

Wanting too little

Imagine you arrive home one day to find that your house or apartment building is burning down. It appears as though it would be relatively safe to dash inside and grab some of your valuables at the moment, but not for much longer. You're on your way to the front door, when suddenly you spy a quarter lying at the side of the walk. Are you going to stop to pick it up?

With the exception of the rare, easily distractible individual, most people would say no. Clearly, your computer, goban, family members, etc. are more valuable to you than a quarter. Moreover, the quarter will still be there when you get out, whereas every second you spend picking up loose change means one more of your irreplaceable belongings is lost to the flames.

And yet, amateur players – *kyus* and *dans* alike – do the Go equivalent of this nearly every game. Most people call it “underplay,” but I think of it as selling yourself short. You and your opponent are playing by the same rules, so you're entitled to just as much of the board as he is; don't settle for less. On the other hand, if your opponent is selling himself short, there's no need to follow suit; why not take advantage and grab more for yourself?

It is not by accident that this is the first section of this book. While any mistake can arise due to simple ignorance or oversight, this is the type of error that is most often committed consciously, even deliberately – the very definition of a bad habit.

The main reasons for such mistakes are pessimism and fear. The *kyu* player sees his opponent's *moyo* as unassailable and his own territory as being full of holes. He dreads leaving any weaknesses in his own position, but also fears trying to exploit those he sees in his opponent's. He would rather play around a well-defined border, where gain and loss are easy to see, than plunge into a relatively empty area of the board whose value, though larger, is harder to count.

Fortunately, bad habits of this type are easier to break than some of the others. Clear positional judgment comes only with experience, but in this section, we will address several common situations to get you started. Once you get into the good habit of thinking about the big picture, you'll never go back to playing four-point *gote* moves when there are *moyos* to be staked out and invasions to be made.

In this section, I'll show you seven examples of situations where novice players play too submissively and let the opponent get more than he deserves.

Playing endgame moves in the middlegame

The mistake

A game of Go is divided into three stages: opening (or fuseki), middlegame (or chuban) and endgame (or yose). Likewise, moves can be divided into the same category, based on which stage of the game they are best played in. Opening moves tend to sketch out large, loose frameworks or approach or enclose a corner. To qualify as a middlegame move, a move must fulfill at least one (preferably more) of the following purposes: creating, enlarging, reducing or invading a moyo; attacking or reinforcing a weak group; and building or erasing influence. Any move that only affects the balance of territory and nothing else is an endgame move.

Given a reasonable middlegame move and a reasonable endgame move, the middlegame move will almost always be larger, even if the amount of territory claimed by the endgame move is substantial. Most endgame moves should only be played once no middlegame moves remain – in other words, in the endgame. However, it is quite common in amateur play to see endgame moves, sometimes even small ones, worth only a few points, played a hundred moves or more before the middlegame is exhausted.

The rationale

“That’s a lot of points!” or “I was afraid he would play there before me.”

The reality

Middlegame moves are deceptively large. Even if the amount of secure territory made by a move is only a couple of points, its value will be much larger than that if it fulfills one or more of the purposes mentioned above. The reason for this is that moves that relate to moyos, attack and defense and influence have consequences that span the board and last for the rest of the game, while endgame moves are over and done with once played. When you consider that a typical game of Go lasts well over 200 moves, even a small effect, compounded over the entire game, will add up to much more than any but the largest of endgame moves.

Furthermore, there is really no reason to fear your opponent playing a large endgame move before you do. If he does, it means that he has run out of effective middlegame plays before you have – this is something to celebrate. Besides, if your middlegame plays are effective, he will be too busy dealing with your attacks and invasions to try to grab any territory.

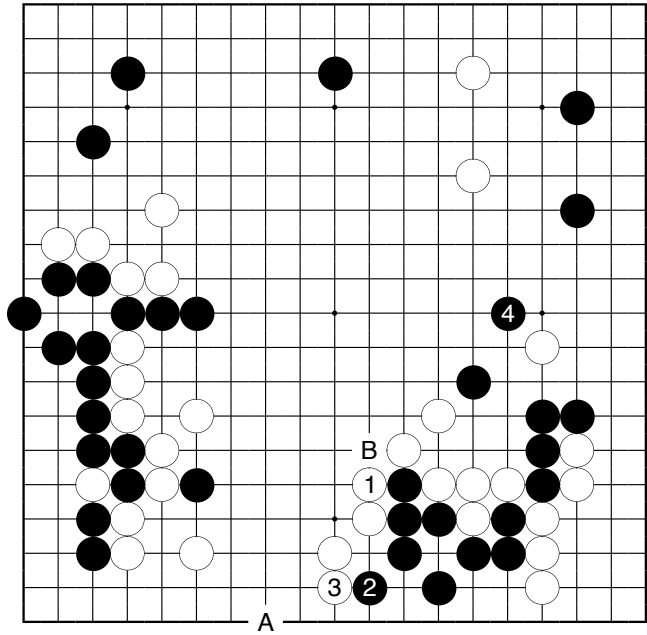


Figure 1.1: White's block is just about territory

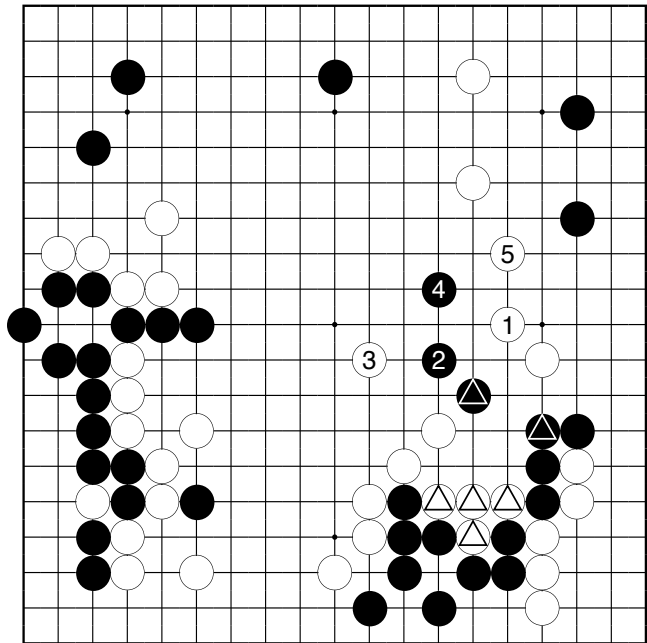


Figure 1.2: Defending while attacking

Example 1 (Fig. 1.1)

Black: 10 *kyu*, White: 9 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

Black approached the lower right corner, and the play quickly deviated from *joseki*. The result was that White split Black into two weak groups. While Black struggled for life with the one on the bottom, White sealed him in and established a fairly secure (though a bit overconcentrated) moyo on the lower side.

W1 is absolutely essential, and a perfect example of a middlegame move. It establishes influence and a *moyo*, defends a weak White group by connecting it to friendly forces, and attacks a weak Black group – making B2 essential for survival. If White omitted this move, Black would play there himself, splitting White into two weak groups and denying White any potential for a *moyo* on the lower side.

W3, however, is an endgame move. It is large – about 10 points in *gote* – as it prevents a Black jump to A. However, it does not threaten the safety of the Black group at all, nor is it terribly important for the safety of the White stones – the cut of B is not terribly dangerous.

Because W3 is a move that affects only territory, Black is free to play B4, defending his weak group by attacking the lonely White stone. It is not difficult to see that this move is worth much more than 10 points.

Improvement 1 (Fig. 1.2)

It would be much better for White to forget about territory for the time being, and concentrate on the weak groups that still populate the board. To a strong player's eye, the most important area of the board is clearly the lone White stone on the right side, and five weak Black stones next to it.

There are a number of ways of handling the situation, but W1 here is a fairly straightforward approach to moving out while attacking Black.

Black, for his part, might do better to look for a way to sacrifice the group, since it is awkward and not accomplishing any clear purpose. However, assuming he decides to try to save it, he might likewise move out with a diagonal move, B2. Please verify for yourself that White cannot cut Black's triangle-marked knight's move, because of the shortage of liberties of the marked White stones below.

White might then continue her attack with W3 (enlarging her moyo in the process), and if Black jumps to B4, W5 is another nice middlegame move, connecting White's two weak groups while cutting Black's off from his friends in the top right.

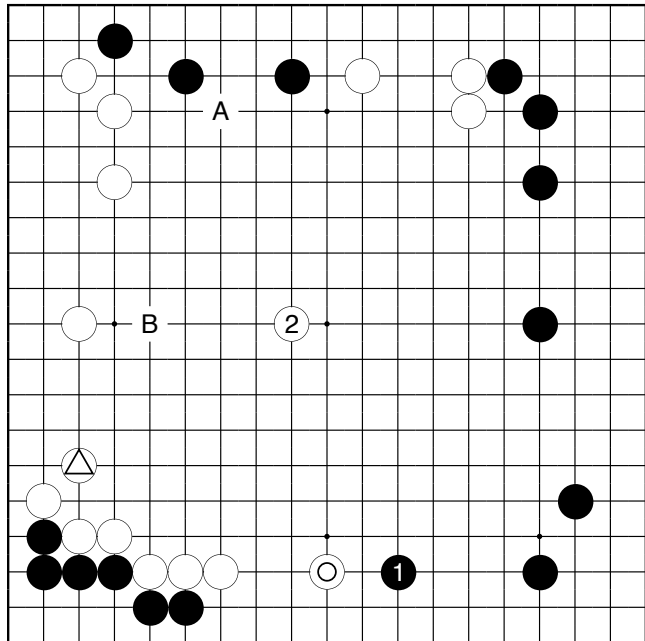


Figure 1.3: The lower side is not interesting

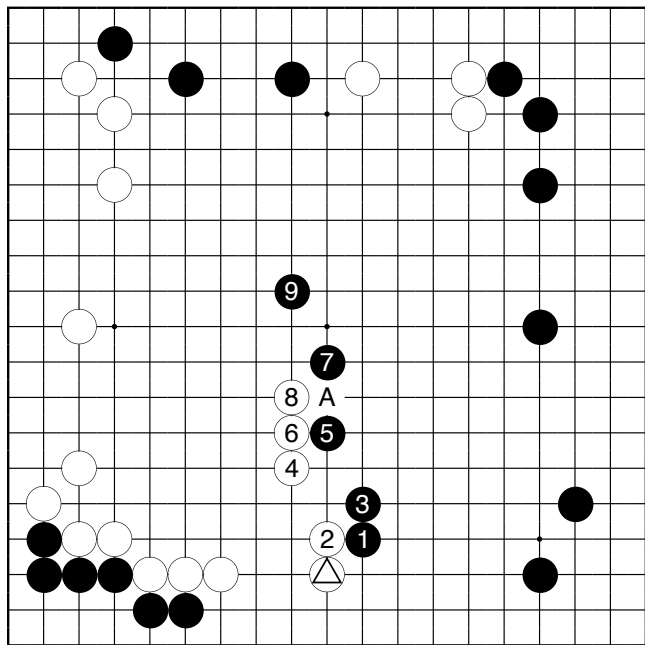


Figure 1.4: Pushing battle

Example 2 (Fig 1.3)

Black: 9 *kyu*, White: 8 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

This is a *moyo* vs. *moyo* game. Black has just invaded the 3-3 point in the lower left, and White has completed the usual *joseki* by playing the triangled stone.

Although the corner invasion was arguably too early, B1 is a bigger mistake in direction. It doesn't look like an end-game move – the weakest group on the board is White's top one, which can't be effectively attacked at this time, and the area in front of a corner enclosure is usually quite large. Nonetheless, despite appearances, B1 is a move that is about points and nothing else.

Black's enclosure in the lower right and White's circled stone are both strong, so there is no offensive or defensive purpose to B1. It's on the third line, so doesn't affect the White *moyo* to the left or the Black one to the right, and because the stones in the lower left are low and strong, neither player has much chance to develop much in the vicinity. Putting all this together, one reaches the conclusion that the lower side of the board is uninteresting to both players until much later in the game.

Because Black's move was slack, White is happy to ignore it and turn elsewhere. W2 has the right idea, expanding her own *moyo* and aiming at reducing Black's, but is a bit too ambitious. Perhaps a peep at A, followed by the more reserved jump to B would be better. Nonetheless, it is clear that W2 is a much better move than B1, and White has taken the lead in this game.

Improvement 2 (Fig 1.4)

It's not easy to find the perfect move for Black in this position, but anything affecting the two *moyos* would be better than the move made in the game.

One idea would be to make a shoulder hit at B1. Although geographically close to the bad move in the game, it carries a very different meaning - since it leaves an open skirt, it obviously does not aim at making territory on the lower side. Rather, it hopes to force a response like W2 from White, allowing Black to start a pushing battle that will help his *moyo*. If White tries to get ahead with moves like W4, Black can follow suit with B5, then play lightly with B7 and reduce around B9.

Of course, Black is stretching himself a little thin like this, but White will only strengthen Black if she tries to cut through at A immediately. Meanwhile, Black's *moyo* has grown larger than White's, while the thickness White builds up to W8 is made somewhat redundant by the powerful wall she already had in the lower left.

Because White's triangle marked stone is neither weak nor particularly important, she may ignore B1, but even then, B1 still does a good job of expanding the Black *moyo*, while pressing at W2 himself will be appealing for Black.

