

Critical positions

Sagar Shah:

Let me start off with a conversation I had with an experienced Grandmaster friend a few days ago.

Me: What, according to you, is a critical position?


GM: It is a position where you need to spend a good amount of time, in order to make an important decision during the game.

Me: Ok. You've told me what to do during a critical position; but how do you recognize whether it is a critical position or not?

GM: (after a long thought) I think a player can understand whether it is a critical position or not, based on his feel and understanding of the game.

Me: But then, how do you explain whether it is a critical position or not to players who do not have a highly developed understanding of the game, like you do?

GM: (again, after a long thought!) I don't really know!!

- A critical position is a position where the outcome strongly depends on the choice of move – where the result may change by the wrong choice. 

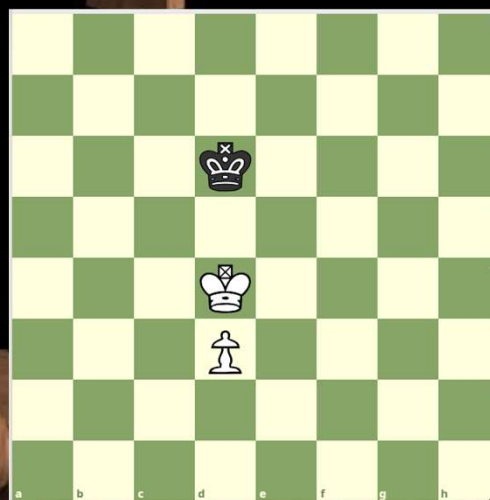


How do you know if the position is critical?



- Your own evaluation of candidate moves shows a lot of variation – maybe only one looks any good
- Immediate threats or crisis, or a big decision
- Last chance to do something
- Lots of counterplay
- Sudden change in tension
- Your assessment of the position and your evaluation of the position at the end of the main line don't match
- Something has just gone wrong!

