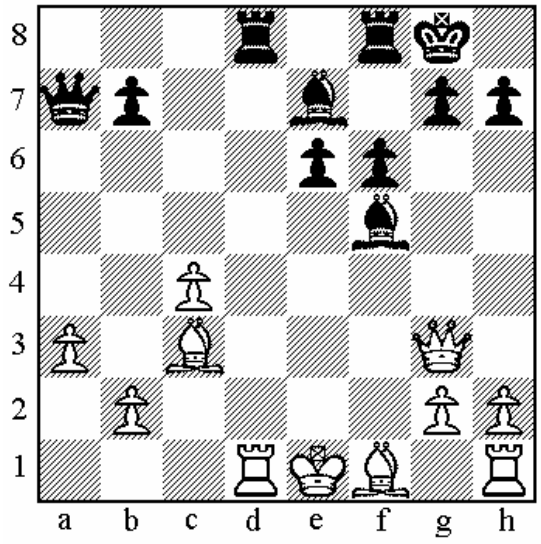
DELUXE COMBOS

By Bob Basalla

Keeping a sharp eye out for tactical tricks can win many a game. But you probably already knew that. Putting it into practice, however, is another thing entirely. You must always stay alert for opportunities. Many times your opponent will see through your schemes, but if your position approach was sound, tactical threats can improve your position even if avoided. And then sometimes you actually get to see your shot happen on the board. That is when you remember what a fun game chess can be. But you have to be right in your calculations. Here are two positions where tactics (but not necessarily perfect calculation) came to my aid in winning a key game.

The first position:

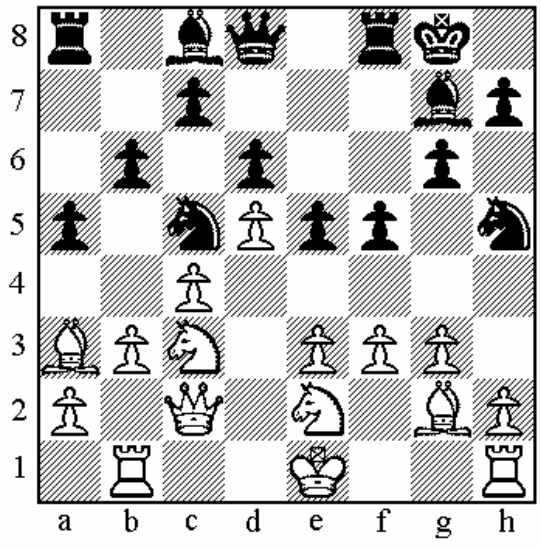


This is from the 2000 U.S. Open in St. Paul, Minnesota. I was Black and my opponent was one of those (you?) very underrated kids out to make a name for him/herself at the expense of us "old guys." I found out later that my opponent had already defeated two masters and an expert before playing me, and he was rated on the wallchart at 1545! What a ringer! Our spirited game was at a critical time. If White can get his king out of danger he might force me to trade down. Then the question would be whether his three to one queenside pawn majority was better than my already passed center pawn and my lone b-pawn holding back his pawn avalanche all by its lonesome.

To this end, he played **1.Bf1-d3**. I didn't wish to trade for the reasons given before, but how could I avoid it? Fortunately an idea was there and double fortunately I happened to find it. (I can't say I always do. That's why I'm not a master myself.) So I played a normal looking move that had a dash of poison hidden within; **1…Be7-c5**. He continued with his exchanging policy, **2.Bd3xf5** expecting the automatic recapture, when he can trade rooks and step his king up to e2 to get his other rook into play. What can I do to prevent this? Here's what: **2…Bc5-f2+.** Just moving the king drops his queen for two bishops, where his exposed king dooms him. So he must take, **3.Qg3xf2 Rd8xd1+**. It's the stock tactic of the overloaded defender. The king can't guard both the queen and the rook so one must go. **4.Ke1-e2**. Now if Black could play …Rd1-d2+ the game would be over. But since the Bc3 guards that square I pick up my second exchange with **4…Qa7xf2+ 5.Ke2xf2 Rd1xh1 6.Bf5xe6+ Kg8-h8**.

