



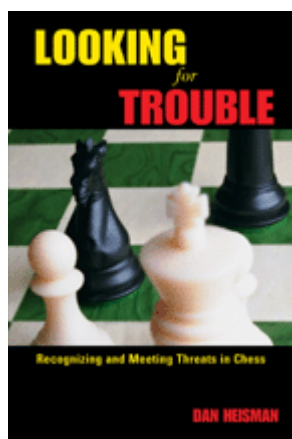
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COLUMNISTS

Novice Nook

Dan Heisman



Is There a Win?

Quote of the Month: *"If you eat at a Tactics Restaurant, for desert you should have Key Line Pie."*

One of the problems with puzzle books on tactics is that all of the problems have solutions, or at least they are supposed to! However, in real games you are often faced with tense positions that may or may not have a successful tactic you can execute by force. Deciding when it is "time effective" to look for a tactic, and when doing so is just wasting your time, was discussed in the Novice Nook's *The Seeds of Tactical Destruction* and *Revisiting the Seeds of Tactical Destruction*.

Below I present a practical side of that same issue: positions where the opponent has one or more clearly recognizable Seeds of Destruction and you must decide whether a tactic exists. I have picked twelve problems; the same number as in the popular Novice Nook *A Tactics Quiz*, which can be found in the [ChessCafe Archives](#). For each problem, see if:

1. There is a tactic that wins material and/or immediately produces a winning position, **or**
2. Do you just have a pleasant-looking game where your opponent has weaknesses, but a forcing exploitation to create a winning advantage is not possible just yet.

Note: "winning" does not mean checkmate, but rather that you can force a position where a good player could always win with best play. In other words, in each position, is there a forced short-term combination that is winning? If so, what is it?

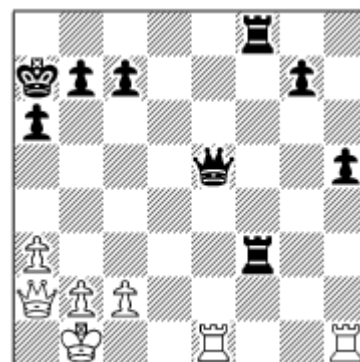
The answers are at the end. Good luck and take your time. Even though these positions are generally meant to be easy, a few are a little tricky!

