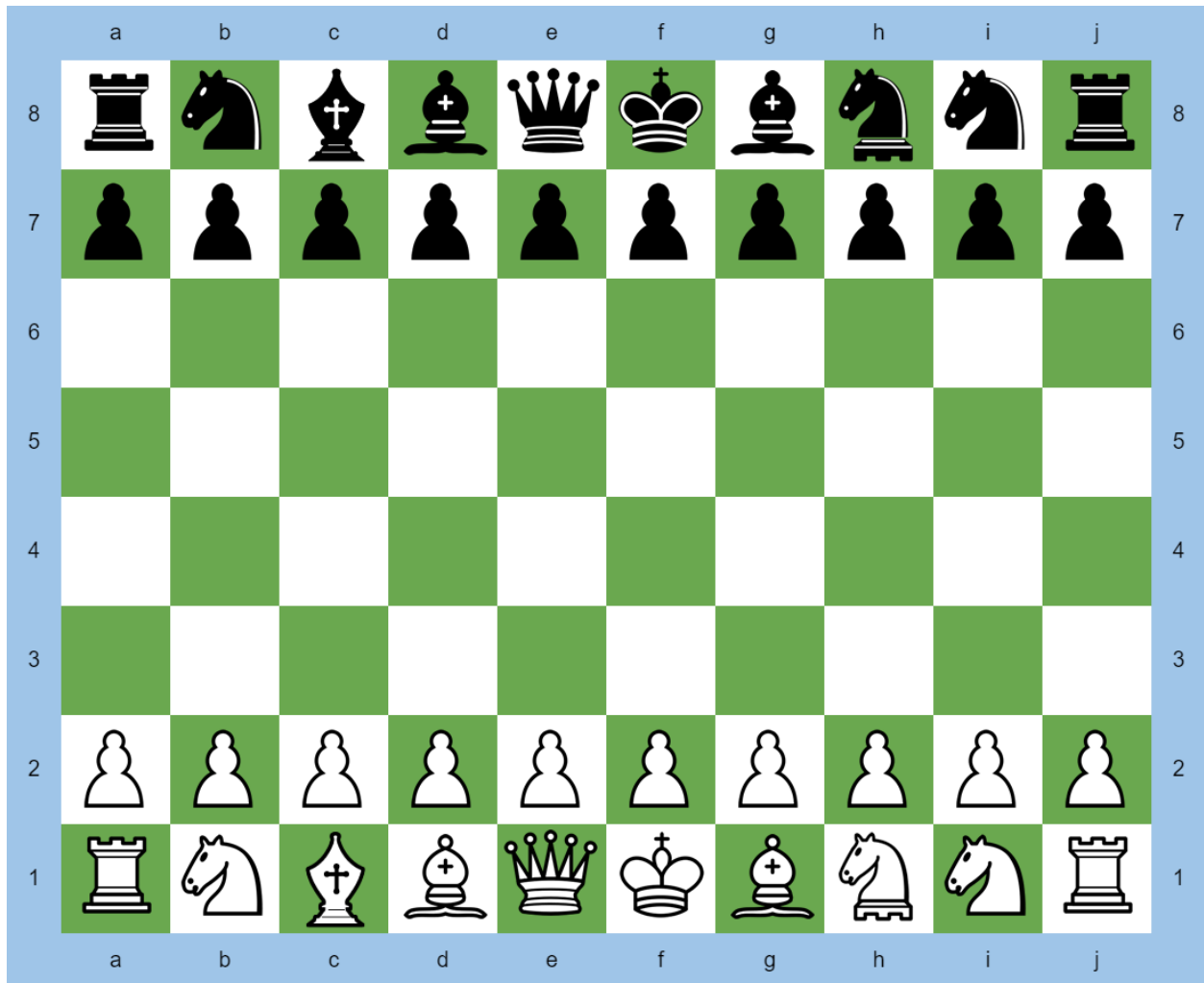


Pietro Carrera (1617), Henry Bird (1874), José Capablanca (1924) and Ed Trice (2000) are the four principal advocates who have favored an 80-square implementation of chess.



I'll start with the board configuration of José Capablanca and work my way backwards in time to his predecessors.

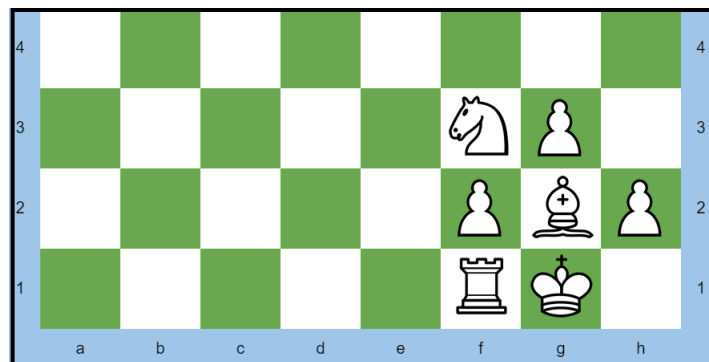


### **Capablanca's Chess, circa 1924 A.D.**

From left to right on white's side of the board, Capablanca placed the Rook, Knight, Archbishop, Bishop, Queen, King, Bishop, Chancellor, Knight, and Rook.

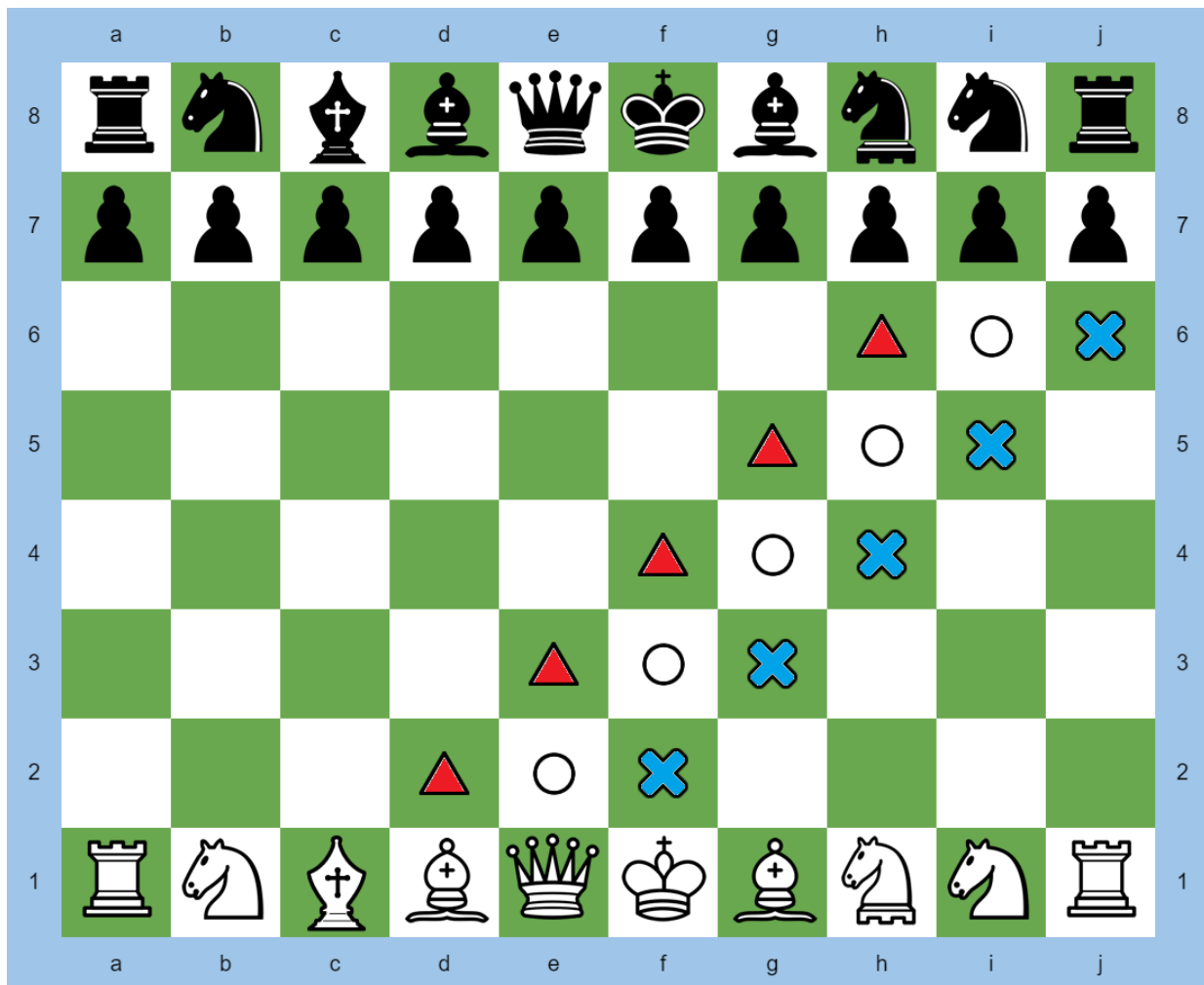
Now when chess players first see such a board there is a “honeymoon period” of “ooooo” and “aaaaaah,” but upon closer inspection, one is inclined to start to wonder about this arrangement.

