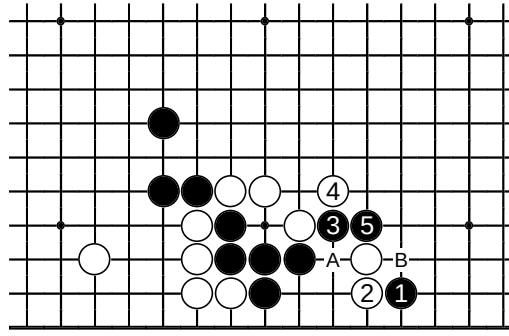
Chapter Nine Escapology

Making an exit

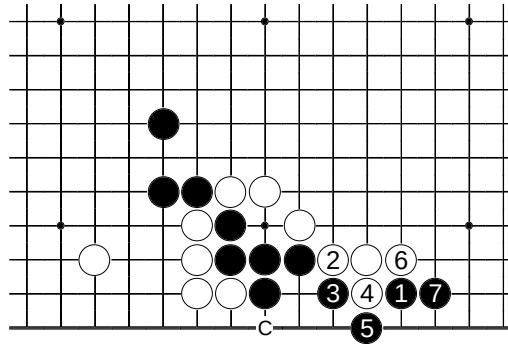
The point of view in Chapter 6 was simply to describe good shape for blocking off, and for preventing it happening to you. In the middlegame the need to escape will add another dimension.

There is more to escape than just avoiding being shut in. Escaping is about finding a way out to the centre with a weak group. If your weak group cannot escape, it may actually die. But that's not all. Being shut in normally causes at the very least a loss in endgame terms: the opponent will be able to play some moves in *sente*, since ignoring plays threatening the eye space of a group that has become shut in is normally not an option. Escaping in good style, rather than just anyhow, is a prime defensive skill.

9.1 Escape tactics

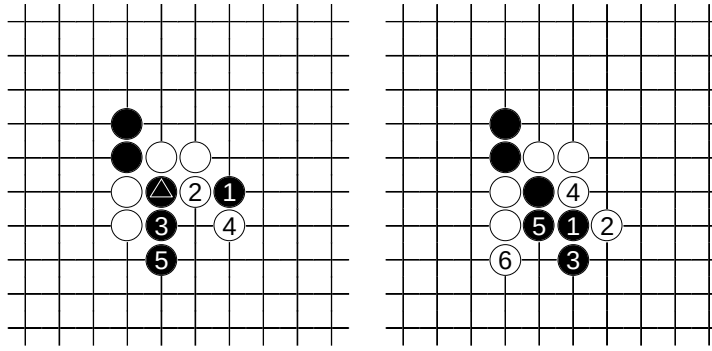


In this tight corner from 7.1, Black has an unexpected resource at 1, setting up plays at A or B to follow on from 5. There is nothing much tactical and new under the go-playing sun: this idea is in the *Guanzi Pu* (Japanese reading *Kanzufu*) published four centuries ago in China.

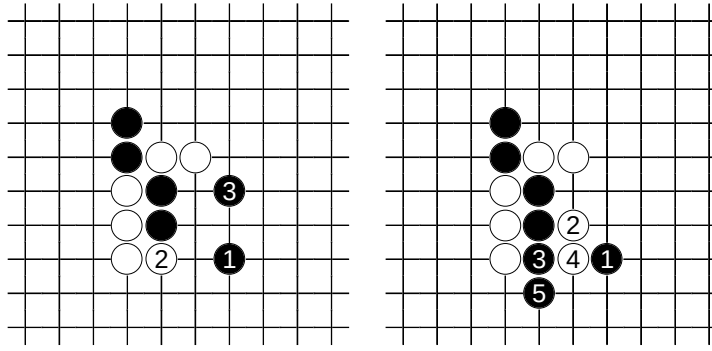


However White can let Black escape in a very low position instead. Without C Black has no eye shape. Therefore Black has little to be proud of here.