Breaking the habit

There are a number of reasons that this habit is hard to break. Firstly, it isn't always easy to tell which moves are middlegame and which are endgame, as the second example above illustrates. Secondly, amateur players tend to reinforce this habit in each other, answering "*sente*" endgame moves whenever they're played, instead of ignoring them as they often should be – after all, if you get profit in *sente*, it's hard to understand why your move was wrong. Lastly, if you're pessimistic or insecure in your skills, you might doubt your ability to profit from attacking or handle a *moyo* invasion. If you're afraid of venturing into uncertain territory, there is a strong urge to grab points you can be sure of and let the opponent take control of the complicated middlegame.

The best way to break this habit is to make a checklist, and ask yourself at each move whether you can accomplish any of the goals mentioned above. Are there any *moyos* on the board that you can expand or reduce? Weak groups you can attack or defend? Places you can press your opponent down to get influence? If you think the answer to all those questions is no, and you're not yet at least a hundred moves into the game, look more carefully. You can be sure that there are better moves out there than the 10-point *gote* territory grab you've been eyeing.

It's human nature to take instant gratification when it's offered, which means that there will remain a strong temptation to make these sorts of moves, even when you know they're wrong. Be strong, and play the moves you believe to be correct, not the ones that tempt you the most.

Exceptions

An endgame move may be worth more than a middlegame move if it's big enough, but it must be very large indeed. Most strong players would play *tenuki* during the middlegame if 10 or 20 points were at stake, but you would rarely see a 40-point move sitting around unplayed for long. The value of middlegame plays is highly variable, and difficult to judge, but a good rule of thumb is a 15 point minimum, and considerably more early on, or when there are weak groups on the board. Therefore, around 15 points is where an endgame play becomes large enough that you might consider the possibility of grabbing it if there is a convenient lull in the middlegame action.

Another exception is late in the middlegame, if you have a significant lead. Then, grabbing the large territorial points is a way to avoid complications and put yourself out of your opponent's reach, provided your aren't leaving any weak groups around for your opponent to attack. When you hear in a game commentary that "with this move, so-and-so has declared that he has a won game," it means that the player has played a large endgame move, believing that his or her lead is enough that the opponent cannot catch up.

Lastly, certain professionals – such as the great Sakata Eio – have been known to play large territorial moves in the middlegame if, after careful reading, they have decided that they can skilfully handle any attack on their weak groups so that the opponent does not get enough profit to compensate. This way of playing, called *amashi*, is exceedingly difficult to execute properly, and I wouldn't recommend that you try it, unless you're equally confident in your reading, defensive *tesuji* and positional judgment.

The mistake

This is actually a special case of “playing endgame moves in the middlegame” (q.v.). The player spends moves to capture one or more of the opponent’s stones that aren’t doing anything useful. Although points are gained by capturing, unless the stones are cutting one of the player’s groups apart, establishing the border of a large territory or *moyo*, or otherwise pivotal to attack and defence, capturing them is an endgame play.

One of the most common forms of this mistake is capturing *kikashi* stones. The value of a *kikashi* stone is that it is obtained “for free,” that is, in *sente* and without strengthening the opponent much. Since they were obtained without cost, they can be discarded without regret; capturing them on a small scale is exactly what their owner would like his opponent to do. For example, in Diagram 1.1, B1 is a *kikashi*, forcing W2. If Black plays *tenuki* with B3, it’s true that W4 cleanly captures B1. However, White has now spent two moves here, and Black only one. Black can now *tenuki* again with B5 – he has gained one whole move on White.

The rationale

“If I play here, there’s no way for these stones to escape, and how could capturing my opponent’s stones be a bad thing?”

The reality

Go is not about capturing stones. It is possible to capture dozens of stones over the course of a game and still lose, and equally possible (though rare) to win without capturing a single stone.

Sometimes, capturing stones serves a higher purpose, such as connecting groups or enlarging a *moyo*, but other stones are worth nothing but one or two points (one for the capture and sometimes one for the territory) apiece. While it’s important to be able to spot ways of capturing stones, it’s equally important to be able to tell which stones are crucial to your position, and which are throw-aways.

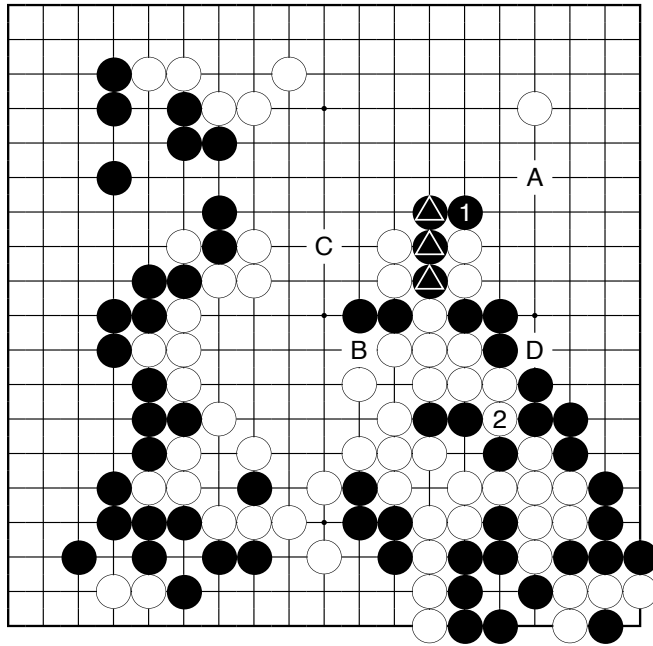


Figure 1.5: White captures three unimportant stones

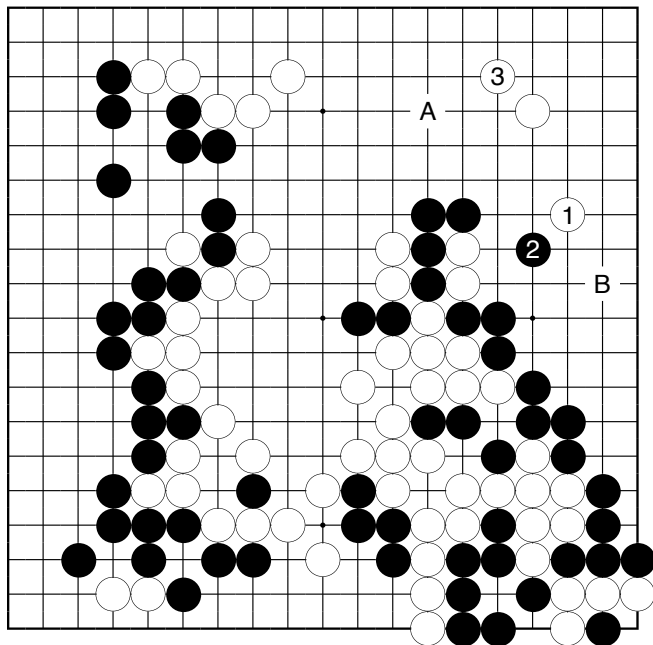


Figure 1.6: White takes a large corner

Example 1

Black: 5 *kyu*, White: 5 *kyu*. No handicap.

White has given Black an enormous territory along the whole left edge of the board in return for some central thickness, a *seki* in the lower right, and the capture of four stones on the lower side.

Black then attempted to reduce White's potential in the centre, provoking a brief fight. The result of the fight is that White has made the mistake of "using thickness to make territory" (q.v.), while Black has developed large potential along the right side. Black has just ended the fight by gripping two White stones with B1.

Things are not going well for White at this point, but the game is not over yet. Her territory in the centre is quite large, she has some potential on the upper side and, most importantly, she has *sente*. Her next move could very well decide the game.

W2 is a horrible mistake. Perhaps White feels that, since Black has just captured two White stones, a bit of tit-for-tat is in order. However, there is a critical distinction to be made.

The stones captured by B1 are cutting stones. If Black doesn't play there, White could likely swallow up the marked Black stones, adding the entire upper side of the board to her *moyo* and taking a large lead. The stones captured by W2, on the other hand, are doing nothing at all. White's group is clearly alive without capturing them, and they have no effect on the Black territory to the right, either.

W2, therefore, is nothing but a six-point endgame move. Although it creates the *aji* of the cut at D, Black can fix that problem by playing at A, taking more profit than White's six points in the process, while also threatening White's corner and robbing her of any chance to squeeze some residual profit out of the two stones Black captured with B1.

If that wasn't bad enough, W2 creates bad potential for White later in the game. Now, a Black move at B is *atari*, forcing White to answer. That allows the Black stones inside White's *moyo* to escape with c, once he has some support on the outside. Please confirm for yourself that C would not work if B wasn't *sente*.

Improvement 1

There is no question that W1 is the vital point. It expands White's corner, while seriously undermining Black's potential on the right side. Furthermore, it aims at pulling out the marked stones, stranding Black's cutting stones in the midst of White strength. If Black defends with B2 (any other defense leaves White with more forcing moves), White can close the corner with W3.

Next, if Black sets about erasing White's top-side potential with a move around A, White can pursue a mutual damage strategy by sliding to B. This way, the game, although still good for Black, would be closer than in the game diagram. If Black instead defends his territory on the right, White can play one line to the left of a, taking a large territory on top and making the game close again.

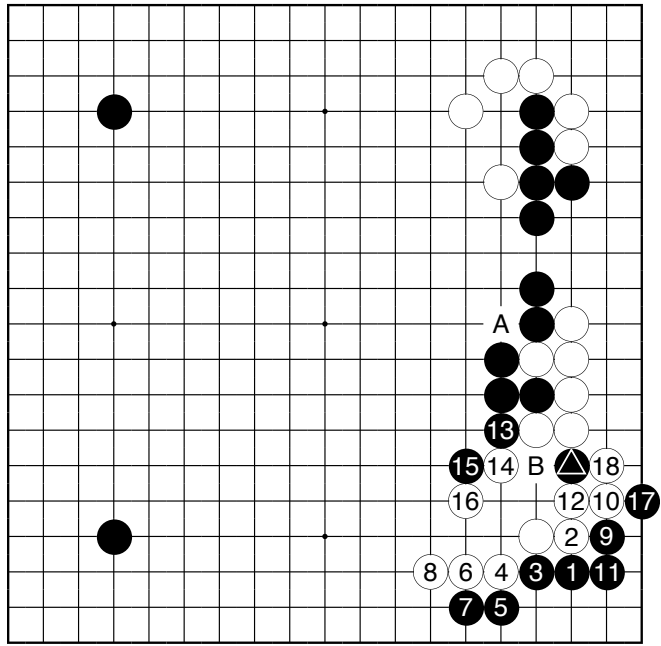


Figure 1.7: White is hopelessly overconcentrated

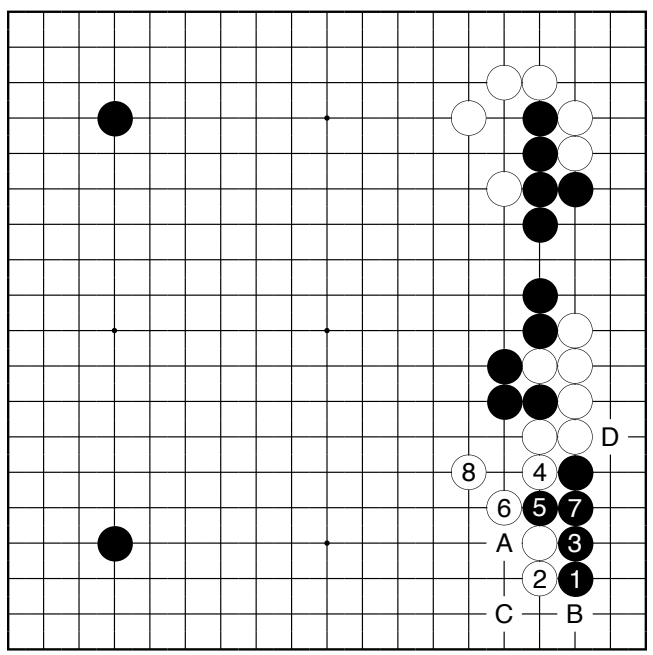


Figure 1.8: Black is sealed in

Example 2 (Fig. 1.7)

Black: 10 kyu, White: 10 kyu. No handicap.

This example shows the extreme to which this mistake can go. Black made the triangle-marked approach move too early, and White was able to cut it off by attacking the heavy Black group above. Sandwiched between White's star-point stone below and the solid White group above, the approach stone has lost nearly all its value. Between that fact and the cutting point remaining at A, White should have an easy game ahead of her.

Black attempts to squeeze some value out of his approach stone by invading the corner at B1. The sequence that follows indicates a serious lack of judgement on White's part. Perhaps she believes that, having cut off Black's stone, she must now make sure that it remains dead. The ensuing sequence shows that such greedy thinking can only lead to overconcentration.

White blocks at W2 to prevent the corner invasion from connecting to the approach stone. This is the wrong direction, since it means that the resulting wall will be used only for territory (see "Using Thickness for Territory" later in this section).

The sequence up to W12 is almost inevitable, and one that should look familiar to most players. W4 is usually overplay when the opponent has an approach stone in place above, but here it is so weak that W4 is playable.