Even the unobservant might say the Bishops “look odd” where they reside. In regular 8x8 chess, it is not uncommon to place a Bishop or two on “the long diagonal.” On the smaller board, the a1-b2-c3-d4-e5-f6-g7-h8 squares comprise one of the long diagonals, and a8-b7-c6-d5-e4-f3-g2-h1 comprise the other. This allows white to play moves such as **1. Nf3 2. g3 3. Bg2 4. O-O** and create a safe haven for the King.



### **Castling quickly in four moves in 8x8 chess**

All of these “King’s Indian” formations are impossible in Capablanca’s Chess.



**Three “diagonal pieces” are placed “in a row.”**

Another undesired feature in Capablanca’s Chess is the “too many diagonal movers in a row” situation. The Archbishop on square c1, the Bishop on d1, and the Queen on e1 all “reach across” the board diagonally, and there is no symmetry from left to right. What makes matters worse is the poor i-pawn is left undefended in the starting configuration, and all three of these pieces are aimed towards it.

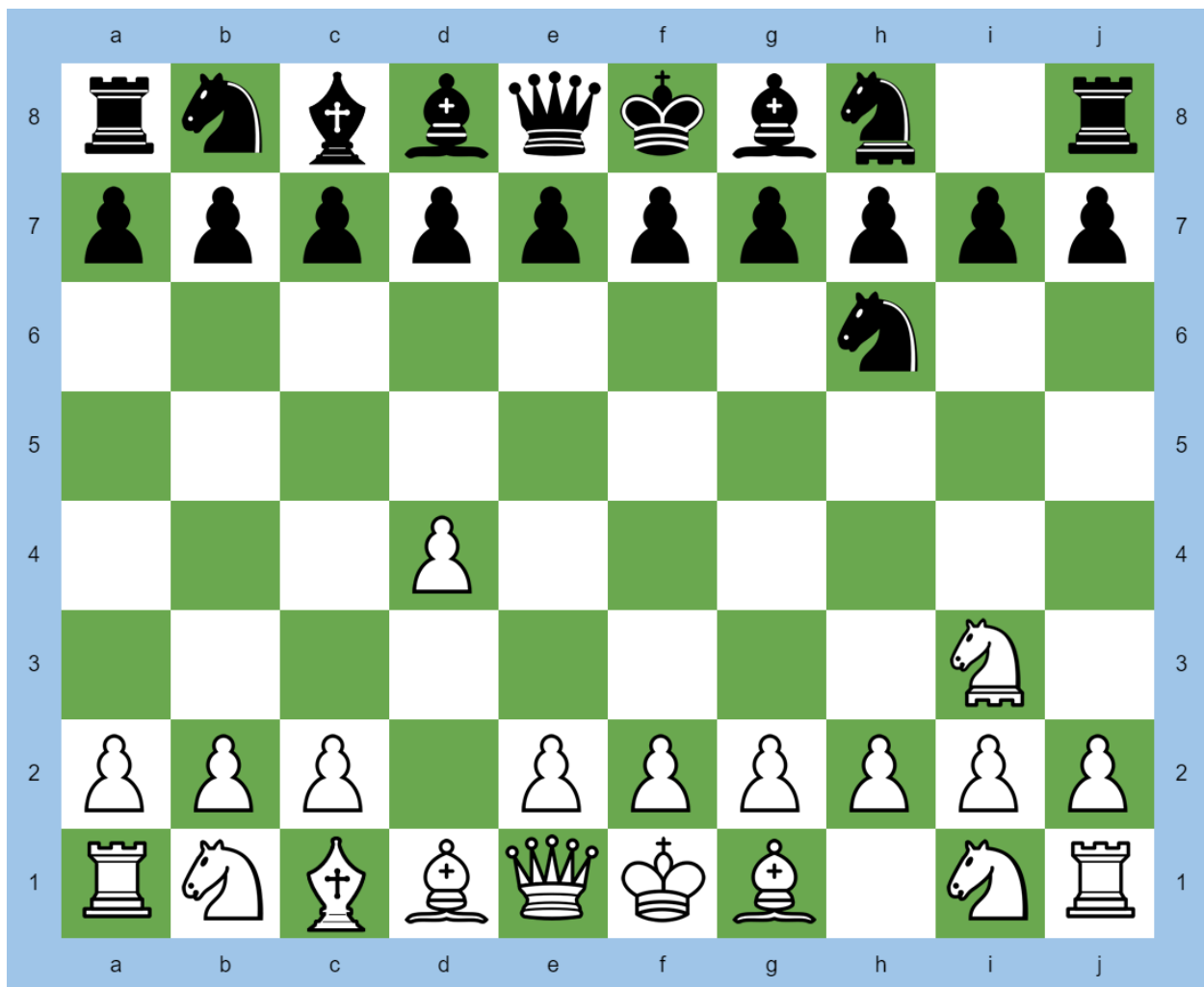
As I discovered in 1998, the undefended i-pawn can be a source of perpetual harassment, especially for the player with the black pieces. The miniature game showcased next is the quintessential example of how to exploit the “bad i-pawn” in Capablanca’s Chess.

