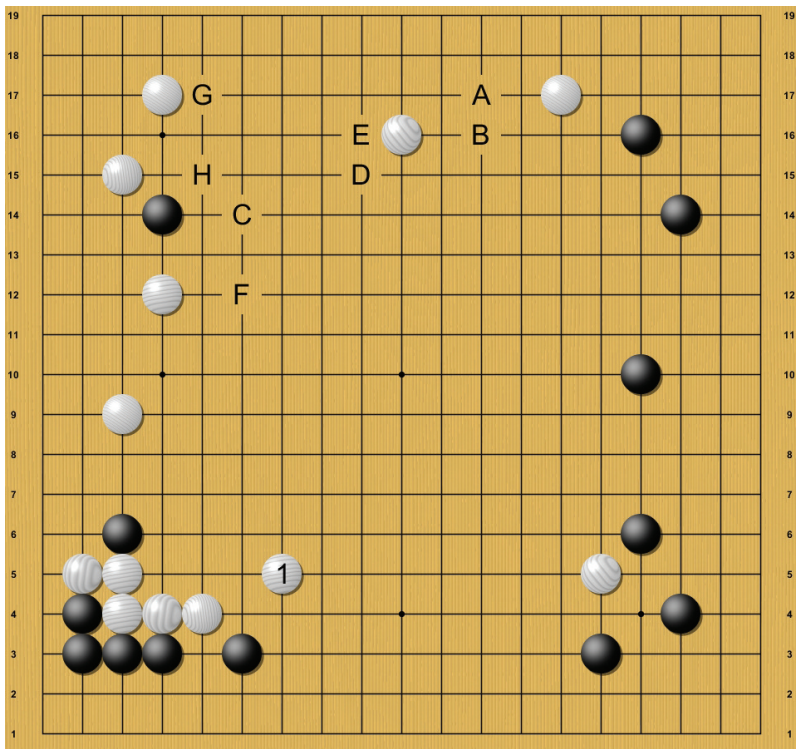
In this image, White gets it first and makes Black defend his wall with **move 2**. The following moves, even if we make the simplest choices, are a local victory for White, since Black had his wall reduced and the top side practically invaded.



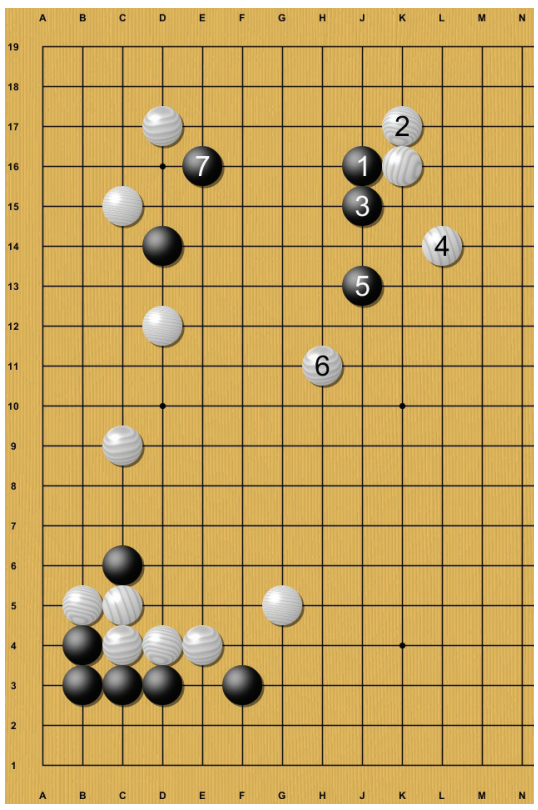
In this image, if Black gets the key point first, now White can only reduce and not invade as well. Regardless of the choice Black makes between **A**, **B**, **C** or **D** the result is going to be a lot better for him than the previous image, because he is locally stronger and he will be able to try and gain compensation on the top side for any reduction made by White.

The main premise behind the extension from your own influence is not so much to actually create a large territorial framework, but to *threaten* your opponent with that possibility, make him worried and make him want to invade it. Sometimes an opponent will ignore that threat and actually let you expand that framework again and again until it can be considered definitely your territory. This is a dream come true, but it will be extremely rare to encounter as you will keep playing and getting stronger. The usual thing to expect will be everyone *trying to reduce or invade your framework* and that is part of your plan, as well. Your opponent will not be able to reduce everything and, if you play your cards right, *you will get more than enough compensation for your local loss*.

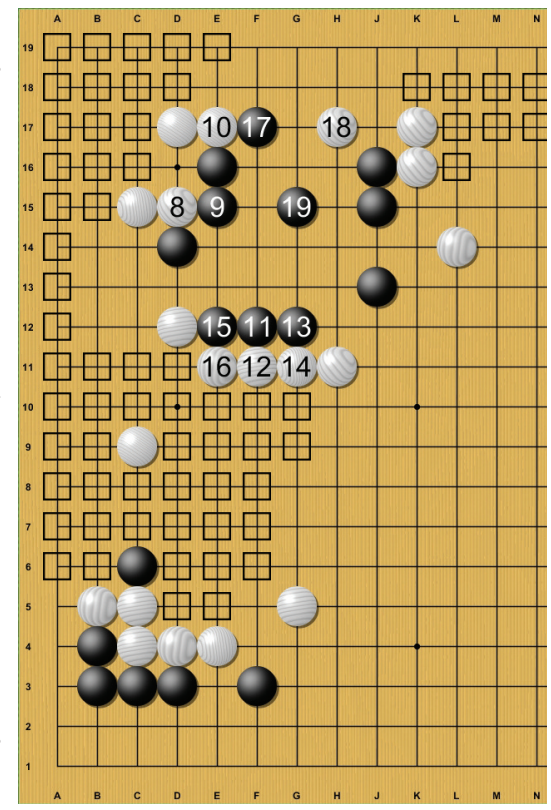
Just talking about this idea makes it sounds really unlikely, so let us see a practical example to understand what is under discussion:



In this game Black tried to approach White's 4-4 bottom left corner stone, got pincered and a usual 3-3 invasion joseki was played out, like the ones we already examined. Now White has a nice framework in the top and the left, while Black's formations are on the bottom and the right side. Despite that the board seems more or less balanced, Black is a bit scared by White's potential and instead of focusing on growing his own framework, he believes that he needs to reduce or invade White's areas of influence. This is a questionable choice, but once it was made all these marked points from **A** to **H** were considered and while we already saw that the invasion at **A** is very effective, Black chose to go for **E**.
That proved to be his undoing...



Left image : White calmly extended his stones and tried to surround Black. After the cap at **move 6**, White not only hinders Black, but he is starting to build another framework with the help of his bottom left stones. Black is in trouble and tries to live with **move 7**.
Right image: White's stones are safe, so he slowly pokes Black's eye space and forces Black to wriggle inside that small space and get surrounded or die. **Move 19** ensures that Black will live with two eyes and that White's framework was indeed invaded, but at what cost! All the marked points are now deeply surrounded by White's walls, so White's profit in points and influence is greater than what he lost.

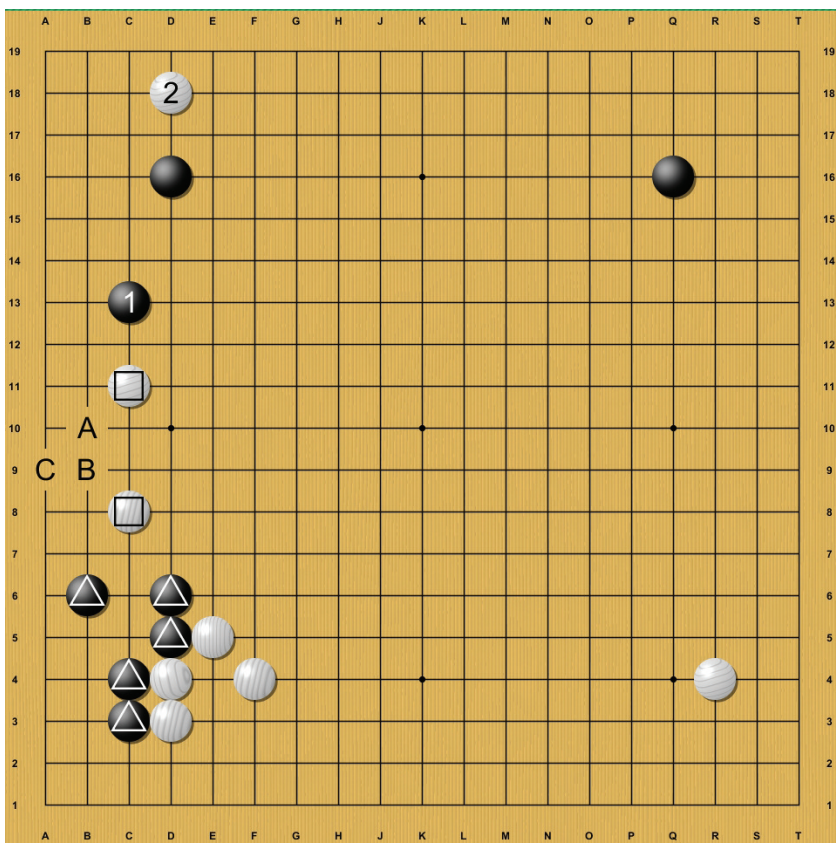


The main idea then is to create the threat of a large framework and lure our opponent inside our sphere of influence. Once he is there we can turn a profit by his effort to survive. You do not have to kill our opponent to profit, as you just saw. The compensation will be usually yours even if your opponent survives, as long as you are pushing him towards the correct direction.
So, what are the guidelines for this strategy?

Things to keep in mind about walls:

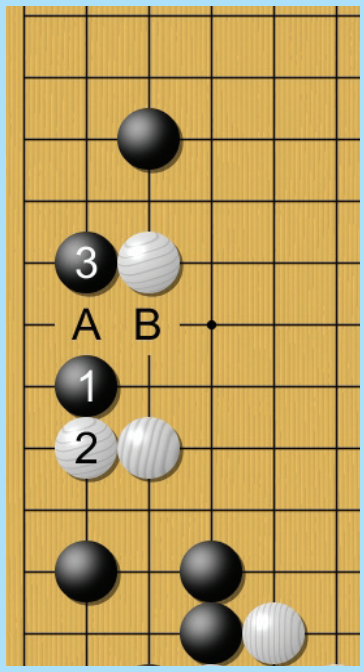
- If you have a wall, try to extend away from it, at least as many points away as the wall is long.
- If your opponent has a wall and you want to reduce its influence, the same idea applies.
- Try to create a large framework and then lure your opponent in. Once he feels that your potential area is so great that he has to invade it in order to win, then you usually need to push his invading stones **towards** your wall and either kill his invasion or profit from the series of free moves you will gain by attacking the weak invading group by simply extending your **sector line**.
- You should convert your wall into territory only if your opponent repeatedly ignores the threat of you building a large framework. Once the completion of your framework becomes the biggest move on the board and your opponent is still afraid to do something about it, then go ahead and claim that territory for yourself.
- Do not be greedy and think that you have to have a huge wall to profit. Remember that while you are building a wall, your opponent is usually taking solid territory for himself. Do not let your opponent take the territory and reduce your wall's influence. **Once your wall-creating moves stop being sente, you need to extend from your wall or suffer a great reduction**.
- Never create a wall of stones that is facing your opponent's stones. That "wall" is simply a string of stones that do not offer you anything.

Now, all these ideas sound great on paper, but they need to be demonstrated in order to be more clearly defined and understood. Let us see an example that highlights all of these points:



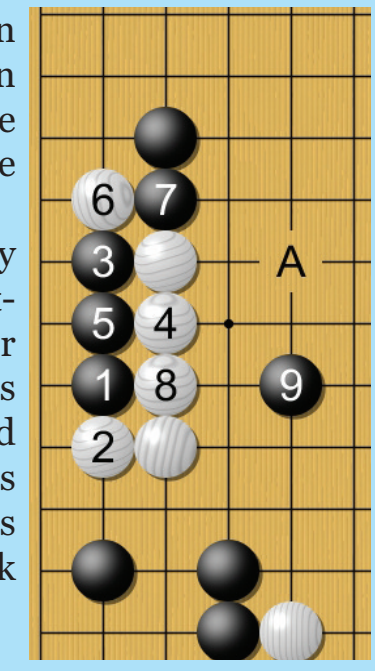
In this game Black plays **move 1** to put pressure on the two square marked White stones.
This move is a large knight's extension from the **4-4 point** in the corner, so Black is attacking and expanding his area at the same time.
Why is this move a severe attack? We saw in previous chapters that the two space jump is a common move used to create a base for a group, but when that group of stones is surrounded by opposing stones, then the base is threatened.
In this case **move 1** and the triangle marked stones, are too close for comfort, as we will see in the next page. Black can play **A** or **B** to take away White's stones base, or even the **monkey jump** at **C** to deprive White from eye space.
Despite that, White is annoyed by the prospect of Black growing in the top side and he ignores his group's perilous situation and plays **move 2**...

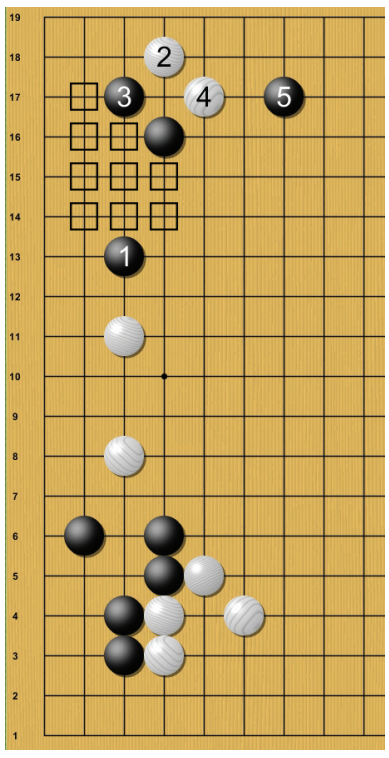
A surrounded two space jump base is in trouble



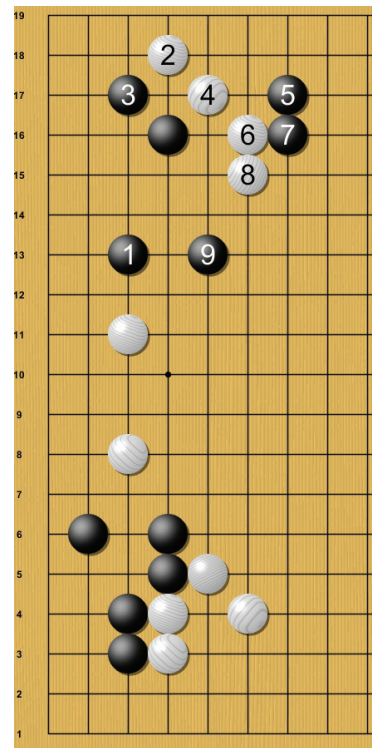
Left image: With the help of the nearby stones Black can play **move 1**. If White blocks with **move 2**, now Black can play **move 3** and try to connect with his other stone. White cannot play at **A**, because Black's response at **B** would place White's stone in atari.
Right image: White then can only extend with **4** and try to keep his stones connected. **Black 5** connects and threatens to disconnect White and defends against **move 6**. After **Black 7,** White's stone has **two liberties** and Black's three stones have **three liberties**. **White 8** connects and **Black 9** attacks the White group which now has no eyes and it has to run away with a move around **A**. Black has profited greatly and will win even more by chasing the weak White group around the board.

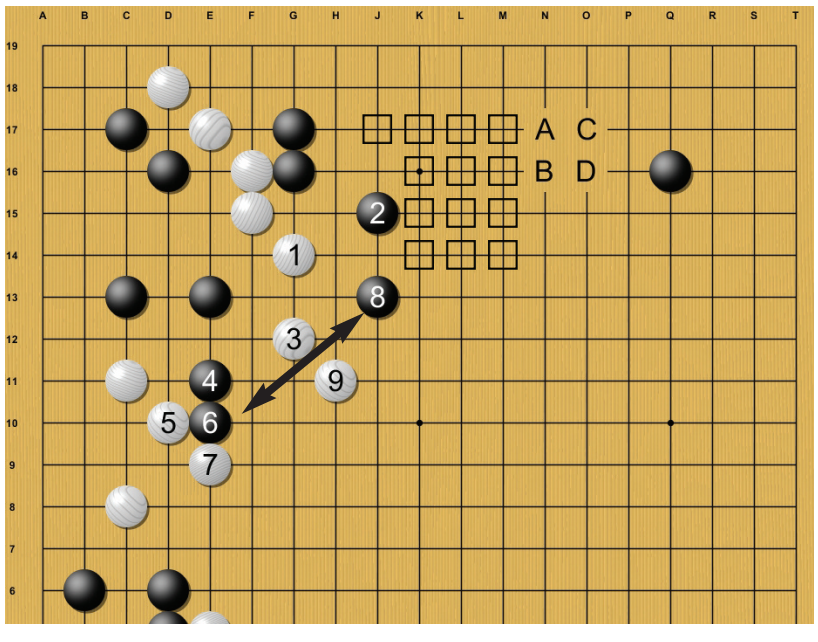
Do not let your stones get in such a position!



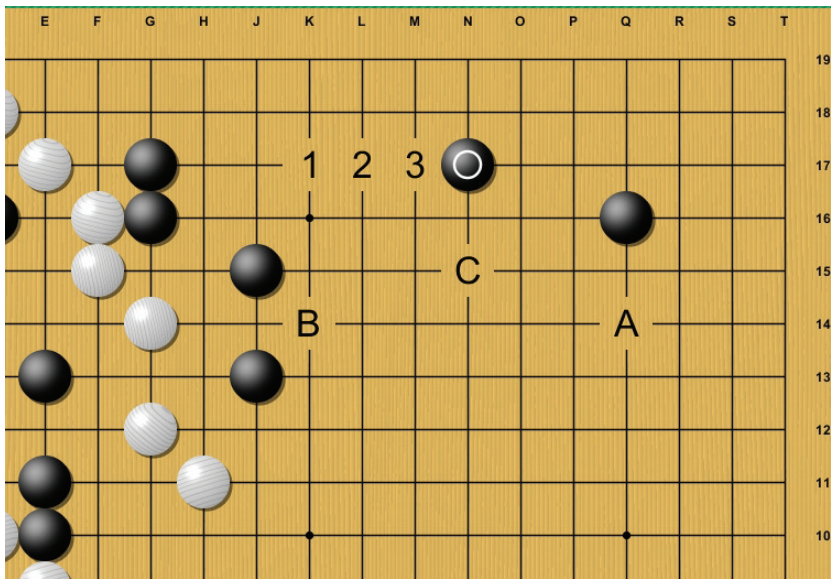


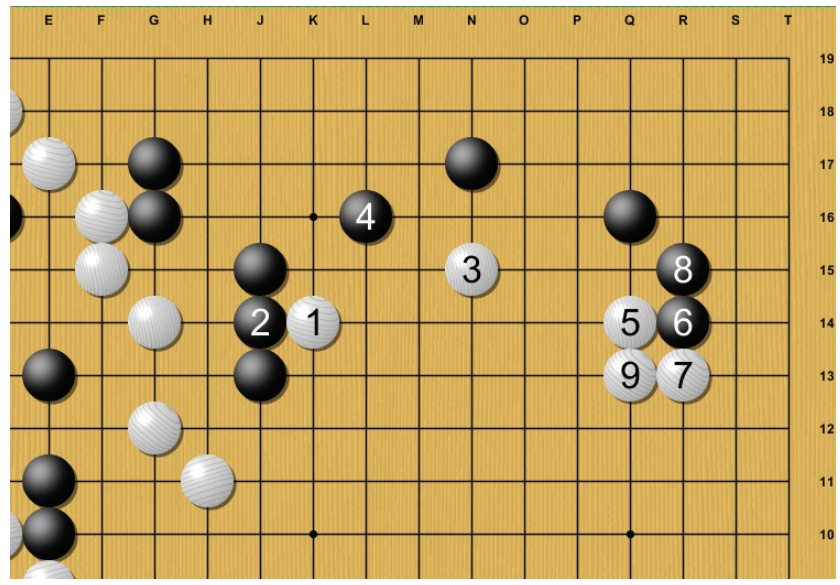
Left image: Black plays **move 3** to protect his group's base. After **move 3** the square marked points will be hard for White to contest and now that Black is safe, he can attack White in force.
White wants to contest the corner though and he plays a slow move at **4**, which should have been around **move 5** in order to create a base. Now White's stones have no eyes, so **Black 5** is a very severe pincer attack.
Right image: White tries to get out, but after some obvious exchanges in **6** to **8**, he is not closer to creating a base for his group. Black **9** makes certain that his group cannot die and it is separating White from his two lone stones which are getting even more surrounded.
When your groups are strong, your attacks can be strong too. If not, then you will eventually be counterattacked.



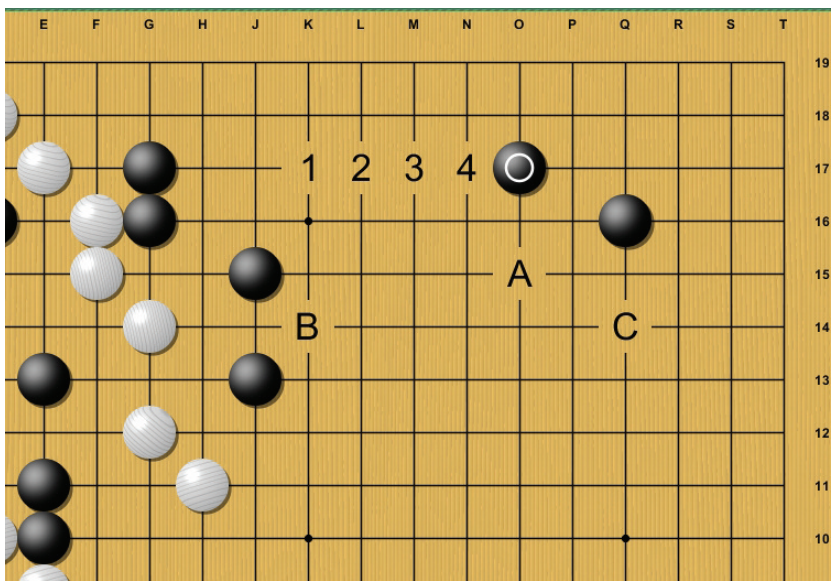


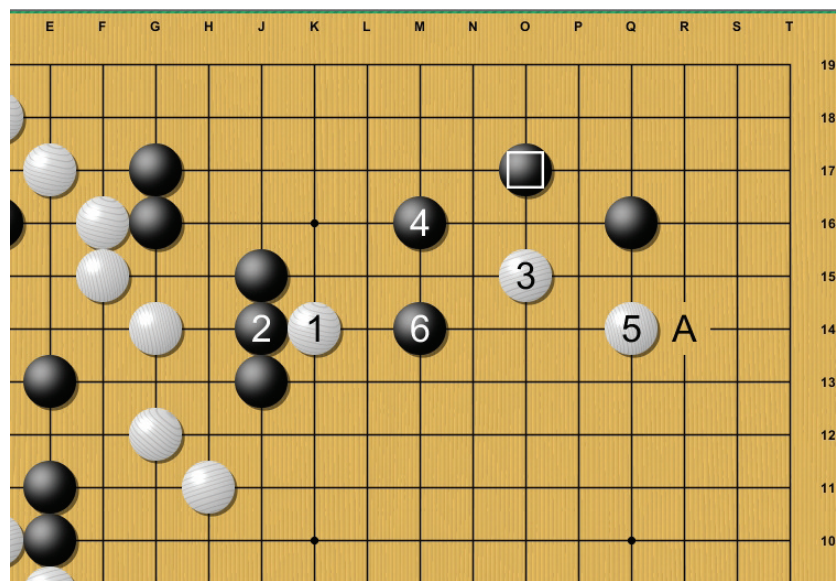
Let us reset the move counter and see what happened next. White is slowly trying to get out with **move 1** and maybe counterattack Black's two stones, but **Black 2** defends his stones and restricts White's options for direction. Cut out from the top, White is forced to jump at **3** and Black plays **move 4** that indirectly threatens both White groups. Now White can no longer ignore his two stones. He has to defend them at the exchange of **moves 5 to 7**. White's group is still not safe (the **monkey jump** possibility we mentioned earlier can still deprive him of his eyes), but Black wants to build influence and plays **move 8** to threaten of surrounding White again, so White makes the diagonal at **move 9** to keep his stones in front of Black's **sector line**. White is building a string of stones, **a wall that is facing nowhere** and wasting his past nine moves to save all those useless stones. Meanwhile Black got a wall in the top side with influence on the square marked points facing his right corner and secured life for his top left group. So, which move is best for Black next? **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**?



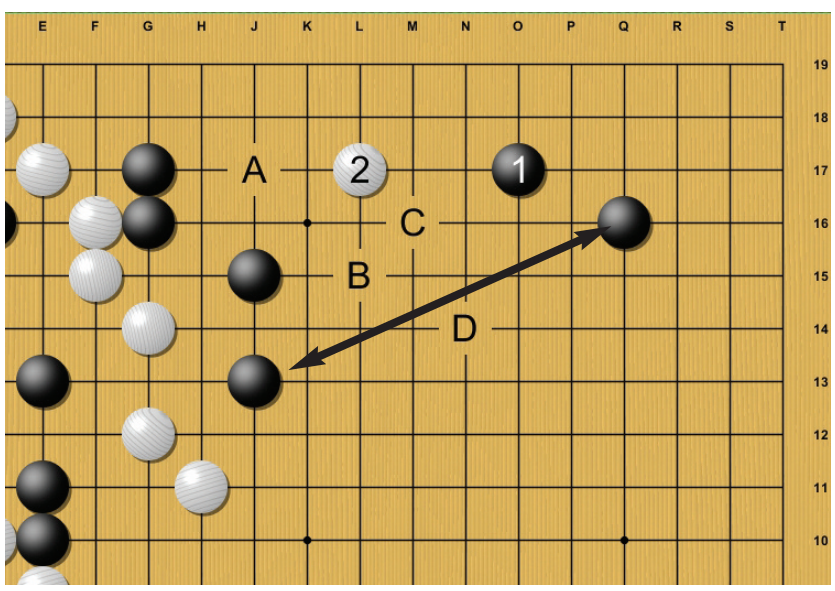


Left image: If Black plays a move closer to the wall, then an invasion by White is unlikely in any of the points around **1**, **2** or **3.** There just isn't enough space there for such a move, but there are a lot of weak points to aim for a reduction of that area and its influence, like **A**, **B** and **C**.
Right image: In a sequence like this one, White can occupy all of those points and since the large knight's move is not a great defense for the corner, Black could be forced to play the defensive moves at **6** and **8** to ensure his corner profit. White has reduced Black's potential significantly.

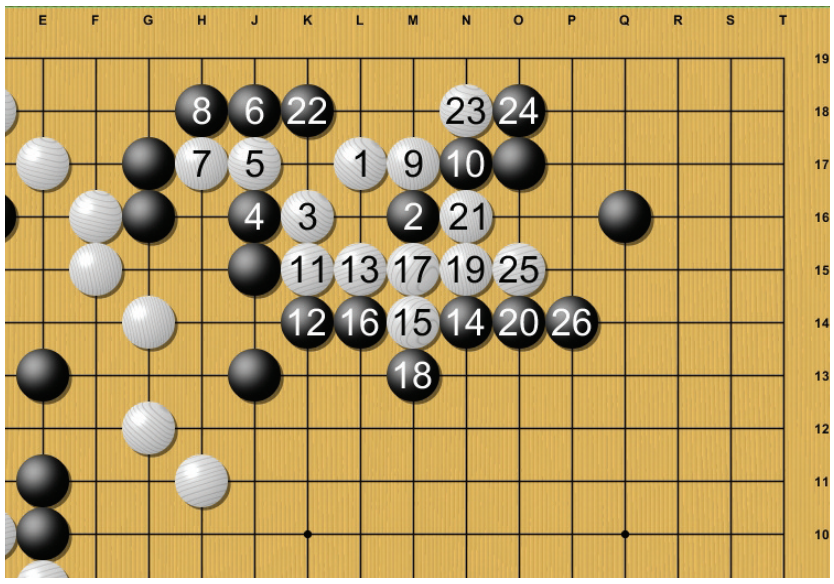




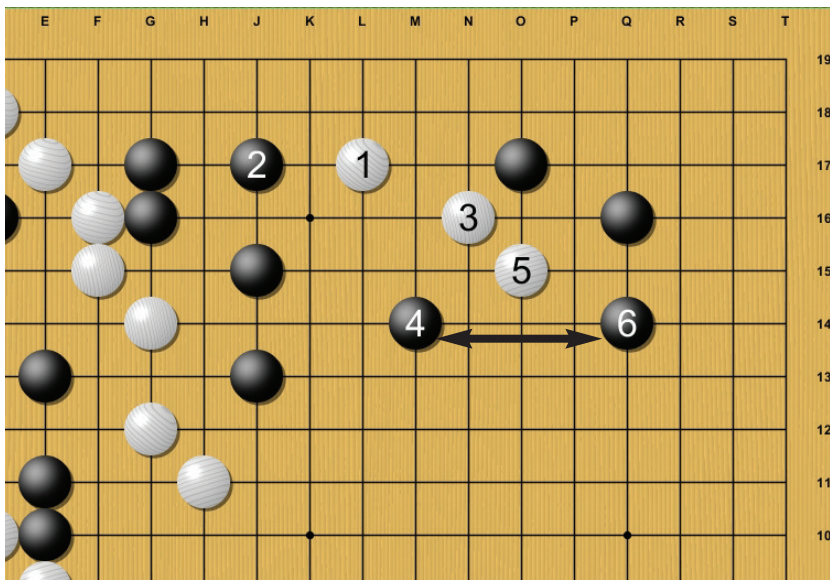
Left image: If Black plays a move closer to the corner and further from the wall, then an invasion by White is more likely to happen. This time Black's corner is stronger and he can play more severe moves. For example, there are still reduction points at **A**, **B** and **C**, but they are not as effective as before, because now **B** is further away and Black doesn't need to actively defend his corner against an invasion.
Right image: In a sequence like this one, White gets cut in half since the square marked stone is defending the corner and **move 1** is further away from the other White stones. This means that Black can play the splitting move at **6** and create two weak White groups which will be immediately in trouble.



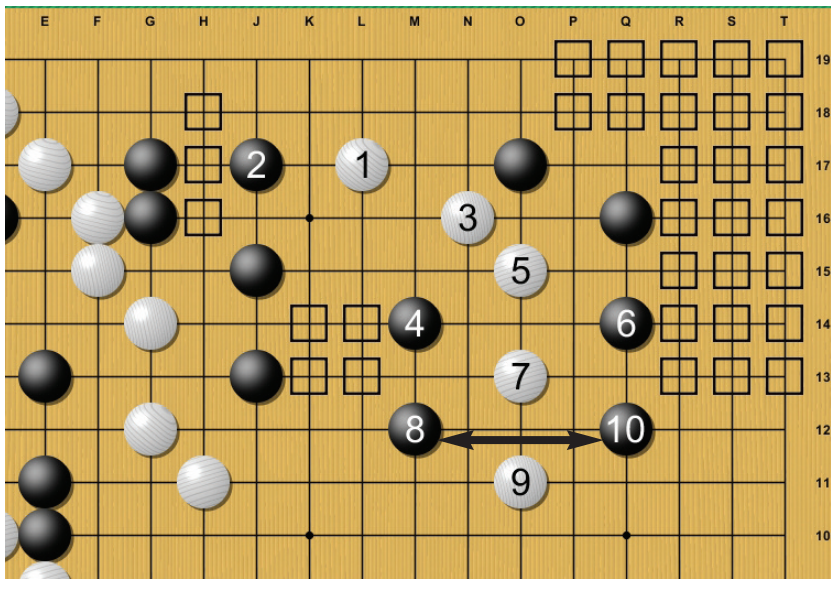
So, in the actual game, Black chose to extend further from the wall and invite an invasion, while defending his corner at the same time. White saw the opportunity and jumped into a deep invasion, way behind the enemy sector line.
Black could simply deprive the White stone of eye space with **A**, surround it with **B** or the shoulder-hit at **C** or simply extend his sector line and making a large net around the White stone at **D**.
Black is worried about the defects of his small wall, so he chose to play **C**, but in most cases the other choices which attack the invader from afar are usually safer and more effective...



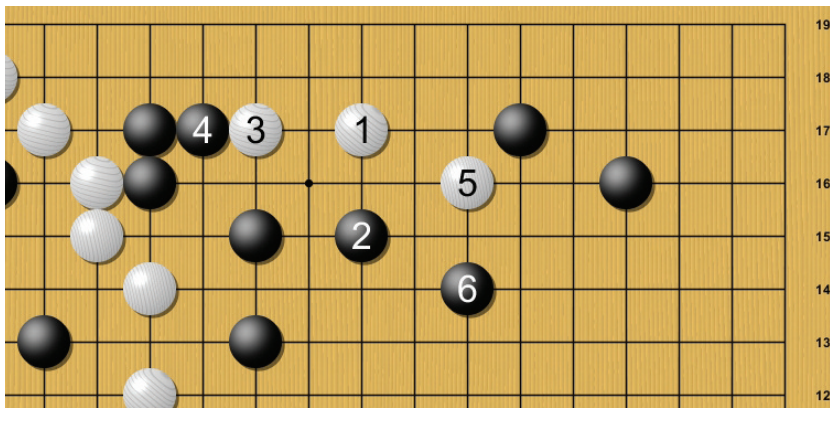
The aftermath of Black's choice is a problem of life and death, which is something we will discuss in the next chapter and in this case it is a very complicated fight which could have gone either way.
Black eventually wins the fight, White's group dies and the game is effectively over since Black got all the top-right side of the board, along with the outside influence. Despite that, **you should avoid getting yourself in such win-or-lose fights**. Not only they are needlessly complicated, but there is no reason to get into such situations where easier and equally profitable solutions exist.



Indeed **Black 2** could have created the table shape (which is a good shape as we saw in earlier pages) , that would have deprived White from any chance of living within that area. Now White has to run and Black simply has to chase from afar and extend his **sector line** in order to profit, without any real risk.
White 3 tries to create a bit more space, but **Black 4** can also make another good shape for his stones. White can try **move 5** to slowly crawl out, but Black's **move 6** simply extends the sector line, surrounding White's stones which have no eye and no nearby stones to help them...



White continues to jump and run with **moves 7** and **9** and Black's extension of the sector line with **moves 8** and **10**, finally falls behind. That was to be expected. Black had two groups to extend, while White had only one, so White would eventually get out, but at what cost?
Look at all those square marked points. Now those are all almost certain points for Black, who lost some of his original points, but was compensated for them with an equally large corner and a strong central group. What did White gain for his troubles? Two strings of stones that have no eyes and are still in danger!



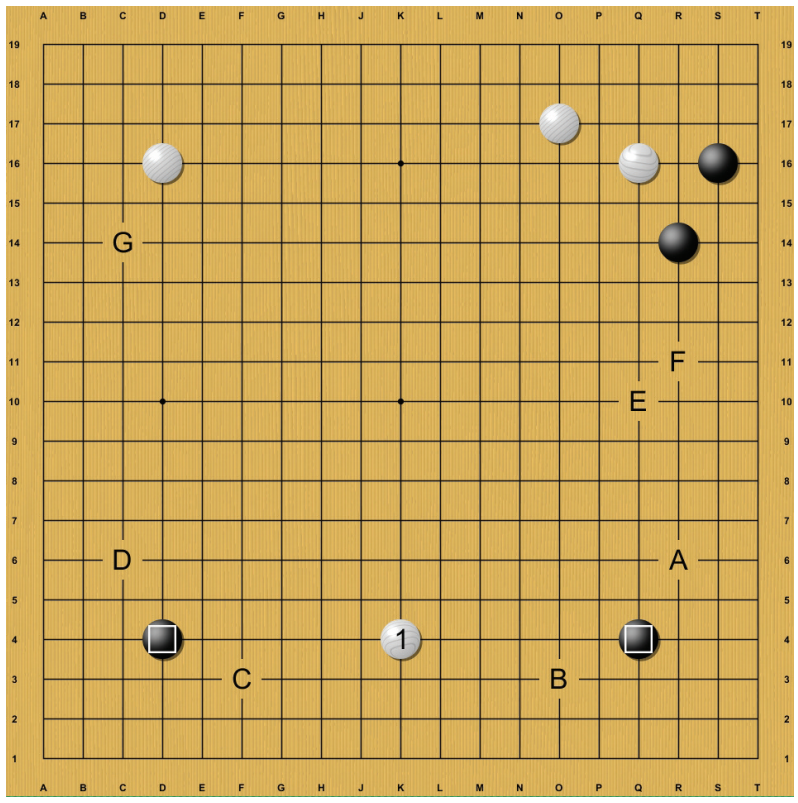
Even the cap at **2** could have been better than the shoulder-hit that Black actually chose. If White tries to make a small base and threaten to connect with the stones on the left with **move 3**, the badly shaped **move 4** stops that ambition and connects Black's stones. Now White had to run again with **move 5** and after **Black 6** we are back in a similar chasing scenario like we just analysed.

Remember: Do not panic! Invite the invasion on your own terms and then either push your opponent towards your wall, or simply try to extend your sector line again and again. While your opponent is busy running his stones across the board, you will be taking profit elsewhere by chasing him.

Trying to use influence successfully is among the most difficult concepts to implement in the game. I assure you that even the best players in the world sometimes make mistakes in their evaluation of whether it was worth exchanging territory for influence, so it is a question you will ask yourself frequently and you will make a lot of mistakes about it.

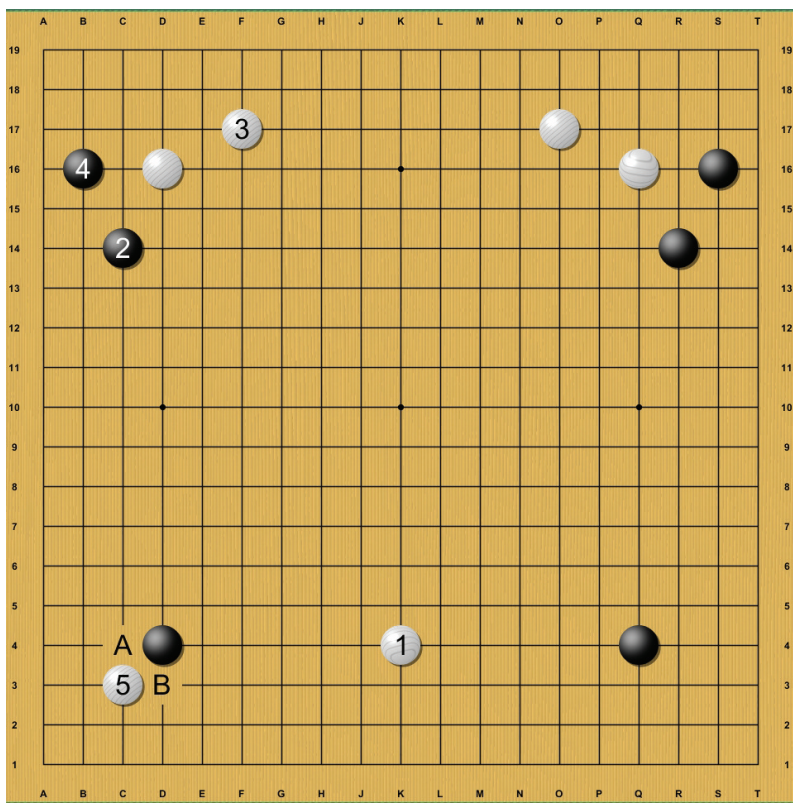
Despite that, there is one common situation where that decision is simplified: *When the opponent has a good position on the board to wipe away our potential influence, then we should not strive to obtain influence***.** In that case, switching our strategy to focus on getting more territory is almost certainly a good idea. This advice might sound vague, but it is usually obvious on the board.

Let us see a practical example to grasp the situation and in **page 139** we will see a harder situation where the answer is not as obvious:



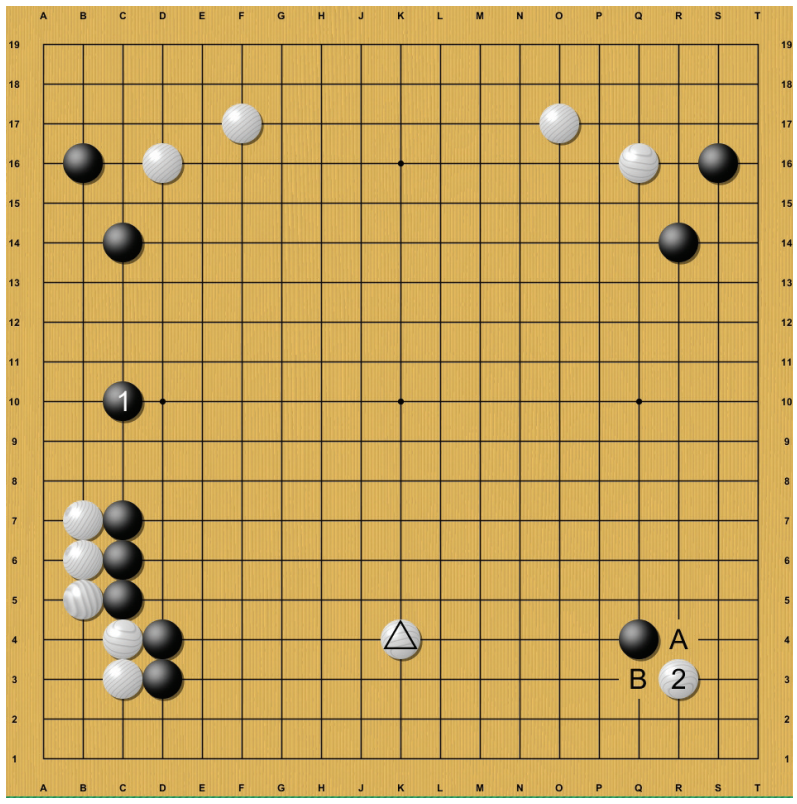
In this game White left the joseki in the top right incomplete and played **move 1** right between Black's two corner stones. This is a move that immediately hinders Black's plans to go for influence or trying to build a huge framework in the bottom, plus it is perfectly positioned in case White wants to invade at the **3-3** points in the bottom side, as was the trend after AlphaGo.

Black has many choices. He can defend his corners at **A**, **B**, **C** and **D**. He can finish the joseki on the top right with either **E** or **F** and focus on the right side. He can play on the largest area on the board at **G** and approach the other White corner or play even something totally different. That last choice at **G** seems good, since it is the largest open side, but in reality it is a move that is at the same time greedy and passive. White is ignoring the danger of **move 1** and he is trying to get as much as he can, without putting pressure on the White stone...

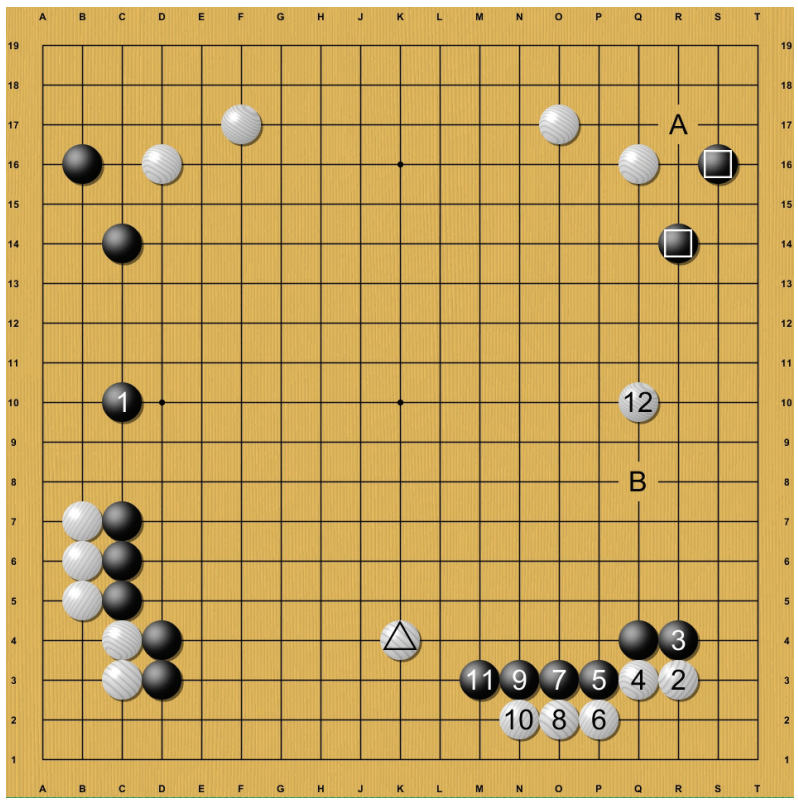


So, Black approaches the top corner with **move 2**. White chooses to defend once with **move 3**, but then leaves the joseki unfinished again and plays the **3-3 corner invasion** at **move 5**.

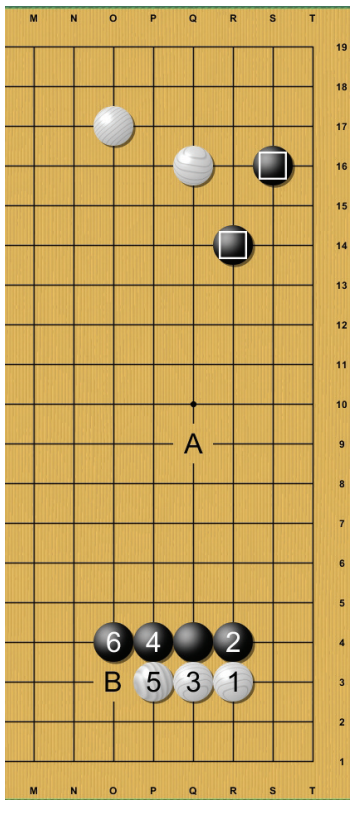
Leaving two joseki unfinished is a risky move, but White knows that the 3-3 corner invasion joseki end with White keeping sente, so he plans on defending his top side eventually. For now White wants to take full advantage of **move 1** and the fact that Black put no pressure on his stone. Black now has two mediocre choices. Blocking at **A** means that Black will get a wall facing an empty space which White can reduce. Blocking at **B** means that Black will get a wall facing a White stone already reducing his influence. Choice **A** is better because it forces White to use his sente move to reduce Black. That gives Black the time to attack the unfinished joseki and punish White's greed...



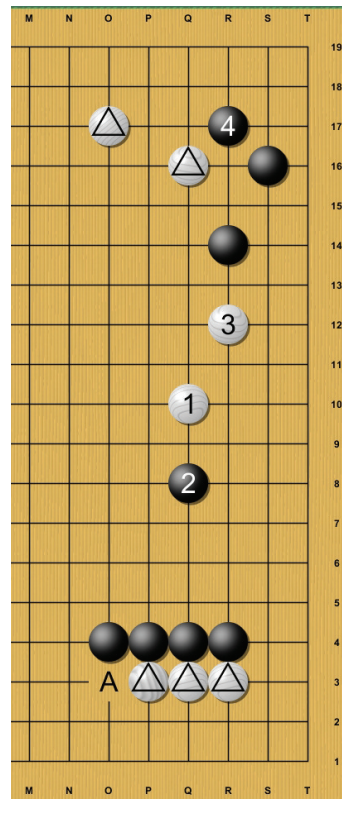
But Black doesn't block in the correct direction.
After the joseki we already analysed earlier in the book is played out with the notable exception of move **1** being further away from the Black wall in order to connect everything together and at the same time finish the joseki on the top left for Black, giving him a stronger group to stage his attack against White. This is a dubious move that leaves a lot of weak points for Black, but that is beyond the scope of this chapter, so let us focus back on the matter at hand.
White is happy that his triangle marked stone is right where most of Black's influence should have been and that he didn't have to use his sente move to reduce Black, so he invades the other corner as well!
Again, two mediocre choices, **A** and **B**. White expects Black to play the same sequence, but Black is unhappy with that result so he changes sides...



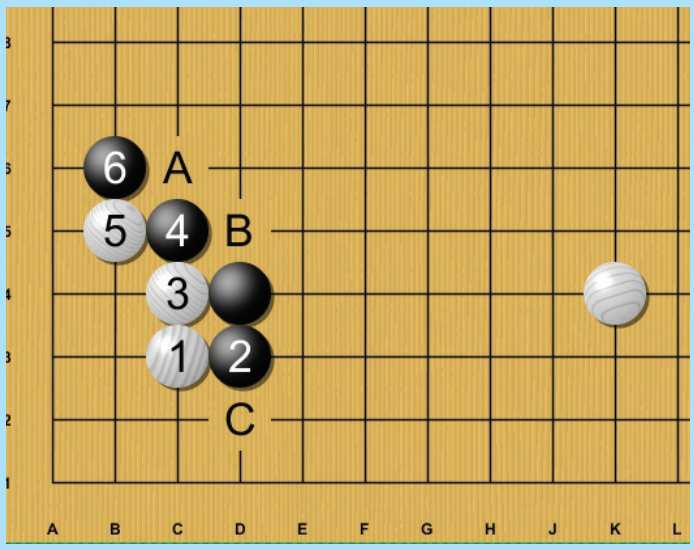
Now Black blocks from the other way and completes the joseki correctly as well, but the result is still not good. **White 12** immediately lands on the right spot to inconvenience Black's wall and apply pressure at the two top marked stones. White's stones are **alive** in the corner and Black has a wall that is facing nowhere.
Black could play **A** and ensure that his stones are alive in the top and give the chance to White to reduce him further in the bottom right. Or Black could play **B** which is closer to his wall than he would have liked, but it is, at least, using his wall to gain something.
Both are suboptimal choices and in the end both sides of blocking turned out to be bad for Black.
So, what is a better choice? You should avoid being forced by your opponent on playing move that are not in your favour. If your opponent has already reduced your potential influence, go for territory...



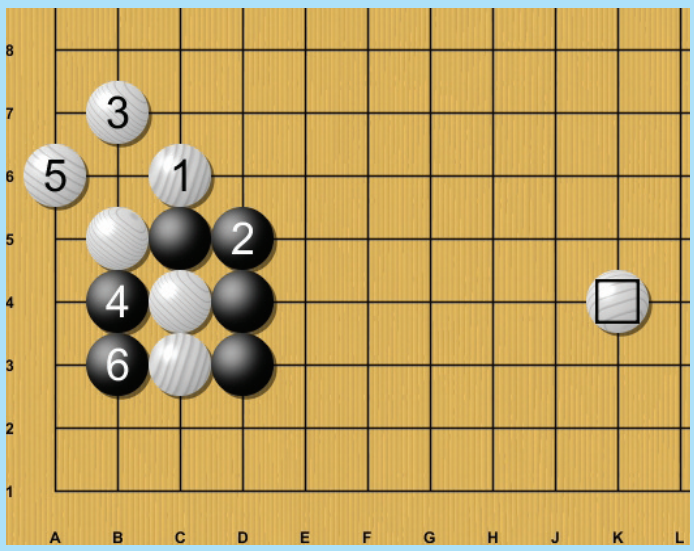
Yes, but how? Even if you do not know a joseki to regain your corner, at least play something simple like the following example, instead of blindly following joseki that you do not like. **Just remember your goal and stay consistent**.
In this case, if you cannot have your territory back, then you want to avoid White ending the sequence with sente.
Left image: Black doesn't play the hane. **Moves 4** and **6** simply extend Black's group and now **A** and **B** are **miai**. If White plays **B** to secure his territory, then Black plays **A** and ensures his influence and helps the marked stones a bit.
Right image: White decides to stick to his original plan and play in the star point and reduce Black's influence. **Black 2** is once again too close, but White doesn't have enough space to move. After the exchange of **moves 3** and **4**, now **all three** White groups are in danger. Unlike the real game, White is not alive in the bottom corner and Black can still play **A** and make White worry. **But there is a better way!**



Extra joseki against the 3-3 invasion when influence might be compromised

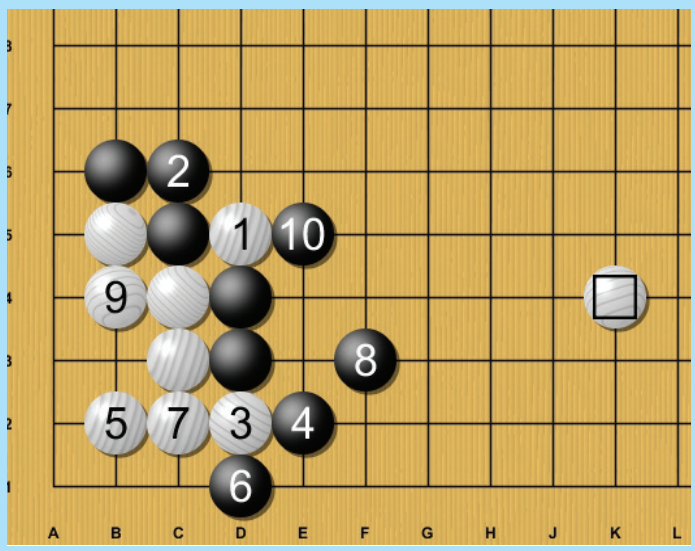


After AlphaGo brought the very early **3-3** corner invasion into the spotlight, this joseki has become more popular in our level, since it is a tool which either gives us back the corner or it gives us influence towards two sides instead of one! The first move of the joseki is practically **move 6**. Up until **move 5** everything follows the usual joseki, but **move 6** is a **double hane** which forces White to choose what he wants. This is already a small victory for Black, since all choices lead to better results than the ones we saw in the previous pages, if his influence has been compromised.
So, White can play either the atari at **A**, the atari at **B** or the hane at **C**...



