

## Advanced Ladder tactics

There is a Go proverb, if you don't know shicho (ladder) you don't know Go. Ladders appear at all stages of the game so understanding and reading them accurately is essential. Misread a ladder and you can lose a game in a most embarrassing manner.

Opening and middle game tactics often involve ladders and ladder breakers. The following examples show examples of ladders in professional or strong amateur dan games.

### Ladder tactics

#### Example 1

In Figure 1 the marked White stone has cut Black's position. Before we examine the position in detail let's look at Figure 2 which shows the game sequence from an amateur dan game.

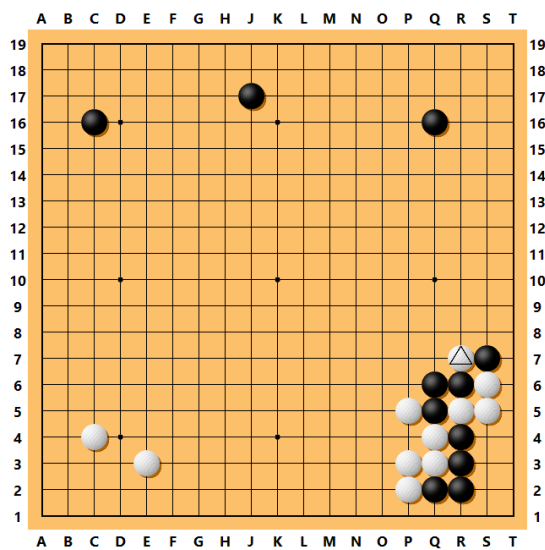


Figure 1

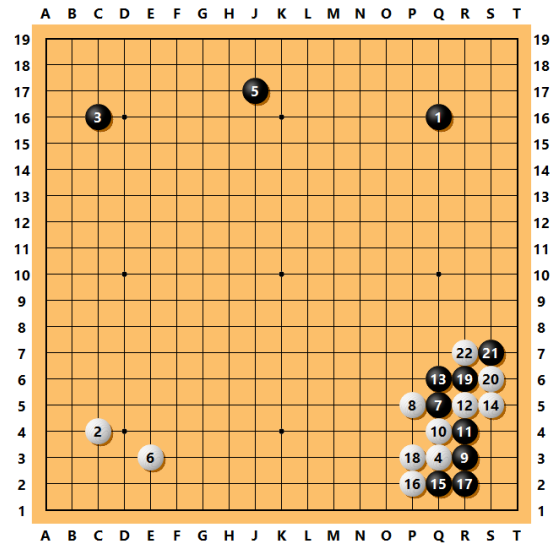


Figure 2

White put a lot of emphasis on the lower side while Black has a low-Chinese opening at the top. There are many options for both Black and White in the lower right and it seems Black has learned a joseki and is determined to play it. The sequence to 22 is joseki – if the ladder works. What ladder?

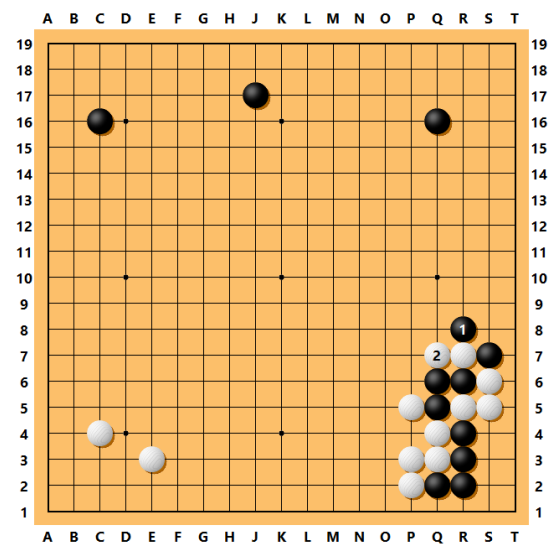


Figure 3

Black 1 is not a ladder, it is an abject failure. When White extends with 2 Black must defend the three stones and White can cut at S8. The corner dies and Black has a floating group.

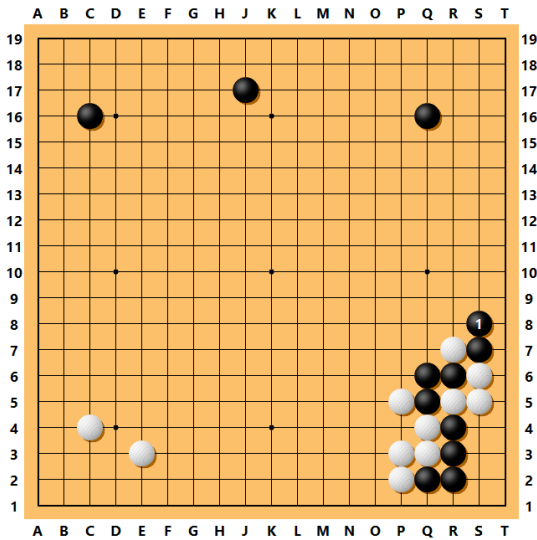


Figure 4

Black's only move is to extend and now we begin to see where a ladder may appear. White Q7 is a nice try but...