## Ed Trice vs. Joel Gehen

October 13, 1998

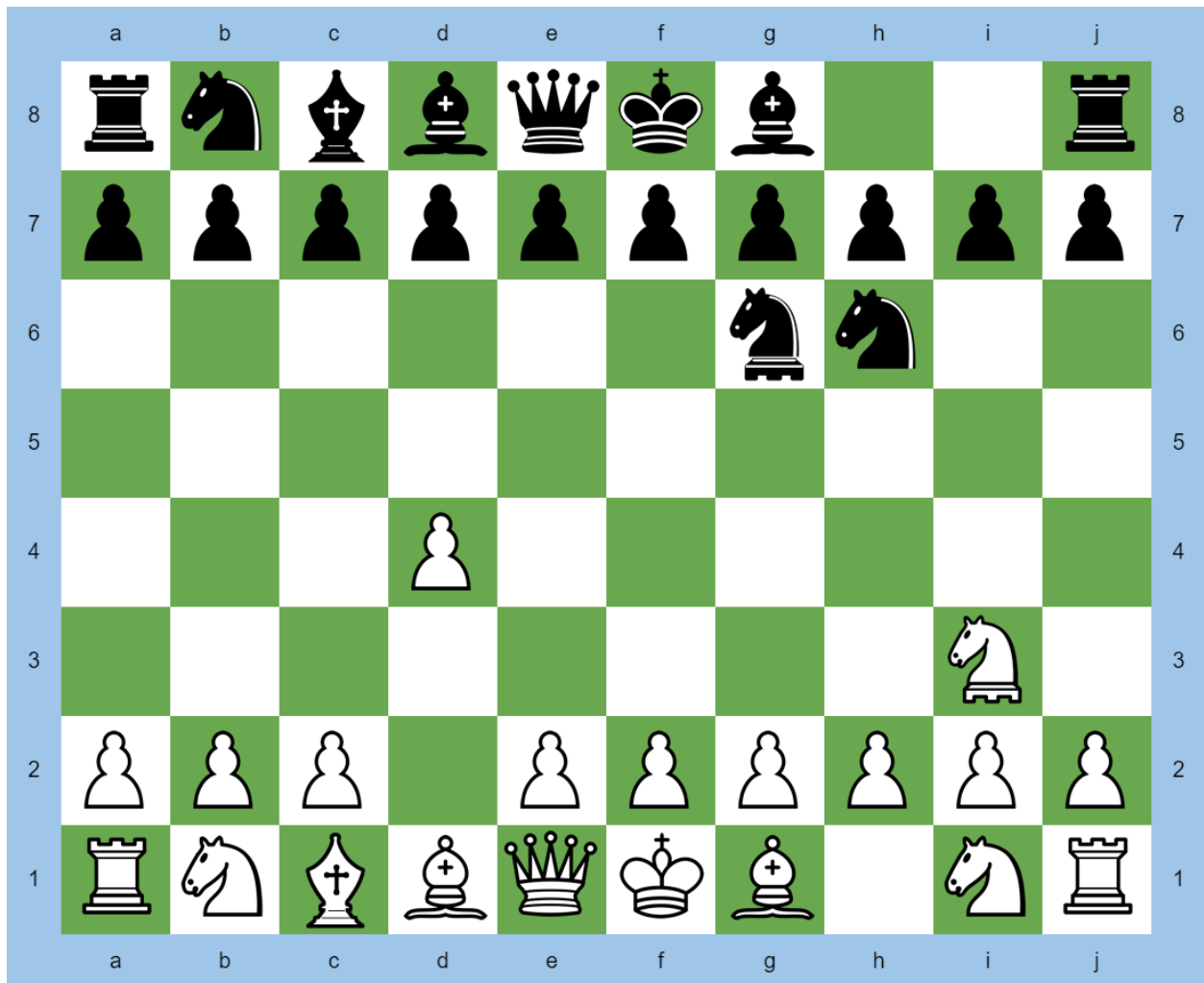


**1. d4 Nh6**



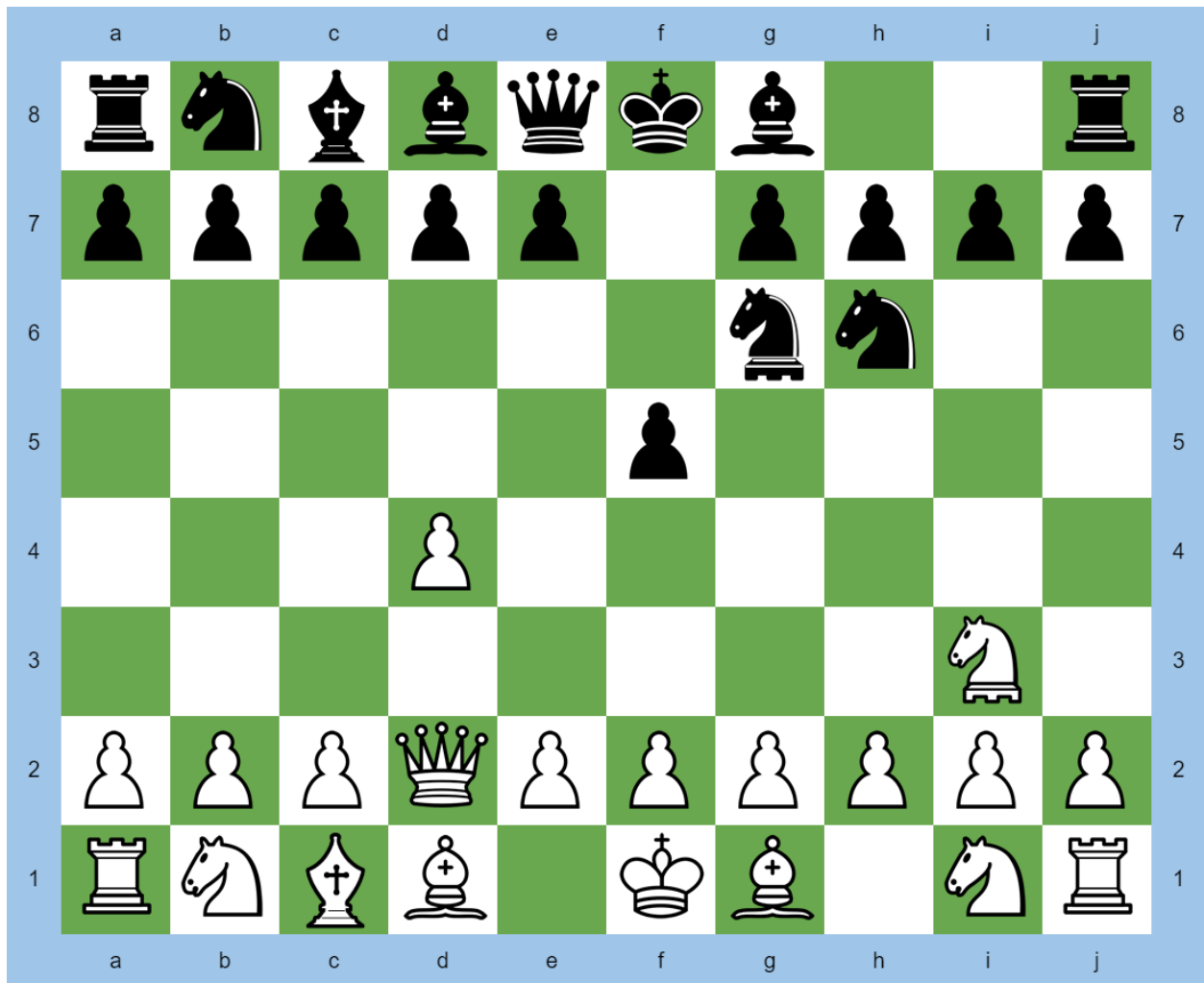
## 2. Ci3?!

Of course, this is bad form! Just because you can get a “Rook” into the i-file by moving the Chancellor so early in the game, doesn’t mean it’s a good idea. It was played more for the “shock effect” as my opponent and I were contesting one of our first-ever games of Capablanca’s Chess. Black doesn’t want to push the weak i-pawn forward which could worsen matters.



## 2...Cg6?!

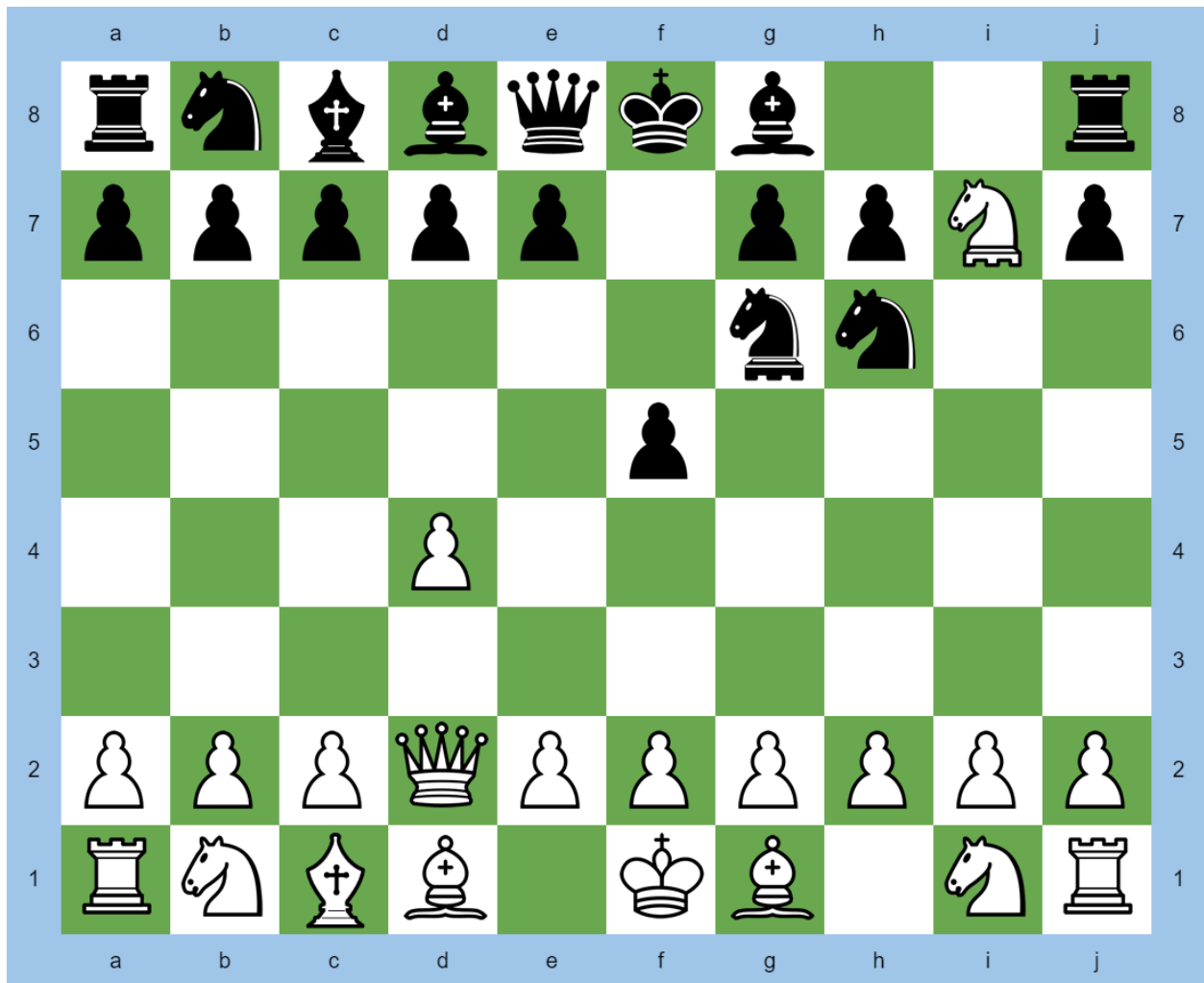
The Chancellor on g6 “reaches backwards” with its Knight-component to defend i7. White will just continue to pile on the pressure.



