

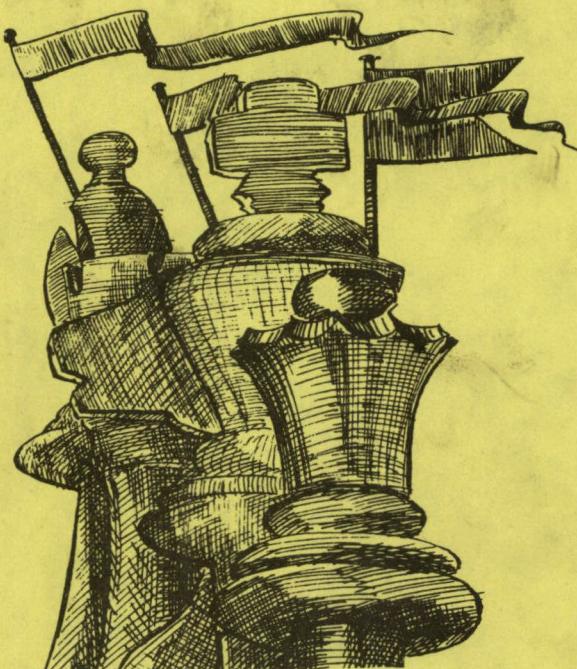
POPULAR CHESS

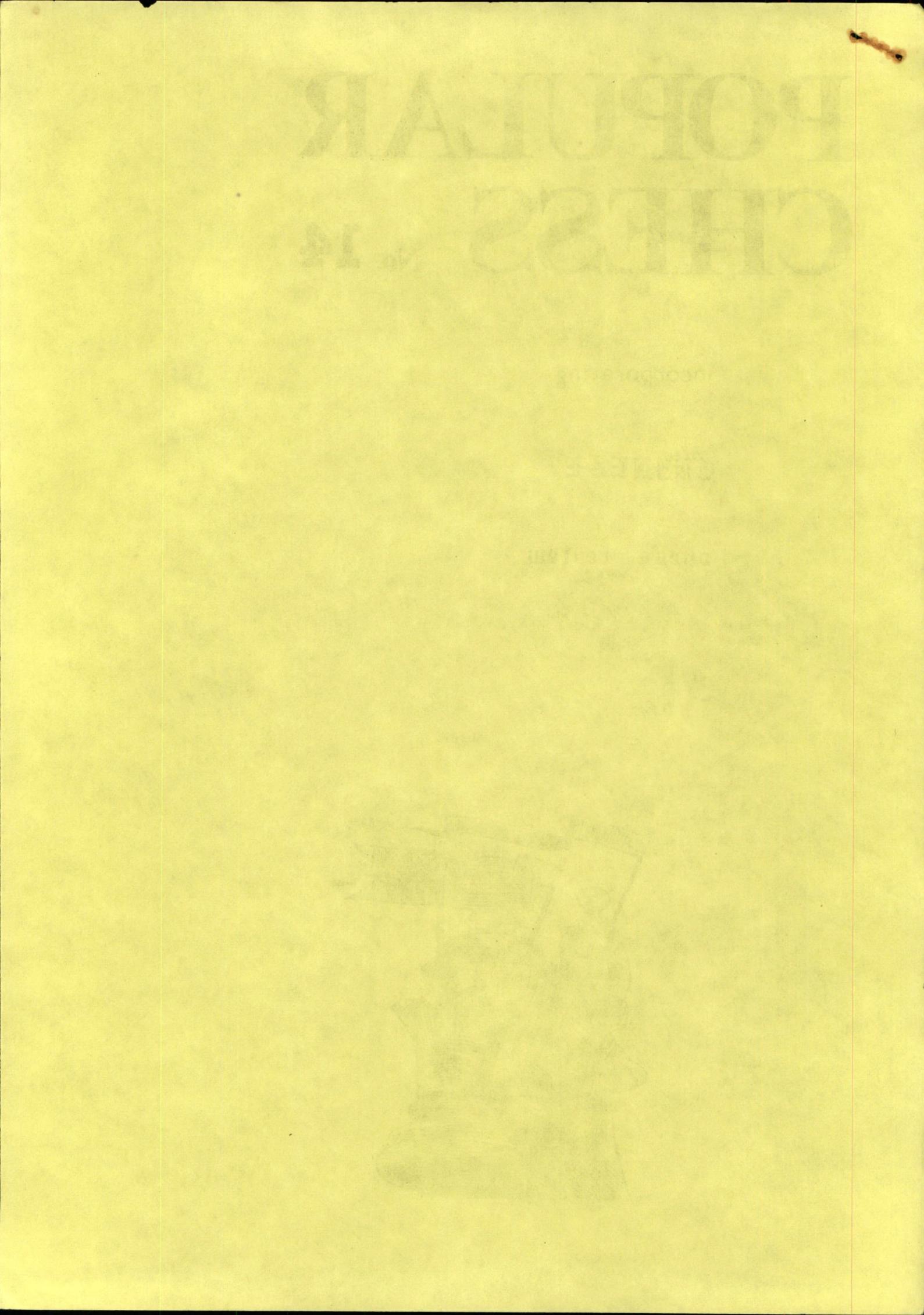
No. 14

incorporating

CHINESE

chess review





ticks and triangles

THE WAY TO BLUNDER FREE CHESS

Many players, some quite experienced, often ask me how they can avoid making blunders, unforced errors which are easy to see - after you have made them.

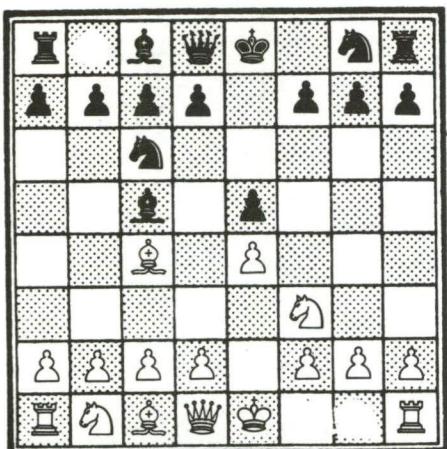
The reason for blunders is inadequate checking routines; sometimes it is time pressure. But I am not going to teach you in this article how to avoid time trouble, or how to play in it. I am talking about the normal chess playing situation, wherein the blunder may strike from a clear blue sky.

Now nobody can force us to make blunders; so the remedy lies in our hands. Secondly, we should discover the types of blunder that occur. I divide them into three types

- 1) basic material errors
- 2) higher material errors
- 3) tactical errors

Later in this article I will describe types 2) and 3), but we shall start with the basic material error, and how to avoid it. Once this has been done, we can build upon it to eliminate the more complicated mistakes.

The method is: after you have decided upon your move, in your head, do not play it, but write it down. Then check to see if the square you are playing your piece to is safe. If you find that this is not the case, then cross the move out, write another down, and check it as well. When you are sure your move is safe, place a tick on your score sheet after the move, and then play it.



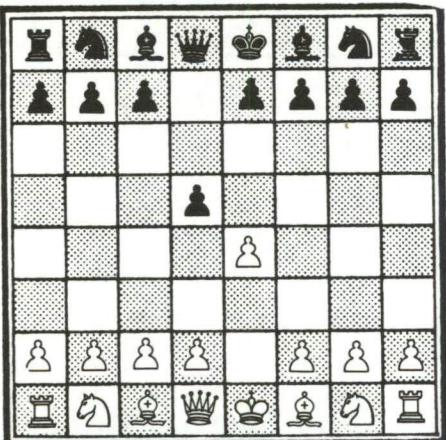
For example, in this position, you decide to play Nf3-g5.

You write down the move and check it out.

Soon you realise that the queen on d8 would capture the knight if it reached g5. You cross out this move, write instead c2-c3, check if this is safe, then tick it and play it, secure in the knowledge that you have not made a basic blunder.

c2-c3 ✓

When the opponent moves, you check to see if there is a threat to win material contained in the move. For example, after the moves



1 e2-e4

d7-d5

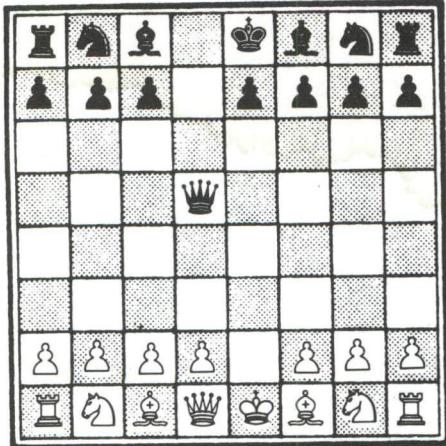
Black's move threatens to gain a pawn by d5xe4; therefore it should be written

d7-d5 ▲

The triangle signs warn of a danger; you should either defend, exchange, advance, block (impossible in this case) the attack, or counterattack.