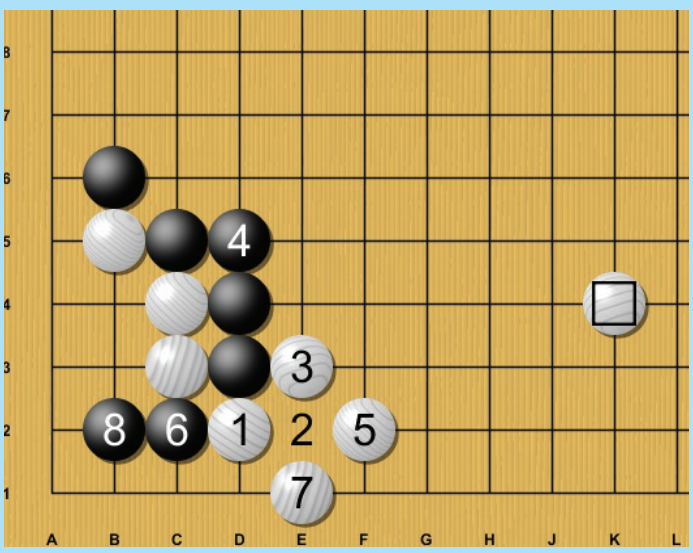
Choice A - Black gets the corner back

Unlike what we did in the joseki chapter we will not over-analyse every possibility in this case, because the choices are usually obvious and it is good to practice trying to find the incorrect responses, in preparation for the next chapter. We will review the correct sequences though.
White 1 is atari, so **Black 2** is the obvious response.
White 3 places another Black stone in atari, but Black will place White in atari with **move 4**. White is forced to capture Black with **move 5** and **Black 6** captures White's stones, reclaiming the corner. The marked stone is still annoying, but Black now has the corner and can attack White.



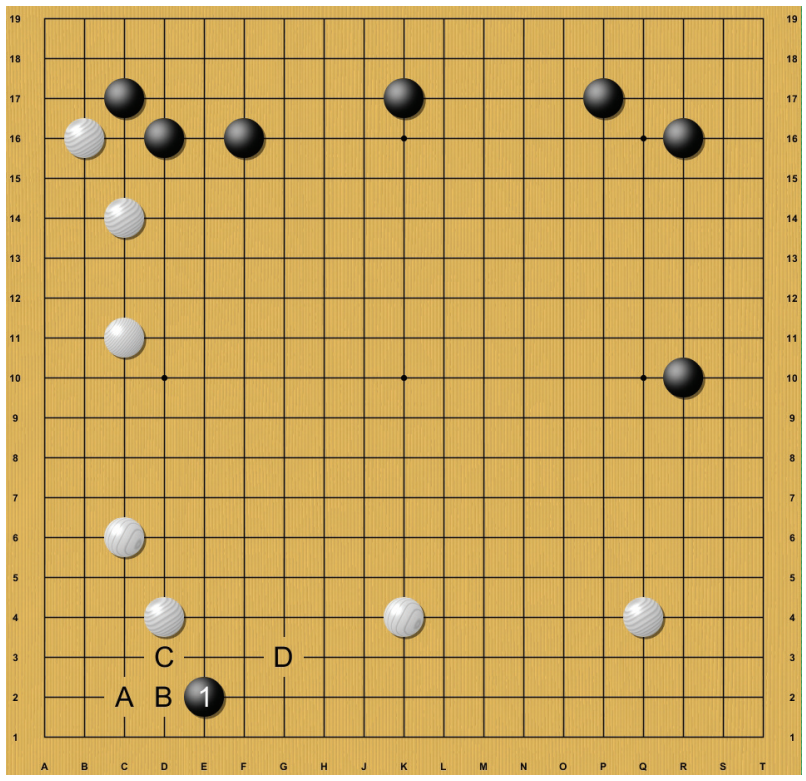
Choice B - Black gets influence on both sides

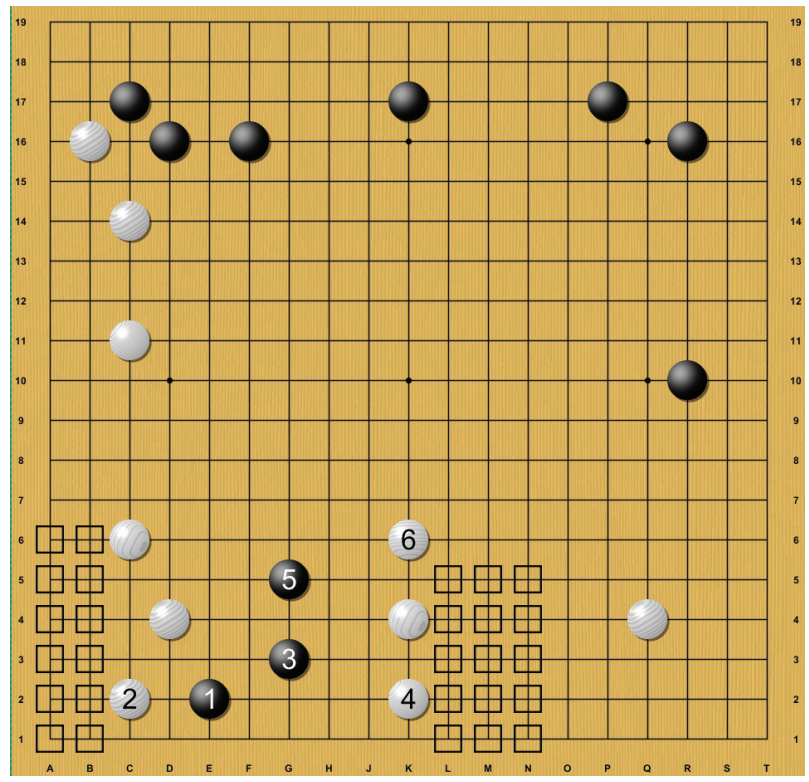
White 1 places Black's stone in atari, so **Black 2** extends.
White 3 makes the hane reducing Black's liberties, so Black needs to respond at **move 4**. White could connect, but he wants more eye-space in the corner so he plays the tiger's mouth connection at **move 5**.
Black 6 places White in atari, so **move 7** is forced.
Now Black needs to defend his cutting points at **move 8** and White gets the time to live with **move 9. Black 10** is the finishing touch to this joseki and if Black has the **ladder**, White's stone is captured. The marked stone is still annoying, but Black now has influence on both sides.



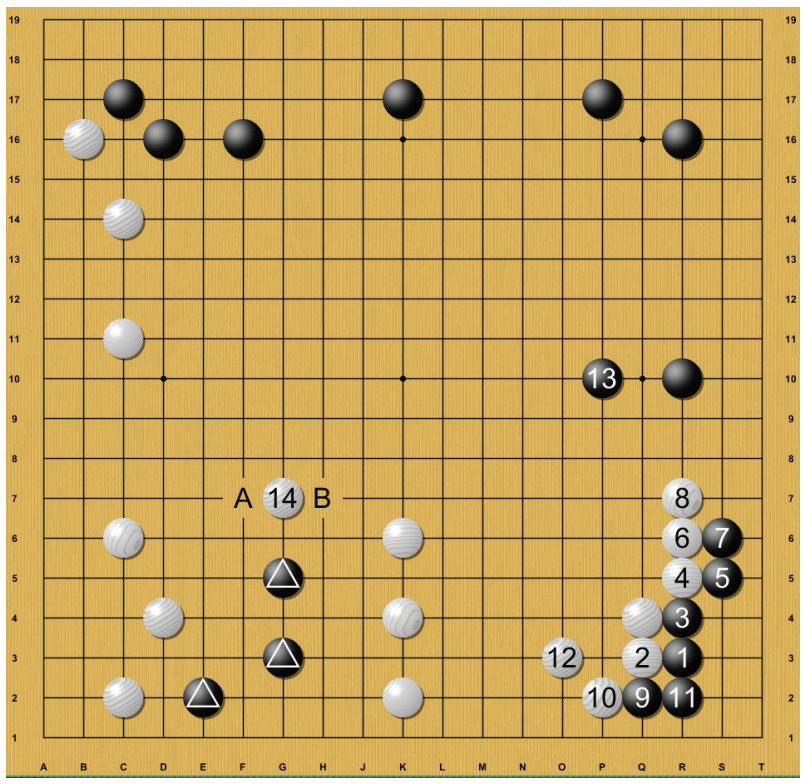
Choice C - Black gets the corner back (again)

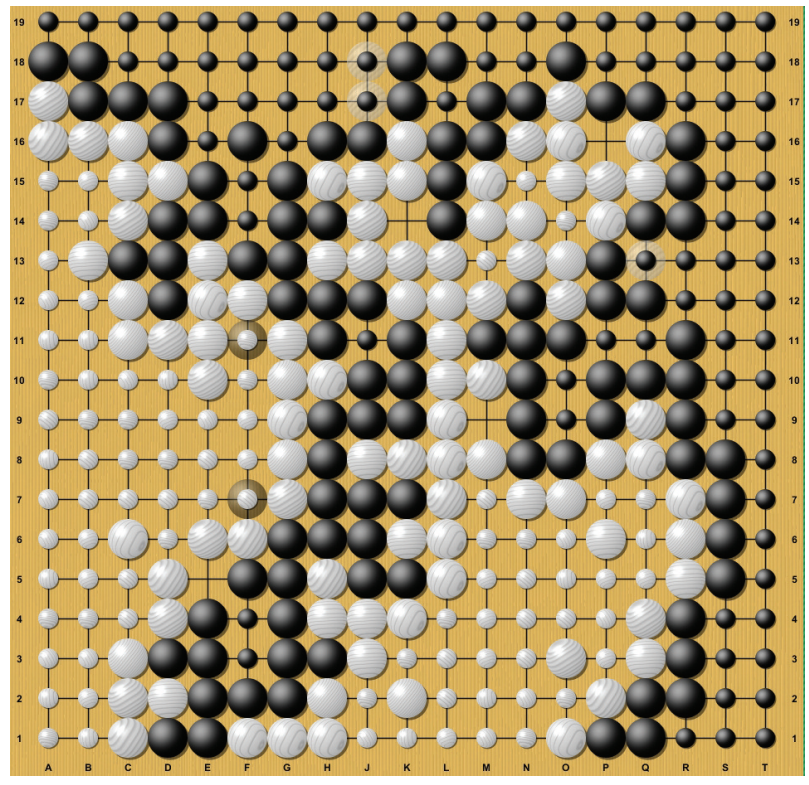
White 1 goes immediately for the hane and **Black 2** blocks.
White 3 makes another turn and threatens to capture all Black stones, but **Black 4** connects.
White 5 places the black stone in atari and **Black 6** does the same with White's stone, forcing the capture at **move 7**.
Black 8 re-captures the corner and gets influence on the left side. White gets sente and a good shape, facing his marked stone. A balanced result. Notice that the two players practically changed sides and now Black is on the left side and White on the bottom side.





Left image: What we want is to stay safe, use our influence and nearby stones and gain as much as we can, while the opponent tries to live. In this game, both players split the board diagonally and **Black 1** is the first invasion of the game. White could play **B** or **C**, but that would be too complicated. Choice **D** isn't doing much and gives the left corner to Black for free, so White chooses the safest path which protects the corner and stabilizes White's group: Choice **A**.
Right image: After White played **move 2**, Black has no eye space so he needs to run and try to create some space for him with **move 3**. White simply descends with **move 4** and eliminates the possibility of Black living there, so Black has to run again with **move 5** and White follows with **move 6**. Look carefully at the square marked points. White wins those points without any effort, while Black struggles...



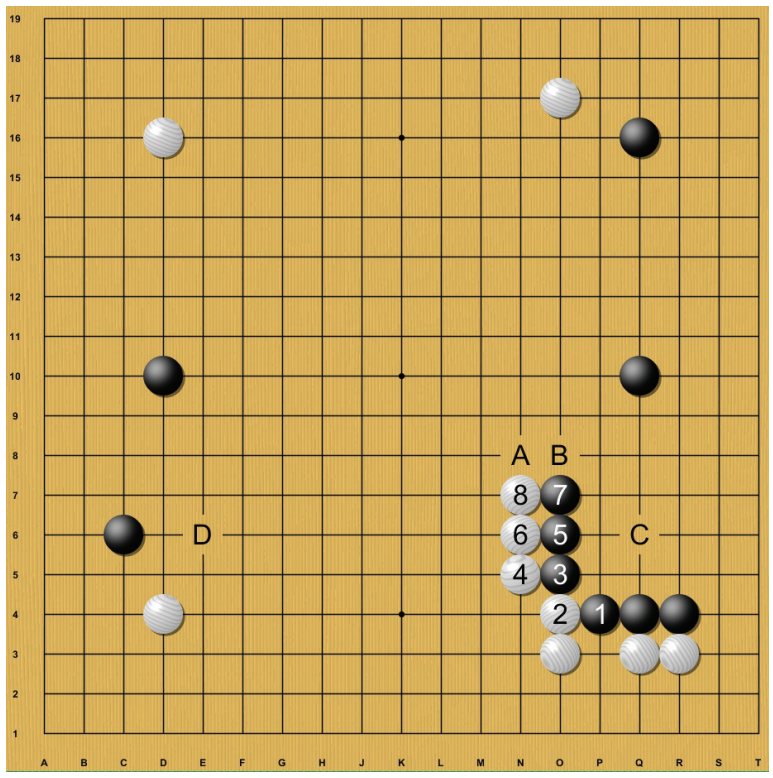


Left image: Black thinks he is safe and plays the 3-3 bottom right corner invasion. After the joseki is played out, Black uses sente to play **move 13**, which expands Black's top framework and threatens White framework in the bottom. But Black forgot about the three marked stones and after **White 14** surrounds them, Black must fight a long fight with either **A** or **B** to escape and reach for help and survive.
Right image: Black did manage to escape in the end, but at what cost! White chased him all the way to the top and got enough points to win.

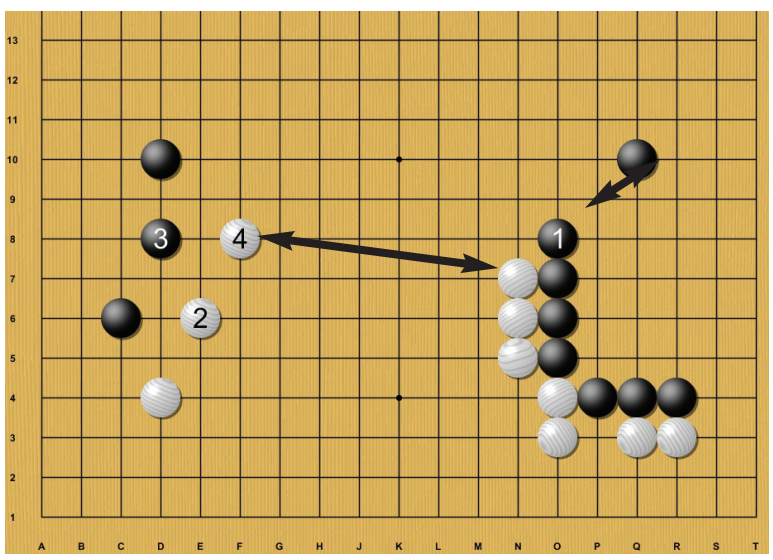
Remember: Keep things simple! Attack from afar, try to surround. That is the easiest way to profit.

Remember: Urgent moves are more important than large moves. Keep your groups safe!

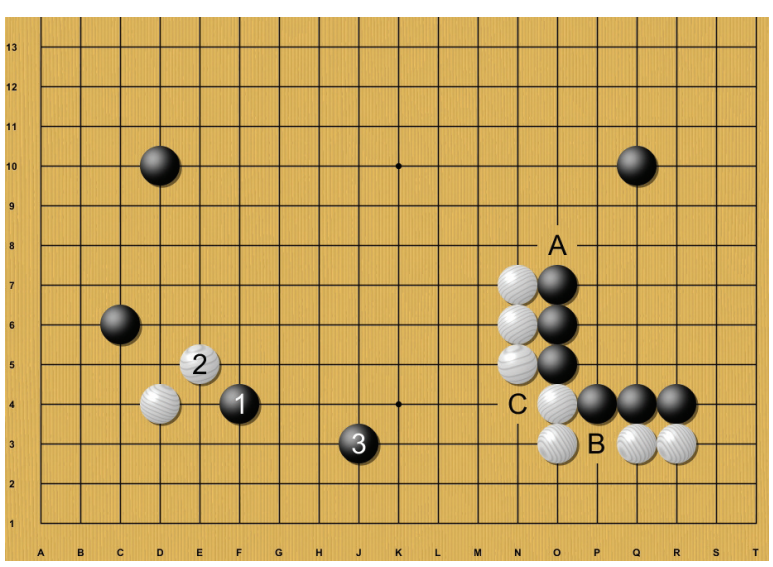
Deciding when to keep playing for influence or territory and when to stop, is not always easy. We need to take into account what is going on in the whole board in order to decide and this is usually difficult to do. The general guideline is that *when our strategy is starting to give too much compensation to the opponent, we should switch gears and try to reverse some of the damage*. Judging which problem and area is larger on the board after each move is maybe the main focus on playing the game and having fun. Let us see an example:



In this game Black is trying a similar idea like we provided at the end of **page 136** by occupying the central shape point with **move 1**. The rest of the moves are not joseki and White is pushing up, gaining enormous influence while giving Black a lot or territory. Black needs to play all the moves till **move 7** in order to protect his weak point at **C**, but he is not happy at all about the huge influence White is gaining.
The main points in this local fight are **A** and **B**. It is Black's turn and he can keep extending at **B** and get more safe territory or hit White's stones on the head at **A** and enlarge that territory, while giving White more influence. If Black doesn't play either of them White can play at **B** and reduce Black's group. Black knows that his group is safe, even if White plays there, so he is thinking about the next image...

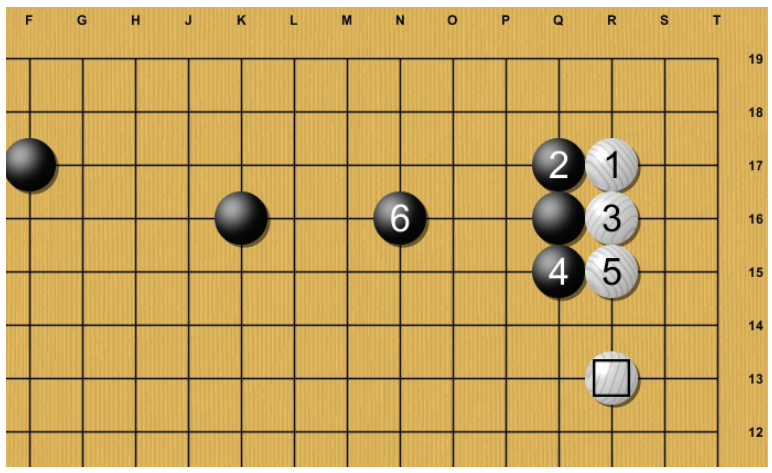


If Black keeps extending his stones, then that doesn't really make any difference on his small sector line. White has enough influence now that he can simply stop following him on the right side and play **move 2** on the left side. Black will be forced to play **move 3** in order to defend the weak connection between his stones and then White by simply playing **move 4** will have created a sector line between his two walls that spans a great portion of the board! Black simply cannot allow that to happen, in exchange of a few points on the right side...

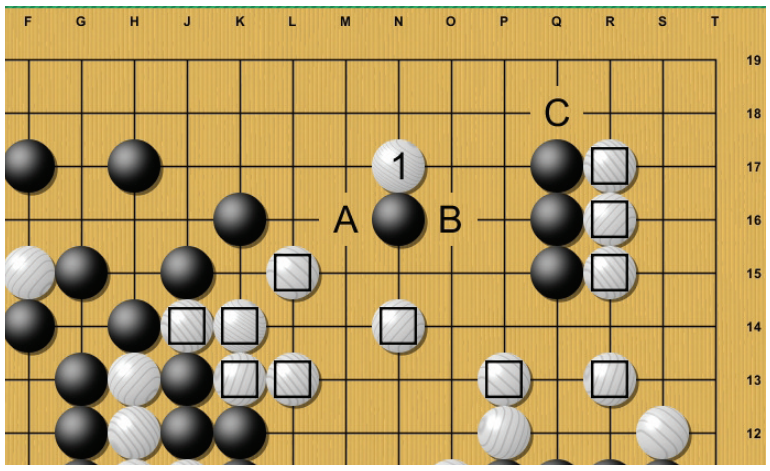


So, Black doesn't play at **A** and plays the double corner approach at **move 1**. White plays the diagonal extension at **move 2**, so that he doesn't get surrounded and Black plays the large knight's move at **3** in order to create a base and threaten to take advantage of the cutting points at White's formation at **B** and **C**.
White will get to play at **A** and cause significant problems at Black, but at least Black prevented the creation of a huge framework. Not an easy decision and neither player can know at this moment in the game if it was correct or not.

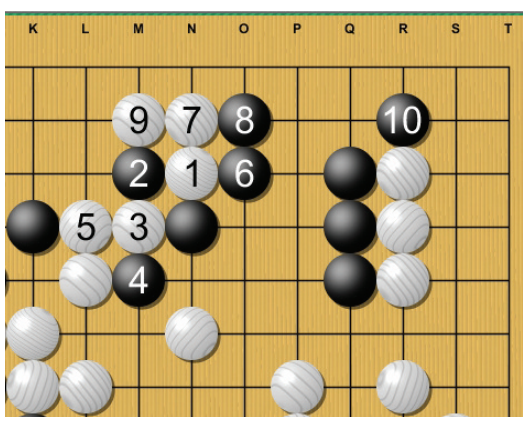
The board is ever-shifting and areas that we deemed safe and settled, can eventually come to be into harm's way. Continuing the idea of the re-evaluation of the whole board in each move, we should always keep in mind that invasions that seem impossible at an early point in the game, might become very feasible as the game progresses and more stones are placed. In this regard *we should never play small end-game moves in the early stages of the game*, in order to keep as much of the possible aji for the future. For example:



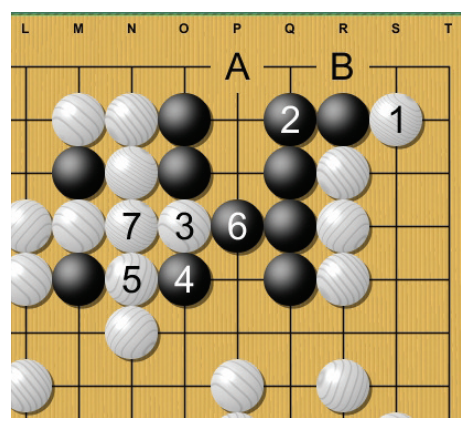
This is another game where Black went for the simple solution of **page 136**. In this case it wasn't needed, since Black already has another stone near move 6 and he is overconcentrated, but now he thinks that this whole top side is solid territory for him.
It is true, that for now White cannot contest this area at all, so he does what we just said. **White avoids to play into this area and help Black finish the job.** So, White plays elsewhere on the board and Black never finds a reason to reinforce these stones...



But the games goes on and many moves later, Black's stones are feeling the heat. Take a look at the marked White stones and compare the situation with the previous image. Black never really had the time to reinforce the top right stones, since he was responding to White's moves, but in his mind that area was safe and settled.
But that was no longer the case. After **move 1**, White can get away by taking advantage of the weak points at **A**, **B** or even **C**...



What followed next was a complicated life and death situation which is the topic of the next chapter. The images of the fight are provided just as an example and a reminder why we pointed that we should try and keep things simple and avoid complex fights, until we are confident that we know what we are doing. If you choose to study the sequence, some pointers:



Left image: Black tries to cut with **move 2** and White tries to connect with **move 3**. Black recklessly places White in atari with **move 4**, practically helping him to play **move 5** for free! You should avoid these kinds of moves, but Black does it again with **move 6**, which forces White to play **move 7**. Black pushes with **move 8** and too late realized that his stone at **2** is now captured, after **move 9**. Suddenly he notices that he doesn't have two eyes anymore and tries to create more space to live with **move 10**.
Right image: Black's plan doesn't work, despite his efforts of pushing stones around, he ends up with this shape which is dead. Why is it dead though? It is Black's turn and **A** and **B** are **miai**.
If Black plays **A**, then White plays **B** and Black has only one eye. The same stands true in the opposite case, so Black is dead.
Knowledge of close combat fights and the shapes that lead to life or death is very important when planning on your invasions or reductions, so this is exactly what we will focus next. **Life and death!**

About life and death

Life and death is the issue of when your group is alive or dead, after a close contact fight erupts. These fights can occur anywhere on the board, but they are usually found in the corners and the sides, where most invasions happen.

There are thousands of life and death problems (called **tsumego**) and there are books specifically dedicated to them, since good knowledge of life and death is considered one of the most important skills in the game. It is said that one of the ways to rapid improvement in Go is through the extensive study of tsumego. You should be wary of such advice though, because total focus on local life and death problems, could make you lose the greater picture and miscalculate the situation of the whole board. I think that the best advice in this case is balance and moderation in everything.

Previously we talked extensively about the shape of two stones and of many stones in relation to each other, but we didn't concern ourselves too much on the matter of shape in relation to the eye-shape it is creating and whether that shape can create two eyes or not. *Our most basic goal to the solution of a tsumego is* ***forcing the opponent with sente moves*** *to end up with a shape that cannot create two eyes*.

Before achieving our goal, it is reasonable to say that we need to first know what this goal looks like. In tsumego, *we need to make each move count and each move needs to force the opponent to play in a particular way*. We need to force our opponent, step by step, to his doom and more often than not even if we have a general idea of what we want to play, *the sequence of the appropriate moves can make a significant difference* to whether we will succeed in killing our opponent's group or not.

Do not think though that this is only a lesson in extremely aggressive offense. Far from it. The study of life and death problems is also a great exercise in defense. You will encounter greedy players that will try to invade almost every space of your territory - regardless of how strong you are in an area - and you need to know how to deal with them. Attacking them in this case is actually a forced defense. Also you will need to know the usual living shapes and the general weak spots that appear in a life and death problem in the game, in order to ensure that your groups can withstand the attack of the opponent. **In Go, knowledge of offense, is essentially knowledge of defense and vice versa.**

Sometimes people complain that life and death problems are needlessly complex and that some particular problems would never show up in real games. Sometimes I feel that way as well, so, in that regard, *all the examples and problems presented, will be from real games*.

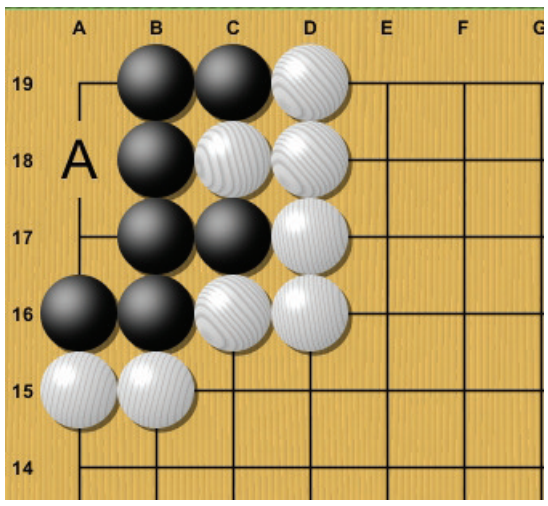
Living and dead shapes

Our first step in our study will be the knowledge of most living and dead shapes. Our second step, after we have set our eyes to our goal, will be to explain some general ideas and skillful plays (called **tesuji**) might affect those shapes in either defense or offense. Let us start with the various shapes and spaces.

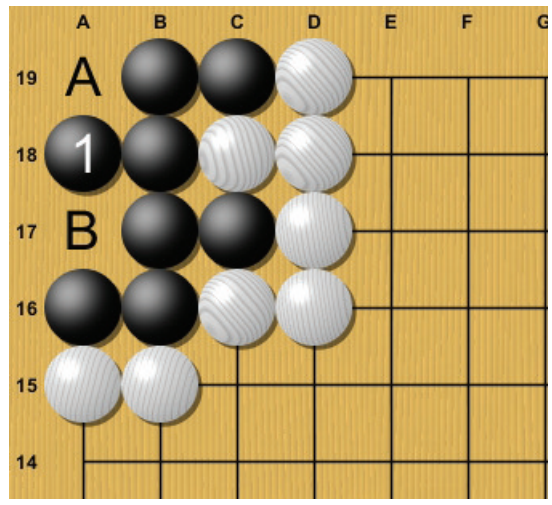
Shapes of three point spaces

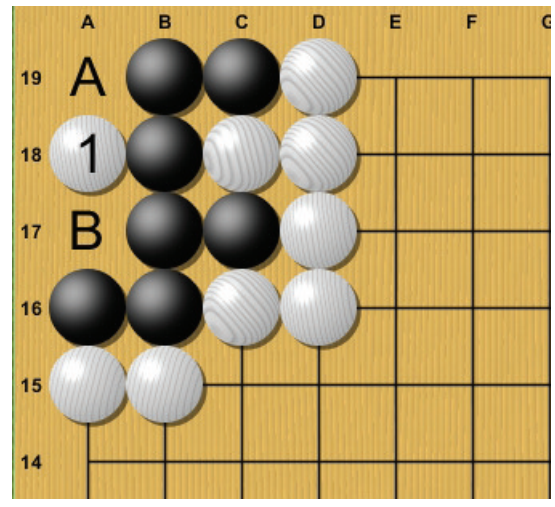
Spaces that consist of three points are dead or alive depending on whose turn is it to play. Taking into account how small they are, this means that they usually end up dead in the course of the game, but that doesn't mean that you cannot force your opponent to play elsewhere in order to secure the critical next move for yourself.

Let us first see the possible shapes and we will see an example of such manipulation.

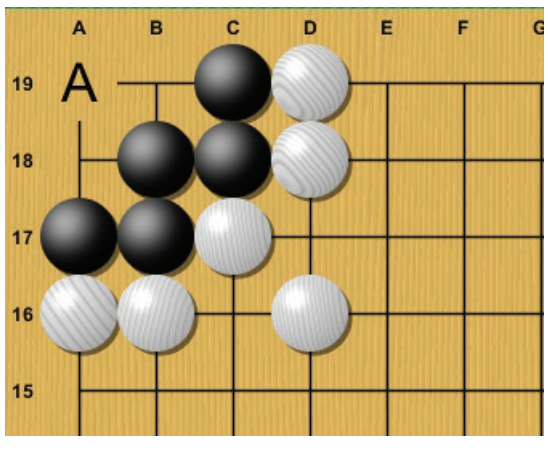


The first shape is **three points in a row**. The center point at **A** is the vital point in this case...

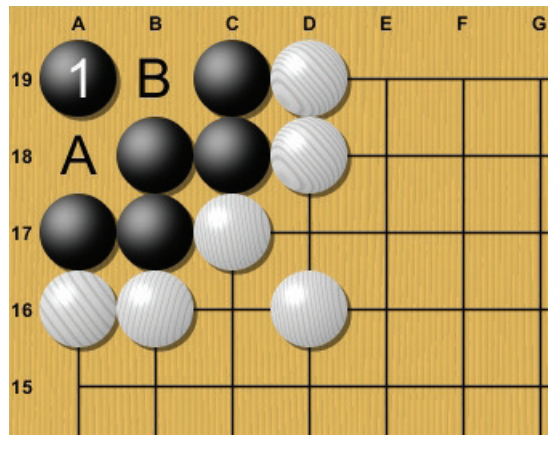


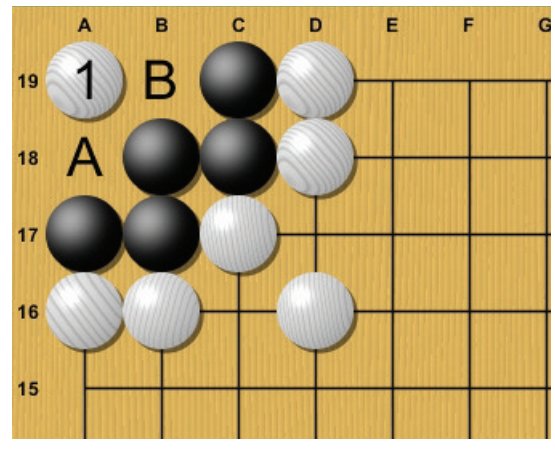


Left image: If Black plays there first, then he is alive since he has two eyes at **A** and **B**.
Right image: If White plays first, then Black has only one eye, since he will have to fill the liberties at **A** and **B** to capture White.



The second shape is **bent three formation**. The center at **A** is again the vital point...



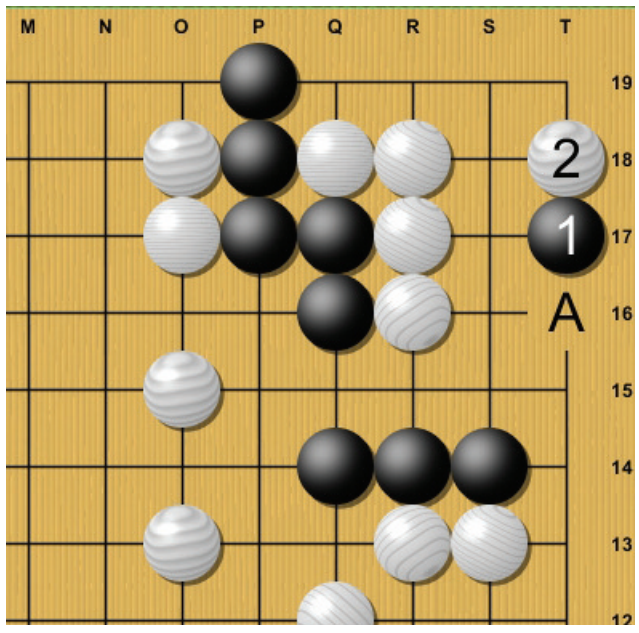


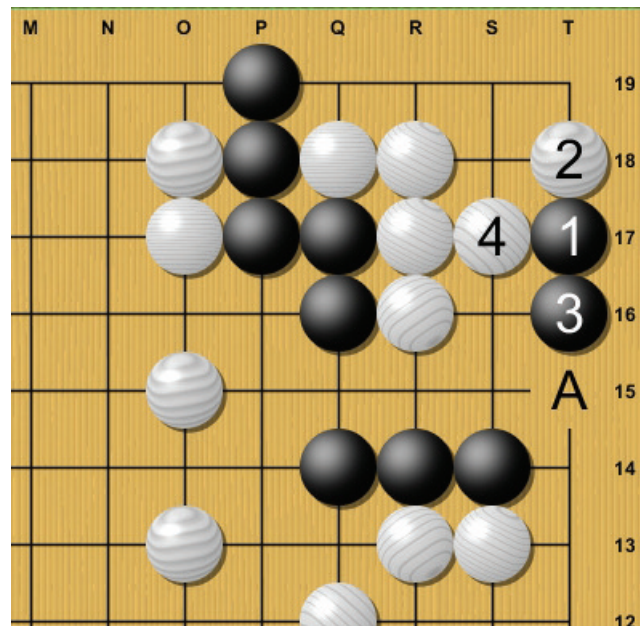
Left image: Just like in the previous shape, if Black plays there first, then he is alive since he has two eyes at **A** and **B**.
Right image: If White plays first, then Black has only one eye.

Useful tip: The center of symmetry of every shape is usually critical to the status of that shape. The same thing applies for the points around the position where a shape stops being symmetric. A lot of vital points can usually be found by looking around for symmetry.

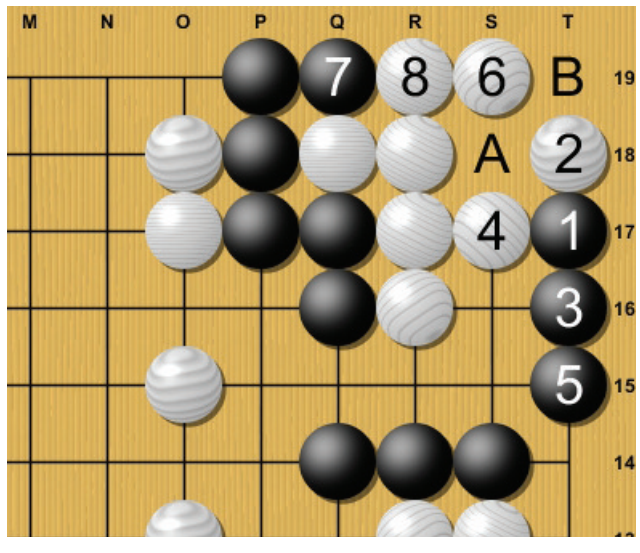
As we said, due to the eye space being too small, the defending player is usually ending up not being the one that has the last move that decides the fate of this group, but sometimes, when there are multiple threats on the local situation, the defending player can end up with sente at the critical moment.

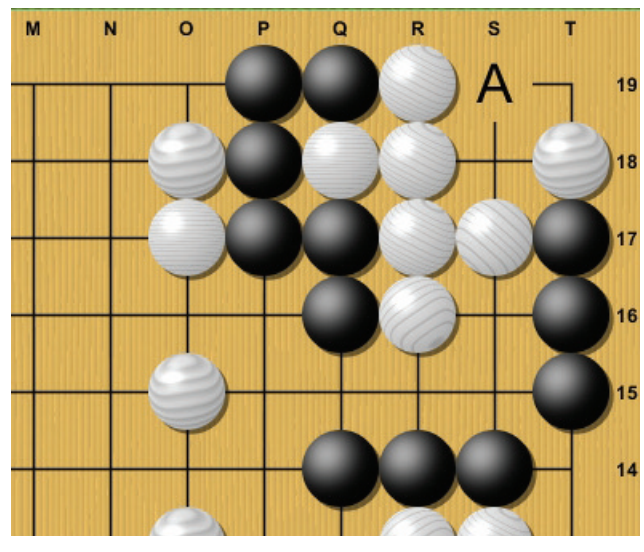
Let us see a real game example:





Left image: White has Black surrounded and Black has White surrounded. If Black can kill the White group in the corner, then he survives. If not, then the Black group has no eyes and it dies. So Black needs to kill the White group urgently, so he tries the monkey jump at **1** and White makes a standard response at **move 2**. If Black is lured in also playing the standard extension at **A** then he might lose the fight.
Right image: If Black extends, then White can simply continue with **move 4**. Now Black might feel that if he doesn't play at **A**, then White can play there in the next move and place Black's stones in atari, effectively ending the fight in favour of White.





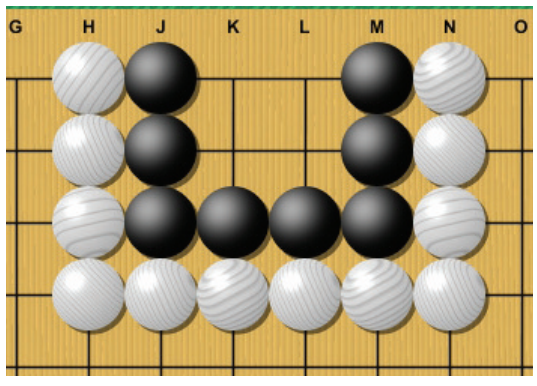
Left image: If Black follows the usual monkey jump sequence and plays **move 5** to connect his stones, now White has sente and the bent three shape, so he plays **move 6** and ensures that his group is alive. Even after the exchange of **move 7** and **8**, nothing can threaten the eyes at **A** and **B**. White is alive and Black feels like he was forced to play moves that were not to his best interest. On **page 153** we will learn about the **throw-in tesuji** which would have provided Black with choices other than the standard monkey jump moves that would have ended this fight in Black's favour.
Right image: In case that it is not apparent that we have the bent three shape, in this image it is obvious that the end result is in fact the bent three shape, where White managed to gain sente and play at **A** first.

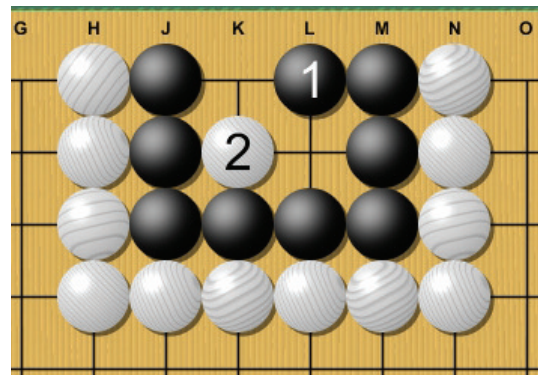
Useful tip: Finding threats and sente moves in a local fight is the key to unlocking the problem, for both sides. If you find yourself being forced in responding to your opponent's moves in order to survive, then you can be certain that he has a trap waiting for you. Look carefully and try to avoid it!

Shapes of four point spaces

The status of the shapes that consist of four points can vary from shapes that are **dead**, to shapes whose status depends on who plays first and shapes that are unconditionally **alive**. One of them can even lead to a ko fight, depending on the situation and that means that with spaces composed by four points we can practically experience the full spectrum of possibilities, regarding the results that can arise from a life and death problem.

With the shapes getting more complicated it is worth noting that, for the moment, we are reviewing the shapes with all the stones totally connected. The added complexity of shape defects will be discussed later on **page 148**. Let us see the five shapes and their characteristics:

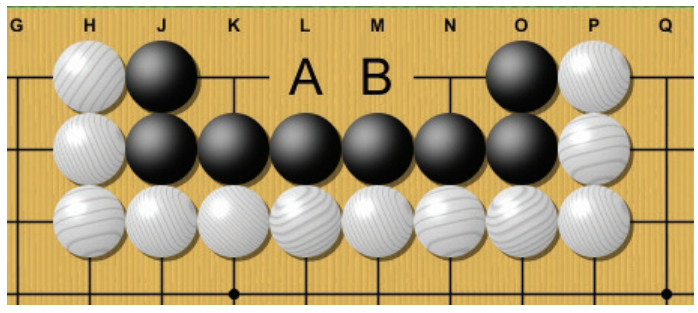


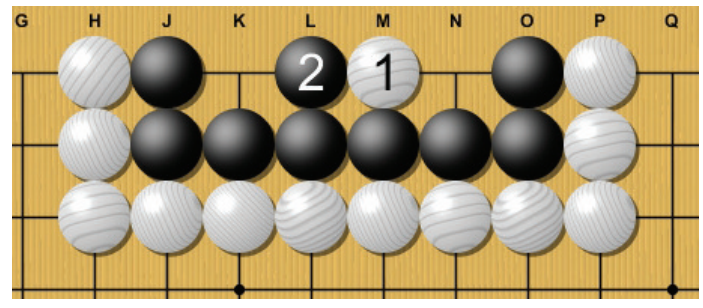


Shape 1 - Four points in a square (unconditionally dead)

Left image: This shape is totally symmetric and always leads to the bent three shape

Right image: This means that White will always get to occupy the vital point of the bent three formation and kill Black's stones, even if Black plays first. So, this shape is **dead**.

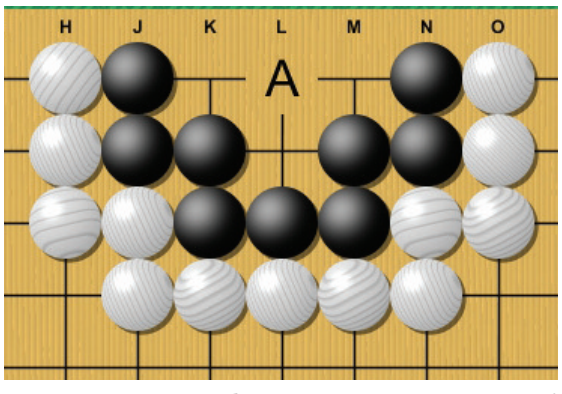


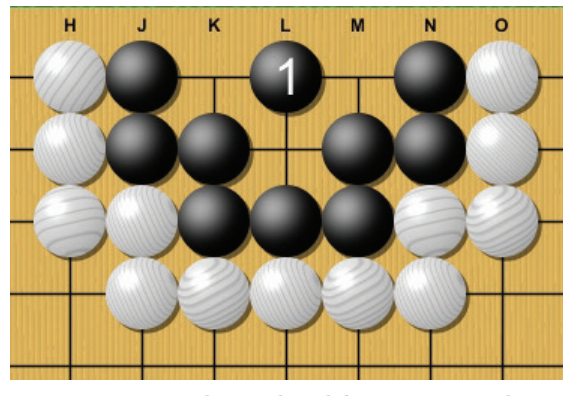


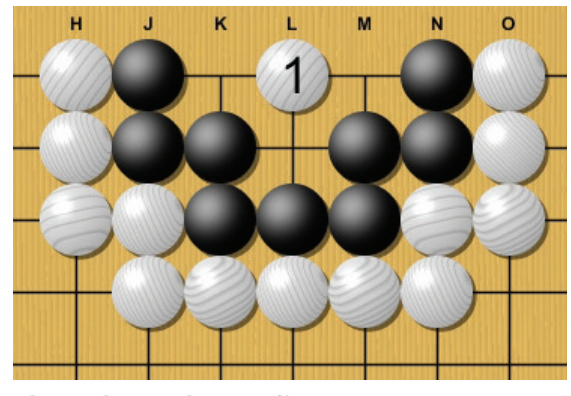
Shape 2 - Four points in a line (unconditionally alive)

Left image: This shape is also symmetric, but here we have two vital points **A** and **B** that are **miai**.

Right image: Even if White gets to play first, Black can play on the other point and make two eyes. So, this shape is **alive**.



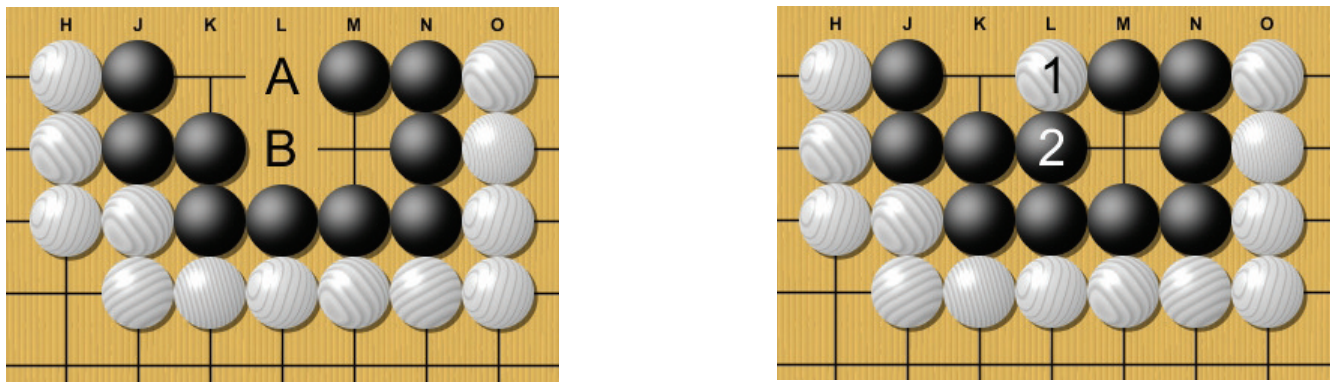




Shape 3 - Four points arranged as half-cross (depends who plays first)

Left image: This shape is also symmetric, but here we have only one vital point at **A**.

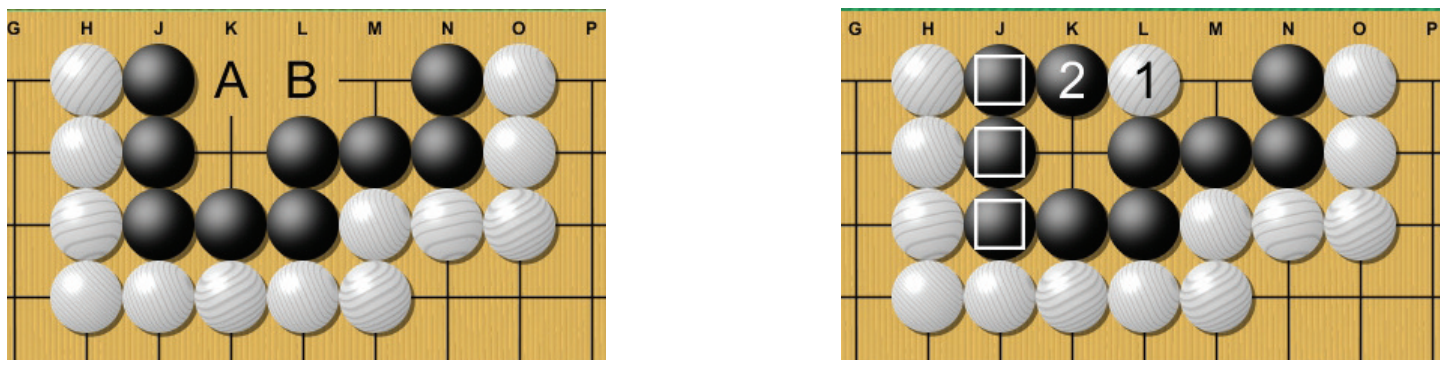
Center/Right image: Depending on who plays first Black can have three eyes and be alive or only one eye and be dead (since he needs to fill all those points to capture the White stone).



<u>Shape</u> 4 - Four points arranged like a ladder (unconditionally alive)

Left image: Another symmetric shape with two vital points, where **A** and **B** are **miai**.

Right image: Even if White gets to play first, Black can play on the other point and make two eyes. So, this shape is **alive**.



Shape 5 - Four points arranged in a bent four shape (alive or special case)

Left image: This shape in not symmetric, but despite that it also has two vital points **A** and **B** that are **miai**.

Right image: This means that this shape is alive, just like the previous one, with only one exception when the bent four is located in the corner. In that case, the square marked stones are missing and are replaced by the edge of the board, creating a different result in this sequence...

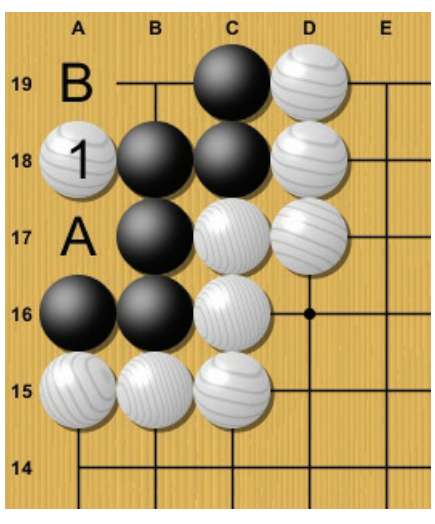
<u>A lot of interesting things happen in the corners for three reasons:</u>

a) Due to the proximity to the edge of the board, liberties are usually in very short supply and that can alter the parameters of the problem significantly

b) Since corners are the intersection of the two sides of the board, this creates unique vital points that can be used to create or destroy eyes easier than any other place on the board

c) The two sides of the board replace solid walls of friendly stones in the creation of the relative shapes, which can alter the status of the group drastically

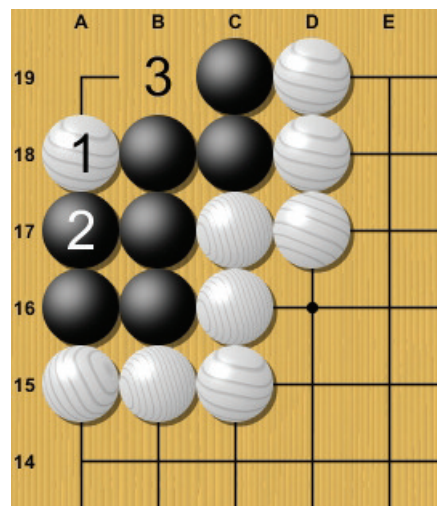
The bent four in the corner is created by the third reason and it is ideal to introduce us to these properties of the corners. Let us see how its cases work:

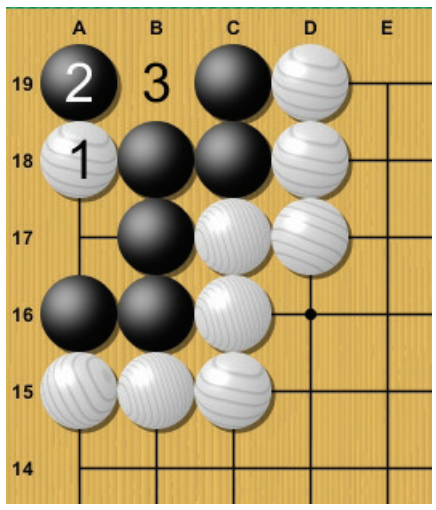


Case 1
bent four shape in the corner
with zero or one outside liberty

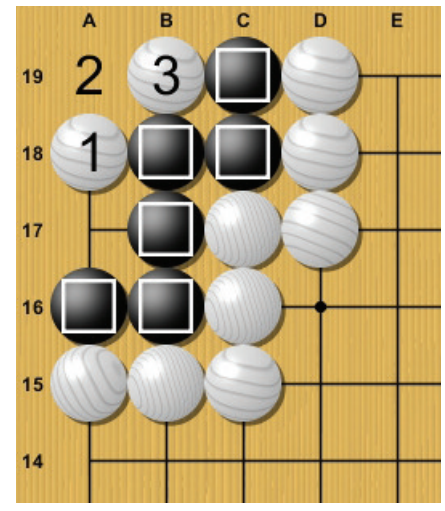
Left image: If White plays at the vital point at **move 1**, now Black needs to capture this stone and has only **A** and **B** as his choices. Black playing **B** leads to a ko fight.

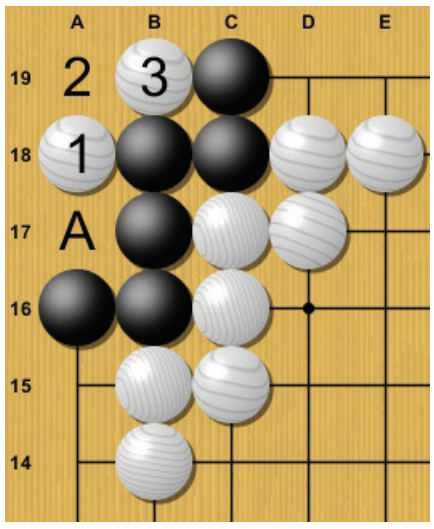
Right image: If Black tries to **atari** the White stone that way he places his own group in **atari** as well, so if he plays **move 3**, White would capture all Black stones...





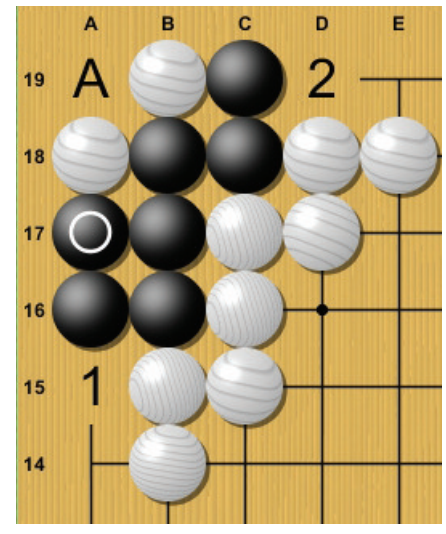
Left image: Black can only play this **move 2**, but since this stone is now alone on the edge of the board, this immediately places Black's stone in atari and White can capture it with his next move.
Right image: Indeed **White 3** captures the Black stone and places all the square marked stones in atari and starts a **ko**. Black needs to find a **ko threat** in order to have a chance of capturing back White's stone with **move 6**, as we described on **page 13**.





Case 2
bent four shape in the corner
with two or more outside liberties

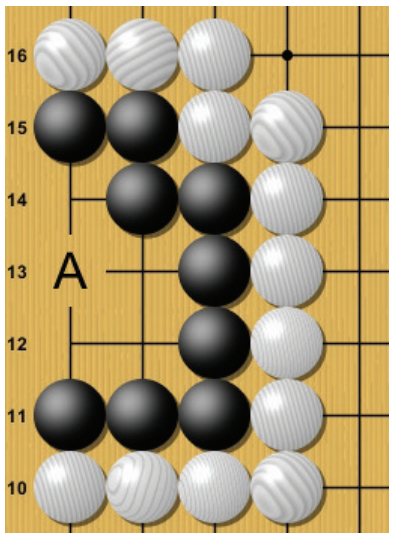
Left image: If the same moves as before are played, the extra outside liberties give Black the ability to live with the interesting move at **A**.
Right image: This is the end result. White cannot play at **A** because it is suicide and he cannot capture Black because of the two marked liberties. If White fills one of those liberties, Black captures two stones at **A** and makes two eyes!



Interesting fact: The japanese rules consider the bent four shape in the corner as de-facto dead, even though it can clearly survive in some cases. There is some controversy around that decision, especially since other rule sets, like the Chinese rules, declare that the ko should be played out in order for the stones to be considered dead, but we will not get into any detail in that debate.

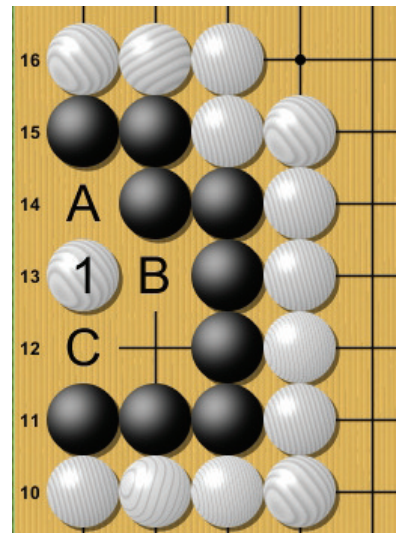
Shapes of five point spaces

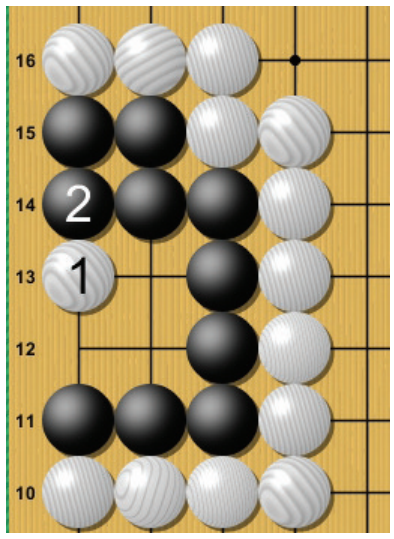
It is intuitive that the larger the spaces, the easier it is for them to be deemed unconditionally alive. *This is true about most shapes made of five points, but* we should still be really cautious of two particular shapes that arise from adding another point to four point spaces that were previously compromised.
For example, the four points in a square is unconditionally dead. If we add another point to that shape it is now called the "bulky five", but will it be alive now and what is the other five point space that we need to be worried about?
Let us see the answers to these questions:

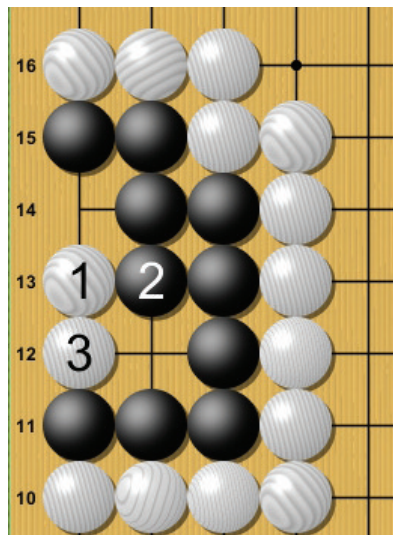


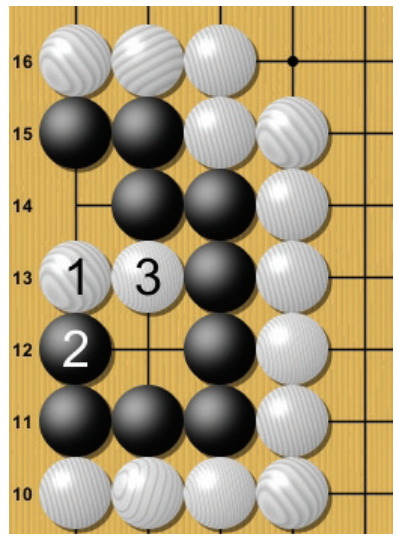
Shape 1 - The "bulky five"
(depends who plays first)

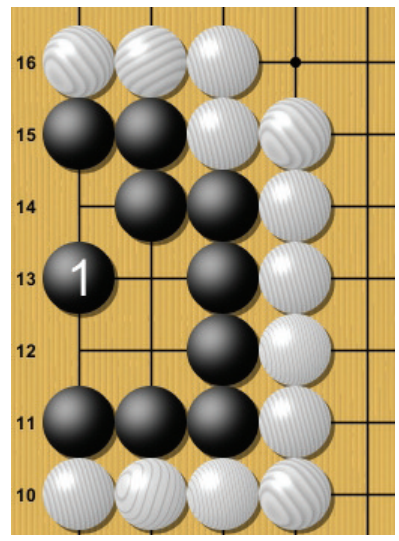
Left image: As we saw with the four point square, there were no vital points there that could help this shape live, but the addition of one point creates a place where the symmetry is broken and now we have a vital point at **A**.
Right image: If Black plays first at the vital point then it is obvious that he has two eyes, but if White plays first, then Black has to capture him and fill his own liberties. Choices **A**, **B** and **C** do not work...



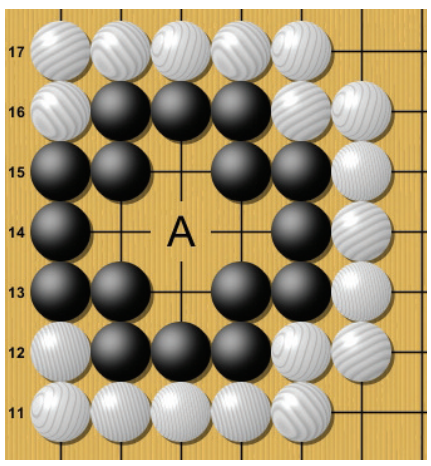








There is nothing Black can do to make two eyes. The only way to live is to play in the vital point first.

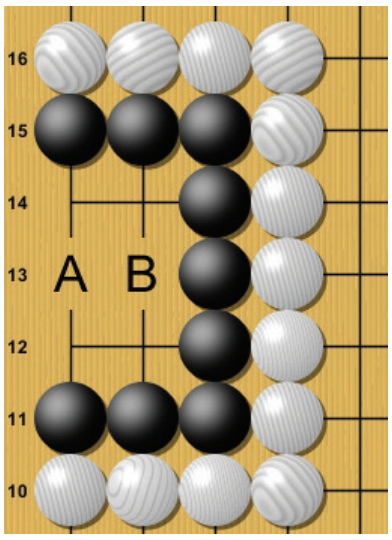


Shape 2
Five points arranged as a cross
(depends who plays first)

If we add one point to the half-cross shape of **page 144** and create a shape of a complete cross we notice that the vital point does not move from the center of symmetry. This means that the life and death status of this kind of shape is totally the same even with the added point and it totally depends on who has sente and plays the next move on the vital point at **A**.

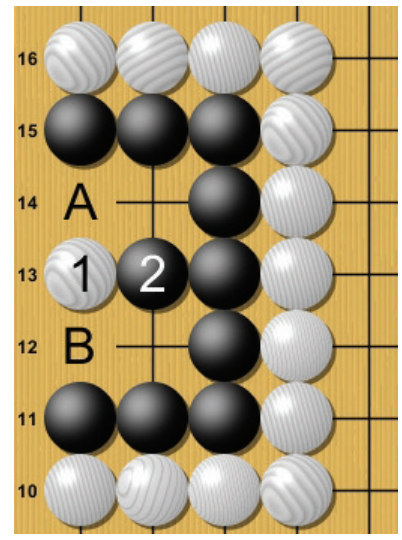
Shapes of six point spaces

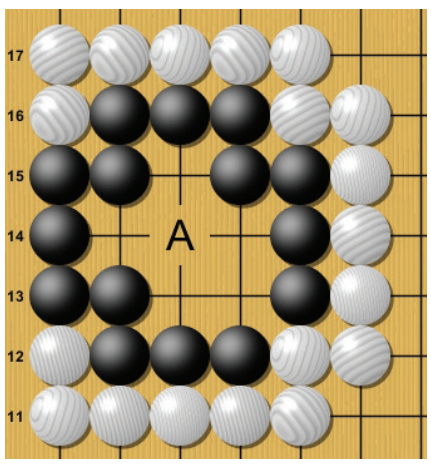
With six points the amount of shapes and the safety those can provide increase and the only dangerous shapes arise by adding points to shapes that previously had some issues. Depending on how we add those points, the group can be conditionally or unconditionally alive.



Shape 1 - The “rectangular six”
(unconditionally alive)

Left image: Adding another point to the “bulky five” makes it symmetric and leads to the creation of another vital point. Now that we have two vital points, **A** and **B**, and due to symmetry those vital points are **miai**.
Right image: Even if White plays first at one point, Black can play on the other point making a living shape. **A** and **B** are **miai** again. If White plays **A**, Black makes two eyes with **B** and vice versa, so this shape is unconditionally alive.

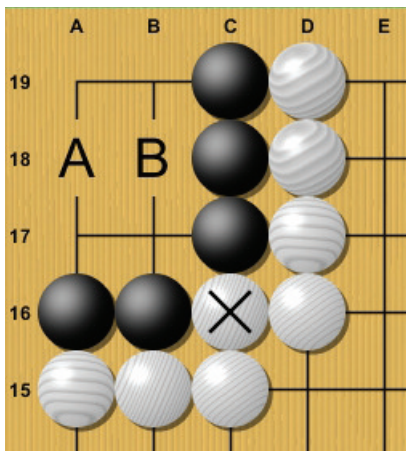




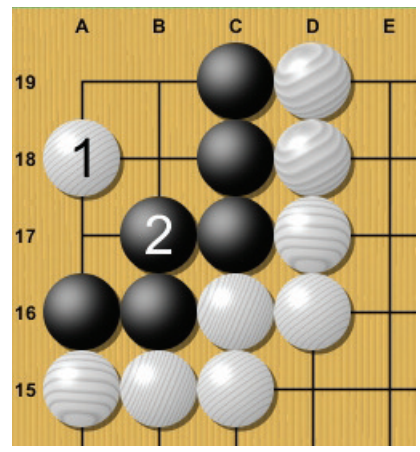
Shape 2
The “rabbitty six”
(depends who plays first)

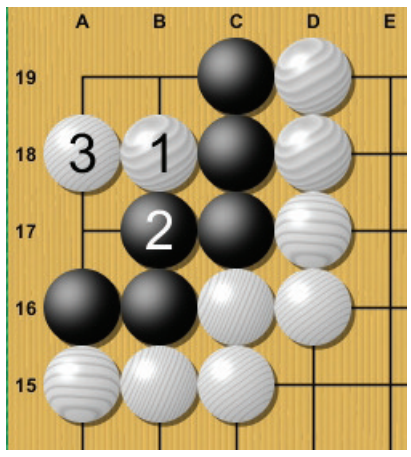
Notice how similar is this shape to the five points arranged as a cross that we mentioned above. The addition of this extra point is totally inconsequential to the symmetry of the shape so the vital point at **A** remains unchanged and whoever plays there first will define the status of this group.
Notice that the concept of symmetry seems to be a recurring theme in our line of thinking about life and death problems.

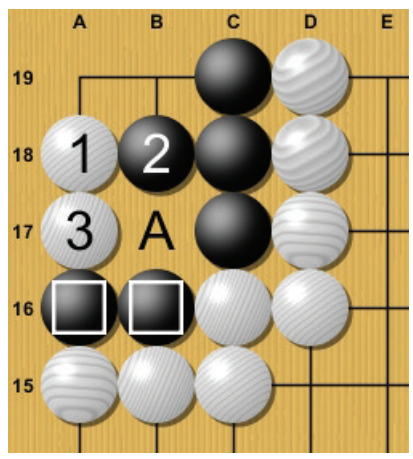
The rectangular six is a good example to introduce the idea of the condition (or status) of a living shape **that has defects in its formation**. We just said that the rectangular six is unconditionally alive, but that is true only if the shape is totally solid as in the simple example that was provided for the sake of explanation. Unfortunately in real games the shapes are rarely so clearly defined and solidly formed and they can have defects. For example:

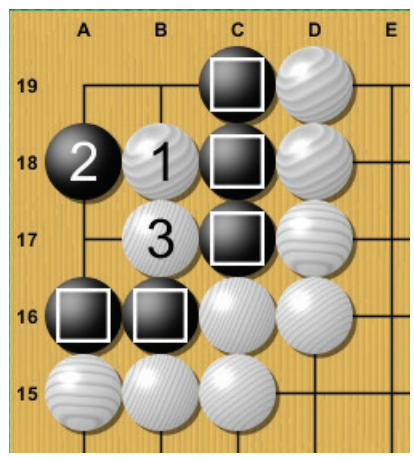


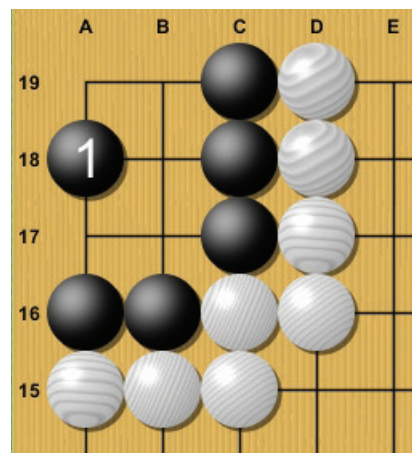
Left image: This looks like a rectangular six with the usual vital points, but there is a severe defect at the **X** marked stone. In the original shape, that stone should have been Black in order for this shape to be unconditionally alive. As it is now, the status of this group depends on who plays next.
Right image: If White plays next in one of the vital points and Black tries to connect his stones, we have the "bulky five" shape which is dead here...



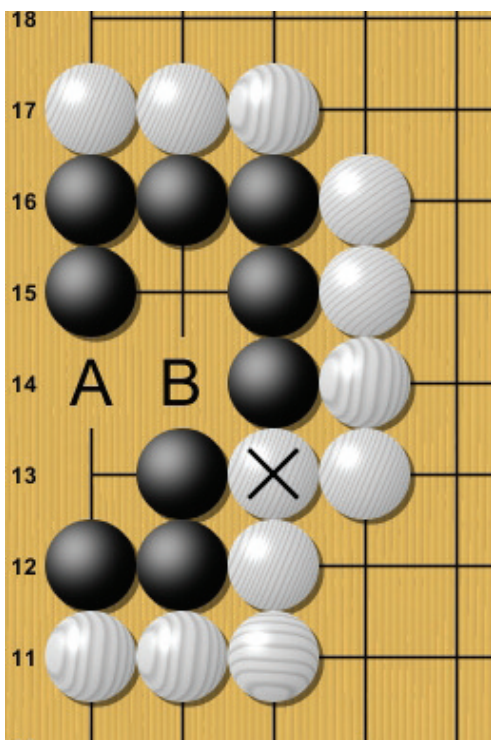




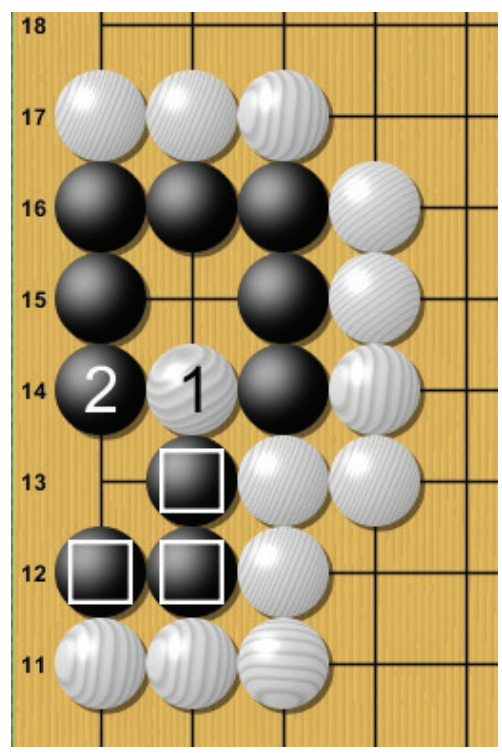




From left to right: If Black tries to connect his stones he ends up with the bulky five. If he tries to play on the other vital point, as with the original shape, then he ends up with the square marked stones in immediate atari and his group dies. The only solution is playing first at a vital point.



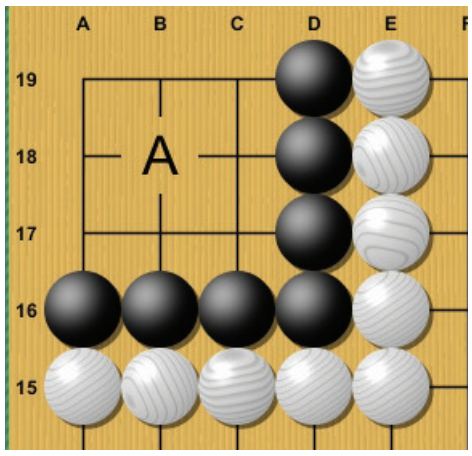
Left image: The same problems can occur in many living shapes. Here we see a shape that we declared unconditionally alive a few pages ago, but now it has a defect at the **X** marked stone. Just like in our previous example, this changes the situation drastically and the status of this group is demoted from alive, to being depended on who plays next.
Right image: If White plays **move 1** at this position he immediately places all the square marked stones in atari. Black cannot play the normal **move** at **2** and create two eyes anymore, or save his stones in any other way and so the whole group is dead.



Useful tip: Imperfections in the shapes and possible cutting points or shortage of liberties, are among the main factors that play an important role in life and death problems.

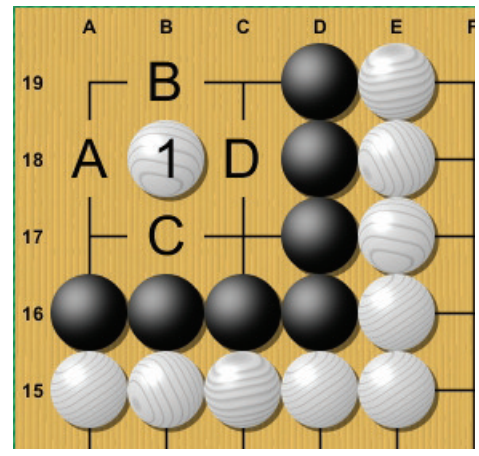
Shapes of seven or more point spaces

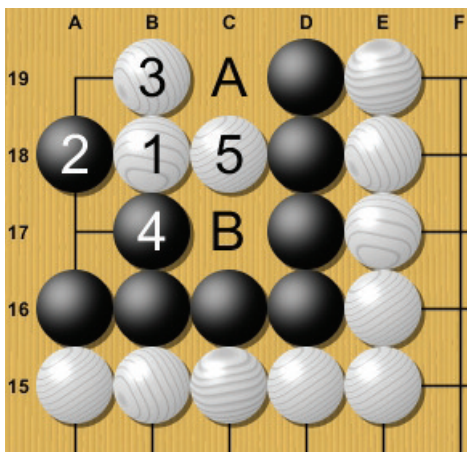
Shapes with so much space are generally alive, but *if the formation has defects or it has no outside liberties*, things can become tricky and lead to a ko or a seki. You need to keep in mind to be careful about the way your stones are connected in a life and death problem and to mind your outside liberties.
Oddly enough a shape that is famous for getting into a lot of trouble if it lacks outside liberties, has nine spaces. Let us see how it works:



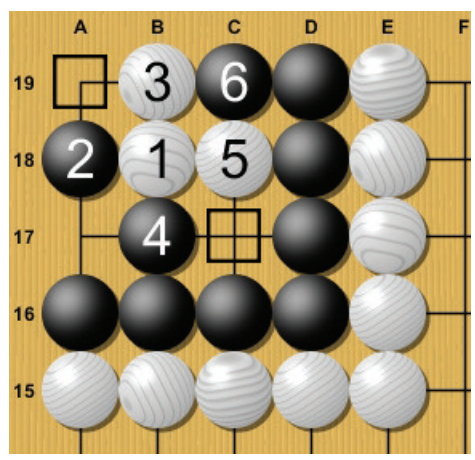
Left image: As it was to be expected only a totally symmetrical square shape could be so fragile even with so many amount of points. The vital point is, as usual, the center of symmetry at **A**.

Right image: If White plays first then if Black tries to capture that stone, all the choices from **A** to **D** are **miai** and they all lead to a favorable result for White.

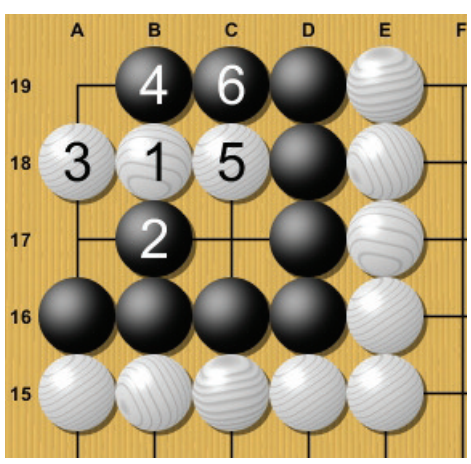




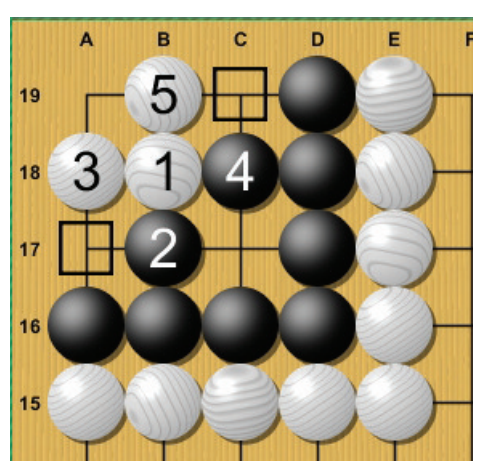
If Black tries this sequence, now **A** and **B** are his only next moves, but both end up with **dual life** (**seki**)...



If Black plays **move 6** in either **A** or **B** from the previous diagram, this means that White cannot be captured, because Black cannot play in the square marked points in the images, without setting his own stones in **atari**! So we have **seki**.



If Black tries something fancy like **move 4**, then this situation turns out to be another **seki**.



Left image: If Black tries to create an eye, then we have seki since he will be in **atari** if he fills the square marked points
Right image: If however Black has two outside liberties, like in this case, then Black can fill the square marked points without being in **atari**, so Black so Black has two eyes and is **alive**.

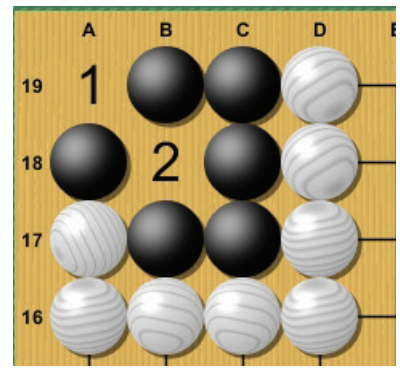
Remember: Try to not get completely surrounded. If you cannot avoid that, try to create eyes with living shapes that do not have severe defects that can place your group in atari.

Tesuji

First of all what is a tesuji? A skillful move or series of moves that aim to achieve a particular and difficult goal is called a **tesuji**. Sometimes the moves can be as simple as playing a diagonal move or slightly extending a group and other times they can be longer sequences that end up turning a situation to your favor. **Not all plays are tesuji.** As we mentioned, the situation needs to have some difficulty and demand some thought in order for a move, simple though it may appear afterwards, to be considered a tesuji. The main goals of a tesuji are:

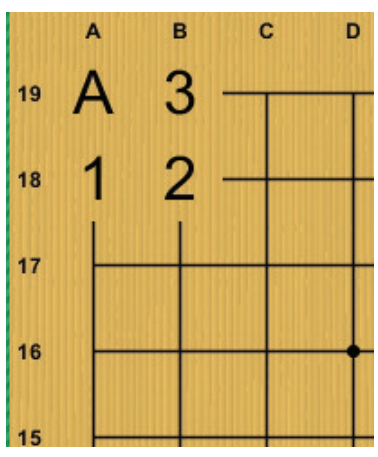
A) To reduce the liberties of an opposing group or help you create two eyes
B) To connect two groups and lead an endangered group to safety
C) To capture or disconnect the groups of the opponent

We have already seen some tesuji, like the ladder on **page 28** and the monkey jump on **page 58**. In this chapter we will focus on the tesuji that appear most often and will help us reduce liberties or capture our opponents, in order to gain the advantage in a life and death fight. By no means can all of them be covered in this book, so it is highly recommended that you study a book dedicated on tesuji, at some later point. Before we begin on the new tesuji, a small note about the **vital points** of the corner. We mentioned on **page 145** that the corner has the unique property of being an intersection of two walls, so it is easier to create eyes there. Indeed, the corner is only the place where a group of only six stones can make two eyes.



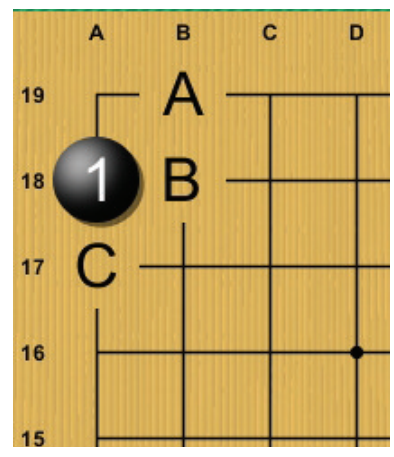
Six stones with two eyes

This creates a very special battlefield that cannot be replicated elsewhere on the board. You will be frustrated or saved many times by this particular property of the corners and it is the main reason why the opening of the game begins with the corners. Because they are the easiest place to make living groups. So, in the tight situations of life and death problems, the corner usually contains **three vital points** which we need to be wary of in either defense or attack and we should always test some sequences concerning those vital points in our minds and see how they play out.



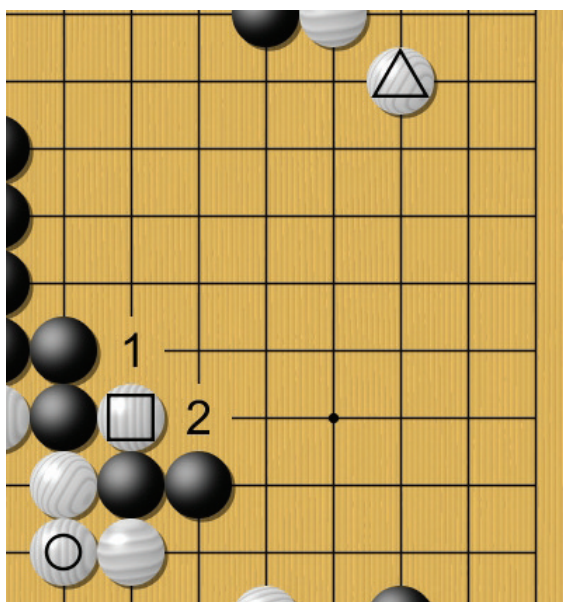
Left image: The three vital points of the corner are **1, 2** and **3**. The main threat is either the creation of an eye or a ko fight at point **A** as we saw on **page 146.** The most critical of these points are **points 1** and **3**, since they are usually **miai**.

Right image: In most of the cases when our opponent plays **move 1** during a fight, we usually want to occupy the miai point at **A** to prevent a ko, or try to surround and capture the opposing stone at **B** or **C**. Which choice is correct totally depends on the surrounding stones.

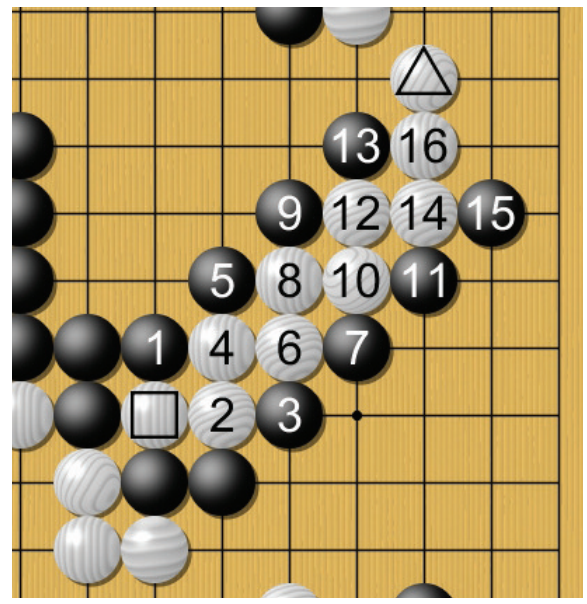


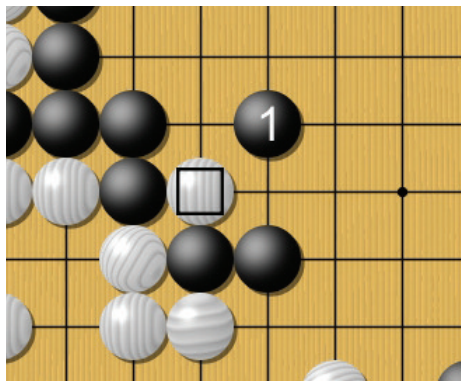
The net

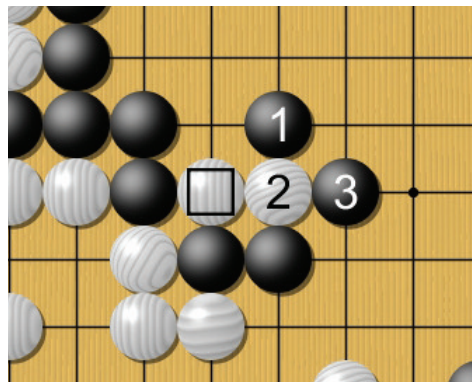
A simple tesuji used mainly to capture your opponent's cutting stones and to nullify the possible aji that those cutting stones might have in the rest of the game. The idea is to cut-off and capture a stone indirectly, instead of attaching to it and placing it directly into atari. The typical shape to keep an eye for when you want to use a net is a group of friendly stones that form a 90 degrees angle and that are separated by one or more opposing stones.

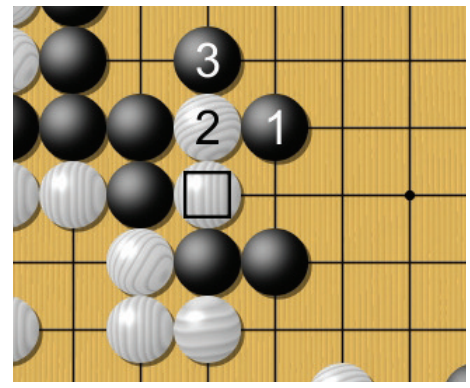


In the example in the left image the White square marked stone is actually cutting Black into two groups. Unless Black does something for the cutting stone, his two stones might be in trouble later.
But what can Black do? If he plays the **ladder** at **1** or **2** to capture the cutting stone, then the triangle marked stone is a **ladder breaker** as we can see in the right image...

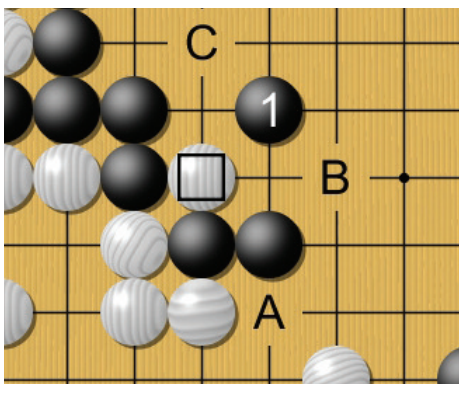


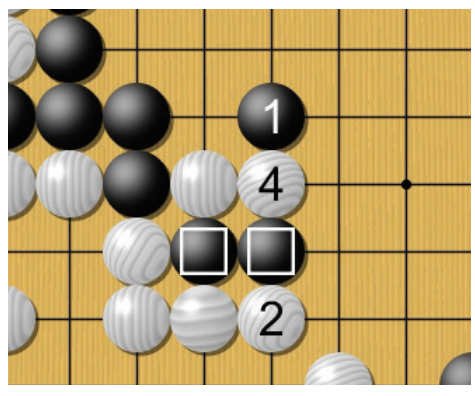


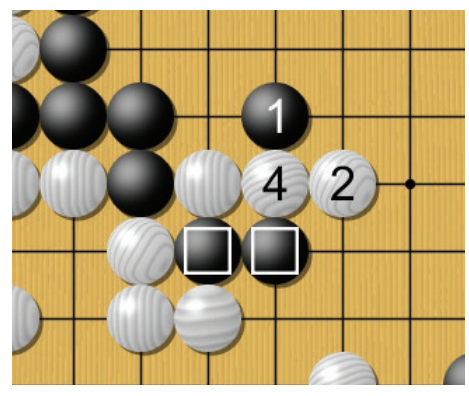




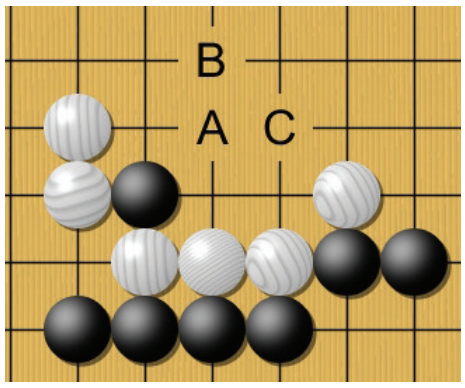
Left image: The correct answer is the **net** tesuji at **move 1**. This is a very typical **net shape** and it captures White's stone no matter which direction White tries to run away towards.
Center and Right image: Indeed if White tries to resist, there is no ladder breaker that can help him this time, since the net is a direct counter to that tactic by shorting the liberties of White's group and immediately placing it in atari as it tries to run away.

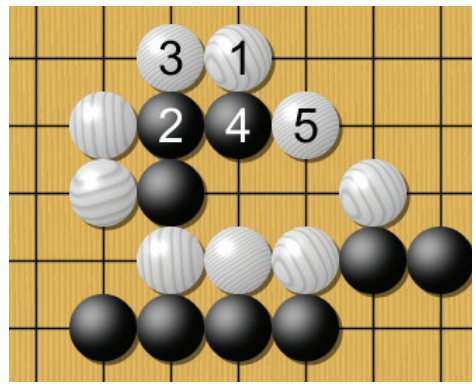


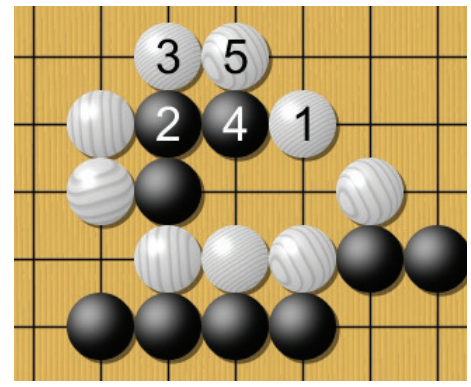




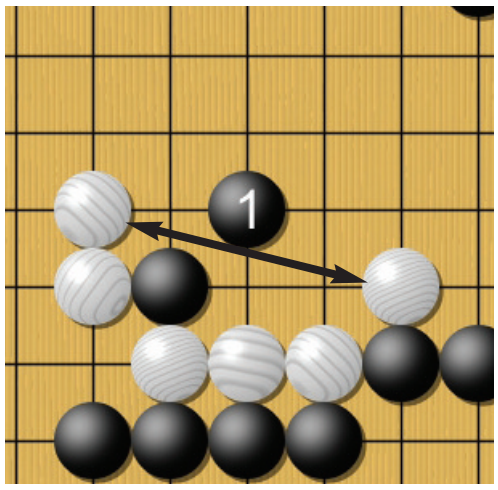
Left image: It should be noted that the net, while very effective at what it does, is not perfect and it leaves aji and forcing moves behind. In this case moves **A**, **B** and **C** are all **sente**, because if Black does not respond, then the White cutting stone can be saved.
Center and Right image: If Black plays **move 3** elsewhere, White can pierce through the net by threatening to capture the square marked stones. The net is a powerful tesuji, but you should avoid using it if the forcing moves it leaves behind would cause you too many problems on your board.



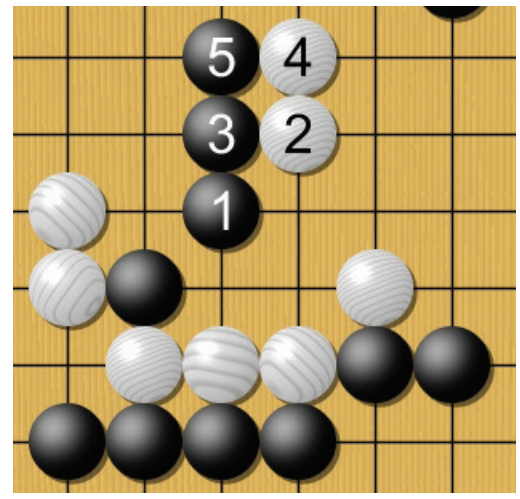


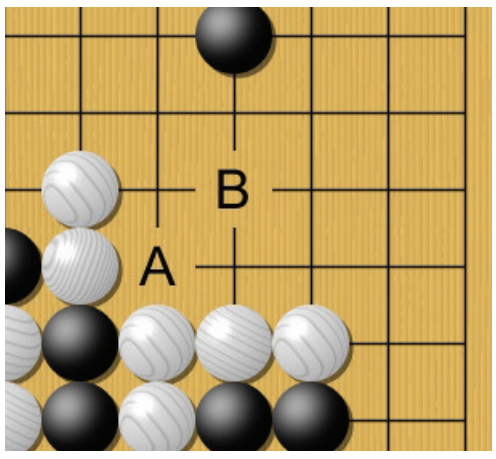


Left image: The longer the groups of our supporting stones, the more easy it is to net a stone. In this example, since White has more stones in the area, he can net the Black stone not only with the typical move at **A**, but also with **B** and **C**. In particular, the knight's move at **B** is a very common move for a net, while **C** is a bit more situational.
Center and Right image: As you can see, in both cases, if Black tries to resist and get out of the net, the result is totally the same. The only thing that changes is the sequence of the moves.

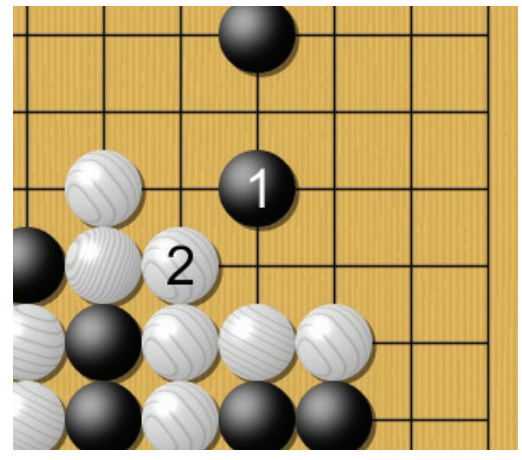


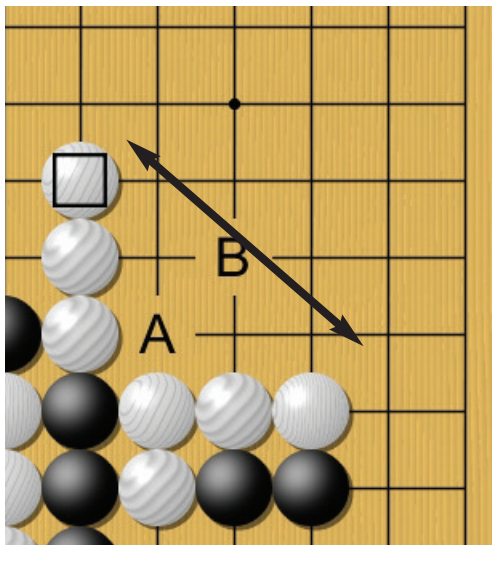
Left image: If White doesn't play the net, the sector line is too short and Black can get out easily with **move 1**. As the saying goes: "The vital point of my opponent, is a vital point for me"
Right image: If White tries to net Black's stones with the knight's move at **2**, he will find out that this is no longer possible. Depending on the whole board, that might not be an issue, but in this case the net fails.



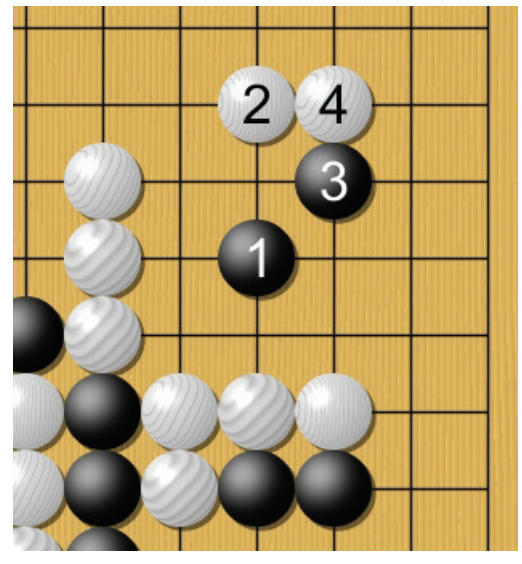


Left image: When the conditions to create a net are in place, you can feel that a cutting point is protected by the threat of the net. For example here, Black cannot cut at **A** because of the net at **B**.
Right image: But Black can play at the vital point at **move 1** first and force White to connect his stones with **move 2**. The less forcing moves you offer to your opponent, the better.





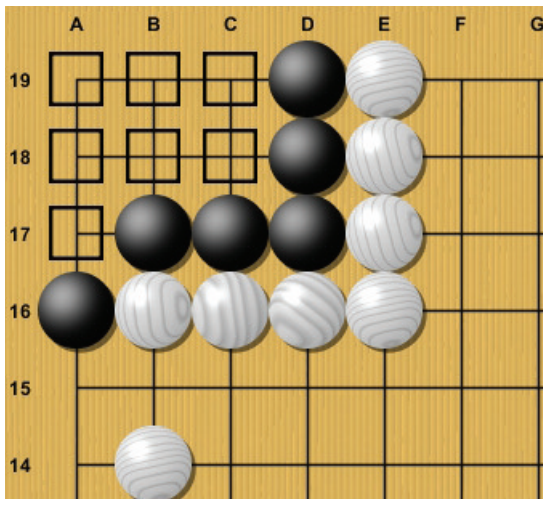
Left image: Combining the two previous cases, if the defending stones are too many, Black cannot get out even by playing on the vital point at **B**, because the sector line is larger and White can still net the cutting stones.
Right image: If Black tries to threaten for the cut with **move 1**, White can simply net the stones again on a wider scale at **2**. If Black tries to get out with **move 3**, White can simply block with **move 4** and be safe, since Black cannot live in there.

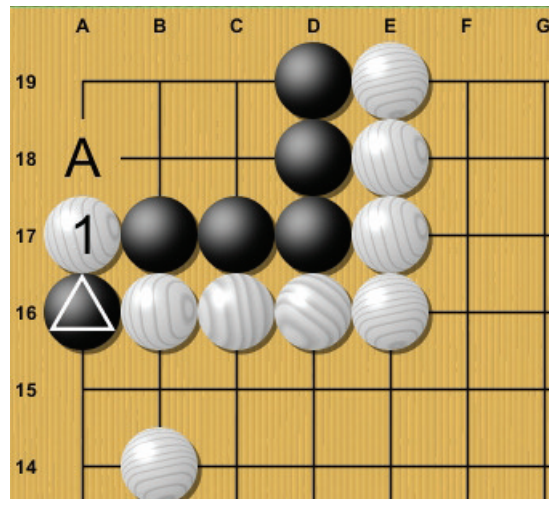


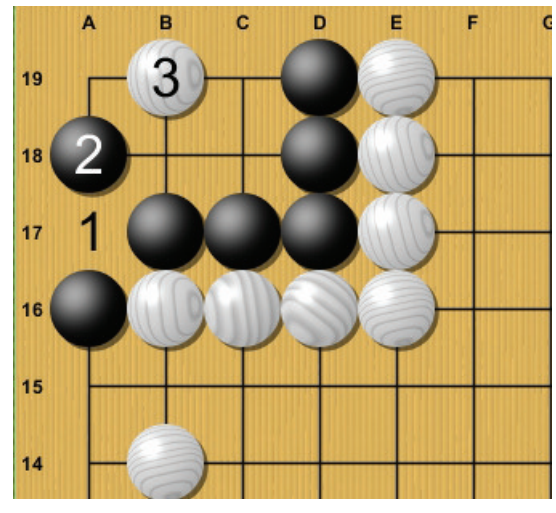
Remember: The net is a very powerful tesuji, but you should always be aware of the forcing moves it gives to your opponent and play in the vital point at the right time.

The throw-in

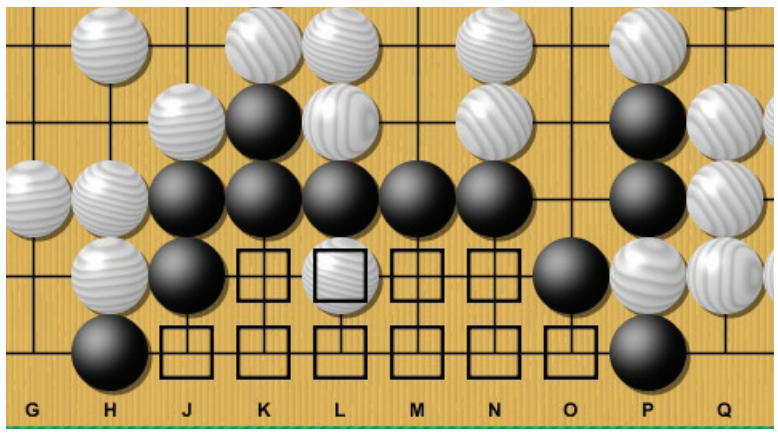
The throw-in is a tesuji used to reduce the liberties of an opposing group. The idea is to place a stone behind enemy lines and force the opponent to capture the stone or lose the group. Usually a throw-in places the group of the opponent in immediate atari, thus making the capture of the throw-in stone a mandatory move, but that is the ideal situation and a throw-in can work just with the implied threat, even if there is no immediate atari. Unlike the net, this tesuji is more versatile and has more applications, but first let us start with the most simple one:

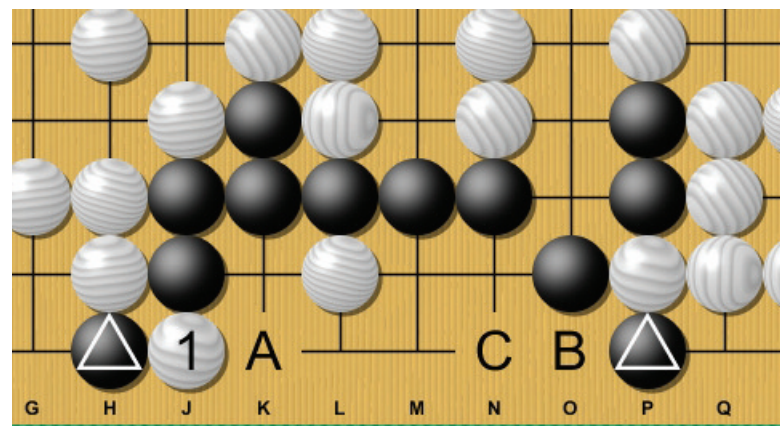




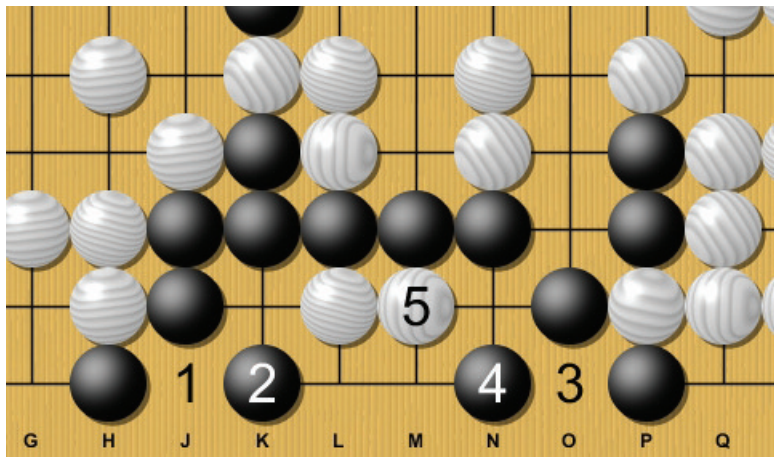


Left image: At first this Black group seems to be a **rectangular six** and so it should be alive, especially if it is Black's turn and he connects his stones.
Center image: But if it is White's turn things are totally different. **Move 1** is a throw-in since it places the triangle marked stone in atari, forcing Black to play **A** to capture White's stone.
Right image: Once his stone is captured the shape is now a **bulky five** and **move 3** is all that is needed to kill the group!





