

# WINNING CHESS TACTICS

By

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*The author at the 1980 edition of the famous Wijk aan Zee tournament*

# Introduction

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In the first book in the series, *Play Winning Chess*, I discussed the history of chess and introduced the basic rules and strategies of the game. Teaching chess to beginners is an exercise in creativity. The teacher can go about the task in myriad ways. Some teachers might explain the rules and how the pieces move and then use the world's great chess games, especially their own, as examples. Others might focus on how to play certain openings or how to checkmate. Though all of these methods may eventually lead to an understanding of the basics, some methods produce quicker results than others.

In *Play Winning Chess*, I chose the most direct path. I broke down the game of chess into its *four elements* – force, time, space and pawn structure – and showed how these elements can be combined to produce a number of principles of play. I deduced these principles from studying thousands of master games. Understanding the four elements helps you understand the moves of the masters and inspires you to formulate plans of action in your own games.

After you've grasped the basics, it's time to go to the next level of chess and explore the world of *tactics*. Only then can you fully appreciate the beautiful combinations that a mastery of tactics allows you to create. Whereas teaching beginner-level chess takes creativity, teaching tactics is a matter of conveying classical knowledge. The teacher can package this knowledge and spin it out in a variety of ways, but the knowledge is basically the same.

*Winning Chess Tactics* won't teach you anything about tactics and combinations that the chess world doesn't already know. However, I've found that accessing this knowledge about these concepts can be anything but easy. Few of the books that teach combinative play explain tactics and combinations in an instructive manner. The exceptions tend to be for more advanced players, making a study of this subject rather difficult for those with less experience. In this book, I divide tactics into themes, which I thoroughly explain and illustrate. Each chapter starts out with a discussion of the basic forms of the theme and progresses to increasingly more complex examples. This teaching technique allows for easy learning at the lower levels but also continues instruction right up to master class.

My goal is to enlighten beginner and tournament player alike!

Teaching for such a range of strength of players has its drawbacks. For example, I don't stop to explain every chess term that I need to use, and as a result beginners will have it a little tougher here than in *Play Winning Chess*.

I expect you to have some basic chess knowledge. In particular, you should know:

- how the pieces move
- the rules of the game
- how to read and write algebraic chess notation
- how to count the force (the value of the pieces)
- basic chess terminology
- the four elements of chess and their associated principles, as expounded in *Play Winning Chess*

I strongly recommend a detailed study of the material in these pages for any aspiring chess player. After all, as nice as it is to admire the artistic combinations that the great chess players have given us, it's much more satisfying to create them ourselves! And I hope this book will be the tool that allows you this satisfaction.

While you are studying tactics and combinations, you might find yourself spending long hours alone, huddled over your chessboard. As soon as you're ready, I advise you to get out and test your skills against those of other chess enthusiasts. Though reading this book will not guarantee that you'll win, it might start you on your way to a championship.

The sport of chess is remarkably well organized; in fact, few sports have such a large international network of players. Local clubs, states, and national federations organize club championships, state championships and national championships. A scoring system of 1 point for a victory,  $\frac{1}{2}$  for a draw and 0 for a loss allows contestants to gradually attain Master, FIDE Master, International Master and Grandmaster status.

The 200 or so national federations, including the US Chess Federation, all belong to the Fédération Internationale des Échecs (FIDE), which organizes the World Championships. The World Championships are contested for millions of dollars!

So join your local club, enter and win tournaments, and who knows, you might manage to bag yourself a championship. And even if you don't feel like doing so, you can try honing your skills online!

Happy hunting!