Already, White's profit is too small for the number of stones she has invested, but matters only get worse. B13 attempts to force White. Although it's true that if White plays elsewhere, Black at B will allow him to connect his stone either to the group above or to the corner, the stone is of even lesser value now than it was before. Nonetheless, White obediently answers at W14, so Black pushes his luck with B15. Again, this is a small threat, and should be ignored, but White plays W16.

As the final insult, Black plays B17 – clearly an endgame move – and again, White answers, determined to keep hold of that one stone at all cost. The result is that Black has strengthened his position in the middle by forcing with B13 and B15 and taken 10 points in the lower right, while White has gained at most 7 points of extra profit and given herself a cramped position. White's advantage has turned into Black's.

Improvement 2 (Fig. 1.8)

In response to B1, blocking the other way with W2 is correct. Although Black will now connect his stones, the approach stone is so weak that, in fact, the resulting position will be worse for Black than a direct corner invasion with no stones of either colour nearby.

B3 is the only move to live, and W4 is the most natural response, although W4 at B5 is also thinkable. B5 wedges in to create cutting points in White's shape, and W6 is *atari*. After B7 connects, defending the upper cutting point with the hanging connection of W8 is correct. The lower cutting point at A is not as menacing as it might appear, since B, C and D are all *sente* moves against Black's corner.

The end result is that White's territory on the right and Black's corner are roughly the same size as in the game. White loses out on a few extra points made by capturing the single stone, but her benefits are enormous in comparison. Firstly, Black is completely sealed in, whereas in the game, White's shape is open on the lower edge. Secondly, White's thickness faces in a useful direction, instead of being used for territory. Lastly, Black has not been able to make any forcing moves in the centre – his upper right group is significantly weaker than in the game and W8 has the dual purpose of attacking it while defending White's cutting point.

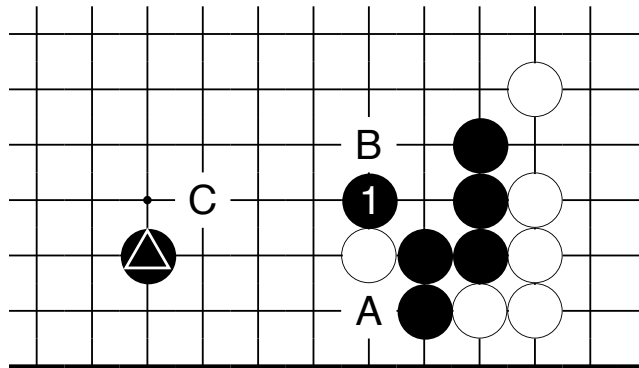


Figure 1.2: Capturing the single stone is honest

Breaking the habit

To break this habit, you must learn to think of capturing stones as a means to an end, not as a goal in itself. Before searching for a way to capture a disconnected stone or group of stones, ask yourself why you want to capture them. If the answer is just that they will get you a few points of territory, or that seeing them escape makes you feel that you've missed out, seriously consider leaving them alone for the time being.

Questions to ask yourself: Are they cutting stones? If so, do you need to capture them to be safe, or are both of your groups alive on their own? Are they pivotal to the opponent's *moyo* or territory? Will capturing them make you much thicker than you are already? Will you be over-concentrated? Will capturing them endanger other enemy stones nearby? If you commit to capturing them, will your opponent gain one or more useful forcing moves in the vicinity? If you don't capture them now, will your opponent rescue them immediately, or will you still have a chance to capture them later? Is there a way that you can swallow them up on a large scale during the natural course of play, or do you really have to make a move to capture them locally?

If you still find yourself instinctively gobbling up stones at every opportunity, perhaps you should try going cold turkey to rid yourself of the addiction. Play a few games with the goal in mind of winning with as few captures as possible. Keep track of the fewest prisoners you've had at the end of a won game, and try to beat that record. It shouldn't be hard to get down to two or three, not counting endgame *ko* fights. Pay attention to the times when you didn't capture, and the decision came back to haunt you – this will give you insight into when capturing stones is the right course of action.

Exceptions

If the stones are, in fact, unimportant, then the only exceptions are in the endgame, when it is appropriate to make moves just to gain points. However, there are “exceptions” that can arise as a result of stones that look less important than they really are. This is one form of *aji*, or lingering weakness. In such cases, capturing the stones is *honte*, or honest play.

The position shown in Figure 1.2 is the result of a common *joseki*. With the triangle-marked pincer stone as far away as it is, White's lone stone is more dangerous to Black than some players might imagine, so B1 is recommended to remove the *aji*. For instance, if B1 is omitted, White might threaten to connect to the corner by descending to a. If Black prevented the connection, White could then jump to b or lean on the pincer stone with c. Either way, Black's wall would become a target for White to attack.

To make these decisions, one must learn to read out the potential uses for isolated stones. What may be a necessary defensive capture in one position could be a wasted move in a slightly different situation.

Defending positions open on two sides

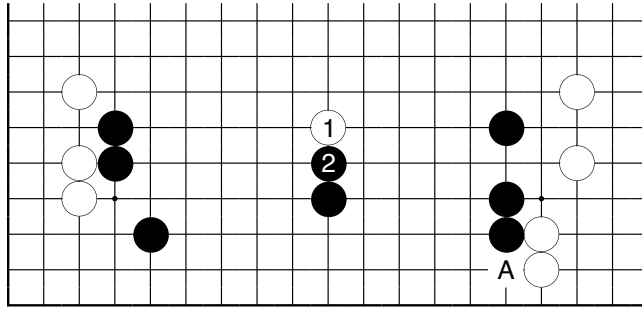


Figure 1.3: Black's framework is undermined at A

The mistake

Amateurs, when they aren't engaged in a violent fight between weak groups, tend to have an unhealthy obsession with walling off territory. It is understandably painful to have the opponent make a monkey jump or slide into your territory, but leaving an open skirt is often unavoidable. In Go, there is never enough time to defend against every possible reduction.

Blocking off an open skirt or other inroad into your position is generally quite large, sometimes even large enough to be a good middlegame move, particularly if it carries with it some threat to the opponent or allows for further profit in the endgame. However, when there are two or more openings in a position, it cannot really be thought of as territory, and should not be treated as such.

In Diagram 1.3, for instance, when White reduces with W1, Black's framework is open both from above and from the direction of A. Black should not try to prevent further intrusion from the reducing stone with a move like B2, since the open skirt to the right means that he would still need to add another move to make much territory here - a better strategy would be to attack W1 and try to make profit elsewhere. If Black had a stone at A, however, then B2 or another move to defend his territory might be appropriate.

It is common to see players slip behind because they spend move after move defending an area of the board that appears large, but is full of holes.

The rationale

"I know that if I block off one side, he can still intrude on the other, but if he does that right away, then my move was sente. If he doesn't do it right away, then later I might have time to block the other side and make a lot of territory."

The reality

First of all, if the opponent responds to the player blocking off one side by intruding on the other, you have, at best, neither gained nor lost anything. If an intrusion on either side is locally *gote* and a defense against such an intrusion *gote* as well, then the two weaknesses can be seen as partial *miai*. That is, if you defend one side, the opponent will intrude on the other. However, if the opponent intruded on one side without provocation, you would be likely to *tenuki*, as your chances for territory in that area would already have been destroyed. The opponent will therefore not intrude until you block on one side or the other, so it is your prerogative to decide when to block, and on which side. This sort of option should not be wasted, as it may later make a large difference, depending on how matters develop in the vicinity.

Worse, if you force an intrusion, it may take away your group's eyeshape or threaten to divide it in two. If the danger is great enough, your original "defense" may turn out to have done more harm than good, or even end up being *gote*.

If, on the other hand, the opponent decides not to intrude immediately, it is true that you could proceed to block on the other side and turn the area into solid territory (assuming there is only one other opening). However, if the opponent allows this, it is because he or she feels these moves are too small at that stage of the game and is probably right - the territory would have to be very large indeed to be worth spending two or moves in *gote* in the middlegame, or even the early endgame.

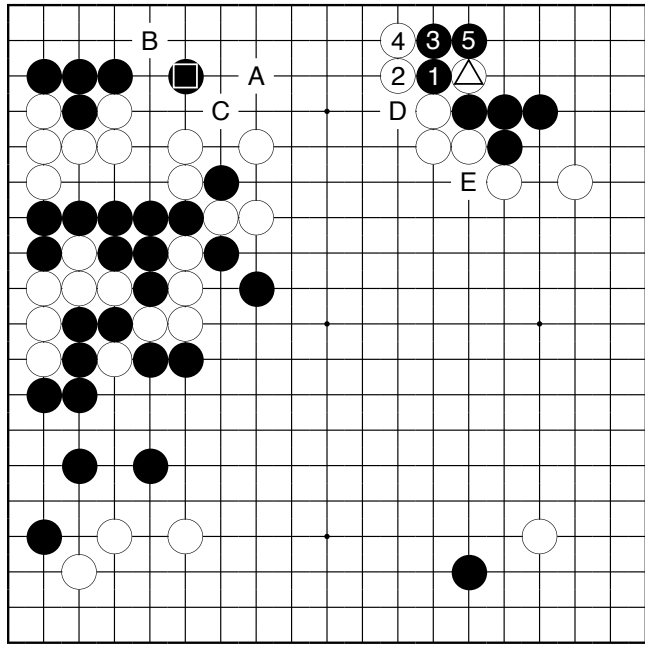


Figure 1.9: White has bad aji and no territory

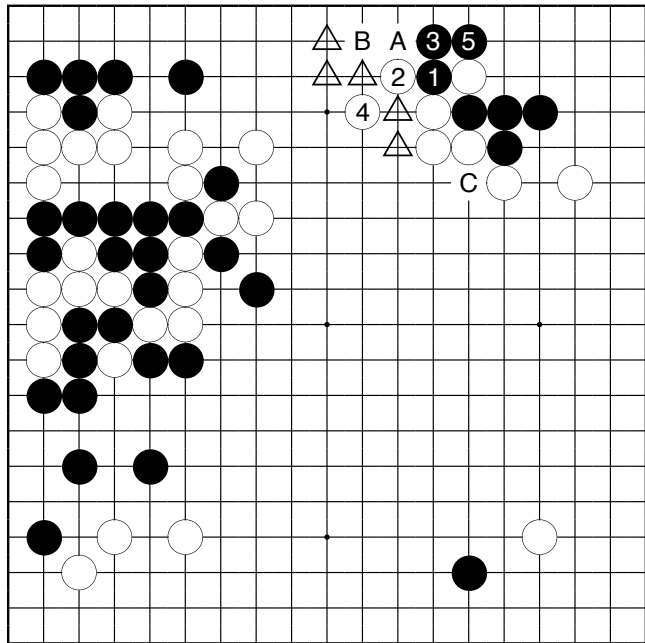


Figure 1.10: White is thick

Example 1 (Fig. 1.9)

Black: 5 *kyu*, White: 4 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

White has suffered a rather large disaster on the left side of the board, losing 11 stones with very little compensation. However, Black has played badly in the top right and allowed himself to be sealed in, so the situation is not entirely hopeless for White. However, if she is to come back from this unfortunate position, she cannot afford to leave any unnecessary weaknesses.

Black cuts at B1 to make life for his group. W2 and W4 sacrifice the triangle-marked stone in *sente*; B3 and B5 are forced. White can now turn elsewhere, for instance to attack the lone Black stone on the lower side.

All of these moves are natural enough and many players would not even pause to think about them. However, something is left to be desired. W4 takes no territory, because of the square-marked stone to the left. Ordinarily, White could play at A in *sente*, because of the threat to take away Black's eyes with B. However, in this case Black would play C and White would have problems.

More importantly, White now has two cutting points at D and E, and her group to the left has only one eye. With these weaknesses hanging over her head, White will not be able to fight aggressively elsewhere. Nor can she spend a move in the vicinity to fix her weaknesses, since there is no time - Black would seize the initiative in the lower right and the game would be over.

Improvement 1 (Fig 1.10)

The reason many players would play W4 in the previous diagram without stopping to think is that it is *sente* and prevents Black from crawling out. The trouble with this reasoning is that it ignores the possibility that there may be other, better *sente* moves in the vicinity. In fact, any move that would allow White to play at B5 and then answer Black A with B would be *sente* as well. A little reading brings you to the realisation that a move at any of the triangle-marked points would be *sente* for White.

The best of these, however, is W4. It makes good shape, reduces the seriousness of the cutting point at C and establishes, more or less, a connection with White's group to the left. White's position, therefore, has become very thick in comparison to the weaknesses left in the actual game. White can now seek to develop on a large scale on the right side and thus make up for her losses on the left. If a fight breaks out, W4 may very well turn out to be crucial.

