



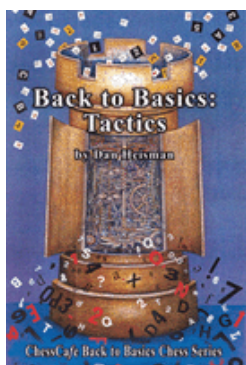
The Inadequately Guarded Piece

Quote of the Month: Nunn's Dictum: "Loose Pieces Drop Off" (LPDO)

It has been stated that loose pieces are the main features of a position that allow tactics. I call these features *The Seeds of Tactical Destruction*. There is another Seed, a close cousin to loose pieces, which, to my knowledge, has never been categorized. All players should be aware of its potential danger. Consider the following problem from *A Tactics Quiz*:

COLUMNISTS

Novice Nook Dan Heisman



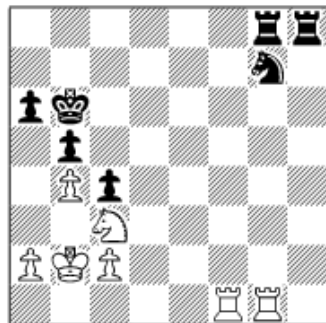
Black to Play and Win

The solution is **1...Nxb5 2.Nxb5 Qa5+** picking up the knight on g5. Key is the try **1...Qa5+** first, which is not nearly as good because of the deflection sacrifice **2.b4!**, allowing White to escape with only the loss of a pawn.

But what is the Seed here? It is not a loose piece, since the bishop on g5 is not only guarded, but seemingly safe as it is guarded as many times as it was attacked. Yet that level of protection was not sufficient to prevent a double attack, which leads us to the central safety theme:

Pieces that are guarded only as many times as they are attacked (especially by pieces of the same value) are, in many cases, no better than pieces that are "loose," that is, not guarded at all. I call a piece that is "safely" guarded only as many times as it is attacked an Inadequately Guarded Piece (IGP). In the above example the IGP is the bishop on g5.

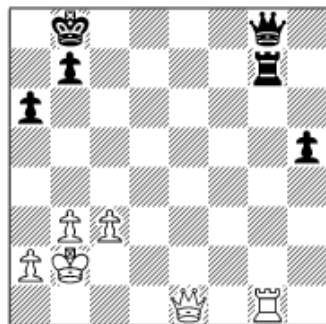
Here is another simple example:



White to Play and Win

The black knight on g7 is an IGP. White can exploit this with **1.Rf6+**. Then, after the black king retreats to the seventh rank, **2.Rf7+** will pick up the knight. Note that the reverse move order with the capture **1.Rxg7?** first does not work. This is just the opposite of the first example, where the IGP needed to be captured first in order for the combination to work. As always, the key is to analyze all possible move orders. *When capturing sequences are involved, no general principle will ever replace solid analysis.*

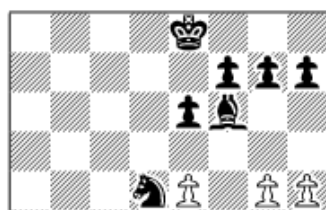
There are many possibilities for tactics involving IGP's. Here is another simple variation on this theme:



White to Play and Win

This combination involves both a double attack and a pin. The rook at g7 is an IGP. After **1.Qe5+** (the only safe check wins, always consider all your – and your opponent's – safe checks first!), Black is faced with a choice of evils: if the king moves, then **2.Qxg7** wins the rook. As pointed out in several previous Novice Nooks, capturing with the queen is usually more to the point than with a rook since White wants to offer to trade queens. On the only other possibility for escaping check, the pin on the queen becomes paramount after **1.Qe5+ Rc7** and the black queen, rook, and king are all lost after **2.Rxg8+**.

The above examples show that an IGP can be double-attacked in a manner similar to a loose piece. However, with regards to a different safety aspect, *an IGP is even more vulnerable than a loose piece*: it is also easily subjected to the removal of the guard tactic (see *The Underrated Removal of the Guard*)



White to Play and Win

The black knight may at first seem relatively safe, but it is an IGP and White simply has to ask himself the question, "Since I am attacking the knight as many times as it is defended, would it be possible to get rid

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of one of the defenders?" The answer is yes: **1.g5 Bc5 2.f4** wins a piece.