### 3. Qd2 f5

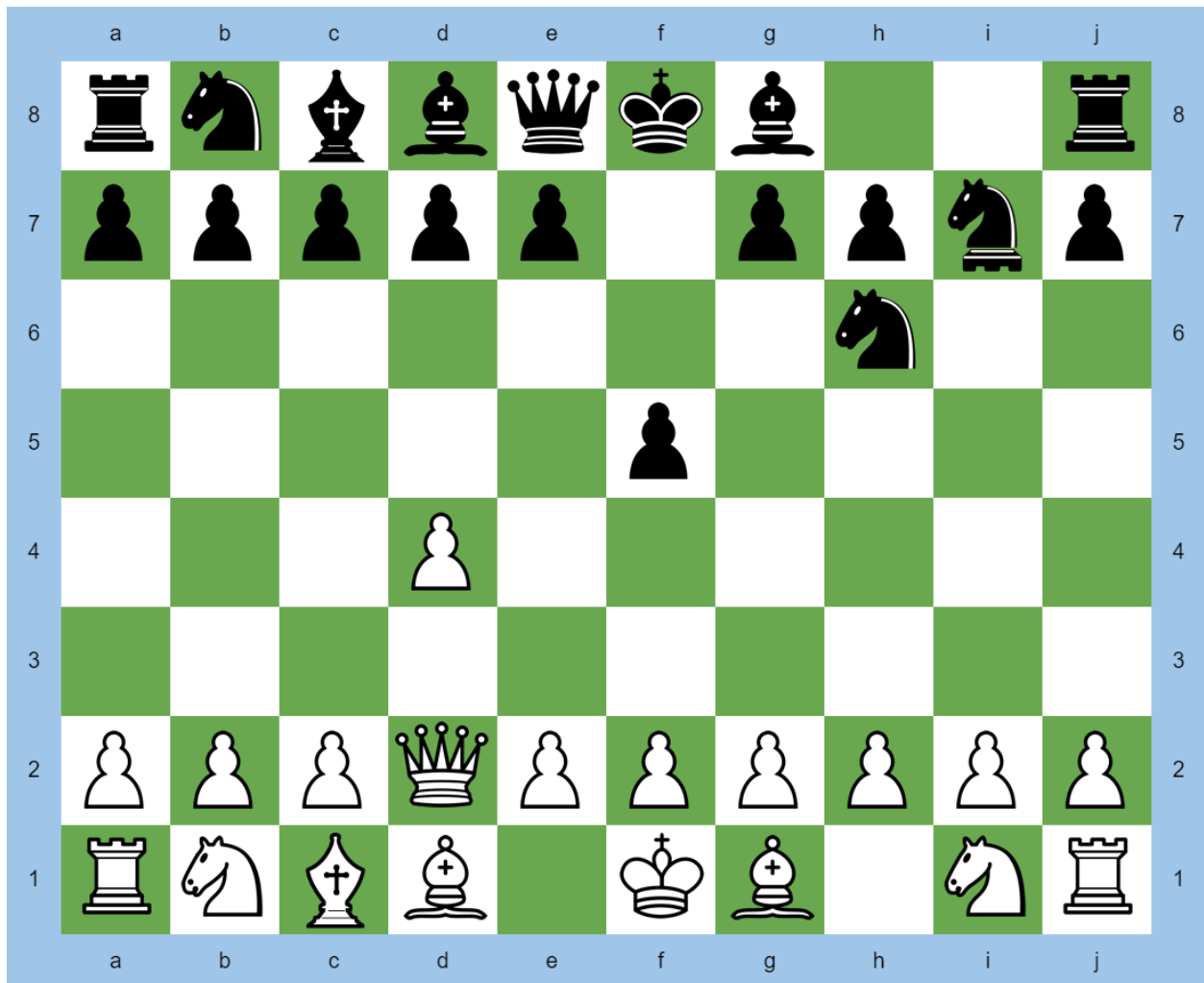
Nothing looks out of the ordinary so far. White compounds the attack along the diagonal, and black pushes a central pawn. What could possibly go wrong?





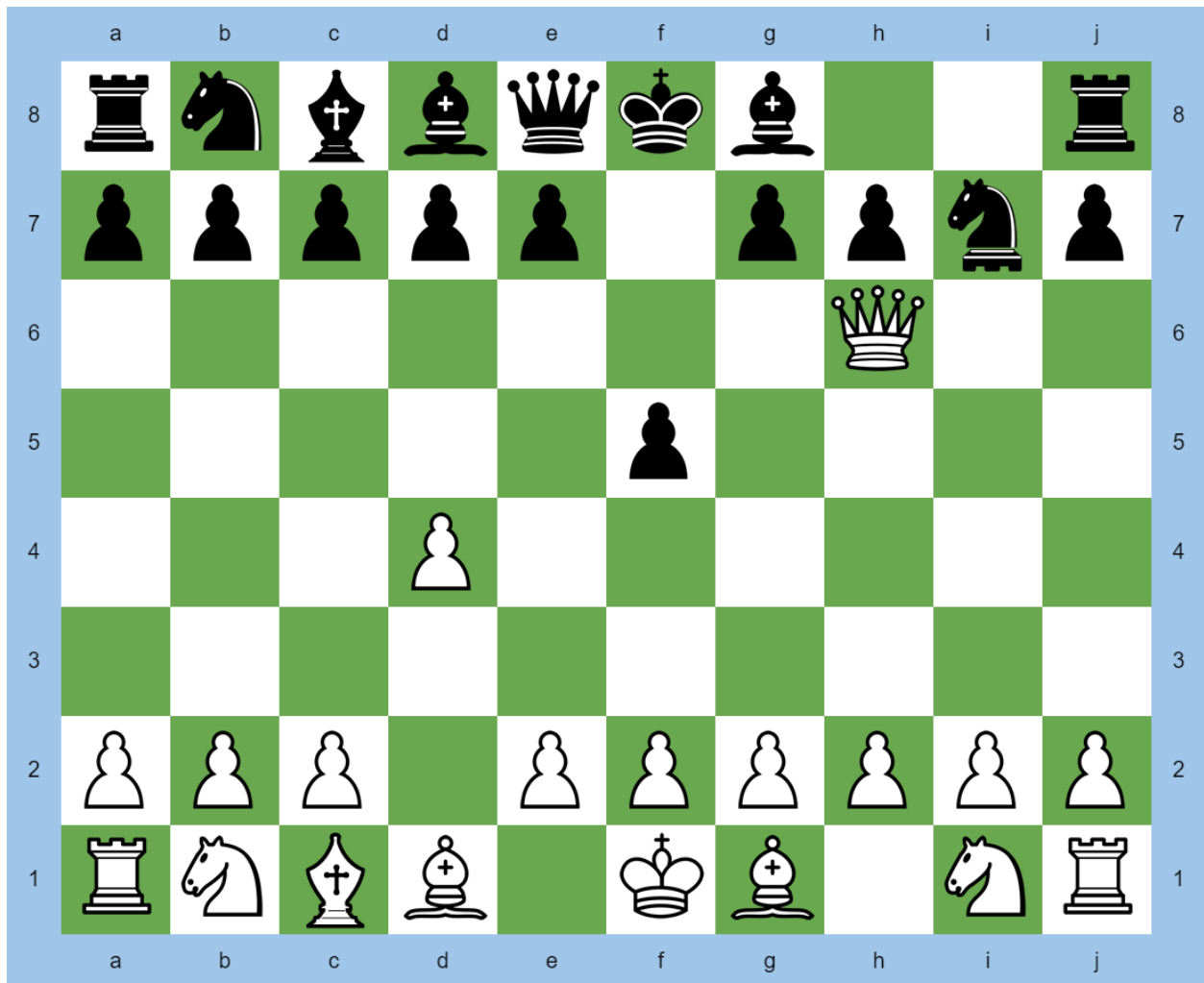
#### 4. Cxi7!?

Bam! OK, so this is the “Scholar’s Mate” equivalent and there is a way out of it, but just about every new Capablanca player would get mated the first time encountering such a line.



