



C O L U M N I S T S

## Novice Nook

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### The Seeds of Tactical Destruction

Novice Nook readers know that I have sometimes referred to “The Seeds of Tactical Destruction” in recent columns. This concept is so important that it deserves its own book, much less its own article

At the heart of the matter is the following question: “When you analyze a position *during a game*, what suggests that you should spend time looking for a tactical combination and which, when lacking, suggests that such a search is likely a waste of time?”

When *solving tactical problems*, each one has a solution (although I have an idea for a book where a percent do not!), so the question, “Are there tactics here worth trying to find?” is moot. However, in a game, no one holds up a sign saying something like, “Black to play and win the exchange using the motifs of a removal of the guard followed by a double attack, in four moves.”

If you look for the combination and it isn’t there, you may be wasting your time; but if it is there and you don’t look for it, you may be missing an immediate win. So the problem becomes, what factors tell you, “Hey, spend some time; it might be worth it?”

I call these factors “The Seeds of Tactical Destruction.”

Note that they are seeds, not the destruction itself. Just because a factor exists does not necessarily mean that you can take advantage of it. But if the factor(s) do not exist, then there is almost never anything on which you can base a combination (see my archived [ChessCafe.com](#) article on Using Steinitz’ Laws), so the existence of one is very unlikely.

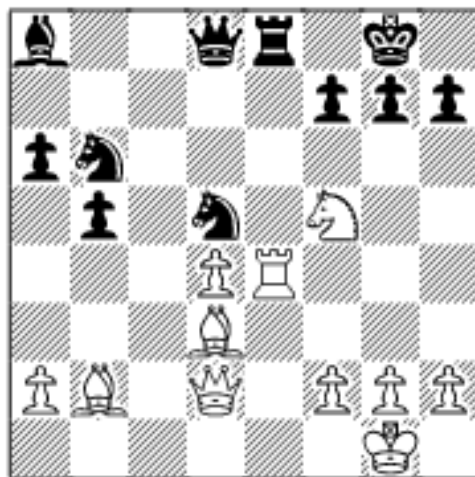
Among the more common Seeds of Tactical Destruction are:

- Loose (unguarded) pieces - "Loose Pieces Drop Off" = LPDO
- Pieces that can easily be attacked by enemy pieces of less value
- One or more pieces than can be attacked via a "discovered attack"
- Weak back rank
- Pinned or "skewerable" pieces along the same rank, file, or diagonal

- Pieces (or squares) vulnerable to Knight forks
- Overworked pieces (pieces guarding more than one piece or square)
- Inadequately guarded pieces
- Falling way behind in development (overwhelming opponent forces)
- Pawns nearing promotion
- King uncastled or lost pawn protection with Queens on the board
- Open enemy lines for Rooks, Queens, and Bishops to your King
- Pieces that have little mobility and might easily be trapped if attacked
- A large domination of one side's forces in one area of the board

I am sure you can think of one or two more.

A special note should be added about the final Seed: “threats that can be met in only one (or very few) ways.” This is a more subtle entry. If your opponent has only one way to meet a threat, then his “flexibility” (as I describe it in my book *Elements of Positional Evaluation*) is low and your chances of success are much greater. Let us consider an example from a Reinfeld book on tactics:



What are the Seeds of Tactical Destruction available to White, who is to play?

1. He has more pieces on or pointing to the kingside, where Black's King resides.
2. His Knight on f5 attacks several key squares around the Black King, such as g7 and h6.
3. His Rook is lifted to the fourth rank, where it can swing to the kingside files to aid the attack.
4. Black's back rank is vulnerable, as his Queen and Rook must guard each other.

Putting these together leads to the possible candidate move **1.Qg5**,

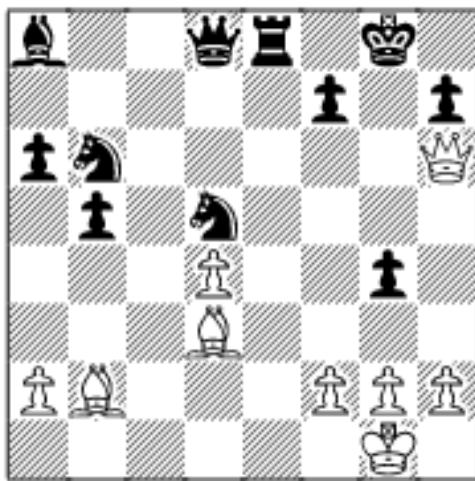
threatening 2.Qxg7#, and the Queen is safe because 1...Qxg5?? allows 2.Rxe8#.