2 e4xd5

Qd8xd5

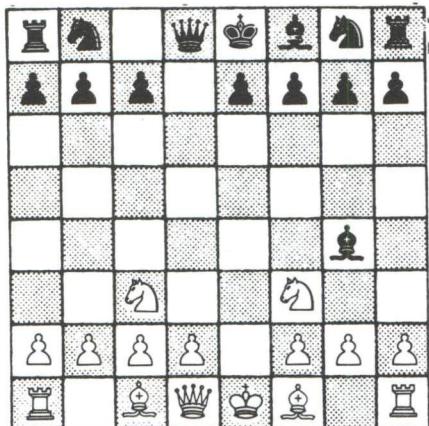


2 e4xd5 Qd8xd5

Here we have written down our opponent's move, and have to decide whether to put a triangle sign or not. It is true that the queen is hitting the pawns at a2, g2 and d2, but all the pawns are defended, so any capture would lose black material. Therefore, no triangle should be placed.

Similarly, exchanges are not material threats. In the next diagram black has just played

Bc8-g4



No triangle should be placed because there is no threat win material, only an exchange.

An example of a game recorded in this way would go like this:
(you are white)

- | | |
|-----------|---------|
| 1 e2-e4 ✓ | e7-e6 |
| 2 d2-d4 ✓ | d7-d5 ▲ |
| 3 e4-e5 ✓ | c7-c5 |
| 4 d4xc5 ✓ | Bf8xc5 |

5 Qd1-h5 ✓

g7-g6 ▲

6 Qh5-f3 ✓

Nb8-c6 ▲

7 Bc1-f4 ✓

Qd8-b6 ▲

8 b2-b3 ✓

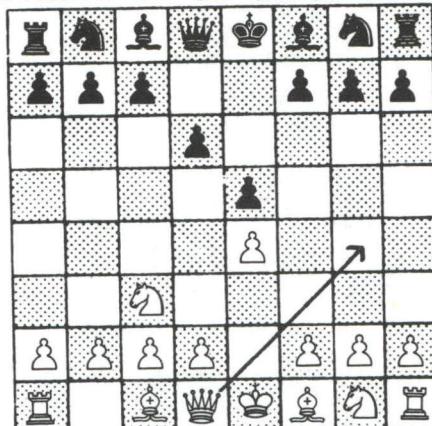
Ng8-e7

and so on. White has not played a very good game, bringing out his queen so early, but at least he has spotted all the enemy attcks.

If you can play 20 moves without losing material because of placing a piece on an attacked square, or missing a direct attack from your opponent, that is already an achievement, and you can then extend your checking to include higher material and tactical errors.

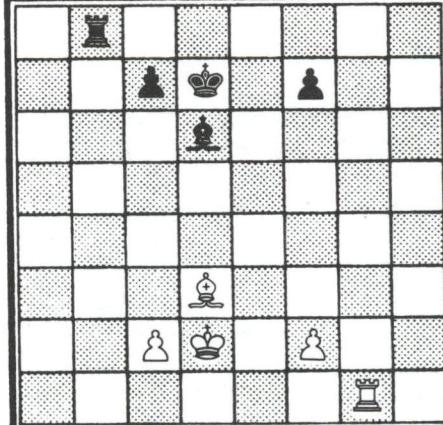
I should mention that there are three types of basic material error you can make when it is your turn to move:

- 1) you place a piece entirely undefended on an attacked square



In this position Qd1-g4 is an error of that type, since the bishop at c8 can capture it

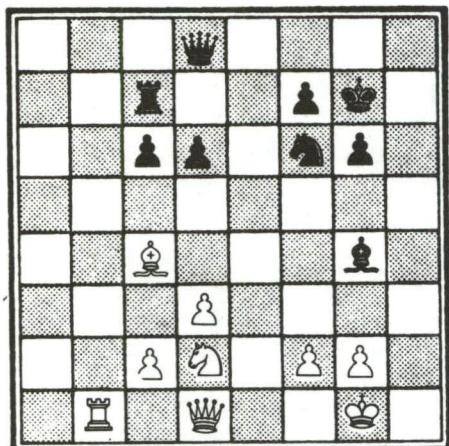
- 2) you place a piece on a square where it is defended, but attacked by an enemy man of lower value



Here Rg1-g3 is defended by the pawn at f2, but attacked by the bishop at d6. After Bd6xg3

f2xg3, white is two points down.

3) you capture a defended enemy piece of lower value



Here Qd1xg4 loses 6 points after the recapture Nf6xg4.

TEST 1

Play a game of 20 moves against a friend or a computer, using the ticks and triangles method.

To pass the test, you must play the 20 moves without a basic material mistake, and you must put all the correct signs in at the right time, and do the checking procedures.

Give yourself three 'lives'. If you miss out a tick or a triangle due to forgetfulness, put them in later with a bracket sign around them; three such bracket signs in 20 moves and you fail the test.

* * * * *

How did you get on? For some of you the test will have been childishly simple, in which case you can carry on to the remainder of the article. For those who failed the test, you will need to play more games till you are certain you cannot make a material error. Make sure the conditions are right for the test; there should be as few distractions as possible, no TV or radio blaring, no pressing engagement which makes you hurry to finish quickly.

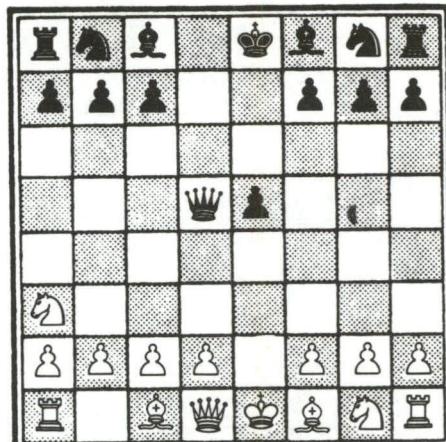
One of your greatest enemies may be impatience: take time to check the position before you place the tick or the triangle; make sure each move is good.

PART II

HIGHER MATERIAL CHESS

Besides the basic material error, your checking routines will need to include the three types of higher material error.

1) leaving unguarded



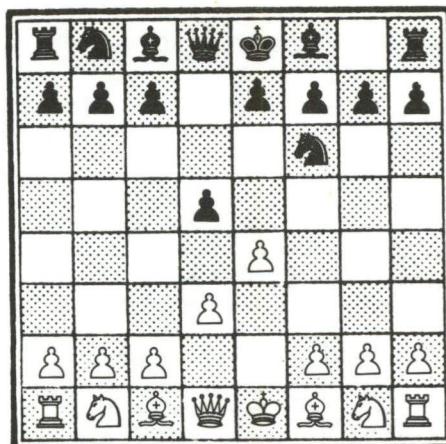
In this diagram you want to play Bf1-c4, attacking the queen at d5; you write the move down and check to see if the move is safe, which it is. So far so good; however, the move is still a blunder. Why?

Because the bishop had been guarding the pawn at g2, and black can now play Qd5xg2.

This type of error is called leaving unguarded.

2) focussed attacks

this is a type of threat involving several captures on one square



In the diagram position, you are white, and black has just played Ng8-f6.

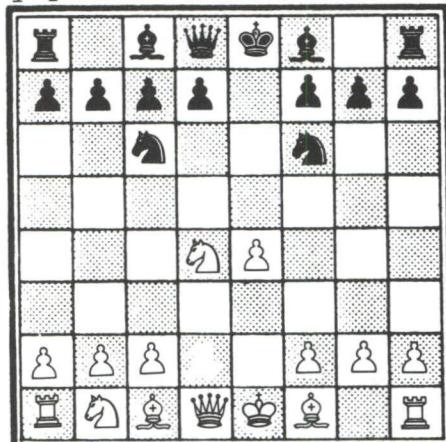
Should we put a triangle after the move?

