

Contents

Symbols	5
Introduction	6
 Part 1: The Basic Skills	
 1 The Hunters	 7
Long-Range Pieces	7
The Queen	7
The Rook	10
The Bishop	14
Short-Range Pieces	16
The Knight	16
The King	22
The Pawn	26
Exercises	29
 2 Crowd Control	 31
Liberty or Death	31
A Tale of Two Positions	36
Exercises	38
 3 Float Like a Butterfly	 40
The Landmine Exercise	41
Give-Away Chess	47
Exercises	48
 4 Dollars and Sense	 50
Up or Down	50
Table of Values	51
Cinderella	53
The Officers	57
Exercises	60

5	Wall Street	62
	Fair Trades	62
	Bad Trades	66
	Proper Sequencing	67
	Exercises	71
6	Homeland Security	73
	The TRIP Method of Defence	73
	Take	73
	Run	74
	Interpose	77
	Protect	79
	Exercises	91
7	Regicide	92
	The Bear Hug	92
	Quad Mates	95
	Back-Rank Mate	97
	Exercises	101
Part 2: The Fabulous Five: The Skills in Action		
	Paul Morphy – Duke of Brunswick / Count Isouard, Paris 1858	104
	Wilhelm Steinitz – Curt von Bardeleben, Hastings 1895	112
	Mikhail Botvinnik – Milan Vidmar, Nottingham 1936	121
	Donald Byrne – Robert Fischer, New York 1956	126
	Bent Larsen – Boris Spassky, Belgrade 1970	133
	Solutions to Exercises	138
	Glossary	154
	Dedication	157
	Acknowledgements	157
	Index of Games	158

7 Regicide

In life, unlike chess, the game continues after checkmate.

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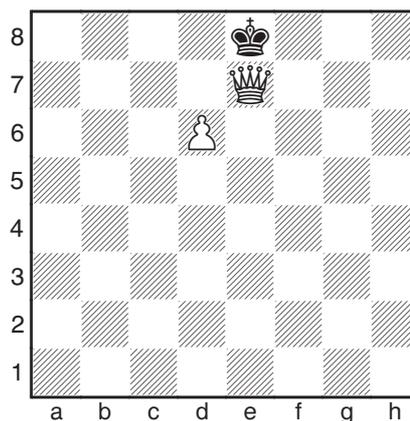
Skill 7: Knowing how to execute basic checkmates

The word checkmate has power. Like a magical incantation, it confers victory over the mind of another. Grandmasters who have played thousands of games in their long careers still love to utter the word. It makes the eyes light up, the pulse quicken and a smile come from the inside out. Most sports have an external force that signals the end of the game: a buzzer, a finish line, an umpire's call. In chess, the player who shows the most cunning, grit, skill and creativity gets to say with total finality that the battle has truly ended.

Before you can magically pull off a checkmate (or mate, as most tournament players say), it's important to know the most typical ones. In Murray Chandler's brilliantly simple book *How To Beat Your Dad at Chess*, the author shows a number of famous checkmates in depth. Since this is a book on the basics, this chapter will devote itself to the checkmates that are a must for the new player.

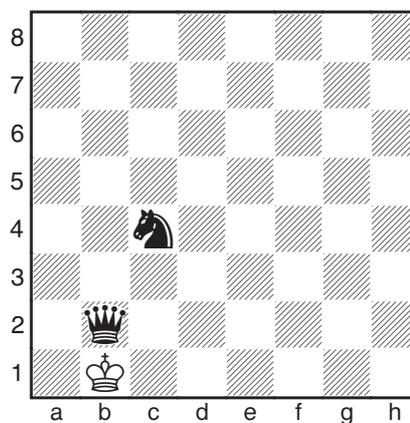
The Bear Hug

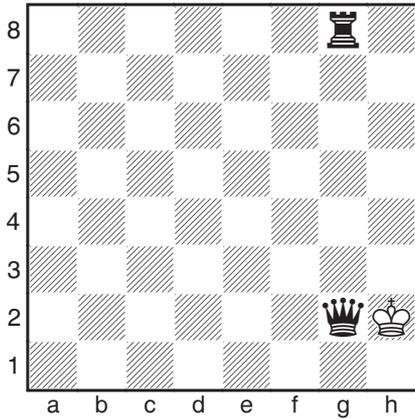
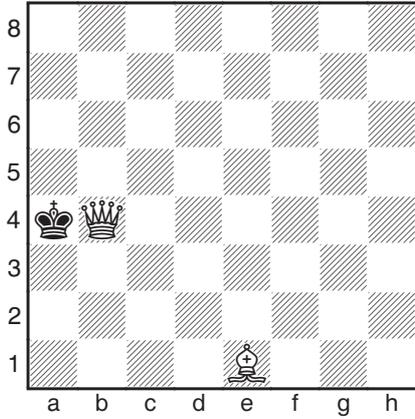
The most important checkmate of all has no name. I call it the Bear Hug because it smothers the king completely, giving it no room to breathe and no possibility of escape. Take a look at what makes the Bear Hug so lethal:



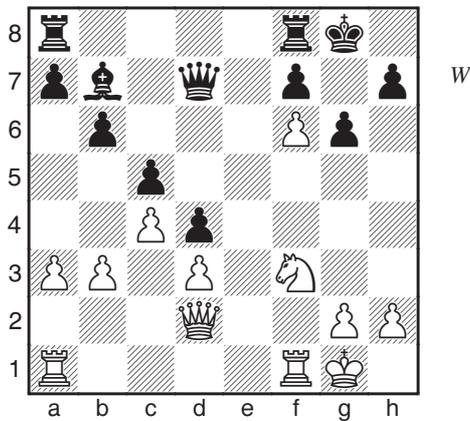
The black king has no moves as the queen is not only attacking it, but is also controlling four flight-squares. This would be a totally dominant position except for one thing: the queen needs protection. Without the pawn on d6, the queen would instantly suffer the fate of any piece that dares to enter the king's inner chamber without backup. As it stands, the king has been mated.

Naturally, any piece can help the queen carry out her deadly mission:

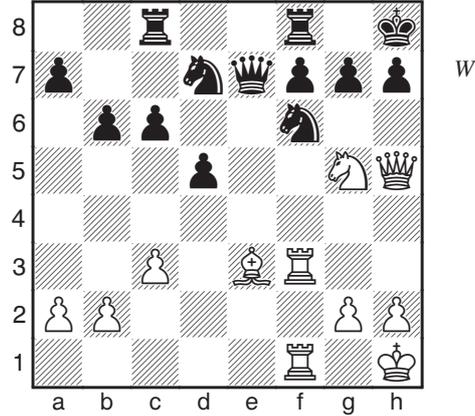




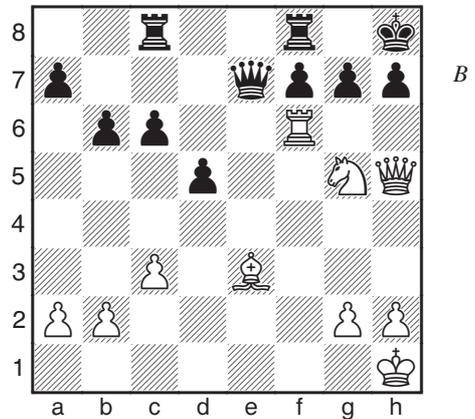
Bear Hugs occur in all sorts of situations:



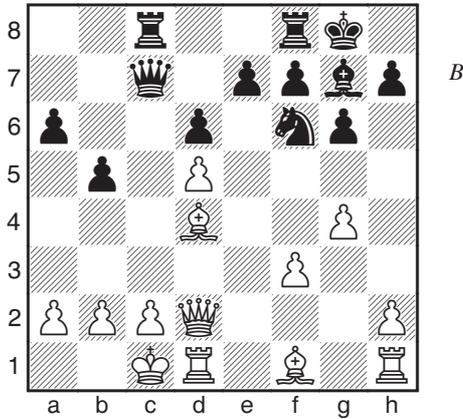
White plays **1 ♖h6!** and the game is over. Black cannot stop checkmate on g7.



In this position, the black knight is preventing the Bear Hug on h7. White plays **1 ♜xf6! ♞xf6**. Now another knight stands guard, so White continues with **2 ♜xf6!** (D).

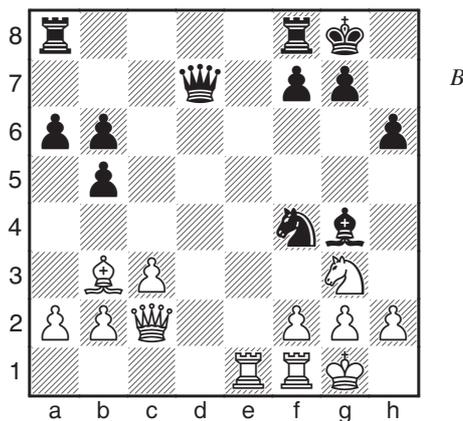


Both knights have been eliminated and the threat of checkmate is still there. Black cannot stop it by playing 2...h6 because then White will break through with **3 ♜xh6+!**, when **3...gxh6** is met by **4 ♖xh6+ ♔g8** **5 ♖h7#**. Black must play **2...♗e4**, when **3 ♞xe4** leads to a decisive material advantage for White.