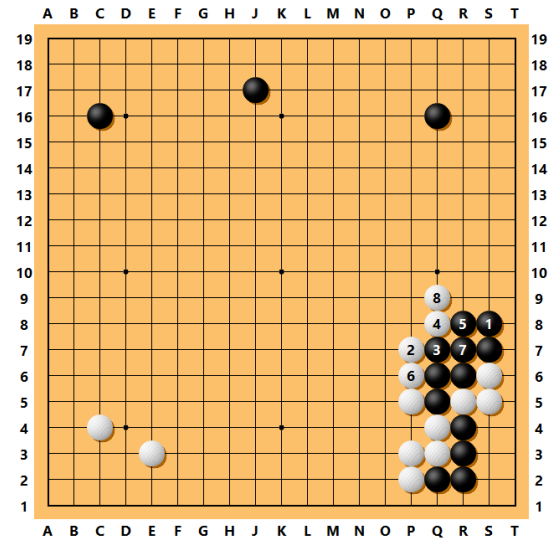


Figure 6

White can opt to build a nice wall to 8 in Figure 6. Not ideal but not a totally lost game either. White's dream is to save the three White stones at R5,S5 and S6.

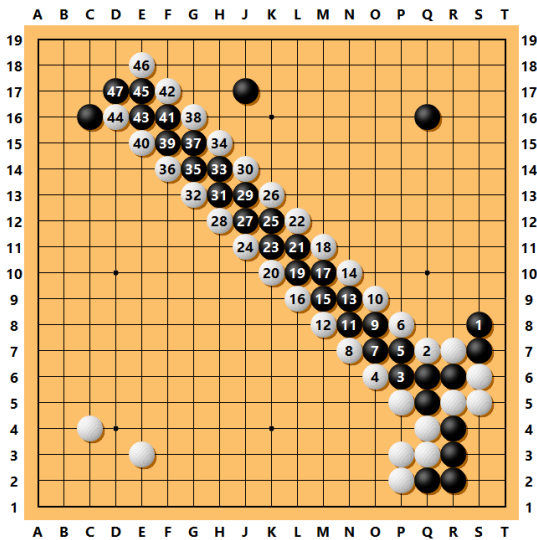


Figure 5

... the ladder is broken by the Black stone at C16 so Black escapes. If this is the outcome of the game Black will feel very happy, while White dies of shame.

Not good but if White reads the ladder and know the outcome there are options.

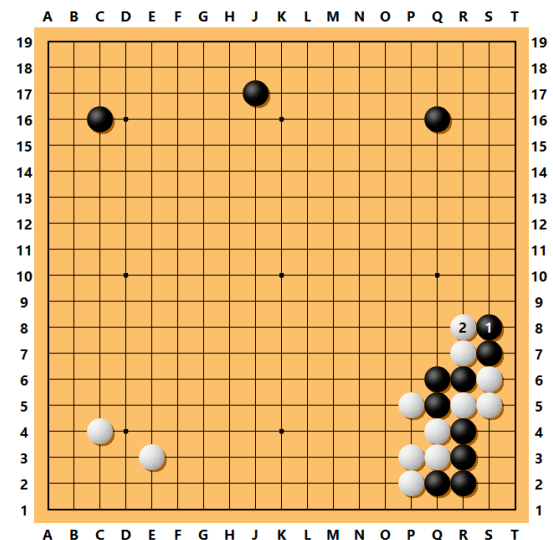


Figure 7

So rather than rushing the ladder in Figure 5 White can extend at R8, this utilises Black's lack of liberties and changes the path of the ladder.

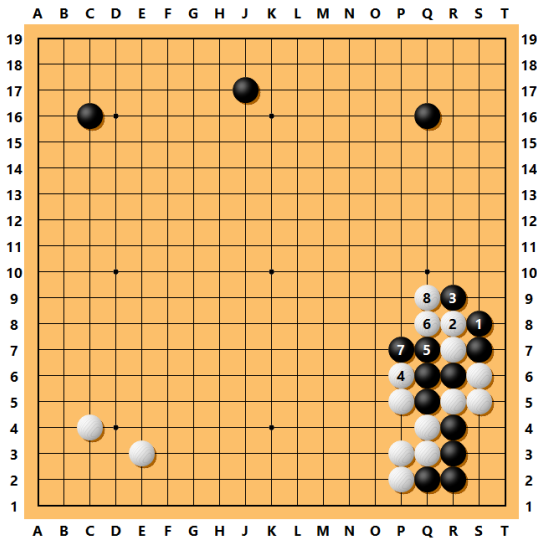


Figure 8

Black is not going to take this lying down. Black's resistance with 3 in Figure 8 is powerful and seems to counter White's plan. However, there is a middle game joseki to deal with this. White starts the ladder with 4 and then turns at 8.

