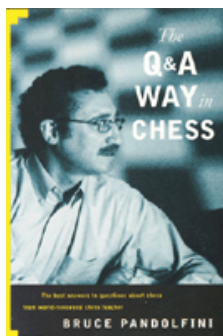




## COLUMNISTS

The Q & A  
Way

Bruce Pandolfini



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## Think of the Whole

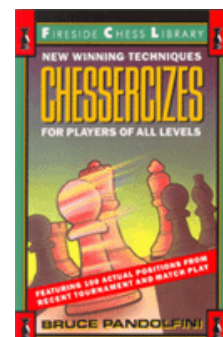
**Question** As a divorced parent with a second-grader involved in chess I am very concerned with a particular issue. Recently my son took on a chess coach. The coach had appeared reliable. He would accompany us to chess tournaments. At these tournaments he would analyze the games after they were played and offer advice for the next round. The coach is a very popular one and he has many other students as well. Some of these students are special players. An unfortunate situation developed not too long ago. My son had to play an important game against another one of this coach's students. It seemed to me that in the past when the two boys were together the coach always favored the other student. (Believe me, I know I am right.) I suspect that he may have advised the other student on how to beat my son, though I have no proof, I just know, as I am sure you can understand (I have seen Searching for Bobby Fischer several times). It was traumatic and my son doesn't want to see the coach ever again. He feels cheated. I feel the same way and betrayed at the same time. He may even give up chess. Does this kind of thing ever happen to you, where you have two students facing each other? If so, how would you handle it? Do you think I did the proper thing, cutting off relations with this deceitful coach? (I pay him handsomely.) I would like to know what you think. **Max Robert (USA)**

**Answer** I'm sorry to hear that you "feel" your coach may have slighted you and your son. The circumstances you've described and the feelings attending them actually happen quite often. Many times I've had students confront each other in key games. The rule I have always followed when conflicts have arisen is not to help either student beforehand, regardless what my personal feelings might be. (No matter how objective one tries to be, it's hard not to have more affinity for certain students and their parents.) Even so, if a coach is to come through with any integrity, he or she must be impartial and evenhanded in these instances.

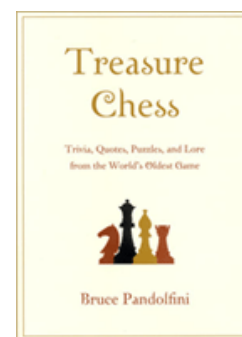
What I do is essentially this. When it's clear that two of my students might face each other, I bring everyone together, students, parents, and/or attendants. I then go over the situation, saying that out of fairness I can't help either youngster. But that's okay because they both then know that neither player is getting preparation and no one has an outside advantage. They're entirely on their own, and that's a good thing. The state of affairs should be viewed as opportunity, a rite of passage enabling the contestants to draw on their inner resources for growth as chess players and human beings. I make it clear that it will give them vital practice at learning how to stand on their own two feet, as they must daily do for the rest of their lives. I wish them both "good luck," tell them to shake hands, and assure them that we can all examine the game together after it's over. I won't pretend that this is copacetic with every child and parent. To be sure, some people never get over it. Still, to me it's the only fair and just thing to do, and, with some minor variations, that's what I've always done.

But I must say it's not at all evident that the coach you refer to has done anything wrong. Maybe he or she has, but it doesn't seem that you have any direct confirmation that this is what happened: that the coach aided the other player to beat your son. Probably you should have been upfront with the teacher, expressing your concerns so that you could get his or her actual take on the situation, before it happened and afterward. Naturally, you want to protect your son, and a good way to do that is to instill in him

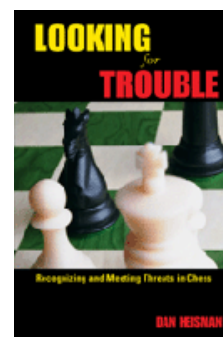
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a basic sense for justice, objectivity, and fair-mindedness by treating others the way you'd like to be treated. He will see your proper behavior and learn to act and judge in the same reasonable manner. Be guided by prejudice, however, and the only thing he's likely to learn is that the Golden Rule doesn't apply to him or you.