## 4...Cxi7

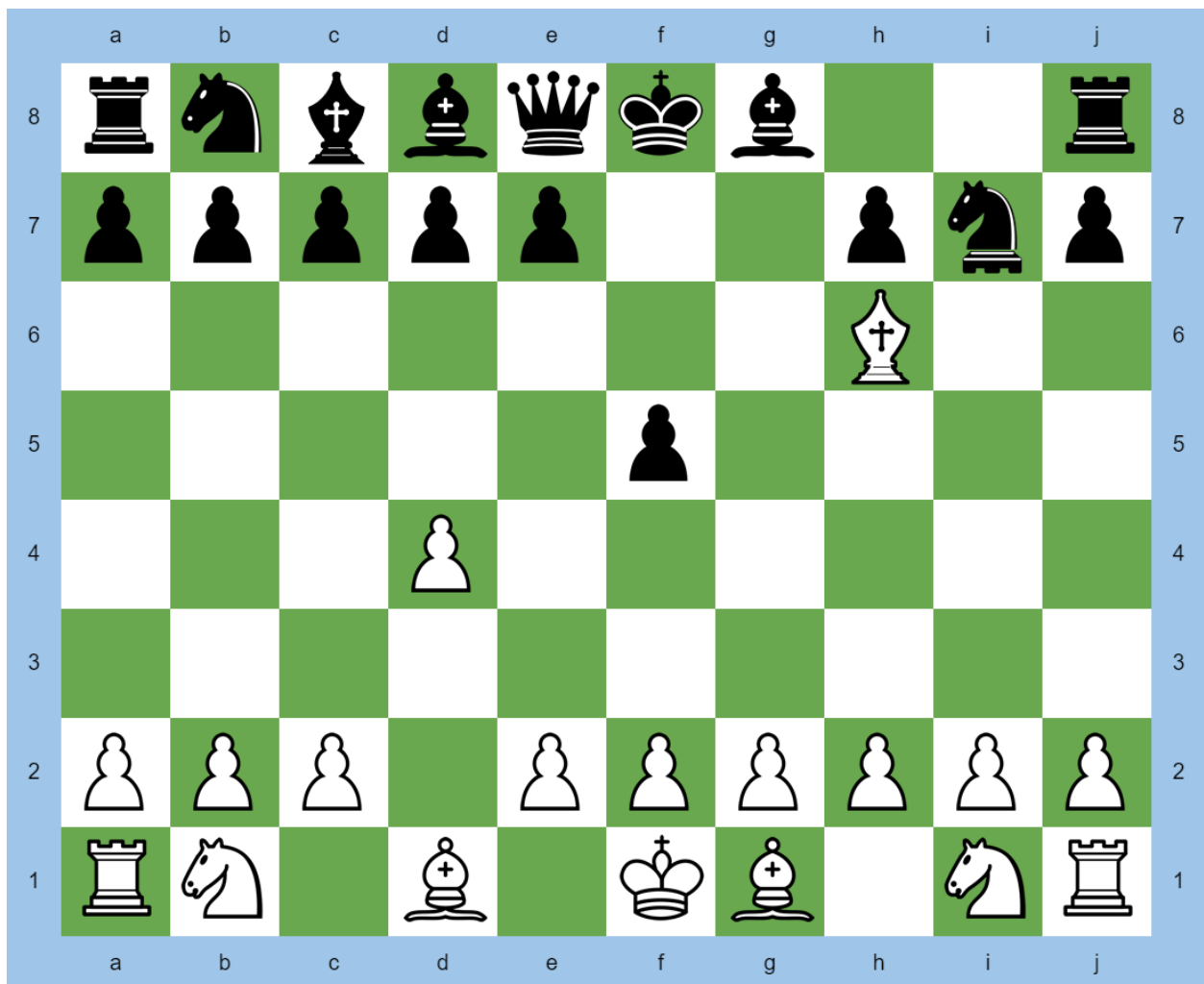
Do you see the deadly trap white is ready to spring now? It's not easy to spot because it requires "Trice's Chess Vision" since there is no similar tactic on the regular 8x8 chess board.



## 5. Qxh6

And there it is. Black can't take the white Queen. The correct continuation is **5...Ri8** **6. Qxi7 Rxi7** **7. Axi7** where black has **7...Qi4** and now white is pressed to find **8. Ag5** in light of **8...Qxi2** **9. Ah3** being necessary to save the white Rook on j1. After **9...Qi7** the material difference is a Rook and Knight for white vs. a Queen for black. That position favors black.

But...

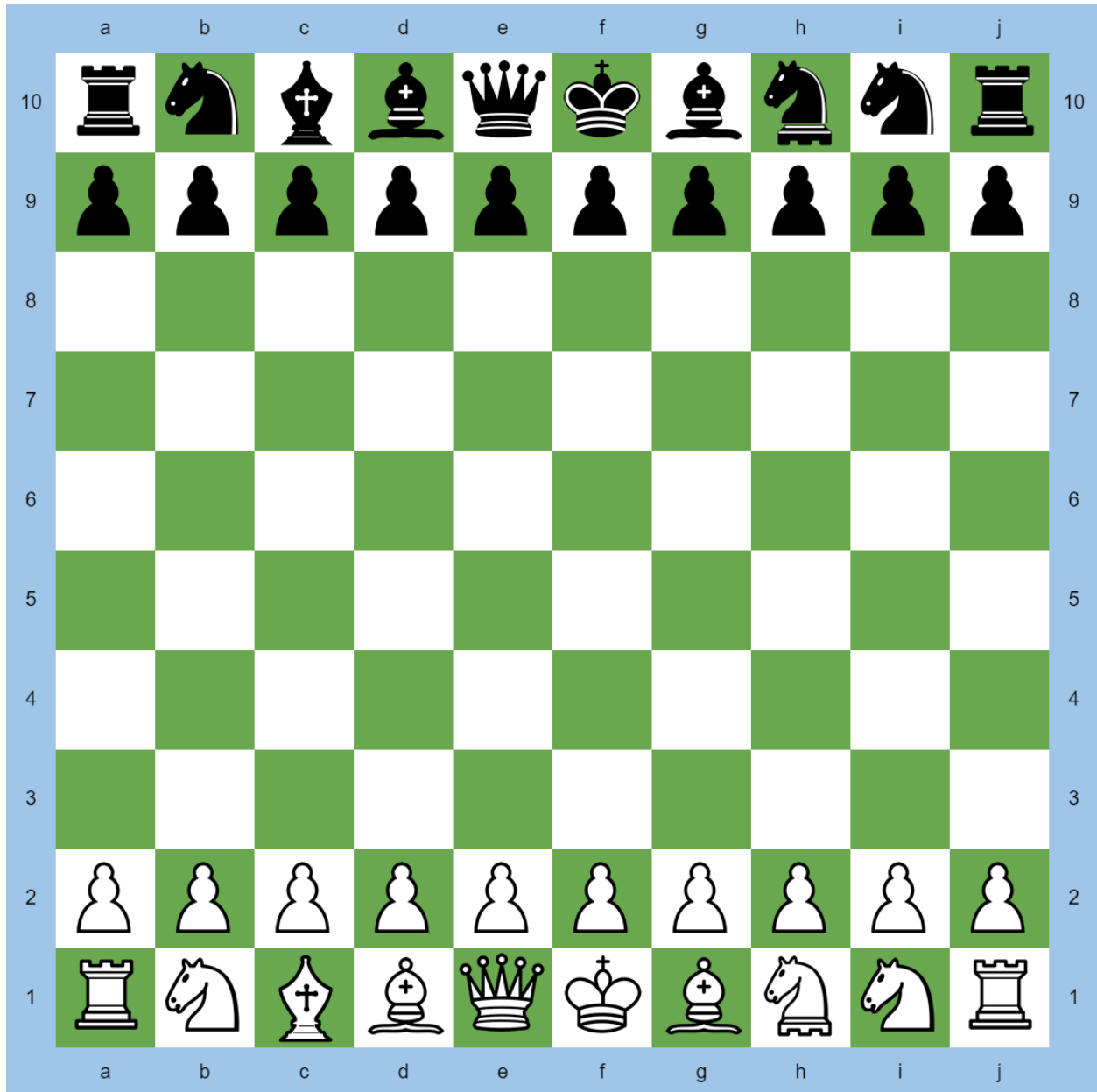


## Trice's mate in Capablanca's Chess.

Black almost always grabs the white Queen with **5...gxh6??** and white has the nice unassisted checkmate with the Archbishop, **6. Axh6#**