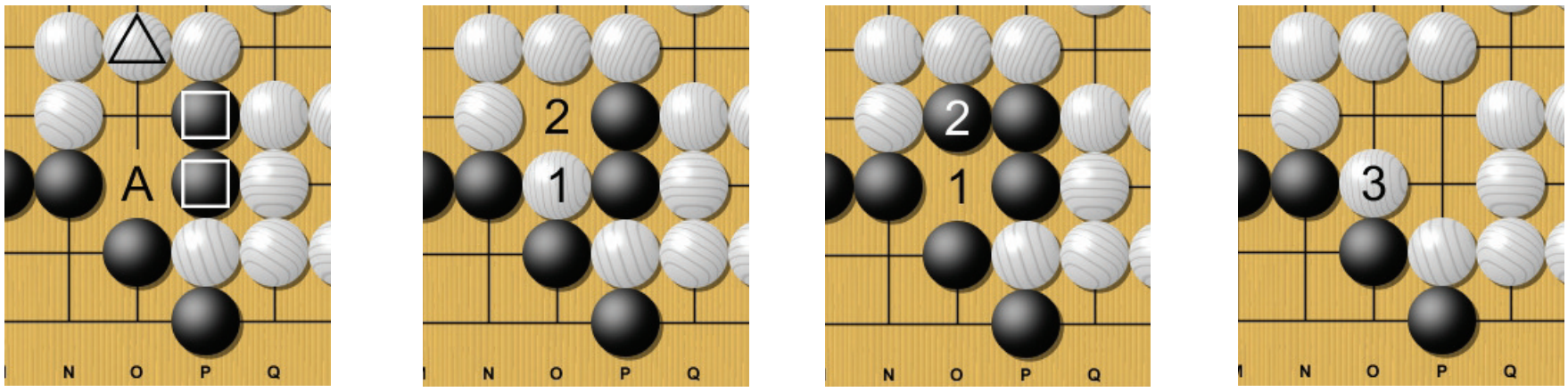
Left image: Throw-ins can upset even larger groups. In this image Black seems to have a ten space area and a captured White stone, but there are many defects in his shape.
Right image: White plays the throw-in at **move 1** and places the triangle marked stone in atari, forcing Black to play **A** to capture that stone. White can do the exact same with a throw-in at **B**...



After the two throw-ins and the "mandatory" captures by Black, the remaining shape inside the Black area is very similar to a **bulky five**, but with six spaces and two vital points, out of which White had already occupied one of them. By playing **move 5** White now occupies both of the vital points of that shape and Black is dead. In order to survive, Black should have played at the vital point at **move 5** first, instead of capturing at **moves 2** and **4**.
Notice that the points at **1** and **3** are not eyes, since White can atari Black's stones and force him to fill those points.

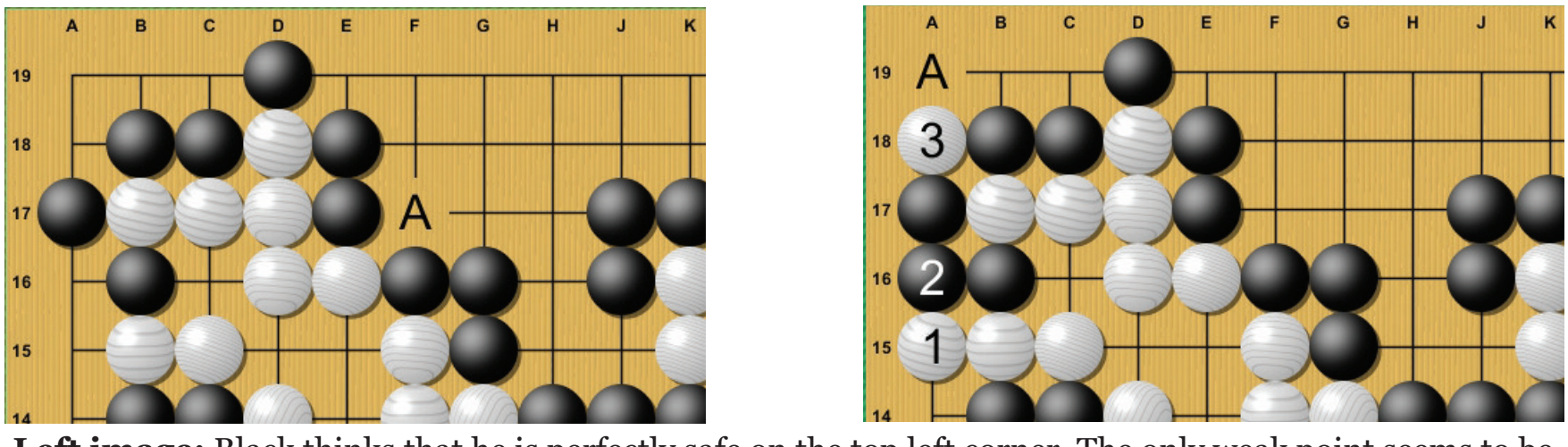
The snapback

The snapback is a special use for a throw-in, but because the result is very specific it is considered as a different tesuji. The idea of a snapback is to throw-in a stone that will place the opponent's group in atari, so that he will have to capture your stone, *but by capturing that stone he is shorting his own liberties and he is placing his group in atari again*. Unlike the simple throw-in, the snapback is a tesuji that is directly killing a group and it sounds very complicated and rare, but a few examples will help clear things out. The main thing to watch out for when you are trying to make, or avoid, a snapback, is groups that are starting to get totally surrounded.

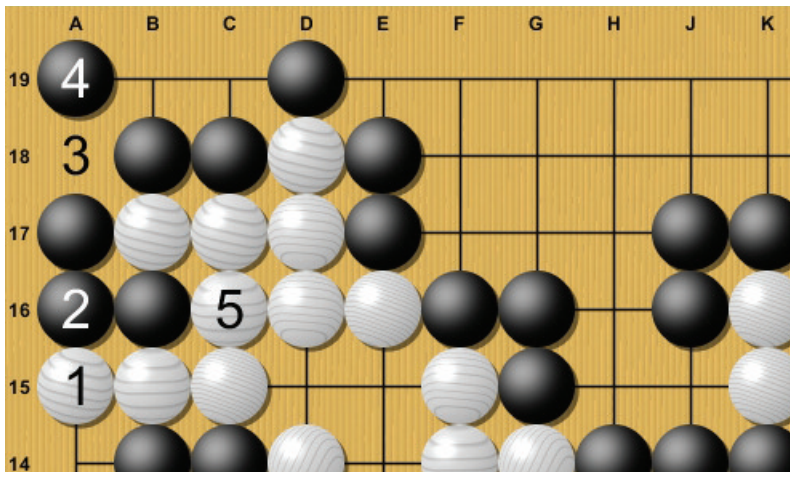


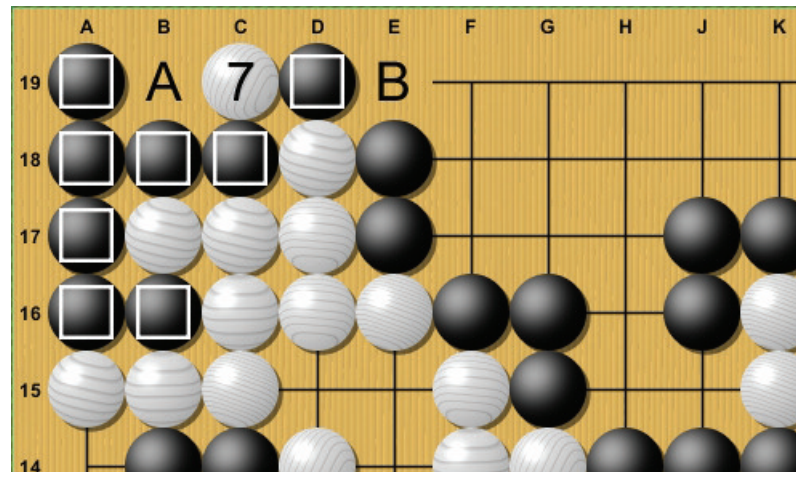
From left to right: The easiest snapback example can be created from the previous images if we add the triangle marked stone on the board. Now, unless Black connects at **A**, the square marked stones are dead due to a snapback. But how?
If White plays the throw-in at **move 1**, Black can simply capture the White stone immediately.
But once Black captures the White stone with **move 2** he is once again in atari. The added Black stone that was needed to capture the White stone, is also reducing the group's liberties to one. So now White can simply play **move 3** and captures all the stones.

The main issue with the snapback is that it can be sometimes difficult to notice and that groups that seem perfectly safe could fall prey to it, after a series of moves and throw-ins. Let us see a combination of the two tesuji :



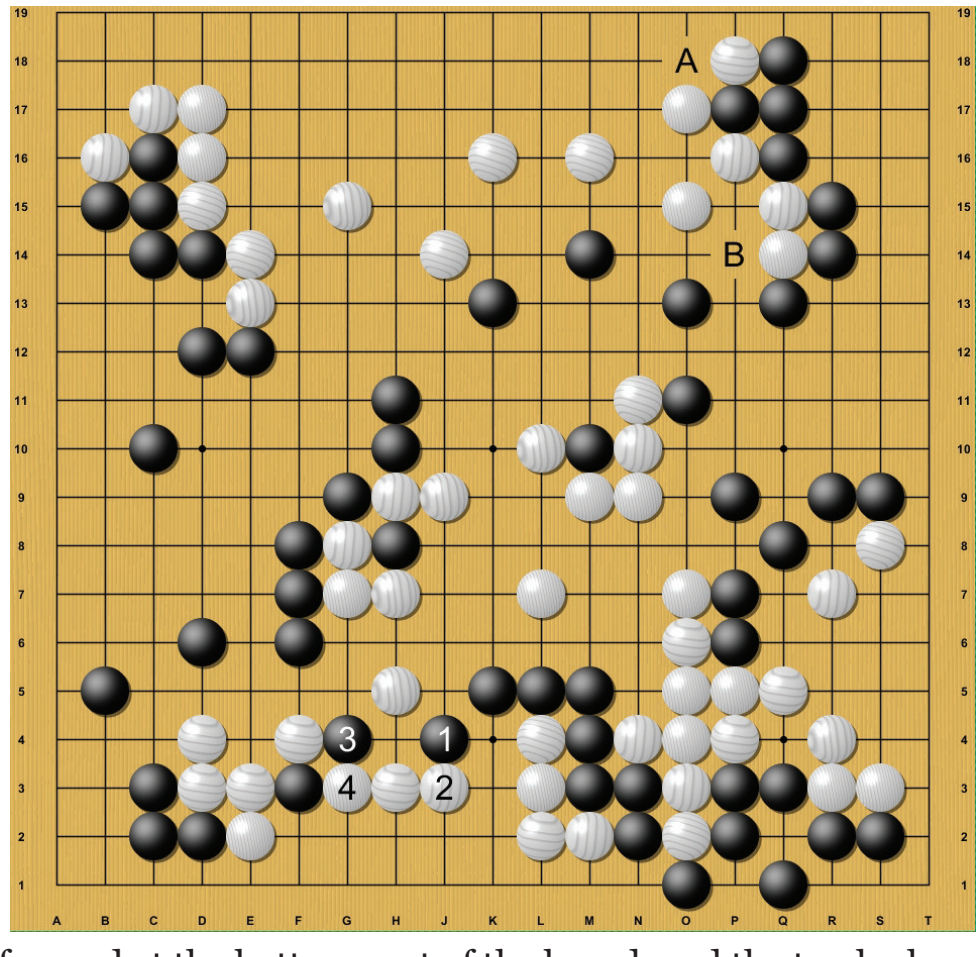
Left image: Black thinks that he is perfectly safe on the top left corner. The only weak point seems to be the cut at **A**, but since it is so near the edge of the board Black can defend the cut with a net or a ladder. Everything looks fine.
Right image: So when White extends with **move 1**, Black simply connects with **move 2** to keep his stone. White plays the throw-in at **move 3**, but Black is still not worried since he can capture that stone by playing at **A**. Everything still looks just fine...



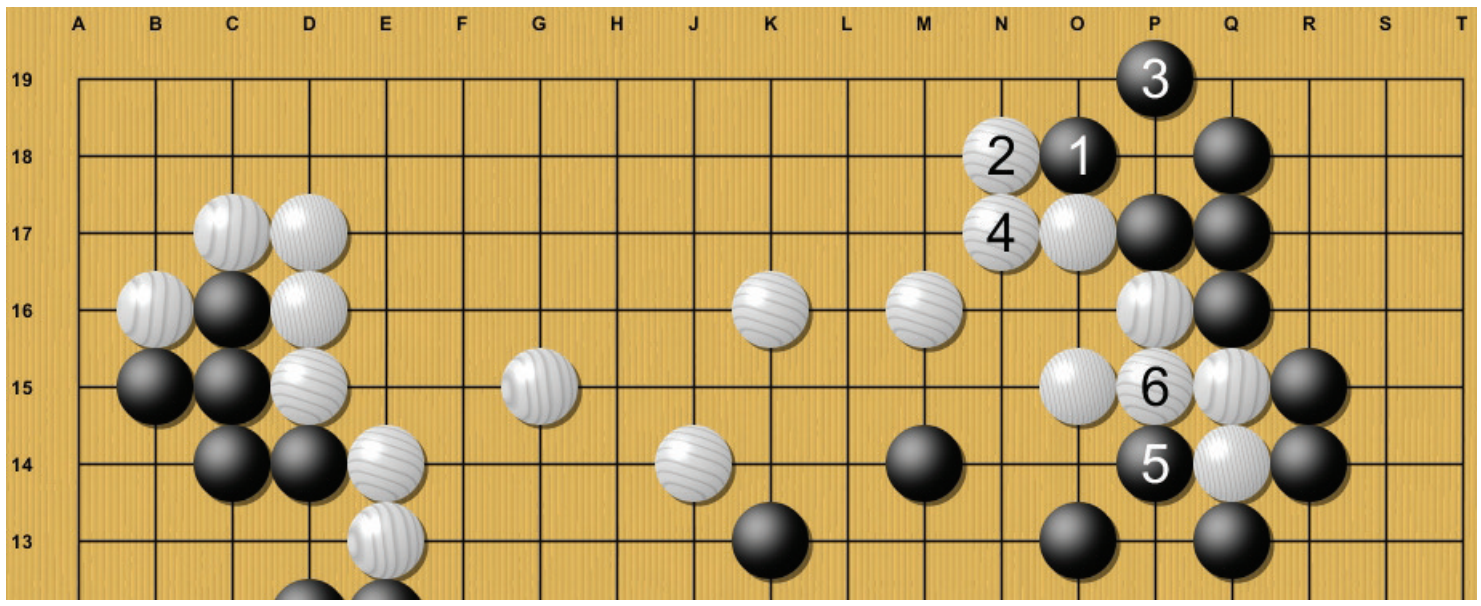


Left image: Black **4** captures the White stone at **3** and then White simply plays the atari at move **5**. Black just needs to fill that liberty at **3** and he is ok, right?
Right image: Wrong. The final throw-in at **move 7** is a **snapback**. It places all the square marked stones in atari and if Black captures the White stone at **A**, then he is still in atari and he loses all of his stones in the next move. Black's stones are captured and the best he can do now is salvage what he can by connecting at **B**.

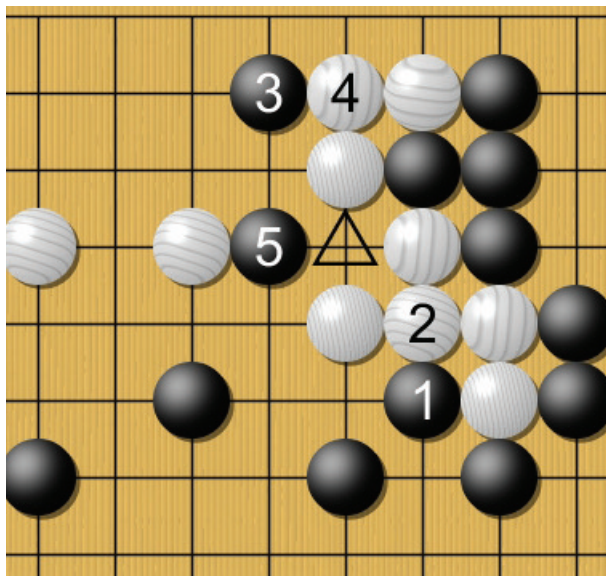
This methodical reduction of an opposing group's liberties is aptly called a **squeeze**. At best it ends into a snapback, as we just saw here, but it usually just ends with the opposing group looking like a shapeless lump or a rock that is just sitting on the board without providing any points or useful influence.
There is no particular way to accomplish a squeeze, so you just have to look after for the possibility of a series of forcing moves or ataris that could destroy your opponent's shape. If, by the end of this process, you have managed to completely surround your opponent, you might have a chance at a snapback.
Let us slowly analyse a more complex case, by starting at this board position:



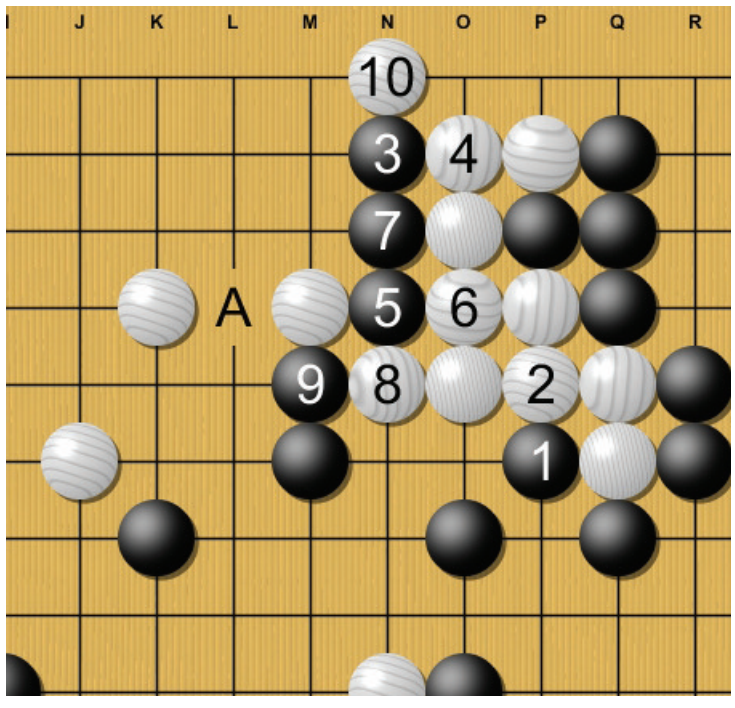
Both players seem focused at the bottom part of the board, and the top looks pretty safe for White. There are two ataris at **A** and **B**, but White simply considers them as a slight possible reduction of his area since he can easily save his stones if Black plays there...



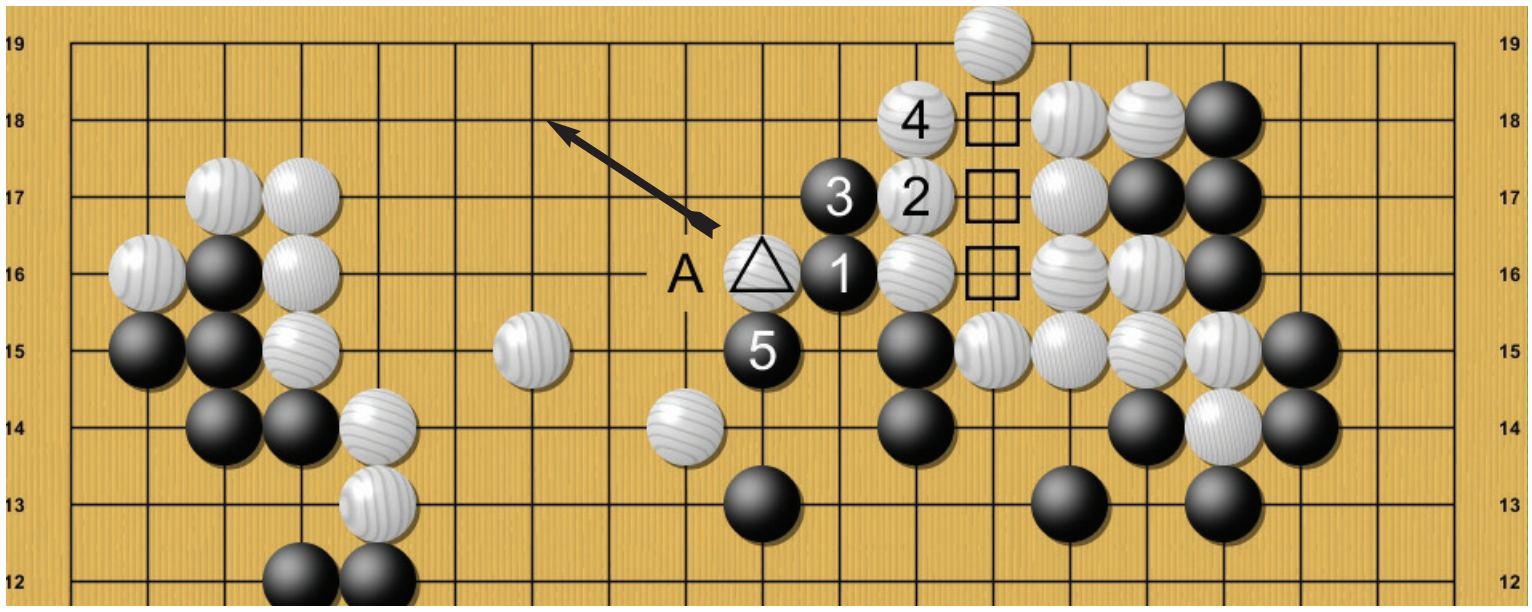
This is the most probable sequence of moves that White has in mind, in case Black gets to play at both ataris from the previous image.
This is a very reasonable expectation and the loss of one stone and two or three points on the top side is not a threat either to the viability of such a large group or a significant loss considering how huge the top side is currently for White, as you can see in the image.
So, White considers himself quite safe and he correctly chooses to not waste any moves to defend an area that he considers his own. With that premise, the choice is indeed correct, but the supposition of safety turns out to be false, as Black puts his plan into motion. You should notice that the top side is White's largest reservoir of points so he needs to preserve it at all cost...



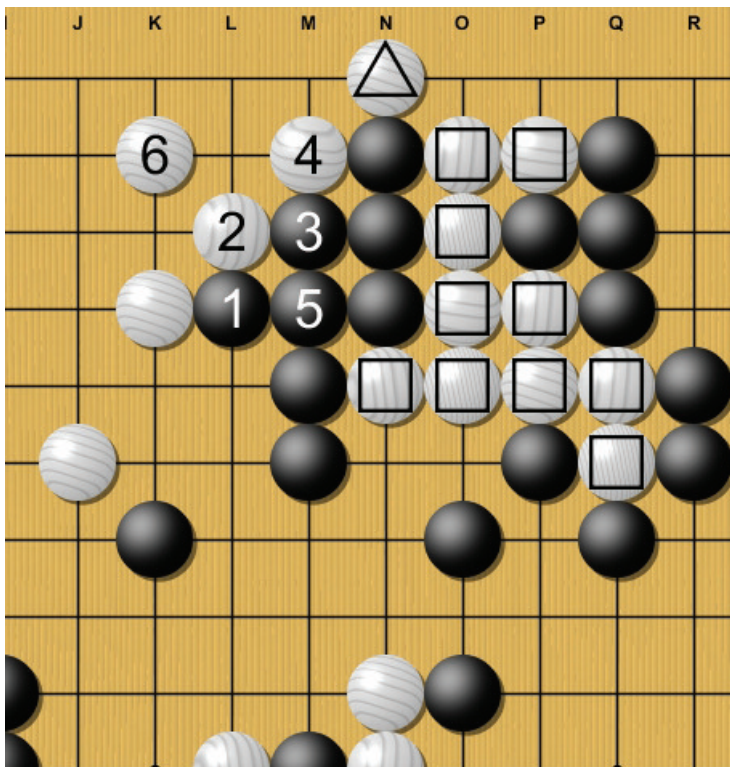
Black starts with the atari at **move 1** and White plays the response that he was planning all along, at **move 2** and so far everything looks normal. But for **move 3**, Black doesn't play the atari White expected. Instead, Black plays one point to the left, threatening to play the atari in the next move and cross under White's stones, reducing his area by a lot of points. This makes **move 3** practically sente and the response at **move 4** compulsory. Forcing your opponent to play moves he doesn't expect or like is usually a very good idea, especially if you have a particular goal in mind, like in this case. Black continues being annoying and plays **move 5** to threaten to cut the triangle marked tiger's mouth weak spot...



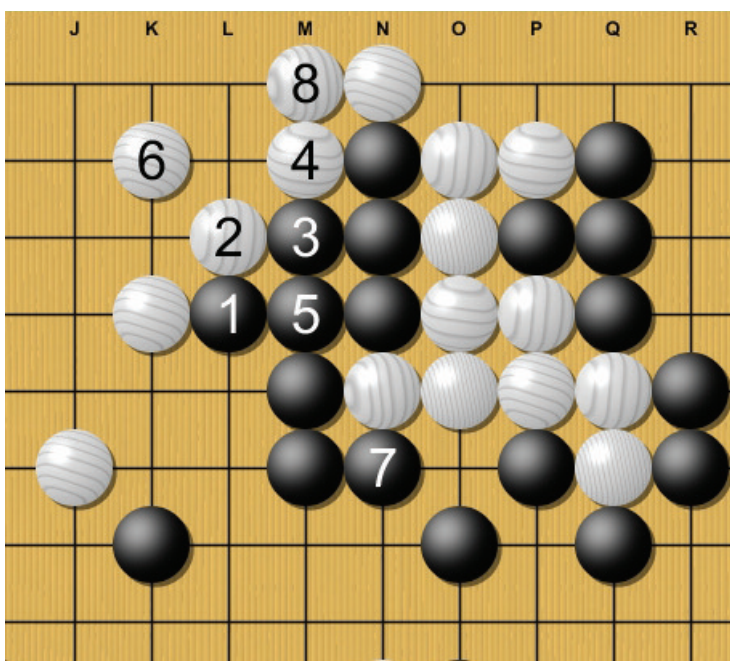
It is very rare for someone to not connect after a peep at the tiger's mouth, so White plays **move 6**, to connect his stones. Black also connects with **move 7** to gain more liberties and with **moves 8** and **9** both players cut each other's groups, effectively splitting them.
However, it is White's turn and **move 10** seems to settle the fight. White's group has four liberties, while Black's only two. White is confident that he can capture the weak Black group and reconnect all of his stones.
Be that as it may, Black has the atari at **A** and it is not an easy move to deal with, considering the whole situation, as we will see in the next page. Notice that White's stones on the right have no particular shape anymore. They are just a lump of stones without any eyes or potential so they have been squeezed successfully...



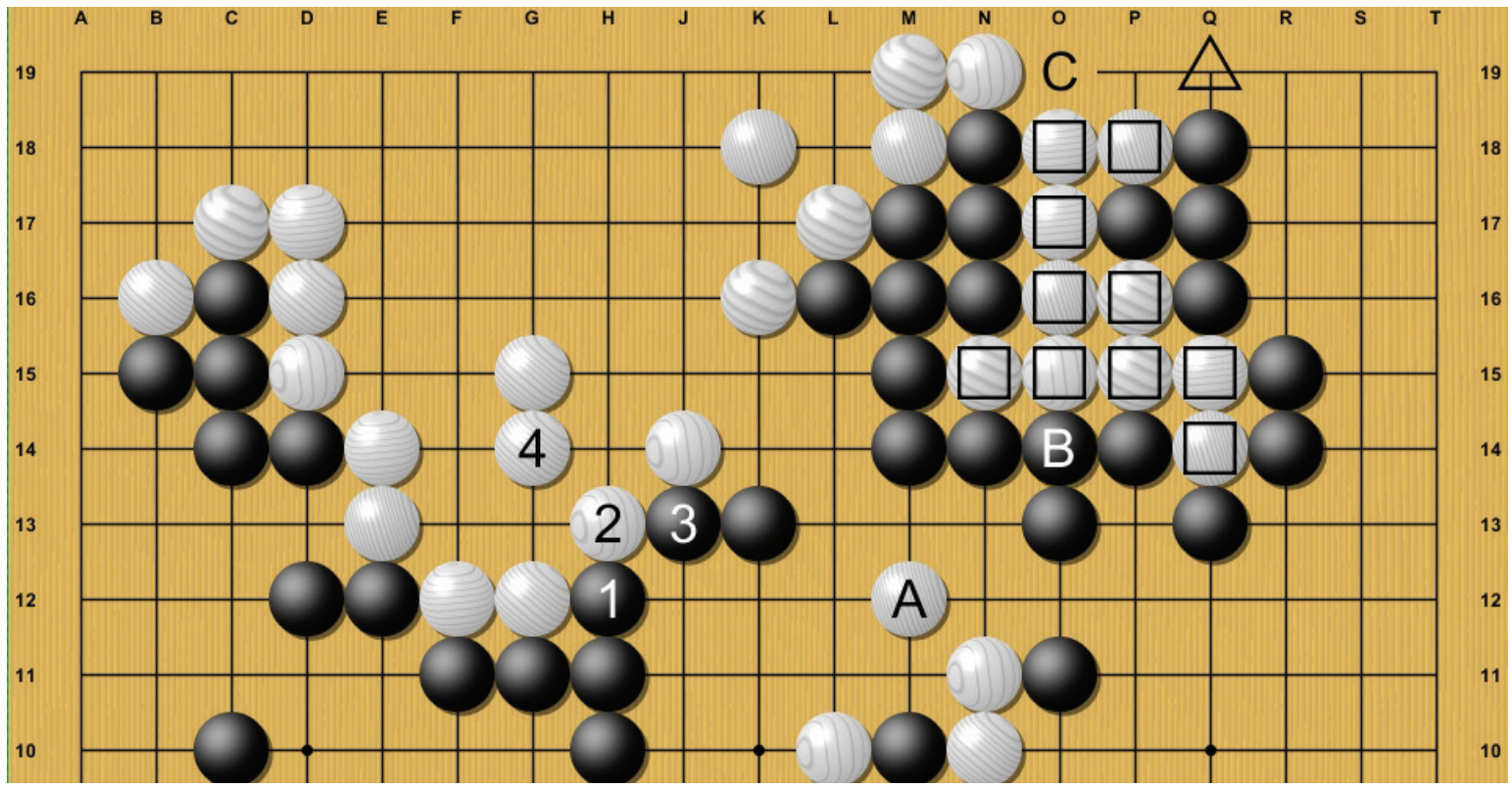
Let us reset the move counter. If Black plays the atari at **move 1** then the obvious solution would be for White to keep extending and capture the three Black stones that were located in the square marked points. However, playing the obvious move, means that Black gets to play next and if Black plays his next move at **A** then the triangle marked stone is captured in a ladder. This means that most of the top side which was solid White territory, is now gone! **White cannot play that way**, so Black knows that **move 1** is another sente move in his arsenal...



Back in the game, Black plays the atari at **move 1** and White wanting to avoid the previous result, sacrifices one stone and plays the direct fighting move by playing the atari as well, in **move 2**.
Black gladly captures the White stone with **move 3** and **White 4** places all Black's stones in atari again, so Black needs to fill the space he just captured, with **move 5**.
White finally has sente again and plays **move 6**, creating two tiger's mouths and defending all his cutting points. White feels safe about his squeezed square marked stones, because he has connected with them under the Black stones, with the triangle marked stone.
This is usually a good tactic, but if one of the groups connected that way can be placed in atari, then it can lead in a snapback. Totally surrounded groups are usually an indication of a possible snapback...



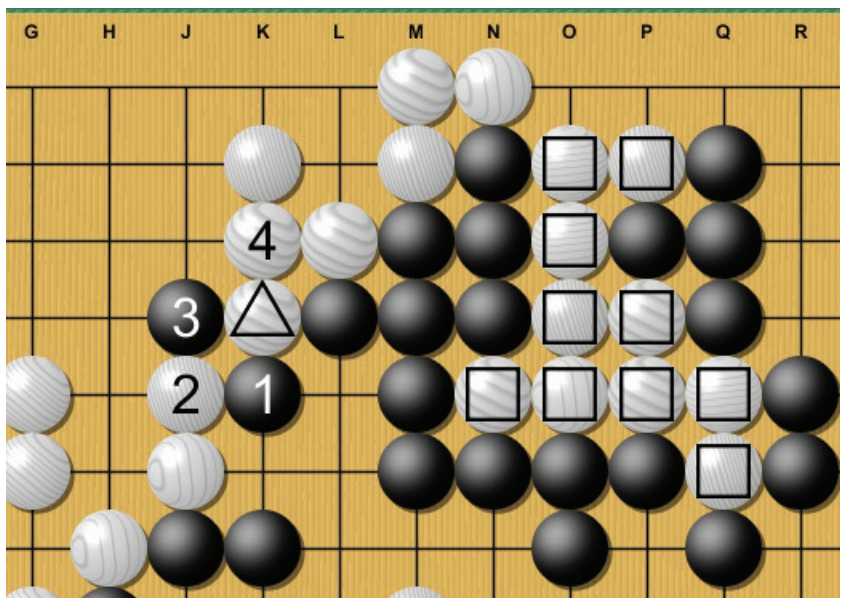
Black has sente again and he just plays move 7 to make sure that those White stones cannot get out in any way and to reduce that White group's liberties to three.
White wants to keep ahead of any potential problems and plays **move 8** and finally feels safe and certain that his stones are connected.
Indeed as things are right now, Black cannot continue his attack, but he is very happy by the result. What once was an area White considered as territory was reduced by a significant amount of points, a White group was squeezed and the new defenses White placed in Black's way are very similar to the ones that managed to get squeezed earlier. Patience is a virtue and Black turns elsewhere to keep White placated. As we said earlier in many instances, if the situation on the board changes, what once was safe could end up in dire danger...



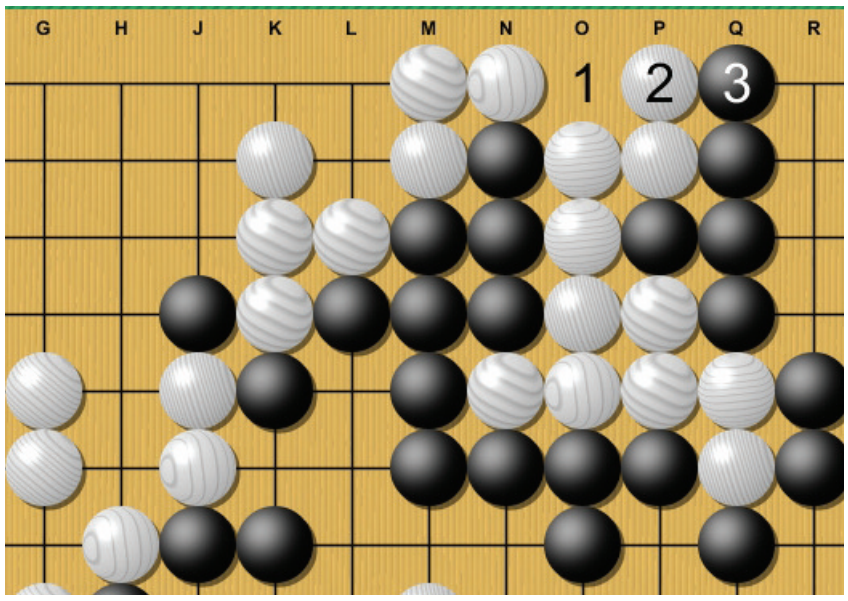
In this case not many things needed to change for White to be in trouble again. After exchanging some moves elsewhere on the board, at some point White threatened to cut Black's stone with **A** and Black managed to reduce another liberty of the marked group by playing **B** to defend and connect his stones.
White is not worried about the safety of the marked stones at all, because there is no snapback, since Black is missing a stone in the triangle marked point. So, White knows that as things are right now he doesn't need to waste a move to connect his group and if Black places that group in atari White can simply capture the attacking stone or connect at **C**.
When you are trying to set up a tesuji, you must try to be subtle and avoid obvious moves like playing in the triangle marked point. Most opponents will notice the intent of such a move and connect their stones, making you lose your chance. Thus, instead of playing there when Black eventually managed to take sente back, he simply played the innocent looking **move 1**. Blocking at **move 2** seems natural for White, the extension at **move 3** is also pretty standard and with **move 4** White makes some more good shape with the double tiger's mouth again. Everything looks fine for White, wouldn't you agree?

Remember: Try to play moves that have multiple effects. A lot of times moves played near an area slowly create pressure to places that the opponent thought safe for so long that he might be misdirected by what is locally reasonable and miss what is dangerous on the whole board.

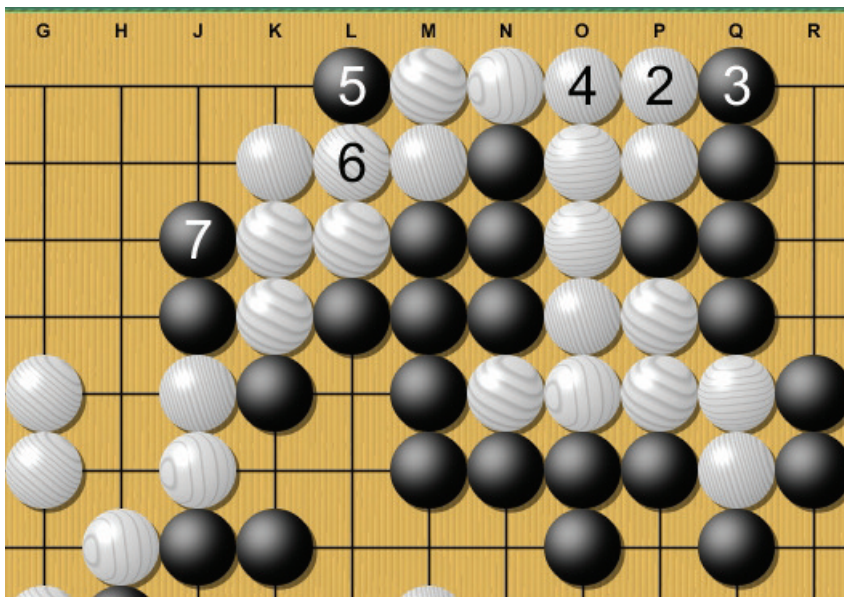
Beware: Whenever our opponent is forcing us to play any moves to defend ourselves, always keep in mind that he might have an ulterior motive, even if the moves we are forced to play look pretty fine and safe, or rather, especially if they look safe. Most people wouldn't want to help us fix our shape and defend ourselves, so why would they do it? Always be prepared for an upcoming trick.



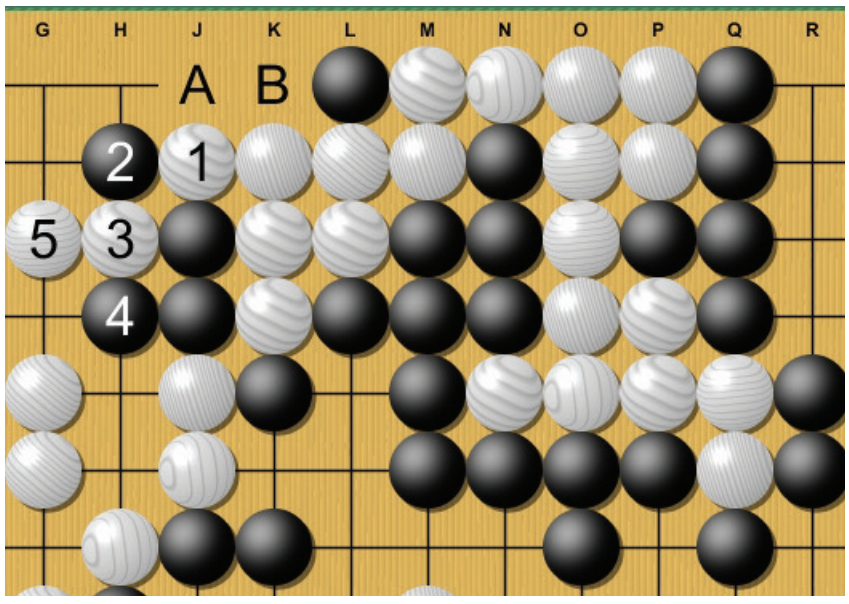
Black plays **move 1** which seems just a threat to atari the triangle marked stone. If White wasn't so strong in this area he might have played passively and simply extended that stone by playing where Black's **move 3** is in the image, but we need to remember that the top is White's main source of points, so he cannot be lax about it.
Besides what is wrong with letting the Black atari the stone. As you can see in the image, **move 2** creates a bamboo joint and cuts off the Black stone even if Black cuts and ataris (which he did with **move 3**), White can simply connect with **move 4**.
But **Black 3** is a very insidiously placed stone...



Black is finally ready for the last stage of this long plan and he plays the **throw-in** atari at **move 1**.
White, as we already said, already knows of that possibility, but no snapback exists, so he simply captures the stone with **move 2**.
Black now places the whole White group in atari again, by playing **move 3**.
White simply has to connect by playing **move 4** where **move 1** was and still have two liberties and the ability to connect his stones with another group with more liberties.
But a group with only two liberties left can always be a source of danger so...



Black plays the **throw-in** atari again at **move 5**.
White cannot capture the stone outright, so he simply connects all of his stones with **move 6**.
And now the stone which Black took so much effort to place earlier, by playing moves that seemed to help White defend his stones, shows its strength with the extension at **move 7**.
Now Black's stones have **three liberties** and White's stones have **only two**!
It is White's turn though and maybe White could escape death, but with the throw-in at **move 5** reducing his liberties, White's huge group is **dead**.
But why is White dead? Let us see...



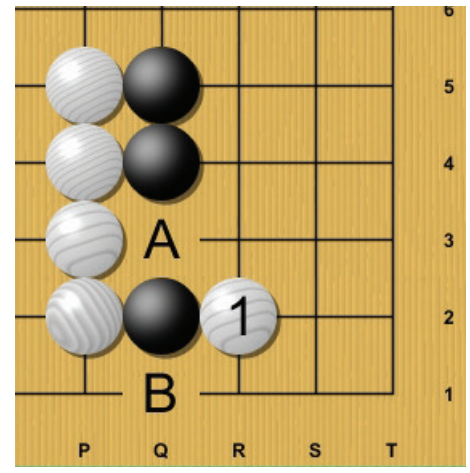
If White extends at **1** then **Black 2** reduces the liberties of the White group back to only two.
The sequence from **move 3** to **move 5** is a local series of ataris for White to try to reduce the liberties of Black to two as well and now it is Black's turn.
If Black plays the atari at **B**, then White simply plays at **A** and captures the two Black stones and thus ends up with an eye and three liberties, winning the capturing race easily.
But if Black plays the atari at **A** and White captures the single Black stone at **B**, then White's group is once again in atari and we have the long awaited snapback that wins this fight for Black.

Remember: The **throw-in**, the **squeeze** and the **snapback** are very important tesuji that you will encounter and use very frequently in close combat situations or in life and death problems that occur in real games. Always be wary of:
- Groups that are not locally alive and can eventually get totally surrounded
- A stone, or a small group of stones, that can be placed in atari and eventually make you lose eyes by forcing you to either connect or lose your stones
- Indirect connections, especially knight's moves, tiger's mouths or unfinished bamboo joints, that can be poked at and force you to connect or play in points that you never normally would.

A common misconception is that those tesuji are mostly used in the edge of the board where creating a lack of liberties is easier, but the fact of the matter is that they can be useful at every point of the board, but the prerequisites for them just need more stones to be accomplished. Be vigilant!

The clamp and crossing under the stones

The **clamp** is a tesuji that can be used everywhere on the board, but it usually appears near the edge of the board. It simply consists of a direct attachment to an opposing stone/group, from the totally opposite side from which your other stones are already attached. This might sound complicated, but in reality it is as simple as the example in the image on the right.

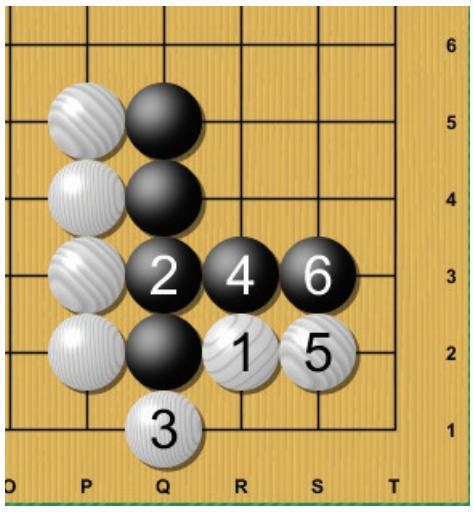


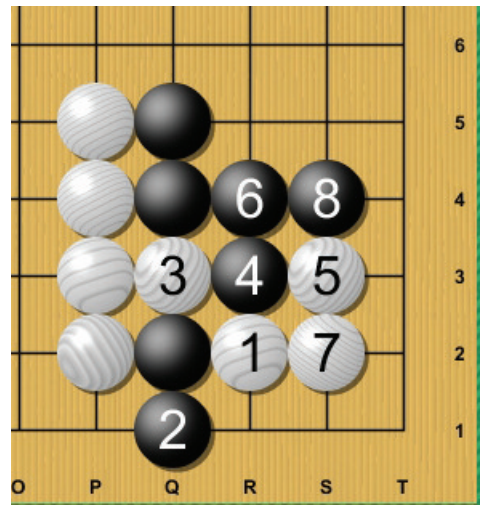
A typical clamp. Because White's stones are strong, the clamp at **move 1** makes **A** and **B miai**...

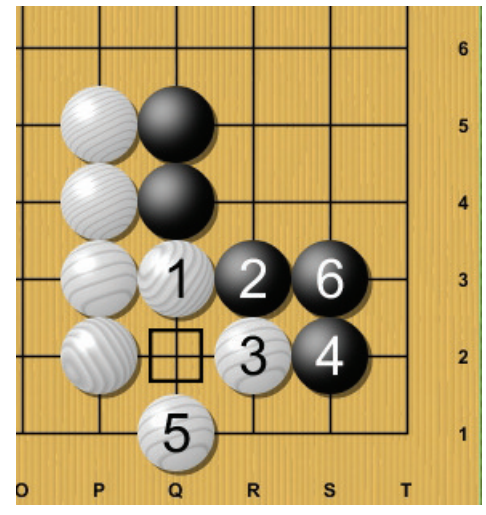
You can also think of a clamp as a one point jump, but with an opposing stone already in the way, cutting your vital point. This makes it sound like a stone that seems to be very precariously placed, so when do we use it and how does it benefit us?

In its most simple use, a clamp is used, to cross under the opponent's stones, by exploiting either a loose formation, as with the example, or a possible shortage of liberties, as we will see soon.

But how does it do that? What was the problem in the example, which we will need to keep in mind when using or facing against the possibility of a clamp?







Left image: If Black tries to defend at **A** this is the most usual result and White crosses under Black's stones with **move 3** and reduces Black's corner while keeping sente.
Center image: If Black tries to defend at **B** this is the most usual result and White cuts Black in half and captures his two stones, while keeping sente.
Right image: Compare the two results of the clamp, with simply White pushing through with **move 1** and just capturing one stone in the process. The clamp was way more effective.

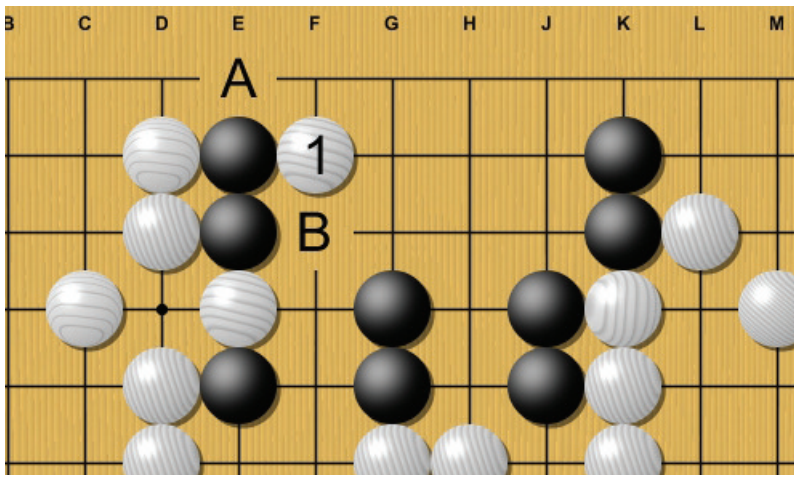
It would appear that the most usual signs of the possibility of a clamp are:

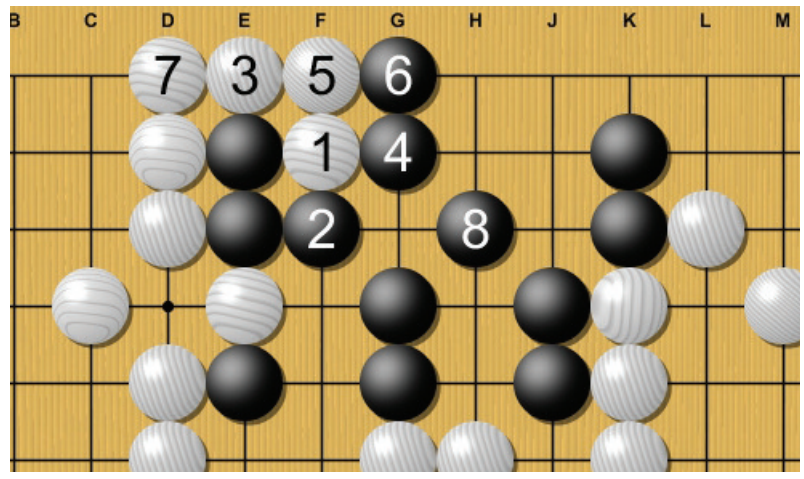
a) Having a strong group of stones which are not in danger of a counter-attack, attached to an opposing stone/group that has a shape defect.

b) Being able to create a **miai** situation by playing the clamp. That way you can eventually connect with your stone and win the fight.

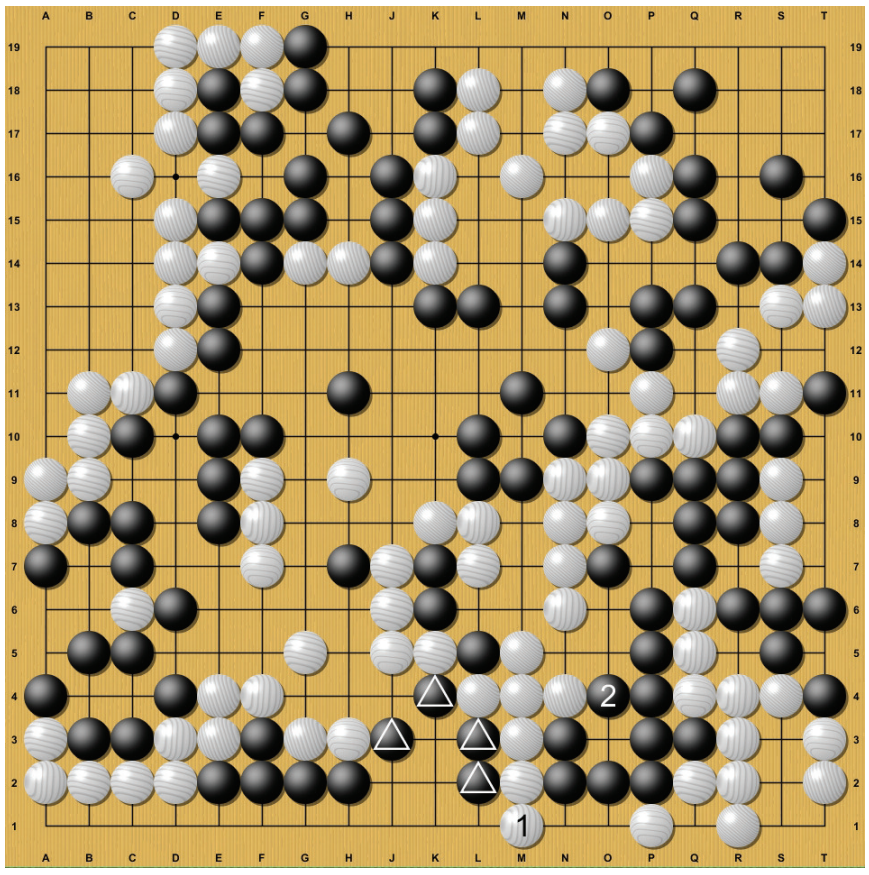
Those signs are a little vague though, at the moment. In our example Black's stone had three liberties. Is that the only case of a clamp? Of course not...