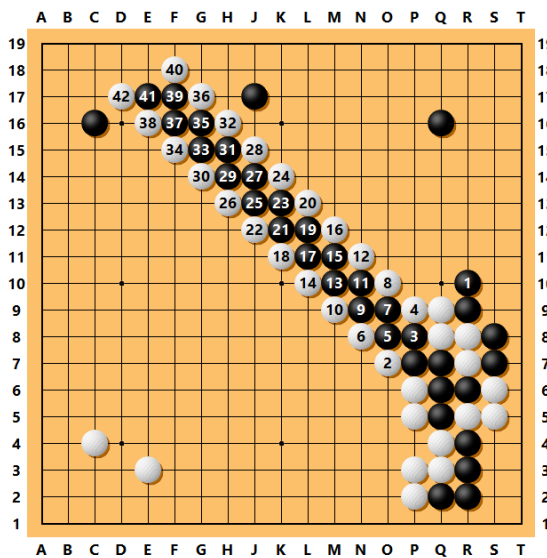


Figure 9

Black needs to extend with 1 in Figure 9 to save the stones on the side. White then plays the ladder and this time the ladder favours White. Many joseki involve ladders and both player must check before blindly following joseki.

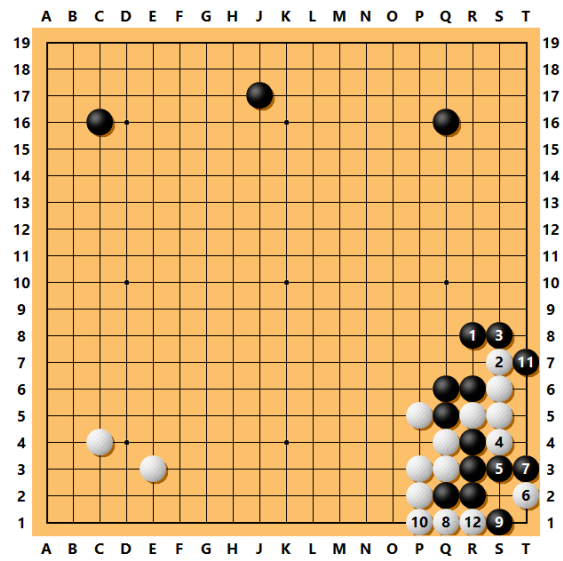


Figure 10

By the way. Black cannot back away with 1 in Figure 10 attempting to avoid the ladder because White to kill the corner.

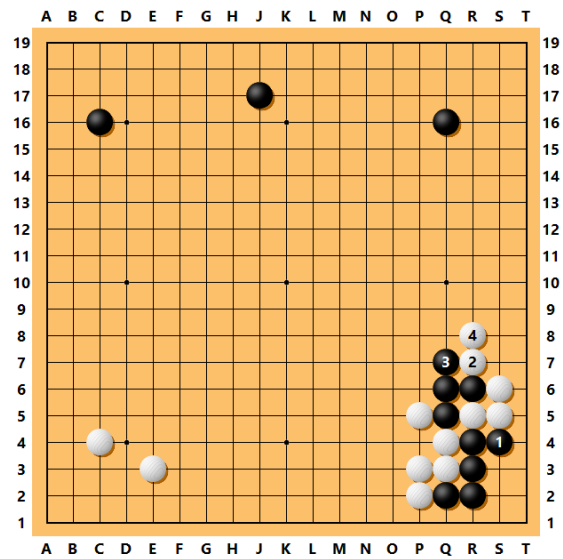


Figure 11

Also, if Black plays 1 in Figure 11 and forces White to run Black will have four stones floating in the centre and the corner group is unsettled.

## Example 2

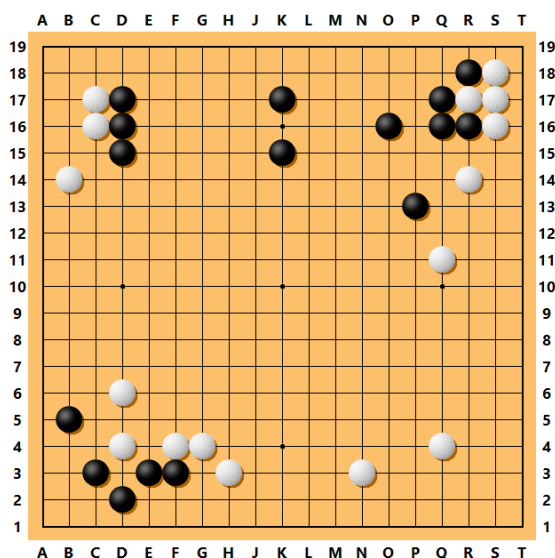


Figure 12

The position in Figure 12 is an amateur game, the position is well balanced. White is perhaps a couple of points ahead but it's Black's move.

Black chooses to reduce the lower right corner – there are many ways, this is just one, but White needs to pay heed of the ladder.

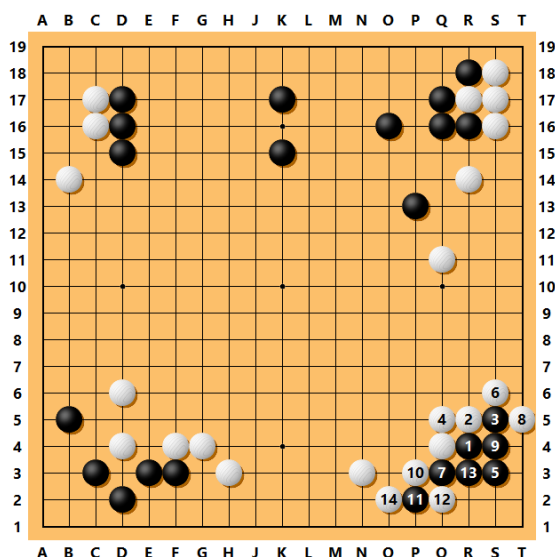


Figure 13

When the ladder does not work White cannot play 14 – not without consequences. So where is the ladder?