Yasser Seirawan,  
St. Louis November 2025

# CHAPTER 10

## Clearance Sacrifice



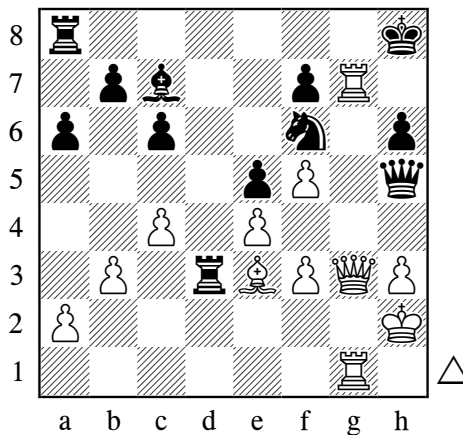
Imagine this situation: you have an opportunity to make a substantial move – a move that's strong enough to win material or perhaps even checkmate. The catch is that one of your own pieces is in the way, and taking the time to move the obstruction to a safe square will give your opponent the chance to mount a defense.

The solution to this dilemma is to sacrifice the obstructing piece! Known as a *clearance sacrifice*, this tactic forces your opponent to take the obstructing piece, thereby vacating the square of your dreams and forestalling any defensive measures.

How can you force your opponent to capture the piece, even though this action will lead to his doom? The best way is to check your opponent's king with the obstructing piece, which forces a response. The next best way is to capture something with it. If your opponent does not recapture, you will have gained a material advantage.

### Georgy Lisitsin – Evgeny Zagoriansky

USSR 1936



Here is an example of the most compelling method, a checking move. White is mounting a strong attack down the g-file. If his rook were not on g7, he could make a brilliant checkmate with ♖g7. The problem here is to jettison the obstructing rook and clear the g7-square, without giving Black the time to stop the desired checkmate.

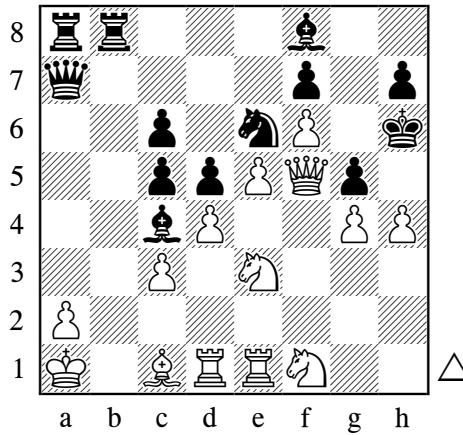
Because 1.♖g8?? fails to 1...♗xg8 and 1.♗xf7 ♖xf7 allows Black to defend the g7-square, White must find a more forcing variation. This is where the clearance check comes in.

**1.♗h7†!**

Black resigned; he must take the rook and so has no time to stop the checkmate: 1...♔xh7  
2.♖g7#

**1-0**

**Illustrative Example 93**



This example is a bit more complex. Both kings are in terrible trouble.

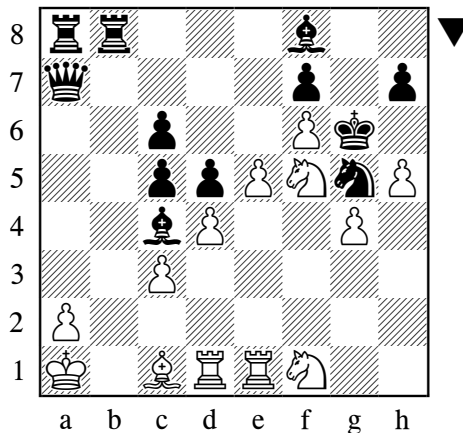
Black threatens to checkmate on a2, and defenses like 1.♞d2 fail to 1...♙xa2†! 2.♞xa2 ♞xa2#. Clearly, White has to get to Black's king first.

White notices that if the white queen were not on f5, he could play the powerful ♘f5†. Checks are the only threats that will keep Black from dropping the axe, so White moves his queen out of the way with a forcing check:

**1.♙xg5†!**

The f5-square is now vacant, and Black must take the white queen.

**1...♘xg5 2.♘f5† ♙g6 3.h5#**

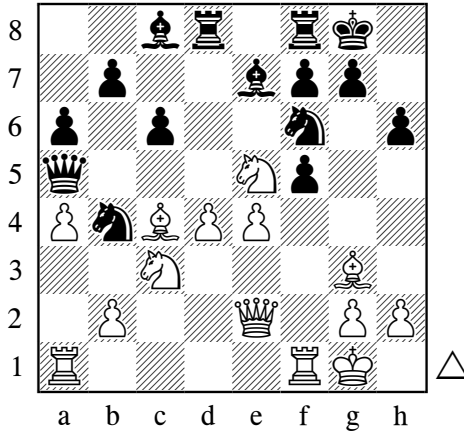


This series of checks prevents Black from making the one move he needed to win the game.

