



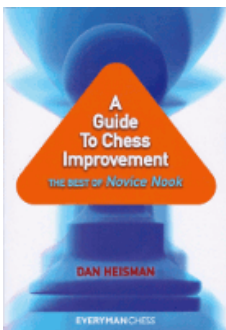
## SKITTLES ROOM

### From the Archives

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## From the Archives...

Since it came online in 1996, [ChessCafe.com](#) has presented thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. This high quality material remains available in the [ChessCafe.com Archives](#). However, we decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the [ChessCafe.com](#) home page whenever there has been a "new" item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

[ChessCafe.com](#) is pleased to present the first contribution by American Master Dan Heisman. He is the author of two chess books, [Elements of Positional Evaluation](#) and [The Improving Annotator](#); a third book is scheduled for November publication. He currently works as a full-time chess instructor.

## The Secrets to "Real" Chess

by Dan Heisman

Recently a student of mine, rated 1100 (a good high school player), played a tournament in which his playing strength was 1900 (!) for six rounds. He beat four players higher rated than anyone he had ever beaten before.

As a chess full-time instructor, I was very intrigued as to what had caused this sudden great jump in playing strength. Could it be attributed to random chance or just "having a good tournament"? I gave this question considerable thought, weighing the possible reasons against many of the theories I had been teaching my students. I finally rejected the "good tournament" idea, even though I am sure that had a part in it. Instead, I created a two-part explanation that should be of interest to players rated under 1800 who wish to improve their game!

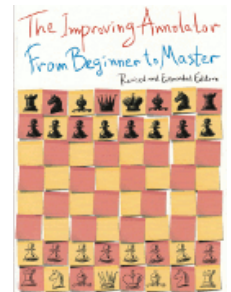
### Three Levels of Thinking

The first part requires a description of three levels of thinking chess players use to decide a chess move. The ascendancy through these levels reflect the maturing of a chess player due to both age and experience.

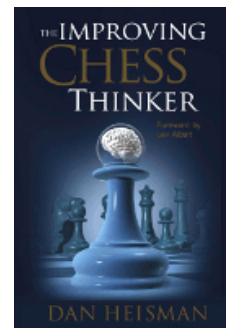
"**FLIP-COIN**" Chess – A move is played quickly and without serious thought. The winner of a game where both players are playing Flip-coin chess is almost random, and thus I named it after a coin flip. If one player plays Flip-coin chess and the other actually takes time to think, the thoughtful player almost always wins. Flip-coin players don't use the important guideline "If you see a good move, look for a better one." Almost all young beginners start by playing Flip-coin chess; they really aren't interested in playing a serious game.

It is difficult to give an example of Flip-coin chess because there is really not much logic to it. The following is taken from my upcoming book, *Everyone's 2nd Chess Book*, due to be published by Thinker's Press in November:

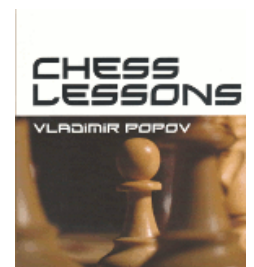
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[The Improving Annotator](#)  
by Dan Heisman



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[FEN "r1bq2kr/pp2ppbp/5np1/4B3/6P1/2P5/P2N1P1P/R2QKB1R b KQ - 0 12"]

White was rated about 500, Black 1000.

### 12...Bxg4 13.Bg2??

White doesn't see that his queen is attacked. This goes right under the lesson about the mistaken logic "If his piece is doing one thing, it probably isn't doing another." White reasoned, "The bishop went to g4 to take my pawn. So I know the purpose of that move. Now I can go ahead and look at what I should do." Wrong!

**"HOPE" Chess** – This is *not* when you make a move and hope your opponent doesn't see your threat. Instead, Hope chess is when you make a move and don't look at what your opponent might threaten on his next move, and whether you can meet that threat on your next move. Instead, you just wait until next move and see what he does, and then hope you can meet any threats. In my first three tournaments I played Hope chess and never won more than one game in any of the three. The speed at which you can play Hope chess also explains why I usually took only about half an hour for each game in these tournaments, even though the time control was fifty moves in two hours. Most high school level players play hope chess, but almost always lose when they run into a serious player who plays "Real Chess."