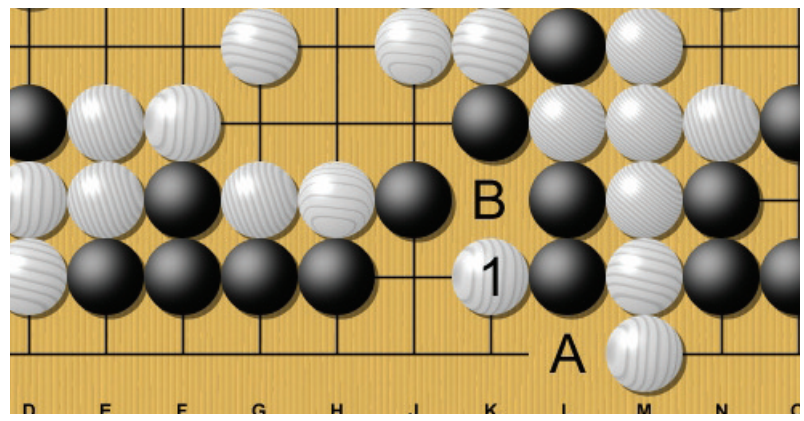
The biggest danger is usually not posed against lone stones that have three liberties, but *larger groups of stones that have a shortage of liberties or bad shape* and might be struggling for life. Losing one stone is not the end of the game, but having a whole group killed, especially later in the game, can lead to surrendering. Let us see some examples to understand how this works. Remember that the main idea is to create a miai situation to your benefit:

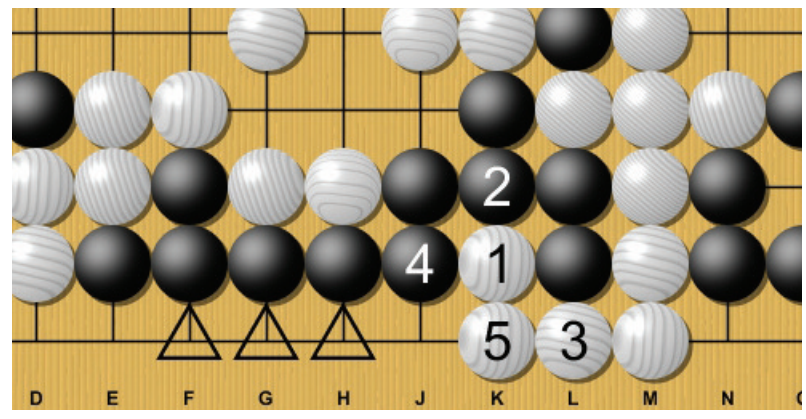




Left image: Black's group seems large enough to make two eyes easily, but those Black stones on the left are in trouble and not really connected with the rest of the stones of the surrounded group.
White makes the **clamp** at **move 1** and **A** and **B** are now **miai**. If Black plays **A**, White will play **B** and capture those stones and kill Black's group. So, Black can only play **B** and barely survive.
Right image: After a series of ataris (**moves 4** and **6**) Black manages to contain the damage and create two eyes with **move 8**. But later on in the same game he will not be so fortunate...

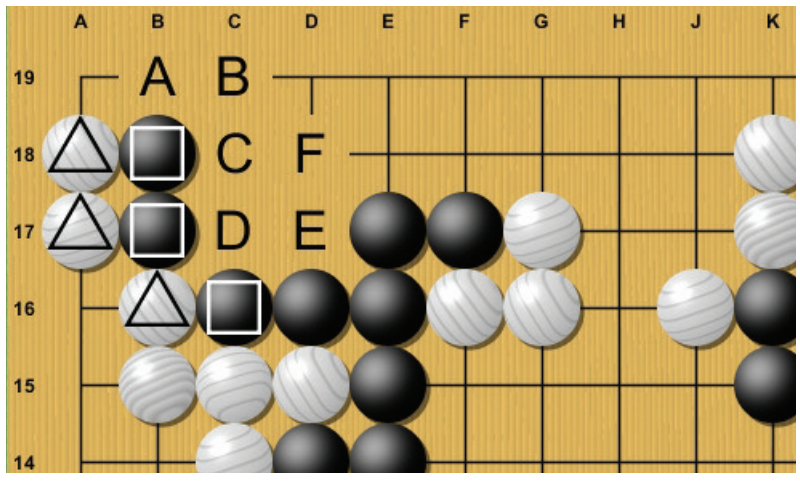


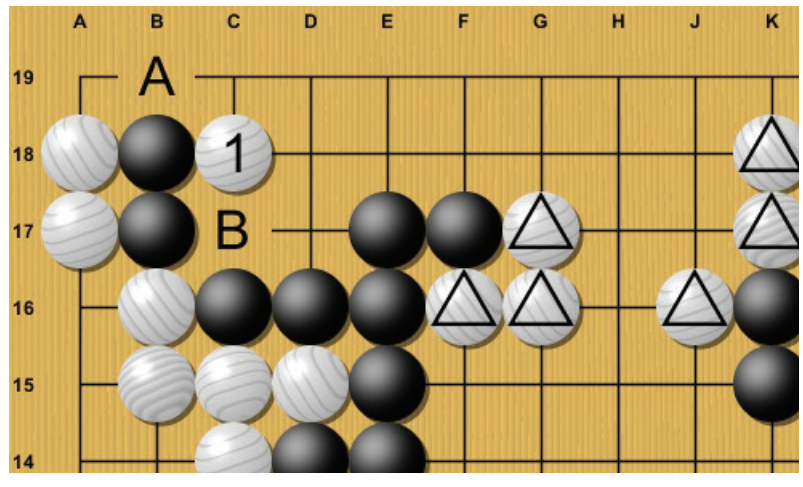




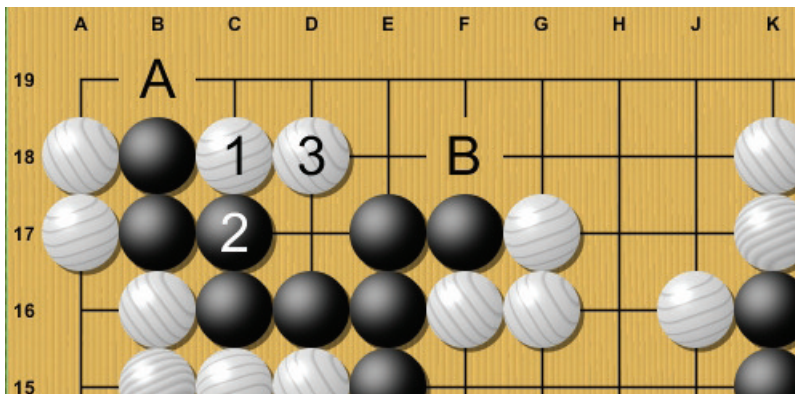
Left image: While attacking Black's right group, White managed to force the exchange of **move 1** with **move 2**, since Black really needed one more eye to survive, but now the triangle marked stones are in deep trouble. Always remember that what once seemed safe, can end up in danger later on!
Top right image: White sees the clamp at **move 1** and once again **A** and **B** are **miai**. Black cannot play **A** because White playing **B** kills all of his stones immediately, so Black once again connects...
Bottom right image: But after the defence ends this time the marked remaining points are not enough to create two eyes. Black's group is dead and so he surrendered.

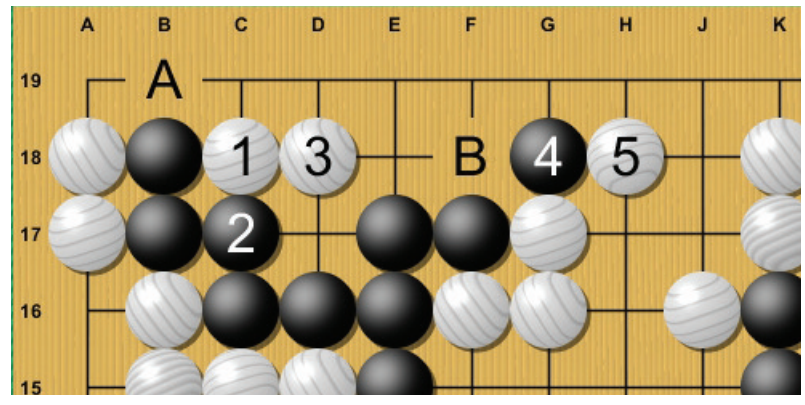
Having a stone over two or three stones of your opponent's (which is aptly called "hitting the stones on the head") is a notoriously good shape for you and horrible for your opponent. It is a classic shape for a clamp and once that shape is formed (usually in the first 50-70 moves) you know that you will eventually get clamped, so you need to spare an extra move to defend yourself, or suffer the consequences, which sometimes can be dire indeed.



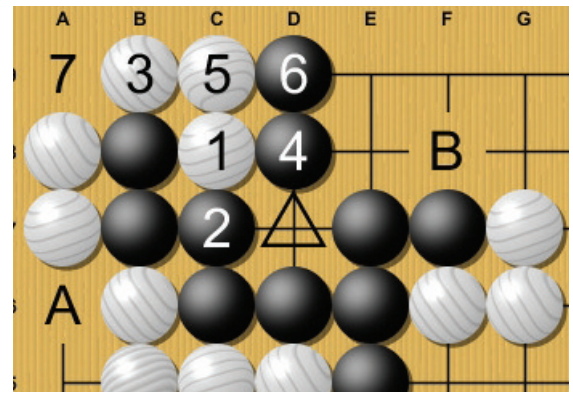


Left image: Here is our lovely shape again formed by the marked stones. Black thinks he is safe so he doesn't play an extra move to defend his stones. Any move at the choices **A to F** would have meant that this group is unconditionally alive, but in the actual game Black played elsewhere (tenuki).
Right image: Eventually the **clamp** at **move 1** is played and the classic miai situation is created. **A** and **B** are equally effective for White and Black can only connect at **B**, but in this case the triangle marked stones on the right, provide extra follow-ups and help for the following moves for White...





Left image: Black plays the classic response at **move 2** and is stunned by White's **move 3** which makes **A** and **B miai** again, since White has helping stones nearby and can connect with two ways.
Right image: Black cannot defend against both dangers with one move, so he picks one side with **move 4**. White calmly defends with **move 5** and now the connection at **A** and the **atari** at **B** are miai again. Black is dead and he resigns. *But why did Black think that he was safe in the first place?*



Black made the classic mistake of expecting the usual moves after the clamp. As we saw in the previous page, Black connects, White crosses under his stones and Black slowly defends his group. Black thinks that he will have an eye in the marked point. White cannot even connect at **7** because a stone at **A** is missing and his group will be in atari again. Even if White could connect, Black could easily make another eye at **B** with **move 8**. The sequence of moves seen in the image on the right is standard, but Go is a game of imagination and adaptation. *Extraordinary things happen in Go!*

Expecting the standard moves is the fastest way to defeat. Avoid that mistake!
(To be clear: With this statement I am NOT lambasting a fellow player. In **all** the examples in **pages 161** and **162** the dying/resigning Black player is myself. Learning from our mistakes is crucial.)

Solving the problems

We talked extensively about shapes and tesuji and during those pages there were many practical examples of life and death, but I feel that all this abundance of information might have made us stray a bit too much from our original goal, which was actually **presenting a method of solving the problems** that we will be facing in the game.

I want to be clear that there is no certain path of solving every problem (I'll say it again, extraordinary things happen in Go and that is what makes it so fun and interesting) and what I suggest is a method that obviously applies for our range of strength in the game. Also, the best way to deal with a life and death problem is to prevent it from happening in the first place. If you are the person defending you need to learn to take care of your groups. Having made all that clear, the steps we should have in mind when a life and death problem appears are the following in each case:

Life and death problems when we are attacking

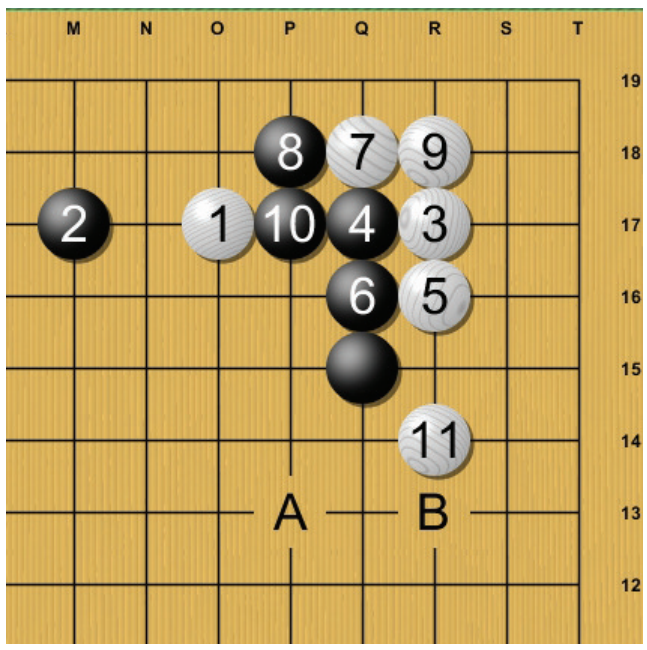
- Look for crucial shape points or incomplete shapes. The living shapes mentioned in this chapter along with the general shapes mentioned earlier are very important. A shape that is not well connected is a shape that can be attacked and forced to a non-living shape.
- If the aforementioned shapes do not exist, try to find a way to play forcing moves and create them.
- Be aware of the possible tesuji or connecting and playing under your opponent's stones and creating miai situations.
- "There is death in the hane" (as the proverb goes) and in the throw-in stones (I'd dare add).
- If the fight is in the corner, the corner points mentioned on **page 150** are usually the key in shorting the liberties of the opposing group
- Try to totally surround the opposing group. Not only that might create an opportunity to kill it, like on **page 149**, but it will also give you profit/influence even if the opponent's group survives.
- If you cannot surround, at least don't let your opponent connect to a nearby group and save his stones. If a group cannot be disconnected, it cannot be attacked, do not waste your moves there.

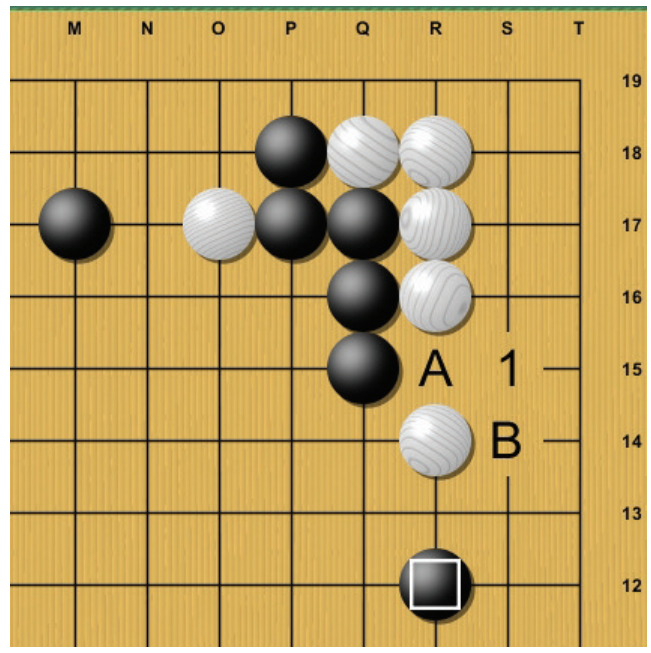
Life and death problems when we are defending

- Your main goal is to create two eyes. Failing that, you must aim to connect your group with another group that is alive
- Do not be afraid to sacrifice stones or leave part of your group behind, in order to create two eyes or connect to safety. Some alive stones are better than none.
- Aim for the shape points. In particular try to find the shape points that are protecting as many of your shape defects as possible. Multi-purpose moves are more likely to secure you eyes and life.
- Beware of any possible tesuji, especially the clamp and the throw-in as on **page 153**.
- Sometimes even bad shape can lead to life. If you see a way to survive do not hesitate to take it, even if the resulting shape is bad. In life and death situations the result is what matters most.
- Whenever you can, try to play some forcing moves of your own, even if that means ignoring the forcing moves of your opponent.

Now that we have finally a method penned down, you might notice that most of the previous examples we have examined followed most of those guidelines. To review the whole process I have saved a particular real game example for last, since a very practical joseki usually leads to that position, and the possible threat to the life of the formed group, is very common and very interesting.

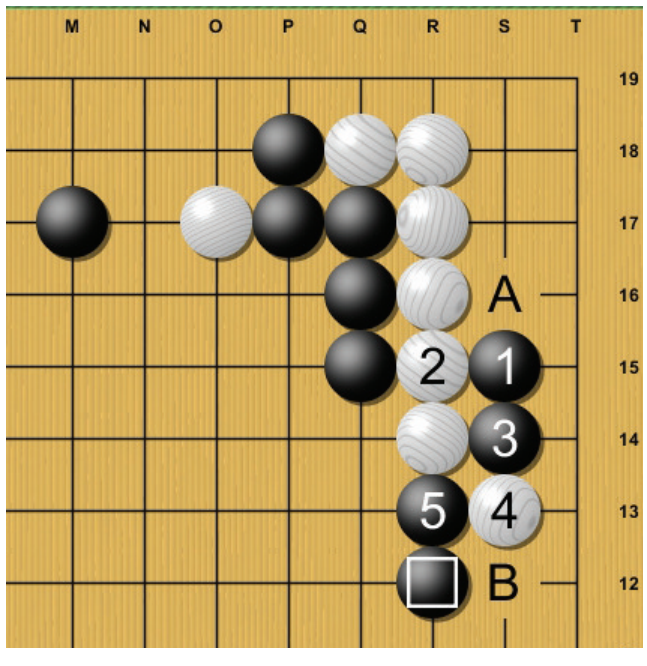
Let us visit again a very common joseki we have already analysed on **page 77**:

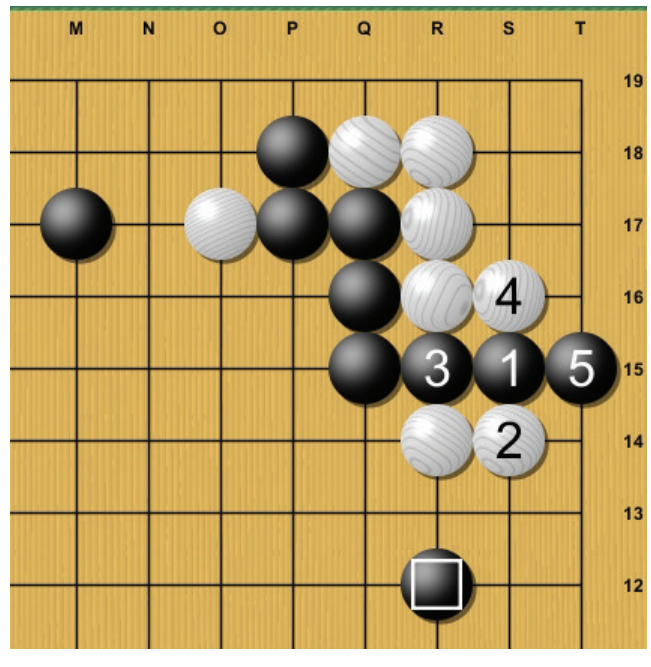




Left image: This is the usual joseki when **White 1** approaches the corner and Black responds with a pincer at **move 2**. You will notice that in comparison with the full joseki on **page 77** the exchange of **A** and **B** is missing. Most players nowadays leave the joseki unfinished like this...

Right image: The reason is that later in the game, if Black can place the marked stone in that position, then Black has a serious future threat at **move 1**, because **A** and **B** are **miai**...

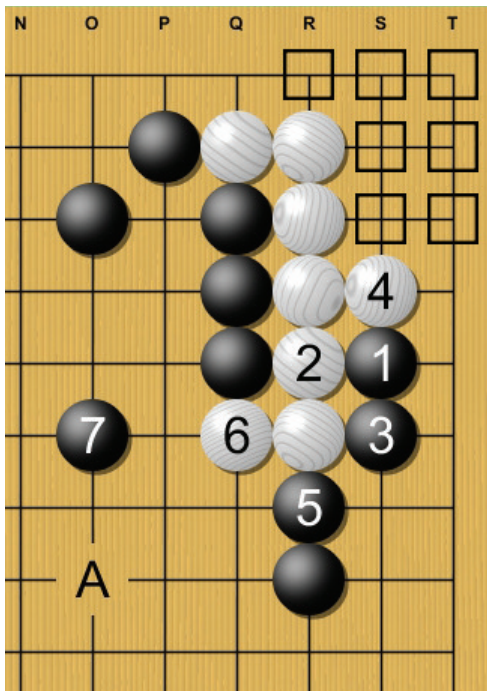




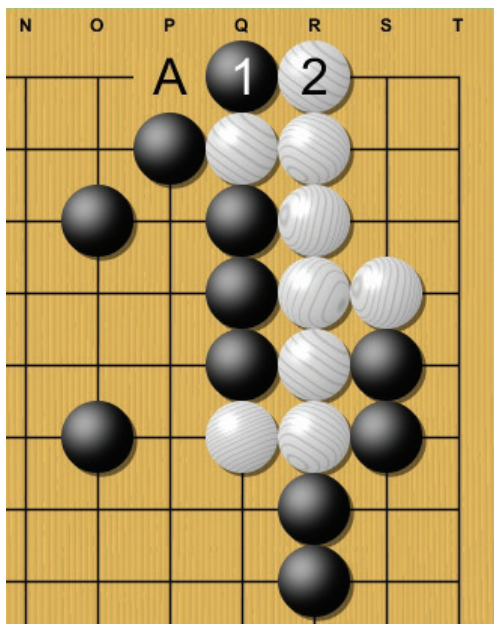
Left image: If White connects with **move 2** then Black simply extends towards the marked stone with **move 3**. White cannot stop that connection even if he plays the cut with **move 4**. Once Black responds with **move 5** White's stone has two liberties and Black's group has three liberties. White cannot extend at **B**, since he just makes his group have three liberties, but it will be Black's turn, so White usually defends his group at **A**.

Right image: If White tries to prevent Black from connecting with the marked stone, then Black simply connects directly with his larger group and completely surrounds the White group.

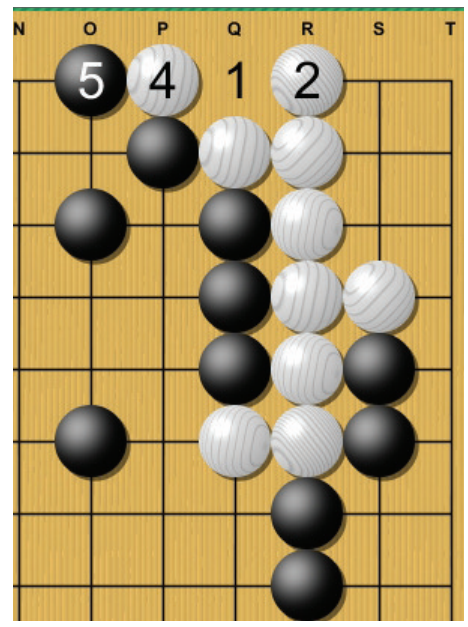
Even in the best of the two options though, the defender is still in serious trouble. Let us go to a very similar real game example and see how things went :

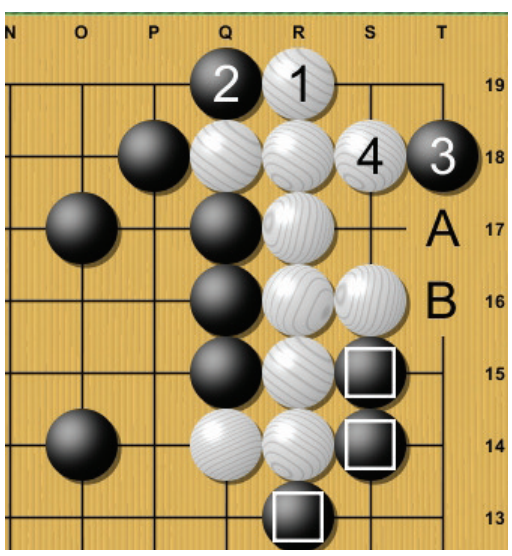


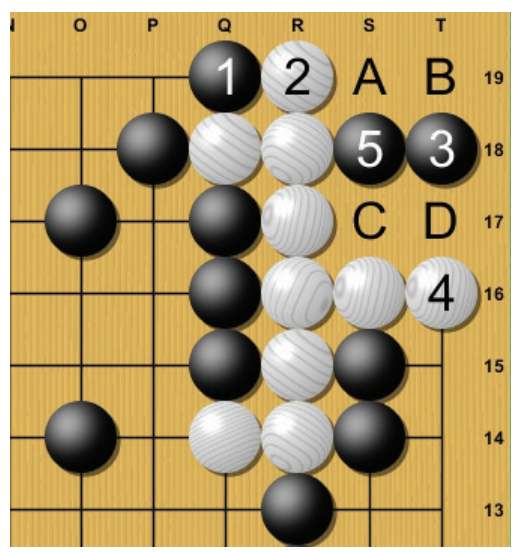
This is an example from a real game. The position is not created directly from the usual joseki, but the situation is very similar and White has the same shape to defend and Black has the exact same threat to execute. So, the **moves 1 to 3** are exchanged, but White knows that the cut is futile and he defends his group with **move 4** and threatens to execute the cut in the next move if Black does not respond.
Black of course does respond and play **move 5** to complete his threat. White tries to avoid getting totally surrounded and pokes outside and cuts Black's stones with **move 6**, but Black defends with **move 7**, giving him the option of netting White's group and connecting his stones with **A** if White tries anything. At this point White deems that the position is settled for the moment and plays elsewhere (tenuki). The square marked eye space seems sufficiently large enough to survive, but this particular space **when it is totally surrounded in the corner** can be turned to a dead shape if left alone...

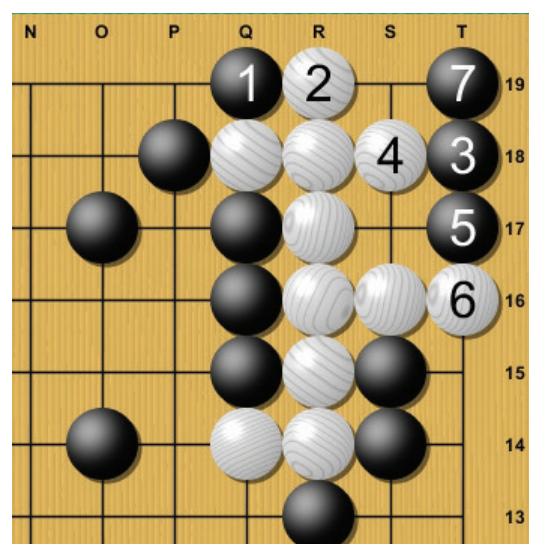


Left image: If White plays elsewhere, Black can begin the process of killing the group by playing the hane at **move 1**. White of course will block with **move 2**, but Black doesn't care about the atari and the capture of his stone at **A**. The real goal of the hane was to turn the seven point eye space into a six point space.
Right image: Even if Black played elsewhere and White captured his stone, Black could simply block with **move 5** and White would have a false eye at **1** and a six point eye space...



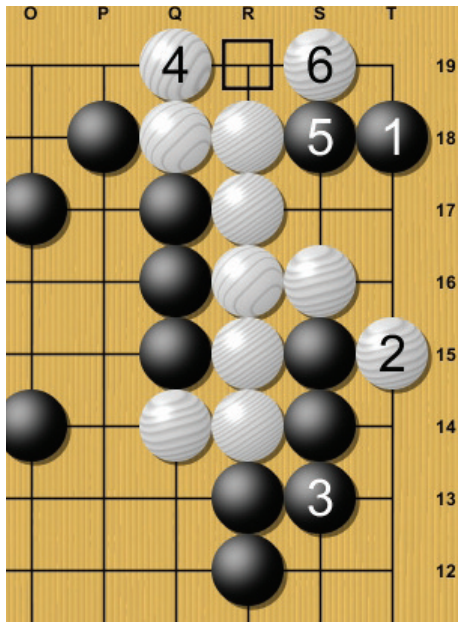




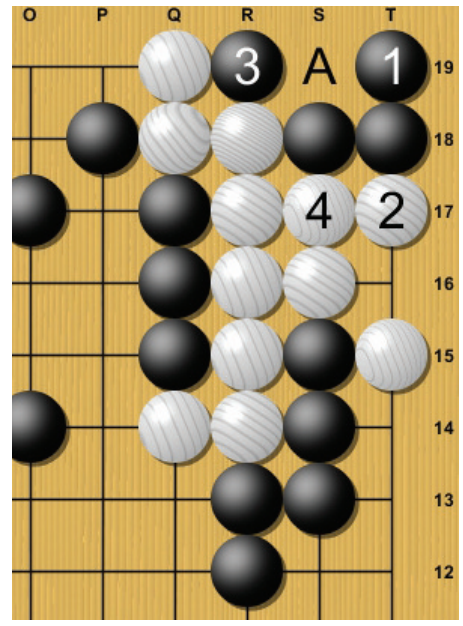


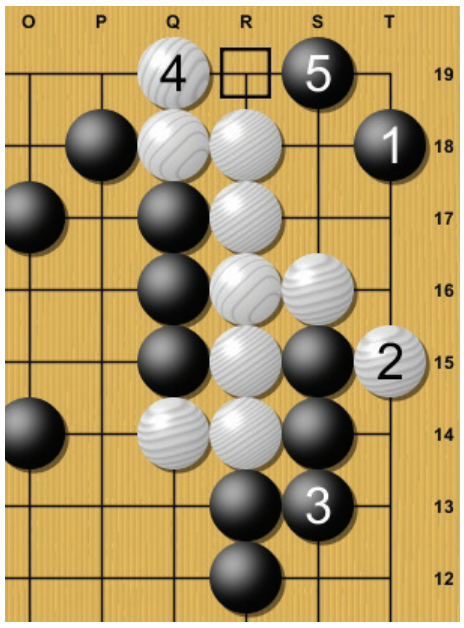
Left image: Of course Black will not tenuki and will keep on trying to kill the group with **move 3** which is also a symmetry shape point and one of the special corner spots and threatens to connect with the square marked stones with **A** or **B**. White cannot defend against all of those multiple threats so he plays in the axis of symmetry as well, in order to try and make two eyes.
Center image: White cannot play **move 4** there and cut off Black's stones because then Black will occupy both points of symmetry in the "rectangular six". This means that every possible move White tries next from **A** to **D**, to capture those stones will turn this shape into a dead bulky five.
Right image: Back to the real game, Black extends with **move 5** and White has to stop him from connecting this time with **move 6**, but now Black can simply play **move 7** and kill White's group, because White is surrounded and he will have to reduce his own eye space to three points in **gote** in order to capture Black's stones. At best this is a bent four in the corner. Either way, **White is dead.**

This particular situation is a very good example about the importance of the sequence of the moves. It really is important to change the shape and size of the potential eye space **before** you attempt to place any stones within it. In this case things would have been very different, if Black tried to kill White directly:

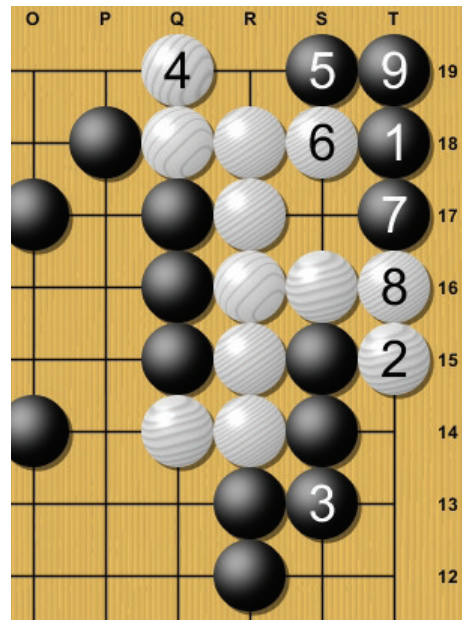


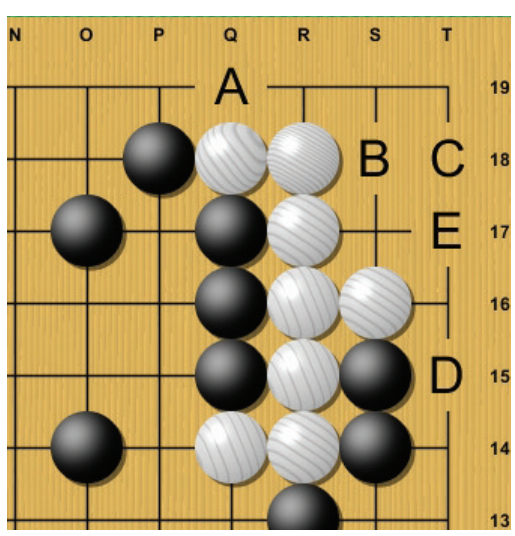
Left image: If Black tries to kill without reducing the eye-space first, then **move 4** creates a potential eye in the marked point. If **Black 5** goes for the shape point, White now can simply form two eyes in any case.
Right image: Black cannot kill White's group anymore. If he tries to capture White's lone stone then Black gets surrounded and captured instead. After the exchange White can form two eyes again by playing at **A** and capturing all the Black stones. If the White group was completely surrounded, then White couldn't play this variation because all his group would be in atari at **move 4**.

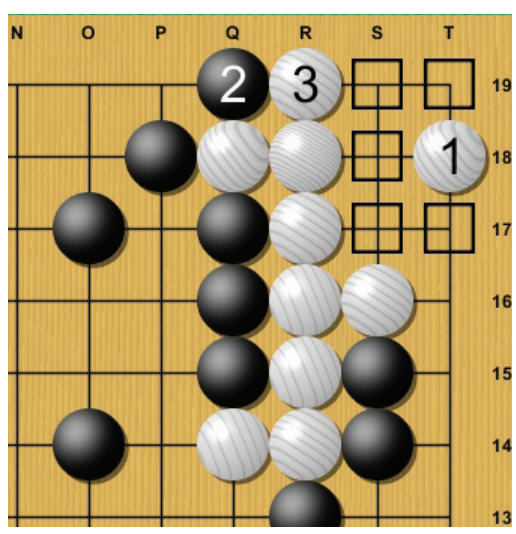


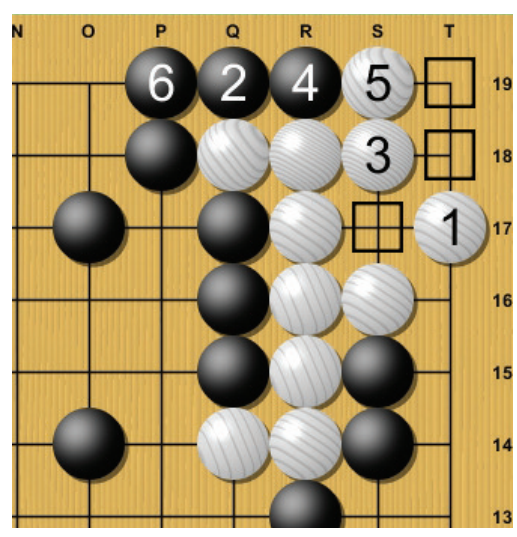


Left image: If Black tries to do away with the possible eye at the marked point and destroys it with **move 5** then White can get a stone in the other point of shape symmetry...
Right image: This is the best Black can do after **White 6** takes the point of symmetry.
Move 7 threatens the cut, **White 8** connects and **Black 9** forms an L shape and hopes to totally surround White and aim for dual life.
In this case White's group has four outer liberties and sente, so White can start capturing Black's group before he is in any threat of self-ataring his group. **White is alive.**









Left to right: White can also live simply by investing in a move at any point from **A to E**. In the two example variations presented, White can easily defend his eyespace with the help of the extra move.

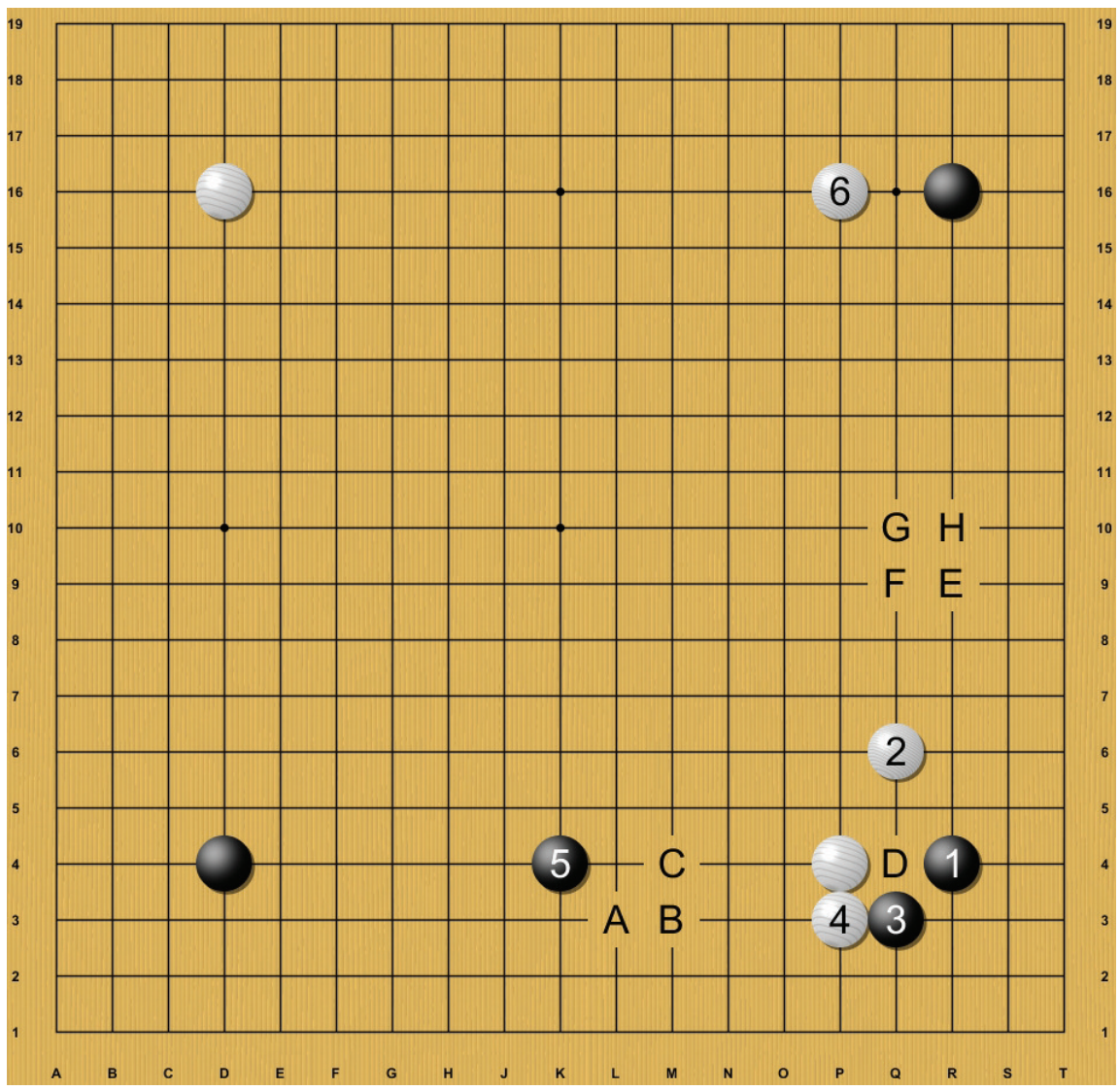
<u>Be cautious!</u> Sometimes life and death problems are simply only about turning a seemingly living shape with lots of eye space, into a smaller, dead, eye space, by exploiting its defects, **before you place stones to kill**. I cannot stress this issue enough and it happens all the time in real games.

The previous shape is a variation of shapes called the **L group** (because the stones forming the most basic case look like an inverted “L”) and it has many variations depending on slight changes in size and space, which will not go through, but are very interesting for future study. Depending on the case an L group can yield many results, but if the defender has **sente** this variation of the L group is alive and that is usually the case in the way it forms in real games.

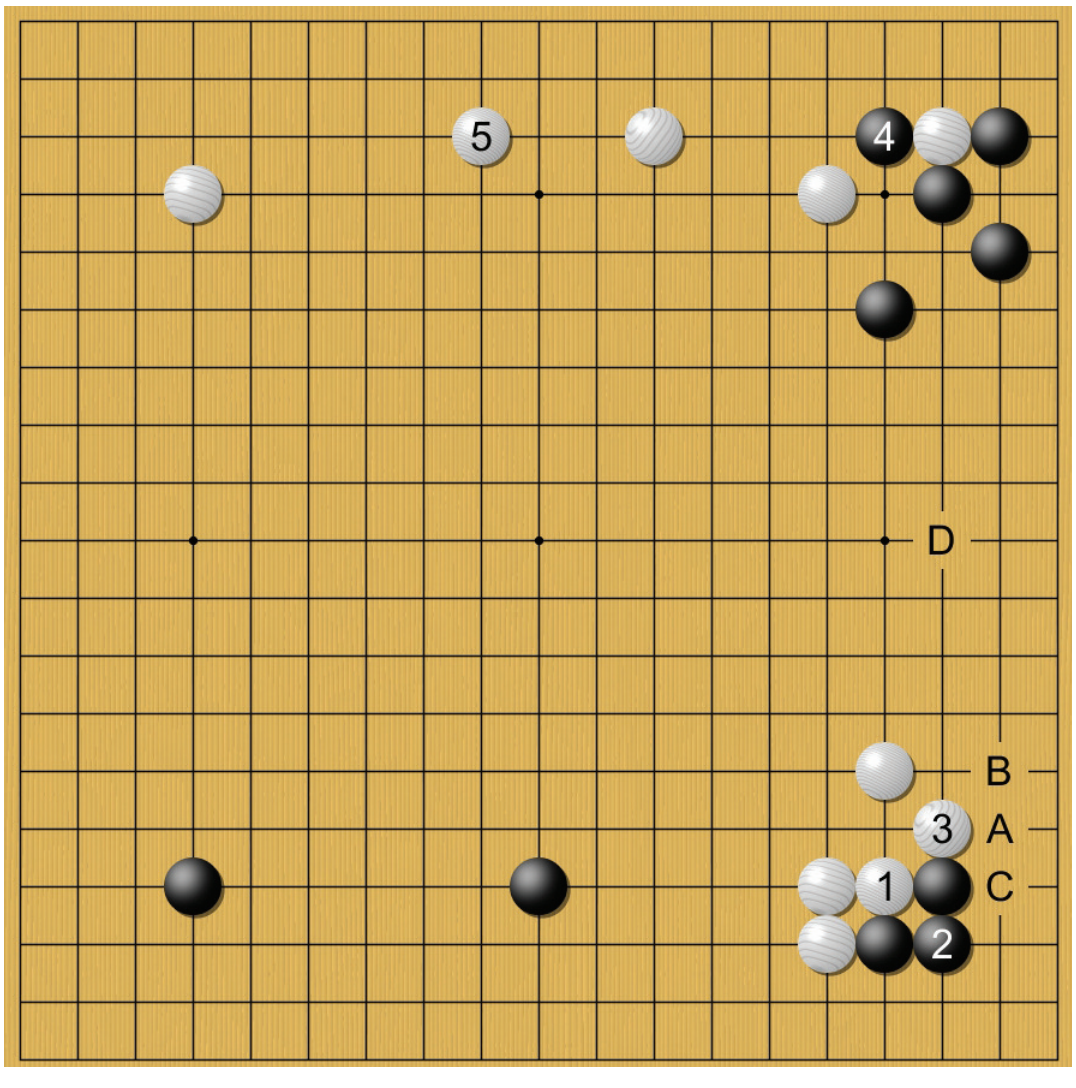
There is a similar shape category called the **J group** which also has a lot of variations, but in its case it usually ends up dead because a lot of the times the way it is formed during the game the defender forms this group in **gote**.

It is a very common shape and a lot of people in our level think that it is alive and do not know how to kill it, even in single digit kyu games, so I think that it is very interesting to see a real game example of how it is formed and how and why it ends up dead if the defender doesn’t know that it is not de facto alive.

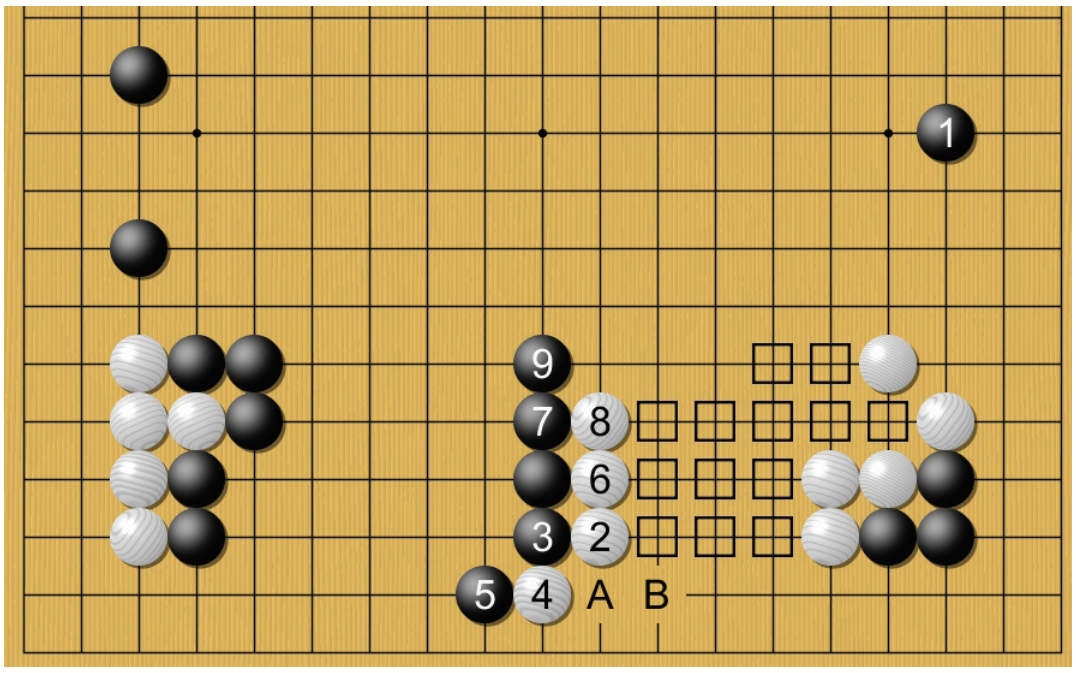
Let us see and analyse what happened:



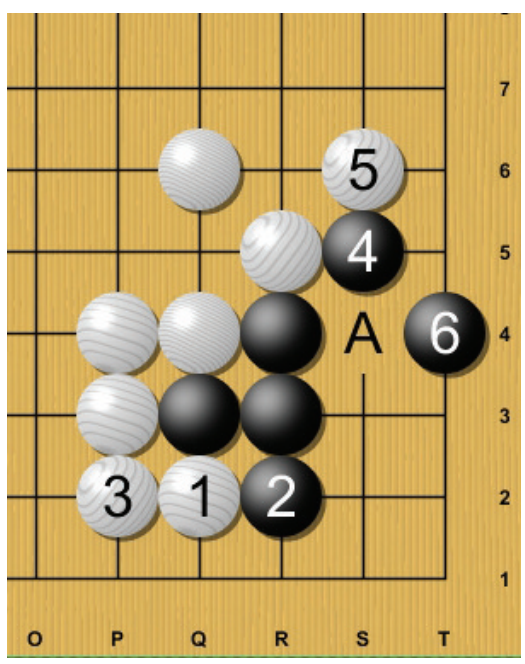
The **J group** will appear in the bottom right corner. After the initial four opening moves that claimed one corner for each player, Black makes the approach at **move 1**. White plays the peaceful knight’s move at **move 2** conceding the corner to Black to gain outer influence and **Black 3** claims the corner though it is a move that is not really considered joseki. White plays **move 4** to expand his outer influence and aim for a move around **A**, after Black responds in the corner, but Black tries to foil that plan by playing **move 5**, trying to negate White’s influence. Foiling the opponent’s plans is, as we already said earlier, a great idea, but safety should come first as well. Black’s corner stones are not as safe as Black thinks and Black owes a move there. White also knows that any move **from A to H** would give him enough breathing air to either live or run, so he approaches another corner with **move 6**...



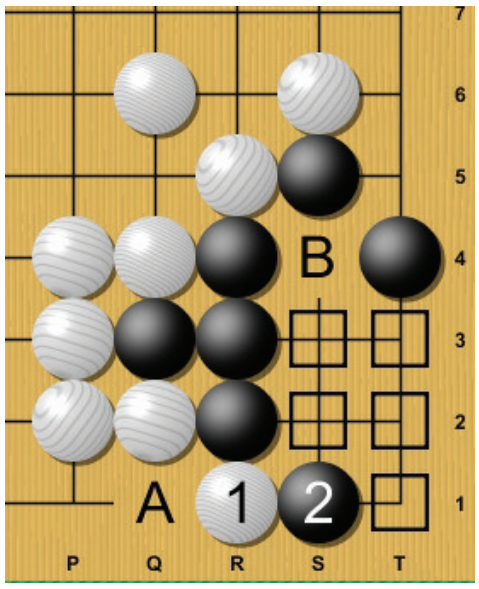
After a semi-joseki exchange on the top right corner, White decides that he should settle his shape a bit more on the bottom corner so he makes the sente exchange of **move 1** with Black defending from the atari and cut with **move 2**. White then proceeds to play **move 3** thinking that it is sente and aiming for the following exchange Black **A**, White **B**, Black **C**, White **D**, which would have given a solid base to White's group, a lot of territory and influence and would have reduced a lot of the potential of the Black group on the top right corner.
It was a good plan, but Black is confident that his three stones have a lot of eye space in the safety of the corner, so he plays away again, foiling White's plan by capturing a White stone with **move 4** and forcing White to extend at **move 5** in order to be safe and expand at the same time.

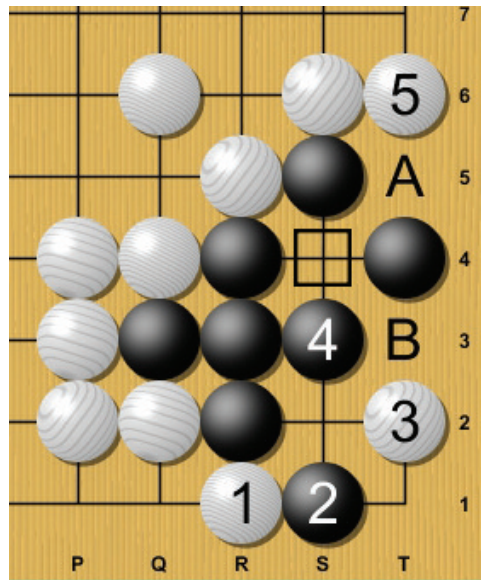


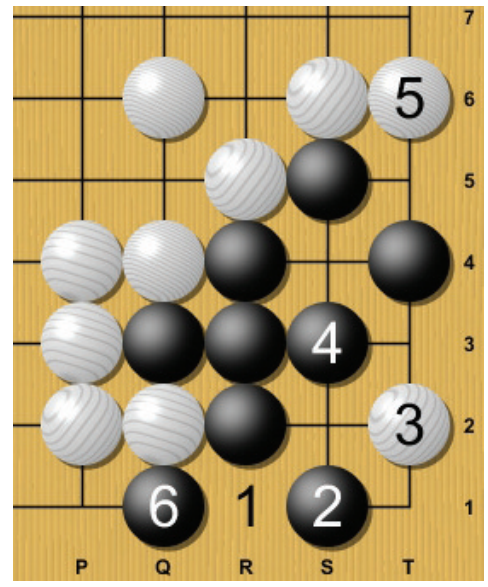
A lot of moves later and with no action on the right side, Black decides to put pressure on White's bottom right corner stones and expand from his top corner with **move 1**.
White now is slowly feeling the heat so he ignores Black's stone and makes the exchange from **moves 2 to 9** on the bottom side of the board to create eye space for himself in the marked points. Pushing from behind with **moves 6 and 8** is usually not good, but in this case it was needed, and Black still owes a move in the corner...



Now that White's group is safe it is ideal time for the **J group** to be formed. White plays the hane at **move 1** and Black blocks, forming the shape of two joined triangles, with **move 2**.
White then defends his stone from getting into atari with **move 3** and seems to be giving up sente, so Black feels that he should finally expand his eye space a bit and plays **move 4**, but White has the perfect shape to block that expansion with **move 5** which forms the double tiger's mouth. Just like White before, Black doesn't want his stone to be in atari, which would decimate the eye space and kill that group, so he needs to defend the weak point at **A**, but unlike White he wants to keep the possibility of forming an eye there in the future so he plays the tiger's mouth "connection" as well, with **move 6**. White cannot play directly at **A** anymore, but he got what he wished for. **This is a textbook J group shape** and it is White's turn, so Black is dead, as we will see in the next page...