Our goal in the last two examples was checkmate. However, at times the target will be a piece other than the enemy king.

**Mikhail Botvinnik – Georgiy Stepanov**

USSR 1931

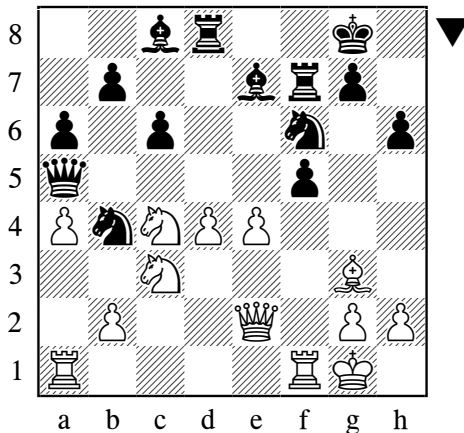


The black queen has few moves. If future World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik can play  $\text{♞c4}$ , he will attack the queen, cover the b6-square and unleash his g3-bishop on the c7-square. In other words, the black queen will be trapped! The problem is that the c4-square is occupied by a white bishop. Bearing in mind what you have just learned about the clearance sacrifice, you'll easily understand the moves of this great player:

1.  $\text{♙xf7!}$

Vacating the c4-square for White's knight.

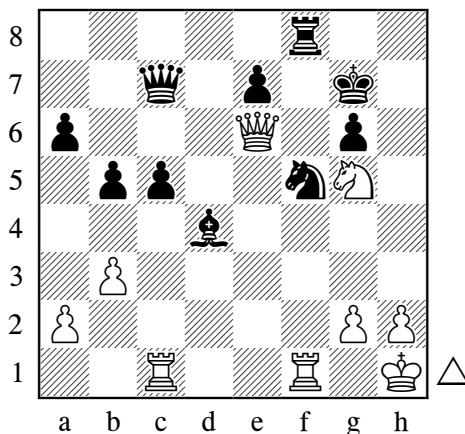
1...  $\text{♜xf7}$  2.  $\text{♞c4}$



Black loses his queen and eventually the game.

## Mikhail Tal – Bruno Parma

Bled 1961



The “Wizard of Riga”, former World Champion Mikhail Tal, was noted for his bold and imaginative play. His tactical ability was legendary. For example, in 1988, Canadian Senior Master Jonathan Berry served as an International Arbiter at a large international tournament in Saint John, New Brunswick, in which Tal took part. Berry recalls:

*Tal was wandering around the tournament hall looking at games. It just so happened that his path took him past two strong International Masters, who, in mutual time trouble, had agreed upon a draw. Hardly breaking stride, Tal bent, pointed out a sparkling win for one side, smiled, and moved on.*

In the position above, Tal is ahead by only the exchange for a pawn, a 1-point edge, and would love to pad his advantage with more material. He realizes that if White’s queen were not on e6, he would be able to launch a maiming royal fork with ♖e6†. For a tactical genius like Tal, the solution is obvious:

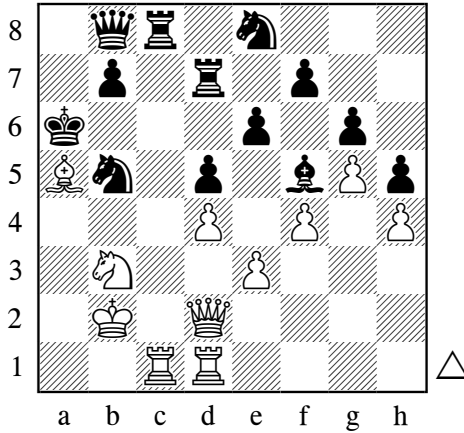
**1. ♙xf5!**

He clears the e6-square and devours a knight at the same time. Black resigned, as he loses too much material: 1...gxf5 2. ♖e6† ♔g6 3. ♖xc7

**1–0**

The clearance sacrifice creates unusual situations that sometimes seem to defy chess logic. Normally, pieces are valuable, and you go out of your way to shepherd and guard them. But playing a clearance sacrifice allows you to boldly move the obstructing piece wherever you want, without caring whether it’s captured or not. You’re not concerned about the piece, but rather about controlling the square that it stands on.

