Dan Heisman

Everyone's Second Chess Book

Second Edition, Revised and Expanded

BOSTON

Contents

Preface to the Second Edition

Everyone's Second Chess Book was the third book I wrote, after *Elements of Positional Evaluation* and *The Improving Annotator*. But it was my first book to strike a chord in a wide readership (*Elements* was more of a cult classic). In a sense, *Everyone's* was the precursor to my very successful "Novice Nook" column at Chess Café, which seven times won the award for "Best Instruction" from the Chess Journalists of America.

After the first printing quickly sold out, we fixed a few typos and came out with a second printing, which also sold out fairly quickly. At some point the rights to the book came into dispute, and no more printings were made. As a result, used copies of *Everyone's* sold for astronomical amounts on the Internet, sometimes going for as much as $200 a copy! For a while I was selling autographed copies for about one-tenth as much, but few bothered to look at my website www.danheisman.com and order the much less expensive autographed copies from me! ☺

One problem with the first two printings was that the pictures all involved scholastic players. This was not my idea, as the title *"Everyone's..."* was correct. Some potential readers browsing through the book looked at the pictures and got the wrong idea that the book was just meant for young juniors. However, readers soon realized that this was far from the case, as the intended reader was *anyone* looking for a "second" chess book. Most of the examples of erroneous play could have (and have!) been made by inexperienced players of any age. Moreover, the intended audience's age was not a factor when I was writing the book. For this new edition, we have completely changed the pictures to be more appropriate to the material.

The first edition of *Everyone's* was rather a thin book. This was intentional, but that left plenty of room to add new material in a second edition without making the book too weighty. So, besides adding material to the existing sections, I have added a number of

new chapters dealing with more of those "What do I do next to get better?" issues that made the first edition so popular.

As with all new editions, we have corrected either outdated or incorrect information from the first edition and edited for greater clarity. In this respect, I want to thank game reviewer Troy Duncan, with especially big kudos to second-edition editor Jorge Amador.

So here's hoping you did not have to pay $200 for the copy you are reading...!

Dan Heisman
Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, August 2017

Chapter 1

Learning, Chunking, And Chess Mistakes

When humans learn a complex subject, such as reading or chess, they learn in "chunks" of information. These chunks gradually get more complex, the complexity corresponding to the level of information that the learner is currently able to process. For example, when a child learns reading, the levels representing these chunks are something like:

1. Recognizing which shapes are which letters
2. Remembering which letters make which sounds
3. Putting letters together to make multiple sounds, such as words
4. Recognizing words (and their meanings – although this is usually already known from learning how to talk)
5. Scanning several words, a line, or even multiple lines for content

There is a reading trick you may have seen. One puts the word "the" in a sentence twice consecutively, once at the end of a line and once at the start of the next. You then ask someone to read the sentence, which you place in the middle of a paragraph. Most experienced readers will not read both "the's". The reader's chunking capability at "reading level 5" makes this trick work.

When your reading chunks are at a higher level (adults with reading experience are almost all at level 5), then you can read quite a bit faster, but you no longer notice the individual words and letters in the same way you did when you were at a lower level. However, a beginning reader at level 3 or 4 will be processing one word at a

time and, when presented with the double "the" trick, will usually see the two "the's."

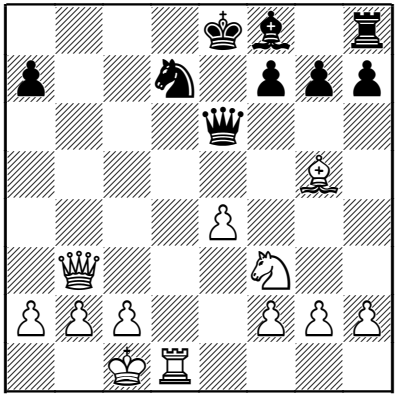
Learning how to play chess can be thought of in exactly the same way. As you progress in chess experience, you will go through similar "levels":

1. Recognizing the pieces
2. Remembering how the pieces move
3. Determining legal moves for each piece
4. Determining reasonable moves for each piece
5. Seeing the whole board and determining reasonable plans for your entire set of pieces

I consider these chunking levels to be classified as "board vision" capabilities, because each is a cognitive problem the brain must deal with via the information obtained from visual input. Thus, a player looking at the board sees different things based upon his level, just as a non-football fan would not be able to recognize a blitzing linebacker when watching a game – instead, he might ask "what is a linebacker?"