Yes, because black has brought another attack to bear on the e4 pawn, and threatens to win a pawn by a sequence of captures, starting from his lowest value piece and working up:d5xe4 2 d3xe4 Nf6xe4.

These types of attack need to be worked out by counting the number of attackers and defenders on one piece. Usually, if there are more attackers than defenders, there is a threat of capture.

3) opening and closing lines

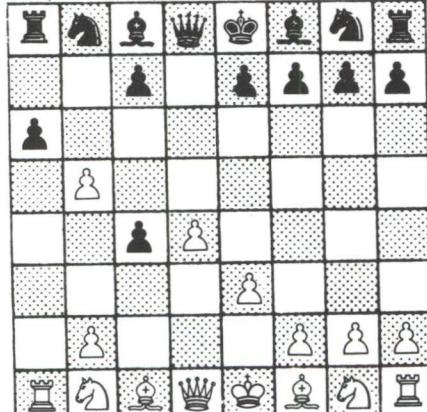
Another type of unforced error occurs when we cut a defensive line, or open a line of attack from an enemy piece.



If white plays Bf1-d3 here, to defend his attacked pawn at e4, he does not commit a basic error, but the move is still a mistake. He has cut the line of defence from his queen at d1 to the knight at d4, and black can now capture it by playing Nc6xd4. White would have done better to have played Nd4xc6 himself first, and then play Bf1-d3.

This error was due to closing a line.

b) opening a line



A simple example. Black plays here a6xb5, recapturing a pawn, and loses his rook after Ra8xa8.

TEST 2: play 20 moves, using ticks and triangles, without making any basic or higher material errors. Once again, give yourself three lives for the recording of the signs.

Before you place your tick, check for leaving unguarded, or opening and closing of lines; before placing the triangles, look for focussed attacks from your opponent, or attacks due to line opening.

Of course, if your opponent makes any of these errors himself, you should be ready to take advantage of them.

* * * * *

PART III

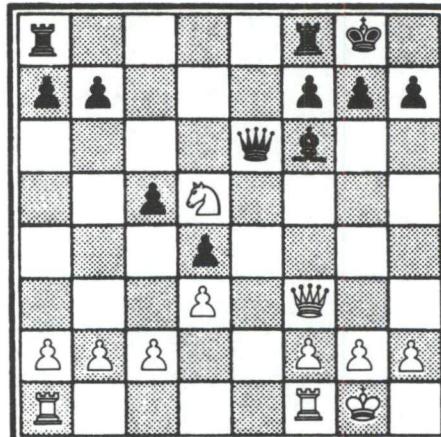
TACTICS

Tactics is a loose term to describe all the sorts of unusual attacks that arise on the chess board; it should also cover all capture series, many of which may go on for several moves, and need to be calculated accurately. Some writers have described tactics as the double attack, and this is quite a useful idea, since material chess is largely based on the single attack.

Basic tactics I shall call Forks, Pins, Skewers, Discoveries and simple mating threats.

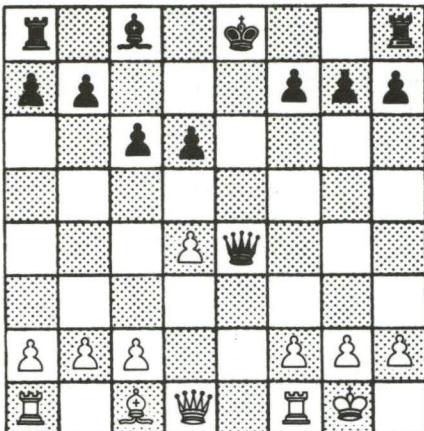
Here are examples:

1) FORK



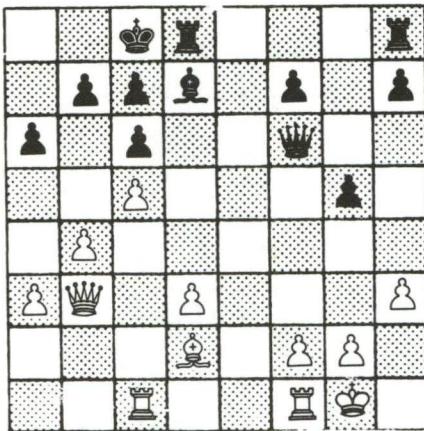
Nd5-c7 forks rook and queen

2) PIN



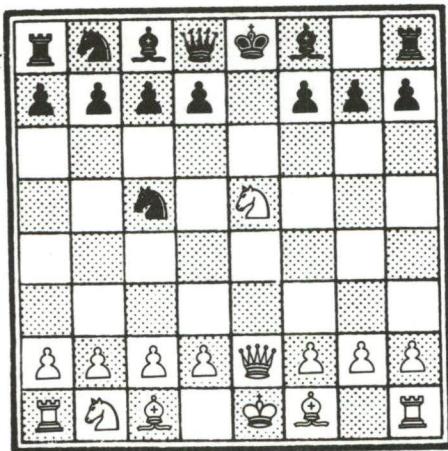
Rf1-e1 pins and wins the black queen.

3) SKEWER



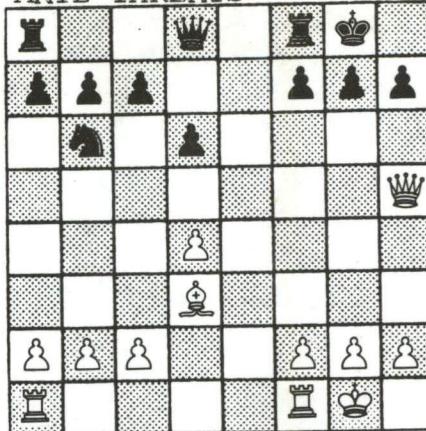
Bd2-c3 skewers the black queen and rook; after the queen moves away, the rook can be captured.

4) DISCOVERY



Here Ne5-c6+ discovers an attack on the king from the queen at e2, and also threatens the black queen, which cannot be saved.

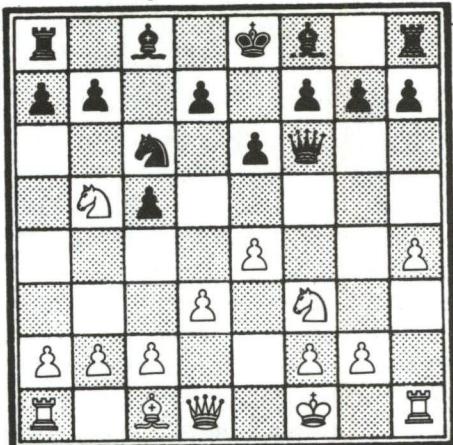
5) MATE THREATS



Here Qd1-h5 threatens mate at h7, due to the focussed attack from the queen at h5 and the bishop at d3.

All these threats require a new symbol $\blacktriangle T$, which stands for tactical threat, as distinct from material threat.

The $\blacktriangle T$ symbol needs to be placed the move before the threat occurs.



In this diagram white has just played Nc3-b5. At this point you should put down the symbol $\blacktriangle T$, and do something about it. If you wait until the fork actually occurs, it may be too late!

TEST 3

Here you must play 30 moves, using ticks, triangles and the new $\blacktriangle T$ symbol. You should not make any basic or higher material errors, and you should foresee and parry any of your opponent's simple tactical threats. If you can think up tactical ideas of your own, so much the better; they may help you to win quicker.

If you have followed the directions in this article you should now be playing a tighter, more controlled game. This in turn will give you the confidence to reach even greater heights in your chess playing.

Beyond basic tactics we have advanced and complex tactics. For example, there are also these tactical themes:-

- overloading
- removing defender
- deflection
- trapping
- pawn promotion
- obstruction

All these themes may involve forcing moves and sacrifices to bring them about. There may also be a mingling of themes, where a pin may involve a fork, a discovery and a mating threat as well. All this is a far cry from the basic material error with which we began our work, but that does not negate the value of our early excercises. If your game has not got rock solid material and tactical foundations, you are wasting your time trying to carry out more complex manouvres.

Tactical play has been well dealt with in many books, of which I will mention a few here: Winning Chess by Chernev, published by Cornerstone; It's Your Move (Batsford) by Teschner and Miles; Test your chess IQ (Pergamon) by Livshitz. These will inform you of the various tactical themes, and test you with hundreds of puzzles, but they are only a support for the real work of tactical analysis which you must learn to do in your own games, building upon the strengths you have obtained from this article.