The following example is obviously made up, but it is a good example of Hope Chess and one that many scholastic chess coaches will probably find depressingly familiar:



[FEN "r1b2rk1/pp3p1p/2n1pPp1/lq6/8/1P5P/5PP1/2Q3K1 b - - 0 12"]

### 12...Qxb3???

Black isn't really looking for what White might do to him; he is just waiting to see what White will do and hoping he will be able to stop it. This violates two of my most important principles for beginners:

1. Look for your opponent's checks, captures, and threats.
2. The more you are winning, the more you need to think defense first.  
Black doesn't need another pawn. He only had to see and stop that one White threat.

### 13.Qh6

And the hope was in vain; there is no defense to the mate in one, other than a few spite checks.

**"REAL" Chess** – You select candidate moves and, for each, you anticipate and evaluate all your opponent's main candidate moves (especially all checks, captures, and threats). If you see a threat you cannot meet, you almost undoubtedly cannot play that candidate move; instead, you must choose a candidate move that allows you to meet all threats next move. One goal of real chess is to anticipate each of your opponent's moves – if you have a good opponent and he makes a move you hadn't even considered, that is not a good sign! This anticipation takes some time and real effort, so all good chess players take their time! Next time you go to a big tournament, notice how the best players use their time.

As I mentioned above, improving players tend to mature through the process: Flip-coin, Hope, Real. Some players never get to "Real" because it requires a certain amount of work which they do not think is fun.

### **A Chain is Only As Strong As Its Weakest Link**

The best way to introduce the second part of my explanation is to make an analogy. Suppose you build a home where the temperature is minus twenty degrees outside. You decide on a one-room home with four walls, a roof, a floor, and a heater. You decide to save a little time and material by finishing the four walls, the floor, and half the roof, but the other half you leave open. Even though you have completed over ninety percent of the structure, the temperature inside your home will still be about minus twenty degrees with half your roof open. If you want your inside heater to be effective, you have to enclose all of your home.

The cold home analogy is similar to what happens when you play Real chess for ninety percent of your moves, but not for the other ten. You think you are a good player, but weaker players beat you when you let down your guard for that ten percent. In order to be a good player, you have to at least try to play correctly on every move, not just most of them. Consistency is important: remember that your chain of moves, in many cases, is only as strong as the weakest link.

As an example, my son Delen, who was rated in the 1300s, was playing in the World Open in Philadelphia last year. He won his first four games in the Under 1400 section (a section for intermediate to weak club players) and was doing well until around the seventh round. He was playing another 1300 player and outplaying him up and down the board for the first fifty moves. He had an easily won endgame, up the exchange and a couple of pawns. All of a sudden his opponent checked him and, even though he was in no time trouble, Delen immediately moved to a square where his opponent could then fork his king and a rook, thus losing the rook and the game. Master dad almost had apoplexy, "How can you play like an 1800 player for fifty moves and then like a 400 (beginning) player for one, throwing the whole game away?!" My son replied, "I can't work hard on every move; it's too much effort!" Aaagh! This is akin to working on a beautiful painting for three weeks and then suddenly getting in a bad mood and throwing paint all over it!

This also explains why you often run into so many people who just lost to a higher rated player and say, "I know I am better than him, but he beat me and he has a higher rating than I do; I just don't understand it." A player might be more talented and more knowledgeable than another player, but be lower rated if the other player plays to his maximum strength on almost all of his moves, but he doesn't. This lack of consistency could be due to stamina, maturity, temperament, age, fighting spirit, or several other factors.

Now you have all the information as to why the 1100 player had a 1900 tournament:

- He knew about Real chess thinking, but until that tournament was still often playing Hope chess.
- He finally realized that, in order to beat much higher rated players, he needed to play Real chess on every move, and not just on most of the

moves. So, like the cold weather home, when you don't play Real chess on every move, there is a dramatic difference in your rating.

My explanation is more than just a theory about this player's performance. I explained it to my student and ask him if it applied to his performance, or did he feel that I was way off the mark. He replied that it was pretty much a good explanation of what had happened. In the next tournament, he continued to play very well, so we are pretty sure he is now playing Real chess.

So that is the secret of Real chess – you must

1. Make sure that your think deep enough (three ply) to ensure that you can make it to the next move without facing threats you cannot meet.
2. Do this every move, not just most of them.

Can this "secret" take you from 1800 to 2400? Of course not. As any high rated player knows, there is a lot more to chess than just trying hard, taking your time, and looking for your opponent's threats every move. But not playing Real chess can keep your rating a lot closer to 1000 than to 2000.

The author invites comments about this article.

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