Critical endgame positions



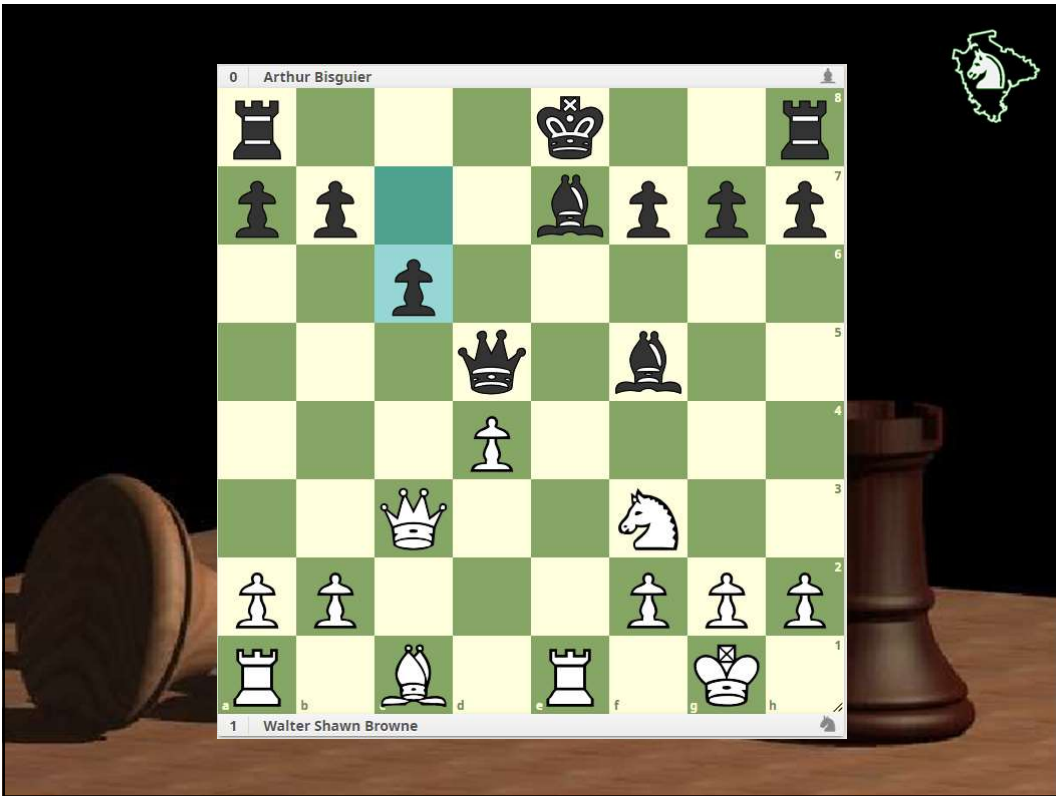
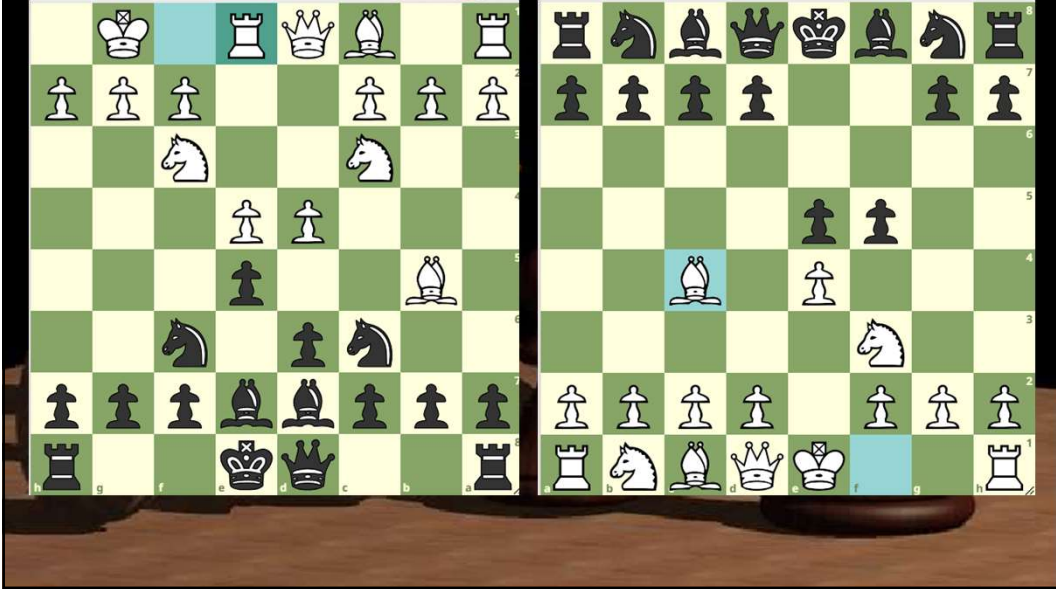
Critical opening positions



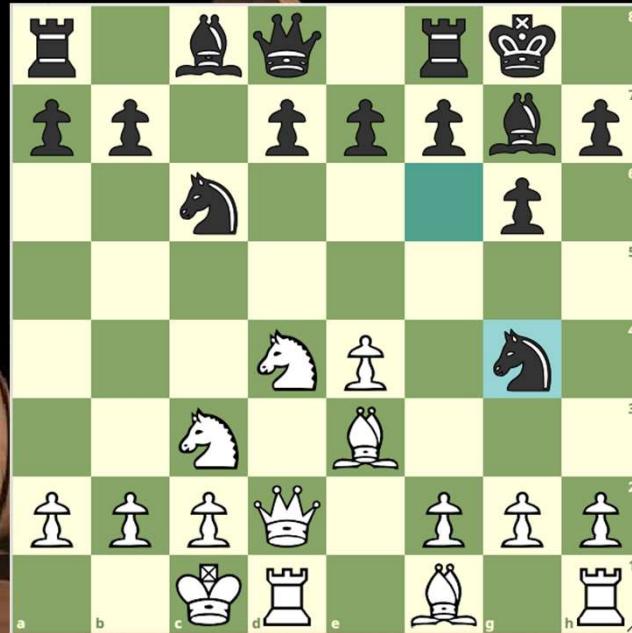
Sharpest lines in the opening



What is considered critical may change



Something went wrong



Change in tension