Positional play? You can get along with the most rudimentary positional ideas, such as may be picked up in a book like Logical Chess by Chernev (Faber publication). They are: develop the pieces; control the centre with pawns; castle; don't attack too early in the game, before you have mobilized; don't move the same piece twice in the opening; don't bring out your queen too soon; develop pieces towards the centre; clear the back rank for your rooks; open files for your queen and rooks by exchanging pawns. But too much attention to positional play can be constricting, especially as one must learn to attack after one has mastered material chess, and this involves developing dexterity in mental calculations.

Also, we should be wary of putting too much burden on what is, after all, a checking routine. The routine is concerned with blunders, errors which lose pieces disastrously or overlook checkmates. Positional mistakes rarely cause such immediate collapse, so I recommend you restrict your checking routines to material and tactical errors.

Good luck with the method. I will be particularly interested to hear of readers' experiences and games, and will publish the most interesting accounts in future issues of Popular Chess.

Michael Basman , Jan. 1987.

TWO GAMES

FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

This game has been annotated twice; once by the player of the black pieces, Victor Matthias, who gives us an insight into the drama of the encounter, and the thoughts of the combatants; and the second time by a master player who demonstrates several positional and tactical ideas that the players may have missed.

WHITE : Tony

BLACK : Victor Matthias

Opening: NimzoIndian defence

1 P-Q4 N-KB3

2 P-QB4 P-K3

3 N-QB3 B-N5

4 B-Q2

Strangely enough, many books on the Nimzo-Indian hardly mention this sensible looking 4th move for white.

4 ... BxN

Perhaps premature. Many books recommend that this exchange of bishop for pinned knight be held up until the opponent has wasted a move by the challenge P-R3. Whether the exchange was premature or not, my aim was to place white's QB on the a1-h8 diagonal, then block it in with my next developing move ...P-Q4.

5 BxB P-Q4

6 P-K3 O-O

7 N-B3 N-B3

8 PxP PxP

9 Q-B2

This move, followed by B-Q3 two moves later, gives Tony a powerful hold on the long white diagonal.

9 ... Q-K2

10 P-QR3 N-K5

This is a typical move for me. True, I'm not fully developed yet; but I couldn't resist a move that affords black an initiative so early in the game. The very worst that could happen (I thought) was that in certain lines I'd end up exchanging the N for Tony's bad bishop at c3 (which in fact did happen).

11 B-Q3 P-KN3

A defensive (but weakening)

move, forced on me before I effect the planned exchange (see previous note). Without it, I'm going to allow Tony quickly to build up powerful threats against my h7 square, and hence my castled king.

12 P-KR4

Tony scents blood, and bares his teeth!

12 ... NxR

13 QxN

Recapture with the queen means that Tony is going to build up his threats very slowly indeed; but I suppose that he feared that recapture with his QNP would weaken his QRP - a very long term consideration...typical of Tony's style of play. The "plus" for him is, of course, that keeping the QNP where it is releases his QR from the defence of the pawn in front of it.

13 ... B-N5

14 K-Q2!

An excellent move, if a quiet one. The king is very safe at that time, on that square. The move unites Tony's rooks, and if I play ...BxN, he'll soon have a rook on the opened g file, looking at my king.

14 ... P-B3

At first sight, this seems to smack of a certain desperation; but, with the centre blocked, my king is in no real danger along this newly-opened diagonal; and my move inhibits the advance of Tony's knight, allows me soon to bring my KR to the defence of my king via KB2, and opens up the white squares for the expected retreat of my bishop.

15 N-R2

B-K3

Should it have gone to Q2, there and then? Tony said he wondered about that at the time. The decision for me was a very hard one; but I noticed that ...B-Q2 would, simultaneously, leave my QP and QBP undefended. Also, the B on Q2 would block up what might turn out to be a useful bolt-hole for my king. (I was already getting very worried!?).

16 QR-KN1 R-B2

17 P-KN4 K-R1

This looks crazy, incarcerating my king for ever in a tight little corner. It is undoubtedly one of the key moves of this fascinating little struggle. In the very long run, my decision turned out to be wise, as the king was easier to protect on h8 than on g8. But, when I made the move, Tony must have thought I was committing self-immolation.

18 P-B4

Tony tightens the screw slowly and methodically, advancing the third of his king-side pawn army in front of his king knight, which currently lies at KR2. He can afford to take his time, as my defences are so cramped.

18 ... R-N2

19 P-N5 P-B4

I was quite pleased with this manoeuvre, because it seemed to block up one of Tony's lines of fire; the b1-h7 diagonal. But when Tony learnt of the move he said that I'd now blocked in my own defensive white bishop with its own pawns, which appeared to me(I must say) a less serious consideration. In view of his capture of my defensive pawns soon afterwards, perhaps Tony's analysis was more acute than mine.

20 N-B3 B-Q2

I know Tony's advance of his KRP is coming, but I am powerless to much about it. My move means that my QN is temporarily pinned in front of the unguarded QBP, but I hope to reposition my bishop defensively on e8 maybe.

21 Q-B2

Once again, Tony chooses the slow methodical way, repositioning his queen on the temporarily closed up diagonal to exert pressure on my g6 pawn, behind its partner on f5.

21 ... Q-Q3

A very deep move, if I say so myself. Tony said it was not at all what he had been expecting. Its disadvantage is that it weakens my second rank defences. And doesn't my unmoved QR cry out to be brought into the picture? After all, I can't put a defensive bishop on e8 BEFORE bringing out the QR, or the poor rook will never properly be able to reach the main scene of battle. But I cast aside all these considerations because my chosen move (a) defends the g pawn anew (b) and defends the undefended c pawn (c) most importantly, vacates the e7 square for my knight, whose wondrous adventures are thus enabled to begin.

22 P-R5!

Here it comes!

22 ... N-K2

With my KRP pinned against the king, my move acknowledges the fact that my pawn wall is to be broken; but the entry of my knight on the scene of battle means my over-all defences are bolstered by an additional piece. 22...PxP? would, I think, have led to quick defeat for me, with the consequent opening up of the h file and Tony's doubling of rooks there and, perhaps, his advance of his own knight to h4.

23 PxP Nxp

24 BxP?

Tony's decisive error. He thought it was all too easy. He was too greedy. My f pawn was his for the taking anyway. He should have refrained from capturing it immediately and instead played the move I feared and to which I could see no very useful defence 24 R-R6!. This simultaneously pins my knight to the queen and prepares to double the rooks on the h file.

24 ... BxB

25 QxB R-KB1

Thanks to Tony's earlier impetuous capture of the f pawn, my QR can at

last jump into the fray and gain a valuable tempo (a breathing space) by forcing Tony's queen to withdraw from the now open f file.

26 Q-B2 NxP!!

This hit Tony like a bolt from the blue. He was very appreciative, however, and said it almost merited THREE exclamation marks, since it transformed a lost position for me into one where I might hope to draw, or even win! If Tony had captured the proffered knight then... QxBPch (a) wins the white N (& may even win it with check again), and (b) leaves Tony's K open anyway to a vicious attack from my queen and rooks, and (c) puts me a pawn up.

27 N-K5

I am not out of the wood yet, though. Tony calmly moves his knight out of the firing-line, and onto a menacing square from which it'll plague me for the great remainder of the game. His knight also blocks the diagonal for my queen, which means my knight is really en prise.

27 ... N-R6!!

Another enchanting knight manoeuvre! It moves from one square where it was en prise to another where, likewise, it is en prise. It is even more taboo on h3, however, than it had been earlier on f4, because if Tony takes it, then ...R-B7ch! skewers his queen. To enhance the beauty of my move, my untouched N now forks a white rook and Tony's KN, the latter of which I thereby win.

28 R-KB1!

Tony is still resourceful. He moves his rook on g1 out of danger and, at the same time, more or less compels me to exchange rooks on the f file, leaving him in possession of it and my threats along it annulled.

28 ... RxR

29 RxR NxP

After this move, just stop and examine the position for a moment. (1) Some 4 moves ago, I was a pawn down and my defences were tottering. (2) Now I am a pawn up (in other words, I've made a net gain of 2 pawns). (3) Where is that pawn army Tony had prepared against my king? All gone. (4) Tony's king is now almost as open to attack as mine still is.