The following provides an example of how a player at each level might think if he had Paul Morphy's position in this famous game:

Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard



Morphy

Level 1: *"Is that my queen or my king here close to me?"*

Level 2: *"Let's see, my knight moves like an 'L'."*

Level 3: *"Can that white rook jump over the black knight?"*

Level 4: *"If I move my queen up and check on b8, he can take me with his knight."*

Level 5: *"His back rank looks vulnerable to a mating attack. Can I clear the knight out of the way? Yes! After a queen check on b8, my rook can mate on d8."*

These attributes of board vision also explain why I could not play blindfold chess when I started, but could later; it is impossible to play blindfolded before you reach Level 5, but not so difficult for many Level 5 players (though of course they would differ greatly in blindfold ability, just as they do when they are looking at the board!).

An adult who is not a serious player but plays chess with his friends occasionally easily gets to Level 4 but may never get to Level 5, while a child playing tournament chess (very) seriously can reach Level 5 at a fairly young age, say eight or nine. The ability to play at Level 5 around age eight or nine for most youngsters would also explain, in part, why the USCF's Top 100 lists for each age group has the largest difference between the ratings of the "8 and Under" group versus the ratings of the "9-10" group (as opposed to, say, comparing the 17-18 group to the 15-16 group).

A note about USCF ratings: the higher the rating, the better. The top computers play around 3300; Magnus Carlsen, Garry Kasparov, and Bobby Fischer were all about 2800; master level starts at 2200; and no one can have a rating below 100.

Here are common board vision problems for lower-rated players:

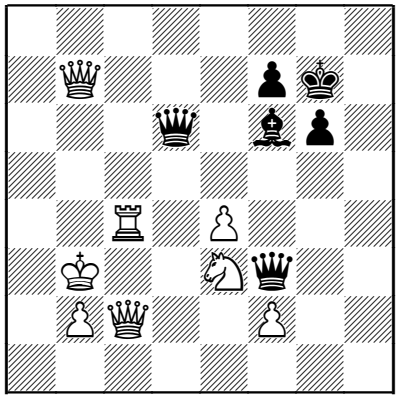
- Under 100 (Level 1): Does not yet recognize all the pieces all the time.
- 100-200 (Level 2): Recognizes the pieces, but has trouble remembering how each piece moves.

- 200-400 (Level 3): Has trouble recognizing what the pieces can do, especially with regard to legality, such as moving into check or checking for illegal moves. During a game between two players at this level, board positions tend to be somewhat random. Players at this level often move very fast and "see" almost none of the possibilities; i.e., board vision tends to be almost non-existent.
- 400-600 (Low Level 4): Focuses almost exclusively on his own pieces; usually doesn't consider opponent's possibilities. Therefore puts pieces *en prise* constantly and still makes and allows illegal moves occasionally. Still tends to move very fast.
- 600-800 (Intermediate Level 4): Can chunk some of the board, but doesn't look for alternative moves; still has trouble taking into account the opponent's moves. Still puts pieces in take. Almost all of the game is legal. Tends to move relatively quickly without thinking of the consequences of their move or of the opponent's previous move.
- 800-1000 (Upper Level 4): Able to see the board but sometimes misses pieces on the perimeter (such as a faraway bishop); can make some plans but has no idea what is important in the position. Misses simple mates for both sides and still may put pieces in take occasionally. Still marked by Level 4 understanding; i.e., sees primarily parts of the board and piece moves, but doesn't chunk as much of the position as a Level 5 player would.
- 1000-1200 (Hazy area between Level 4 and Level 5): For the most part no longer puts pieces in take, but still has difficulty seeing and avoiding simple combinations. Has a tendency to come up with needlessly complex solutions to simple problems. Is able to see ahead on the board but still has difficulty understanding what is important in the position.
- 1200-1400: The beginning of higher-level chess. Players no longer just win because one just gave away more pieces than the other. Level 5 chunking is now becoming apparent in the player's analysis.