An IGP is also the basis for play around the e5-pawn in the main lines of the Ruy Lopez: **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6** guarding the pawn. **3.Bb5** Putting pressure on the defender. **3...a6** Taking advantage of the fact that capturing the knight immediately does not win the pawn, e.g. **4.Bxc6 dxc6 5.Nxe5(?) Qd4** regaining the pawn with a slight Black advantage because of the bishop-pair after **6.Nf3 Qxe4+**. **4.Ba4 Nf6 5.O-O Be7 6.Re1**

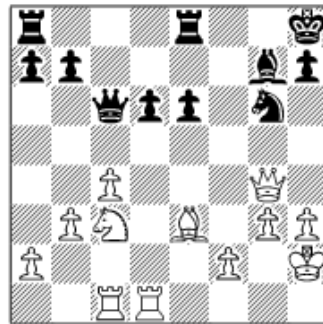
By guarding *his* e-pawn, White now threatens to win the IGP on e5:



Black to Play

6...O-O? A common mistake by beginners who think the e5-pawn is safe. **7.Bxc6** removing the guard **7...dxc6 8.Nxe5** wins the pawn, e.g. **8...Qd4 9.Nf3** remains a pawn ahead. Instead, Black should remedy the e-pawn's IGP status by playing the safe **6...b5**.

Let's see how the IGP removal of the guard theme cost one of my students a game:



White to Play

White is ahead a pawn with a good game, but Black is threatening **1...Ne5**, which not only attacks the queen, but also threatens **2...Nf3+** with further discovered checks. This is a "big" offensive pattern for Black, which is helpful for everyone to recognize, and here is best thwarted by the simple and logical **1.Qe4!** This move would not only stop the threat, but

is exactly the kind of strategic move you want to play when ahead: White puts Black between a rock and a hard place: *retreat to a lesser square or make an unfavorable trade*. Notice that after **1.Qe4**, the removal of the guard **1...Bxc3** fails to the correct move order **2.Qxc6 bxc6 3.Rxc3**, but not the disastrous **2.Rxc3?? Qxe4**. One has to check such variations *before* playing **1.Qe4**, or you are putting strategy before tactical soundness, and such carelessness is often fatal.

However, in the game White did not recognize the danger and aggravated the situation by creating an IGP with **1.Ne4?**



Black to Play

This move blocks the diagonal, but makes the defense of the IGP (the knight) a problem. Notice that White made this move on general principles "I wanted to move my knight closer to his king to help checkmate" (viewing just the pattern **Ng5, Qh5, and Qxh7#**) and not with additional analysis that would show whether it was safe or not. I have dubbed this lack of a safety check for possible opponent replies "Hope Chess" – a common problem among intermediate players, as it gives the opponent a chance to make a threat that cannot be met. Now Black has the opportunity to harass the knight's defender, the white queen, whose options are severely limited because of the new constraint of continuing to guard the knight.

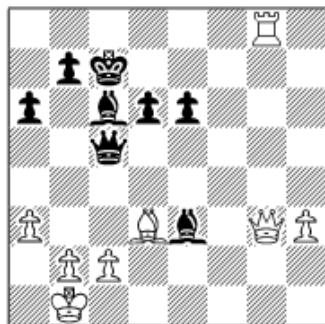
Black correctly put his finger on the problem with **1...Ne5**.



White to Play

This move attacks the queen and attempts to remove the guard. White is now much worse, and would have had a difficult time saving the game even if he had found the tricky best defense: **2.Qf4! Rf8 3.Rxd6!**. Instead, White was shocked by going from being ahead a pawn and on the offense to desperation (one bad move can do that to you), and completely collapsed, losing his queen after **2.Qh4?? Nf3+**. The strain of the IGP cost him the game in one move!

IGP's are not limited to non-masters who don't know recognize the danger; sometimes they are unavoidable and thus occur in games at any level. In the following GM game, the IGP is the bishop on e3.