30 Q-KB5!!

This time, Tony didn't miss the move I'd feared. It brings his attack roaring back into life. Most vitally, it gets his queen into the attack, just in time. For I'd been hoping to play 30...N-k5ch! next, bottling up his queen, perhaps for ever. His queen on f5 is absolutely enormous. It sets up threats along the f file and also threatens a back rank check which would lead to the demise of at least one of my queen-side pawns. Perhaps Tony even has a quick back rank mate, if I'm not careful. What's more, a spite check by me with the knight on e4 is now not only pointless but actually dangerous for me (rather than the check being dangerous to Tony) because I'm going to need my knight to counteract his and guard my weak points at h7&f7. I almost felt like resigning, as at first I could see no single move that would adequately defend against all the ways in which Tony's queen now menaced me. But, after much cogitation, I found the move—the only one, I think, which saves my game. Can you see it?

30 ... Q-Q1!

Backward queen moves such as this one are so hard to see, even when you stare at the board for ages. The move defends my back rank, which was absolutely essential; and my queen on Q1 also defends my knight. Of course, I lay myself open in the long-term to a knight fork by Tony on f7; but there is no immediate danger of this, as I have f7 twice defended. In any case, I can sidle my queen along the back rank a bit if I deem it necessary later.

31 K-Q3

Tony betrays the fact that my last move solves all my immediate problems. He excludes me from a check on e4, which I'd almost certainly not have played anyway.

31 ... K-N1

A strange looking move, because my king seems to be advancing into danger. I want, however, to make sure that f7 is thrice-protected, as it is thrice attacked. (Had I not played this move, Tony might have been able to engineer some sort of winning sacrifice on f7). Secondly, I am happy with a draw. Finally, what else can I do, except make useless waiting moves with my queen-side pawns?

32 N-N4

Tony decides to move his knight from its impregnable and threatening square on e5, so as to be able to threaten a check (and other things) on f6 instead.

32 ... K-R1

My draw-seeking king scoots back to its corner again to avoid the check.

33 N-B6 P-B3

I've never played such an ice-cool defensive move. The sweat trickles down my neck but I reckon that Tony still lacks any devastating combination against me, so I bolster up my queen-side pawn structure. This quiet move of mine, though, achieves one vital aim, in addition to what I've already said about pawn structure; it liberates my queen, which now no longer needs to remain on the d file to defend my d pawn.

34 R-KR1

Tony yields up his steely hold on the f file in order to swing his rook into a direct line on my cornered king; but my defences still hold. My isolated little KRP is pinned against the king and attacked 3 ways; but it is defended 3 ways as well! (Tony said at

this stage "I may not have anything better than a draw here". But he was still thinking hard and trying hard, as any player would do, having had such a dominating position against his opponent's cornered monarch.)

34 ... R-KB2!

I almost wish I didn't have to move at all; but, if I've got to do something, it may as well be courageous. Here, I am offering an exchange of knights, although my own knight is one of the lynchpins of the defence.

35 R-R6

Did Tony miss anything? I leave it to other observers to work out missed opportunities. Probably, there was no win, for Tony must have exhaustively investigated all his possible manoeuvres in this position. If there was a win for him, I missed the danger of it too; and I was giving quite as much thought to defence analysis as he was giving to his attack. (At last, incidentally, he has established a rook on R6, which had he done so 11 moves ago, - would probably have won the game for him. But, alas for Tony, he has put the rook on the right square too late.)

35 ... Q-KN1!

What's this??? Putting my queen en prise? No, this is a final cheeky flourish to round off my successful quest for an honourable draw. Tony's knight is pinned (by my previous move) against his queen; therefore, my move merely offers an exchange of queens. Or no; it really offers me even more than that. By putting my queen en prise and offering a Q-exchange I might even hope to win! After the exchange, Tony must move away his attacked N, whereupon my king emerges, breathless but unharmed, from its hole on h8, and I have a passed pawn which gives me the edge. (I am this pawn up anyway.) Once Tony declines this queen exchange (as he did do), my queen right beside the king is guarding the latter from most of the remaining threats that Tony can conjure up.

36 Q-K5 Draw agreed.

This I consider, was the finest defensive game I've ever played. Moreover, the game afforded me great pleasure because my defensive role was not dour, but was brightened by those dancing moves by my knight, after Tony snapped up the pawn too quickly on move 24.

Game 2 (Notes by Michael Basman)

White: Tony

Nimzo-Indian defence

Black: V. Mathias

1 d4 Nf6

2 c4 e6

3 Nc3 Bb4

4 Bd2

Not a very powerful line against the NimzoIndian. The trouble is that the bishop at d2 or c3 is blocked by its own pawns, and can quite often be exchanged off by black playing Nf6-e4xc3 (or d2).

4 ... Bxc3

5 Bxc3 d5

6 e3 0-0

7 Nf3 Nc6

I prefer Nbd7 here, which does not block the c pawn. Black later has problems counter-attacking in the centre with ...c5 because of this knight move.

8 cxd5

This exchange looks unnecessary. Why free the bishop at c8 and open the e file for black so obligingly?

8 ... exd5

9 Qc2 Qe7!

Excellent move, placing the queen on the newly opened e file.

10 a3 Ne4!

Another excellent centralising move. Black has a dominating game. Note this was all made possible by white's pawn exchange on move 8.

11 Bd3 g6

Unnecessary pawn move. Better to develop the bishop on d7, f5, or g4.

12 h4

Double-edged move. White's king

cannot really castle king side, so that gives black attacking chances as well.

12 ... Nxc3?

A faulty exchange, this time by black. The knight was well posted; why swap it for a barren bishop?

13 Qxc3 Bg4

14 Kd2!?

White hopes that the centre is so solid that the king can do without castling. Black's game still looks the better at this point. Possibly 14...Qf6 here threatens to win a pawn by 14...Bxf3 15 gxf3 Qxf3, and though white gains by opening the g file for the attack, Black also improves his attacking chances against the black king. After 14...Qf6 15 Be2 black could continue the attack with ...a5-a4 and ...Na5-b3 or c4. Or he could try to advance his c pawn, starting ...Rac8 and later playing ...Ne7 and ...c7-c5.

As the game goes, black gives white's attack too much respect, and soon finds himself in an inferior and defensive position.

14 ... f6

15 Nh2 Be6

16 Rag1 Rf7

17 g4

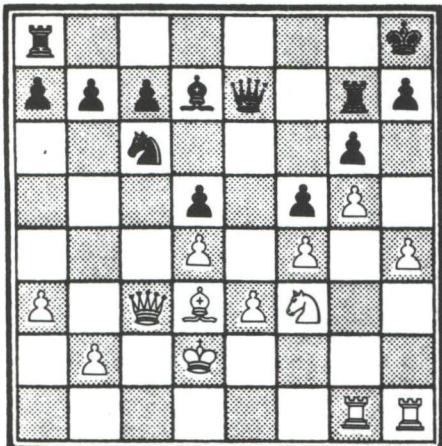
The white attack grows. Black's principle difficulty comes from swapping pieces on c3 at move 12.

17 ... Kh8

18 f4 Rg7

19 g5 f5

20 Nf3 Bd7



White has a beautiful looking position. A ready made attack on the black king with h5 and h5xg6; a black bishop blocked in by its own pawns on the white squares; and a possible outpost at e5 for the knight.

Besides the line chosen, white could have played to exchange bishop for knight at c8, which would give him an unassailable outpost at e5, and a crushing position for both middle game and endgame (if black gets that far).

Thus 21 Bb5 needs to be met by ...Nd8 22 Bxd7 Qxd7 23 Ne5 Qe7 24 h5 gxh5 25 Rxh5 Nf7, which is strong for white, but not overwhelming.

21 Qc2 Qd6

22 h5 Ne7

Supports the g pawn, but allows the knight immediately into e5. Why not 23 Ne5 gxh5 24 Rxh5 Ng6 25 Rh6 with tremendous pressure for white?

23 hxg6 Nxg6

24 Bxf5

Wins a pawn but allows some counterplay. Rh6 followed by the other rook to h1 looks stronger.

24 ... Bxf5

25 Qxf5 Rf8

26 Qc2 Nxf4!

Excellent counterblow! It looks too dangerous to capture the knight now, without allowing the black men into the fight against the white monarch.

27 Ne5!

And an excellent rejoinder. The knight arrives on a square he should have occupied several moves earlier.

27 ... Nh3?!