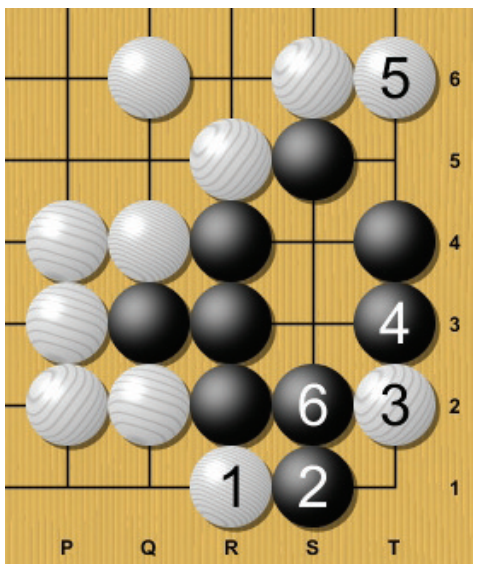


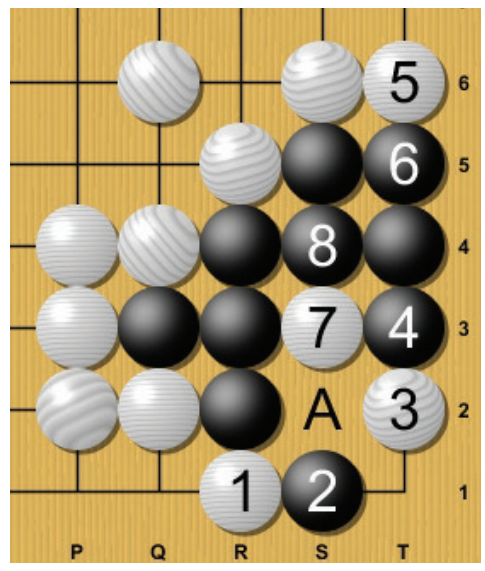


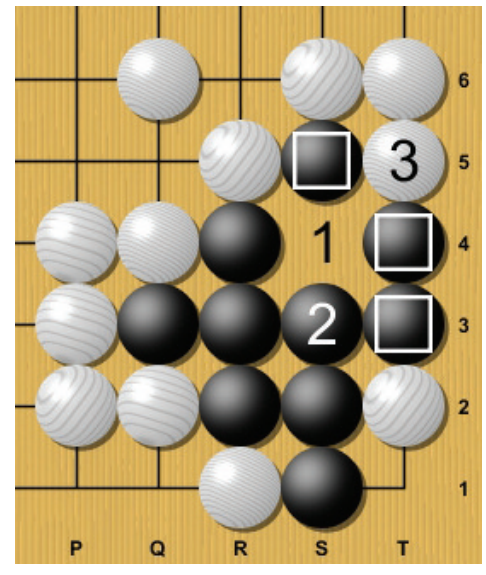
Left image: First comes the move that alters the shape, in this case the hane at **move 1**. Black is almost forced to defend at **move 2** to retain some eye-space potential, but as you can see, if White can falsify the possible eye at **B**, then the marked space is the bulky five, which is a shape that can die if White can play in the vital spot first...

Center Image: And this vital spot is exactly what White plays next in **move 3** to keep Black from living and threaten to atari the stone at **move 2**. The usual variation is not the one played in the game, but Black tried to defend everything with **move 4**, since it looks like a point of symmetry and that it helps to form an eye in the square marked point, but **move 5** puts an end to that possibility by making **A** and **B miai**. If Black plays **A**, then White plays **B** and puts the three stones in atari and Black needs to fill the square marked point, destroying his own eye. If Black plays **B**, then White plays **A** and puts the single stone in atari, falsifying that eye. So, Black now has only one eye space and the vital point is already occupied by his opponent. **Black is dead** and since he at least has sente now, he should play elsewhere and try to make up for his loss elsewhere.

Right image: But instead, in the actual game, Black made the capture at **move 6**. This does not change anything, since Black is totally surrounded. **The point at 1 is not an eye** as we have seen in previous cases, since White can atari the stone played at **move 6** and force Black to fill the point at **1**. Do not lose sente for nothing. When your group dies accept the loss and move on to another part of the board.





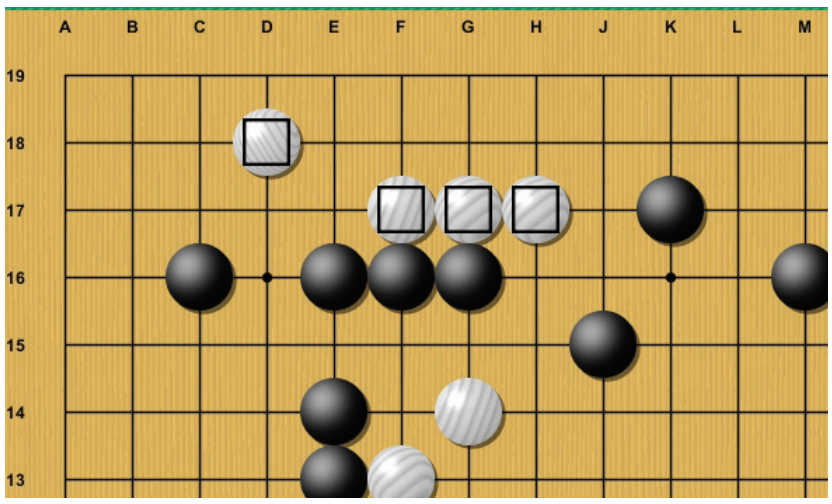


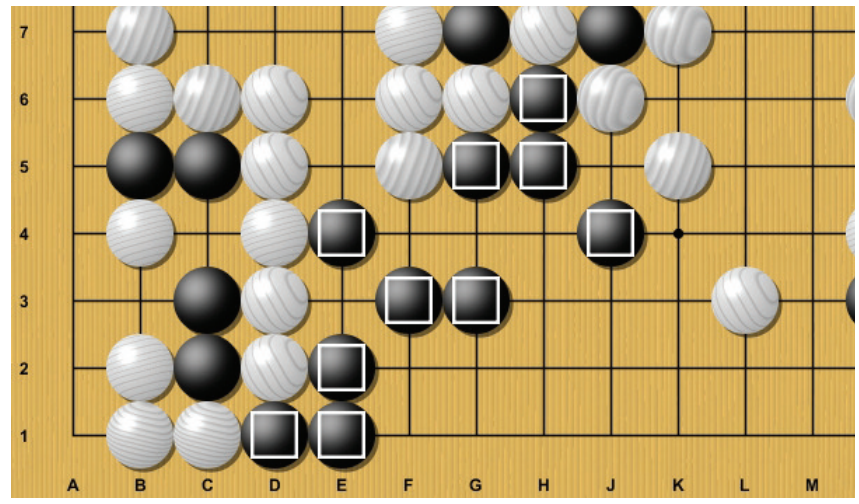
Left image: After the exchange of **moves 1 to 3**, this is the most usual variation and the most tricky to kill. Black's **move 4** aims for the creation of two distinct eye spaces that would inevitably lead to two eyes, but White is ahead of that goal and needs to play **move 5** again to threaten falsify the eyespace by placing the lone stone in atari. Black plays **move 6** to make certain that one of the two eyespaces are safe and creates the first eye.

Center Image: Black cannot play **move 6** to defend the other eye-space, due to this series of atari. Black is forced to connect with **move 8.** His whole group is now in atari and White can capture at **A**.

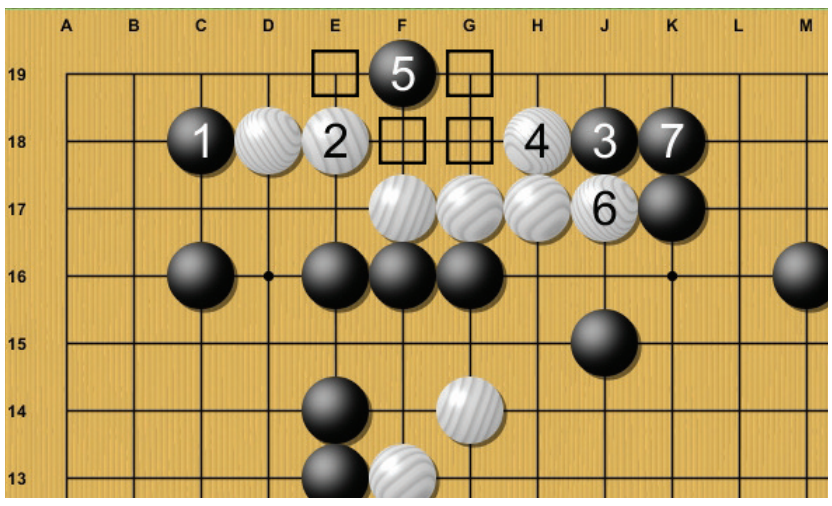
Right image: Now comes the difficult part, so let us reset the counter from the left image. White plays the throw-in at **move 1** and Black is forced to play **move 2** and connect or risk losing the marked stones. Then White plays **move 3** and falsifies Black's potential eye. **Black is dead again.**

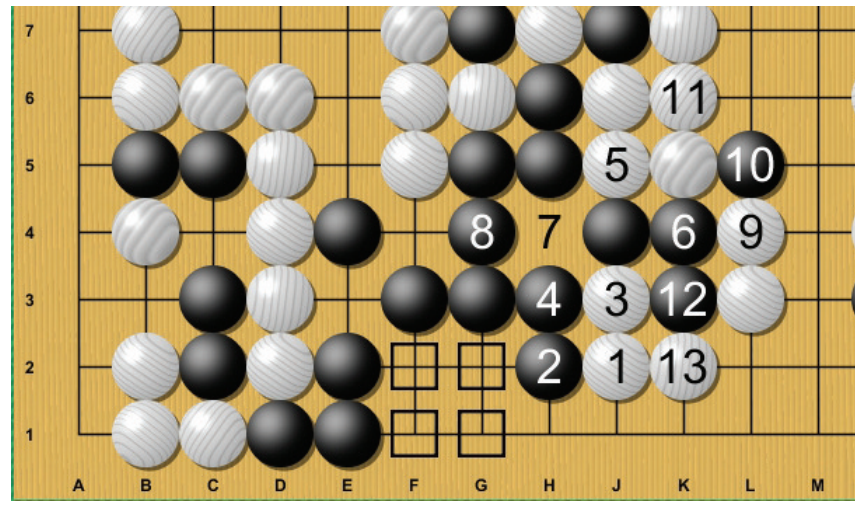
Those two groups of shapes, the **L group** and the **J group,** and their variations are a good topic of future study for you. As always the idea is not to memorize moves, but to understand their meaning, so that we can apply those ideas elsewhere and it would indeed appear that the method/guidelines we used have merit and can be used widely in life and death problems. So, last, but not least, I want to finish this chapter by pointing out again that this is a surrounding game and that getting totally surrounded is usually the beginning of most of your life and death troubles. We will not analyse them play by play, they are a bit more advanced examples than what I would have liked for the level of this book, but I think that they are worth checking out. Please look at the two following examples from real games and *think whether the surrounded marked groups are alive*.





They seem to be just fine and with plenty of space to make two eyes, but the fact that they are totally surrounded gives the attackers the option to play bold moves that otherwise wouldn't work as well. These groups both ended up dying in the actual games with the following sequences…





Left image: If Black hadn't been so strong in the area and White totally surrounded, a bold attack like **move 1** could have never worked, but here White cannot cut through Black's stones so he is forced to defend at **move 2** and after another shape altering exchange with **moves 3 and 4**, Black plays in the vital spot of the bulky five. White tries to wriggle out, but he is totally surrounded.
Right image: By far a more complicated example since it employs the throw-in tesuji at **move 7** that forces Black to capture that stone and practically destroy his own eye there. After all those moves Black is left only with the four points in a square, which we now know that it is dead even is White doesn't play a move inside the eye-space to kill it. White's stones that surround the Black group are the ones that give him the strong basis to play aggressive moves that reduce Black's shape.

Remember: Even if you found this chapter a bit overbearing, I urge you to at least always keep in mind those three important ideas: Do not get surrounded, mind your shape, beware of the corners.

This is just the beginning

Believe it or not all the pages so far are only about the basics of the game and they are not even totally exploring them in their entirety. There are so many concepts to explore in Go and so many sectors which one can focus on and become better: study more opening theory and joseki, more elaborate tesuji, get better at reading sequences and visualising the incoming moves and variations, attacking, defending, building or destroying influence, reducing or expanding territory, killing or saving groups of stones. All those are matters we talked about, but there are so many more things to learn about them by playing the game and having fun and, of course, studying.

By my estimation, if you have at least read and understood everything so far, then you have the necessary basic knowledge to be a high single digit kyu player and the more you will apply that knowledge in games, the better you will get while you will have fun transposing that knowledge into practical experience. Soon enough you will have your own games to look back and review and find how basic concepts work and where you or your opponent misplaced a stone. *The road to getting better and having fun is open to you*, even if you are not very keen on studying more about the game. This stands true for myself. **The more I understand the basics, the better I become, the more fun I have**. Do not concern yourselves too much over ratings. If you keep playing and have fun and keep your eyes set on re-evaluating the basics, the strength you will accumulate will eventually reflect on your rating.

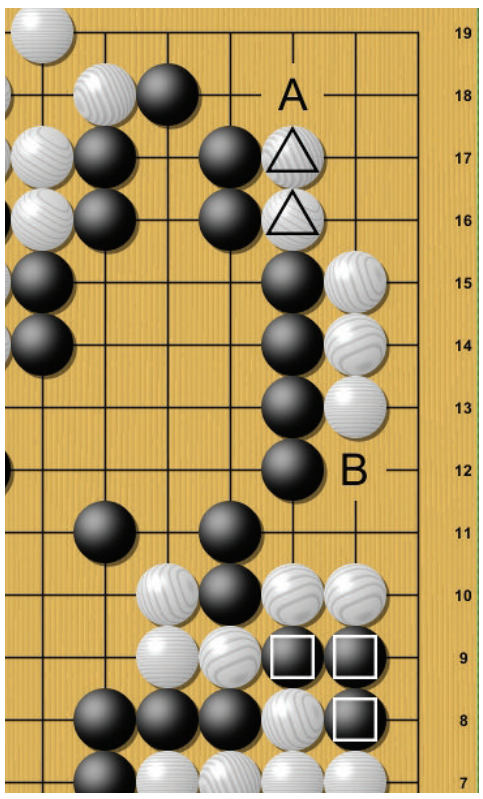
Now, this last chapter is about some advanced topics that I believe that we should all have in mind for two reasons. First and foremost because learning is fun and interesting. The second reason is that some opponents might try and confuse us with some moves that might appear bizarre and we should be able to identify those moves for what they are, even if only to learn from them.

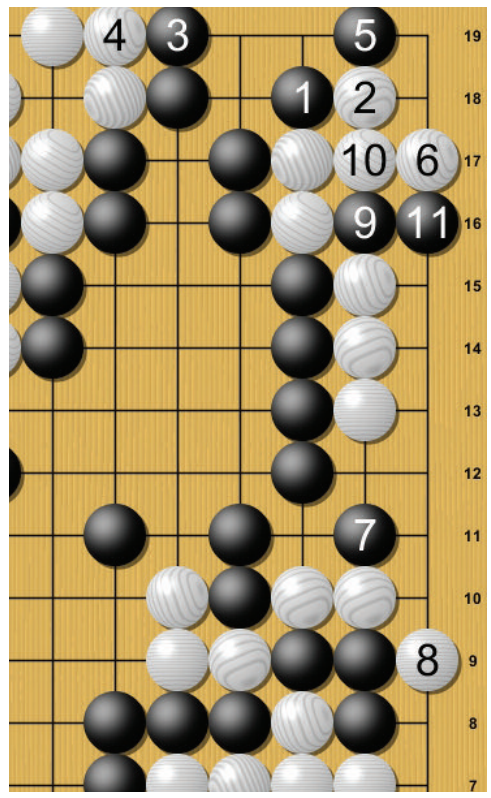
Lately I find myself playing even games with much stronger opponents, just to see how they think and operate and how they sometimes deal with situations with moves that I wouldn’t think or play. Those players almost always win against me, of course, but I am having fun and I am learning new things. But to learn, you need to at least recognise what is that concept that was just used against you. What idea is lurking behind a move. Why something you played or thought that was good is not played by better players. How something can be avoided and how a greedy play can be punished. All these things and more can be answered by facing stronger opponents, not so much with the goal of winning, but the goal of observing and learning and having fun. I have found that this carefree mentality actually makes me play better and improve faster.

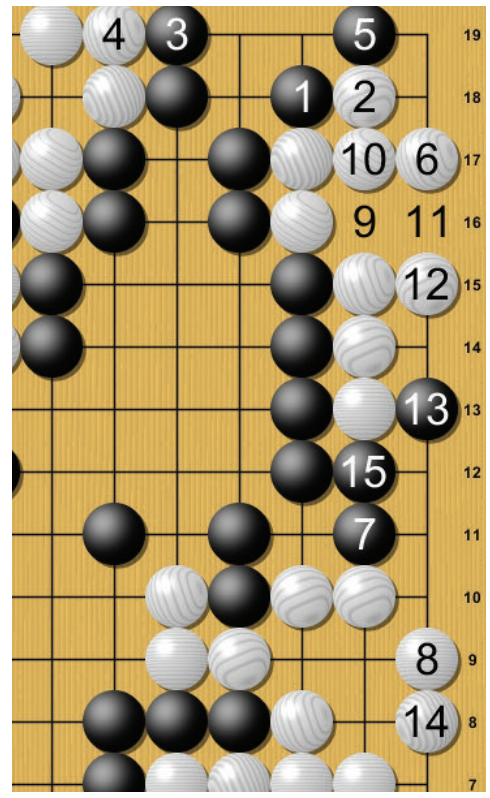
Learn to let go

Sometimes we want to make each and every stone we have played stay on the board. We feel the urge to save it from getting captured, it is “our precious”, our own stone or small group of stones. We cannot let them go, we cannot let them fall into enemy hands. Other times we think that we snared a whole group of stones and because we wouldn’t ever let some stones go, we are surprised when the opponent just lets us get only a small tail of that group, while he runs away with the rest of his stones to safety.

Learning to let go of some of our stones that have either served their purpose or have become detrimental or chain our groups down, is ***very important*****.** We also talked about “heavy” and “light” stones at **page 50**, but finding what stones are “heavy” and endanger our groups and which stones are “light” and can be discarded without any real damage is rarely easy to achieve. But first we need to understand how this whole concept works. Why would we want to let go of our stones? It sounds like an odd idea, so some examples will help us get more familiar with it.



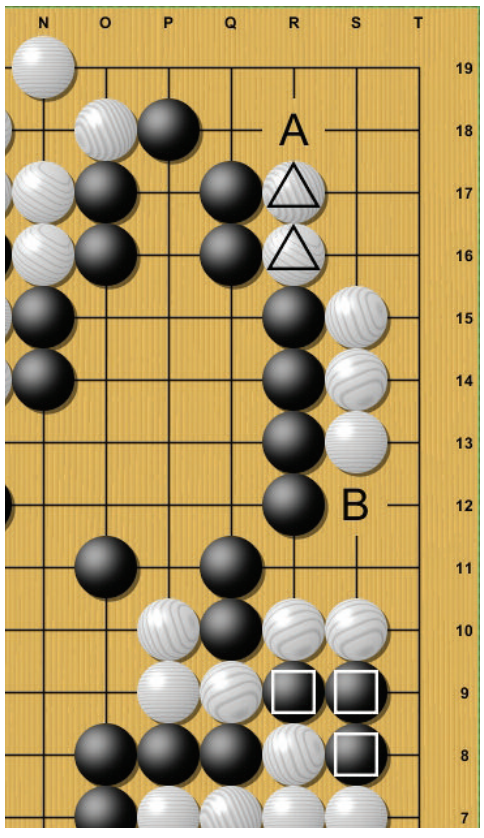


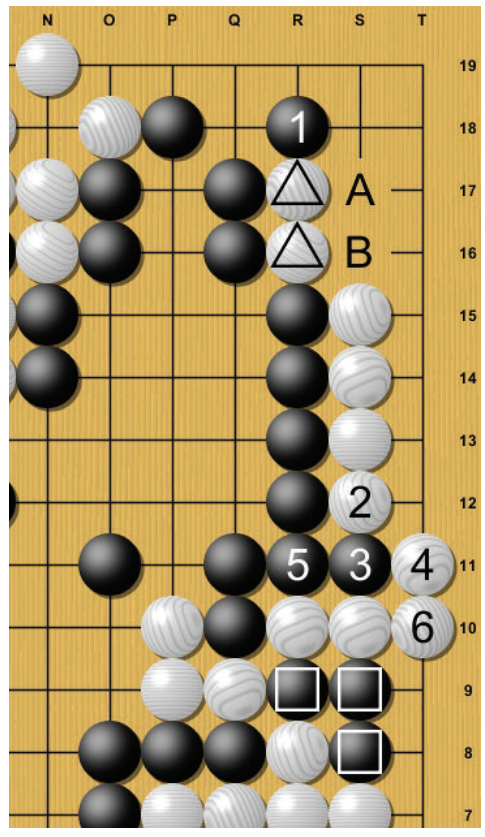


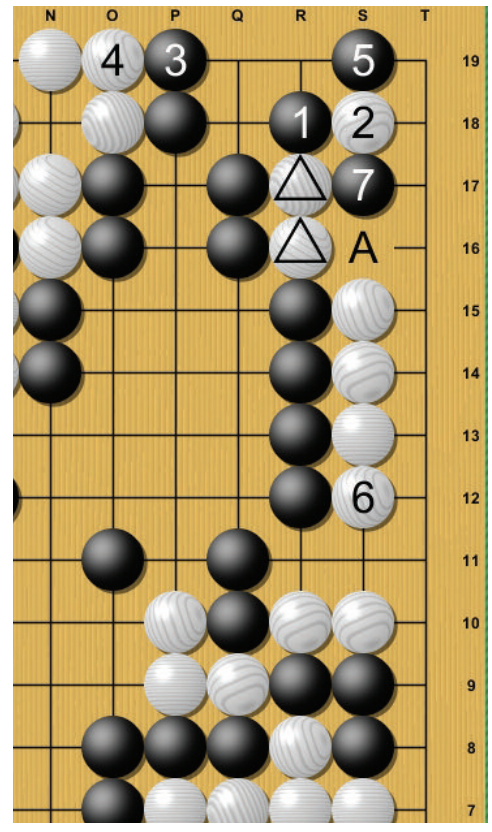
Left image: This is another life and death situation from a real game. The square marked Black stones are currently dead because they have two liberties, while White’s groups have three, but those stones’ existence is not determined yet. As long as they are on the board they provide **aji** for Black. White’s group can live easily by extending at **A** or connecting with the other White group at **B**, so White thinks that he is quite safe. (We will not analyse the life and death details, since our focus is different this time, but it is a good exercise to try on your own, just like we did in the earlier chapter)

Center image: Black commences his attack and he is slowly altering the White group’s eye shape, as he should be doing and White defends thinking that he can still connect if he lands in trouble, but **move 7** reduces a White group to two liberties in **sente** and forces White to play **move 8** to keep those three Black stones captured. White can no longer connect now, he must live.

Right image: But it is impossible in such a tiny space. Black continues the attack and with **move 14** White gives up his group in exchange for **sente**. All of White’s stones are dead. Could he have achieved a better result if he had learned to let go of some stones? **In this case, the answer is yes…**







Left image: Returning to the original position White's mistake is that he thinks that he has two different ways to live, **A** and **B**. What he doesn't spot is that in this case they are **miai** so he proceeds to be greedy and tries to defend all his stones and, as we saw, he loses everything. The solution is to treat this case with the urgency it demands.

Center image: So, once Black plays **move 1**, if White immediately plays **move 2** and treats it like a real **miai** situation, then White is connected and alive as you can see, since the square marked Black stones are still dead in this sequence. Even if Black plays **A** to try to atari the two triangle marked stones, White can connect at **B**, although it is not really needed. Now that Black successfully reduced the corner so much, those two stones are without meaning in terms of territory, so exchanging two worthless stones to get **sente twice** (once for Black playing **A** and a second time for Black playing **B**) is a great prospect for White, if Black goes for it.

If White just lets these stones go, **then he is going to gain much more profit elsewhere on the board,** in comparison to the four points these stones represent (two points of territory and two points for the captured stones)

Be careful: This obviously works both ways! Try to offer worthless stones to your opponent and gain elsewhere while he wastes moves to capture them, but at the same time you should not play extra moves in order to capture stones that the opponent discarded or offered in exchange.

Right image: Even during Black's attack, White is given another chance to fix his mistake and still gain **double sente**. After **move 5**, White should just connect with **move 6** and give up the three stones in the top. If Black plays **move 7** to place White's stones in double atari, White can ignore Black and gain **sente** elsewhere and if Black seals the deal with a move at **A**, then White gets **sente** again.

Black seems to have destroyed a White corner and gained some stones, but giving sente two times to your opponent is an amazing advantage which could mean that White could have gained even more points elsewhere, depending on the game and what White would do with that sente.

Be careful: An exchange that demands you to give up **sente** should make you pause and think whether it is worth the trouble, but an exchange that demands you to give **sente twice** is an exchange that you should shy away from. At the same time if you can actively create a situation where your opponent might be tempted to try that against you, **then you should seriously consider giving up some stones** if that is what it takes.

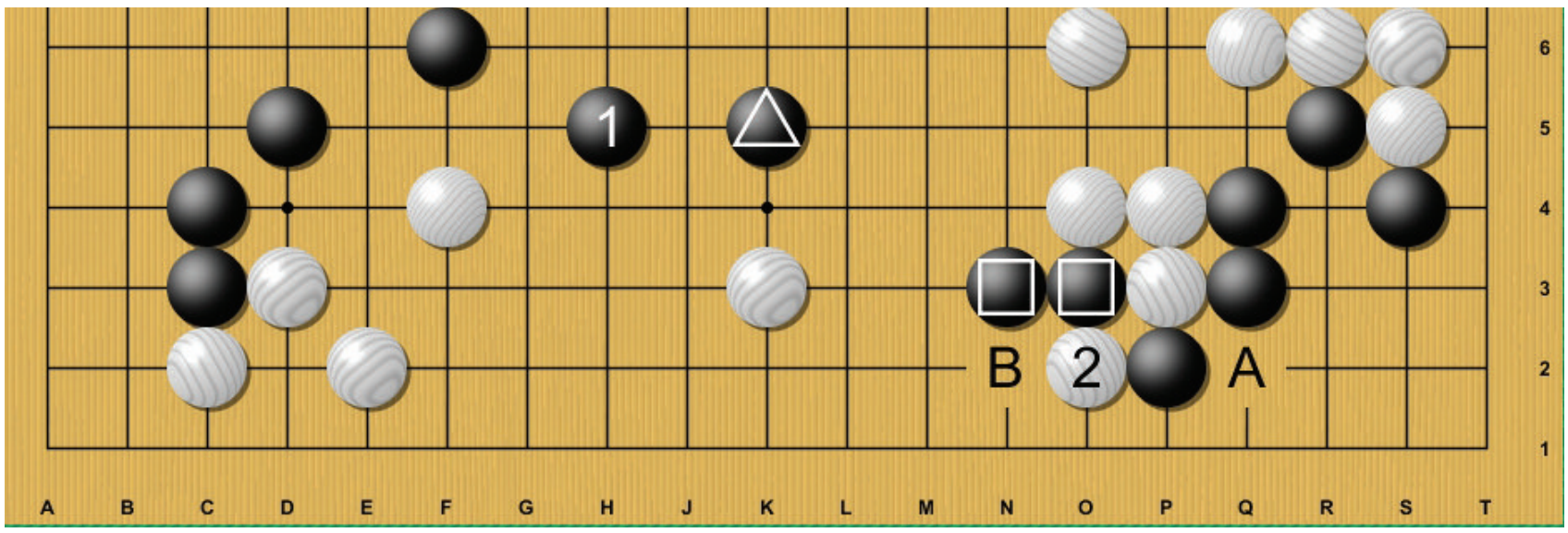
The more you play, the more you will come to realize that more often than not the player that "wastes" the most moves for small gains, is usually the player that loses the game.

Try to think on a large scale, play large moves, keep sente and do not play small moves.

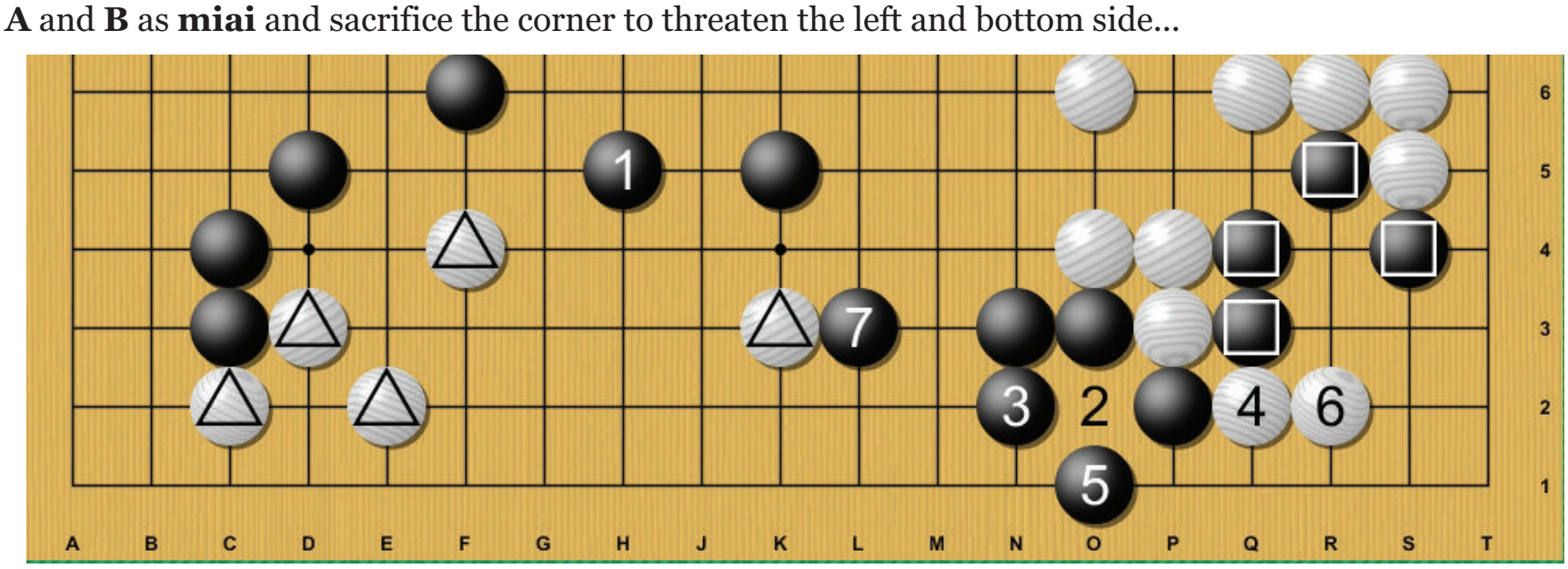
This is, of course, easier said than done, but it is good to have those goals in mind.

Sometimes an exchange by our opponent is offered willingly or by mistake and we can gain more, by giving up the stones we already have. Such chances don't happen too often, but it is an opportunity that we need to be aware of and to manage that we should try to get over our natural tendency to protect each and every stone.

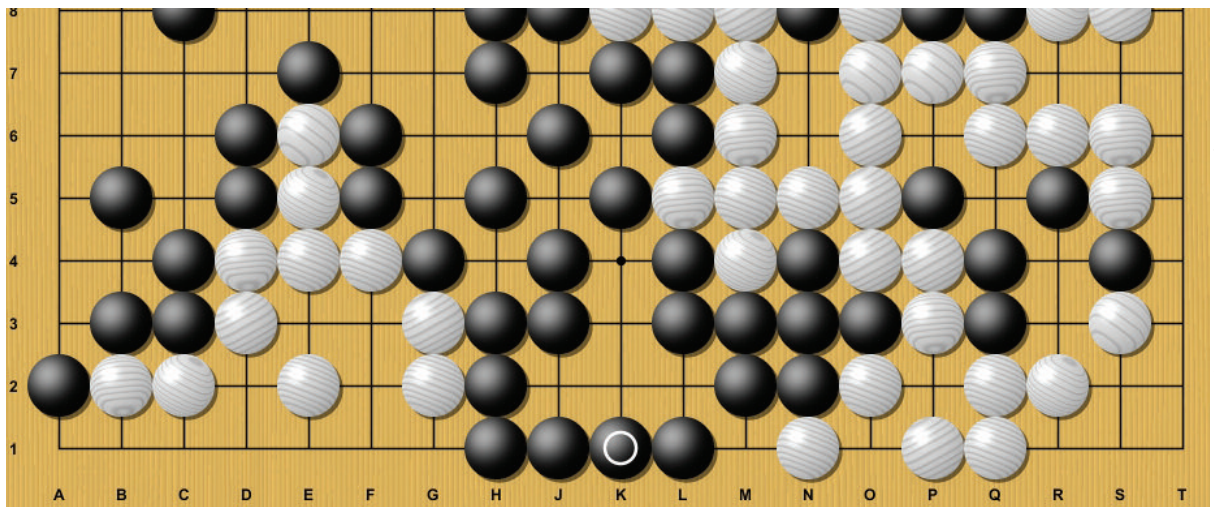
For example :



Black tries to threaten White's group on the left with **move 1**, but White ignores the threat and chooses to cut at **move 2**. Normally Black would simply connect at **A** and defend his corner and White would play at **B** and threaten to capture the two square marked stones, while those would flee towards the triangle marked Black stone, giving profit to White. But now that White ignored a threat on the left, Black can treat **A** and **B** as **miai** and sacrifice the corner to threaten the left and bottom side...



So, Black defends on the other side and the following exchange is played naturally. Black captures a stone with **move 5** and White kills any eye potential the four Black marked stones could have. But with **move 7** Black begins a full out attack on the triangle marked White group which is now totally surrounded and it doesn't have two eyes yet. Black gave up the corner, but he did that exchange in order to threaten to gain a lot more points elsewhere...



This is the final result, just before the end of the game. White barely lived on the left side and, if you compare this image with the early fight, Black seems to have gained more points than the ones that he gave up in the corner.

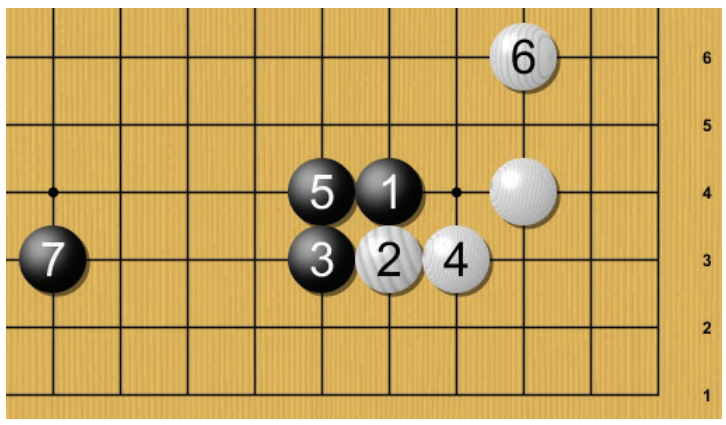
Deciding which group of stones is **"heavy"** and which is **"light"**, is totally dependent on the situation and our opponent's nearby stones, but in general there are three criteria that can tell us whether a group is heavy:

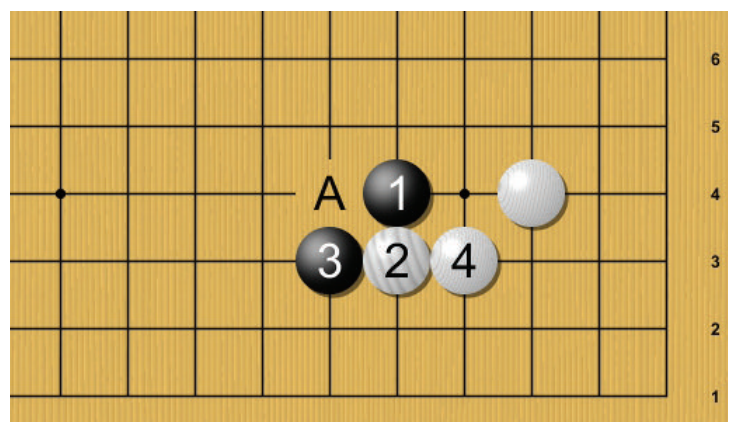
A) Are all the stones directly connected?

B) Are the stones played as a direct investment in securing that area?

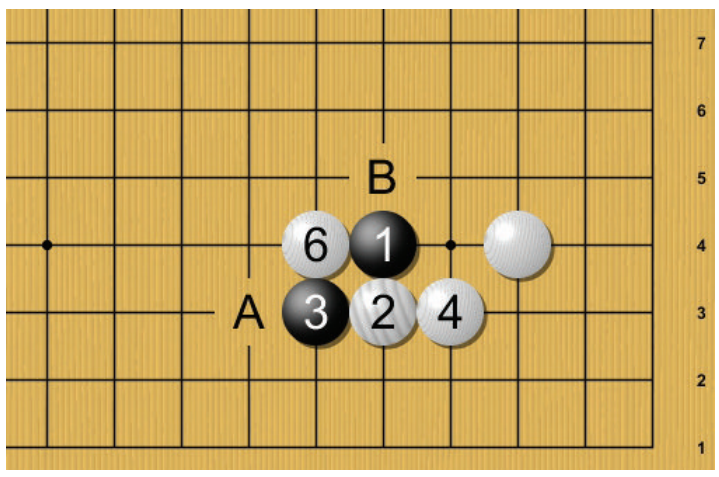
C) Is it possible that we will get surrounded or deprived of our eye space and eventually have to run away to survive?

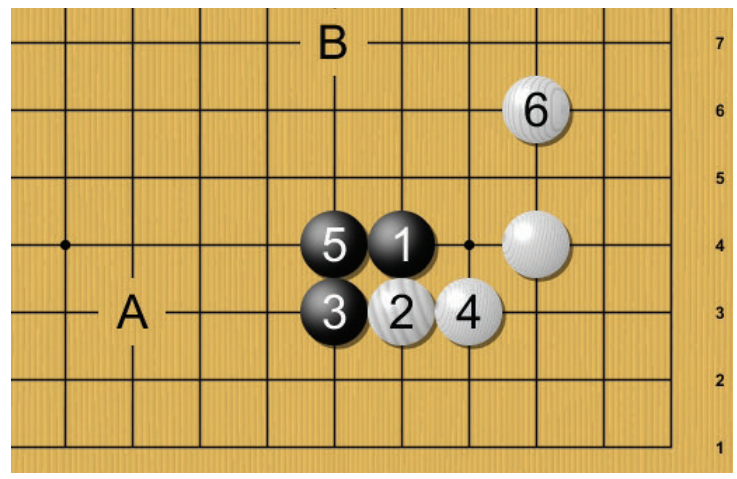
Of what we saw from the previous examples, that is not always easy to decide and it becomes mostly a matter of experience. To make matters worse, sometimes it is only one or two stones that change the decision of whether our group can be treated as light or heavy and that can add even more complexity to the issue. At what amount of stones does our group stop being light and it has crossed the threshold to being heavy? A classic case is something that you can see in more advanced games where players are starting to leave joseki unfinished. A good example is the classic joseki we saw on **page 84**:





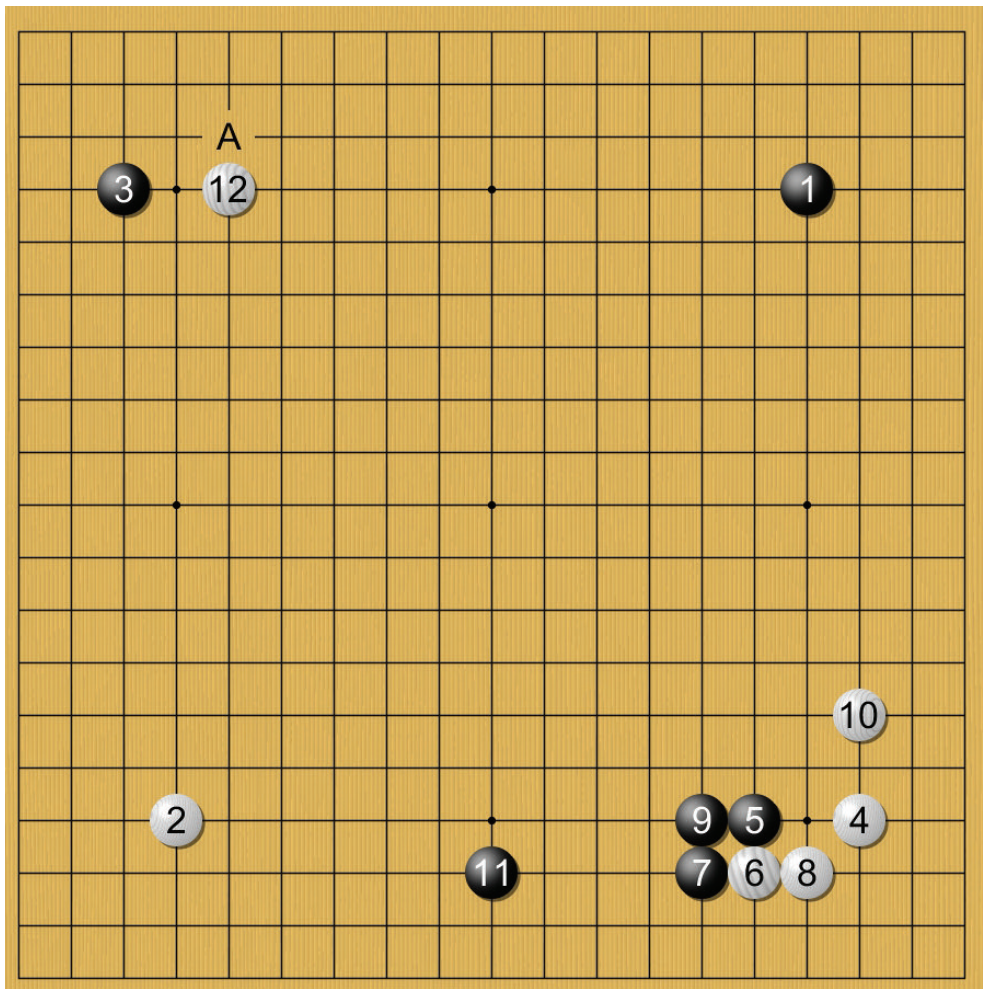
Left image: This is the joseki we expect normally.
Right image: Black can decide that after **move 4** his stones need no more help at the time and can be treated as **light,** if White decides to play the obvious cut at **A**. So Black plays **move 5** elsewhere to gain the advantage at some other place on the board. So, these stones are considered **light**. But why?





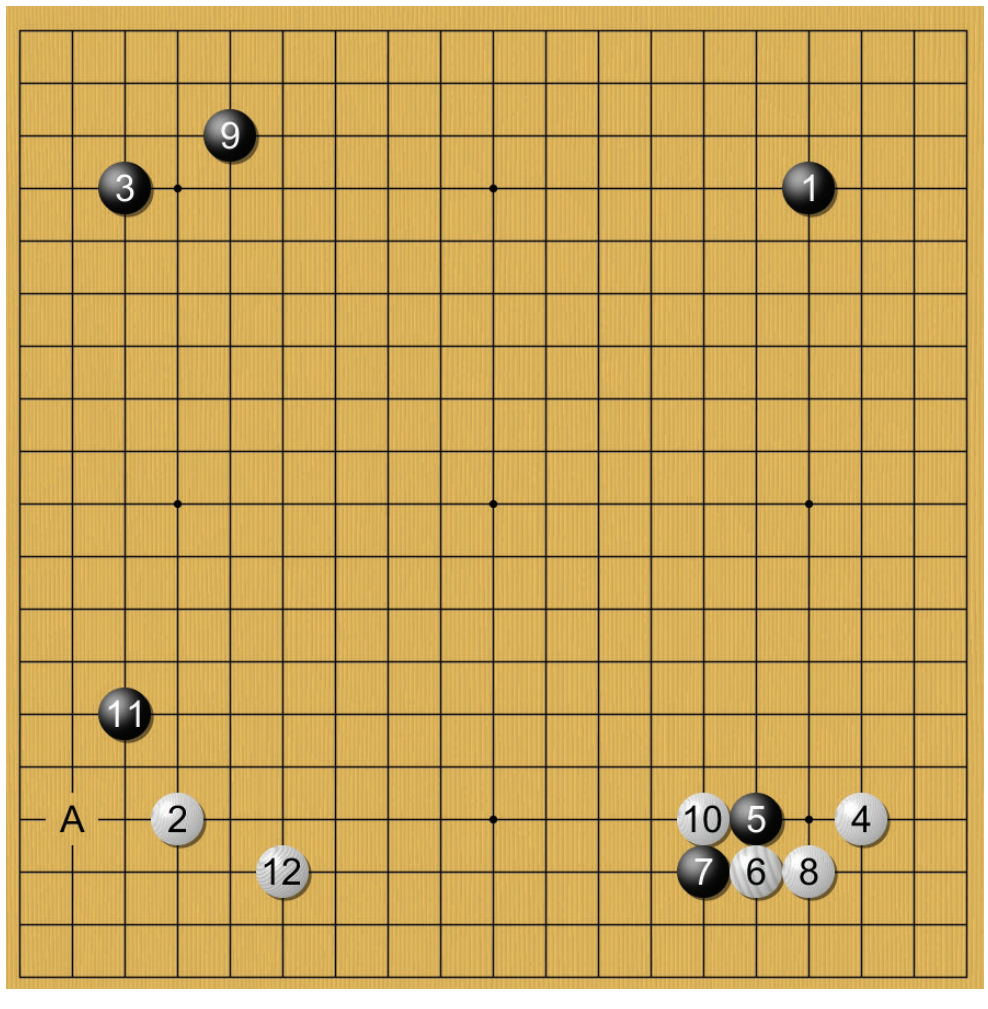
Left image: Even if **White 6** cuts his stones apart, either one of them can still escape at **A** or **B**, so they are not totally lost. The are flexible, they have **aji**. They have bad shape, but they are not dead. In order to kill those stones White needs to play at **A** usually. So, White needs to invest six stones to get one corner, compared to Black's two stones. So, Black gets a free move elsewhere and at least some of his stones are still alive. That is why his stones are light and he can tenuki for **move 5**.
Right image: However, if Black invests even one more stone, then his group is now **heavy**! Black cannot tenuki for **move 7**, else White will pincer him at **A,** stealing his base. Now Black has no base, his stones are all connected and they are no longer flexible. Black cannot sacrifice one stone and live with the other. All of his stones must run away at **B** or die. **Black is heavy**.

So, stones being light appear to be stones that are flexible. Stones that we can sacrifice for a greater cause or stones that we are comfortable with losing, in order to gain advantages elsewhere. Another way of viewing the issue of heavy and light is whether with the same amount of moves we can spread our stones faster and more effectively, at the expense of some of our safety.
Let us return to our previous example and take into consideration the whole board. Which of the two boards would you consider better for Black:



Board 1 - The classic sequence

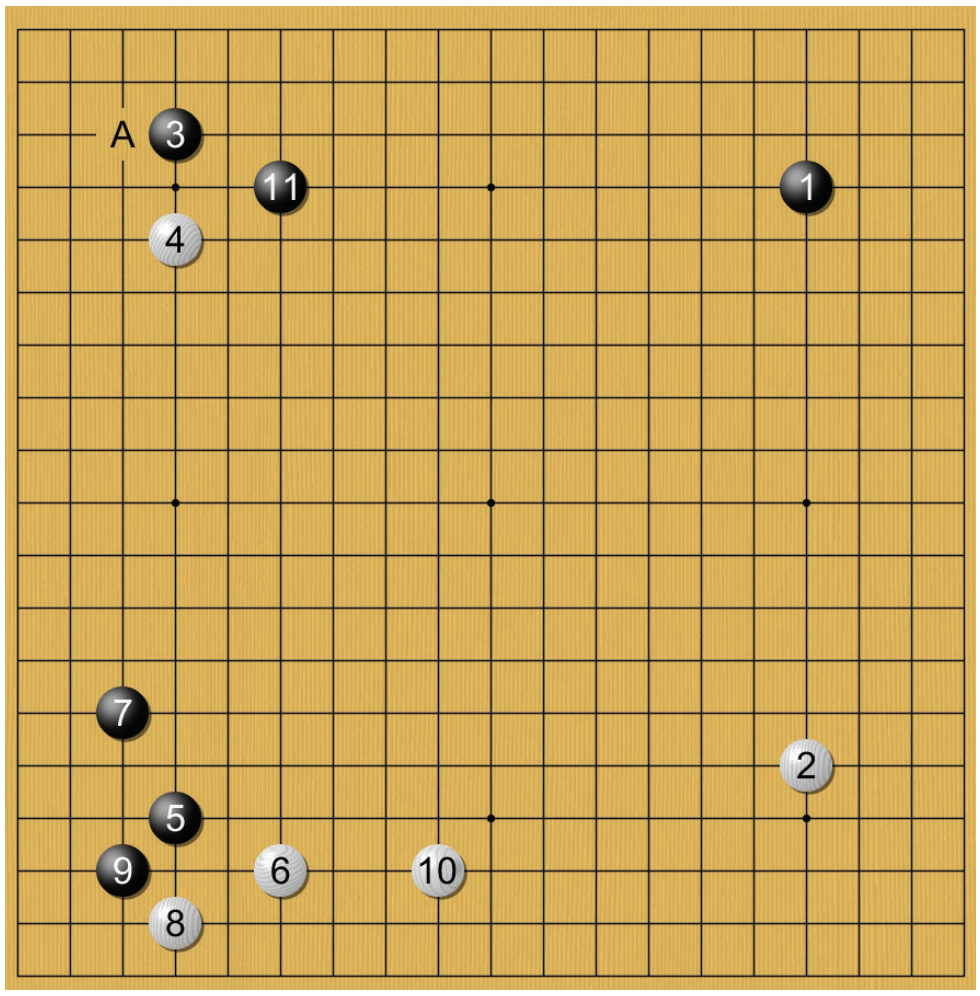
This is a typical board for our level of playing. Both players are following the opening theory focusing the corners first and finishing up their joseki.
As you can see, there is some balance on the board. Both players seem to have an equal stake in the corners and the sides (Black in the bottom side, White on the right side). After the joseki is completed in the bottom right corner, White has sente and he approaches the top left corner and it is Black's turn to defend, possibly at **A** or maybe with some pincer move due to the existence of **move 1**.
Either way, **move 13** for Black is bound to be a **defensive move**...



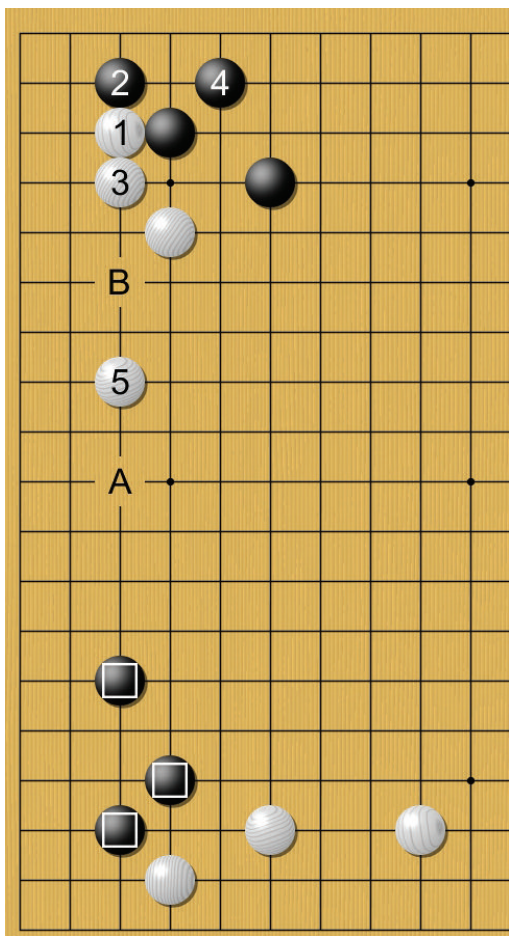
Board 2 - Treating stones lightly

In this board, Black didn't use **move 9** to complete the joseki on the bottom right corner, but he used it to make the enclosure on the top left corner instead. White's **move 10** split Black's stones giving Black the chance to approach another of White's corners with **move 11** and White defends naturally at **move 12**.
In this board Black's **move 13** will probably be around **A** and it is going to be an **offensive move**.
This is a significant difference with the previous board. In addition to that, the board is no longer balanced. Black seems to have a large stake at the top and left side. Also Black has enclosed the top left corner, White the bottom left, but White has **no aji** in Black's corner, while Black has two stones in White's corner that can cause trouble. Black is happier with this board...