*In tactical positions, one should always consider checks, captures, and threats, usually in that order.* The most forcing moves – or the ones with the biggest payoffs, such as mate or winning enough material to win - usually should receive your higher priority. In the diagram 1.Qg5 is a very high priority candidate move because mate-in-one threats should often be given higher priority than mundane checks and captures that don't appear to be promising.

Since we have seen that 1...Qxg5?? loses and 1...Qf6?? 2.Rxe8# is no better, Black must play **1...g6**. This is already a good sign for White, for any time your opponent only has one reasonable move to stop your threat, you get a free move to continue your attack. So what suggests itself after 1...g6? Well, **2.Qh6** is a logical follow-up, which continues to threaten a similar mate on g7.

This is such a typical combination that I often use it when giving private lessons. However, at this point many of my students say, "I would never consider 2.Qh6; it would lose the Knight." But look at it this way: *I am not losing a Knight at all! The sacrifice is still "in my head"! If the variation doesn't work, I won't play it, so the Knight is in no danger!* And I am not wasting my time if the line is forcing and has a decent chance for success. Of course, it takes some experience to know when analyzing lines involving sacrifices are wastes of time and when they are not but, as mentioned before, if the payoff (here mate) is potentially bigger than the cost (anything is less than mate), it is worth investigating.

After 2.Qh6, for the same reasons (2...Qf6? 3.Rxe8#), **2...gxf5** is forced. But now White has two promising lines of attack: 3.Rg4+ targeting g7 and 3.Rh4 threatening h7. In this case looking at the check first is correct even though it "loses" a Rook, since Rh4 is less forcing and gives Black the opportunity to try defenses like 3...Re1+, so **3.Rg4+** forces **3...fxg4** (3...Kh8 4.Qg7#). But now I now recognize a well-known mating sequence:

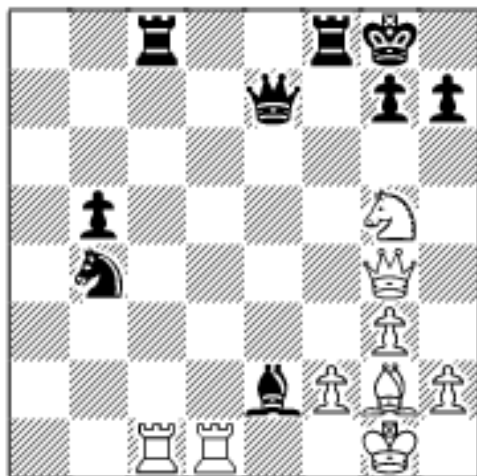


This is the old, “Put the Bishop on g6 mate shown in *Novice Nook* last month!.” **4.Bxh7+ Kh8 5.Bg6+ Kg8 6.Qh7+ Kf8 7.Qxf7#** I recognized this mating pattern as one “chunk” of my tactical knowledge.

If you are still unsure of how this tactic can be spotted if you don’t already know it, how should your thinking proceed to get the solution? Your candidate moves

are 4.Qxh7+ and 4.Bxh7+. But 4.Qxh7+ allows the King to escape toward the center as 4...Kf8 5.Qh8+ Ke7 is not clear, so that leaves 4.Bxh7+ as the more likely containment process. So you say to yourself, “OK, after 4.Bxh7+ Kh8 I want to play a discovered check. *Since the Touch Move Rule does not apply to mental analysis, suppose I just move my Bishop anywhere to some random square – I will come back later and fill in the blank once I see what happens.*” So 5.B??+ Kg8 6.Qh7+ (at this point 6.Bh7+ just gives me a draw – good for playing GM’s, bad for solving White to play and win problems) 6...Kf8. Now you stop and say, “Where would I like to have my Bishop now?” The answer is g6, for if f7 is unguarded, then Qxf7 is mate, so mentally you fill in the blank: 4.Bxh7+ Kh8 5.Bg6+! Kg8 6.Qh7+ Kf8 7.Qxf7# - Voila!

Here is a position from a recent slow game I played: diagram



I am playing White and have just allowed Black to double attack my Queen and Rook with **31...Be2**. My opponent is a good tactical player and believes he has found a hole in my analysis. Who is correct? Let’s list some Seeds for White:

- Black's Rook on c8 is attacked twice and defended once.
- White can threaten Mate-in-one on h7
- A kind of Philidor's Legacy possibility exists on checks

on the a2-g8 diagonal (with either discovered checks with the Knight or smothered mate on f7 possible).