**Question** After playing chess for more than ten years, there is one question that is still not clear for me. Why is 2.c4 so popular after 1.d4 d5, and 2.f4 is not after 1.e4 e5? **Eduardo S. Benazzi (Brazil)**

**Answer** It may have to do with risk. While the King's Gambit is a perfectly playable opening, it entails much greater potential hazards than the Queen's Gambit. Although there are variations of the King's Gambit that are conducted more positionally, many of the lines hinge on sacrifices and chance-taking, which doesn't appeal to everyone. The Queen's Gambit can lead to sharp play as well, especially if one opts for speculative variants. Notwithstanding, if one is more aggressive, he or she can find a place there too. But most of the positions emanating from the Queen's Gambit are slower and more plodding than those of the King's Gambit. So that's a basic difference, and may explain why the Queen's Gambit is more popular. It offers wider amplitude for a range of temperaments and styles, whereas, though the King's Gambit can be played gradually and strategically, it primarily appeals to the more hell-bent among us. But what do I know? I don't play either one.

**Question** When I use [Fritz](#) to search [MegaBase](#) for games that end in stalemate, I find many games with moves almost identical to the following. Are most of these games pre-planned by the two players? An example would be the game Frenklakh-Shahade, Spain 1996: 1.h3 f5 2.d4 e5 3.Qd3 f4 4.Qg3 e4 5.Qh2 Be7 6.a4 a5 7.Ra3 Bh4 8.Rg3 e3 9.f3 Qe7 10.c4 Qb4+ 11.Nd2 d6 12.c5 Be6 13.c6 Bb3 (stalemate seems planned) 14.d5 b6 ½–½. **Gene Milener (USA)**

**Answer** Perhaps the game you provide is a little different from the norm. You're not implying that the players agreed to the outcome beforehand, are you? In international competitions, especially when players from the same team or country meet, and they don't want to beat each other, it's not unusual for them to draw without a fight. As a means of protest against the system and its absurdities, players may indeed enter upon ludicrous variations and such to make their protestations more transparent. Additionally, there's a psychological element to it. To be certain no one will misread their irregular ploys as the product of personal logic, players conspiring in this manner prefer essaying truly bizarre moves that leave little doubt among observers and other grapplers as to their collusion. The reason many of these strange stalemates look so alike, albeit with slight but imaginative alterations, is that most of them take off from the shortest stalemate possible. I believe that to be a whimsical expression first worked out by Sam Loyd. Although Loyd's ten-move draw is clearly different from the game you've cited: 1.e3 a5 2.Qh5 Ra6 3.Qxa5 h5 4.Qxc7 Ra6 5.h4 f6 6.Qxd7+ Kf7 7.Qxb7 Qd3 8.Qxb8 Qh7 9.Qxc8 Kg6 10.Qe6 ½–½, it has a few things in common with it, such as the burying of the queen at KR2 and the impeded kingside pawns. But let's not jump to conclusions.

**Question** I have noticed a significant weakness in my playing style. I tend to overlook tactics that put my pieces en prise. I look for sacrifices and giving up material immediately rather than noticing weak squares or potentially weak squares and fighting for those areas on the board. I have read some articles where blindfold chess has helped in these areas, whereby the players say they see the squares more so than the pieces. Would you recommend blindfold chess to solve this weakness or should I continue solving tactical problems? My rating is around 1700. **Edward Harmen (USA)**

**Answer** Getting around the terminology, you seem to be hanging your pieces, putting them where they can be taken for free or overlooking that

they're under attack. Blindfold chess may help, but I don't think that's the best way to go about reducing the trouble. You simply have to get more careful. This problem is typically addressed by playing regular chess and solving lots of tactical situations giving you practice in that very area – avoiding loose and unprotected forces. I would suggest the books of Gillam and others who offer lots of en prise situations, but as a 1700 player you probably need more demanding examples. Why don't you work your way through Polgar's Chess. It's a terrific source book (5,334 billion examples or so), and that should give you enough to do for the upcoming year and beyond. There is also Dan Heisman's [Looking for Trouble](#), which is written to address the identification of and reaction to threats.

**Question** Should we all subscribe to “tried-and-true” tactics when it comes to chess? I've found on the subscriber boards that tactics all comes down to what I learned about computers in the 80s. IF-THEN statements. IF Opponent A makes a move, THEN Opponent B should make a certain move. This disgusts me, because it makes the game stale. Certainly, we can all benefit from our predecessors by using their tactics, but I believe that in the middle to endgame we should take our knowledge of chess to the next level by eschewing “given tactics” and making our own moves to throw off our opponents. Otherwise we risk replaying all chess games over the last 200+ years. I don't mind learning from my predecessors, but I don't want to play their game. I want to play my own game, my way. If I lose, I learn from what I did. If I win, I learn from what I did. If I play exactly like a “grandmaster,” all I learn is how to play it like the grandmaster did, and all I really learned is how to play it in that situation. If the situation changes (and we all know the situation will never be the same from one game to the next), I would rather play my way, knowing the possibilities, taking that into consideration, taking the risk, and then play according to “my rules.” That is what makes playing chess fun. Not winning, but learning. Learning how to be better at this game is better than being the best at it in my opinion. **M.J. Closet (USA)**

