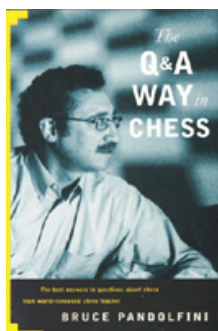




COLUMNISTS

The Q & A
Way

Bruce Pandolfini



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Malice Through the Rooking Pass

Question When castling, why is a rook able to pass through an attacked square unharmed, but the king may not, as this is considered castling through check? Sometimes a position will not allow a king to pass through check when castling, but the rook does, so how come something similar to *en passant* does not exist giving the opponent the opportunity to capture the rook on the square it passed through? I have asked many players and coaches this question, and no one has given a response beyond, "because that's what the rules are, and we have no way to ask those who made the rules about it."

Keith Ziegler (USA)

Answer What kind of harm would you like inflicted on such a rook? What kind of jabberwocky is this? The rule makes perfect sense, and moving the rook through an attack in no way transgresses anything, whether it's the rules of chess or more universal laws extending beyond the chessboard. Every piece is allowed to be placed in jeopardy except the king. So what's so special about castling requirements that would lead Caissa's framers to suspend the overriding general rule? If you're allowed to sacrifice your queen directly during the course of play, why shouldn't you be permitted to imperil the rook by fleeting suggestion in the act of castling? Nor is there a problem with castling if the rook is under attack to begin with (say, a black bishop at g7 attacking the white a1-rook along the a1-h8 diagonal), since castling queenside does not at any point place the white king in violation of the game's basic rules. True, the a1-rook gets away with murder, but that's chess, as untold numbers of carping devotees have come to realize.

That doesn't mean players never become confused over this wedge of rules. At times, even grandmasters have supposedly had trouble with aspects of castling. But you have to wonder. Did Korchnoi in his 1974 Candidates match with Karpov really question the arbiter about the right to castle with his rook under attack, as several news sources reported? Or was this some devilish human ploy that went unperceived and unappreciated? If not an issue of being on certain squares, perhaps it was a matter of being on something else.

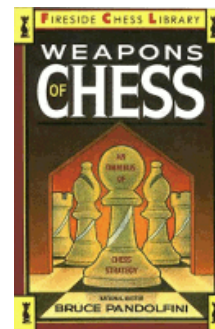
Then there's Averbakh. Supposedly playing a game with Purdy he became surprised that Purdy's queen-rook was allowed to pass through an attack while castling. When told that the restriction applied to the king, not the rook, was there some clever tongue-in-cheek-ism veiled behind the Russian grandmaster's reply: "Only the king? Not the rook?" Taking another looking-glass look at these situations, is it possible that either or both instances were exaggerated or made up?

But look, I don't want to come off like the other players and coaches who responded to your earnest query dismissively, with cold indifference. Indeed, I'm beginning to feel rather passionate about it. It's time to punish that good-for-nothing rook. It's been flouting and scoffing, getting off Scot-free for too long. Let's start a movement to enact special *en passant*-like legislation that allows castling to take place, but not without reduction of privileges, or, better yet, maybe even with outright loss of the very rook responsible for all the trouble.

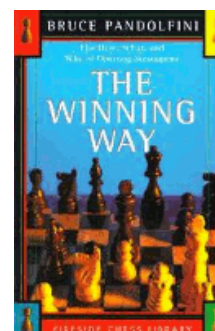
Question Nowadays everybody wants to learn chess as early as they can. One isn't considered a promising player if he doesn't do big things by six or seven years old. It is hard to make an argument for not learning as a young person. What if any drawbacks do you see for a young person playing serious chess at four, five, or six years of age? **Kendle Parsons (Australia)**

Answer Unquestionably, it's better to learn as early as you can so that you build greater and greater critical experience while you still have the energy

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and power to exploit your knowledge. If there is one drawback that often sinks the ship, it's the amount of losing a young person has to go through to get anywhere. Losing is never a pleasure, and young people, to make meaningful gains, often have to play up. This process entails losing many games and weathering great cumulative misery. Too much of that and it's easy to see why talented young people often abandon the game completely. They simply can't deal with the endless losing and the promises of their parents and coaches that it's eventually going to succeed. The sheer pain isn't worth it. But if they survive the ordeal of constant defeat in their tender years, I have no doubt that they must be better off for it. (Well, that's what I've been told.) If they get through all the agony of defeat, ultimately they may even realize the ambitions thrust upon them by all those living through them.

Question Ever since I was younger I have been advised to base all my decisions on the moves and not the opponent. Yet strong chess players advise different things. They say to take the other guy into account too. There seems to be psychological thinking at work in chess games. What do you think about playing the man? I wonder if you are acquainted with the saying "Play the board, not the man." Personally, my plan is to do the most by doing the least.

Jonny Sampson (USA)

Answer I wish you well on your plan, to do the most by doing the least. I'm also acquainted with the saying you mention about playing the board, and I do get questions like this now and then. Personally, in trying to answer them, I try to do the least, whether it's the most or not. Nevertheless, the expression makes sense. By focusing on the board, and not the other player, we're less likely to be misled by subjective cues. We can never tell what's inside the other player's mind for sure, but we can see everything happening on the chessboard, even if we don't quite understand it. Chess is a game of perfect information, where nothing is hidden. At best, the facts are merely disguised. We should, however, be able to make all our decisions with some reliance on what we perceive happening before us.

But there's a problem. The game is so intricate and detailed, and there are so many possibilities, that no matter how good we are, we're always going to encounter a measure of uncertainty. Thus, we must rely on principles and strategy to guide us. So we turn to anything we can think of to help us get through the complexity. In some cases, that might mean resorting to what we know about the other player and his or her past performance. It might lead us to try fathoming his or her behavior and reactions. That is, we might evaluate this supplemental data to lend weight one way or the other, but we don't count on it categorically. If our experience reminds us that our opponent has played particular variations in the past, has had trouble handling positions of specific character, doesn't like to be attacked, ordinarily goes astray in endgames, or has had a history of certain response, why not bring any or all of that into our thinking?

Nor should we eliminate external circumstances about the situation. For instance, if our opponent is short of time, rather than playing the best move, which may be very obvious – the very thing he or she has likely been considering – why not find another good move, though unexpected and complicated, that could force him or her to overstep analyzing it? The very fear instilled in the opponent by being confronted with a surprise might be all we need to throw him or her into a losing panic. Or if we get an intuition, something we can't prove by analysis on the board, but feel is very much right, and if our sensors have usually been on the money in the past, why not defer to what may be a powerful insight if similar conditions seem to apply?

Consider some of the greatest chess confrontations of all time. Surely it is impossible to contend that matters away from the board didn't impinge on the Alekhine-Capablanca and Fischer-Spassky matches. Or in those phantasmagorical contests between Karpov and Korchnoi, it is hard to ignore the argosy of psychological extras, the supreme gamesmanship that took place, such as the mere presence of the staring Dr. Zhukhar on the sidelines. Why was he there? Where is he now? And in the greatest of all chess battles, the series of yin-and-yang fights between Kasparov and Karpov, is it possible to think that neither of them factored into their decision-making personal thoughts, however sublimated or objectified, about the other player? But hey,

when we come right down to it, and even after trying to make sense of all these intangibles, we still should go back to the board and analyze explicit moves and variations to see if the mass of extrinsic impulses swaying us have any concrete basis in reality. Least or most, it's the best we can do.

Question I collect chess games played by famous people. Recently I heard about a game in the Playchess database played between Jean Rousseau and David Hume. Because of this entry I am convinced the game was really played. What do you think? **Dwight Konchy (USA)**

Answer There are many things that exist in this world that don't really exist (see Hume *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*). I don't even have enough space in the totality of my columns to list them. But if I did, certainly one of them would have to be this chimerical chess game played between Rousseau and Hume. Even though it is in the Playchess database, even though Hume and Rousseau did spend time together, I think in the 1760s or so, and even though they may have played chess against each other, it's extremely unlikely that they created this particular game, with it ending in "Philidor's Legacy." Indeed, in seeing it, noted chess historian Bruce Alberston thought that, if it were genuine, it might be one of the first examples of a double-rook sacrifice in actual recorded play.