Illustrative Example 94



This is a good illustration of a move that appears suicidal, yet leads to victory. White has sacrificed a piece and a pawn in order to attack the black king. If the white bishop were not on a5, White could win with ♖a5#.

A simple move like 1.♗d8 gets the bishop out of the way, but allows Black to defend with 1...b6.

White needs to clear the a5-square with a double attack:

1.♗c7!

The bishop moves to a square that is defended no less than five times!

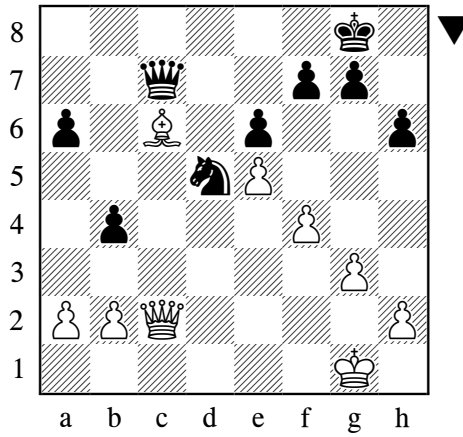
Unfortunately for Black, taking the bishop with his knights or rooks, such as 1...♞dxc7, makes 2.♖a5# possible.

If 1...♜xc7, then 2.♞xc7 ends the game.

Sadly, 1...b6 is Black's best move, even though it gives White a decisive advantage on material after 2.♗xb8.

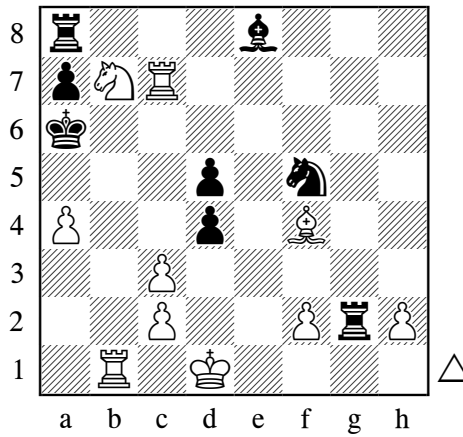
Let's try a few exercises. To solve them, keep in mind that one of your pieces is in the way of another. Figure out what the obstruction is and then find the most forceful move to clear it out of the way!

Exercise 81



*White's bishop is the target. Here's a hint: look for a fork. Good luck!*

Exercise 82



*White has a forced checkmate possibility, but one of his pieces is in the way. Which one is it, and how can he get rid of it?*



**81. Prohorovic – Ravinski, USSR 1958**

Attacking the bishop with 1...♗e7 gets Black nowhere because 2.♙e4 (or 2.♙a4) breaks the pin. If the b4-pawn were not in the way, Black could play 1...♗b4, forking the queen and bishop. If it's in the way, get rid of it! **1...b3!** White resigned, knowing that his queen and bishop will be forked: 2.axb3 ♗b4 **0-1**

**82. Ivkov – Portisch, Bled 1961**

White sees that his bishop needs the c7-square if his upcoming attack on Black's king is to be successful. Because his rook is in the way, he forces Black to take it: **1.♖c6†!** Black resigned, in view of: 1...♙xc6 2.♗c5† ♕a5 3.♙c7# **1-0**

**83. Roneat – Reicher, Germany 1950**

White gets his queen off the important h6-square: **1.♙e6†!** ♗xe6 1...♙xe6 has the same result. **2.♗h6#**