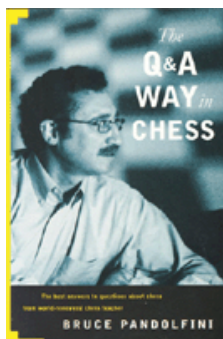




COLUMNISTS

The Q & A Way

Bruce Pandolfini



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Think of the Whole

Question I have been playing chess for a long time. My step-father at the time showed me how the pieces move and the rest I taught myself. I have big problems with my game. I usually have a good beginning in chess but my middle and ending is not that good. I find out in the middle that I sometimes make stupid mistakes. I might get lucky and find it out in time. But when I find myself winning I stalemate most of the time, even with people I know I can beat. So I was just wondering how I could fix this problem. I did get Chessmaster Grandmaster Edition to see if this will help me. It did a little. But when I play it I can put it on a harder setting and hold my own but still lose. But I can play it on very easy and lose because of my middle and endgame. **Emanuel Alcaraz (USA)**

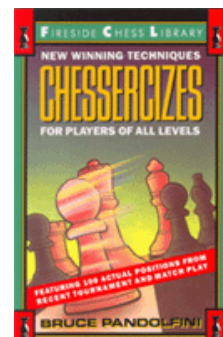
Answer Let me applaud you for attempting to learn chess on your own and becoming reasonably proficient at it. That you should experience trouble with the middlegame and endgame is fairly typical. These areas can't be perfunctorily absorbed as easily as the opening, where we always start with the same position. This constant setup and repetition makes the possibility of committing some of the fundamentals to memory much greater. So it's not so much that we tend to understand the opening phase better, it's that we convince ourselves we understand it better merely because we're slightly more familiar with it, having seen some of the same moves over and over. We may not, however, necessarily play the opening with any more perception and grasp than we do the other two less frequented phases. Rather, within a narrow range, we probably play all three phases at about the same roughly approximate level.

While it may be true that you often seem to be making mistakes in the middlegame, some of these errors may result from faulty execution of opening lines that lead to problems a number of moves later. In selecting certain move orders, in misevaluating superficial opportunities and potential threats, it's natural not even to consider the connection between earlier ideas and subsequent ramifications. Losing a piece in the middlegame, for instance, even if it's an outright blunder, could have been affected by the pressure generated against us after we chose moves and lines conducive to slip-ups.

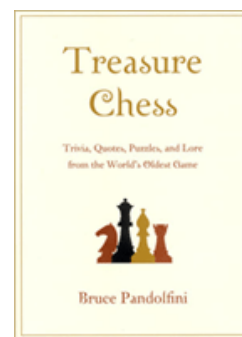
From your question it also appears that you're throwing away many wins, if I understand you correctly, by falling into stalemate. This suggests a number of things: first, that you may be making too many queens, or unnecessarily gobbling up enemy pieces and pawns before heading directly to checkmate; second, that you don't yet have down basic winning techniques; third, that you may be moving too quickly, especially at critical junctures; fourth, that you are not analyzing positions with confidence, and therefore wind up overlooking impending dangers and pitfalls; and fifth, you therefore aren't planning wisely or maybe at all. There are other possibilities, but let's just attend to these and try to draw up some understanding and plan of action, as surface based as it might be.

None of these problems can be solved for sure by dint of any particular effort. But all of them can be relieved and lessened by approaching chess study differently. Instead of imputing the problem to possible oversights in the middlegame and endgame, why not see the game more organically, trying to take it all in as a whole? Thus, in your opening work, in addition to assimilating specific variations to obtain reasonable positions, try to learn something about the middlegames and endgames likely to ensue

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from those opening lines. To this end it makes sense to think in terms of pawn structures, piece placements around those configurations, and appropriate plans for those setups as they apply in all three phases.