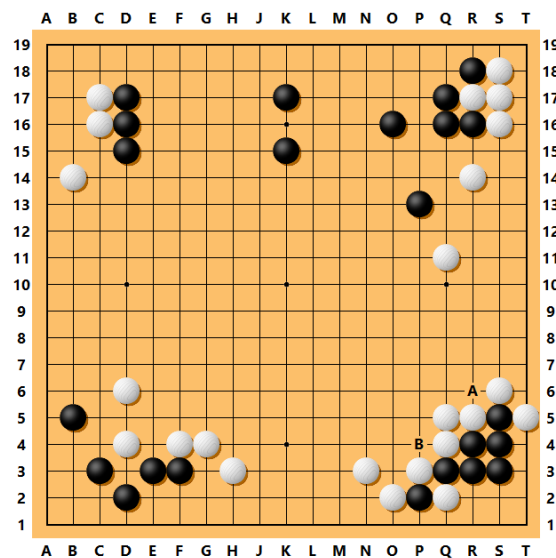


Figure 14

The shape in the lower right is similar to the shape in example 1. The atari at 'B' and the cut at 'A' lead to the same ladder tactics.

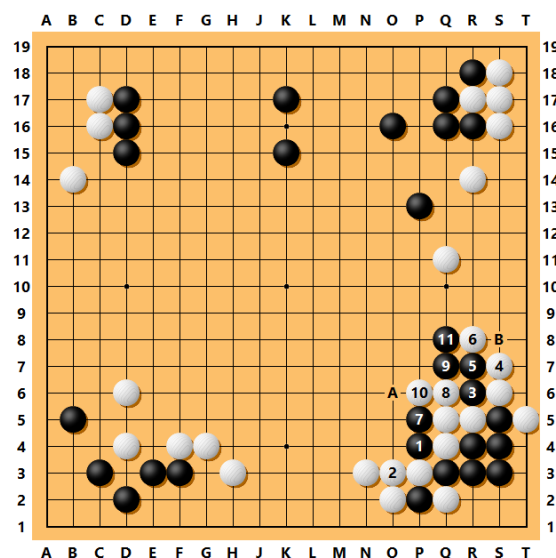


Figure 15

After Black 11 White needs to defend at 'A' and 'B'. Not a good outcome.

White's mistake is move 14, this is only possible if the ladder favours White. The correct sequence is White O3, Black O2, White N2, Black R2.

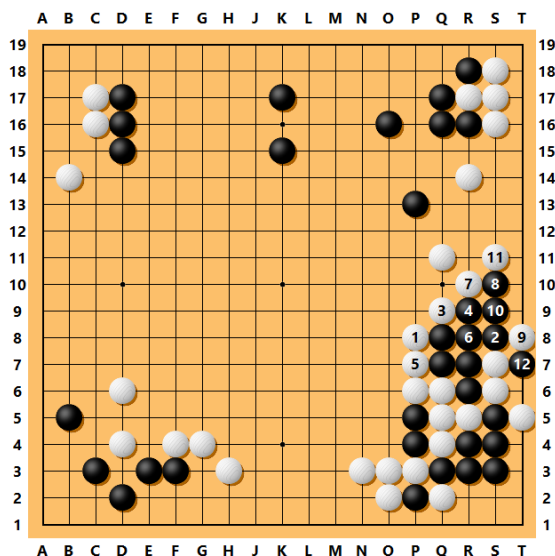


Figure 16

Note: White has an option. White can play the tesuji of 1 in Figure 16 to build a wall but the loss in the lower right is big. Also, there is aji at P9 and R12 to worry about.

### Example 3

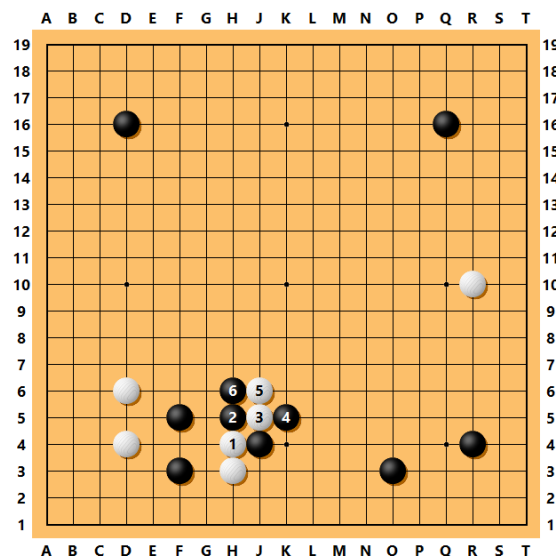
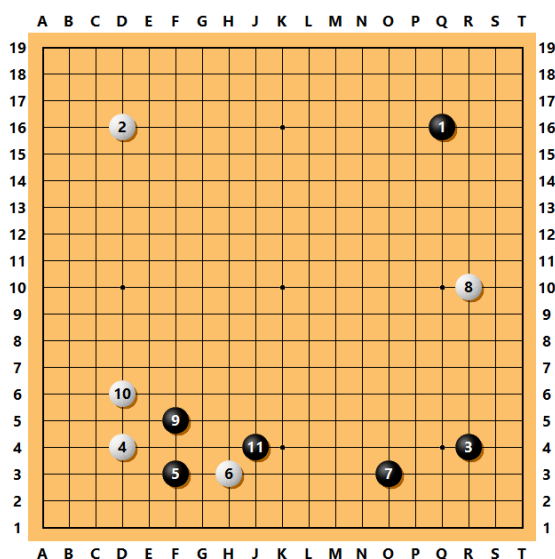


Figure 17

...Black can form a ladder shape with the exchange of 4 and 6 in Figure 17. White needs to do something about the ladder which will allow Black to defend the cutting point at K4.

White however has a cunning plan and cuts at K4, This threatens to capture the Black cutting stone at J4 and breaks the ladder.

This example is from a game between two professional 6 dan players on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2000. White is Kono Takashi and Black is Mizokami Tomochika.

I am sure most people have seen Black's pressing move at 11 and perhaps wondered what happens if White pushes up and cuts. Well...

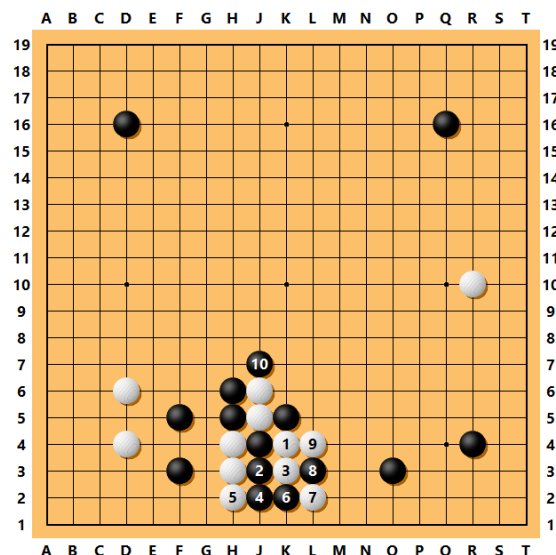


Figure 18

The problem is that Black can fight back and force a second ladder. The sequence to 10 is forced and this ladder will capture the White stones (see Figure 19).

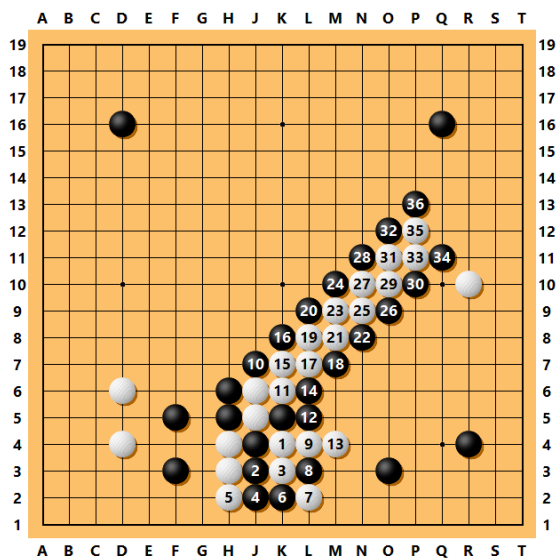
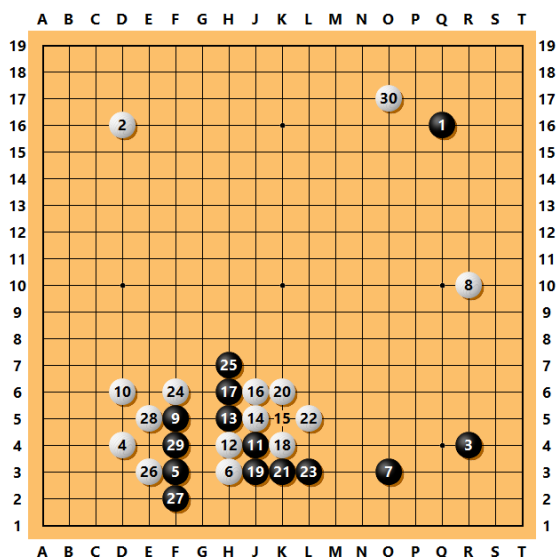


Figure 19

Back in the real-world...



...White was aware of the ladder and changed direction.

According to AI Black has a 75% chance of victory – then again, AI has the lead at 3 points. Not exactly a forgone conclusion – certainly not for amateur players.

### Example 4

This is a game between Black Wang Lei 6p and Black Ma Xiaochun 9p.

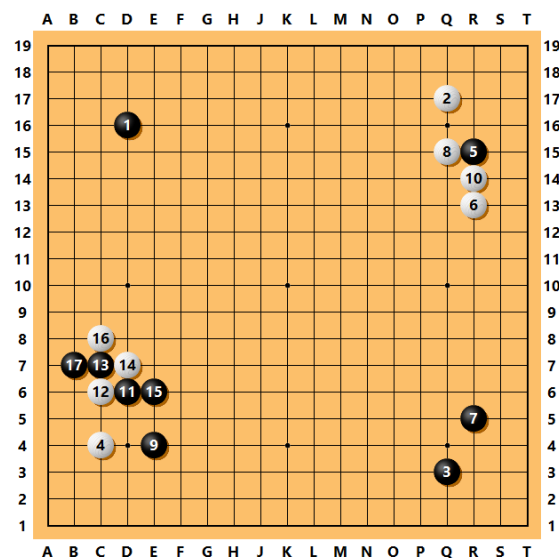


Figure 20

White's position in the lower left is fraught with danger. There is a cutting point at D8 and White 12 has just two liberties.

White could sacrifice the corner by playing B8 – Black would play C5, B5 and finish with D4 but the outcome is too good for Black. The only way forward is to play 1 in Figure 21 and fight...

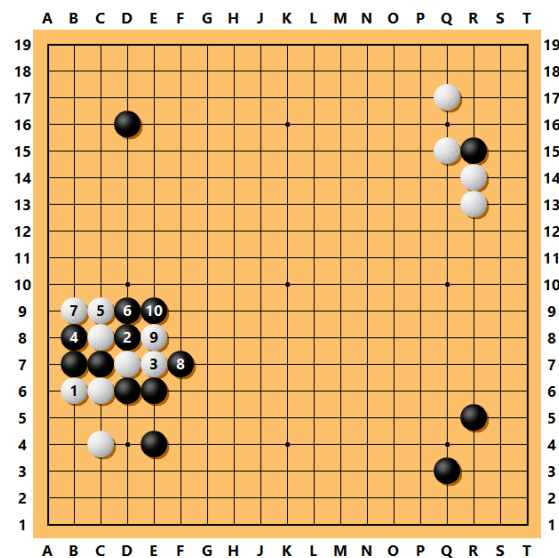


Figure 21

Given the situation in the upper right this is not a bad decision.

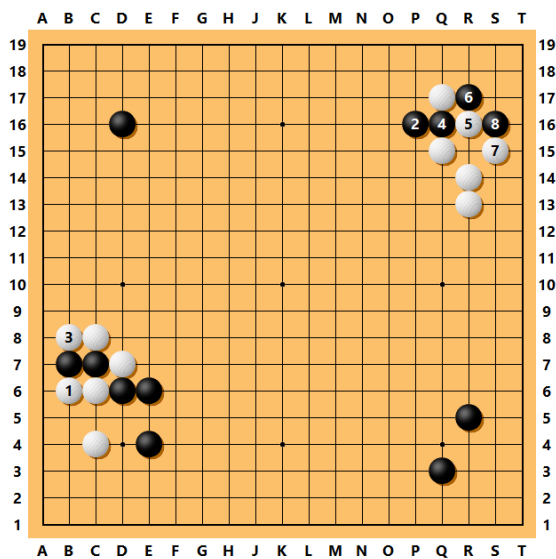


Figure 22

In the game Black played the peep at P16 offering an exchange (shown in Figure 22).

The question is – if White defends at Q16 can White still escape the ladder?

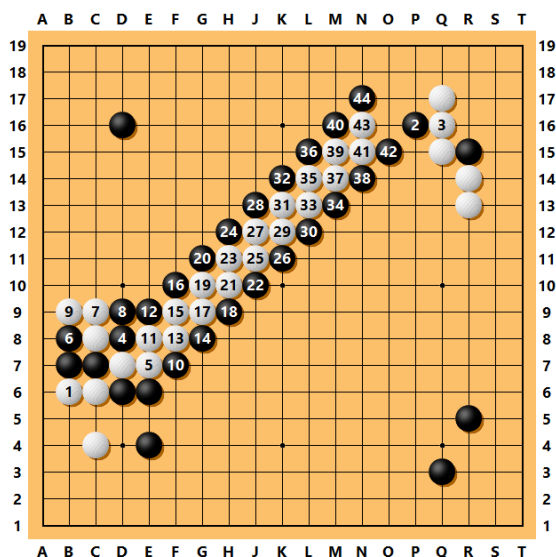


Figure 23

...and the answer is no. Black's stone traps White in a ladder.

### Example 5

The position in Figure 24 is from a professional game between (White) Xie Yimin 6P and (Black) Okuda Aya 3P in 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

White's attachment at P3 starts a common joseki pattern...