Though this move has tactical attractiveness, possibly Ng6, offering exchanges, was a simpler course.

28 Rf1!

Naturally, white cannot take the knight, for that would allow Rf2ch, winning the white queen. Now the white attack burns anew.

28 ... Rxfl

29 Rxfl Nxg5

Black has garnered a pawn, but has had to lose valuable time and position in doing so. The white rooks control the f file, and the knight at e5 has not been challenged.

30 Qf5!!

A crunching move which puts black in severe difficulties. There is, surprisingly, no direct threat, but if black plays something like ...c6? white has the combination Qxg5 Rg5 Nf7+ and Nxd6, winning a piece. Possibly 30...h6 could be played here, supporting the knight and providing a bolt hole for the king at h7 in some lines.

30 ... Qd8?

The dearth of reasonable moves gets to black. This move is worse than no move at all, but one cannot blame black. There was a degree of zugzwang about his position, which means that he had to tread very, very, carefully. For example, as the last note suggested, 31...a6 (doing nothing) or 31...h6 (doing a little) would have been better.

31 Kd3?

White misses his chance to finish black off.

31 Qxg5 Rg5 32 Nf7+ wins a piece, as does 31 Qxg5 Qxg5 32 Rf8+ Rg8 33 Nf7ch Kg7 34 Rxg8+ Kxg8 35 Nxg5. All white's moves are with check, and it is simply the arrangement of the pieces that allows him to pull off the winning combination.

31 ... Kg8

32 Ng4 Kh8

33 Nf6

White is angling for some mate at h7, but 33 Nh6!, renewing the threat

of Rxg5 and Nf7+ is better.
I can see no defence for black
there.

33 ... c6

34 Rhl

Here 34 Rgl could be met by
Rg6, counterattacking against the
knight at f6.

34 ... Rf7

Once again, staunch counter-
measures cause the white onslaught
to wilt.

35 Rh6 Qg8!

Continuing the harrassment.
The queen is not en prise due to
the pin along the f file.

36 Qe5

Here the game was agreed drawn.
It seems that the white pieces
have become ensnarled, despite,
their agressive positioning. Black
could play Qg7 here, and will
answer Qb8+ by Rf8 or Qf8.

All credit to black for his
heroic defence in a very
critical position.

Readers surprised by the high
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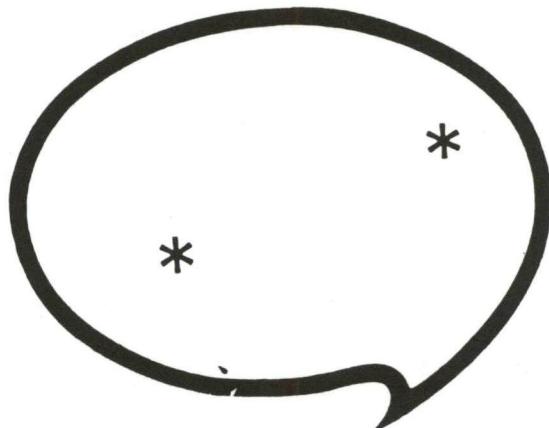
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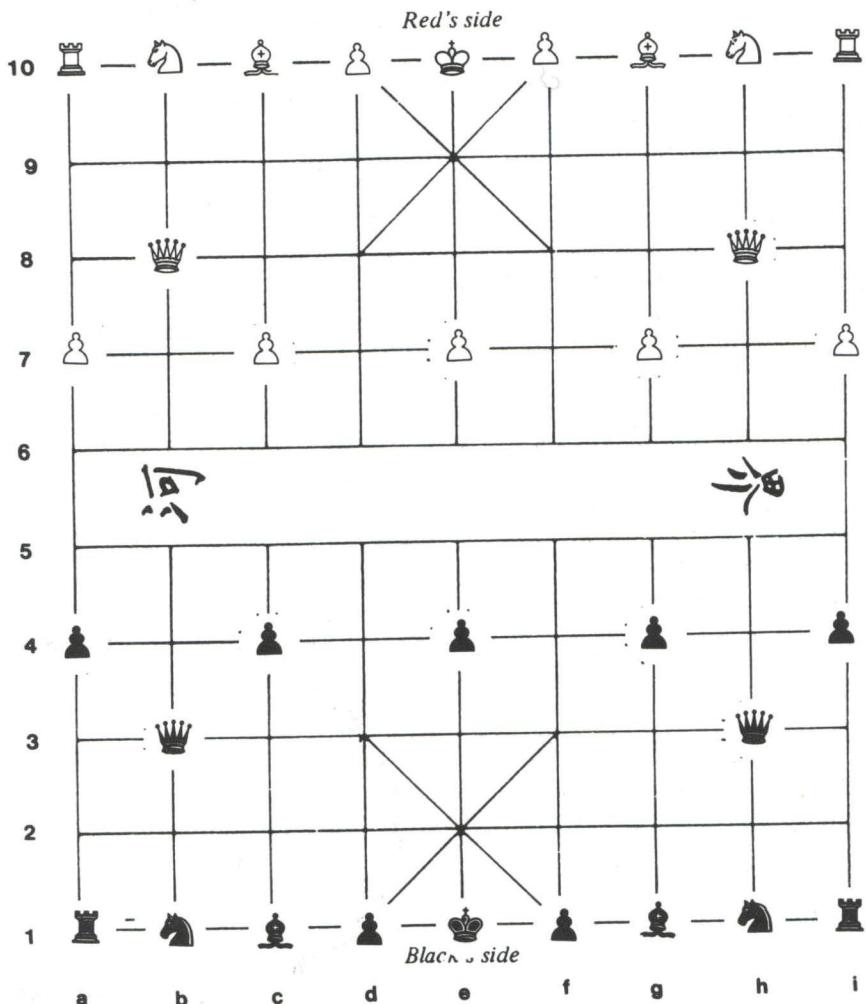
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THE ANCIENT GAME OF CHINESE CHESS

Of all the three oriental rivals to chess, - Go, Shogi and Chinese Chess - it is Chinese Chess that has the most similarities, and thus is the easiest game for a westerner to break into.



From the diagram above, you can see that the pieces are placed on the intersections, not in the squares. The board is 9 by 10, so there are 90 points, as opposed to 64 in chess. As the Chinese designs for the pieces may be hard to get used to, I have transposed them into their chess equivalents.

Now lets look at the pieces. The layout on the backrow is very familiar: rooks (chariots) at the corner, then knights (horses), then bishops (elephants), two mandarins (the king's bodyguards) and the king in the centre. No queens. The two 'queens' at b3 and h3 are in fact cannons. Then, along the fourth row we have the pawns (soldiers).

Now for the piece movements. The chariots move exactly like rooks, and capture in the same way. The horses move like knights in chess. For example, the horse at b1 could travel to c3 on its first move. However, unlike their western counterparts, these horses can be blocked. Their line of movement is one point straight, and one diagonally. If there is a piece in the line of movement, the horse cannot jump over him. Thus in the diagram position, the knight at b1 cannot go to d2, because his path is blocked by the elephant at c1. This feature takes a little getting used to.

As for the elephant, represented here by a bishop, he does a diagonal move of two spaces. But it is a move, not a hop, indicating

that elephants have a larger stride than humans. They cannot jump, and if there were a piece placed at f2, for example, the elephant at g1 could not reach e3. The elephants also may not cross the river, that middle section between the 5th and 6th rows.

Next come the general and his two mandarins. These pieces are all confined to the central fortress, and may not move outside it. The general can go one square horizontally or vertically, but not diagonally, and the mandarins can move one point at a time diagonally only.