There are wonderful treatises that could prove helpful here. They start you in the beginning and take you relevantly to the final stage. Edmar Mednis's *From the Opening to the Endgame*, as well as his *From Middlegame to Endgame*, emphasize the oneness of the project and are a great place to begin. But there are plenty of other works that might do just as nicely, which could be checked out on the USCFSales.com online catalog. The Chessmaster DVD you've gotten is superb, and you should go back to it again and again. But you might also consider the excellent DVD offerings of grandmaster Roman Dzindzichashvili, *Roman's Lab: Mastering Chess Series*. He has quite a number of volumes and they make an effective instructional package. For game annotated collections, there are a huge number of possibilities. If you want to get a comprehensive take on the history of chess ideas, and do so with power and contemporary feel, you can't do better than Garry Kasparov's outstanding series *My Great Predecessors*. The five volume set constitutes, without doubt, one of the finest achievements ever in the presentation of the game's theory and application. Kasparov probably should be given a special award for putting it all together.

As a final word, let me suggest that you may not be paying enough attention to opposing threats and plans. Consequently, you're simply going to have to get more practice at analyzing positions and making apt decisions. It's likely you need to calculate more in training sessions, especially without moving the pieces. I'm certain it would also help to solve simple tactical problems on a regular basis, say at least ten or twenty every night. You might have other things to do, of course, so like a chess player, you're going to have to figure out how to do them all without overstepping on the clock. I wish you well in this endeavor.

Question I "think" I have often heard chess described as an art. Other people I know say it is a science. I "think" you have to be good in mathematics to play chess at a high level, and most scientists use math. But I also "think" that musicians play chess very well, and music is more like an art. Doesn't this prove that chess is both an art and science? Don't you also "think" that you have to be highly intelligent to play chess well? Aren't world champs intelligent? You never see a moron or imbecile playing chess, do you? **Tony Andrews (USA)**

Answer What? It doesn't prove any of that at all. I'm not sure what it proves, other than a need for you to "think" about it some more – no, a lot more. There are mathematicians, musicians, and scientists who puke at chess. And while every world chess champion has incredible intelligence, I've known and have seen my share of morons and imbeciles who can indeed play chess. I "think" in my time I may have encountered a few chess-playing idiots too.

While your question is not entirely a big one, it's too extended to tackle with my deadline approaching, so let's stay with one aspect of it: that portion dealing with chess as an art. Few serious chess players doubt that chess is artistic. "Think" of the language typically used to describe the game: economy of force, elegant solutions, brilliant moves and combinations, simplicity of means, and so many other terms, ideas, and expressions exude the aesthetic. "Think" of the game's beauty, its splendid patterns. "Think" of its harmony and balance, its surprising solutions and truths. Furthermore, as with the musical arts, accomplished performance requires repeated practice until it becomes intuitive. "Think" also what happens when a chess position seems on the verge of petering out. The chess artist can often find a way to turn the game on its head, so that the commonplace is suddenly seen as beautiful, and glorious new schemes emerge out of nowhere. I'm not a chess artist, but I'm beginning to get intrigued by the next question, and so I "think" I too must turn things a bit and move on.

Question How many ways can an *en passant* move? If my pawn is on a2, and the enemy's pawn goes to b3, and my a2 goes to a4, is that an *en passant*? **Karen Simmons (USA)**

Answer No, it's not, unless they've redefined the meaning of *en passant* and I'm simply too old to realize I'm getting old. At the risk of losing half my already dwindling readership, please allow me to go over the rule. *en passant* refers to a certain kind of pawn capture, where a pawn takes another pawn.

If you have a pawn on your fifth rank; and your opponent has an unmoved pawn on an adjacent file; and your opponent then moves the adjacent pawn two squares (as if he or she were trying to avoid being captured); you may "pretend" the opposing pawn had moved only one square, capturing it as if it had moved only one square. There are some other details regarding *en passant* that you may want to become acquainted with, and you can do so by checking them out online or in hundreds of introductory books. But please never treat *en passant* as an entity experiencing a move, even if doing so suggests a moving experience.

Question What is the proper pronunciation for fianchetto? Is it "fee-ann-KETT-oh" or "fee-ann-CHETT-oh?" **Gene Milener (USA)**

Answer If you're an Italian, and you're speaking to someone about developing a bishop on the flank, you'd go with the first listing, "fee-ann-KETT-oh." If you're not an Italian, however, especially if you come from anywhere else in the solar system, and you're still thinking about that flank development, you probably should go with "fee-ann-KETT-oh." So you see you have some leeway.