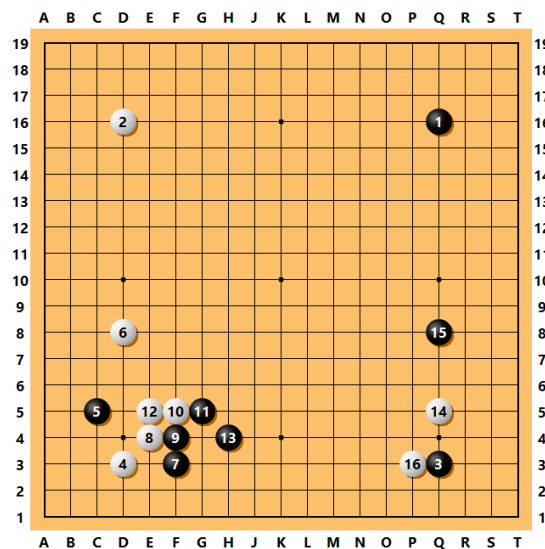


Figure 24

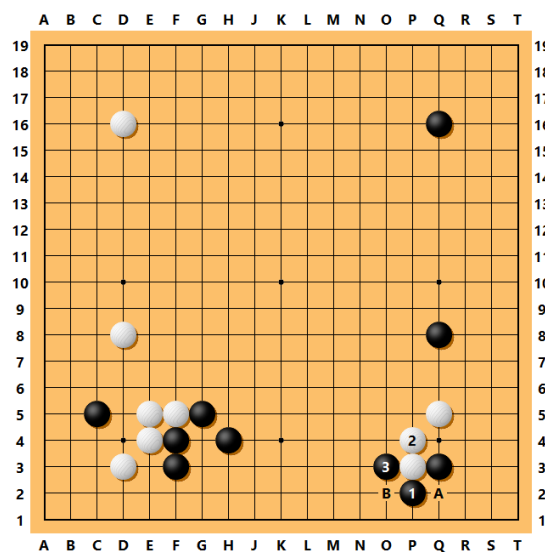


Figure 25

...Black protects the edge, White connects with 2 and locally Black has two options either 'B' or 3 as in the game.

When Black plays 3 White has two options 'B' to capture the corner or 'A' to make a position on the outside.

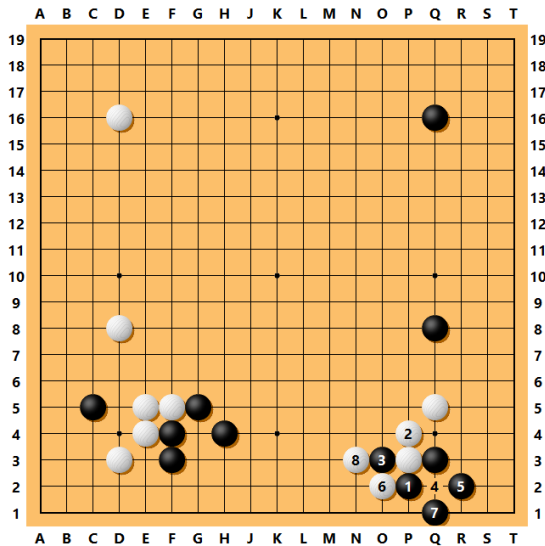


Figure 26

The ladder comes when White chooses an outside position.

White gets to capture Black 3 in a ladder. This looks like a great outcome for White. Black was first into the corner and had potential on the lower side. Black has the corner but the outside potential has been badly damaged but ladders can be a two-edged sword.

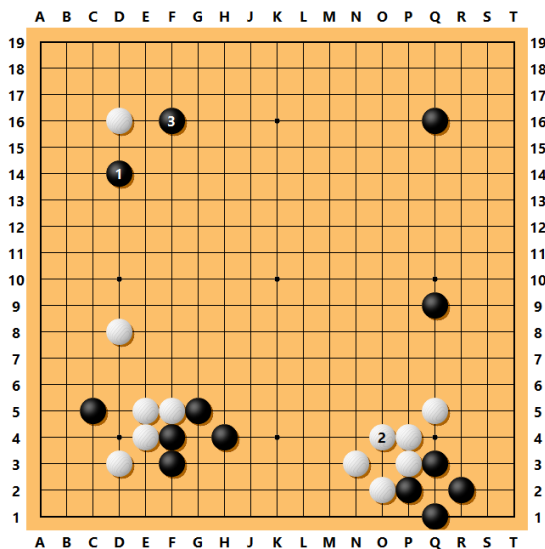


Figure 27

Black 1 at D14 in Figure 27 breaks the ladder so White is forced to capture at 2. Black can then attack with 3 causing White a lot of pain in the top left corner.

### Example 6

The sequence to 15 in Figure 28 is from a game between (White) Kajiwara Takeo 9P and (Black) Hashimoto Shoji 9P in 1975.

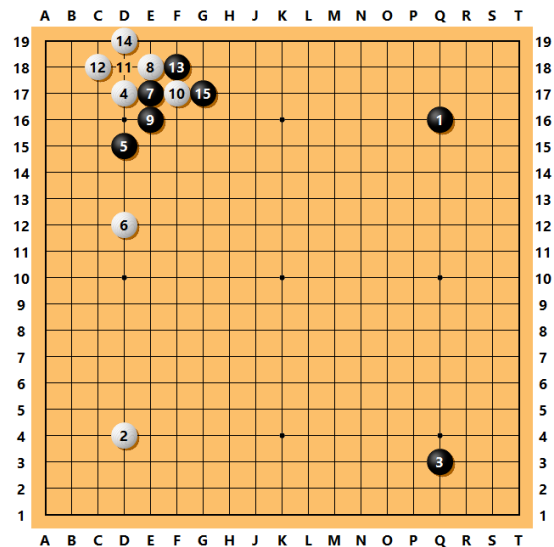


Figure 28

The joseki in the upper left is the same as the previous example so you will not be surprised to see White attack Black 3 in the lower right.