Even adult players who are able to achieve Level 5 chunking may make enormous board vision errors when confronted with an unusual situation. At the 1970 Interzonal at Palma de Mallorca, during a tense endgame with both a pin and a pawn lever causing difficult tactics, a tired GM, Efim Geller, hallucinated against Bobby Fischer and made a famous mistake by thinking his king was pinning a pawn to a rook!

On a much more humorous level, two adults in the 1200-1500 range made the following unique board vision error at our local chess club:

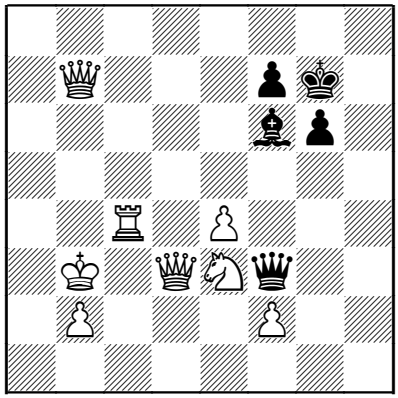
Black



White

This unusual four-queen position was reached during a club game, and both players had less than five minutes left to complete the sudden-death time control. As the tournament director, I had retrieved two queens from another set for the second pair of queens (in other words, they were not playing with upside-down rooks). The second, borrowed "pair" were the queens on b7 and f3. The lack of board vision for unusual positions, even for relatively experienced adults, began to show as Black played the terrible 1...♕d3+???, putting his original queen *en prise* (attacked but not guarded). White hesitated longer than I would have, but played the obvious and correct 2.♕xd3.

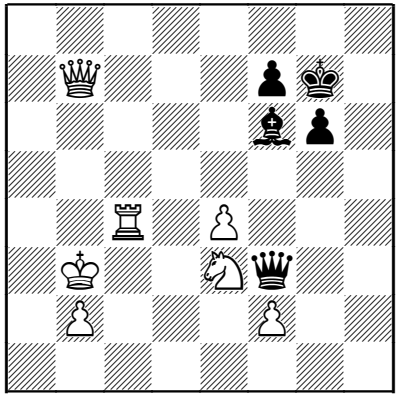
Black



White
Position after 2.♕xd3

At this point *much* stranger things began to happen. White decided it might be a good idea if the player owning the borrowed two queens got those two pieces back. White therefore first picked up his capturing white queen, the original one *still on the board at d3*, and replaced the borrowed queen on b7 *but never putting back anything on d3(*!!), and then took the captured black queen (the original one that was now *off* the board) and used it to replace the borrowed queen on f3, creating the following position (with only the set's original queens on the board) without any "chess" moves being made!!

Black



White
Position after returning the other set's queen(s)!

Yes, White has literally "Given away a queen" – the extra one with which he had made the capture on d3 is no longer on the board!! *Neither player noticed what had happened until I told them after the game!* How is it possible that experienced adult players could make such a mistake? I contend that it was because of the following factors:

- Both players were in time trouble and, under pressure, were not thinking clearly.
- The position was unusual, as both players had been playing with two queens. If the position had featured one queen each, then White would have certainly noticed if he (or anyone else) had given his only queen away. But since they were in a very rare position where he had two queens to one, it was much easier to "normalize" the position back to one queen each, as if the extra queens had been traded.
- The two extra queens had only been on the board for a few moves (which in real time, had only been a minute or two), so that it was easier for White to miss the fact that the position had changed drastically and he was now up a queen! I don't think this would have happened if the players had been rated closer to 2000.

Returning to chess development, there is another aspect that should be mentioned, and that is the issue of age and brain development. For example, almost all players below approximately age 8 have a difficult time "caring" about their opponent's moves. They have fun moving their pieces as a type of "problem solving," but no interest in the other player or solving problems that their opponent poses to them. This seems to be directly correlated with personal development away from chess, as the ego is strong, but the perception of others' feelings (empathy) is not yet well developed. As players get older and better, they begin to realize that it is equally as important (during one's move) to solve the problems the opponent is making for them as it is to pose those problems for that opponent. (Note: in chess, when one has the *initiative,* he is *posing* more of these problems, and when his opponent has the initiative the player is *solving* more of them.)

Most chess books are written either for absolute beginners (getting you quickly from Level 1 through Level 3) or for experienced players looking to get better (Low to high Level 5). Unfortunately, most chess-playing children are either at Level 4 or do not yet have the intellectual development to fully operate at Level 5. In addition, as was a central theme in my book, *Elements of Positional Evaluation,* many players are incorrectly taught stringent "rules" that should be learned as nothing more than helpful "guidelines," and thus continue to make the kind of mistakes we will discuss in later chapters.