Great escapes

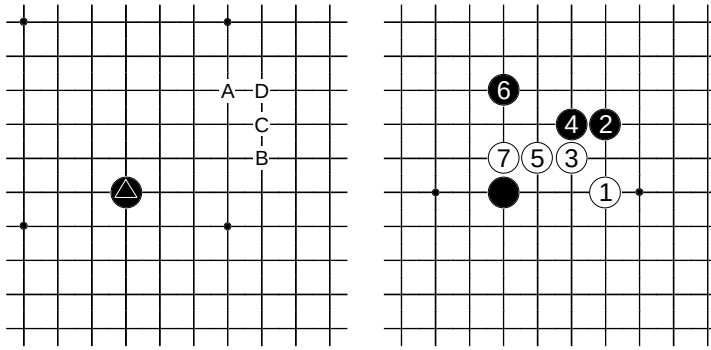


There are some stylish ideas for avoiding a net. Black 1 **(left)** is good when Black anyway is interested in moving out towards 5, weakening the stones to the left. The escape with the diagonal play **(right)** is just as bad shape, as when exactly this pattern arose in 7.6 from a push into a knight's move.

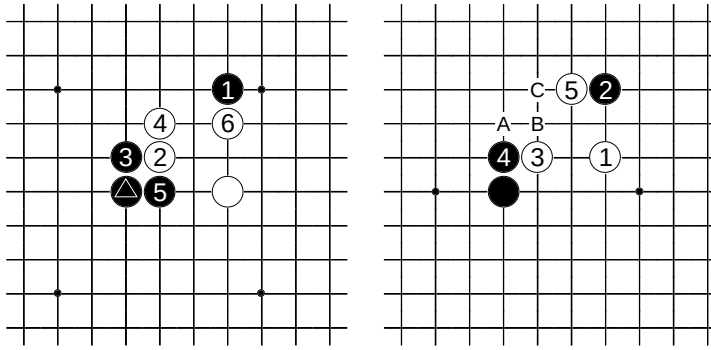


For two stones about to be netted, there is Black 1 here. **(Left)** If White 2 is the bend, Black 3 is good shape. **(Right)** As before, assume Black has taken into account White 2, and is happy with the effect of this fight. See 13.3 for some theory about this position.

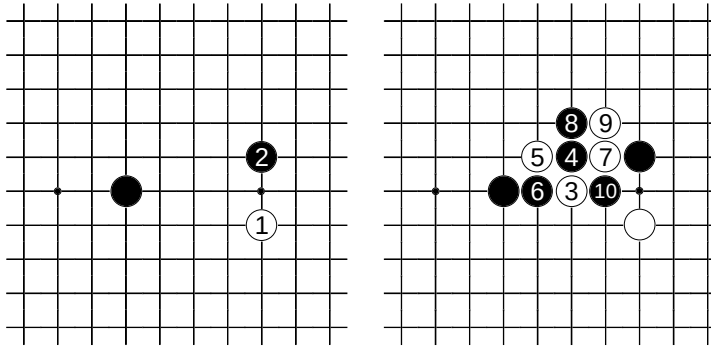
9.2 Capping plays and radius-five shapes



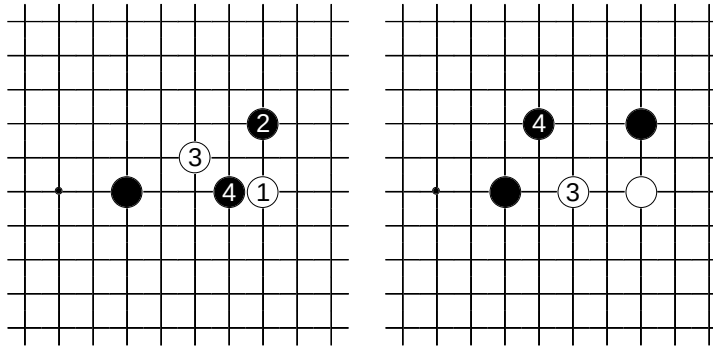
A *radius-five shape* is the combination of the marked Black stone and a play at A, B, C or D (between four and five units away). One of the standard ways to attack is to drive your opponent through a gap of this gauge. **(Right)** Narrower gaps, such as this one, invite simple plays to push out, since the Black stones on one side will end up too close.