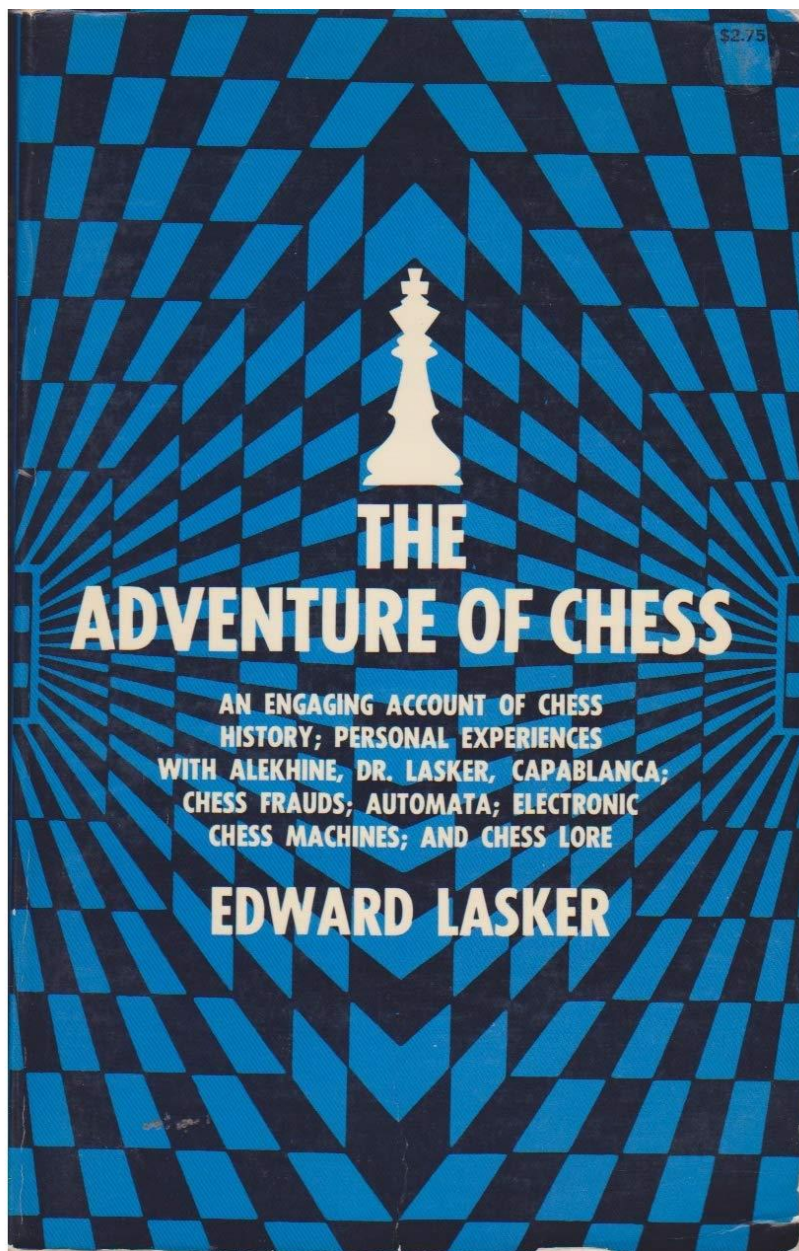
Notice in the diagram above, the black King cannot move forward since the Knight-component of the Archbishop's reach prevents this.

While this was not a forced mate from the onset, it does underscore the dreaded weakness in the vicinity of the kingside as a direct result of the i-pawn being undefended. So what was Capablanca's thinking?



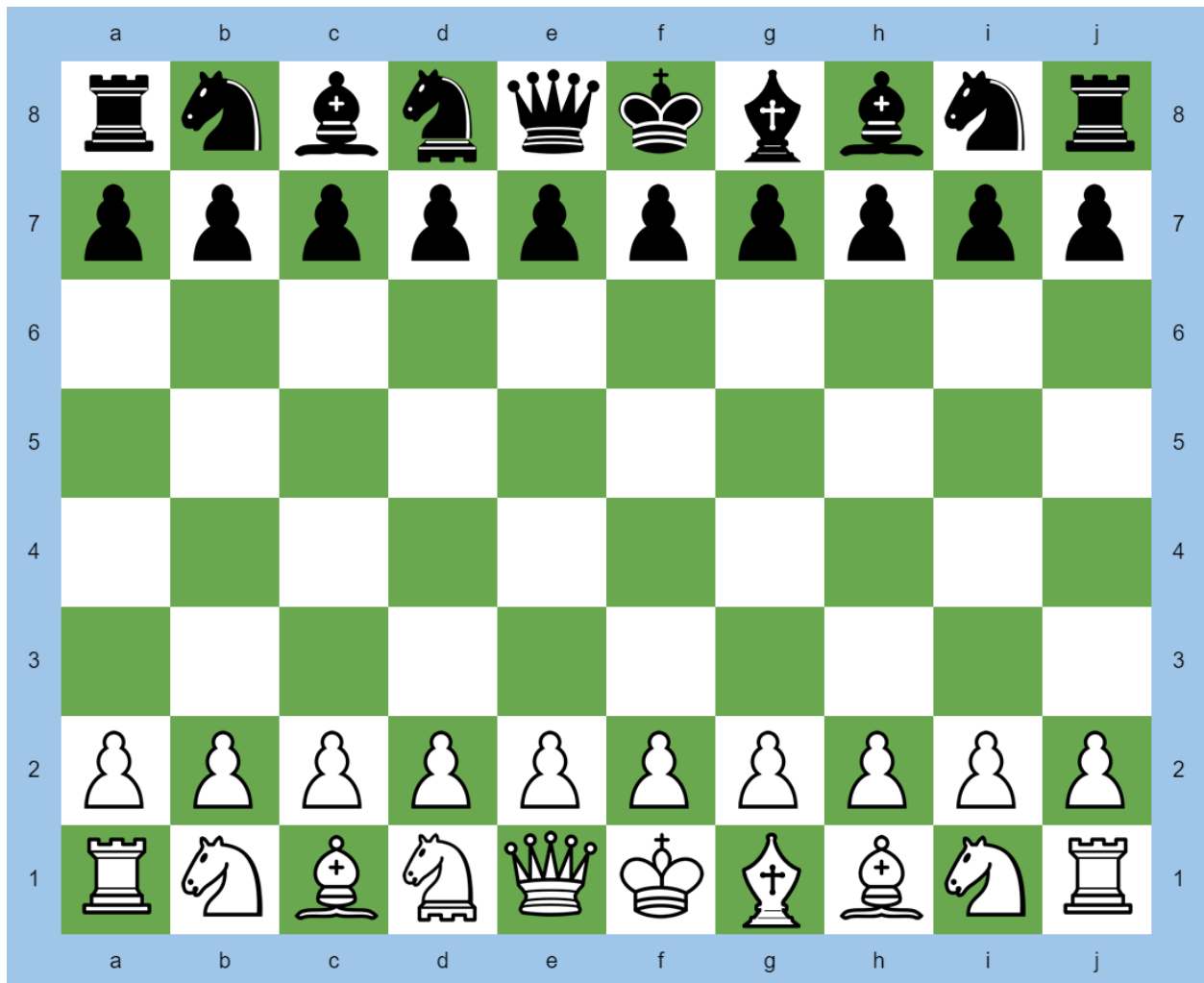
**Capablanca's Chess on 100 squares**

In my own opinion, I believe Capablanca originally experimented on a board comprised of 100 squares, where such defects are not experienced since the “diagonal strikers” do not make landfall amidst the pawns at all. Then, for some reason, he switched to the 80-square version without play-testing it as much as the testing he performed on the 100-square board.



In his awesome book “The Adventure of Chess,” Edward Lasker (not Emmanuel, this is a different Lasker) confirms that Capablanca did try his setup on both 100- and 80-square boards. But Lasker only mentions in passing that eventually Capablanca preferred the 80-square setup, possibly because it took too long for the pawns to engage on the 10x10 board. Furthermore, *en passant* becomes a real mess.

There is no way anyone can convince me that the great José Capablanca “missed” some of the defects associated with the 80-square version of his game. There’s just no way that he did. Which can only mean, *he did not play it nearly as much* as the 100-square version. That’s the only logical explanation. If we had some exact dates and some full games he played, we would know the truth of the matter without question. Who knows? In 1927, he lost a long and hotly-contested match for the World Championship to Alexander Alekhine. It is safe to say that his quest to regain the crown would have taken a priority over any of his chess variant distractions. And we know Capablanca tried for years to get a rematch. I’m certain “setting the record straight” regarding the dimensions of his variant was not a major concern.