In the above diagram, Black's queen and rook would deliver a Bear Hug on c2, if not for the white queen standing guard. Black starts by playing **1...♙h6!**. The white queen cannot leave to capture the bishop, nor can it move away since the king would be in check. White can try **2 g5** but **2...♙xf4!** continues the joke. After **3 f4 ♙xf4!** **4 ♙e3 ♙xe3** White has to defend against the mate (with **5 ♙d3**, for instance) and part with the queen.

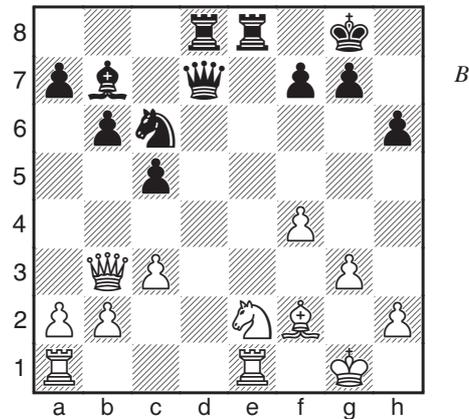
Bear Hugs can show up when you least expect them:



Lengyel – Mikhalevski
Budapest 1993

The white king appears to be well defended. However, this is only a mirage. After **21...♙f3!** White wakes up to realize that his king is being surrounded by deadly scorpions. The black bishop cannot be captured since **22 gxf3** is met by the devastating **22...♙h3!**, when there is no way to stop the mate on g2. White panicked and played **22 ♖e3** only to be greeted with the bone-crunching **22...♙h3!!** (anyway!). An indefensible Bear Hug is threatened on g2 and the queen is untouchable because **23 gxf3 ♙d5!** loses instantly to **23...♙xh3#**. Seeing these embarrassing options, White threw in the towel. (The desperate but spectacular **22 ♙e6!** was his best chance, when **22...fxe6 23 gxf3 ♙d5!** wins either the f3- or the a2-pawn.)

The struggle for the Bear Hug Mate can sometimes get very complex:

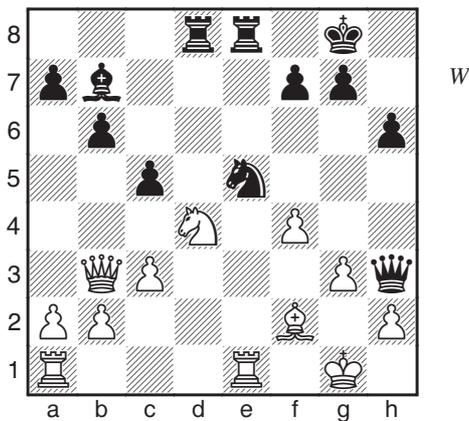


With a fantastic bishop lurking on b7, Black can fantasize about giving mate by dropping his queen into g2. In fact, there are several ways to bring this about, all based on moving the knight out of the way. For instance:

a) **1...♙a5!** is the most obvious, as it attacks the white queen and prepares to bring the black queen to h3 or c6. White has no defence.

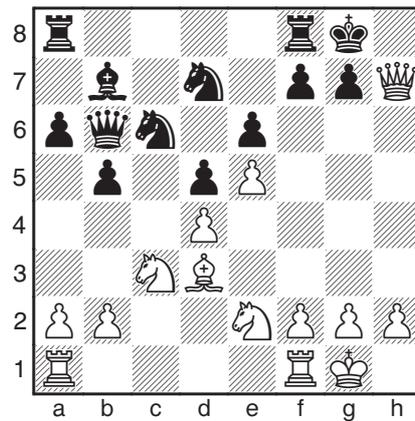
b) **1...♘d4!** is also effective, but a little more complex; e.g., 2 cxd4 ♖h3 3 d5 ♜xd5!? 4 ♘d4 and now 4...♞xh2+! mates.

c) **1...♘e5!** is more spectacular. If White accepts the sacrifice with 2 fxe5, Black plays the crushing 2...♞c6!, threatening 3...♞g2#. White can try to prevent ...♞c6 by 2 ♘d4, but Black replies **2...♞h3!** (*D*), when the Bear Hug Mate quickly triumphs.



Notice that the queen is not flattening the king as it did in the Bear Hug, needing the queen on d8 to block the one square the Quad mate does not cover.

As popular as the Scholar's Mate is, it pales in comparison to the following Quad mate:



Quad Mates

Quad stands for **Queen along diagonal**. It is the cousin of the Bear Hug and rivals it in importance. The next diagram shows the most famous Quad mate, the Scholar's Mate (a.k.a. the Four-Move Checkmate):

This mate on h7 is critical to remember because most good players remove their kings from the centre by castling kingside. Because of the specifics of the initial set-up, it is very easy for the f1-bishop to get to d3, the g1-knight to get to g5, and the queen to get to h5. The only hindrance to the conquest of the square is usually a knight on f6. If that piece is captured or diverted, checkmate often follows:

