



## A Fistful of Lessons

**Quote of the Month:** *“All the chess knowledge in the world won’t help you if, each time you move, you don’t take your time and use the information that is applicable to your current position.”*

### COLUMNISTS

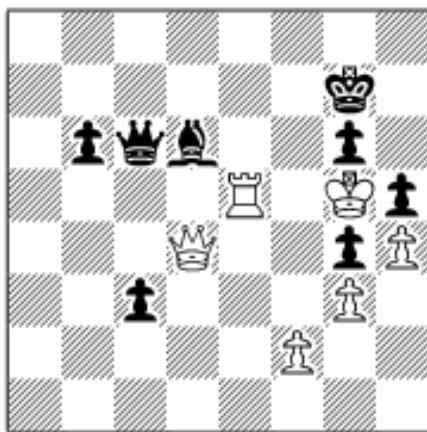
## Novice Nook

Dan Heisman



Sometimes the best lessons are the ones that hurt, like the ones from games where you are winning easily and then lose through a series of seemingly incomprehensible moves. If that often happens to you, then you should learn quite a bit from the Reversals of Fortune shown below. Of course, all names are withheld to protect the guilty. The following four examples are pretty rough, so if you have a weak heart I suggest you take your pills before continuing. We could call them The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly, but then I would need a name for the fourth...

### Example 1: Justice Is Not Served



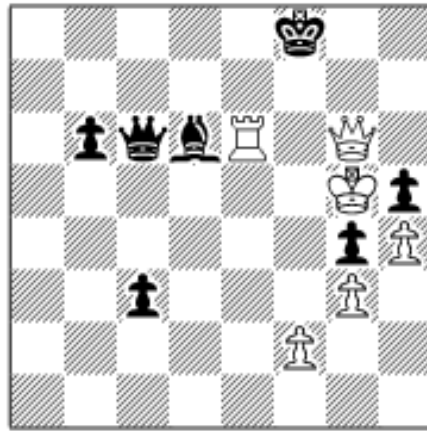
White is to play in a recent game at our local chess club. White was a new student, an adult who had not been playing serious chess very long. Black is a much higher rated player who is more experienced, but has also made a very bad mistake by taking his inexperienced opponent extremely lightly. So, despite his superior playing strength, Black has now crashed from a winning position into a completely lost game.

White has many ways to win, but the most powerful is to checkmate in two moves with 1.Re7+ Kf8 (1...Kg8 is the only other legal move since Black is in *double-check*, but in either case the next move for White would be the same) 2.Qg7#. White can also win the Queen with 1.Rc5+. US Chess Hall of Fame IM Donald Byrne once told me “Unless you are 100% sure about the mate, take the Queen first and mate him later; most players will resign and the ones that don’t you can beat easily.” Here the mate is so easy that Byrne’s Rule does not apply, but either move will do!

Instead White played **1.Re6+**, which is comprehensible, if not anywhere near best. It turns out (I asked White after the game) that White rejected moves like 1.Re7+ and 1.Rc5+ because “Black could just take the Rook”, ignoring the fact that Black is in a discovered check after those moves and capturing the Rook is illegal! You may chuckle, but even players who have been playing for years make similar mistakes by not considering moves that at first blush seem silly. Moves that at first

glance seem terrible may possibly be worth a second look whenever discovered checks, pins, pseudo-sacrifices, and other tactical motifs are present. It is ironic that most tactic books are full of problems that start with “pseudo-sacrifices” – temporary sacrifices of material that are not real sacrifices because the sacrificing player can win all that back and more, and yet often players do not even consider these same moves in real games. Cutting off your analysis just because the initial capture loses material without continuing to see if you can end up ahead eventually is called a *quiescence error* since you mistakenly assume the position is “quiet” (no more checks, captures, and threats) and stop analyzing.

Anyway, the good news is that White is still winning easily. He has a choice of either winning the Bishop or possibly mating, and either should be quite good enough. After **1.Re6+** the game continued **1...Kf7 2.Qf6+ Kg8 3.Qxg6+** So far, so good. Looks as if White has decided to play for mate and not just the win of the Bishop, and that’s OK so long as the mate is there and he pulls it off! **3...Kf8**



Now White has four safe checks: 4.Rf6+, 4.Qf6+, 4.Qf5+, and 4.Qh6+. Which one of these is best? - or should White settle for winning the Bishop with 4.Rxd6, or even possibly a non-check move that closes the noose around the black King?

#### **4.Kf6??**

This quiet move violates a fundamental guideline of chess attack, which is *Don't stop kicking a man when he is down* or, to put it

more politely, *When both Kings are exposed and the heavy pieces are still on the board, the initiative (or attack) is often worth everything – so you usually should keep checking (or capturing) if you can.* The best check was the “retreat” 4.Qf5+! This 5<sup>th</sup> rank check allows the Rook to check on the 6<sup>th</sup> rank, forcing the black King into the corner, where his pieces cannot help him: 4...Kg7 5.Rg6+ Kh7 (5...Kh8 6.Qf6+ Kh7 7.Qg7#) 6.Qf7+ Kh8 7.Qg7#

Now Black gets a chance to start an attack. At this point Black has about 20 minutes left and White has about five, although they are playing with a time delay clock.

**4...Qf3+** Black misses the trickier but better 4...Be7+! But it is not Black’s errors that are the most instructive. **5.Kg5 Qd5+ 6.Kf6?** 6.Kh6 would spoil the fun. **6...Qf3+ 7.Kg5 Qd5+ 8.Kf6? Qf3+**

Up to now White has been very content to repeat moves, and indeed Black could even have claimed a draw before his last move by writing the move on his scoresheet, stopping the clock, and claiming that 8...Qf3+ would lead to threefold-repetition. But instead Black now said “If you move to g5 again that will be a draw

by threefold repetition.” In response to this comment, what should White, a relative novice, do?

The first answer is, “Don’t believe your opponent!” *Even the most well-meaning opponent likely does not know the rules*, so White should have stopped the clock and asked the Tournament Director (TD) about the three-fold repetition rule, which White did not know. The second thing White should have done is to ask himself if the only alternative to drawing, 9.Qf5, was good or not. *If* 9.Qf5 is not good, then taking a draw against a higher rated player, especially when you have much less time on the clock, would be the prudent course of action. White did neither of these things. Instead he thought to himself, “Well, *of course* we can’t have a draw” and, without any more logic than that, proceeded to play **9.Qf5??**

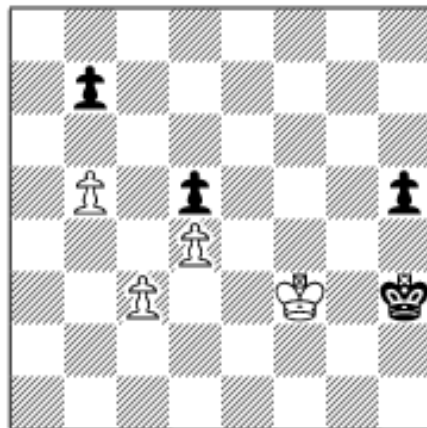
Black did not overlook the gift horse this time: **9...Qxf5+ 10.Kxf5 Bc5** The simple 10...c2 won immediately, but it does not matter – Black’s game is too good. **11.f4?** 11.Re2 was certainly called for, when White can at least make Black do some work. **11...gxf3 e.p.**

At this point White was again surprised. He was not sure of the en passant rule. He asked his opponent something like “Can you do that?” and Black replied “Yes, you can take a pawn that way” and White was satisfied. I think in their current mindsets Black could have taken white’s King (!) and if Black told White it was legal White would have accepted it! After the game I again suggested to White that he not be so quick to believe his opponents, but to stop the clock and request the appropriate rule(s) from the TD. The rest is not pretty:

**12.Rf6+ Kg7 13.Rg6+ Kh7 14.Kg5 Be3+ 15.Kxh5 c2 16.Rh6+ Bxh6 17.resigns**

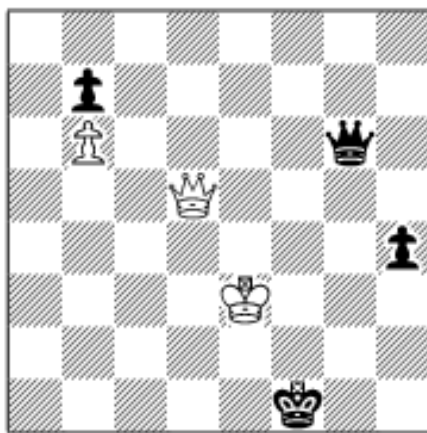
Still, I have to give White a lot of credit. Despite going from an easy win into a loss, he still took the whole thing remarkably well and graciously accepted all the lessons learned. After I went over what happened, he just said “Thanks, Dan! I learned a lot!” and smiled a genuine smile.

### Example 2: Forcing the Opponent to Win!



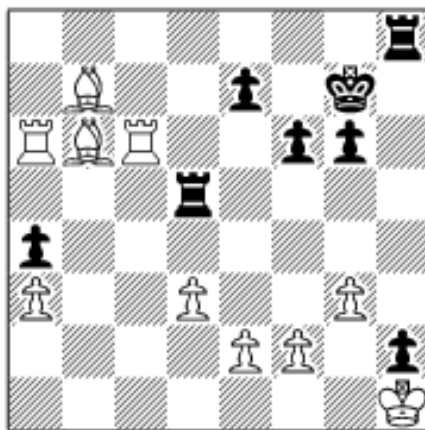
In our second example it is White’s move and, while things don’t look nearly as good as they did for the White player in the previous game, it is nonetheless a win. The key is that white’s King can both block black’s King from getting out, while simultaneously getting a passed pawn via a sacrifice: 1.c4! dxc4 2.d5 c3 3.Ke3 white’s King can stop the black pawn, but Black cannot promote either the c-pawn or h-pawn! 3...Kg2 4.d6 h4 5.d7 h3 6.d8Q h2 7.Qg5+ Kf1 8.Qg3 h1N (8...h1Q 9.Qf2#) 9.Qh2 c2 10.Qxh1#

**1.b6?** Now the game is a draw – Black has time to promote the h-pawn too. **1...h4**  
**2.c4** Here it is a case of “Better late than never”, because **2.Kf2?** Kg4 can even win for Black since he has the dreaded “outside passed pawn” to deflect the white King while the black King goes to the queenside. **2...dxc4 3.d5 c3 4.d6?** White completely forgot his King could catch the pawn and stop it from promoting!  
**4...c2 5.d7 c1Q 6.d8Q Qf1+ 7.Ke3 Qg1+ 8.Ke2 Qg2+ 9.Ke1 Qg1+ 10.Ke2 Qg6**  
 Not the best way to stop checking, but irrelevant for our story. **11.Qd7+??**  
 Allowing Black to trade Queens and win with **11...Qg4+** - this is the kind of transition point that White must not allow. **11...Kh2??** Returning the favor.  
**12.Qc7+ Kh3 13.Qd7+ 13.Qxb7** is probably a draw. **13...Kg2 14.Qd5+ Kg1 15.Ke3??** Making a similar mistake as made by the player in the first game by halting offense maneuvers with a “negative” quiet King move. **15.Qd4+** would be drawing. **15...Kf1??** Missing the win starting with **15...Qxb6+**. Now it is White to play the worst possible “safe” check:



**16.Qh1+???** This is one of the best examples of “Hope Chess” I have ever seen! White literally forces Black to win. If White had made any attempt to see what would happen next (he gives Black no choice, so seeing what must happen does not take any special effort), there is no way this move would be played. Black is forced to trade Queens into an easily won King and pawn endgame. Besides the easily drawing **16.Qxb7**, correct was **16.Qf3+ Kg1 17.Qf2+ Kh1 18.Qxh4+ Kg1 19.Qf2+ Kh1 20.Qf3+ Kg1 21.Qxb7** with good winning chances. **16...Qg1+** Hmm. What did White think would happen? **17.Qxg1 Kxg1 18.resigns** White cannot stop the h-pawn from promoting.

### Example 3: Letting the One-Trick Pony Win



In this position White is up two pieces and to move, so the most important thing is to follow the “Way Ahead” principles I laid out in the Novice Nook *When You're Winning it's a Whole Different Game*. The primary idea is *Think Defense First*. This does NOT mean to play passively or defensively, but simply to first make sure your opponent does not have anything offensive that can get him back in the game *before* you consider your own attacking moves (the other four principles are Keep it simple, Trade pieces not necessarily pawns, Use all your pieces, and Don't worry about the little things).

Here Black, a USCF 1400 player, has lost two pieces as a result of the all-too-common but rarely discussed problem of *miscounting* on two capturing sequences

(see the Novice Nook *A Counting Primer*). Therefore, Black's only remaining game plan is a one-trick pony: if the Rook on d5 can eventually check on the first rank, then ...h1Q+ would follow with a win. But if Black *cannot* find a way to check on the first rank, then there is little to be done. So long as White looks at the position this way, that would be *thinking defense first* and he would come up with the obvious idea 1.Rc1! Then White should plant this Rook on the first rank and figuratively laugh at Black as the one-trick pony is gone forever and his extra two Bishops win easily. Sure, many other moves win, but that is not the point! Unfortunately White did not have my advice in mind and instead played:

**1.Rxf6?!** This tricky discovered attack on the Rook is completely unnecessary, flouting the second principle of Way Ahead: Keep it simple - don't play tricky. 1.Rxf6 is tricky. From a practical sense I could give this move two question marks since it causes all of White's future problems but, theoretically, that would not be correct since White is still winning.

**1...Rb5** was the immediate reply.

So, with one tricky and unnecessary move, White goes from up two pieces and completely winning to figuring out how to save the game! Black admitted after the game that he would have resigned if White had figured out how to stop his only idea.

**2. Rxc6+!** Great move by White, who is also a 1400 player. It is a shame that such a great move is required just to keep winning, when a move ago almost any non-tricky move would have won. Now Black is faced with only bad choices.

**2...Kxc6?!** Not the best. Black should try to stay off of the sixth rank by playing 2...Kf7. White would still be winning easily, but it would only be so after the difficult-to-find 3.Bd5+! Would you have found this move for White if Black had played 2...Kf7?

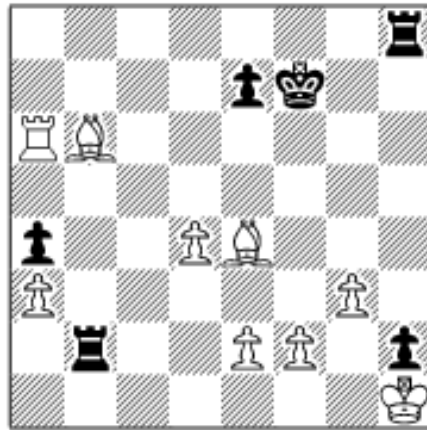
**3.Be4+?** White's idea, but definitely not best. *When you see a good move, look for a better one!* Much better is 3.Bd4+! when White wins back the entire Rook with interest (3...Kh7 4.Be4+! removes the guard and is much better than 4.Bxh8?) and is winning easily. 3.Be4+ is a direct check and 3.Bd4+ is a discovered check, but they are both checks. In this case the discovered one happens to be much better than the direct one so make sure to consider all of them!

**3...Kf7** Notice that now White has lost a Rook from the original position! White is still winning, but the margin for error has decreased dramatically.

**4.d4** This was White's idea from 3.Be4+, to guard the b1 square. I can't resist adding that it all would have been much easier if White had followed the *think defense first* idea and played 1.Rc1, preventing these problems forever.

**4...Rb2** Black continues to ride the one-trick pony, searching for places along the

second rank that will allow the Rook to get to the first rank safely.



**5.Bd3??** This is Hope Chess. If White had looked to see that nothing could be done about the threat created by Black's obvious reply, then this move would have been rejected as not playable. White should not be worried about the e-pawn, but instead focused on preventing Black's infiltration points onto the first rank. After the game I suggested 5.Ba5, which wins. Fritz points out that 5.Bc7 is even slightly better than 5.Ba5.

**5...Rd2!** What did White expect? Black threatens the unstoppable 6...Re1+. *Now White began to think hard, but it is too late – the hard thinking should have been done last move to prevent this from happening! You must plan to meet your opponent's upcoming checks, captures, and threats before they make them, not after.* 5...Rd2 is a good example of a threat that cannot be met, so it never should have been allowed. On the previous move White should have thought:

“Suppose I play 5.Bd3, then what will Black do? Black wants to get on to the first rank, so the Rook will move somewhere safe along the second rank to where the first rank is not guarded. Since 5...Ra2?? allows 6.Bd5+, suppose Black tries 5...Rd2? Then there is no defense to 6...Rd1+, so I can't play 5.Bd3...”

**6.Bg6+** Too late, but worth a try. Maybe Black will blunder big time and capture!  
**6...Kg7** Oh well. Good for Black. The rest needs no comment:

**7.Bc2 Rxc2 8.f4 Rc1+ 9.Kg2 h1Q+ 10.Kf2 Qh2+ 11.Ke3 Qxg3+ 12.Kd2 Qxf4+ 13.e3 0-1**

#### Example 4: I've Seen Enough - I Win the Queen – Whoops!



In this final position, what could be easier? White is to move, is up a piece and a pawn, has a mating attack, a discovered attack on black's Queen, and Black has no threats! Do you think it could be possible for White to get a losing position just by making a couple of superficially reasonable moves? Of course we have to cut White considerable slack here because this was a fairly quick game. Even so, watch and learn:

**1. Re8+?** Not a terrible move, but the prelude to a disaster. Better is 1.Rg6+ when the discovered attack on the Queen forces Black to give up his Queen with 1...Qxg6 2.Nxg6 and the game is about over.

**1...Rxe8** forced.

**2.Qxf5??** Looks good - superficially. This was White's idea, to win the Queen. Instead of this capture, still winning easily is **2.Qxe8+**. Once again this example shows that if you don't look to see what might happen next, anything that happens to you is deserved! **2...Re1+** Believe it or not, Black missed this move in the game despite having lots more time than White. But the win for Black was "this close"! Instead, Black played **2...Ne2+??** and resigned a couple of moves later. He made the common mistake of assuming his game was hopeless and not even taking time to look for the gift White had handed him on a silver platter. *You should start by looking at your checks, captures, and threats.* In this case Black only has two checks and one of them wins. *When you see a good move, look for a better one!*  
**3.Bf1** The only legal move. **3...Rxf1+** Not hard to spot. **4.Kg2** The only legal move again. **4...Ne3+** Ouch! Not only does this move fork the King and Queen, but it also guards the Rook to boot! So, instead of being down all that material, Black is going to end up ahead a Rook after he captures the Queen! This is a great example of how superficially reasonable moves in a won position can still lose.

### Reader Question

*A debate has emerged on our newsgroup about the differences between Experts/Low Masters and GM's. In your estimation is a USCF Expert/low Master's ability to calculate about the same as a GM's?*

**Answer:** Here is a summary about the differences in skill between experts and GMs that I have gathered from reading deGroot's *Thought and Choice in Chess* and performing his experiments myself:

1. Depth of analysis in actual play - same (this makes sense due to #4 and the same time limit)
2. Ability to visualize deeply - about the same, perhaps GMs slightly better
3. Evaluation capability for equal material positions - GMs much better
4. Knowledge of how to play various positions - GMs enormously better
5. Speed of calculation - likely GMs somewhat better, but not always
6. Accuracy of calculation - GMs better

For more on this, see last month's Novice Nook, *Learning from Dr. de Groot*. It is clear that #4 and #3 are the predominate reasons. deGroot states that GMs know how to play 100,000+ positions and Masters only 10,000+ so masters have to "figure out" what GMs know and often make mistakes, especially due to small differences in #3, which compound over the game.

That is why GM Andrew Soltis says in *GM Secrets: Endgames* that a GM would never go into a King and pawn endgame against a 1900 unless he was sure that it was 100% won. The reason is that these endgames are calculable and that completely negates the knowledge of #4 and almost all of #3 because King and pawn endgame evaluations become win, loss, draw, much easier than the shades

that GMs are so much better at, and exist in other endgames.

**Question:** *In a recent on-line game where each side had sixty minutes, my opponent complained I was moving too slow? What should I do?*

**Answer:** Wait a minute! Let me get this straight: your opponent agreed to play a game where each side has sixty minutes and then in the middle of the game complains that you are playing too slow? Hmm. That makes no sense – you are just doing what *he* agreed upon in the first place. Since he agreed to play at that speed, why doesn't he complain to himself about agreeing to play at that time limit?

Besides, suppose this was true and you were playing “too slow” for a sixty-minute game. Since that means you were pacing yourself to use more than your total time, at some point you would have to speed up considerably or lose on time. Either way would be to your opponent's benefit, as you would either be having to play quickly in time pressure or just lose automatically when your flag fell. So your opponent should be happy, not upset!

In any case, my warning is: If you play a sixty-minute game and don't intend to use your entire sixty minutes, you are really giving your opponent a handicap. If that is so, why not offer to play a faster game at the beginning? Never start a game without the intention of doing the best you can, which includes pacing yourself to use all your time, unless you purposely want to give a handicap.

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

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