**White to Play**

Kamsky is ahead the exchange for the bishop-pair (roughly worth slightly more than a pawn equivalent) and would like to trade queens so his rook can more easily shepherd the outside passed h-pawn. That does not look likely unless you find the move that I thought Kamsky would play – and did: **1.b4!** The idea is that the queen has no good square to guard the bishop. For example, **1...Qb6** blocks the king's escape square and allows a dangerous pin after **2.Qg7+ Bd7**. Rybka then calculates **3.Qf6** – targeting d8 – with a fairly easy win. The alternative retreat **1...Qa7** would result in the queen blocked out of the game after **2.Qg7+ Kb6** (while **2...Bd7** is again a very dangerous pin; Rybka gives **3.Qc3+** winning easily). Therefore, Black played **1...Qd4**, but this allowed **2.Qg7+** with the desired trade of queens. Kamsky went on to win the game

and eventually the World Cup, setting up a 2008 match with Topalov. The winner of that match will challenge the Anand-Kramnik 2008 match winner for the World Championship in 2009.

The following instructive position occurred in a promising young student's recent *Team 4545* Internet game:

**White to Play**

My student is playing White, and he can capture on e4, winning a pawn.

A good guideline for capturing on squares that are multiply attacked and defended is "*All other safety issues being equal, capture with the piece that is most likely to be removed as a guard*" so that the remaining defenders are the ones harder to remove.

Therefore, it follows that White should probably play **1.N5xe4**, because **1.N3xe4** allows **...h6**, losing a defender for e4. However, there is a reason that we call chess advice like this a guideline or principle and not a rule: in this position the principle does not lead to the best move. Here

it turns out the tactics (such as a possible fork on f7) favor capturing with the knight on g3, instead of the one on g5. *In situations where there are multiple attackers and multiple defenders all capturing sequences must be considered*, as disaster periodically befalls those who make such moves without careful analysis of their safety.

White decided to play **1.N5xe4(?)** creating an IGP on e4: it is defended twice via the knight on g3 and the queen on b4, attacked twice by the black knights. Normally a capture to win a pawn, even if it creates an IGP, might be lauded as the only way to win material, assuming the IGP is not sufficiently vulnerable. However, in this situation, can you see how Black can cleverly take advantage with either a double attack or a removal of the guard?

**Black to Play**

Black played the thematic **1...a5!** The idea is to squeeze the queen which, like its counterpart in the previous example, is hampered by the need to continually protect the knight. After **2.Qa4**, then **2...b5!** continued the removal of the guard attempt. Luckily for White he was able to avoid losing the knight by now playing **3.Qc2** (if this were a problem instead of a real game, I would have blocked access to this square so that the knight would have been lost). However, the awkward position of the white forces allowed Black to maintain the balance with **3...Nfxe4** **4.Nxe4 Bf5** with a pin and enough initiative to eventually regain his pawn with possibilities for further attack: **5.f3 Bxe4 6.fxe4 Rxf1+ 7.Kxf1** and now, instead of **7...Qh4** as played in the game, Rybka prefers **7...Qe7**. Although disaster had been averted, White's incorrect capture

creating an IGP cost him a chance at the advantage, and continuing weaknesses and some black initiative later resulted in a loss for White.

In addition to allowing double attacks and removal of the guard, there is one final reason why IGP's are dangerous: they give their owner an unjustified sense of security. As USCF Expert Brian Karen pointed out, IGP's are also more likely than loose pieces to be subject to tactics because they *are* guarded. Therefore, psychologically, the defender is more likely to let his guard down, too.

I've heard the observation that Kasparov usually arranged to have his pieces guarded at least twice (or, perhaps more accurately, at least one more time than they could be attacked). Now you know why...

Tip of the month: When playing online, *never choose a time limit where you don't want to take almost all your time*. For example, if you feel like playing fast, why play a slow time control and thus effectively give your opponent a handicap? If you want to play fast, choose a fast time control. If you chose a slow time control, then, as always, try to finish your game with very little time on your clock. To do otherwise would not be trying your best, and that is a bad habit to break.

Dan welcomes readers' questions; he is a full-time instructor on the ICC as Phillytutor.

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