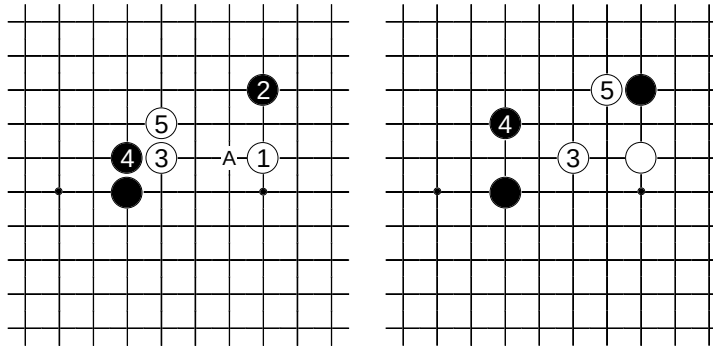
Type A. **(Left)** White emerges with good shape. **(Right)** White has no real problems with this capping play: A, B or C may do as well as 5. In these cases White's task seems easy.



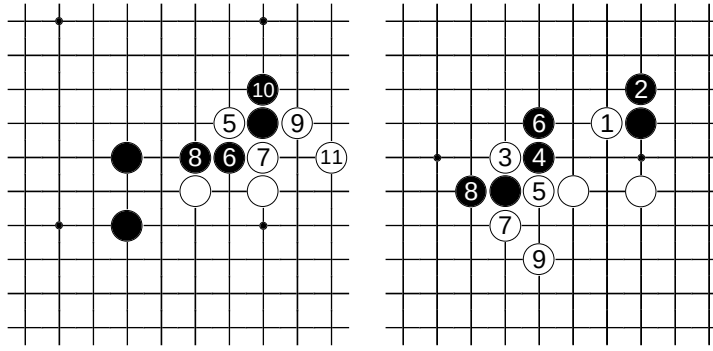
Type B. **(Left)** Maybe White came in too deep. **(Right)** White is in trouble, if this is the best than can be hoped for.



Type C fights. Black seems to have the shape advantage.

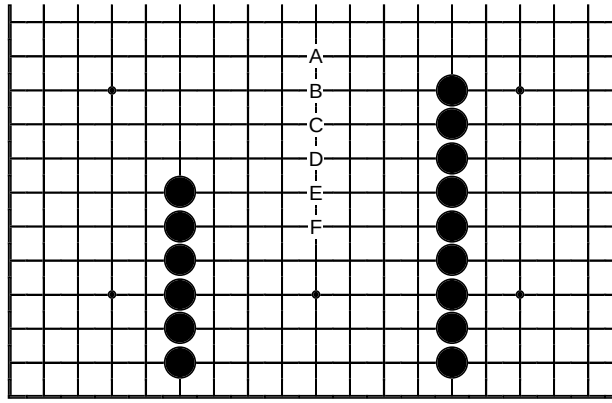


Type D fights, in which White does well, covering the cutting weakness at A in the left-hand diagram. **(Right)** Can Black resist White 5?

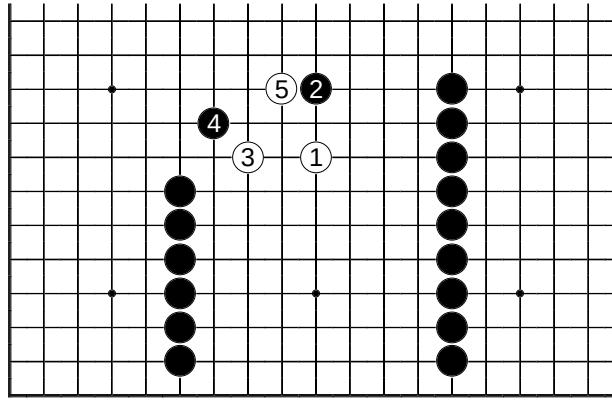


(Left) Black can indeed try the *hane* inside at 6, but it generally doesn't prevent White from developing good shape. **(Right)** In this related formation, White can usually make the two contact plays 1 and 3, to emerge in good shape (see also problems p.89). Black 4 leads to a position where White's shape is better than Black's, which has the kind of weaknesses associated with attacking too hard. These two last diagrams are examples for the *amarigatachi* concept mentioned on p.31. Black should refrain from aggressive gestures when they don't work out well.