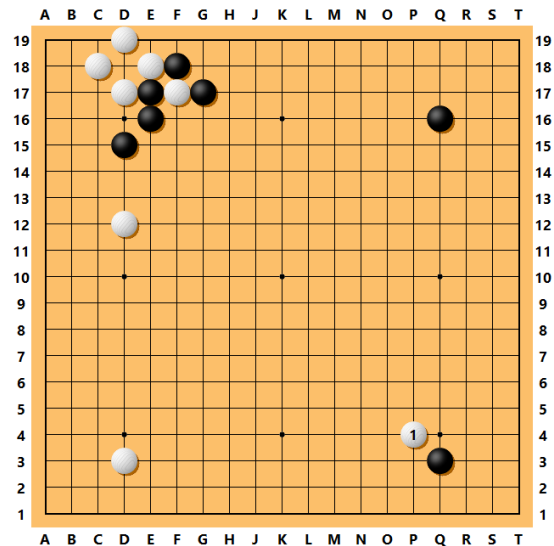


Figure 29

White 1 is severe and it appears Black's lower right corner is going to suffer but both players are renowned for their fighting spirit, so this is not exactly a surprise.



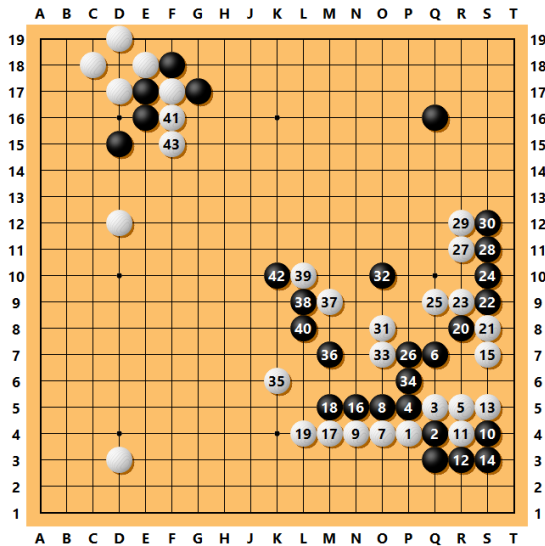


Figure 30

The sequence to 43 sees White rescue the ladderred stone but the price is the life of the group in the lower right. This is not the end of the game, White goes on to win by resignation.

Tip

Reading ladders is not easy, there are a lot of moves to calculate and diagonals are not easy to follow but there is a method that can help...

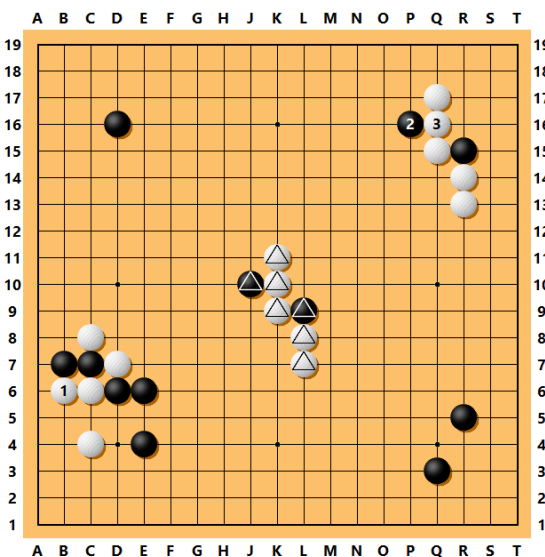


Figure 31

...try to visualise the position at the end of the ladder in the centre of the board. In Figure 31 the position in the top right is moved along the diagonal to the centre of the board.

The marked stones are the same shape as in the top right simply shifted along the diagonal. You can use the hoshi points to maintain the diagonal – in this case White 3 is on the 4x4 point so it will be on the 10x10 point.

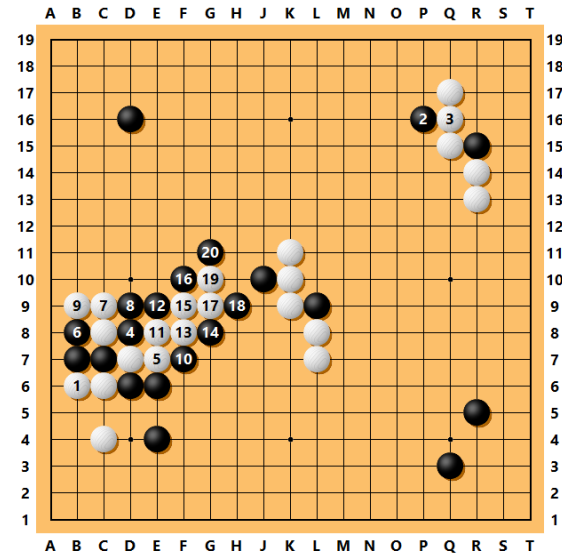


Figure 32

Once you visualise the position closer to the start of the ladder then accurately reading the outcome will be simpler and faster.