Question I have been having problems with my tactics in the middlegame and endgame and so I have wanted to improve in those areas. I "hang" pieces and overlook simple tactics and mates and ways to win. I was at a tournament and was able to purchase from a friendly vendor three books to help me in those areas. The vendor seemed to be enthusiastic and helpful and the books looked interesting. I was rushed and didn't know when I would have another opportunity to get such items and so I bought them. One is *American Chess Art* by Walter Korn. The other is *The Chess Endgame Study* by A.J. Roycroft. The last one is *How to Solve Chess Problems* by Kenneth Howard. When I got home and began to read them I couldn't get much out of them. They did not relate to the tactical problems I was having. But I'm confused because the books seemed to be about what I needed to learn. Can you make any suggestions or tell me where to go for help? **Daniel Fine (USA)**

Answer If I weren't in a good mood (actually, I'm not so certain I am), I'd tell the friendly vendor where to go. He obviously didn't pay any attention to you or simply didn't care. The books you've purchased, while all very good, deal with chess compositions. They represent the highest form of chess art, but they do not present typical over-the-board situations. You need to get a book or two, or a piece of software, providing examples of forks, pins, mating nets, and such. The number of books and DVDs at your disposal pertaining here is probably legion. As an example, and I don't want to go on until it's time for next month's column, just about any of the works by Fred Wilson and Bruce Alberston should be satisfactory, but there are so many good offerings you can hardly go wrong. Just go to the online USCFSales.com catalog, or to any other respectable chess online service, and take a look at what they have to offer. It will be fun, and you'll be surprised at all the marvelous texts out there. But be careful you don't once again purchase a work on chess compositions, and don't buy anything from that friendly vendor.

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

What is your favorite composed chess problem?

Reader's Responses from Last Month

We received many responses to the [October](#) question of the month:

Which style of play do you prefer, Anand's or Kramnik's?

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

Mikkel Andreassen (Denmark) writes: Well that's an easy question. Anand's style of play is what I prefer. I would call his style universal attacking. He embodies pretty much every aspect of the game: strategic, positional and tactical. He has always been famous for his fast thinking abilities and tactical vision, but in his later years he has developed the other aspects of the game as well I think. A more simple way of summing up Anand's and Kramnik's differences would be to say that Anand likes to play the game with queens on, Kramnik doesn't! And who doesn't like the queen?

Zak Smith (USA) writes: I much prefer the play of Anand. I will outline three reasons:

- Fighting Spirit
- Tactics
- Aesthetic impressions

First off, I am an attacking player, and so the top two reasons are "Fight" and "Tactics." I think they interchange, in that the more tactical games you play (i.e. Shirov, Morozevich, Kasparov, and who can forget Tal), the more "fighting spirit" you tend to have. So what is fighting spirit? (Aside from the biggest philosophical question in chess.) I would say that on any given day if you came up to Kramnik, Anand, Kasparov, Karpov, or even myself, and asked, "Would you like to win, lose, or draw?", you would get the exact same response from each of us, "win." However, fighting spirit is in my mind the lengths that a player is willing to go to find a position that contains winning chances, even if this position also contains winning chances for the opponent, and is unclear. As evidenced by the openings chosen by both competitors during the recent World Championship Match, Anand wins in fighting spirit. (Incidentally, he also tends to play more tactically oriented positions, which I like.)

As far as aesthetic impressions go, I am also in favor of Anand, but admittedly only slightly. Anand creates the impression of fierceness, which brings about excitement in the kibitzer. However, to be able to squeeze someone as Kramnik can is also a feat, and one which brings about its own sort of awe. It was the match against Kasparov wherein I lost a great deal of respect for Kramnik as far as aestheticism goes. His overall strategy of queen exchange and complicated middlegame took away some of the most beautiful portions of chess (attack and defense of the king) completely, merely for a match strategy. I will concede that it was effective, but in my mind it will always go down as "wuss chess," and leave a bad taste. My attempt to be concise was a complete failure, yet I hope at least I was understandable. Go Anand!!

(BP – Two very nice answers, and based on results of the match, they apparently knew what they were talking about.)

The Q & A Way is based in large part on readers' questions. Do you have a question about preparation, strategy or tactics? Submit your questions (with you full name and country of residence please) and perhaps Bruce will reply in his next [ChessCafe.com](#) column...

[Yes, I have a question for Bruce!](#)

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