**Answer** I think I'm getting too old to be old. I was trying to find your question and somehow overlooked it was contained in the first line. But finding it apparently doesn't help. I still am not entirely sure what you're asking or saying. So forgive me if my answer misses the point. I may skip around a bit depending where my decaying cranial matter takes me. Actually, let's cut to the quick. I don't think you have to worry about playing it exactly like a grandmaster, even a particular one. And if somehow you do, defying the laws of probability and all they're purported to stand for (hey, think of quantum mechanics), as uncreative and mechanical as it may make you feel, perhaps it's true that a gaggle of monkeys eventually could type out all of Shakespeare (we're talking smart monkeys). But the heck with that, I agree with you, if, then, or whatever. Take your risks, break the rules (assuming you can figure out what they are), don't worry about winning or being the best, and have your fun. Happy New Year!

### **Question of the Month**

The best answers will be published in the next column.

*What's your chief chess resolution for the New Year?*

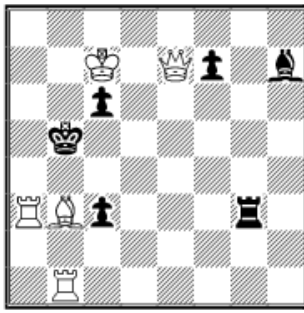
### **Reader's Responses from Last Month**

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

*What is your favorite composed chess problem?*

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

**Geoff Foster (Australia)** writes: My favorite chess problem is G. F. Anderson, *Il Secolo*, 1919, White to play and mate in two moves:

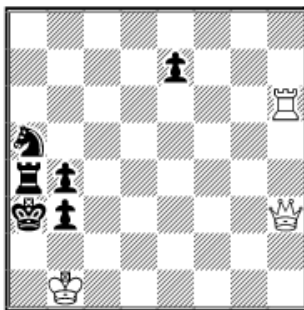


1.Kd6! (threat 2.Qb7)  
 1...Kb6 2.Bc2  
 1...Kb4 2.Kxc6  
 1...Rg6+ 2.Be6  
 1...Rd3+ 2.Bd5

The bishop on b3 and rook on b1 form a direct *battery* against the black king. The battery is controlled by the bishop on h7, but White cannot mate at once by 1.Bc2, because the white bishop must retain its guard of c4. The wonderful key move 1.Kd6! gives the black king two flight squares and also allows two checks. After the key move, the white king on d6 and the white queen form an *indirect* battery (indirect because it is not aimed directly at the black king). If the black king moves to b6, then the white bishop no longer needs to guard c4, so it can *shut-off* the black bishop with 2.Bc2. If instead the black king moves to b4, then the indirect battery becomes a direct battery, and mate follows by 2.Kxc6. The other *variations* come after checks by the black rook. If the black rook checks the white king by moving to g6 or d3, then it interferes with the black bishop's control of the battery, allowing the white bishop to intercept the check, while still retaining its guard of c4. These are known as *cross-checks*, and the black error is known as *black interference*. The problem has marvelous economy, using only five white units. (BP – Thank you, Geoff.)

**Michael Howson (England)** writes: Here is a position I found on the website of the British Chess Problem Society. It was offered as a “Challenge Problem” and looked easy, so I had a go. It nearly drove me round the bend! You soon think of bringing the rook to a2 by, for example, 1.Qg3 and 2.Rh2, but it seems useless, as Black can just throw his knight in the way and delay the mate to the fourth move. The solution is really beautiful. I take my hat off to anyone who has the ability to make such things.

Johannes Bruski (*Akademische Monatshefte für Schach*, 1906),  
 White to play and mate in three moves.



1.Rd6!

(BP – I actually worked very hard at trying to solve this problem and failed miserably. Then I had my analytic class at the Dalton School tackle it, and that didn't help either. The key idea eluded us. The kids were becoming very upset, so I did the only rational thing I could think of to mollify the group: I called Dan Lucas, editor-in-chief of *Chess Life* and

asked him to see what Fritz could come up with. Naturally, Fritz solved it in a fraction of a second. Thank you, Michael, Dan, and, lamentably, Fritz – great problem.)

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**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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