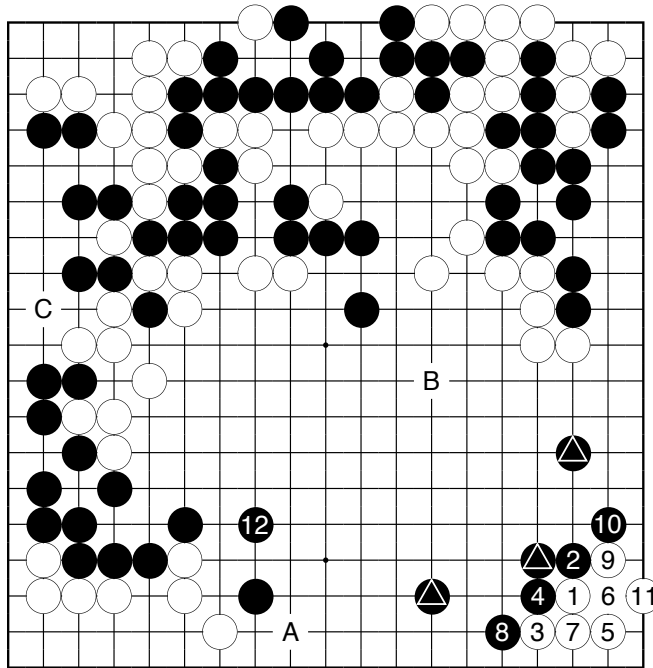


Figure 1.11: Black's moyo is full of holes

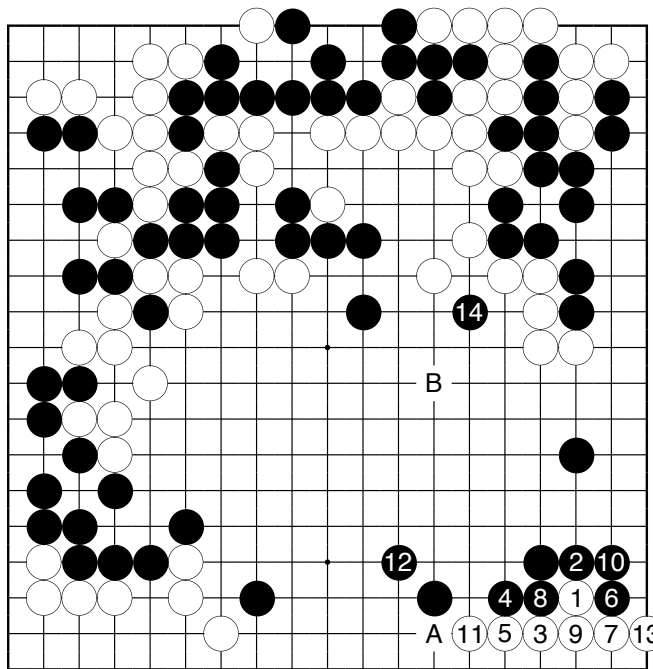


Figure 1.12: Attack is more important than a moyo

Example 2

Black: 2 *kyu*, White: 1 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

This is one of those difficult games where neither player has very much territory. In these situations, it can be very tempting to cling to every little scrap, for fear of letting the opponent creep ahead.

Black's three triangle-marked stones form a corner position known as a "butterfly." It is generally inadvisable to try to enclose the corner with this shape, because even with three stones invested, it can still be invaded at W1 which is the only move in this case, since the corner would give Black enough territory to win.

With the sequence up to W11, Black seals White into the corner in *sente*, then attempts to stake out a *moyo* with B12. However, it will be hard for Black to make much territory in this area of the board, because White can reduce from below with A and from above with B. Moreover, if White gets a chance to play C, Black's group in the centre will be set adrift and it is uncertain what the outcome will be. This is not to say that the game is necessarily bad for Black, but it will not be easy.

Improvement 2

The critical fact about this position is that there are still three unsettled groups on the board, even at this late stage. Even after invading the corner, White does not have much of a lead in territory, so Black should play for thickness.

Blocking with B2, as in the game, is correct, but Black should play B4 here, rather than at B8. If White crawls out with W5, Black can play *hane* at B6 and *atari* at B8. After Black connects with B10, White must crawl to W11 to seek life. Black might now be tempted to play at A, but this would leave a cutting point at B, while B12 is just as much *sente*.

After White lives with W13, Black has control of the centre and can attack at B14. The profit he gains by harassing this group and the one on the left should be enough to make up for the loss of the corner territory. More importantly, Black's central group will become safe in the process, so he does not have to worry about White shaking things up.

B12 could also be at W13, forcing White to crawl further with A. This would build even greater thickness for Black, but he must be careful not to let White get *sente* - if she has a chance to play around B before Black peeps at B14, Black's thickness will be negated and his centre group will be back in danger.

Breaking the Habit

Avoid developing a position in an area of the board that has no potential. If the opponent has a low, solid group, there is little value in developing a high position nearby, as you will be likely to leave yourself with openings.

Also avoid trying directly to make territory in the centre of the board, unless you already have walls on three sides. It is common in kyu-level games to see a player make a move on or around tengen to try to convert his or her central influence into territory but there are usually too many directions from which the opponent can reduce, and the player ends up with only a handful of points, while the opponent builds thickness of his or her own.

If you've already taken territory or built a *moyo* but allow it to become open at one side, understand that this means you must ignore the opponent if he attempts to reduce from another direction. Defend if necessary for the life of the group, but do not try to hang on to any points there. Keep in mind that allowing the territory to vanish in this way probably means getting two moves elsewhere - once for each opening left undefended. If these two moves are not large enough to compensate, you've either failed to find the biggest points, or else you should have defended earlier.

Exceptions

If the position is wide enough (seven or eight lines, at the very least), there may be some profit to be made by defending at one side, then holding the opponent back as much as possible when he or she intrudes on the other. It won't be very large, however - a monkey jump, for instance, is usually worth between 6 and 10 points in sente, so subtract that (and any other sente reductions the opponent has available) from the size of the territory when estimating the value of defending. Chances are, it will be small enough that it is only worth bothering about well into the endgame.

Of course, if defending one side of the territory is *sente*, or at least has a good follow-up, it may be a good move; if it's *sente*, you'll get to come back and defend the other side, so the position was not effectively "open at two sides" in the first place. If it has a large follow-up, then the opponent will have to choose between preventing that follow-up or reducing from the other side; provided that you can ignore his reduction and that your threat is big enough, this sort of mutual damage may end up being just as good as making territory.

Using thickness for territory

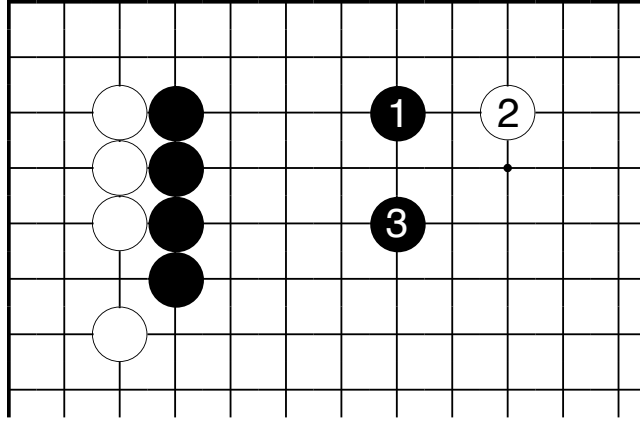


Diagram 1.4: Black makes territory too close to his wall

The mistake

Unless this is the first time you've been exposed to Go theory, you've probably read or heard proverbs along the lines of "Don't use thickness to make territory," or "Don't play near thickness." Nonetheless, despite such clear advice against it, this is one of the most common bad habits in this book, and one that is made – often deliberately, out of fear – by beginners and stronger players alike.

The player starts off by playing a sequence that gives his opponent solid territory in exchange for getting a wall or a similarly thick shape. Very often, this tradeoff is adequate, or even favorable. The player then wastes that thickness by playing moves to turn the area directly in front of his thickness into solid territory immediately, as with B1 and B3 in Diagram 1.4. These moves take territory, but do not take advantage of the true potential of Black's wall, which is to attack.

The Rationale:

"I gave my opponent solid territory to get this thickness. If I don't get any territory out of it, he's going to be winning. I know that I'm supposed to play far away from it, but the space in between looks so big. He could just play anywhere inside there, and then I'd have to kill the invasion or be left with nothing. Therefore, I should play close enough that there's no way he can live or escape if he tries to invade."

The Reality

If you play so close to your thickness that any invasion can be quickly and easily killed, you will never get as much territory out of it as you gave your opponent to get it in the first place. If you wanted immediate territory, you should have chosen a sequence that gave it to you, and left the opponent with thickness and the question of how to use it.

It's true that playing further away from your thickness might allow an invasion. However, it isn't true that an invasion, even an unreasonable one, needs to be killed. Chasing weak stones can be very profitable. You get to choose the direction to attack from, while your opponent can do nothing but run. With a bit of skill and forethought, you can ensure that your stones perform a double service – attacking while making territory or more thickness, helping out weak stones of your own, or destroying your opponent's moyo – while his moves are nothing but a single-purpose scramble for life.

Seen that way, invasion starts to look like something you should welcome, rather than fear, and killing the invading stones begins to seem a bit like killing the goose that laid the golden eggs. When you come to this realisation, then you have begun to understand thickness.

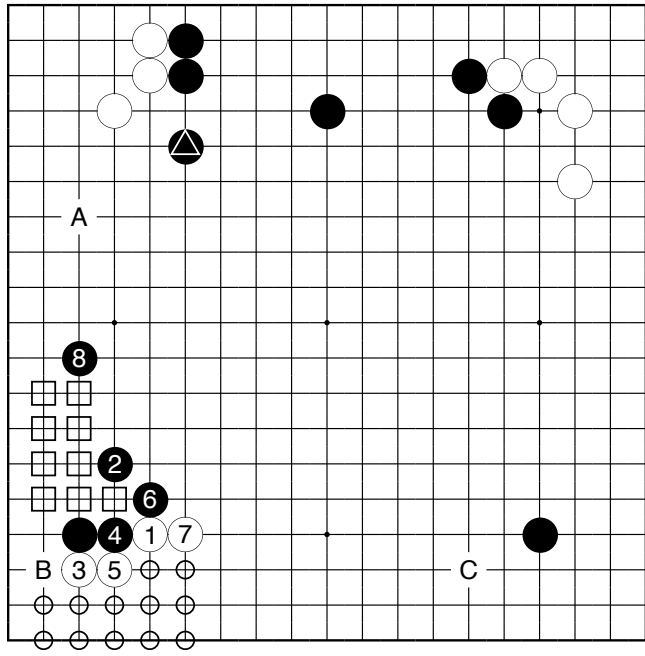


Figure 1.13: Black is behind in territory

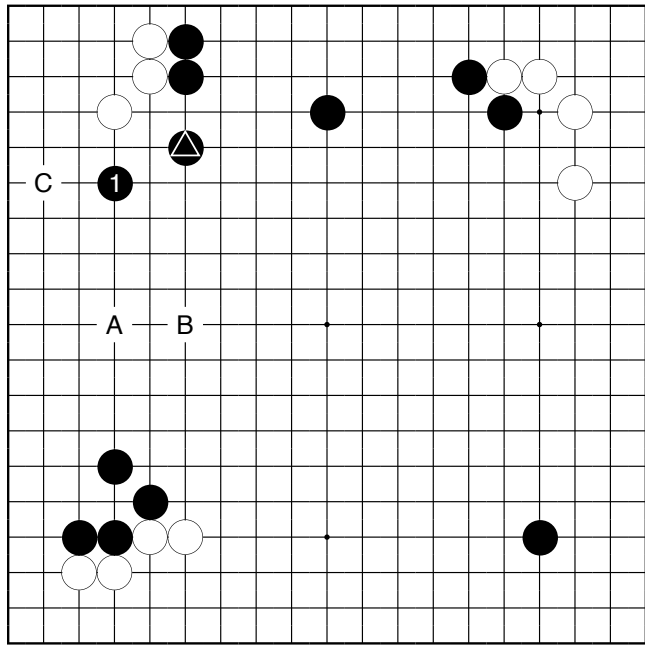


Figure 1.14: Black controls the whole board

Example 1 (Fig. 1.13)

Black: 7 *kyu*, White: 5 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

Black's position on the upper side is a little bit overconcentrated, but not too bad. Meanwhile, White has omitted an urgent move in the top left, at or around A. Before the sequence shown, Black is slightly better off.

W1 approaches the lower right. There is nothing wrong with B2, although a pincer would also have been playable.

The trouble begins with B4. The most common joseki move in this position would be at B instead. B4 is dubious because it plays into a hane at the head of two stones (see Part IV: Bad Shape) and also induces W to start making territory on the fourth line. Still, B6 does make a very solid shape, so the moves up to W7 do not represent a terrible loss for Black.

B8, however, completely misses the point. If we estimate Black's territory as the squared points and White's as the circled points, we see that White has come out three points ahead of Black and retained *sente*. Furthermore, if she later gets to approach at C, her position on the lower side will be very good.

Between the triangle-marked Black stone on the upper side and the thick shape Black makes up to B6, he should have aimed at encompassing the left side on a large scale, and extending his upper-side *moyo* into the center. B8 shows short-sightedness and pessimism – such moves will not win a game of Go.

Improvement 1 (Fig. 1.14)

The key, as mentioned above, is making Black's position on the upper side work in conjunction with the thickness he has built at great expense in the lower left. The fact that White omitted extending from her corner in the upper left is also important.

B1 here is a powerful move. In one blow, White's upper left is sealed in, and now the center of the board, as well as the left and top sides, looks very Black.

It may appear that White has plenty of room to invade on the left. Playing at A, for instance, might tempt most players. However, Black B is a severe attack – even if White survives, Black will have the opportunity to extend his upper-side *moyo* well into the middle of the board. Note that White will have no chance to link up with the upper left, because Black C is *sente*, as it threatens to kill the corner.

If Black plays this way, even B4 in the Figure 1.13 begins to look reasonable. Black's position is very good.