The smoke clears and Black is up a lot of material, but the position makes it look very hard to convert into a win. The game continued, **7.Be6-d5 Pb7-b6 8.Ph2-h3 Rh1-c1 9.Kf2-e2** (Here White should have played something like 9.Bc3-d4. He failed to see Black's newest scheme.) **9…Rc1xc3**. Of course. One advantage of being up material is that one can often give some of it back to make things clearer. Black got to give back one of his exchanges at a favorable moment and now has a much easier technical win. As often the case, us "old guys" have a bit more experience in the endgame, and that helps us keep you young guys at bay.

The second position:



I was Black to move again in this position from a Parma Chess Club Championship, 2003, game. White, although a 1900 rated player himself, seemed unduly afraid of my "expert" skills and was trying to wall the whole board off with Pe3-e4 and if …Pf5-f4, then Pg3-g4 and only the h-file might open up, leading to a likely draw. I of course wanted to win so I took the opportunity (or chance, if you will) to guarantee some open lines for my more active pieces against his uncastled king with **1…Pf5-f4**, even if that meant ceding the e4 square to his pieces. (To get squares ya gotta give squares, said the great Bobby Fischer in his heyday.) White wished to continue his policy of blockade, so he played **2.Pg3-g4**, figuring that the attack on my knight would force me to retreat it when he could continue with 3.Pe3-e4 as planned. Unfortunately for him, his move does not work like he thought. He could have tried 2.Pe3-e4 first, when 2…Pf4xg3 3.Ph2xg3 might still keep Black at bay. Many mistakes happen because one player assumes that the opponent must play something, or that the opponent cannot play something at that moment. If you are wrong, bad things often follow.

First I developed some more and pointed out one problem with the way he played things: **2…Qd8-h4+ 3.Ke1-d1** (White does not want to allow 3.Ke1-d2 Pf4xe3+ when the knight on h5 can comfortably hop into the great outpost f4. The same is even true of 3.Ke1-f1 Pf4xe3 threatening checkmate on f2, and thus gaining the needed tempo to post the knight on f4.) Now if the knight on h5 has to retreat White can still lock it up with 4.Pe3-e4; no harm, no foul. So Black must play a quicker attack to break through. Putting these ideas into words makes the next move an obvious one to look at, if not play. **3…Bc8xg4** (Another idea would be 3…Qh4-f2, but the text move is likely the stronger way to play it. Remember, I did not subject this game to the rigors of computer analysis.) **4.Pf3xg4** (Otherwise White is just down material with a bad position. He might at well accept the sacrifice and see if there is a flaw in Black's idea or moves.) **4…Qh4xg4** (This seemed to be the most natural way to continue the attack..4…Pf4-f3 seemed unduly complicated. Also, there are big threats immediately of …Qg4xg2 and Pf4-f3.) White drops back even further: **5.Bg2-f1 Pf4xe3** (If nothing else, Black has three pawns already for his piece and open lines for attack against the confused White forces.)

White now finds a good move but fails to see the full point of his own play. **6.Ba3xc5** (Why not get rid of an attacker with an offside defender?)
6…Qg4-f3 (I was quite proud of this in-between move hitting the rook on h1 and threatening mate beginning with 7.Qf3xf1+. But unfortunately, I missed a move that defends all his problems: 7.Qc2-e4!, guarding the rook and providing an escape square for the king as well at forcing off the queens. It's still a hard game for White to defend, but it isn't all that clear that Black must win for sure. Luckily for me, White missed this possibility too, and gave up the exchange, with more material following. The attack concluded, **7.Bc5xe3 Qf3xh1 8.Kd1-d2 Rf8xf1 9.Rb1xf1 Qh1xf1** and Black had winning material. Was there a better way for me to conduct my attack? I'd like to think so. Otherwise, my scaredy-cat opponent should have succeeded in locking the whole board up in his attempt to grovel for a draw. I guess I'm not a good enough player to easily beat Class A players that try to do nothing but draw with White against their "stronger" opponents. On the other hand, my opponent being chicken probably had a hand in him flubbing the defense to my attacking play. Let no one tell you otherwise; there is psychology in chess—and luck, too!