- Rd7 can get to the 7th rank with tempo
- The Black Queen is overworked in that it must guard the Knight and the Bishop

White is able to best use only the first of these, but that is sufficient and the geometry is perfect for a nice finish. Who said that chess was an easy game?: **32.Qxc8 Bxd1** You should be able to see that this is forced, as 32...Rxc8? 33.Rxc8+ Qf8 34.R1d8! (stronger than 34.Rxf8+, which also wins easily).

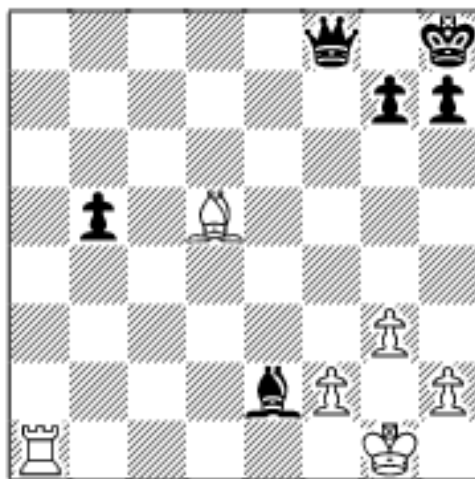
Now there are a new set of Seeds – see if you can find how some have changed! **33.Qe6+** (Reminder: “Always consider checks, captures, and threats, usually in that order of descending force.”) **33...Qxe6** Black’s moves are all forced, which is good! **34.Nxe6 Re8** (34...Rxf2 35.Rxd1 doesn’t help, but not 35.Kxf2 Nd3+ which unnecessarily complicates things) **35.Rxd1 Rxe6** (now the remaining seeds should be readily apparent!) **36.Rb1** Removal of the guard is a probably the most underrated tactical motif; here White removes the guard to the square d5. **Black resigns**, as the perfect geometry continues: 36...Re4 is not possible, and a Knight move is met by 37.Bd5 winning the exchange and a pawn.

I was proud to find this combination and showed it to several of my students because it is really quite instructive. Interestingly, most of the students who are at the level of the intended audience of this column had trouble seeing that 32.Qxc8 was strong. Some even rejected it out-of-hand by thinking “I can’t take the Rook with the Queen because it is guarded by a Rook, and I will be giving up 9 pawns (actually about  $9\frac{3}{4}$ ) for 5. They miscounted that this instead should be “9 for 10” for the immediate captures since White gets two Rooks, not to mention that White is winning the Queen back with interest if his is captured.

In thought process books, the above analysis problem is called a “quiescent” error. These type of errors occur when a player stops analyzing a position for a superficial reason, even though there are still relevant checks, captures, and/or threats remaining. Thus the position is not “quiet” and analysis should not be stopped for evaluation yet.

Other students had trouble figuring out that 32...Bxd1 was forced. This lack of deductive logic is not necessarily just due to lack of skill; it could also likely be lack of experience at working through difficult positions in slow games – too much fast chess will do that to you! In order to play better, you need to practice better.

Interestingly, both my opponent and I looked at the candidate move 32.Qxb4?! – spectacular but faulty. My opponent said he looked at the line 32.Qxb4 Qxb4 33.Bd5+ Kh8 34.Nf7+ Rxf7 (necessary if Black is playing to win) 35.Rxc8+ Rf8 (my analysis had stopped here and I decided Black was better) 36.Rxf8+ Qxf8 37.Ra1, and he wondered if White was OK:



In the above position Black should not play 37...Bh5 (or 37...Bg4) because of 38.Ra8 Be8 39.Bc6. He can win the Bishop and pawn endgame after 39...b4 or 39...Bd3, but I pointed out that **37...Bf3!** is immediately decisive and pretty. The theme that the Bishop guards a8 through the other Bishop in the line 38.Ra8 Qxa8 39.Bxa8 Bxa8 is much more commonly seen with Rooks. The other line is 38.Bxf3 Qxf3 and the Black Queen still

guards a8.

White is not doomed by a Seed of Tactical Destruction – that happened earlier – he is down a Rook for a Queen and that is sufficient to give Black the flexibility to win in more than one way.

As always, I welcome questions from [ChessCafe.com](http://ChessCafe.com) readers.

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