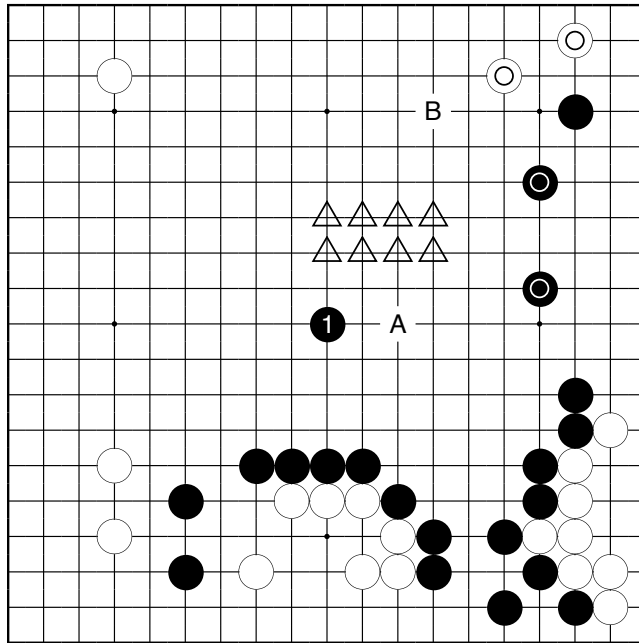


Figure 1.15: Black's moyo is small and easily reduced

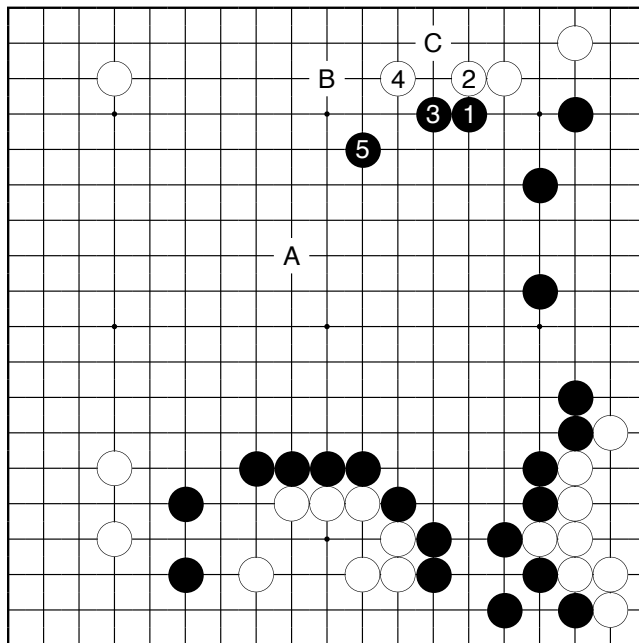


Figure 1.16: Black's moyo is huge

Example 2 (Fig. 1.15)

Black: 11 *kyu*, White: 11 *kyu*. No handicap.

Both sides have made mistakes, of course, but up until now, Black's play has been much better than White's. White first invaded the lower side and lived with bad shape and little territory. Next, she played the circled stones in the upper right, with Black's responses also marked. Finally, she invaded the lower right and again lived small, in *gote*.

Despite a few potential weaknesses, Black's thickness is extremely imposing. There should be a way to make the game miserable for White, but how?

B1 is certainly not the way. It is precisely the sort of petty grab for territory that leaves a *sensei* groaning at the wasted opportunity. The amount that Black secures in the middle with this move is around 20 points. Even if he blocks off the right side, making another 20 points or so, his whole-board total is not much better than White's.

In the actual game, White's next move was at A, a terrible move that allowed Black to use his thickness to attack and made B1 look somewhat reasonable. She should have played at B instead, securing her stones and patiently waiting for an opportunity to reduce Black's center with a move around the triangled area. In that case, it would have been anyone's game.

Improvement 2 (Fig. 1.16)

Black should lean on the top right White group with the shoulder hit of B1 and the probable continuation to B5. Such moves are very common and seen in professional and amateur games alike.

B1-B5 and Black's thick wall on the lower side act like two burly arms, trapping the entire center of the board in a bear hug. Unless she is extremely confident of her reading, White cannot try to reduce any more deeply than A or thereabouts without coming under murderous assault. Black can therefore expect something like 40 or 50 points in the middle, or the equivalent in compensation if White attempts to invade. Furthermore, if White does not answer B5, then B later is a good move for Black, making good shape, most likely in *sente*, as it threatens to sweep out White's eyespace with C.

Had Black played this way, the game would have been hopeless for White. When you look at the size and power of Black's *moyo*, it's clear that when you have a thick position, you can afford to think big.

Breaking the habit

The only way to break this habit is to learn not to fear invasions. To do that, you need to stop thinking of the interior of your *moyo* or the space between a wall and its extension as your territory. Instead, you need to think of it as your zone of pain, your stronghold, the bait in your trap. Instead of thinking about preventing him from invading, you need to think about developing on a large enough scale that he's forced to invade. When he does so, he's stepping into a dragon's cave and he's going to get burned. Not killed, mind you – you're a smarter dragon than that. He's going to get chased all over the board, while territories spring up in places he didn't even know you had them.

Of course, that may be easier said than done. What makes this habit so common and so hard to shake is that successfully profiting by attacking an invasion is something that takes practice. The first 10 or 20 or 100 times someone dives in between your rock and your hard place, you'll probably botch the attack completely. The wall that was supposed to be thick might even end up dying. You'll want to give up and go back to your safe, overconcentrated, territorial moves. Don't. Keep playing the large-scale moves, and you'll learn something with each failed attack. You might lose more games in the short term, but eventually your attacking skills will improve, those wide open spaces will start looking narrower and narrower and your rank will rise in leaps and bounds.

Exceptions

A good time to be conservative is when your opponent has some very strong groups in the vicinity, your “thick” group doesn't have any clear eyes (e.g. a completely straight wall) and your opponent has much more support nearby than you. In such a situation, an invasion might split you into two weak groups, putting you on the defense instead of the offense. In that case, it might be a good idea to hold back a few lines from where you would play if you were on your own turf.

The other reason to make territory in front of your thickness is if it's really the only thing left to do. If you make a wide framework and your opponent never tries to invade or reduce (probably because of the pounding he took the last time he tried), then you can play moves to make it solid territory, but only after there's nothing big elsewhere.

Living on the second line

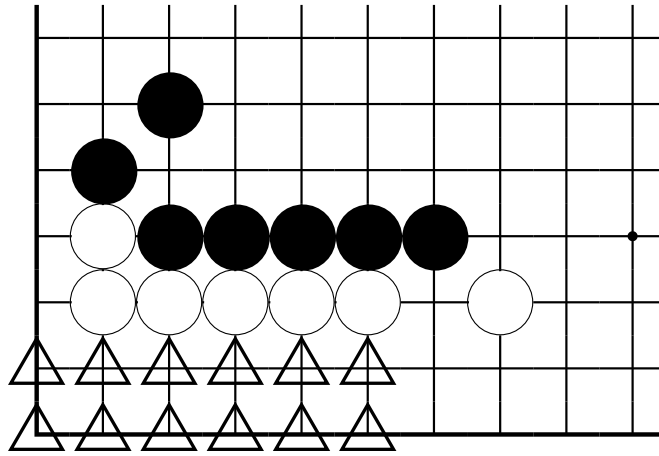


Diagram 1.5: Third line territory

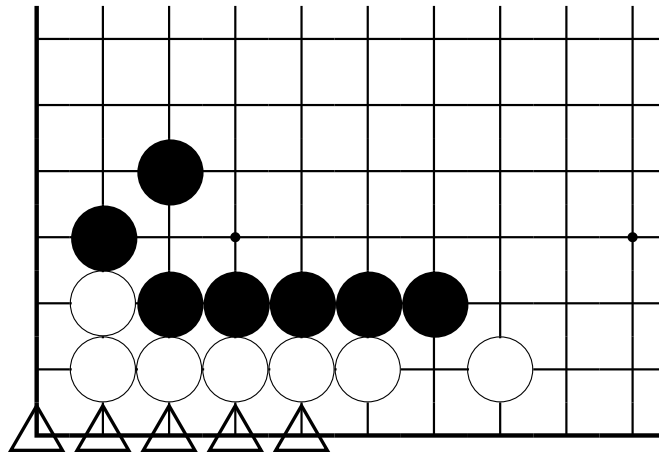


Diagram 1.6: Second line territory

The mistake

It is said that the fourth line is the line of influence, the third line is the line of territory, and the second line is the line of defeat. The reason for these names is that a player who plays most of his stones on one line is likely to get the corresponding result. Fourth line plays give influence, third line plays give territory, and too many moves on the second line will result in a hopeless position.

Nonetheless, given a weak group and the choice between jumping out into the middle or finding two eyes with moves on the second line, many amateurs will choose the second line. As a result, their opponents obtain a wall on the third line. If third line territory for fourth line influence is a roughly a fair trade, as shown in Diagram 1.5, then second line territory for third line influence represents a loss of more than one point per stone played, as shown in Diagram 1.6. Furthermore, you never want to crawl any further than you have to, and living on the second line usually requires you to crawl further than on the third line, because of the reduced eyespace; although the stones in Diagram 1.6 have just barely enough eyespace to guarantee two eyes, White needn't have pushed as far as she did in Diagram 1.5 - two lines less and she would still be very much alive.

The rationale

"I was told to secure my weak groups first, and think about attacking second. Surely two guaranteed eyes can't be a bad thing, whereas my prospects in the centre are uncertain."

The reality

While it's true that "safety first" is as good a principle in Go as in life, there is an important list of priorities that you should keep in mind: base, escape, eyespace, vital point. This goes both for attacking groups and defending them.

The first thing to do when defending is to try to make a base. A base means eyespace plus access to the centre. Making two eyes for yourself while being sealed in does not constitute a base. If you are prevented from making a base, or have it swept out from under you, the next thing to do is look for a way to run. As long as your opponent has to chase you, he will not have time to take away your eyes. Only when you can no longer threaten to connect to friendly forces by running should you enlarge your eyespace and, if absolutely necessary, play on the vital point to live, although this is painful. The reason is that running will affect the rest of the board, while enlarging eyespace generally takes only a few points of territory and little else (see "Playing Endgame Moves in the Middlegame," earlier in this section). Playing on the vital point is worst of all, as it usually represents a loss of one point of territory and is almost always *gote*.

Breaking from this order of play and making eyes before running out is usually underplay. The benefit gained from immediate life will rarely be worth the influence granted to the opponent in the process. Even in cases where running out is risky or impossible, sacrificing the group to reduce from the outside or leaving the threat to live as *aji* for later is often better than seeking meagre life on the inside.

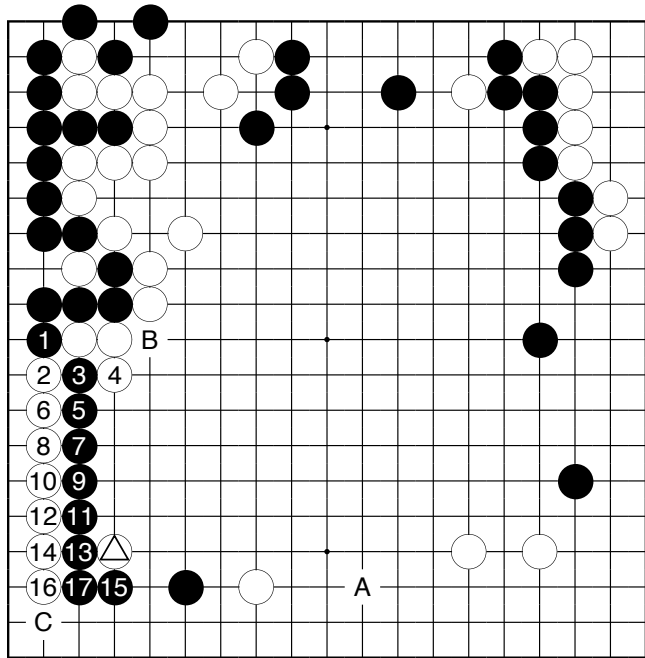


Figure 1.17: White's moyo is ruined

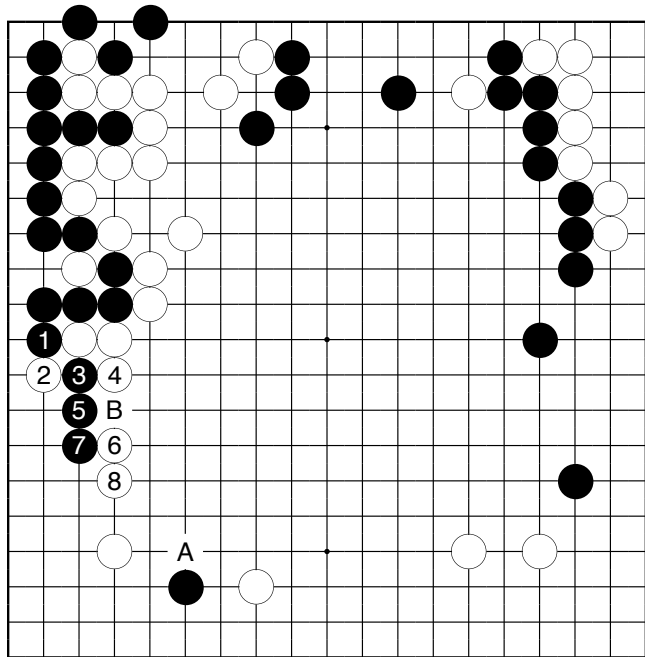


Figure 1.18: White cuts her losses

Example 1 (Fig. 1.17)

Black: 7 *kyu*, White: 7 *kyu*. No handicap.