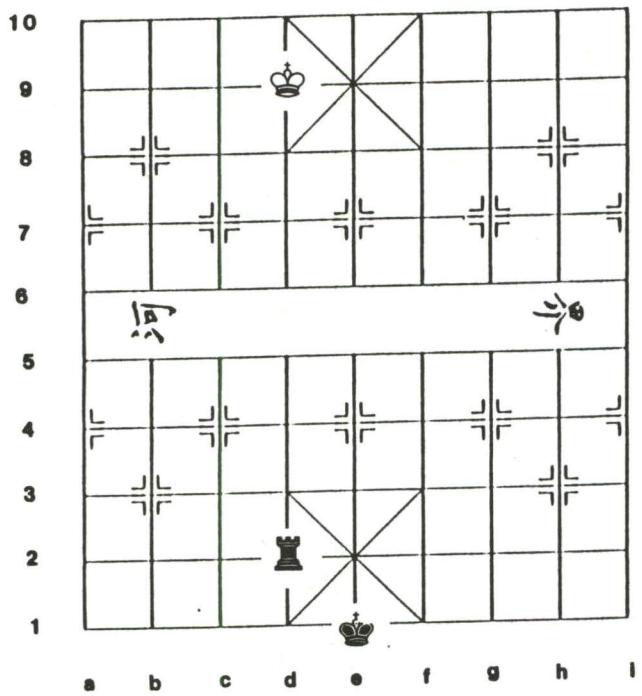
The cannons move just like rooks, but capture by jumping over a screening piece, which can be either friend or foe. Thus the cannon at b3 could capture the horse at b10, though in this case he would only be recaptured by the chariot at a10.

The cannons are ballistic pieces. The rule of jumping over to capture gives the idea of the height to which a cannonball rises in the air after firing.

Finally, the soldiers. They can move one point at a time in a forwards direction, and they capture in the same way that they move, unlike western pawns. When a soldier has crossed the river, he is promoted, and can then move sideways as well as forwards. Soldiers cannot move backwards.

The object of the game is to checkmate the enemy general, just as in chess. Perpetual check is not allowed, and the checking side must vary his move, even if this means defeat. Stalemate is a win for the stalemating side.

Though the kings cannot get out of their fortresses, they can influence the checkmating process. There is a rule that two generals/kings may not face each other along an empty line. Thus the position in the diagram below is checkmate. The chariot at d2 gives check to the king at d9, which cannot move aside to the e line, because that would be going face to face with the enemy general.



A few words on strategy. Pawn structure is meaningless here, as the position is wide open and outposts and lines for the pieces can readily be found. Nor is pawn grabbing to be recommended, as an extra pawn will never turn into a queen, and the time spent capturing a pawn may leave you exposed or behind in development. Development is important, and often the first moves of a game will be spent mobilising the cannons, horses, and chariots, which bear the brunt of the fighting.

Both kings are extremely vulnerable, despite the vast array of defensive pieces. Frequently attacks are mounted by both sides, and the difference between checkmate for one side or another may hang on just one move. Attack and counterattack are the hallmarks of this fast moving game.

The values of the pieces are rather hard to assign, but give the chariot roughly 8 points, the horse and cannon 5, and the rest of the pieces 1-2 points in value.

Now for a couple of early traps (the Chinese Chess equivalent of Fool's Mate and Scholar's mate). In order to follow these games, I suggest you get out your paper Chinese chess board supplied with this article, and set up small chess pieces on the board, just as in the first diagram.

The notation I am using is the same as Algebraic, with letters along the bottom, and numbers going up the sides. The symbols for the pieces are as follows:

King/General	= K	Chariot	= R
Horse	= N	Cannon	= C
Mandarin	= M	Elephant	= E

No symbol for the soldier.

x is a capture; + means check as in chess.

Game 1: Fool's Mate

1 Cb3-c3 Mf10-e9

This move of the mandarin, incarcerating the general, is a vital part of the self-mating process.

2 Cc3xc7

The cannon leaps over and captures the soldier at c7.

2 Cb8-c8??

Suicidal.

3 Cc7xc10 checkmate!

The cannon now attacks the red king over the top of his mandarin, and there is no way of unblocking the check nor of moving the king to a safe place.

Game 2: The double cannon checkmate.

1 Cb3-e3

This is called the central cannon opening, quite a popular one, as it puts immediate pressure on the enemy soldier at e7. White does best to defend it by moving one of his knights to c8 or g8. Here is what happens if he just makes pointless moves.

1 . Nh10

2 Ch3-h5 Ril0-i9

3 Ce3xe7 Nbl0-c8

Attacking the cannon at e7 - too late.

4 Ch5-e5 checkmate!

If red interposes to block one cannon check, the other unleashes its fire. Even if he captures the forward cannon with the knight, this piece then becomes a screen and the check is still there from the cannon at e5.

My own interest in Chinese Chess was revitalised when I purchased a Chinese Chess computer from Novag at Southampton this year (1986). A constant sparring partner such as this is a real boon, especially as there are so few players of the game in England. I will give a couple of my games against the computer with annotations.

Black always starts first.

Black Michael Basman

Red Chinese Chess computer, level 8

1 Nh1-g3

Develops the knight towards the centre, and also supports the sensitive e4 soldier.

1 ... Nh10-g8

2 Cb3-e3

Centralises the cannon, and eyes the opposing enemy fortress.

2 ... Ch8-i8

An unusual looking move, but the cannon now puts pressure on the soldier at i4, as well as clearing the file for the chariot to come to h10.

3 Nbl-c3 Cb8-e8

4 Ril-i2

One way of developing the chariots is to lift them off the back row and then move them sideways to an open file.

4 ... Ril0-h10

The chariot occupies the open line, but does not yet threaten to capture the cannon at h3, as this is defended by the cannon at e3.

5 Ri2-f2?

This move cost me a soldier at i4, because in moving the chariot over to the central file, I inadvertently left him unguarded.

5 ... Ci8xi4

The computer immediately leaps upon this error. I cannot capture the cannon with my knight at g3, as his path is blocked by the cannon at h3.

6 c4-c5

This advance of the soldier is usually played to allow the knight at c3 to advance to b5 or d5.

6 ... Rh10-h4!

The computer immediately puts on more pressure. I was now beginning to feel uncomfortable. The chariot was threatening a capture at g4, after which the horse at g3 would be vulnerable, and then both cannons at e3 and h3. Added to this the e4 point was under fire from both cannons, and I had visions of the computer slowly eating through my rickety position. Donnelly's book on Chinese Chess (advertised elsewhere) advises that often the best method of defence in this game is counterattack. But how could I find some means of striking back which did not leave me completely denuded of fighting units at the end of the day? Eventually I devised a plan.

7 Nc3-d5!

The knight begins a long but jaunty trek to the other side of the board.

7 ... Rh4xg4

The computer has breakfast.

8 Nd5-f6

Taking advantage of the peculiarities of the horse's move in Chinese chess to strike at the knight at g8, which cannot strike back because of the blocking pawn at g7. The knight also hits a few other pieces - the chariot at g4 and the cannon at e6. You could call it a fork.

8 ... Rg4xg3

The computer has lunch. And it looks like supper is not far off in the shape of the cannon at h3 and the elephant at g1.

9 Nf6xg8!

At last black gets in his counterblow, and what a blow it is! By capturing the knight at g8, black now threatens checkmate by 10 Rf2xf10.

9. ... Ce8xe4+

Red has no time to gobble up black pieces any more, and opens up a new avenue of attack against the black general.

10 Ce3xe7

Fortunately for black, he need not passively defend against the cannon check by moving a mandarin to e2. This capture removes the screen, and thus gets the general out of check.

10 ... Rg3-e3 double check!

The computer simply will not give up. Now he swings in with a double check from cannon and rook, and the rook is immune to capture due to the screening check rule.

11 Mf1-e2

As I later realised, this was an innaccuracy which could have cost me dear. Better was to play Md1-e2.

11 ... Re3xh3 discovered check

The computer is playing skittles with my pieces. Another cannon disappears, but I still have my little threat of Rf2xf10 checkmate. I had intended to answer 12 Kel-f1 but just in time realised that red then had a forced mate starting 12...Ci4-il+ 13 Egl-i3 Rh3-hi+ 14 Ei3-g1 Rh1xg1 checkmate.

I therefore retraced my steps and put the other mandarin in the way, preparing to move my General to d1 and not f1.

12 Me2-f1 Ci4-f4

Jettisoning a cannon to avert mate. By now the computer had realised that the game was up.

13 Rf2xf4 Rh3-e3 double check

14 Md1-e2 Re3-i3 discovered check

15 Kel-d1

Why can't red defend against the checkmate by placing his own mandarin at e9, guarding the f10 square? Because that would put his own general in check from the cannon at e7! So, after performing a ritual sacrifice on his own chariot, the computer gave up the ghost.

15 ... Ri3-f3

16 Me2xf3 Ecl0-a8

17 Rf4xf10 checkmate.

The next game is a longer affair and features mutual attacks on the two fortresses. Fortunately, when one is carrying out an attack in Chinese chess, one does not have to worry that the opponent can bale out by giving perpetual check. Perpetual check is simply not allowed in Chinese chess, and the checking side must vary even if this means defeat for him.