This attitude towards light stones and gaining extra moves on the board is very powerful indeed. I would advise against using it at the very early stages of learning the game, because if done incorrectly the opponent can punish you severely, but once you get the hang of the game then, by all means, give the idea of using light stones a lot of tries. It is very satisfying to plan ahead for the possibilities provided by light stones and the ability to slightly alter what the board looks like to your favour, but things rarely go as planned. I believe that another example would serve us well to illustrate the benefits and dangers of this idea:

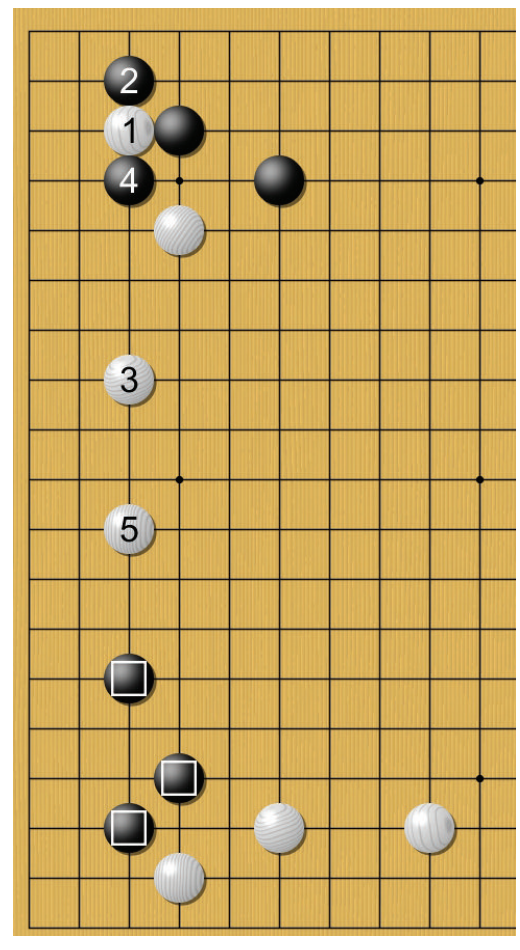


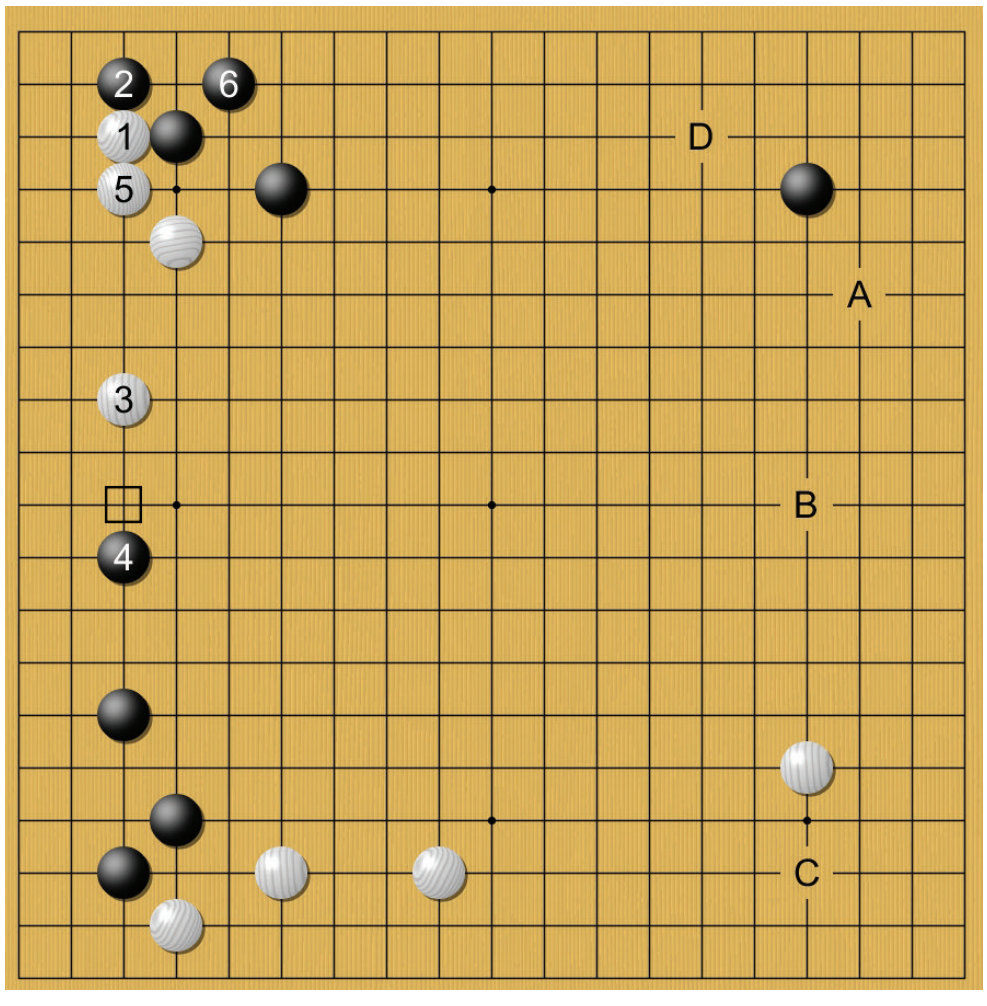
This is a bit of a peculiar board, due to White's **move 2**. It is not very usual nowadays, especially now in the AlphaGo era, but it has some theoretical merit. White is trying to make Black not approach this corner soon, by making that side the smallest and thus less profitable, due to the tenets of opening theory and the **direction of play**, which suggests us to approach the largest side/corner first.
After **Black 3**, White doesn't go for the open bottom left corner, but instead goes for the approach at **move 4** thinking that he would treat Black's defense lightly, as we just saw in the previous pages, and then ignore Black's cut and use that extra move to get the bottom left corner, as well.
But Black is aware of the possibility and grabs that corner with **move 5**. After that both players follow joseki and so for **move 12** White is expected to play at **A**...



Left image: This is the normal joseki. White doesn't like that Black can later expand his marked group by playing **A**, because that move also allows Black some dangerous possible invasions later at **B**...

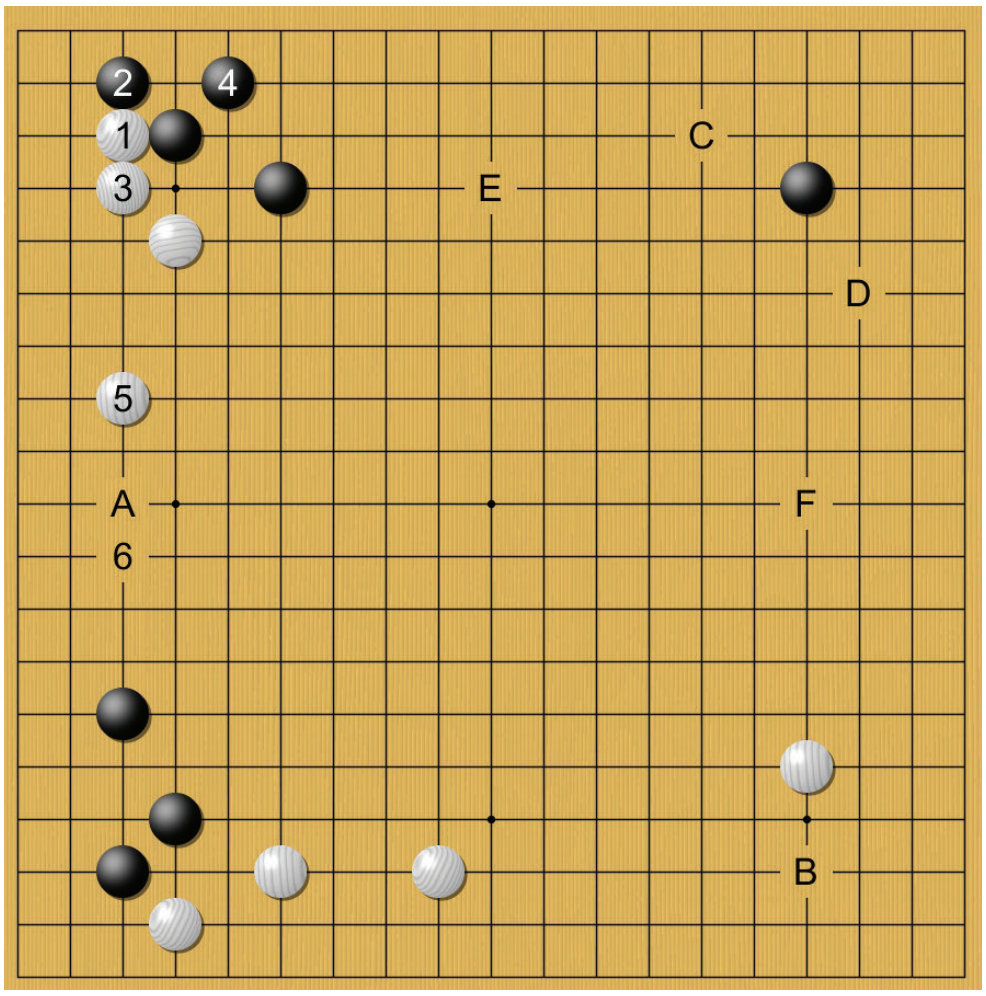
Right image: So, White plans to treat his stone at **move 1** lightly and offer it as sacrifice to Black and play a different, more rarely used joseki. Notice that **move 3** in this image is in the same position as **move 5** in the left image
After Black swallows White's stone with **move 4**, then White intends to play **move 5** and dominate the side and this time it will be he who will apply pressure on Black's group instead.
In the actual game though, Black was once again aware of White's plans...





What actually happened

Black knows what White is thinking so he extends safely from his bottom left group with a two point jump at **move 4**.
Having his plans disrupted again, White reverts to playing the usual joseki with **move 5** and Black completes the joseki with **move 6**.
Even if White's original plan failed, White is happy with the result because now it is his turn to play and he has **sente**. If he had played the normal joseki immediately, then now it would have been Black's turn, as we will see in the next image.
White now is free to play first at various large points of the board from **A** to **D**.
Another advantage is that White made Black play one point lower. As we said in the previous page, Black's correct point of putting pressure in White's group is in the square marked point, not **move 4**...



Comparison with the more standard moves

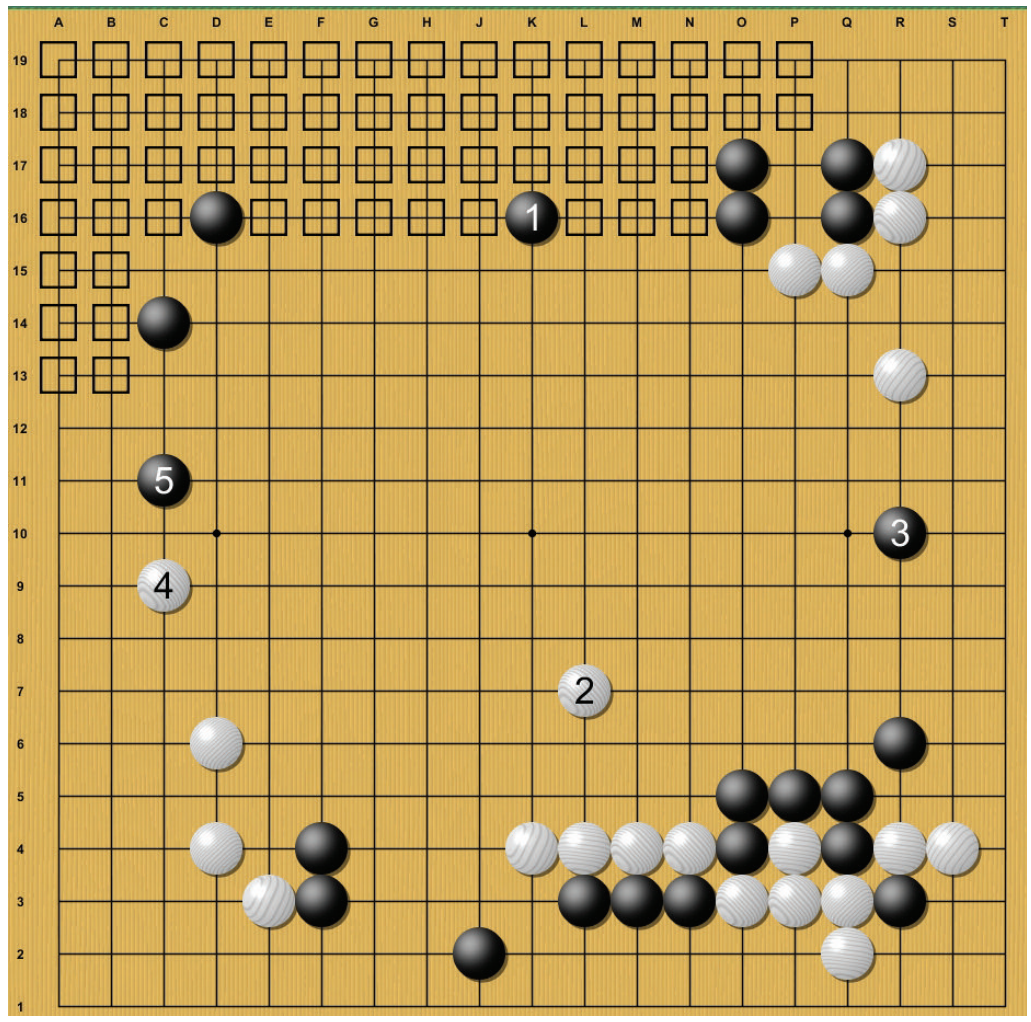
If White had simply played the normal joseki, as we can see, now it is Black's turn to play and there are a lot of larger areas and points on the board at the moment instead of **A**. Even if Black chose **A** he still wouldn't have played the **move 6** marked here, that was actually played in the game. More reasonable moves for Black are move **B** to approach the open corner, an enclosure at **C** or **D**, or a side extension at **E** or **F**. Move **A** is very small and over-concentrated at a side that has already had too many moves played there, in comparison with the rest of the board.
So, White is happy because he got **sente** and lured Black to play in a position that he wouldn't have chosen to play on his own at that moment in the game.

Important note: While learning the game it is strongly advised to stick to the normal joseki and understand how they work and why those particular moves are played. Changing the sequence of the moves in a joseki or even offering exchanges is a very effective tactic indeed, but its use should come after you have mastered the basics and you know exactly what you are doing and what you are risking on the board. Such small gains will eventually give you the upper hand over time, but you should not be complacent and play slow moves later and lose your hard earned advantage. (White, in our example game, eventually played a few slow moves and lost the game).

Sabaki

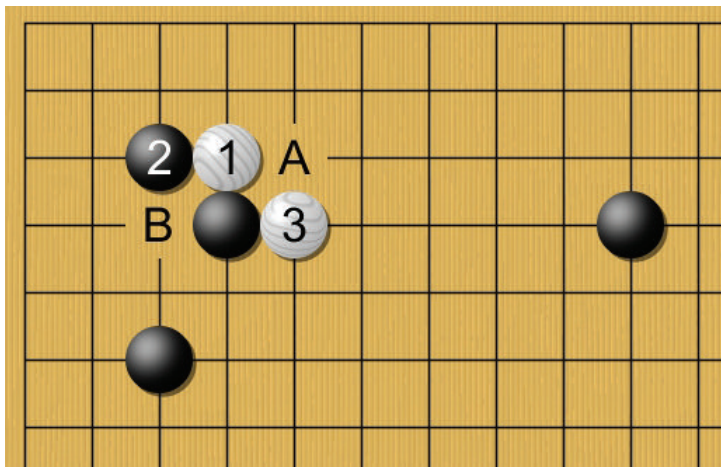
Giving a definition for sabaki is a bit hard. It is practically a skillful exchange of moves that places one of your stones in danger - or plans to sacrifice it - in order to settle a group within enemy territory or generally make possible some very hard invasions or reductions. Sabaki relies heavily upon the idea of letting some stones go and has a huge variety of cases that can be considered as sabaki. Their main similarity is that the stone that is getting sacrificed by the player trying to make sabaki is providing a significant threat, so that it forces the opponent to respond to that threat and make other nearby plays possible.

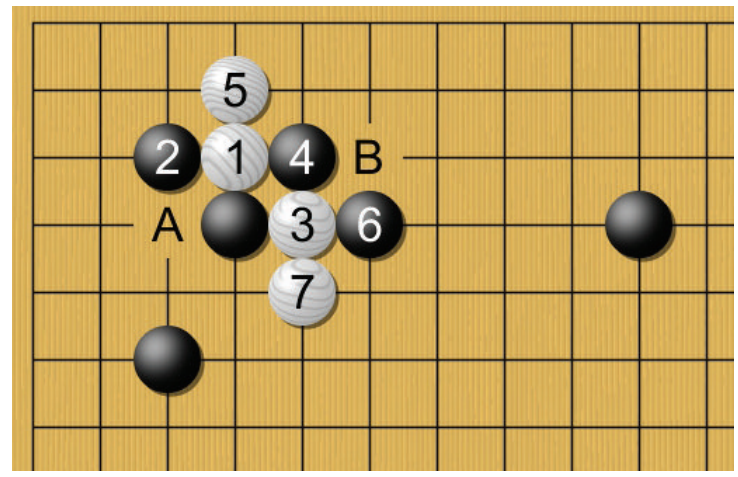
As always with such complex matters, simply speaking about something is just creating confusion. It is worth noting that sabaki is a very advanced technique requiring experience and a good reading ability or a lot of thinking time in order to pull it off. *In our level of play, I would* ***not*** *really dare claim that real sabaki techniques appear in our games or are within our knowledge*. This means that it is a technique for the future, but in order to become better at something we need to be aware of it or at least its efforts towards it. Let us see two examples of these efforts and try to understand how sabaki works:



Both players are trying to play in the last remaining large areas of the board. **Black 1** extends Black's influence in the top side, **White 2** extends from a group that needs to run to the center to survive, so it is an urgent move for White. **Black 3** extends his own group on the right and creates space for a base. If White got to extend at **3**, Black's group would have been in trouble. **White 4** extends first in the last open side and **Black 5** extends towards the same area, closing White's prospects on the left.

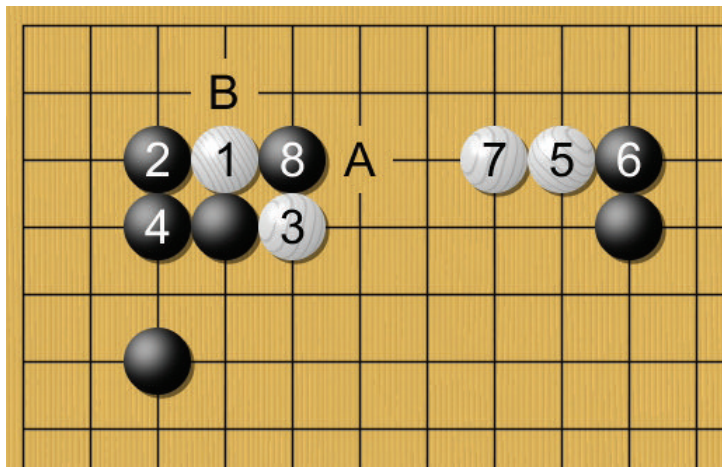
The square marked points are worrying the White player. If Black plays another move in the top side, any possible invasion there would be very hard. White feels that he needs to play there now...



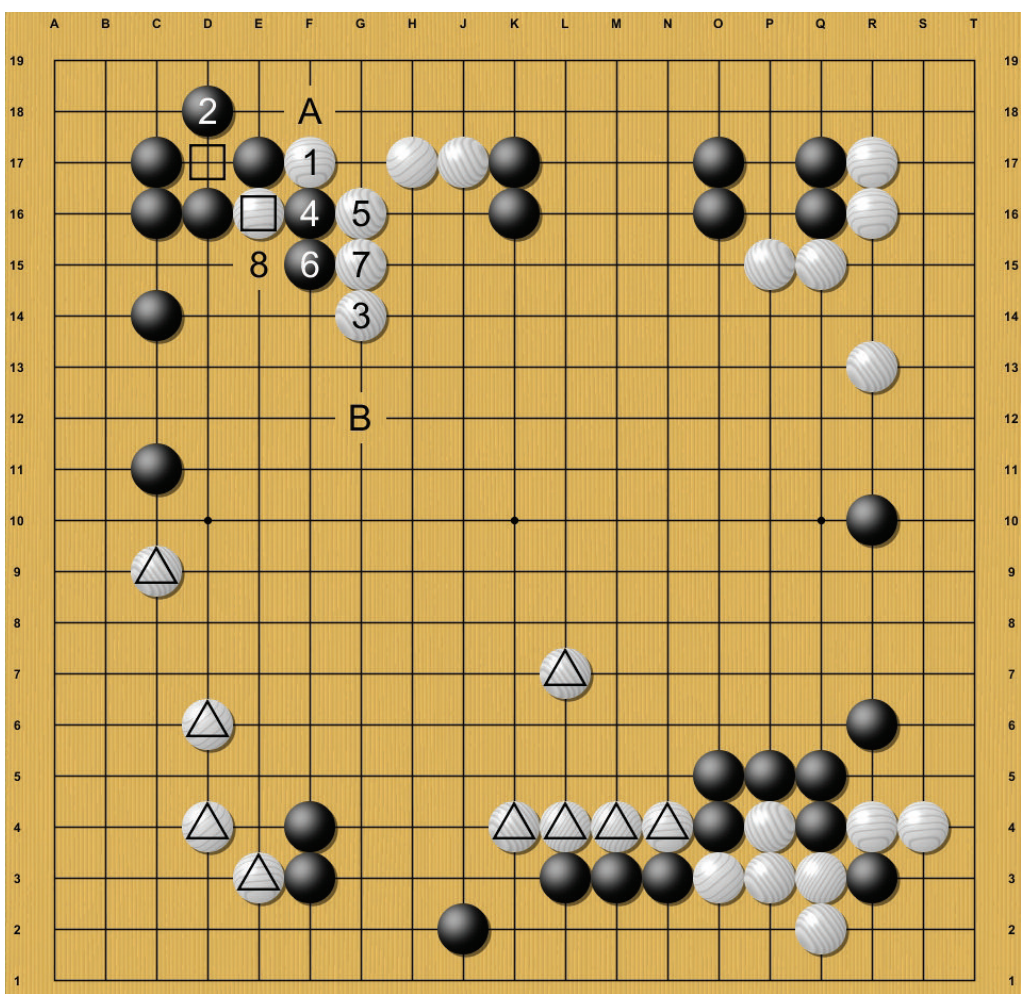


Left image: White decides on the direct attachment at **move 1** (**page 110**) and Black is strong in this area so he responds with the aggressive hane at **move 2**. A very light response to that is the counter-hane we see in **move 3** from White. This move seems like an overplay and Black could easily cut at **A**, but the cutting point left at **B** for Black is very severe and he has to return and defend it at some point, leaving his attack after the cut at **A** unfinished, with potentially disastrous results.

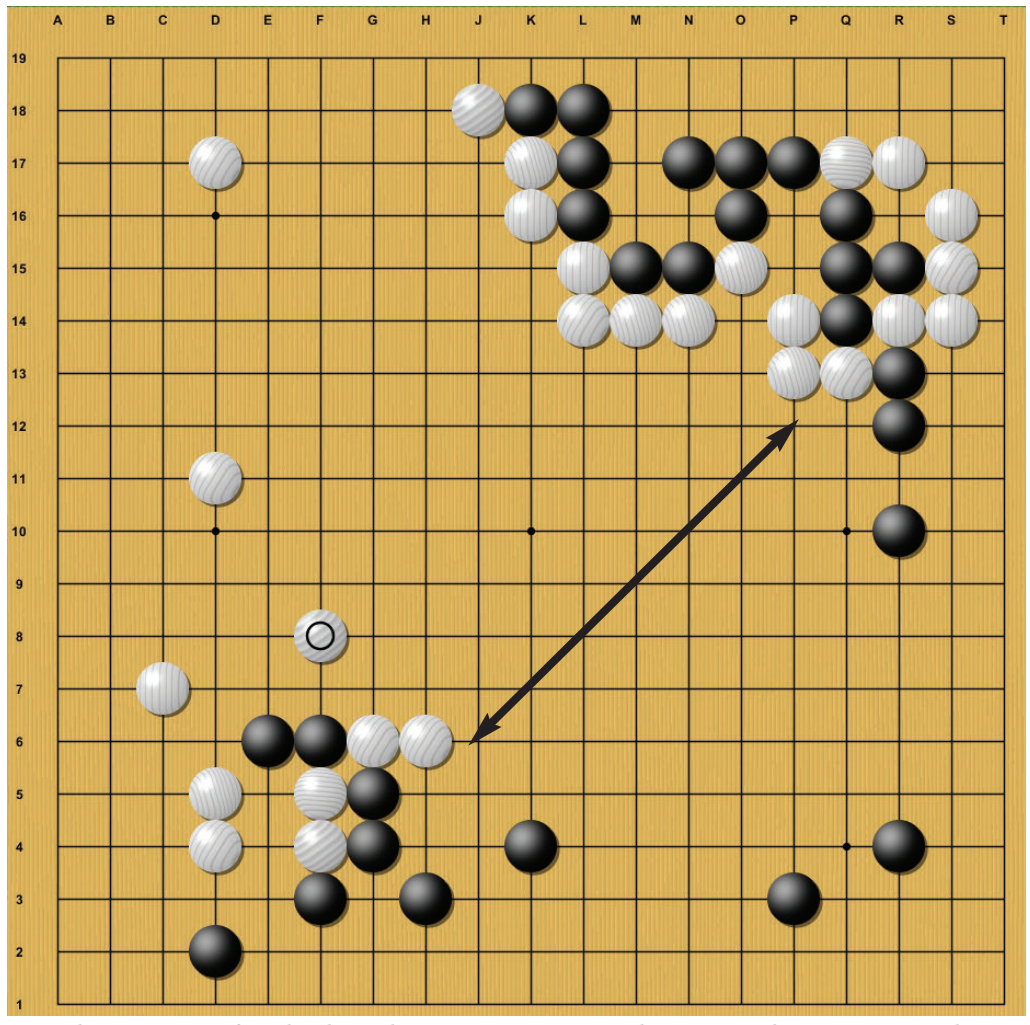
Right image: Even if Black does cut at **A** and tried every atari and aggressive move on the board, then White by simply extending his stones exposes Black's aggression as an overplay. Now Black has two cutting points, **A** and **B** and defending both of them with his next move is impossible. There are, of course, other more moderate variations, but all of them end up with an acceptable result for White, considering that this was a very deep invasion. So, Black usually avoids playing the cut immediately without defending at least once...



So, **move 4** defends the cut and now Black is ready to attack White's flimsy stones, but White seems to ignore his stones and hops on a diagonal hit with **move 5**. Black doesn't want White crawling underneath his stones so he responds with the iron pillar at **move 6** and White seems to be trying to create a base with the extension of **move 7**. Black puts an end to that prospect with **move 8**, practically capturing the White stone at **1**, but giving White another exchange. If White plays **A** next, Black will have to play **B** and capture White's stone, or give move forcing moves...

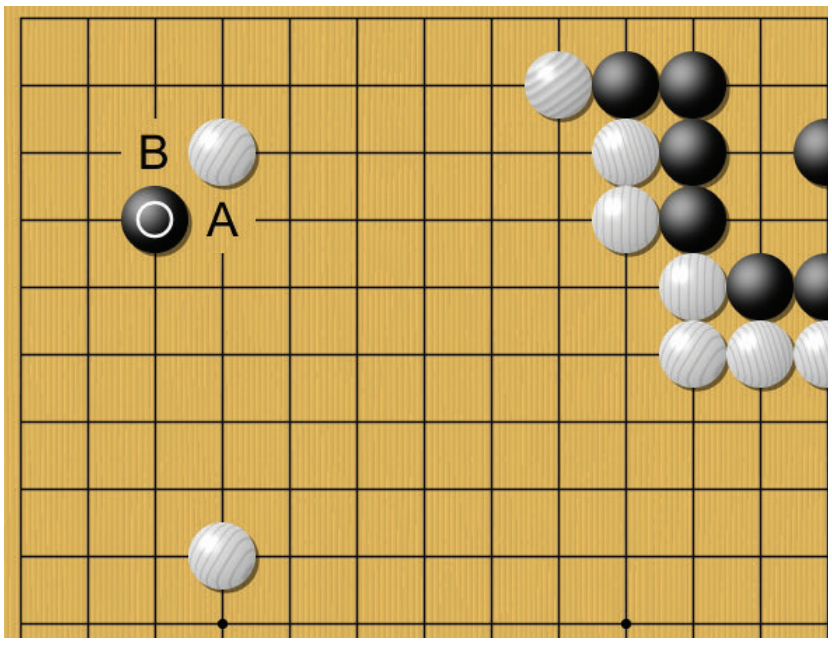


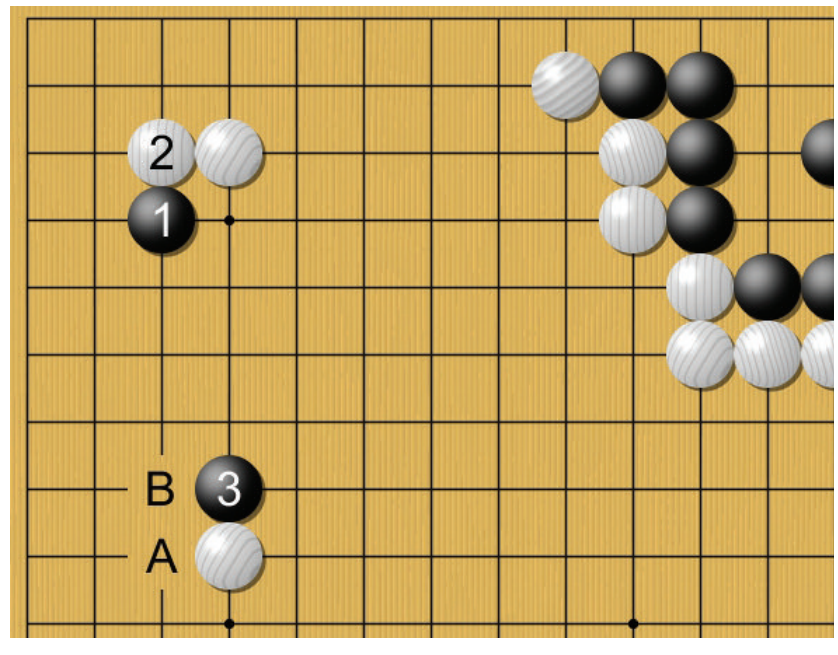
After the exchange of **moves 1** and **2**, White now has enough strength to jump away at **move 3** and give options to his stones. At any point White can either play **A** and create a base and live within Black's influence or he can keep jumping with **B**. Black plays **move 4** to capture yet another White stone and threaten the cut, but **move 5** simply defends from this threat and places the Black stone in atari. **Black 6** extends and threatens to cut through White's stones again and **move 7** solidly connects. In the game Black captures the White stone at **8** to remove the **aji** and White is left with **A** and **B** being **miai**. White sacrificed his initial stones, but managed to survive deep within enemy territory by a series of real threats and by letting go of some of his stones. This is a crude and general idea of sabaki.



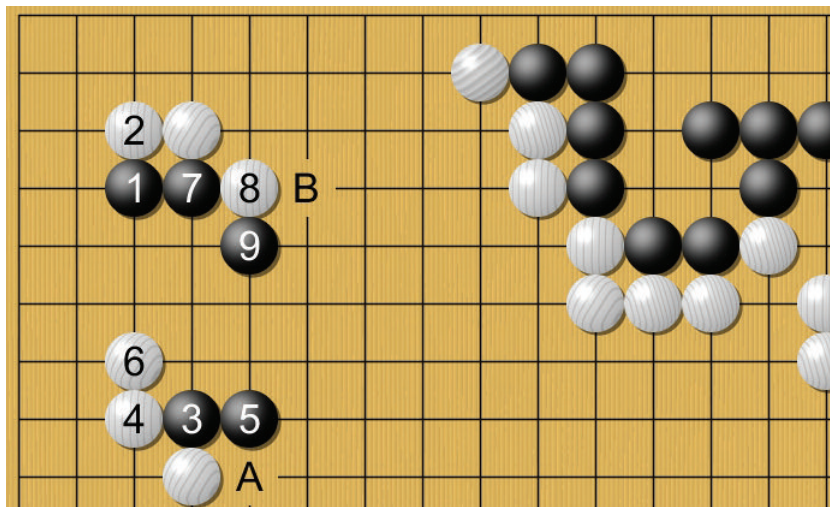
Let us see another application of sabaki, this time not only to make a group live, but to reduce in a larger scope. Remember that the general idea is to play a light move that threatens a lot of damage, but it can be sacrificed for a better compensation, in comparison to playing a safe move.

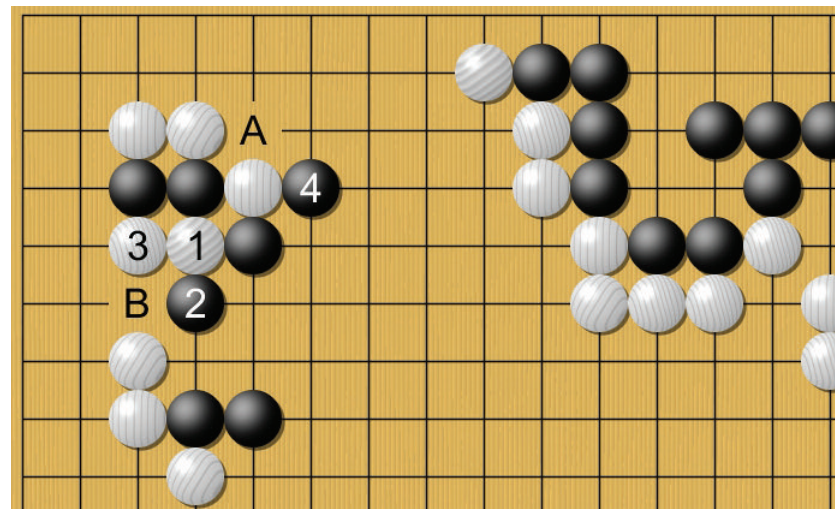
In this case Black is in deep trouble. White has a magnificent framework in the center and the top and a direct invasion seems unlikely. A reduction is also not going to be very effective, considering where the sector line is currently for White. With both typical choices out of the way, Black will need to play something light and try to sacrifice stones in order to survive and reduce White.



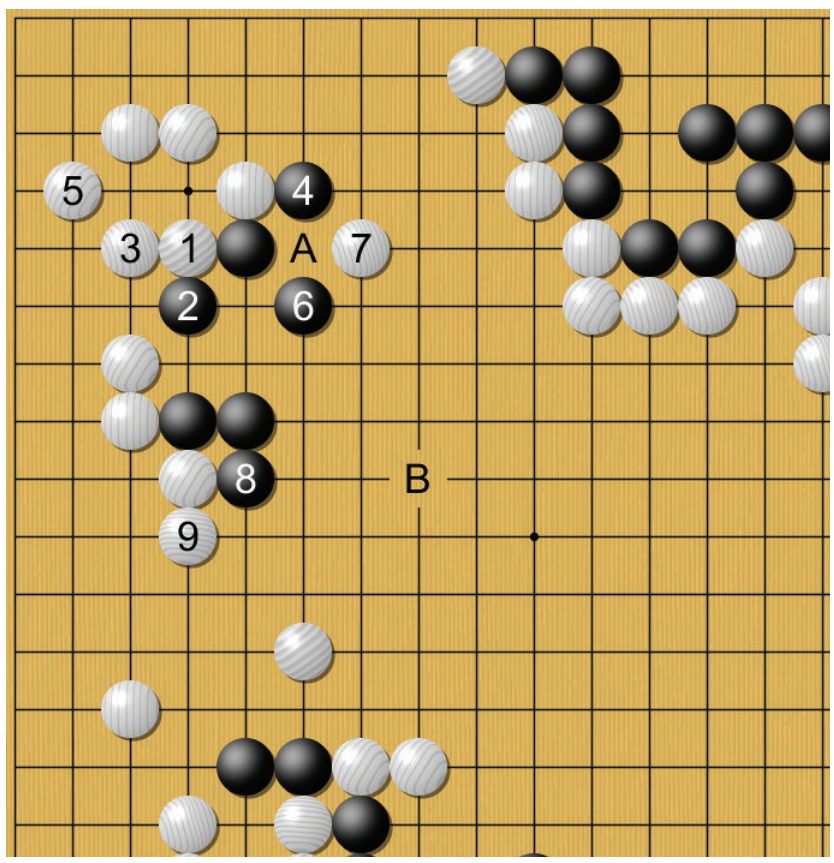


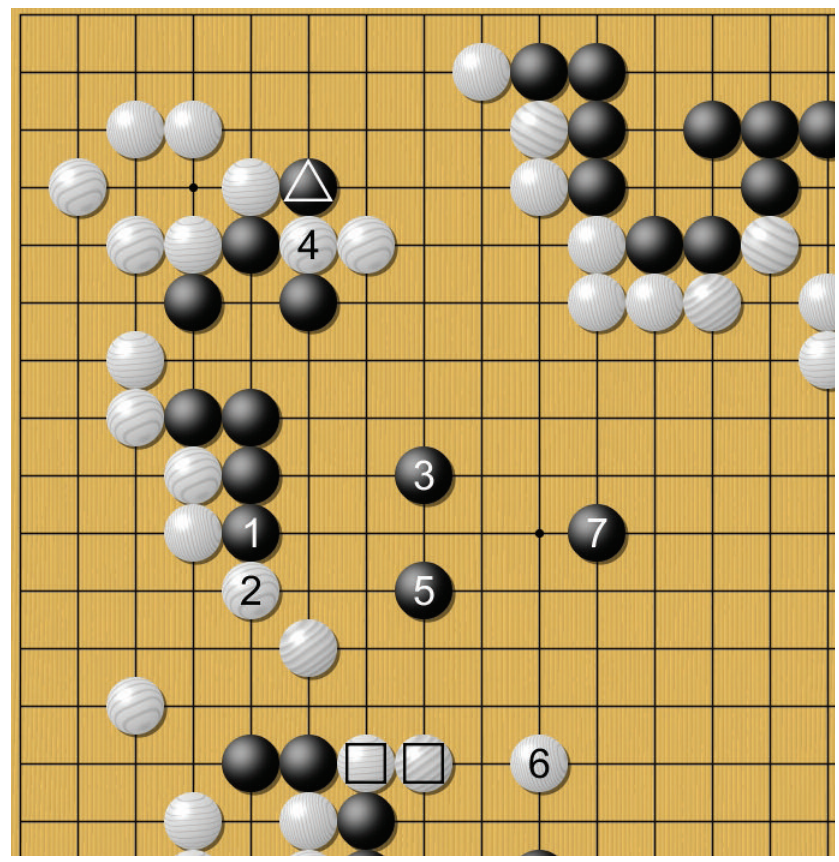
Left image: Notice that White is widely surrounding an area, but that area is very large and this allows Black the possibility of making two eyes. Black aims for the area which is easier to live, the corner. If White plays **A**, then Black will play **B** and we will have a usual **3-3 invasion joseki** where the moves were played in a different order. White could do that and turn all that framework in the top side into territory, but it would be a bit too safe to play such a move against one stone that is so lonely within White's framework. So, White in this case is more likely to play **B** and try to kill the invading stone. In this case Black cannot respond with a play at **A** because White will simply hit his stones on the head.
Right image: So, Black leaves the original stone alone and attaches to the nearest White stone with **move 3**. White cannot play **A** and allow Black's move **B** which would create a perfect base for Black...





Left image: White is practically forced to play **move 4**. Black extends with **move 5** and tries to form some eyespace towards the side and the center and threatens to play **move 6** if White plays **A**.
This forces White to play **move 6** and destroy Black's possible base towards the side. Black extends with **move 7**, but this time getting hit on the head with **move 8** is less severe, because Black now has some allies around him. **Black 9** goes along with White's attack, but White cannot extend at **B** now, since it would be a very slow move that would allow Black to build eyespace in the center.
Right image: So, White cuts at **move 1**, Black plays the atari and makes some shape at **move 2**, White extends and places the two Black stones in atari as well and Black ignores that threat, sacrifices his stones to play **move 4**. White cannot connect at **A**, because that would allow Black to play another free move with the atari at **B**, so White is almost forced to capture the Black stones...



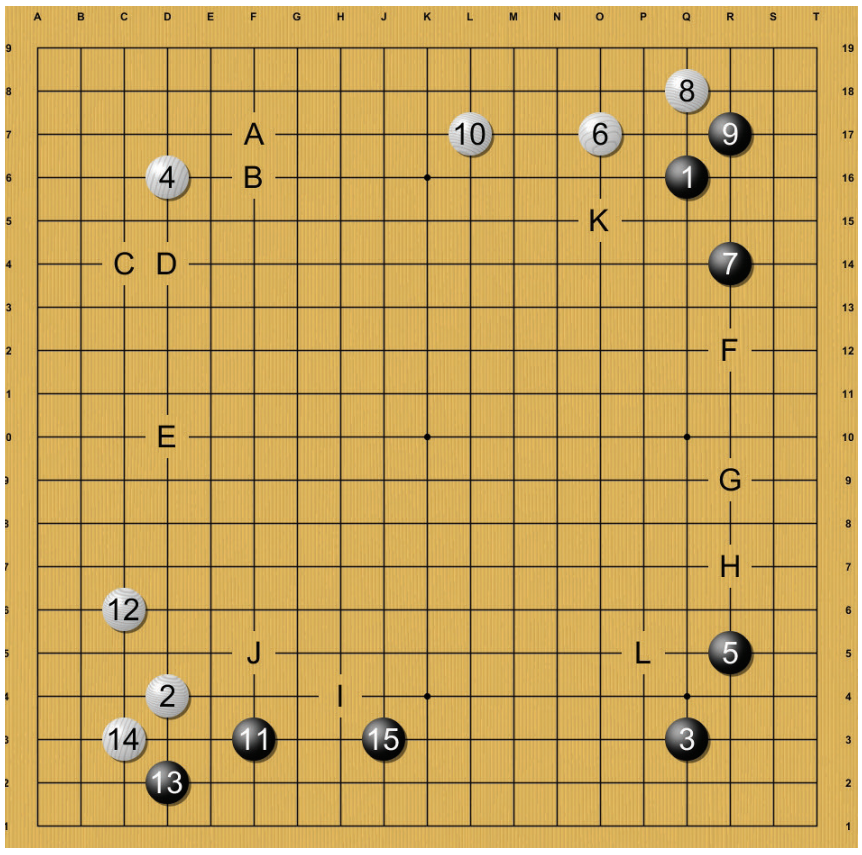


Left image: White 5 is a forced move and **Black 6** makes the double tiger's mouth. Now Black seems to be making some good shape with the cost of only two stones! White is having none of that though and he peeps at **move 7**, threatening to cut at **A** and destroying some of the potential eye space. But the move at **A** is slow for both players and if Black plays there he is worried that he will get sealed in by a wide move around **B**, so he keeps threatening White with **move 8**. White cannot allow Black to play the atari on that stone so, instead of playing **A**, White extends at **move 9**.
Right image: Black tries to push again with **move 1**, but White blocks with **move 2**. Black jumps at the vital point at **move 3** and now finally White has the time to play the cut at **move 4**, capture the triangle marked stone and atari another Black stone. **White 4** is a large move, but Black is only interested in surviving and reducing, so he makes good shape with **move 5** ensuring his survival and threatening the square marked White stones. White jumps at **move 6** to strengthen his stones and Black makes even more eyespace for himself with **move 7**. Black sacrificed at least three stones in the process, but look how much of White's framework he managed to reduce.

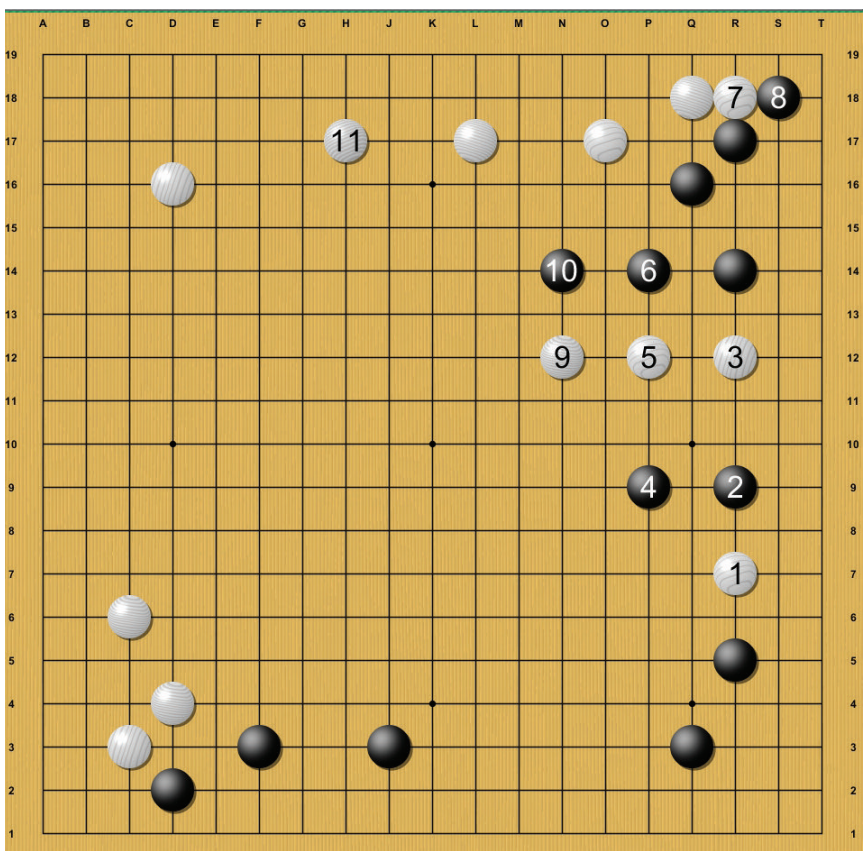
Avoid creating too many groups

Or also known as not being too greedy and spreading your forces too thin. Unlike most other ideas, this one is fairly comprehensible. Go is a surrounding game, so if you create too many small groups then this means that they are usually easier to surround or attack or even outright capture.

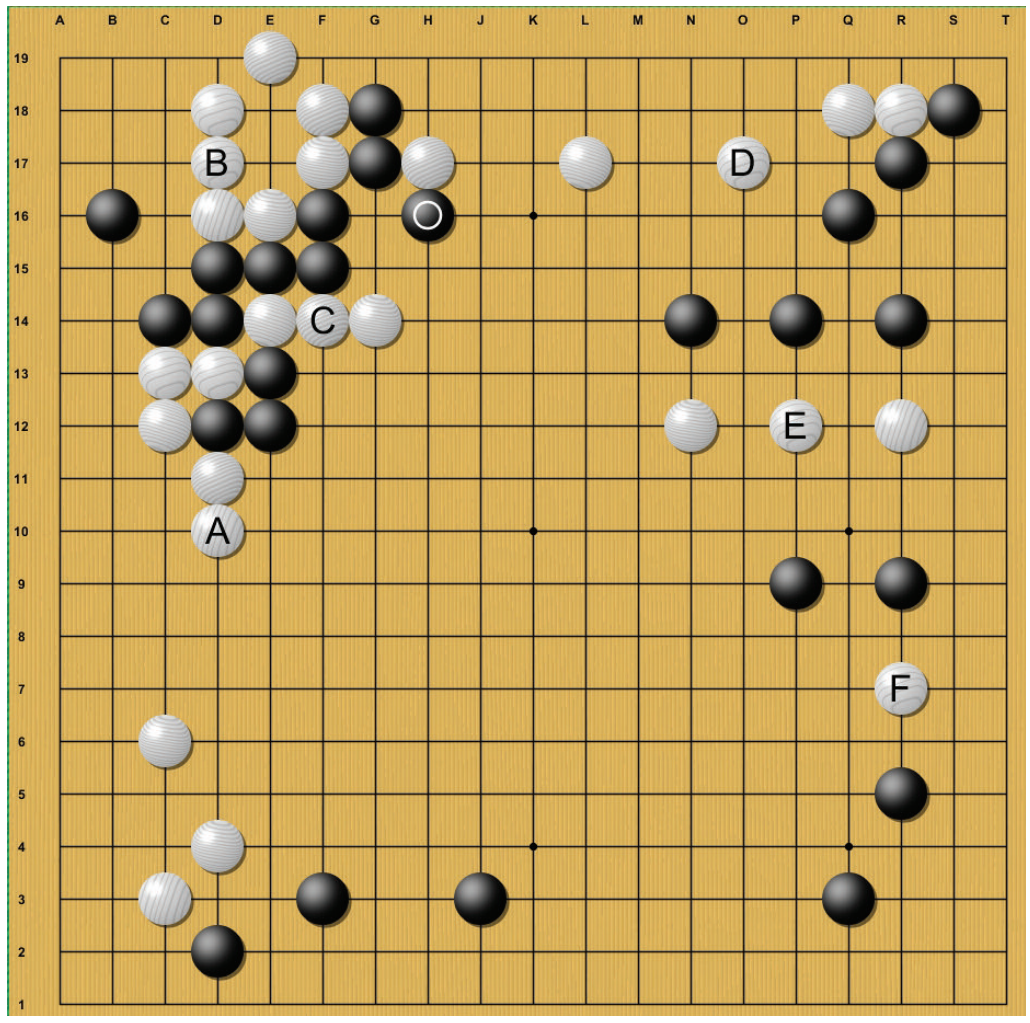
Maybe such a seemingly easy idea seems redundant, but the more you play, the more you will feel the urge to make "just another group" here and there. Sometimes the temptation is just too great. This is why a word of caution and some practical real game examples are in order, to see how we can end up with too many groups on the board:



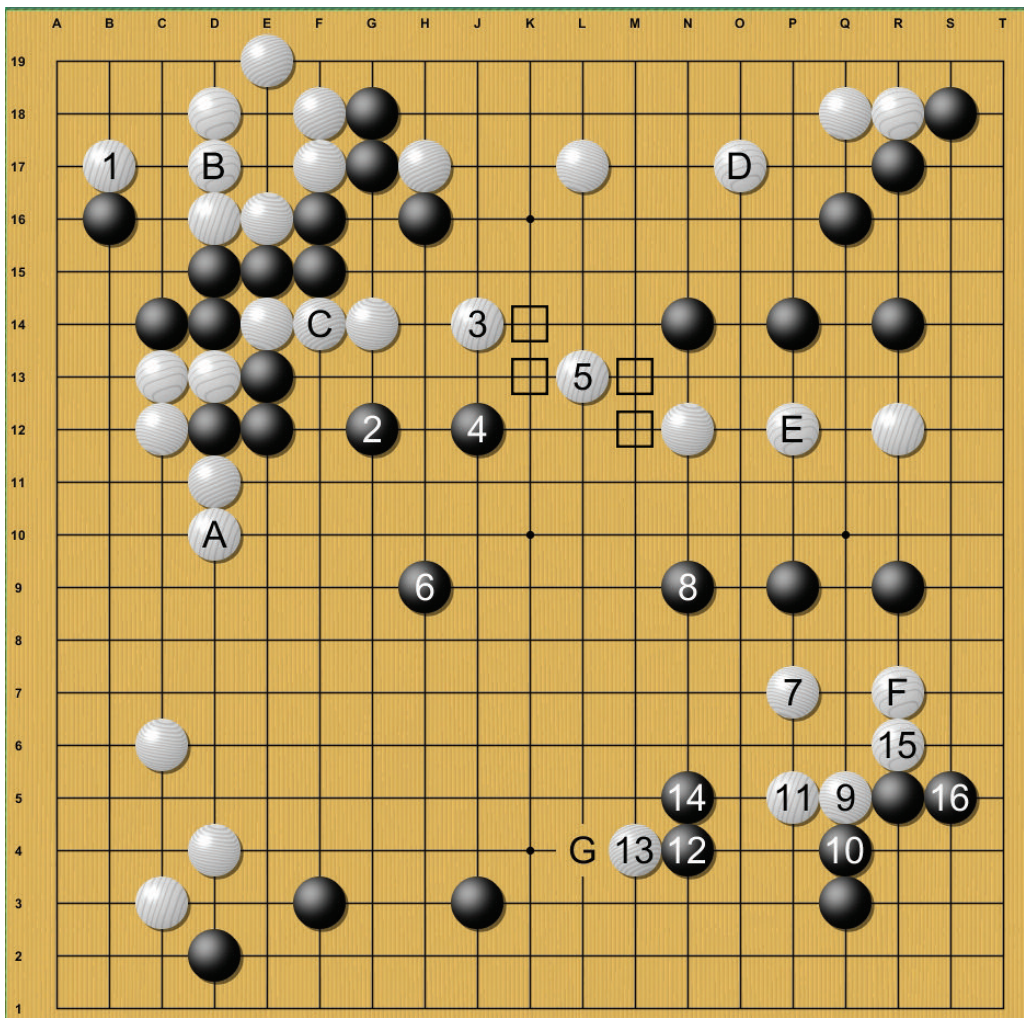
This is a typical opening board. Both players chose to follow the opening theory and approached the corners first and they chose the **direction of play** that made them expand towards the biggest side of the board for them.
It would seem that the board is split diagonally in half. Both players look like they each have one large group, with the White player having the top left part and Black having the bottom right part.
It is White's turn and as you can see there are many valid options on the board. Some of the choices continue to play according to that diagonal separation of the two players, making peaceful moves that solidify White's grasp on his own side of the board, while other choices practically invade Black's side of the board, effectively beginning the middle game phase.