Therefore, there is somewhat of a gap in the chess literature. We will try to address some of the most common kids' mistakes, especially at Level 4, through a series of examples, most from actual games from my students. For each example, we will try to examine why the mistake occurred and what general thinking guidelines would help you (or someone you are teaching) to avoid making a similar mistake.

The Eleven Most Common Mistakes Of Players Rated 800-1400

800-1400 is the USCF rating of most of my students when they begin lessons. I see students in this range make the same mistakes over and over again. The following is a "Top-10 List" of the most common mistakes – almost all of them related to either board vision or inexperience:

1. Missing a simple tactic

Since being tactically sound is the main prerequisite for becoming an intermediate player, it follows that all beginners need to improve on their tactics. Not just combinations, but even simple motifs such as the most basic, counting (i.e., determining when a series of captures gains or loses material), as well as the standards such as pins, double attacks, x-rays, queening, forks, removal of the guard, overworked piece, interference, etc.

Note that it is far more common to miss (allow) a simple tactic by the opponent and lose material than it is to overlook an offensive tactic and fail to win material. That is because most weaker players are far more interested in what their own pieces can do, and also because most tactics books concentrate on how to win pieces, but not on how to avoid losing pieces. I address this latter problem in my book, *Is Your Move Safe?* (Mongoose Press, 2016).

The big tip here is to take time to ask the following about each of your candidate moves: *"If I make this move, does my opponent have in reply a check, a capture, or a threat that I cannot meet next move?"* If so, then that candidate move may have to be discarded. If this is the only thing you learn from this book, it may have been worth it...

2. Not determining all of the things the opponent can do (e.g., not considering all of the opponent's threats)

Beginners, especially youngsters, have a tendency to be "overwhelmed" (or preoccupied) with their own possibilities. Often the opponent makes a simple threat and a simple "What can he do to me now that he couldn't do to me before?" would suffice. Especially onerous seem to be discovered threats or threats from fast pieces (like bishops) from across the board. A suggestion: every time your opponent moves, ask yourself, *"What are ALL the things that move does?"*

3. Not getting all the pieces into play

Of all the problems on the list, this is the most perplexing. Often I have very bright, mature students, who simply cannot follow this guideline. I guess they are seduced by the forces of the "Dark Side." Some years ago John Keir, a parent of one of my students, was playing in his second tournament. He easily swept aside all six opponents in his Under 1200 section, taking home some nice first-place money. I immediately asked him how he did it. "Simple," John said, "All I did was pay attention when you were giving Clayton lessons about how important it was to get all your pieces in the game

and I did. My opponents did not and I just got a good game and won!" If only I could bottle this attitude and sell it. Unfortunately most of my younger – and older! – students want to do something as soon as possible and don't have the patience to wait until all the forces are ready.

4. Not knowing basic opening traps

It is unfortunate, but playing good chess requires not just skill but also knowledge. Even beginners need to be schooled on some of the most basic opening traps in the openings they play. One player from our club, who has never taken any lessons or read any books but has a world of talent, lost in the opening after getting a bad position out of Black's side of the Fried Liver Attack, which he knew nothing about. Just a couple of hours of going over his basic opening moves would have allowed him to avoid Black's inferior fifth move in the sequence 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♘f6 4.♘g5 d5 5.exd5 ♘xd5?.

5. Phantom fears

While a common error, this one is not so easy to correct for the improving player. This problem entails a kind of "lazy thinking" whereby the beginner does not actually analyze to see if a continuation is possible, but rather assumes the opponent can or might do something harmful. Unfortunately, this type of analysis is often faulty, and the beginner often bypasses the correct continuation for fear of something that's totally impossible or easily preventable.

6. Excessive worry about the value of the pieces

I call this one of the "Reinfeld" problems (named after author Fred Reinfeld), and it is becoming more widely recognized. The problem is that assigning point values to the pieces is such a useful and necessary "principle" to beginners that they often don't get the follow-up: these values are not absolute, nor are the values given to beginners perfectly accurate! Play the position. For example, everyone understands that in the endgame it is better to have only