Development - that is, the activity of all the pieces - is important in Chinese chess, and the main problem the computer laboured under in this game was poor placing of its horses, one of which was driven back to the a9 point, the other to f10!

The game also illustrates a potent attacking theme - landing a horse at the sensitive g9 spot (or c9) - which can seriously disrupt the enemy general's life style.

White	Basman
Black	Computer level 6
1 Nhl-g3	Nh10-g8
2 g4-g5	Cb8-e8
3 Ril-i2	Nbl0-c8
4 Ri2-f2	Ral0-b10
5 Cb3-c3	c7-c6
6 Ecl-a3	Ch8-i8
7 Nbl-d2	Ri10-h10
8 Ch3-i3	Rh10-h4
9 Ng3-f5	Ci8xi4

An attack from the horse at f5 against the chariot at b4.

10 ...	Ci4xe4
11 Nf5xg4	Ce4xa4 discovered check

The check is coming from the cannon at e8.

12 Mdl-e2	Ca4xal
-----------	--------

The tactics have resulted in the exchange of chariots and the loss to black of a couple of soldiers. But now the computer threatens checkmate starting with 13...Rb10-bl double check. I cannot interpose by placing the mandarin at d1 because it is still pinned by the cannon at e8.

13 Nd2-b3	
-----------	--

Blocks the threatened invasion. The horse is defended by the cannon at i3.

13 ...	Mf10-e9
--------	---------

14 g6xg7	
----------	--

It would be unwise to capture the cannon at al, since after 14 Nb3xal Rb10-bl+ black would soon be mated. So, as the red attack has been held on the left wing, black prosecutes his own attack on the other wing. After the move played (g6xg7) black gains his first positional advantage, for the red horse is driven back to a passive square.

14 ...	Cal-a2
--------	--------

Counterattacking against the chariot.

15 Rf2-f9	Nf8-d10
-----------	---------

16 Cc3xc6!	
------------	--

Apparently a blunder, but this is not so, since if red now plays 16...Rb10xb3, he is mated by 17 Cc6xc10, a Fool's Mate pattern we have seen earlier.

16 ...	Nc8-a9?
--------	---------

Though this renews the threat of Rb10xb3, I do not like a move that places a knight in such an offside position.

17 Cc6-g6	
-----------	--

Another mate threat is generated, this time against the elephant at g10.

17 ... Egl0-i8

18 Cg6-g3

In this way black guards the horse at b3 by screening his cannon at i3.

18 ... Rb10-b4

Pawn grabbing, a weakness of chess computers, not merely Chinese chess computers. Redeploying the knight at a2 looked the better bet to me.

19 g7-g8 Rb4xc4

20 g8-h8

This soldier is gunning for the elephant at i3, which is holding up the mating attack by guarding g10 against the invasion of the cannon at g3.

20 Ca2-b2!

Neatly obstructing both the horse at b3 and the elephant at a3, and threatening checkmate by Rc4-cl. Black must attend to his defences again.

21 Egl-e3!

A good move, which guards cl as well as covering the e line against the pressure of the cannon at e8.

21 ... Cb2-bl

Now threatening to continue the attack with Rc4-cl double check, a familiar cannon and chariot battery.

22 h8xi8!

Black sees that red's attack will not lead to checkmate, so takes the opportunity to strengthen his own hand by removing the elephant which was defending the g10 square.

22 ... Ce8-g8

Since black was immediately threatening checkmate with Cg3-g10, red blocks this line but at the same time takes one of this best placed pieces out of the attack.

23 i8-h8 Cg8-g10

24 Nh3-f5!

An important move. Black must bring more men in to round off the assault. His primary advantage still consists in the poor placing of the red horses at a2 and f10.

24 ... Rc4-cl+

25 Me2-d1 Rcl-c9 discovered check

26 Ee3-cl Rc9-d9

27 Nf5-h6

The knight's manouevres are not purposeless. He is headed for the checking square g9.

27 ... Rd9-d6

28 Nh6-f7 Rd6xd1+

29 Kel-e2 Eclo-a8? Better Me9-f8.

30 Nf7-g9 Rd1-el+

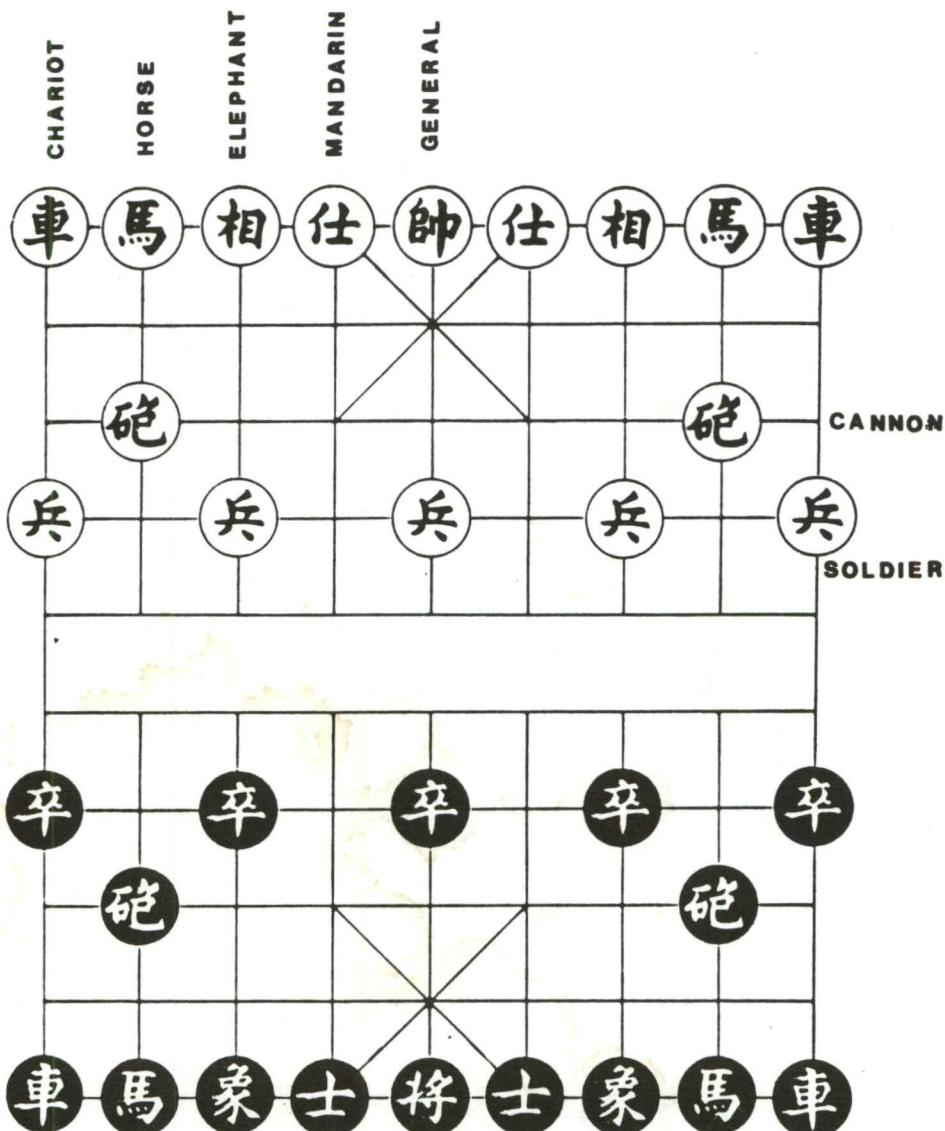
31 Ke2-d2 Cg10xg3

32 Rf9-f8 discovered checkmate.

GETTING USED TO THE CHINESE PIECES

This needn't take long. The trick is to hang some mental idea on to the piece so you can quickly recognise it. For example, the red soldiers have two feet; the black soldiers look like scarecrows. The horses have four little feet; the chariots look like boxes on wheels. The mandarins have an unmistakable 土 symbol; and the cannons always have a curved tail. Don't forget that the same piece does not always look the same for both sides. The red elephant looks like a man standing beside an elephant house; the black elephants look like a smudge.

A little practice and you will soon be playing with the real Chinese figures. It's much easier than learning to eat with chopsticks!



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