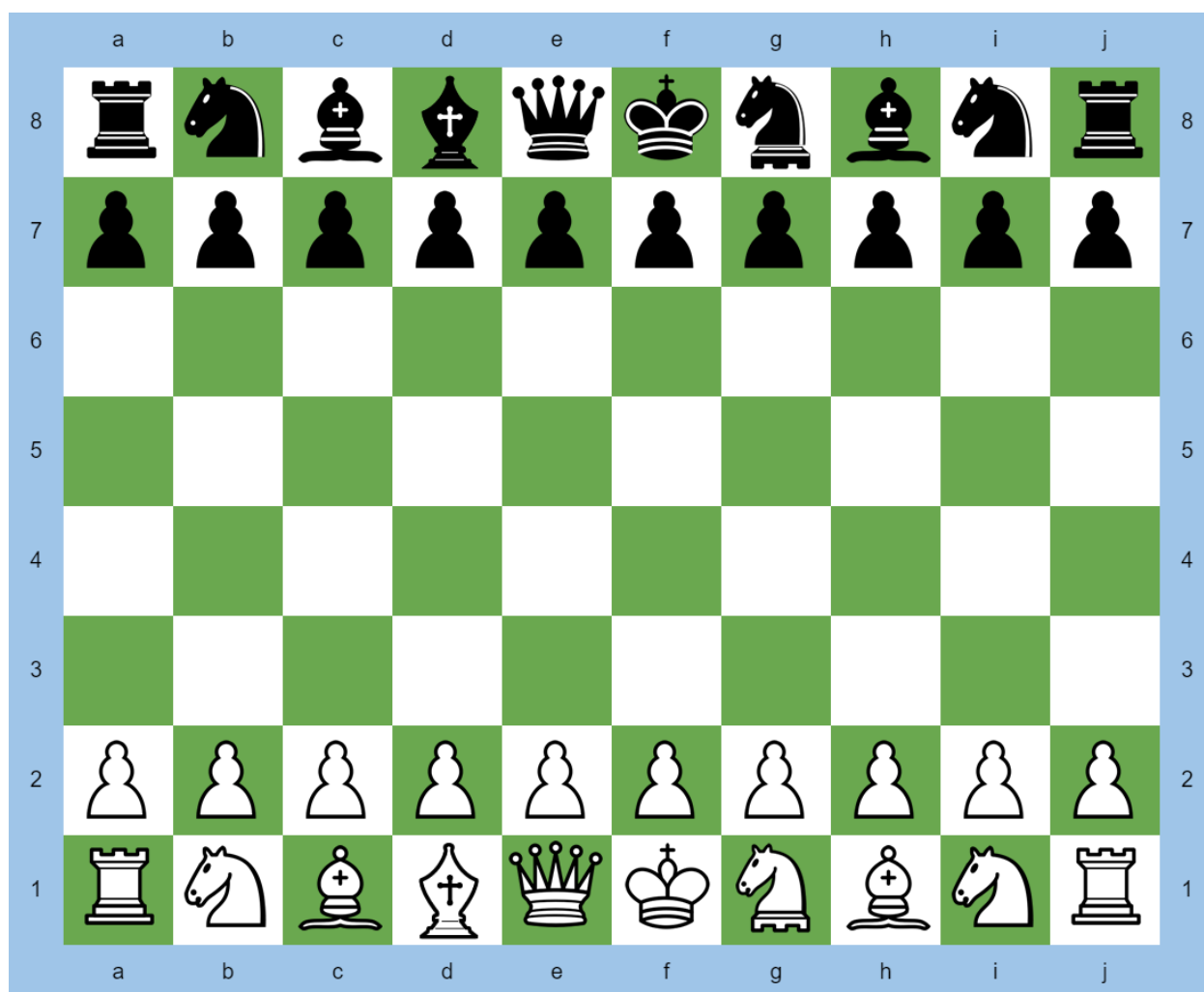
## Henry Bird's Chess, circa 1874 A.D.

From left to right on white's side of the board, English Chess Master Henry Bird placed the Rook, Knight, Bishop, Chancellor, Queen, King, Archbishop, Bishop, Knight, and Rook.

I have a theory why Capablanca may have wanted to "improve" this setup of Henry Bird's.

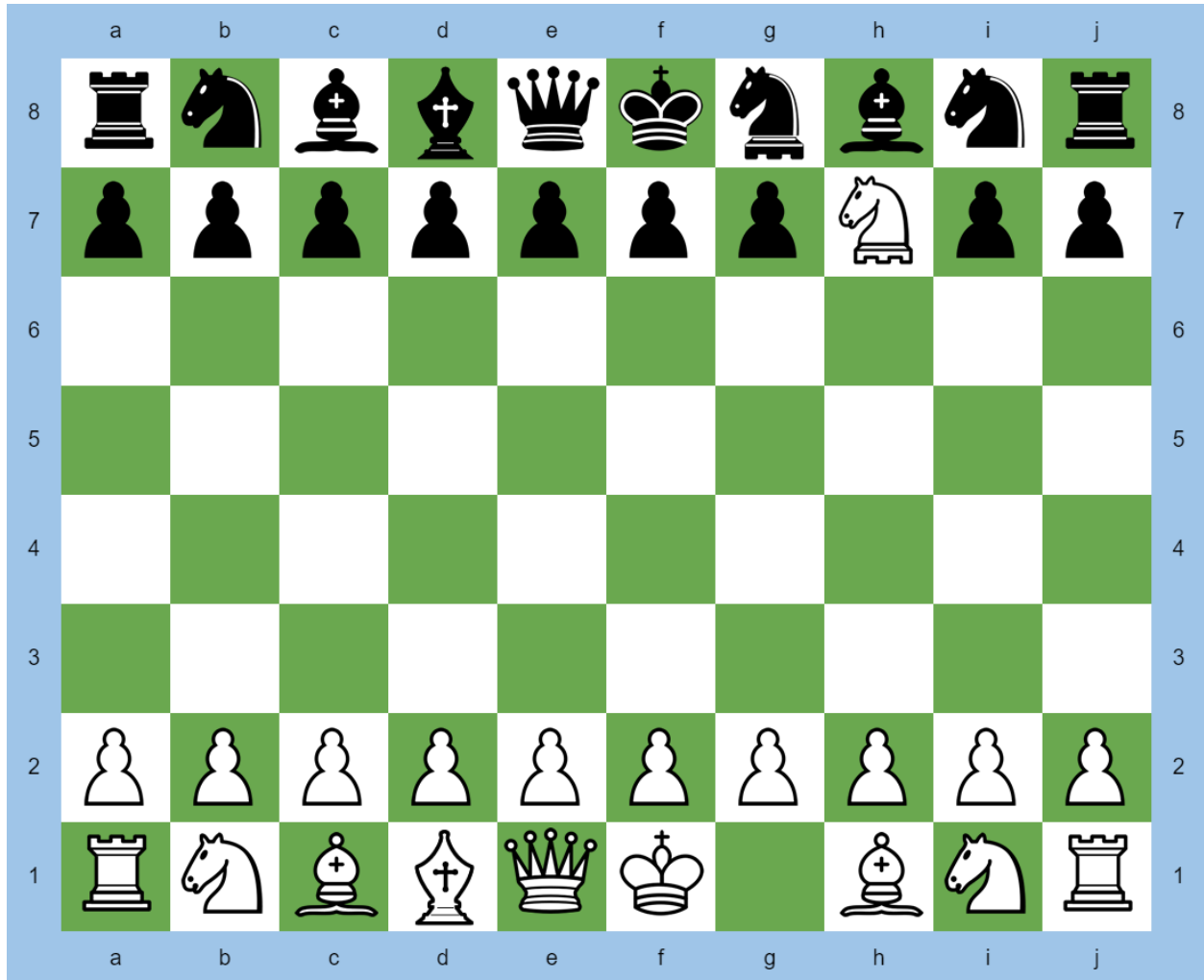


Players back then were using the terms “Cardinal” and “Marshal” instead of Archbishop and Chancellor, sometimes interchangeably. If Capablanca had misinterpreted which piece Bird was describing in his configuration from a span of 50 years prior, he may have thought this was Bird’s setup:

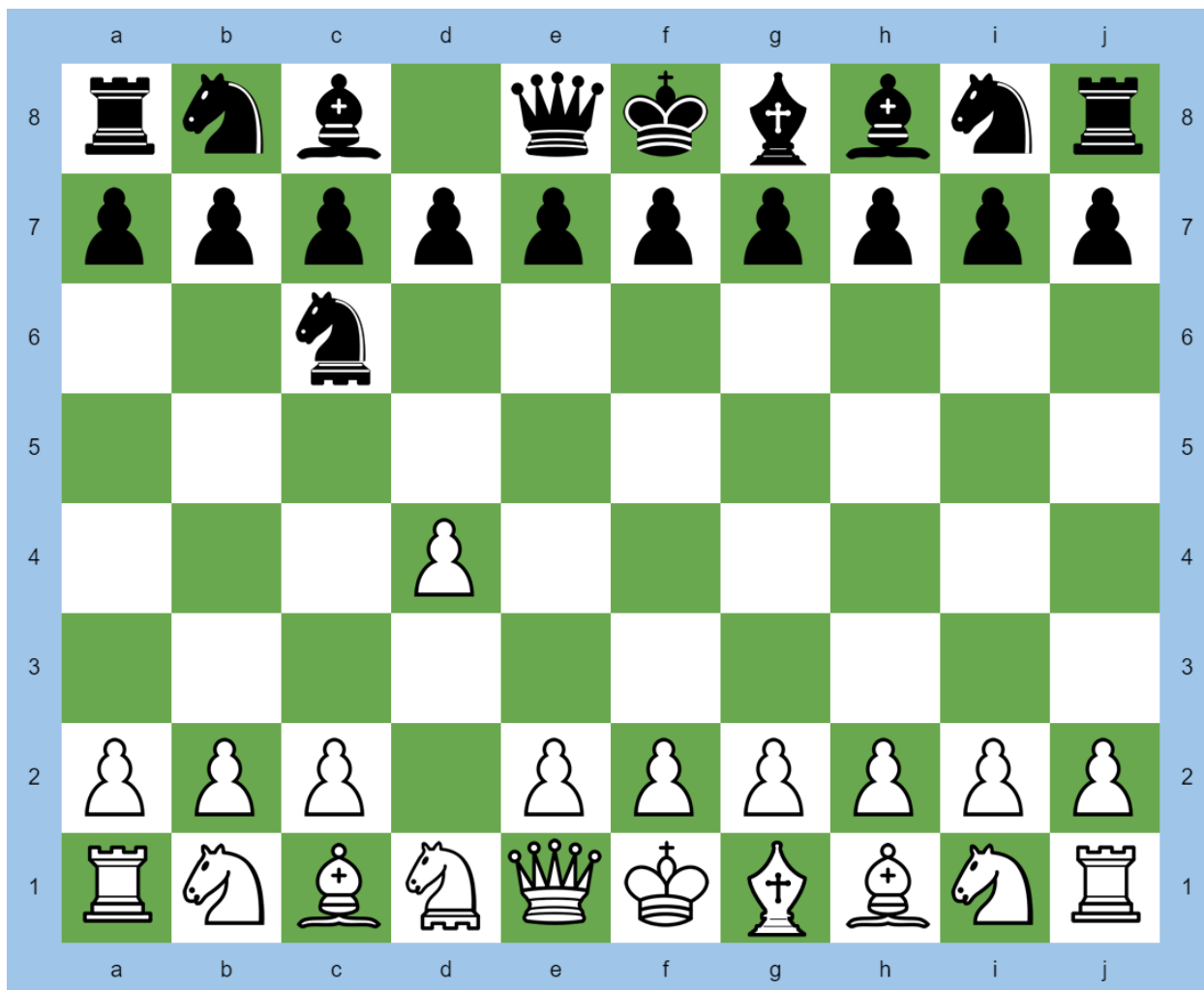


**Nobody’s board, ever, just a theory of mine.**

You might be able to detect the “problem” with this board yourself. White has a mate in 2 if black comes to the board and left his brain on the sofa **1. Ch3** and **2. Cxh7#** so who would want to play a game where this smothered checkmate was possible?



If Capablanca took this as Bird’s board, then his “correction” was to swap locations of the Bishop and Archbishop on the queenside, and swap the Bishop and the Chancellor on the kingside. Such a swap would give you *exactly* Capablanca’s setup!



## 1. d4 Cc6 from Bird's Chess.

So if we go back to Bird's actual board, and not my hypothetical version of it that Capablanca *may have* been looking to improve upon, do we find any blemishes? The short answer is: Yes. The c-pawn is undefended in the original position. Suppose a game begins with **1. d4 Cc6**, then white has the unenviable task of having to defend the c-pawn already.

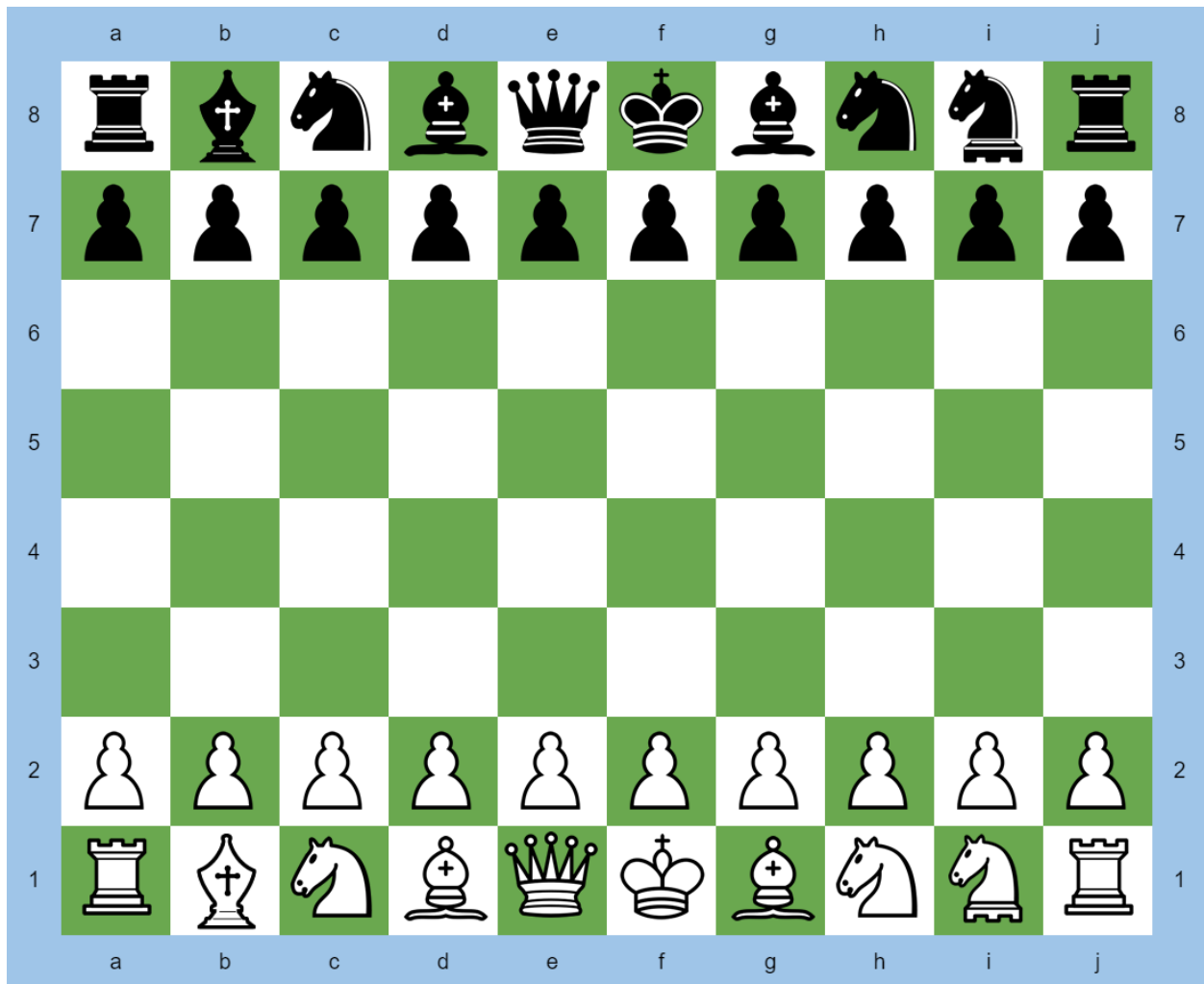
White would have to choose from the awkward and anti-positional **2. Na3**, potential mutual Chancellor annihilation with **2. Cc3**, a closed and future cramped position with **2. c3**, or chess from another planet after **2. Qd2 Cc4?!**

That small c-pawn blemish becomes a Lorentzian “strange attractor” of chaotic chess play. By now, hopefully, you will begin to appreciate how difficult it is to add any meaningful extension to the game of chess without stirring up a hornet’s nest of trouble!

One might ask: “What happens if white plays **1. Cc3** to guard his undefended c-pawn and attack black’s?”

Therein lies another undesired feature of that configuration. Black must choose from **1...c6** to defend passively and allow white to deploy the Chancellor without punitive damages, ditto for **1...Nc6**, or **1...Cc6** and Chancellors most likely would be removed from play very early. In the latter case, what would be the point of adding such a powerful piece to the board only to have it sublimate?

So, by retrograde analysis, we must ask ourselves, “What was Henry Bird thinking” with his setup?



### **Pietro Carrera's Chess, circa 1617 A.D.**

From left to right on white's side of the board, the Italian chess author Pietro Carrera placed the Rook, Archbishop, Knight, Bishop, Queen, King, Bishop, Knight, Chancellor, and Rook.

I'm going to bypass the discussion regarding *all* of the differences between Italian Chess played in the early 1600s and modern chess played in the early 2000s. Suffice it to say Italians had many different ways to castle and despised the *en passant* capture.

In Carrera's book "Il Gioco degli Scacchi," he names the pieces the *Centauero* and *Campione*. We would translate these as the Centaur and Champion. He describes the Centaur as an *Alfincavallo*, which is a Bishop with the Knight's move added. This is our Archbishop. The Champion is said to move like a *Roccocavallo*, which is a combined Rook and Knight; our Chancellor.

If we transplant Carrera's arrangement onto the modern 10x8 board, we see that he "pushed everything inward" from and including the queen's knight to the king's knight, added to the two new pieces outside of them, then placed the Rooks outermost. This makes things pretty messy. First off, the b-pawn is undefended. Secondly, there is no more *fianchetto* of the Bishops onto a long diagonal. Thirdly, there are "two Rooks" next to each other in the form of the Chancellor near the king's rook, etc.

The Carrera board contains too many oddball elements for it to be considered a playable option by those who are chess aficionados. Still, it was innovative to introduce these two new piece types, and it was left for later generations to try other arrangements to figure out how to best utilize them.

Now we can understand the mindsets of *all* of the involved 10x8 progenitors. Henry Bird liked the idea of the new pieces proposed by Carrera, but Bird completely revamped Carrera's setup. Capablanca possibly reversed the location of Bird's Archbishop and Chancellor by mistake, then "corrected" this by switching the locations of the Bishop and mistaken Archbishop with the Bishop and mistaken Chancellor.

And Trice "corrected" Capablanca's chess while being completely unaware that Bird's Chess was much more similar to his own variant.

There is a great story behind this third and final "correction" of the 10x8 chess variants, available in my book, "Better Than Chess: Volume I."