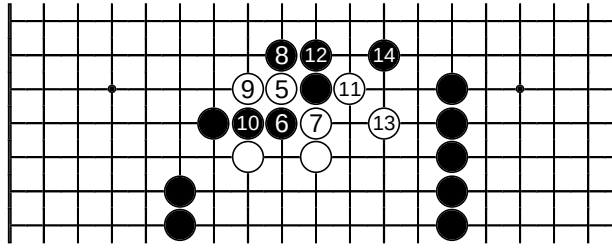
9.3 About sector lines and the mid-point



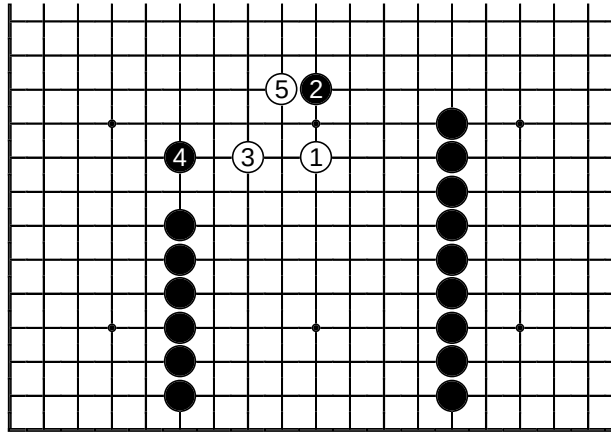
An aspect of the middlegame in which escape is very important is reduction play. This is a schematic example. Black has two perfect walls. Where should White play to reduce Black's framework? The line with the letters on is equidistant from the walls; this makes sense in terms of the proverb ***stay away from thickness***. Experience shows that point C is deep enough.



The immediate problem with D is the capping play. Here it seems that White may make an escape with 3 and 5.

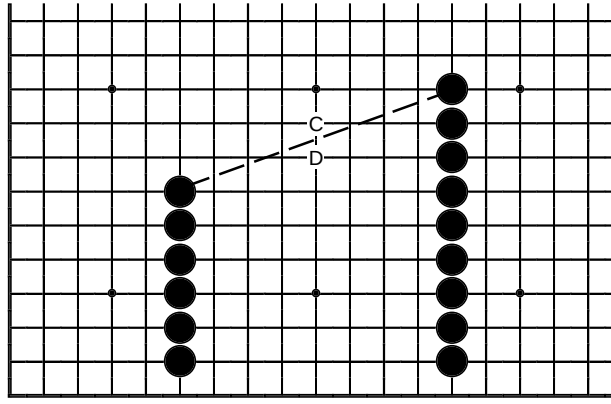


Black brings the strength of the wall on the right to bear. The combination of 8 and 10 is powerful, and it seems likely that White will die.



White's play at C is much more comfortable, when Black caps. White 1 played this deep cannot be shut in by force.

That doesn't mean that C is correct; a play at B might be sensible, with Black's walls being so perfect. There is some discussion at the end of Chapter 13 about these decisions, and counting.



Now we have drawn in the sector line (in the sense of Bruce Wilcox), joining the tops of Black's walls. It passes between points C and D. Very often the play at or just outside the mid-point of the sector line is the correct one for reduction. There are rather too many configurations to study, so this sort of rule-of-thumb may be helpful. It complements the variations listed in 9.2.

A sector line, being a line drawn between stones of the same colour, differs from the gain lines of Chapter 5. Bold escapes must cut across sector lines. There are two parts of the rule to explain. One aspect of the mid-point rule is respect for the existing lines, so when capped you need only cross freshly created ones. Looking at the central point assumes, until told otherwise, that Black's walls are equally strong. If there is a noticeable weakness in one of the walls, common sense (converse to 'stay away from thickness') says you should bias your play more to that side. (Example on p.197.)