Problem 1



White to play after ...Ne4

Problem 2



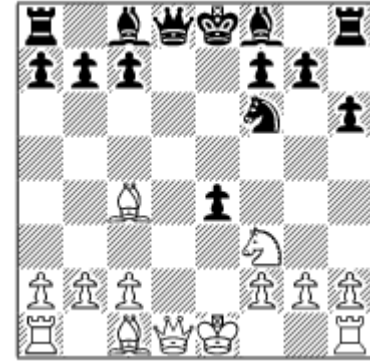
White to play after ...R8f8

Problem 3

Problem 4

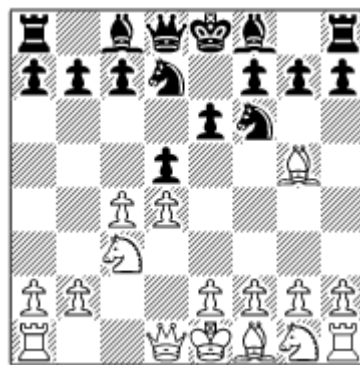


White to play after ...a6



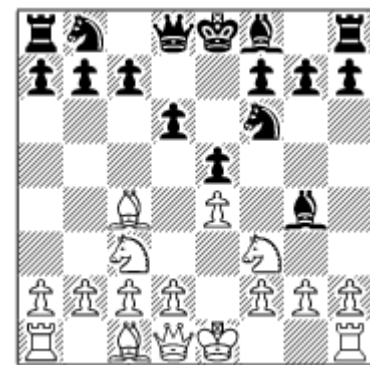
White to play after ...e4

Problem 5



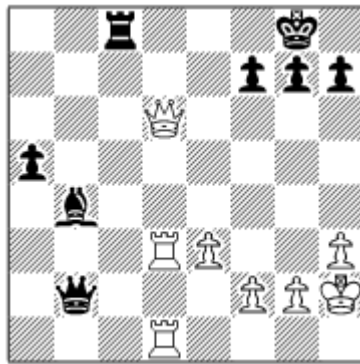
White to play after ...Nbd7

Problem 6



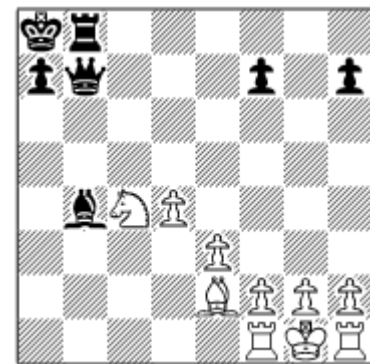
White to play after ...Bg4

Problem 7



White to play after ...Bb4

Problem 8



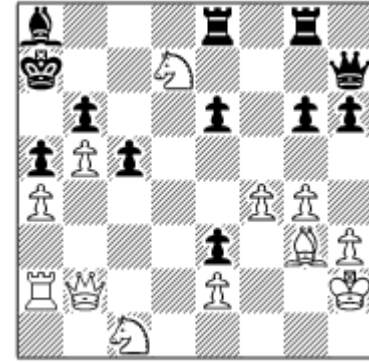
White to play after ...Qb7

Problem 9

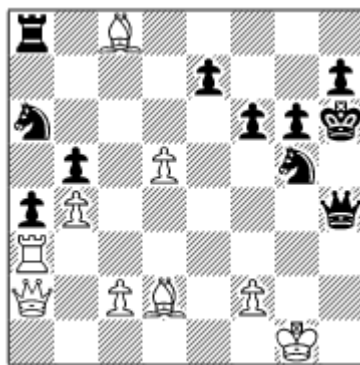
Problem 10



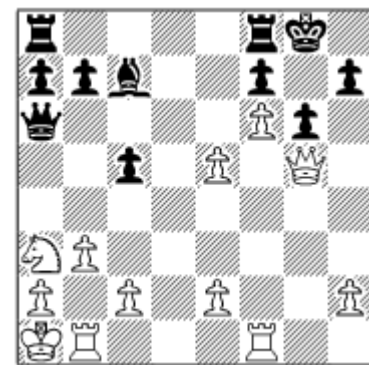
White to play after ...e6



White to play after ...Qh7

Problem 11

White to play after ...Na6

Problem 12

White to play after ...Qa6

Answers:

1. No. In this typical Petroff's Defense position the pin **1.Qe2** is just met by **1...Qe7**. Most other Black defenses do allow **2.d3** winning the knight. Hopefully we started with an easy one for you! (Seeds: Knight pinned to king on e-file)

2. Yes. **1.Rxe5** wins the queen for nothing since on **1...Rf1+ 2.Re1** is perfectly fine. Of course not **2.Rxf1?? Rxf1+ 3.Re1 Rxe1#** Despite the simplicity of moves like **2.Re1**, many beginning players don't even consider this "guard through another piece" possibility until it is pointed out to them. (Seeds: Black queen en prise, weak White back-rank)

3. No. **1.Nxe5 Nxe5 2.Qh5+** is very speculative due to **2...Nf7**. White should settle for **1.Bc4** when Black's kingside is full of holes, but White's advantage is actually fairly small. (Seeds: Black's kingside exposed, weak white squares, White will have more pieces in play)

4. No. Despite the obvious Seeds, there is no big combination here. **1.Bxf7+ Kxf7 2.Qxd8** fails to **2...Bb4+** and Black wins back the queen and is OK. This counter win of the queen is quite common and is a good pattern to remember. The attack on White's knight also makes a difference here in Black's favor. White definitely has a pleasant game as he can win back his pawn easily with just the dull **1.Qxd8+ Kxd8 2.Ne5** or **2.Ng5**. (Seeds: Possible removal of the guard on d8 and/or f7, white knight en prise)

5. No. White cannot even win a pawn in this famous trap, as after **1.cxd5 exd5 2.Nxd5?? Nxd5! 3.Bxd8 Bb4+ 4.Qd2 Kxd8** (this is slightly more accurate than the perfectly fine 4...Bxd2+) and when the smoke clears Black is up a piece. (Seeds: Black d-pawn attacked twice and defended twice, but one of the defenders is pinned to the queen, White's e1-a5 diagonal can become weak, exposing the king)

6. No. Legal's Mate does not work with a knight on f6: **1.Nxe5? Bxd1 2.Bxf7+ Ke7 3.Nd5+?** is not mate. And **1.Bxf7+? Kxf7 2.Ng5+** fails since the bishop on g4 is guarded. Finally **1.Bxf7+? Kxf7 2.Nxe5+?** is also bad due to the obvious **2...dxe5** and White has egg all over his face, plus a goose-egg on the wall chart. (Seeds: Legal's Mate type of pattern: possibilities for attacks on f7, discovered attack on bishop on g4)

7. No. **1.Qd8+ Rxd8 2.Rxd8+ Bf8** is OK for Black. If you reverse the starting piece configuration, so that the queen is on d1 and the rook on d6 instead, then it *would* work: 1.Rd8+ Rxd8 (1...Bf8 2.Rxc8 wins) 2.Rxd8+ Bf8 3.Rxf8+! Kxf8 4.Qd8+ is a back rank pattern worth remembering. (Seeds: Weak Black back rank)

8. No. The tempting pin **1.Bf3?** fails to **1...Qxf3** (don't forget to look at **all** checks, captures, and threats!) and if **2.gxf3? Rg8#!** (Seeds: Black queen and king on same diagonal with presence of white bishop; both kings cramped)

9. Yes. Instead of withdrawing the knight, White has **1.Bb5** (pin) **Qxb5 2.Nxc7+** (fork) winning the queen. This tactic is often overlooked by beginners. (Seeds: Black king and queen on same diagonal, possible knight forks on c7, White is ahead in development)

10. No. The "obvious" family knight fork **1.Nf6?** fails to **1...Qb7!** with an inevitable mate for Black on g2. If you didn't look for this defense, then your thought process is similar to Hope Chess as described in the section below. Instead the simple **1.Ne5** leaves White with a solid advantage. (Seeds: Big family forking square on f6, White weak on a8-h1 diagonal).

11. Yes. Thanks to the bishop pin on the c1-h6 diagonal, White does not have to immediately save the bishop on c8, but instead can play **1.Rh3** winning the queen for the rook. If White tries the double attack, removal of the guard, with **1.Bb7?** then **1...Ra7** is OK for Black. (Seeds: White bishop en prise, black rook and knight on a-file can be double-attacked by white bishop, bishop pins knight on g5, black queen and king lined up on h-file)

12. No. The tempting **1.Qh6**, threatening the obvious **2.Qg7#**, fails to **1...Bxe5+ 2.Rb2 Bxf6!** (but not the greedy **2...Bxb2+?? 3.Kxb2** and Black loses his queen since **3...Qxf6 4.Rxf6** is forced to prevent mate. White should just play the far more subtle **1.c3!** with a long-term winning attack. (Seeds: Both sides have weak dark squares around their kings, possible mating pattern with white pawn f6 and queen g7, knight on h3 is en prise) Thanks to Harold Stenzel for the idea.

Novice Nook's Most Common Misconception

I often chat or get e-mail from readers and their most common *misconception* about Novice Nook is the following:

Hope Chess is when you make a move that contains one or more threats and you hope your opponent does not see the threats.

This is **not** the way I define Hope Chess in my writings. It is true that the above certainly *could* be called Hope Chess, so maybe I should give it a name and call it Hopeful Chess or just list it as another aspect of Bad Chess Thinking. You don't make a bad move and then hope your opponent makes a worse one.

My correct definition of Hope Chess is:

Hope Chess: You make a move and, before doing so, do not consider if you can safely meet all of your opponent's possible replies that are checks, captures, or threats.

What happens when you play Hope Chess is that in reply to your move, your opponent often makes a threat you did not consider and you hope you can answer his threat. If you can, you are just lucky! If you cannot, it often results in an immediately lost game.

No really good player purposely plays Hope Chess in slow games, or else anyone could often beat him just by finding the unstoppable threats that he is allowing. Instead, a good player's thought process includes something to the effect of "Suppose I play Rad1. Let's see what he would do. Suppose he threatens mate with Qh3; then I cannot stop him. Therefore any candidate move that allows Qh3 and thus mate cannot be allowed: so Rad1 and moves like it are not playable." That kind of thinking, where a player includes this type of safety check before every move, I call **Real Chess**.

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



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