White chooses to begin the middle game and plays **move 1** within Black's side. Black having so many stones around, predictably pincers White's stone with **move 2**. Instead of White jumping out, White thinks that Black's stones are too wide apart and he counter-pincers Black's stone with **move 3**. But **White 3** is already pincered from both sides, so after Black jumps up and disconnects White's stones this means that White has created two new groups of stones which he has to defend individually and they are both behind enemy lines!
A difficult situation indeed and after the moves up to **move 11** are exchanged, Black's groups are alive and safe. In comparison, White's three stones do not have a base and the lone stone at **move 1** is almost totally surrounded and it is Black's turn...



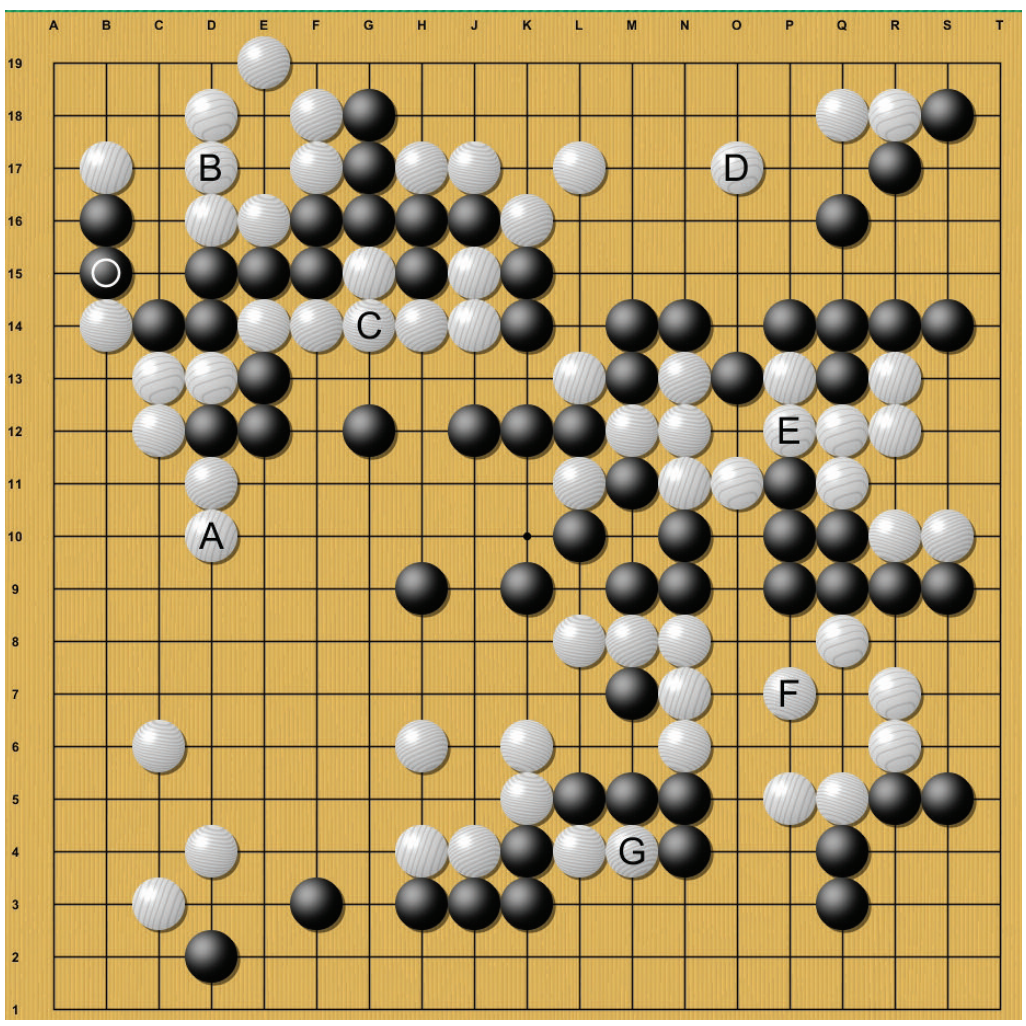
Black leaves the right side alone and approaches the top left corner. After a very complex and unorthodox fight by both players, which we will not analyse, this is the board position. It is White's turn and now he has **six different groups** on the board (from A to F) out of which only **group A** is totally safe. **Group B** has only one eye, **group C** no eyes and it is almost surrounded, the edge of **group D** can be captured, **group E** is deep between Black stones and **group F** is almost totally surrounded as well!



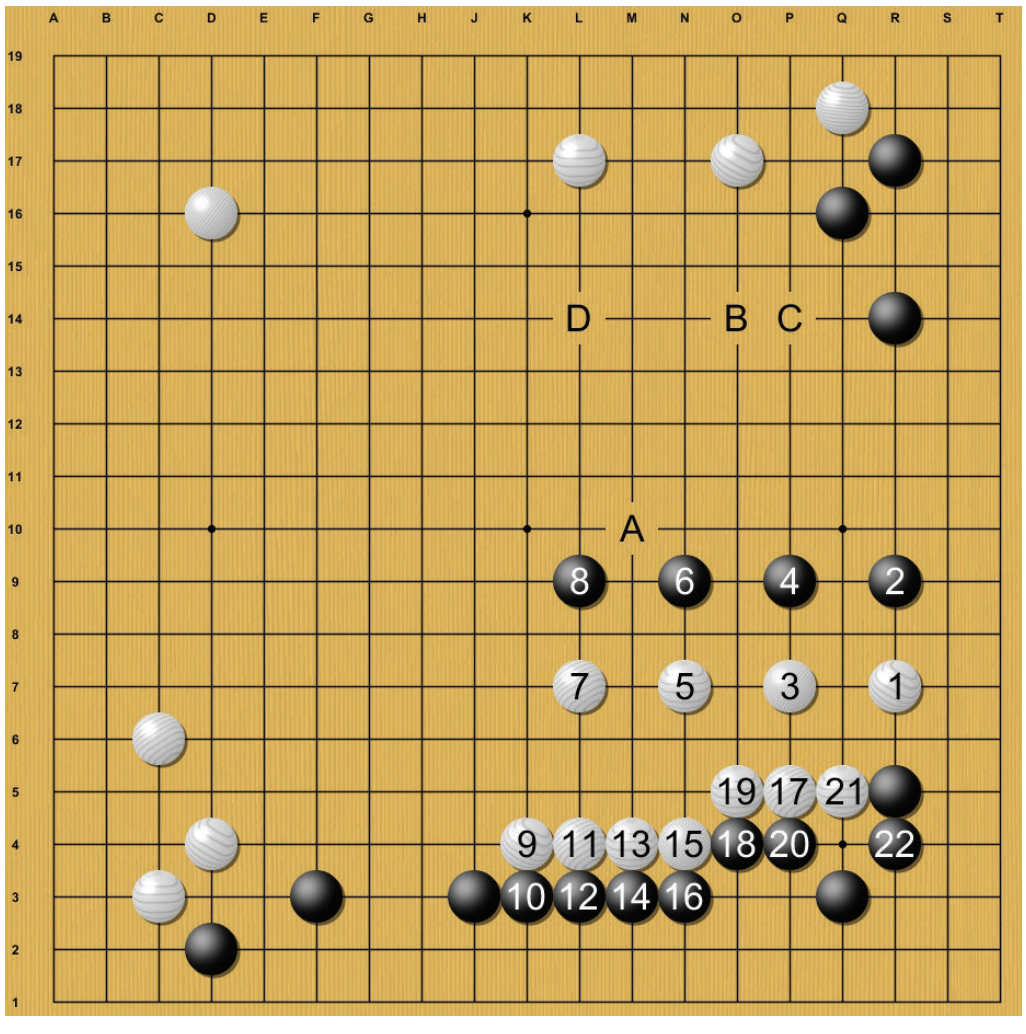
Let us see what happens next. White needs to start tidying things up. **Move 1** makes certain that **group B** has two eyes. One group is definitely safe now, but that gives Black the chance to play the exchange from **move 2** to **move 6**.

Now Black's group of three stones is settled and White thinks that **group C** and **group E** are connected, but the fact is that the knight's move has the cutting points at the square marked points. Black cannot cut there immediately, but later if he gets the chance, those stones can be separated.

Now that it is White's turn again, White decides to take care of the lone stone at **group F** and try to make it create two eyes and live. With the exchange of moves from **7** to **move 15**, White indeed manages to create one eye for his stones, but he is not alive yet, while Black's **move 8** is setting up for the disconnection of **group E** we were talking earlier. Even worse is the exchange of **moves 13** and **14** which created another separate group of stones for White. This is a group that White plans on sacrificing in order to create a second eye for **group F**, but it will cost White a lot. Black will get the entire bottom side in exchange for a single eye...

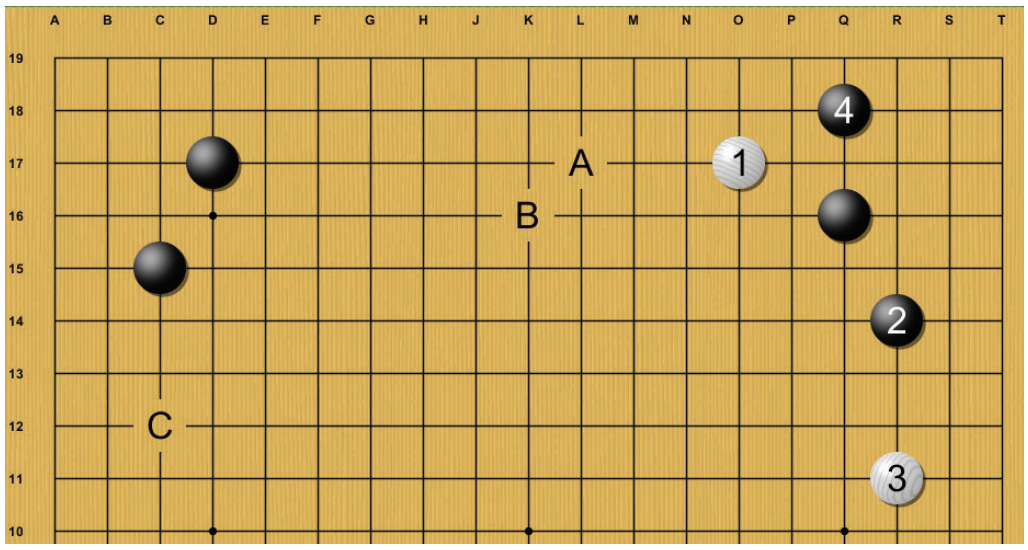


This is the end of the game.
As we said, **group G** was sacrificed in order for **group F** to survive and Black took the bottom side as compensation. That was hardly a fair exchange for White, but he couldn't let his group die. **Group C** and **group E** were eventually disconnected and **both are dead**.
Group C is surrounded and dead with four liberties against Black's group that has at least five liberties.
Group E only has one eye and it is totally surrounded by Black groups that cannot be killed, so it cannot survive or be saved in any way.
Groups A and **F** are almost connected, but they are both alive at that point, so their connection is now insignificant . Out of the five groups that were in danger it is reasonable that White couldn't save all of them and that some of them died.

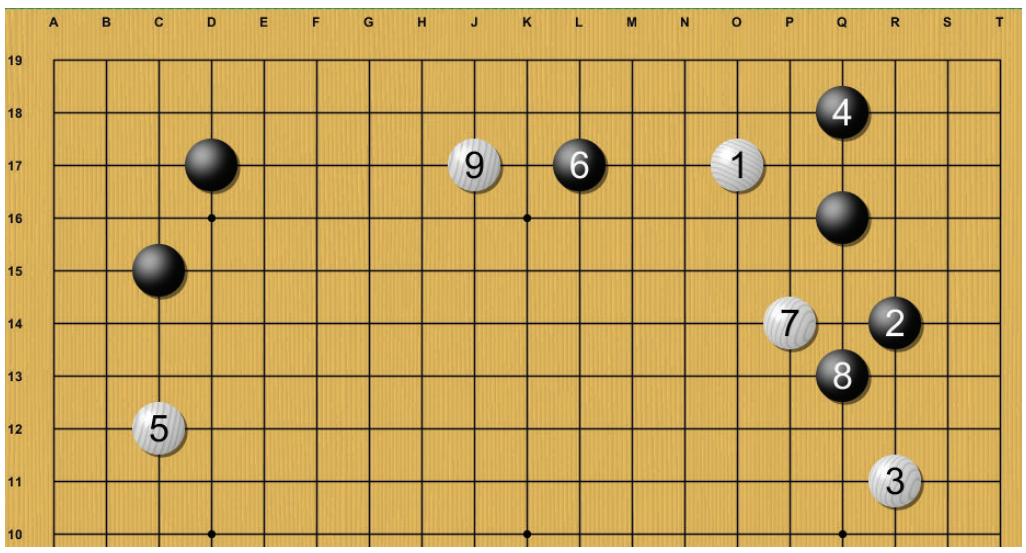


A much more reasonable result for White would have been initially defending his pincered stone by jumping out and inviting Black to jump out as well, to keep up the pressure.
After that (**moves 9** to **21**) White would have had enough space to create good shape for his stones and a lot of eye-space to create a living group and the image on the left is just one of the many options which that could be achieved.
Black got a lot of influence on the center and right side, but it is early in the game, so there are many options for White to reduce that framework. For example White could play the **peep** at **A** to threaten the cut or **B**, **C** and **D** to directly start reducing Black's potential.
The important point though is that White would have created a strong safe group and not a lot of weak groups that could be attacked constantly.

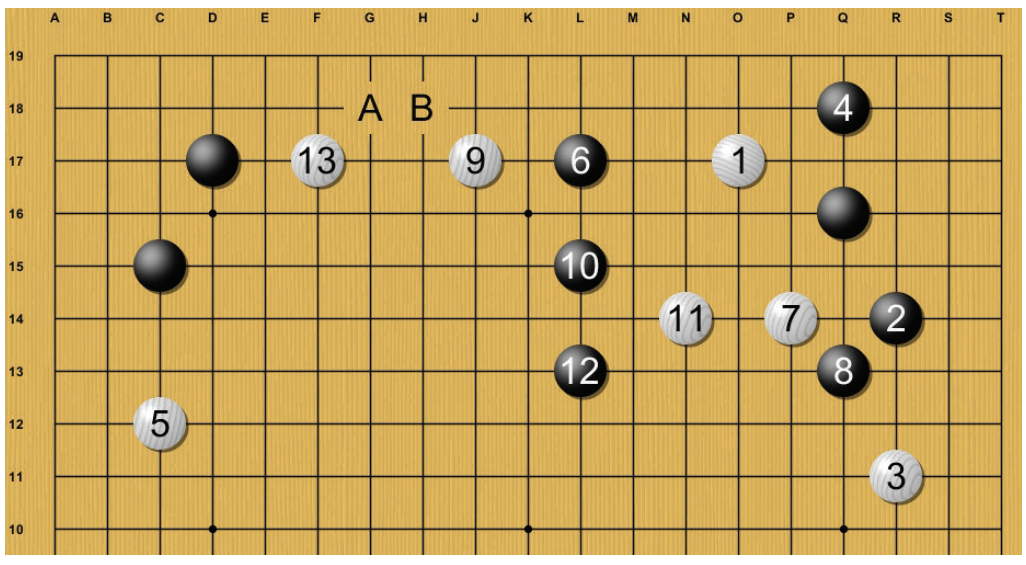
Remember: Do not create too many groups. If your groups are strong and safe, then you can attack the groups of your opponent. If your groups are too many and weak, then you will be chased around the board. *Even if your groups survive, the compensation which the opponent will get out of the chase will usually be **far larger** than the worth of your group* (just like what happened with the sacrifice of group G in the example).



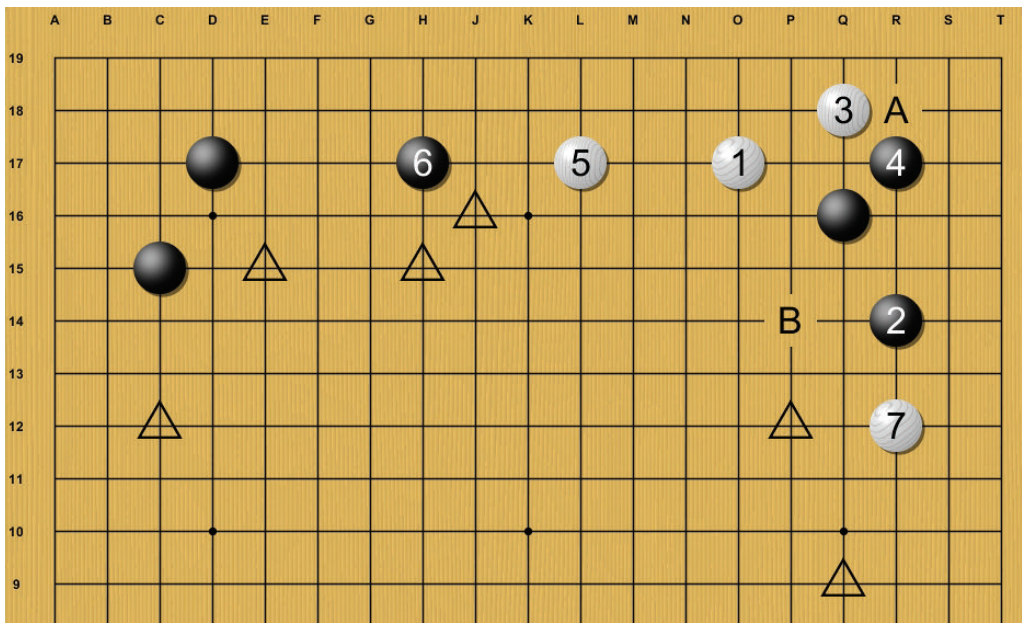
Another example of how you can end up with too many groups comes from another game and its opening phase. **Moves 1** and **2** seem normal but, instead of following a joseki, White reversed direction and approached from the other side as well with **move 3.** Black played **move 4** to secure the corner and now a move like **A** or **B** seems reasonable for White, to strengthen his stone. Leaving the stone at **1** alone and playing **C** is stretching things thin...



but this is what White does. **Black 6** immediately pincers the White stone and deprives it of any chance of living in there. This means that White has to run and connect with some other group with **move 7**, but **Black 8** intercepts that possibility and splits the two groups.
White decides to up the pressure and escalate this battle, so he creates another group of stones by playing the counter-pincer at **move 9**. Suddenly in five moves, White created four groups!



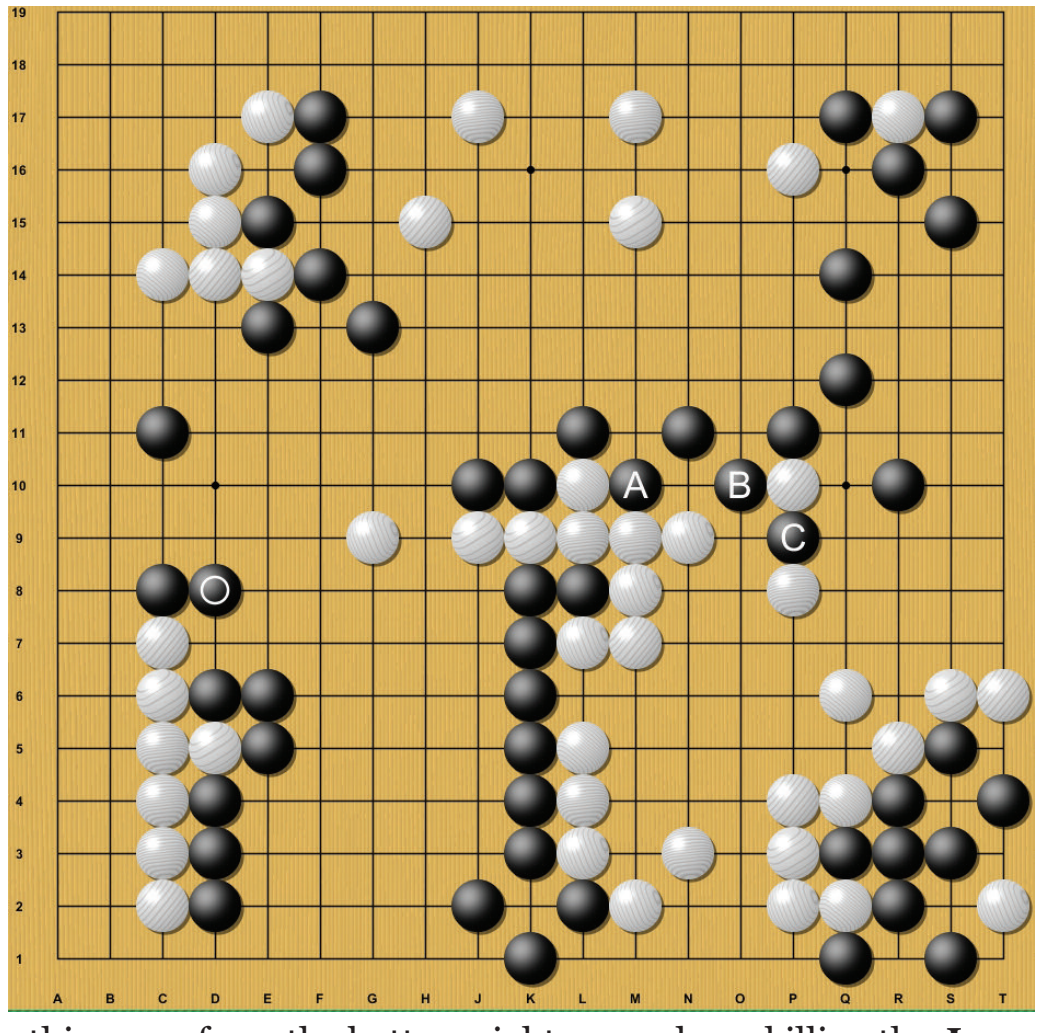
Black uses **move 10** to predictably jump out and put pressure on both White groups at the same time. Forced to choose one or the other to strengthen, White chooses to play **move 11** to try and restrict Black's jumping stones.
Black is among friends though, so he jumps out again with **move 12**. White gets to defend his other group as well, with **move 13**. But a surrounded two space base can be attacked at **A** or **B** and be deprived of eye-space.



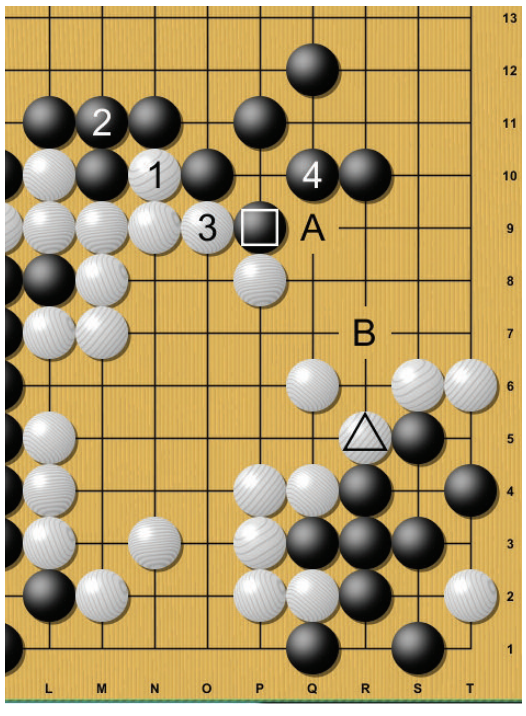
Instead of creating multiple groups so fast, White could have settled a group first before venturing for his next point of approach. For example, after following joseki, White could approach at **move 7** which is sente (it threatens to kill the Black group later), so Black needs to play **A** or **B** to be safe. After that, White has all the marked points to expand safely. There was no urgency to make multiple attacks in the first place. **Stay strong, stay safe and attack from positions that are solid.**

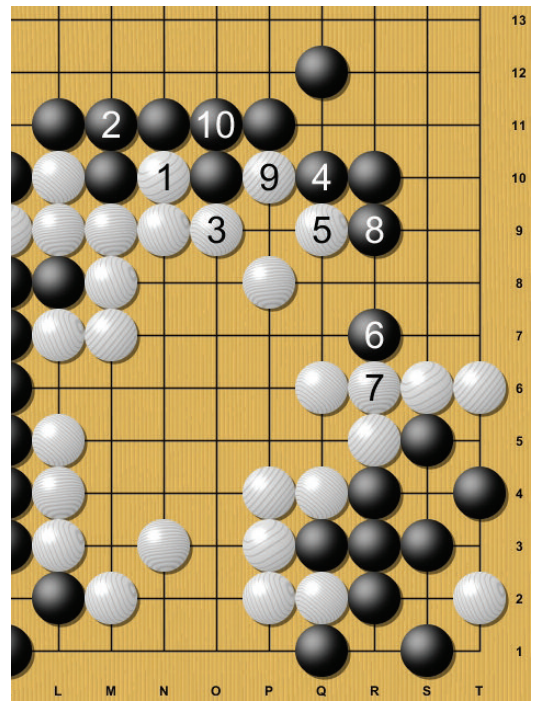
Do not reduce your own liberties for no reason

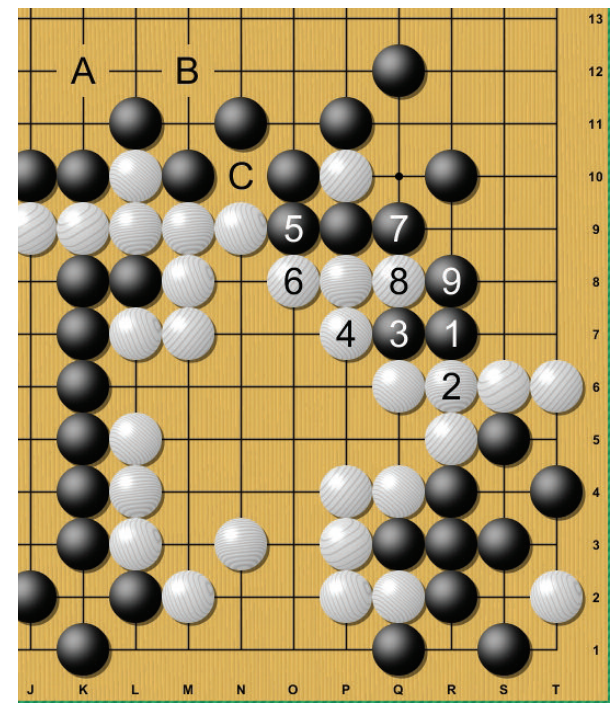
Last point of this book, but not the least, is the advice to avoid playing moves that reduce our liberties, without having an actual plan and goal which we want to achieve. Especially in double digit kyu games, just because a gap exists between two stones, a player feels the need to play there, even if there is no chance for a cut to work. This accomplishes nothing, except reducing our own liberties and forcing our opponent to defend and correct a problem in his defenses, practically for free. It is far better to leave that small problem for later. As the board changes, what is initially a small source of aji, can become a large threat which can let you mount a devastating attack. Or it might not blossom to be useful at all.
Either way it is better to leave behind small problems in your opponent's defenses to possibly exploit them later, than forcibly playing at every little small opening trying to wedge your stones in places where they cannot possibly go.
So, how does this idea look on the board? **There are usually two cases**, one in which you spend moves to help your opponent fix his shape and the second, which is more serious, the case where you reduce your liberties and place your own groups in danger. Let us start with the less severe case:



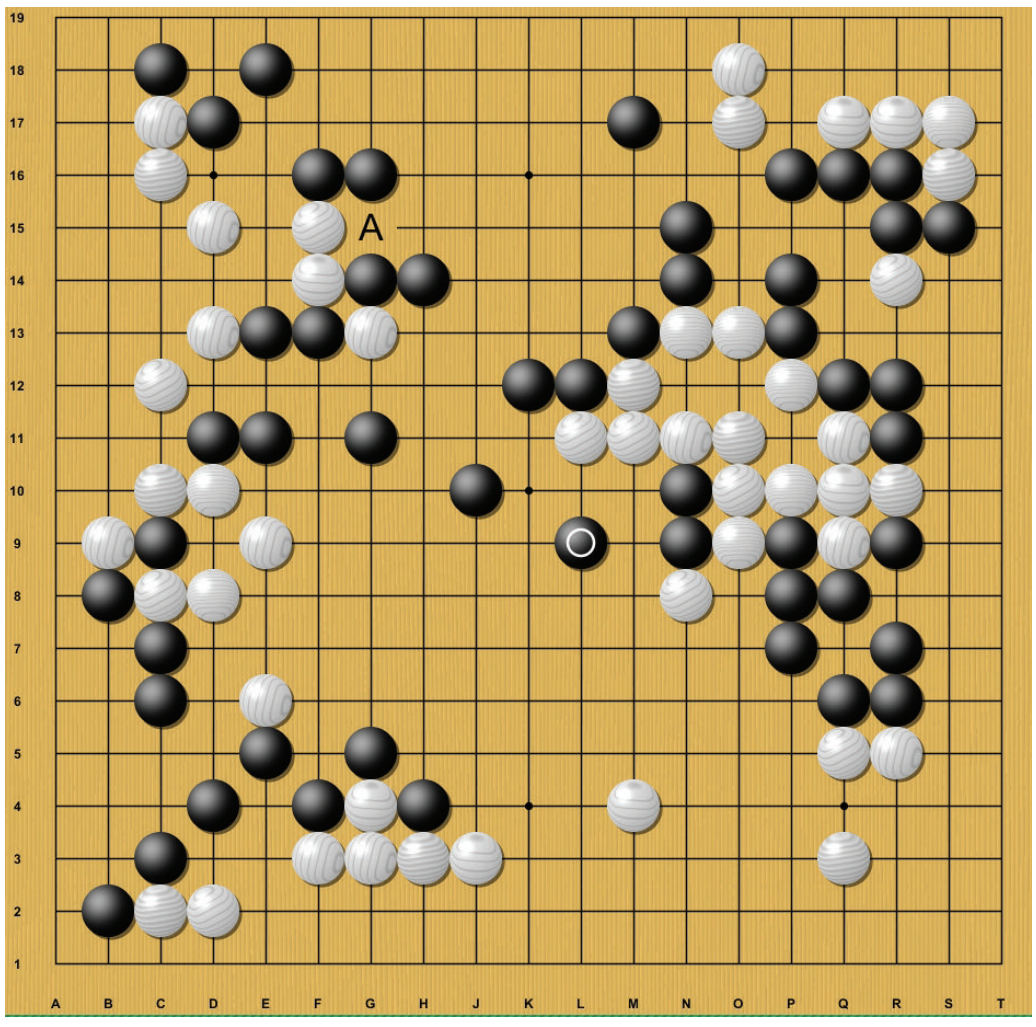
You may remember this game from the bottom right example on killing the **J group** in **pages 167-169**. This is the board a lot of moves later and it is White's turn to play. As you can see there is a series of ataris that can be played by White with stones **A**, **B** and **C**. Placing opposing stones in atari is always a tantalising prospect, but in this case White doesn't really gain anything by filling liberties to play those ataris. White cannot capture any stone that will give him any meaningful advantage and playing the ataris will help Black fix his hanging connections and eradicate any **aji** in the area. Let us see why...



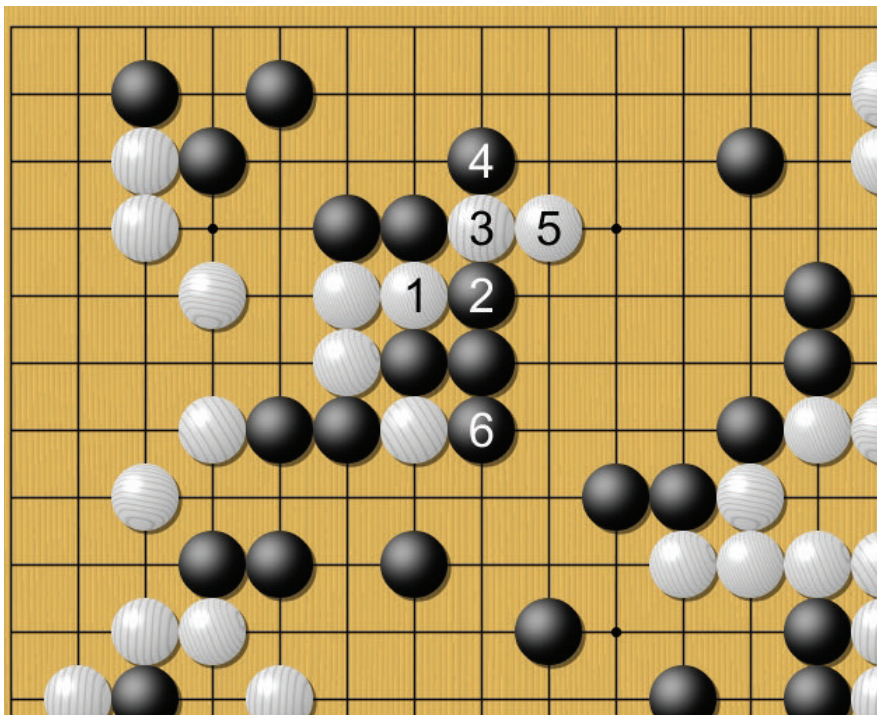




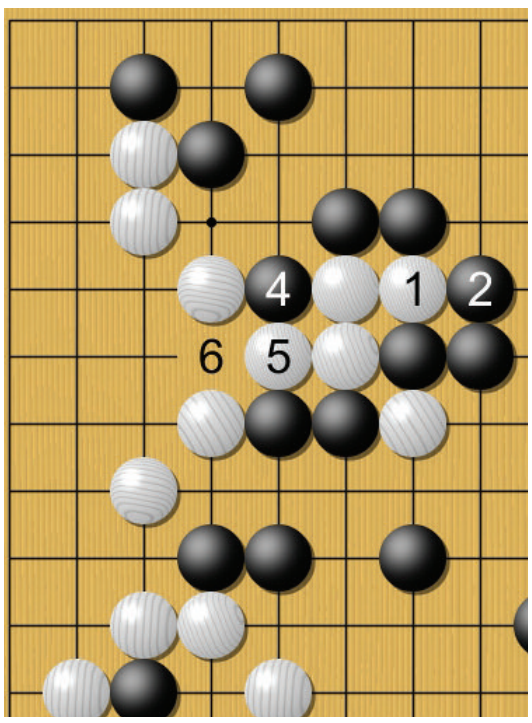
Left image: If White plays the atari at **move 1**, Black can simply connect at **move 2**. If White plays the double atari at **move 3**, Black can simply capture the White stone that made the double atari possible, with **move 4**. Even if White persists and plays another atari at **A**, Black can ignore it and play the sente threat at **B** because the square marked stone is not important for Black's shape after the solid connection of **move 2**. On the other hand White cannot let the triangle marked stone be placed in atari, or else the dead Black group will be brought back to life!
Center image: Here we see the end result of the exchange if White is stubborn and plays the atari at **move 5**. As you can see even after White captures the stone at **move 9**, Black can calmly connect all his stones with **move 10**.
Right image: This is the result if White totally ignores this area and uses his sente move to gain advantage elsewhere on the board. Black once again plays the peep and then follows up with some reducing moves, but White's defence is solid. The difference between the center and the right image is only a few points (around four points when we reach the endgame) and White still retains a bit of aji against Black at the points **A**, **B** and **C**. Compare the two images and think if it is worth for White to spend movements in this area at that moment, considering the whole board in the previous page.

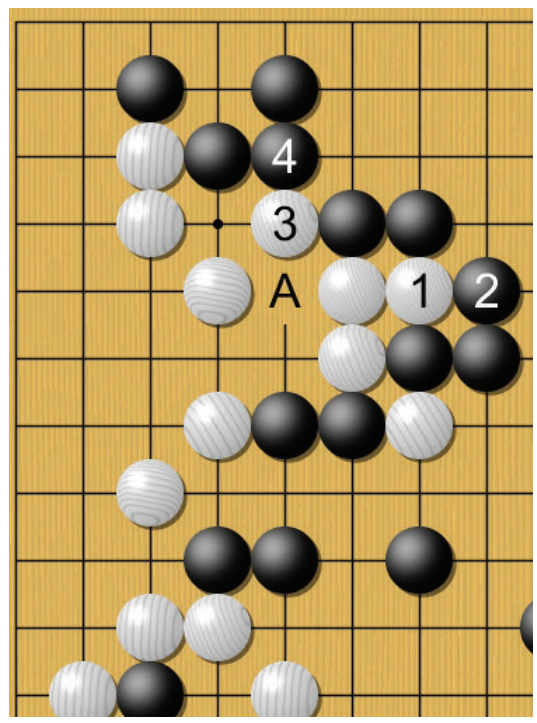


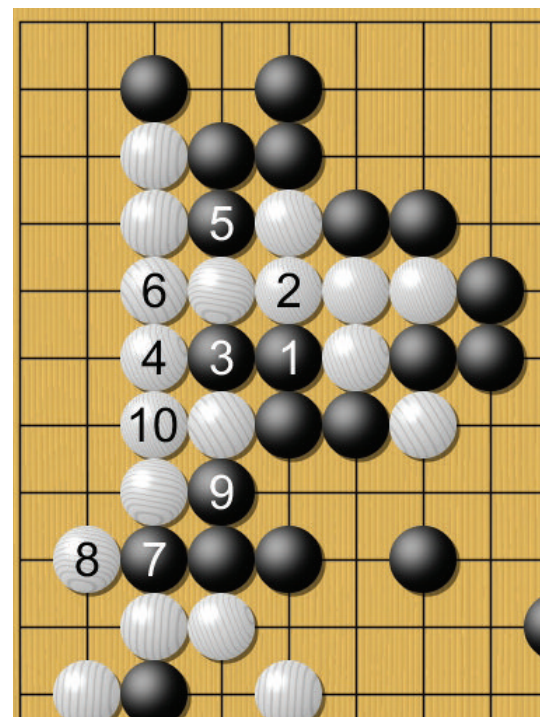
In the previous example, even if you decide to invest some moves to settle that position of the board, it is not the end of the world. White is practically helping Black to fix all his defects in his shape and his defence, in exchange of a few points and possibly sente later on, but it is not a disaster. In this case filling your own liberties to play an atari was just not a very good move.
But, as we said there is the second case, where filling liberties and going for cuts that do not exist can cost us the stability or even the life of our own group. Such an example is the left image and the possible push and cut at **A**.
Both players are fighting elsewhere at the moment, but White refuses to play that push that will fill one of his liberties till the end of the game. Why is that particular move so bad for him?



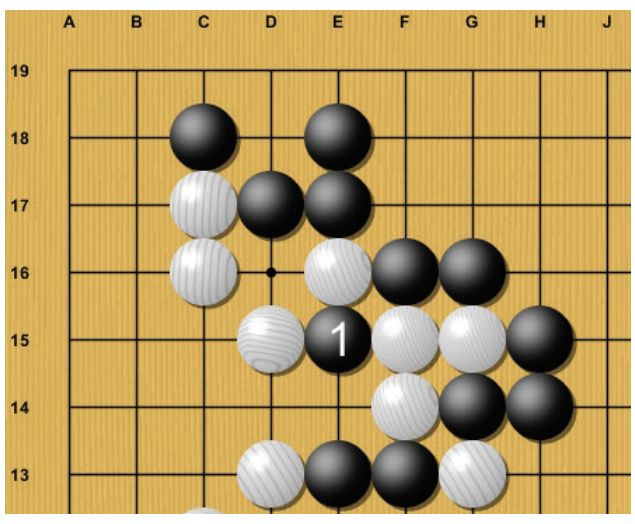
If White goes on with the push with **move 1**, Black will definitely just block with **move 2**, but Black has so many stones around that there is no follow-up move for White.
Cutting at **move 3** is pointless. In the resulting sequence Black can easily defend his few defects and the two White stones have no chance of living inside such a small space, totally surrounded by Black stones.
One could say that **move 1** is sente, since Black needs to respond, so it seems like a harmless move for White that cost him nothing obvious.
It is easy to overlook that White's group now only has two liberties. That is something that White lost and now he needs to defend his group or lose it outright to Black, if White plays away...



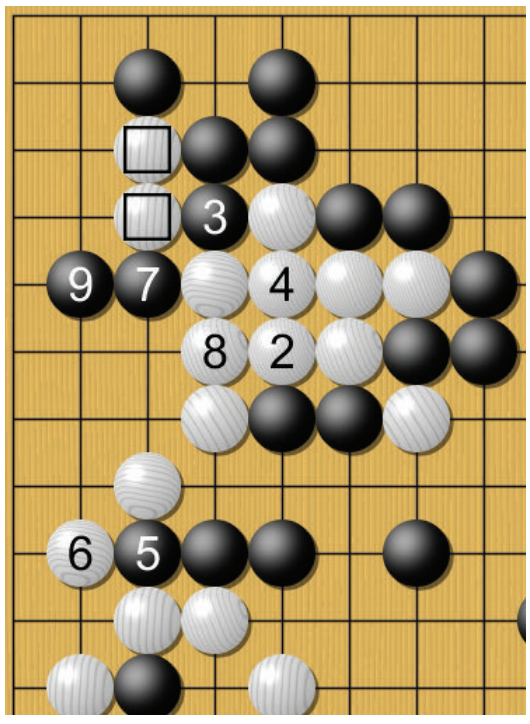


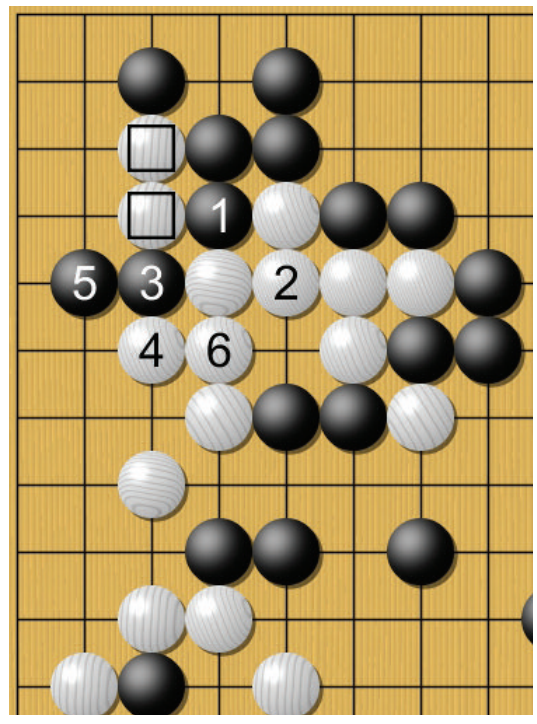


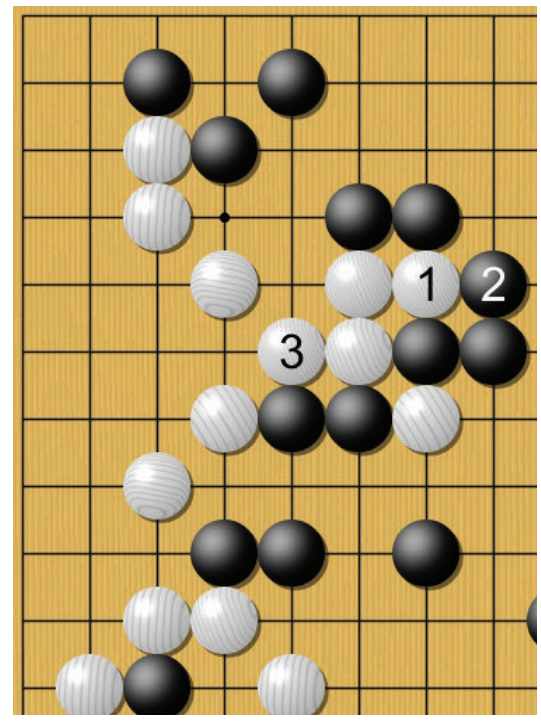
Left image: If White does not defend his stones, then **move 4** kills the group outright. **Move 5** does not add any liberties to the White stones, so **Black 6** simply captures the group.
Center image: Even if White tries to defend against Black **A**, while keeping sente, with **move 3**, this is not very effective. If White thinks that he is safe now and plays away, he is still in danger of getting severely reduced even by simple moves, while Black **A** is still a significant threat.
Right image: Even if Black plays the obvious and slow push at **move 1** and follows up with every possible atari in the exchange of moves up to **move 10**, then White is getting reduced and Black gets to keep sente. This is not a good prospect for White and so the original move of filling that one liberty actually backfired on White...



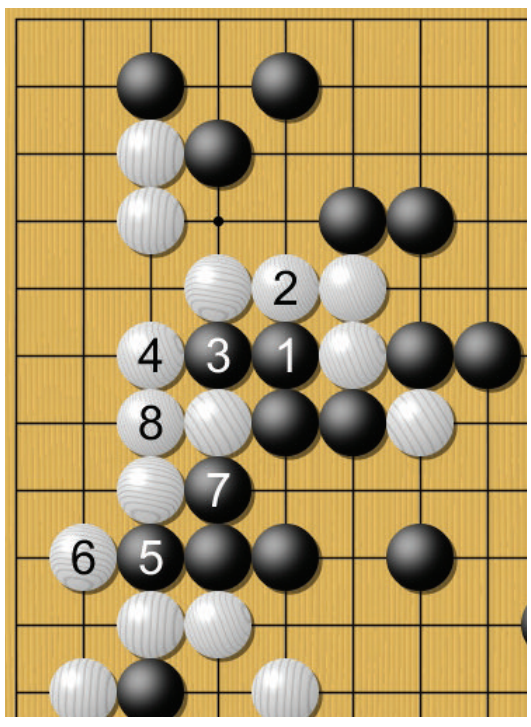
But what happens if Black tries to play the double atari throw-in at **move 1** as shown in the image on the left?
White had played the original exchange on the premise that he was going to gain something, but so far the only thing that White has managed is to place his own groups in jeopardy. If this move by Black is still on the table, then White's exchange of moves, and the shortage of liberties it created, becomes even worse. Let us see what happens in the next page.





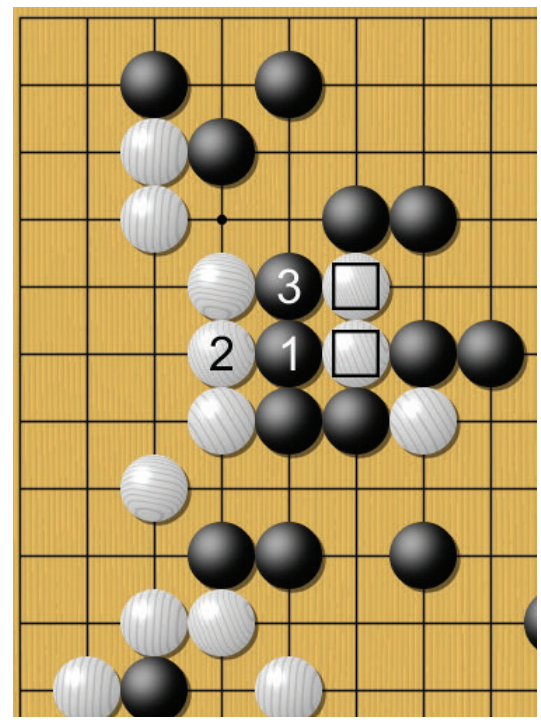


Left image: This is the result if White gets overconfident and decides to try to defend every atari. After **White 2** captures the throw-in, **Black 3** ataris another White stone and **move 4** connects. The exchange of **moves 5** and **6** ia sente because it threatens to cut White in half, but it puts even more pressure to the fight after **Black 7** places White in atari again. **White 8** connects and **move 9** extends, capturing the marked White stones and effectively destroying all the eyespace for White!
Center image: A similar result could be reached with the cut at **move 3** without an immediate atari, so White needs to defend that cut instead of running after every single atari. In this case defending at **move 2** is a mistake. In response to **move 1** White should simply play the bamboo joint at **move 6** that connects his two groups and defends the cut at the same time, by sacrificing one stone. Black however can ignore that and still extend to capture the two marked stones.
Right image: This means that, back in the original exchange of moves, White should have spent another **move** at **3** to defend against all the shape and liberty issues that would ensue from **move 1**. But is losing sente for that area and those moves worth it? To answer this we must think about what would be the result on the board if Black played first in this area...



Left image: This is the result in case Black plays first and White decides to defend every single stone. As you can see, Black keeps sente and while it is a smaller reduction than previous cases, it is still significant. However...

Right image: If White simply gives up the two marked stones then the reduction is smaller than the worth of those stones and White takes sente! With a possible result like that, White doesn't need to play first in this area at all.



Remember: Do not be stressed over every single stone or small group. Once a stone has served its purpose it is not always a good idea to keep it alive. Learn to let go, do not apply pressure to gaps that do not wield a direct threat or a cut and always keep in mind the condition of your own groups and the amount of liberties and eyes that they have left. More often than not, preserving or taking sente can be more precious and important than losing or gaining a small amount of points in a local situation. Think bigger, think of the whole board and then decide.

Epilogue and what is coming next

This is the end of this book, which contains most of my Go knowledge as a single digit kyu. Of course learning, for both you and me, will never stop, but it doesn't need to be an arduous procedure. The main goal for us amateur players is to get better and have fun while playing our games.

For some people that might mean more and more studying. Others might take it easy and try to learn as they play. Whichever you might choose, remember that the basics described within this book are by no means exhausted as topics.

There are so many things to learn, even in basic and simple concepts. During the many months that it took me to write this book I reduced my own studying to the bare minimum in order to focus on rearranging what I already knew and explain them as well as I could. **Revisiting those basic concepts actually made me a better player.** When I began writing I was 4-5 kyu and had struck a small wall. During writing I finally broke a small hole in the barrier and rose to 3 kyu.

Now I am focused on challenging dan level players in DGS and playing against them constantly. I am still losing all those games, but I am having fun and I feel like I am getting better slowly, but surely, just by the re-evaluation of my knowledge that those better players are forcing me to do, in order to present an actual challenge for them.

In that regard, now that you finished the book, I would advise you to go back and read again the chapter with the review of an actual game. I guarantee you that you will see a lot more into it than when you started reading this book. Of course, despite having learnt and understood something, that doesn't mean that you can apply it easily yourself. **Play Go**, **have fun** and **try to experiment** with what you learned and what you understand of the game. Sometimes, immediately after playing a move, you will regret it and see your mistake. Do not worry about that, it is part of the fun. I found myself in a very embarrassing situation where I was writing an example on life and death, finished the corresponding pages and right the next day I made a mistake in a very similar position and died. **It happens.**

I hope that you found this book helpful. I am confident that I will get better as well, both in Go and in writing, and it is my intent to make more books in the future. **Books that are helpful, books that are free, books that can be read in your own native language.** That is my vision. I know that it can be done, especially with your help.

If I can get to one dan and I can write a book to help you all achieve it as well? That is my dream. I hope that it will happen.

Thank you for your time and patience

About the author



Born and still living in the Greek countryside after completing his university studies and his mandatory army service almost a decade ago.

He has extensive experience working as a private tutor and as a typesetter for the local newspaper and he is a massive English fantasy and sci-fi fan.

Those fields of work along with his love for books and his habit of writing walls of text in various internet fora provided him the knowledge and the idea of trying to write a guidebook for Go. He learned about Go around 2005, but his obligations didn’t allow him to seriously act upon his passion for the game until August 2016. Since then he has participated in every Greek Go tournament that has been organised and he is determined not to miss a single one of them.

Think of the many wonderful things we have been introduced to by our friends. A variety of hobbies, games and knowledge, passed like a torch from one another, powered by fun and companionship.

You do not have to be an expert to share something fun. You only need to have a passion for it and to want to share that passion and joy with others.

This is a book like that...

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