Let's get real. More than likely, since Rousseau and Hume were philosophical opponents on a number of issues, some clever person thought it humorous to fabricate the game, making sure that Rousseau won (once again?). Maybe the real point is that though man is born free he strives to be in pawn chains everywhere. Who knows who made it up, but prove me wrong and I promise to read Rousseau's *Confessions*, especially the sections about his chess.

For the reader, here is the game for your own consideration and amusement:

Jean Rousseau - David Hume

Casual Game, 1765

Philidor Defense [C41]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 d6 3.Bc4 Nd7 4.d4 c5 5.dxe5 dxe5 6.Nc3 Be7 7.Qd5 Nh6 8.Bxh6 0-0 9.Be3 Qb6 10.Nxe5 Qxb2 11.Nxf7 Qxa1+ 12.Kd2 Qxh1



[FEN "r1b2rk1/pp1nbNpp/8/2pQ4/2B1P3/2N1B3/P1PK1PPP/7q w - - 0 13"]

13.Nh6+ Kh8 14.Qg8+ Rxg8 15.Nf7# 1-0

Question In a previous column you were asked about how someone can keep his repertoire up to date and how much time do you think is required in doing this. In the final portion of your response you wrote, "How often should you explore this new material to keep your repertoire *au courant*? For a 1400 player, I'd say at least an hour every week, and that's just to stay a 1400 player." Are you serious that one hour a week is necessary for opening preparation to stay at 1400? I have had a 2100-2200 FIDE rating for around fifteen years and I spend less than one hour a week on openings. I try to avoid main lines and play old lines. I prepare an opening for around one hour for every opponent. (I play around twelve tournament games a year and I am very flexible with openings for white.) On blitz, rapid games I do not prepare and get through with my old openings based on theory current around the middle of the 1990s. One of the most important things, if you are that lazy: Never

play a Sicilian! Could you please share your thoughts on time for opening preparations for other ratings, such as 1700, 2000, and 2300? Thank you and I really enjoy your column. **Thomas Petroczi (Austria)**

Answer As usual, I spoke impulsively and overdid it. I agree with you, and I like your adapted approach. It's certainly not necessary for a 1400 player to prepare so rigorously. To be sure, many such players get by with little or no preparation whatsoever. Nor does any of this have to be handled so formulaically. Half the world's chess players like spelled out prescriptions for success. The other half hates rules, seeing them as intellectual shackles that stultify creativity and personal expression. Indeed, once they have a regimen forced on them, they often set out to prove it wrong, struggling to find an opposite line of attack that works even better. So if one player needs three hours to train properly, a comparable player may paint the town black and white not preparing at all. Rather than getting any more egg on my face, laying down guidelines I'm not able to back up, I'm going to take a different tack altogether. I'm going to recommend that you study and practice for as long as you enjoy the experience, but no longer.

Question of the Month

The best answers will be published in the next column.

What is your favorite chess maxim?

Readers' Responses from Last Month

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

What is the most important of all chess skills?

Among the many interesting replies were the following:

Guillaume Wüthrich (France) - I have given a thought to this question already and have been trying to improve my visualization skill, my calculation skill, my endgame knowledge, my midgame understanding, prophylaxis and many other things which may come in useful. I am afraid to think at how many hours I have put into the game. All this brought me good results as one might expect until I got stuck because I do not manage to improve on the most important skill of all: the will to play, to fight. The will to learn and understand, which I obviously very much have, clearly only comes after...some of this is of course a joke. It's nice to read you by the way.

Bill Johnson (USA) - The most important of all chess skills is the ability to balance overwhelming will to win, on the one hand, with the personal resilience needed to deal with a loss and learn from it, on the other. If you lack this skill, one of two fates will befall you. You'll either lack the will to improve, and therefore never will improve; or you will come to hate losing so much that the fun goes out of the game and you quit playing. (Been there, done that.)

Hans Peter Roggensack (Germany) - Perseverance in learning is most important for becoming a better player. Perseverance in bad habits is most important for staying at the actual level.

Tim Spanton (England) - Learning from mistakes (preferably other people's).

(BP - It's great to have an informed and entertaining readership.)

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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!

Comment on this month's column via our [Contact Page](#)! Pertinent responses will be posted below daily.



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