White has managed to press Black down on the second line in the top left. This is a grand success, as it means Black's corner territory is very small, and White's thickness will later permit a strong invasion of Black's *moyo* in the upper right. Now, Black has neglected his invading stone in the lower left in order to push out on the left side with B1.

White, fearing her potential territory in the lower left is about to be destroyed, tries to block with W2. This is blatant overplay. Black does not hesitate to cut with B3. Already, this is a loss for White, but the situation could still be salvaged if White were willing to admit her mistake.

Instead, she sees her star point stone (marked with a triangle) in the lower left, and realises that, with its help, W2 can crawl to safety. She makes an *atari* at W4 to prevent her two stones from being captured in a ladder, then proceeds to crawl along the second line with W6 to W16. At no point in this sequence is Black able to hane down to the second line himself and attempt to kill. After B17, White has achieved life in *sente*.

Can this be considered a success, however? Look at the position in the lower left before all this happened. Black ignored a tight pincer on his stone there, leaving it in serious danger. Now, White's star point stone is all but useless, and all she will have to show for it is four or five points of territory on the left. Meanwhile, Black's formerly lonely stone is now entirely safe (albeit overconcentrated), and it's White's pincer stone that is in danger.

Black can aim next at an invasion around A, and even if White uses *sente* to defend there, there is the cut at B to worry about. Meanwhile, Black can play C in *sente* at any time (White will need a move to keep her stones alive) to make a base for himself and take the corner territory.

Improvement 1 (Fig 1.18)

The best thing to do would not be to make the *hane* of W2 at all. Better would be to ignore B1 and play at A, or else defend the side with the solid jump to B5. However, W2 is an overplay, not an underplay, so it is not the sort of mistake we are concerned with in this section. We will focus on the subsequent mistakes.

The *atari* of W4 is fine, but White goes wrong with W6 in the Figure 1.17. At this point, White should realise that she has made a serious mistake, and look for a way to sacrifice W2, instead of trying to save it at the expense of her position in the lower left.

The right idea is W6 in Figure 1.18 instead. Now, W2, although still a bad move, at least provides some help, as it creates a shortage of liberties for Black, preventing him from cutting at B. If Black now pushes along with B7, W8 creates thickness, increasing the danger to Black's lonely stone below. If Black omits B7 to play elsewhere, then White can play there in herself (possibly in *sente*, if Black wants to save his two stones), halting Black's advance. Either way, White's thickness is imposing.

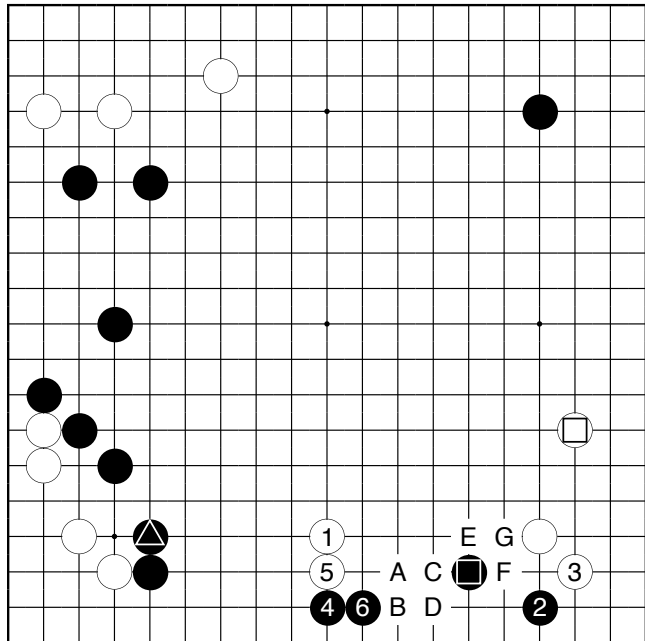


Figure 1.19: Black fails to attack White

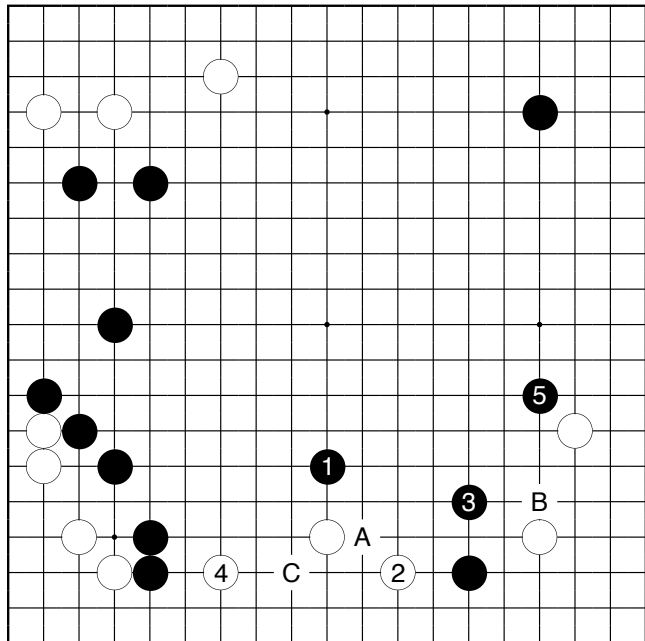


Figure 1.20: Black defends lightly while attacking

Example 2 (Fig. 1.19)

Black: 5 *kyu*, White: 4 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

After settling the top left corner in a simple manner acceptable to both sides, White invaded under Black's triangle-marked 5-4 stone in the lower left. During the exchange that followed, Black found time to exchange the square-marked stones, which is beneficial to him, given the thick wall he then produced while sealing White into the corner.

White finished the sequence in *sente*, and was then able to set about erasing Black's potential on the lower side with W1. Of course this puts pressure on Black's stone in the lower right, but it also leaves W1 in a vulnerable position.

Rather than combining attack with defense, however, Black submissively aimed for quick life by sliding first at B2, then at B4. Neither of these are good moves.

B2 isn't terrible, but it fixes White's weakness in the corner. This is always a concern when playing this type of slide, but especially so when White's extension (the square-marked stone) is the large knight's move, as here, instead of the more usual small knight's move one line below.

Although B2 is thinkable, B4 is horribly passive. It does eliminate the chance of Black dying, but that is about all. With three moves, Black has secured only five or six points of territory on the lower side, and more importantly, has done nothing at all with the thickness he built in the lower left.

White then hammered Black down with W5, forcing B6. Now (although she didn't in the actual game), White could proceed with White A, Black B, etc. up to White G. White would then be thick in addition to being ahead on territory and it would be difficult for Black to get back in the game.

Improvement 2 (Fig. 1.20)

There is no question; Black must attack in order to make use of his thickness in the lower left. There are several possibilities, but capping with B1 is a fairly straightforward way to proceed.

White might now set about seeking immediate life with a move like W2. The difference between this and Black's moves in the actual game is that White is outnumbered and surrounded – it is acceptable, even recommended, to seek quick life in such circumstances. Also, she is playing on the third and fourth lines, instead of the second, thus making a respectable amount of territory in the process.

W2 induces Black to jump out at B3 in the natural flow of play, running to safety with his own stone while separating White. Finding ways to achieve one's defensive goals through attacking shows the correct fighting spirit.

If White then establishes definite eyespace and territory with W4, Black has the chance to press at B5, seizing control of the centre. Notice how B1, B3 and B5 have a consistent strategy behind them and work together to combine attack and defense. Indeed, Black's stones around the whole board, including even the *hoshi* in the top right work together for the common purpose of staking out an enormous central *moyo*. Black may appear to be a bit thin, but he has enough forcing moves available to him (A and B, for example) that it is hard for White to do much, as long as Black is willing to play flexibly. White also has to worry about Black invading at C, since her lower left corner is too thin to allow her to resist strongly.

Breaking the habit

The only antidote to this bad habit is to develop a good, positive fighting spirit. To do that, you need to lose your fear of groups dying, and place more faith in your abilities. Every Go player has to deal with his or her own psychological weaknesses, but there are a few proverbs that you can repeat to yourself as mantras to help you along the way.

“Jump [at least] once, then make eyes.” This is a restatement of the aforementioned principle that a base requires access to the center, and that running should come before making eyes.

“The second line is the line of defeat.” Submissive play will lose games just as surely as having groups killed. The only difference is that you will lose slowly, instead of quickly. Would you rather die by inches, or go down fighting?

“The best defence is a good offence.” This well-known saying applies to Go just as much as to sports. Before you panic and scramble for life, remember that your opponent won't have time to kill your stones if he's busy saving his own. By the time the dust settles, you might discover that there's no longer any need to defend.

Exceptions

If you're severely outnumbered, deep in the opponent's sphere of influence, with nowhere to run, quick life may be your best option. Even then, abandoning the group entirely is often preferable, unless the thickness your opponent obtains by trapping you on the second line will go to waste.

If you have another weak group nearby (see “Creating Two Weak Groups” in Section II: Wanting too Much), running out might allow your opponent to engineer a splitting attack. In that case, too, living quickly might be called for. However, you must make sure that you can live in *sente* and then defend the other group, or else your opponent may be able to use the thickness he obtains to kill it. Unless you're sure that you can defend both groups in this way, sacrificing one group to save the other is a better plan.

Protecting every cutting point

The mistake

Having your groups cut apart is not a pleasant experience. It does not take many games for beginning players to discover that, if they allow themselves to be cut, quite often one or both of the resulting groups ends up dying. In response to this, they usually begin to develop the habit of connecting their stones wherever it appears they might be cut. This is both good and bad.

On the one hand, they avoid many disastrous cuts. On the other hand, it is very easy to go too far, and start connecting at places where a cut would not have done much damage. Timidly defending against non-existent threats in this way, while your opponent has free reign to claim other large points on the board is perhaps the very worst example of selling yourself short, since an unnecessary defence can be as bad as passing or worse.

The rationale

"I know that I shouldn't allow my opponent to cut me in two and I couldn't read out what would happen if he tried to cut, so I thought it would be best to defend."

The reality

There are a few things to keep in mind about cuts. Firstly, the cutting stone is usually cut off from friendly forces itself. Sometimes it can be captured locally, such as in a ladder or net, in which case the cutting point is not immediately threatening, though it may allow the opponent one or more *kikashi*. Even if no direct means of capture is possible, you can often attack the cutting stones from one or both sides, strengthening yourself in the process. If, by attacking the cutting stones, it is possible to render both your groups free from danger, then again, the cut may not be as threatening as it looks.

Of course, determining whether it is possible to capture the cutting stone, or settle both sides by attacking it requires a certain amount of reading. No matter how weak or strong you are, there is some limit to the depth you can read. If you can't read out a clear method of dealing with a cut, you must assume that it will turn into a fight. That still doesn't mean that you must certainly connect, but it does mean that a certain amount of intuition is required. You need to pick your fights carefully, examining the local and whole board positions to determine which player the fight would favour. If it would favour you, then you might want to forego defense and invite your opponent to cut and start the fight.

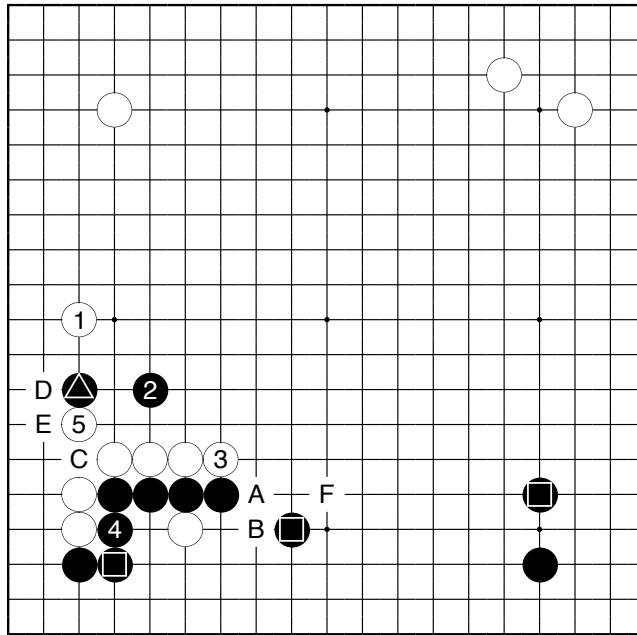


Figure 1.21: Black's defence damages his weak stone

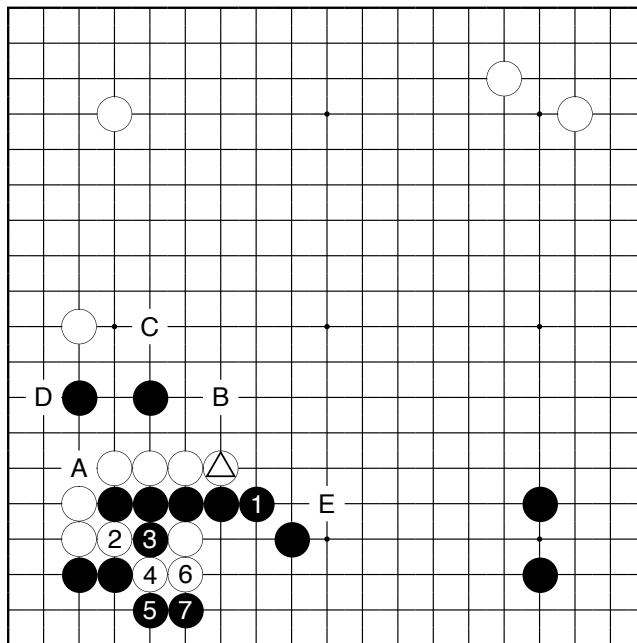


Figure 1.22: Black has little to fear

Example 1 (Fig. 1.21)

Black: 8 *kyu*, White: 7 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

This first example shows a player defending against a cut that wouldn't have worked if he had just followed the natural flow of the game. Black began the game with an unusual *fuseki*, playing his first three moves at the square-marked points. After he enclosed the lower right corner, White approached the lower left and Black played the triangle-marked pincer. The sequence that followed was not *joseki*, but the result was good for Black, giving him a very large territory.

White's only chance for compensation is to attack the pincer stone. W1 is too close – a more distant counterattack is in order – but at least it has the right idea. Because White's move is overconcentrated, Black should probably try to induce her to capture the triangled stone on a small scale. Instead, he jumps out with B2 – overplay of the sort commonly seen in *kyu*-level games.

White expands her influence with W3 and Black defends with B4 – a bad move. It's true that W3 is *sente*; Black must answer somehow, or else a White move at A is very severe in combination with the cutting point; Black would not be able to block at B. However, there are better ways of defending, while also increasing the potential of the lower side.

Perhaps Black's thinking behind B4 is that it also sets up a cut at C, forcing White to defend. This is something she'd like to do anyway, however, since W5 threatens to connect underneath with D, hurts the triangled stone, and denies Black the option of forcing with D (threatening to cut at C), which could have been useful. Of course, Black gains *sente* because of White's defense at W5, so he can continue to run out with his weak stones, but White has good chances to lean around E, so the fight will not be pleasant for Black.

Improvement 1 (Fig. 1.22)

Here, the most instinctive move is also the best. The calm, solid extension of B1 removes all the *aji* of the cutting point and renders his group extremely solid, making it more difficult for White to reduce the lower side later in the game. Furthermore, it prevents White from pushing any further in *sente*, which is a relief for his two weak stones.

If White tries to push and cut with W2 and W4, Black simply plays *atari* at B5 and ends White's hopes with B7. This sequence is disastrous for White, as the exchange of W2 for B3 makes the cut at A a serious problem. It also shows why B1 is necessary. Had it been omitted, W6 at B1 would be a painful *atari* for Black.

Of course, White would read out that this sequence does not work and would not play W2. She would probably cap at B or jump at C instead, but either way Black could continue to move out, content that he still has forcing moves around D and will now be able to ignore a White move around E.

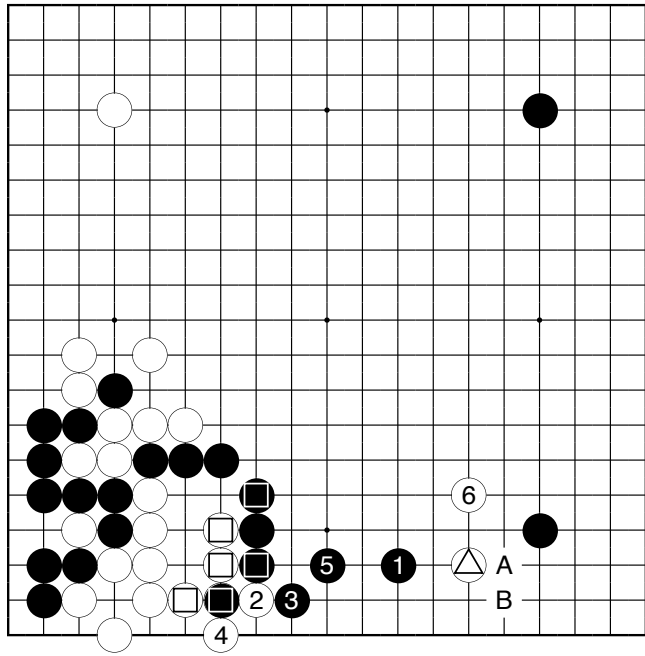


Figure 1.23: Black's defence allows White to escape

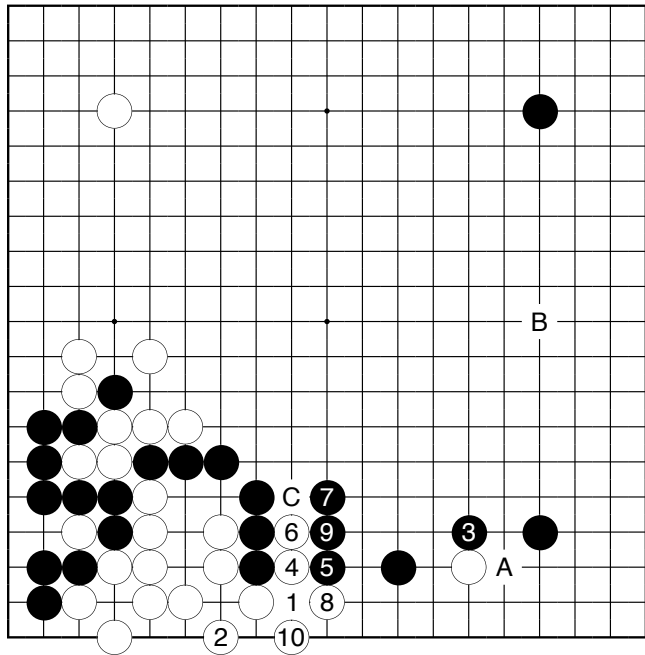


Figure 1.24: Black can answer the cut skillfully

Example 2 (Fig. 1.23)

Black: 5 *kyu*, White: 5 *kyu*. No handicap.

White began this game with a 3-4 stone in the lower left corner. As soon as the four corners were claimed, Black approached the lower left and a non- *joseki* sequence followed, leading to the result seen here (minus the square-marked stones), which is reasonable enough for an amateur game. White then committed an error in the direction of play by approaching the lower right corner with the triangle-marked stone. Neglecting her group on the lower side allowed Black to seal it in by making the square-marked exchanges in *sente*.

The sequence that follows is remarkable in that nearly every move is a mistake. B1 is wrong because it is too close to his thickness; Black A or B is preferable, to make White heavy. W2 is greedy, hoping to claim a little profit in *sente* before defending. The B3-W4 exchange is to be expected, as White would not have played W2 if she wasn't planning on answering B3. It is B5, however, that is the sort of unnecessary defense you should try to eliminate from your game.

First of all, an immediate cut is not possible for White, because the cutting stone would be caught in a ladder, and there is currently no ladder breaker on the right side. This alone is not a good reason to forego defence, because positions that rely on ladders have terrible *aji*. However, as we will see shortly, there is an alternate means of defence that needs no ladder and connects the Black stones to the left and right. The cut "works" in the sense that Black will give up a few points in the process, but because no weak group results, the cut is an endgame move, and therefore so is playing B5 to prevent it.

Because of Black's timid defence, White is free to run out with W6. This, too, is not the best choice – making a double approach or invading the corner are both better ideas – but the fact remains that Black has allowed himself to be pushed around, when he could have punished White's greed and secured his lead.

Improvement 2 (Fig. 1.24)

Assuming that White sticks to her plan and answers B1 with W2, Black can return to the lower right. B3 is the most usual way of dealing with White's triangle-marked stone when White ignores the pincer. White could still live in the corner by playing at the 3-3 point, but it would be *gote* and give Black enormous thickness facing up the right side. If Black doesn't like that possibility, he could also try a more aggressive attacking strategy starting with A to make White heavy.

Even if White later gets a ladder breaker stone in the vicinity of B, Black has little to fear from the cut of W4. He plays *atari* with B5, then hems White in with the net move of B7. Although this fails to capture the White stones because of W8, Black can next squeeze with B9. W10 means that White has made an intrusion of about 10 points into Black's territory, but in *gote*, and at the expense of making Black thicker – W4 is merely a large endgame move. Note that there is no threat of a cut at C; all of Black's stones are firmly connected. Furthermore, with just a bit of additional support nearby, Black could answer W4 by extending at W8 - as it is, the cutting stone could escape, but just barely. Later in the game, Black might be able to make the cut an out-an-out loss for White.

Playing W4 as a clamp at W8 is likewise just an endgame move with no additional threat. Please explore Black's possible responses for yourself.

Breaking the habit

Deciding whether or not to include this as a bad habit was difficult. Cuts can indeed be devastating, and it would be irresponsible to suggest that it is a good idea to leave cutting points all over the place. The only way to be sure of whether or not a cutting point needs to be defended is to examine all possible continuations. Unfortunately, Go is complicated, and this isn't always possible, even for an amateur *dan*.

Although there is no real substitute for reading, there are certain rules of thumb that can help you make a judgment call when the situation is too complicated to read out.

If one side of the cut consists of only one or two stones, it's often easy to sacrifice them to build thickness on the other side. If this would lead to an acceptable result, it's probably okay to leave the cut alone for the time being. Make sure to take into consideration the thickness and/or territory your opponent will obtain by capturing.

It's rarely a good idea to have two weak groups, so if a cut would leave both sides heavy and without eyes, a defence is probably necessary. Conversely, if cutting would leave your opponent with two weak groups, it probably isn't a good idea for him, and so you may not need to defend for the time being. Make sure to reassess the situation once his group stabilises itself.

The surroundings are important. If you have another weak group nearby, protecting the cut might be important. Conversely, if you have thickness nearby, you're more likely to be able to handle being cut. Of course, the opposite holds true for your opponents' weak groups and thickness.

Finally, if you decide that you do need to defend, remember that you may have better options than connecting directly. Look for ways to defend from a distance by strengthening your other groups, or protect yourself indirectly while taking territory or building influence. Best of all, you may even find a way to do it in *sente*.

Exceptions

Most cutting points have some degree of *aji*, even if cutting directly wouldn't work. Depending on how the surroundings develop, the opponent may be able to find a move that renders the cut a real danger, while simultaneously threatening something else. If the surrounding position is weak, protecting a cut, even one that wouldn't work immediately might be the right move to make a thin position thick. This is a form of *honte*.

A common pitfall arises when there are several cutting points in the same area of the board (see "Leaving Multiple Cutting Points" in Section II: Wanting Too Much). There is a tendency among amateurs to read each cut separately, decide that they can capture the cutting stone, and leave it at that. Sometimes these cuts can be greater than the sum of their parts, and the refutation for one cut may be mutually exclusive with that for another cut, so that if the opponent cuts first in one place, then the other, it is impossible to handle both. Make sure you read out your cutting points in combination, not individually.

Treating sente as absolute

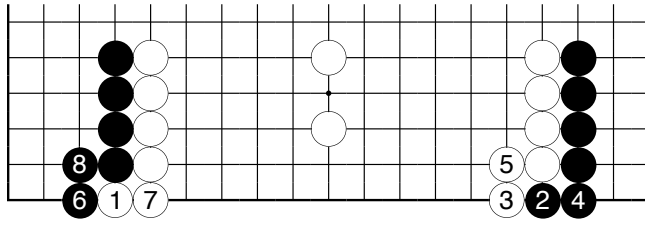


Diagram 1.7: Mutual damage

The mistake

Sente and *gote* are among the most commonly heard terms when discussing Go, but also among the most misunderstood. The confusion arises because there are several different definitions people commonly give when trying to explain *sente*. Some would say a play is *sente* if the opponent must answer it. The flaw with this definition is that it's not always easy to say whether a given play should be answered. Therefore, when pressed to give a definition that is easier to pin down, some players will say that a move is *sente* if it threatens a follow-up that is bigger than itself.

The problem is that, although these two definitions both attempt to describe the same word, they are not synonymous with each other. Many beginners believe them to be and thus automatically respond to any move that carries a larger threat.

This mistake comes in many forms, such as answering an endgame *sente* move during the middlegame, responding passively to an attempted *kikashi* when it is possible to resist or ignore it, or defending a group or territory when a counterattack is in order.

The rationale

"His move threatens a follow-up larger than itself. That means his move is sente. A move that is sente is one that must be answered. Therefore, I must answer this move."

The reality

The problem is with the word "must." There is no "must" in Go. Unlike in chess, where the rules dictate that checking the king must be answered, there is no threat in Go that cannot legally be ignored. It may be that a very large threat should be answered in order to retain hope of winning, but that depends on the whole board situation. Even a 50-point threat can be ignored – temporarily – if there is a move elsewhere that threatens 60.

Answering every play the opponent makes, simply because it threatens something, shows a lack of fighting spirit. If you allow yourself to be pushed around and bullied, the opponent will take the larger piece of the pie every time. Exchanges of stones and territory are an essential part of Go, and to win games, it is necessary to be willing to give something up in one part of the board to pursue a greater gain elsewhere.

This often comes in the form of mutual damage, particularly during the endgame. Consider the position in Diagram 1.7. Although unlikely to arise in exactly this way, functionally similar positions occur frequently in actual play. The *hane* reduction of W1 is a very common endgame move, and one that is *sente*, in the sense that it threatens a larger intrusion if Black fails to answer. Before W1, Black had the possibility of making a similar reduction of White's territory by playing at W7, so W1 is double-*sente*. If Black was to treat it as *sente* and answer it immediately at B6, White would be able to do the same again on the other side, by playing at B4 and reducing Black by another two points.

That would be a terrible loss for Black, so he must counterattack bravely with B2. If White followed through her threat on the left by intruding on Black's territory by playing W3 at B8, Black would continue his mutual damage plan by doing the same to her with a move at W5. Because White's territory is higher and wider than Black's, she has more to lose than he does by playing this way. Therefore, she plays W3 and W5, allowing Black to return to the lower left with B6 and B8. Now, both players have been reduced the same amount, so Black is four points better off (two points more for himself and two less for White) than if he had answered W1 immediately. Many games are won or lost by smaller margins than that.

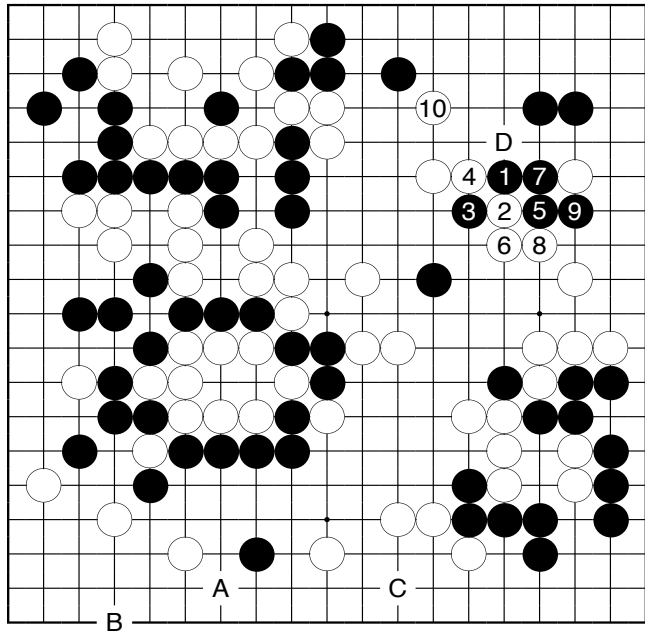


Figure 1.25: White allows Black to reduce and take profit

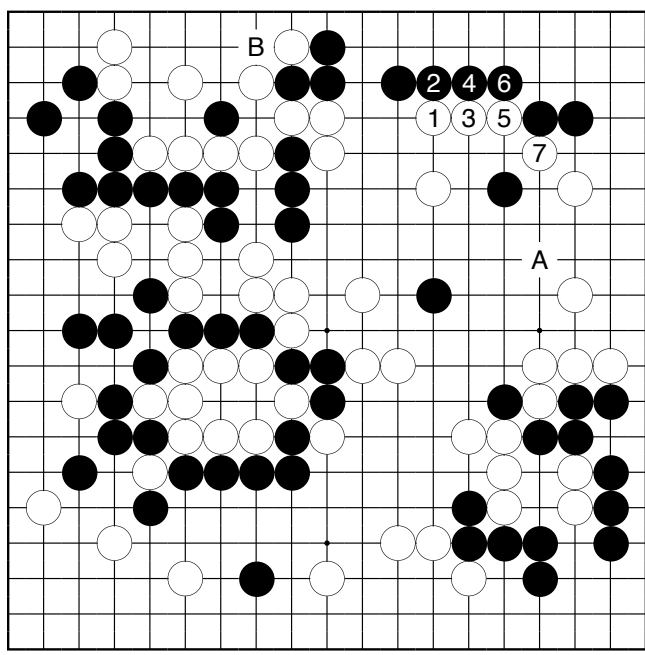


Figure 1.26: Black's attempted reduction is captured

Example 1 (Fig. 1.25)

Black: 4 *kyu*, White: Unknown. No handicap.

The middlegame is over, and despite Black's three corners and substantial capture in the lower left of centre, the game is quite close as a result of the *komi* and White's large territory extending from the right side into the middle. It is now the time to start looking for the largest endgame plays.

B1 may look like a reasonable way to reduce White's territory, but in fact it is overplay. A better plan might have been to play at A, aiming at both B and C. If she answers it correctly, White can punish B1 and take the lead. Instead, she looks at it, sees that it threatens to intrude into her territory, decides that it must be *sente* and answers at W2 without thinking any more deeply.

Black plays *hane* at B3 and White has no choice but to cut with W4 if she wants to continue defending her territory. When Black plays *atari* at B5, fighting back by playing at D is too risky for White, so she extends at W6. Black connects at B7 and swallows up one stone with B9. Now White plays a *sente* move of her own at W10, but it is too late. B1 is safely connected to his corner, so W10 does not have the same punch it would have had earlier. Black now has a slight lead.

Improvement 1 (Fig. 1.26)

Counterattacking with W1 immediately is the correct approach. If Black defends with B2 to B6, W7 neatly cuts off Black's attempted reduction, putting White far ahead. Trying to defend more lightly by jumping directly to B4 instead of playing B2 does not turn out any better for Black.

Of course, Black can't afford play this way – he should follow White's example and ignore her "*sente*" move to embark on a mutual damage plan, perhaps beginning with a move at A. However, when White pushes down at the point of B2, Black must play at B if he wishes to live on the upper side, so White will be able return to the middle and prevent Black from penetrating any further. The damage to Black's position will be greater than to White's, so White will still be ahead.

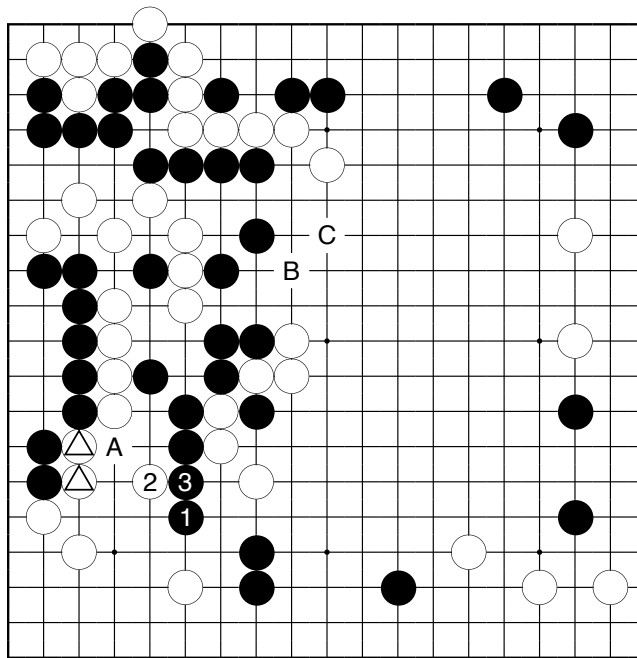


Figure 1.27: Answering the peep is huge, but...

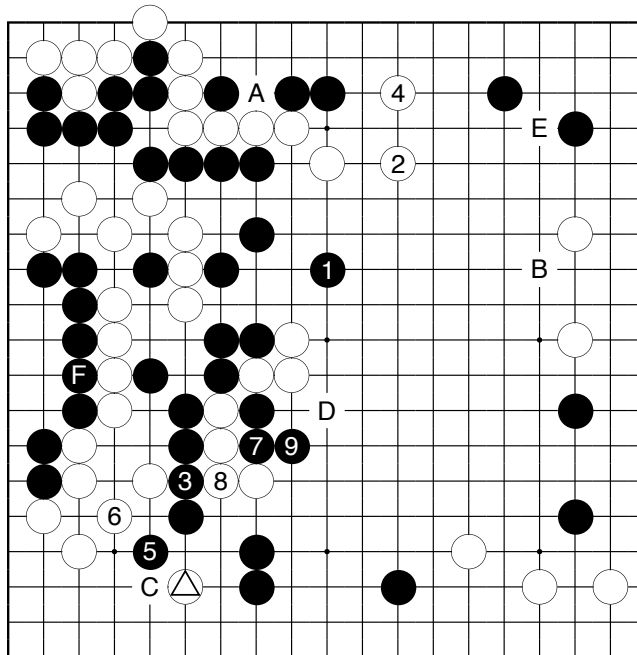


Figure 1.28: Black's resistance provokes an exchange

Example 2 (Fig. 1.27)

Black: 7 *kyu*, White: 6 *kyu*. 1 handicap.

The situation here is much trickier than the last example, because there is a complicated middlegame fight in progress. Black should be able to come out ahead, despite the danger, because White has three weak groups that can be attacked.

White has a dangerous cutting point at A. Black should cut immediately, but White can sacrifice the two triangle-marked stones and complicate the situation even further, so he decides to put safety first and loosely connect his group to the lower side with B1. The cut would now be fatal to White, so she must protect it immediately.

Black's plan backfires, however, when White peeps with W2, protecting the cut while also threatening a very severe follow-up indeed, linking up with another weak group while simultaneously cutting Black off, should she get to play at B3.

Faced with such a dire threat, Black connects at B3 without hesitation. This means that White has connected her group to the corner in *sente*. She can now peep a second time at B and, if Black connects again, link her remaining weak groups together with C, becoming strong in the process. Black cannot afford to let this happen.

Can Black really afford to ignore W2, though? The threat is very real and very large. Nonetheless, it is still unnecessary to respond, provided Black can find a move that is even more severe.

Improvement 2 (Fig. 1.28)

There is nothing particularly fancy about B1, but it is extremely severe, threatening a serious attack on White's upper side group. Playing A would not be sufficient for White to make life – Black can get a *ko*, at least – and Black B would be a severe leaning attack, so White will probably decide to run, perhaps with W2.

Now that Black has stuck his head out into the middle, White can no longer connect her two groups, so Black can now answer the peep at B3 without regret.

If White then stabilises her topside group and takes territory by capturing some Black stones with W4, Black has an excellent forcing move of his own at B5. White must defend with W6, because if she tried to save her triangle-marked stone with C, Black could cut off and capture most of the White stones above. I'll leave it as an exercise for you to figure out how.

After White answers with W6, Black can leave C as potential profit for later, and turn to the centre to attack the White stones stranded there. B7 and B9 work to capture half the group and leave the rest too small to be worth saving, giving Black more than enough profit to make up for the loss on the top side. Note that, although B9 at D is usually better shape, here White has a severe ladder breaker at E, so Black cannot play that way. Of course, instead of B7, Black could also try to attack the whole group on a larger scale, but a direct approach is usually best if it looks like it will lead to a win.

In this fashion, by slipping in your own forcing moves before answering those of the opponent, you can dictate the course of the game, rather than merely following him around.

Breaking the Habit

Whenever you see a move that looks like it might be *sente*, take a deep breath and resist the urge to defend immediately. First ask yourself what exactly the follow-up threatens, how much it is worth, and whether you have larger gains to make, or ways of offsetting the loss without defending directly. Here are some things to think about, depending on what type of threat it is.

Destruction of territory: Unless the loss of territory is enormous or also leaves your group with insufficient eyespace, this is only endgame *sente*. If there are still incomplete *moyos* or weak groups on the board, it is probably not worth answering. Even if it is the endgame, look around for other large moves. If you have a *sente* move of your own, whose value plus the value of its follow-up is greater than the opponent's follow-up, it may be good to aim for mutual damage. There may even be a *gote* move large enough to be worth allowing the opponent to follow through with his threat.

Making your strong group weak: This is a serious threat, and usually not one that is worth ignoring to take petty profit elsewhere. However, it may be one that can be postponed or dodged entirely. Does your opponent have a weak group that can be attacked in *sente* before you defend? Or perhaps there is a way to run into the middle with your group to gain influence while making *miai* of living/connecting there and answering the threat.

Making his weak group strong: This is probably the trickiest type of threat to which to assign a value. By allowing him to secure his group, you lose the chance to chase it, but the value of such an attack is highly variable. If forcing him to run out into the middle will allow you to establish a large territory or *moyo*, perhaps the threat should be answered. If, on the other hand, you would be chasing him into your *moyo* and thereby ruining it, letting him live or connect might be better. You might even want to attack from the outside, and force him to follow through on his threat to live inside, especially if you can seal him in with one more move.

Capturing a group: This is the sort of threat that you most likely want to answer, unless you can capture an even larger group. Even so, look for threats of your own first, moves that would allow you to live even if he followed through on his threat. If he answers them all, you can go back and answer him. It's important to do this, because those moves of yours might not be forcing anymore, once your group is already alive. This is what is meant by the proverb "Play *kikashi* before living."

Sealing you in: This is also usually worth answering, since it will give the opponent a lot of influence, but look at the surroundings first. If there are stable groups all around, his influence won't be of much use, and poking your head out might not be necessary if there are better points available elsewhere.

Exceptions

Make sure to consider whether the first follow-up on a move allows an even bigger follow-up next. A mutual damage plan might fail if the opponent's successive threats get larger and larger, while yours get smaller and smaller, even if your initial threat was large. Think about who will have to back down first, and who will have sustained more damage when the dust settles.

Beware, too, of double threats, such as moves that appear to be merely reducing territory, but also threaten to cut something off, or leave a group with only one eye if ignored. Make sure you fully understand the extent of the threat before deciding to ignore it.