THE KISS OF DEATH

It's the end of the game. The last round of the tournament. You've got a King and a Queen left: your opponent's only got a King. Perhaps you've just promoted a Pawn. If you win the game you win the tournament. Can you do it? The positions below show what you are aiming for - and what you are trying to avoid.

On your right it's checkmate. THE KISS OF DEATH! If you move the White King to d6 or f6 is it still checkmate? Yes! If you move the White Queen to d8 or f8 is it still checkmate? No! The second diagram shows a different sort of checkmate: the GUILLOTINE. This would also be checkmate with a Rook rather than a Queen. If you move the White King to d6 or f6 is it still checkmate? No! If you move the Black King to f8 is it checkmate? No! If you move the Black King to d8 is it still checkmate? Yes! The White Queen controls c7.

The next diagram, with Black to move, is STALEMATE - a draw! Check for yourself that the Black King has no moves. Move the White King to e6, g6, g7 or g8 and it's still STALEMATE! If you have a King and Queen you must avoid this sort of position.

Now you know what you're looking for it's time to have a look at how we go about driving the King to the side of the board and reaching CHECKMATE.

We'll start with the position on your right.

Here's how the game might go. Play it out on your board to see how it works. White starts by moving his Queen to g4 to get close to the enemy King. The Black King moves to d5. The White Queen now wants to KISS the Black King but first she needs the King to hold her hand, so the King moves to d2.
The Black King tries to stay in the middle of the board, so moves back to e5, and the White King gets in closer so moves to d3. The Black King returns to d5 and now the White King is close enough to let the Queen KISS the Black King by moving to d4 (Qg4-f5+ is just as good). The King has to retreat so moves to e6, and the White King comes in again to e4.

Again the Black King has to move back, this time going to e7, and the White King comes into f5 (Diagram).

The Black King, trying to keep off the side of the board, moves to f7. Now the White Queen could KISS the Black King again on f6, but it's quicker if she checks on d7 instead. Now the Black King is forced to the side of the board, moving to f8, and the White King comes in again to g6 (Diagram). The poor Black King only has one square: g8. White has a choice of checkmates: the Queen could go to c8, d8 or e8. But instead he chooses the KISS OF DEATH, moving the Queen to f7.

Suppose you reach this position with White to play. What would you do? If you selected Kf5-e6, go to the bottom of the class. Look again and you'll see that it's STALEMATE. There's a rule you can remember to avoid this sort of trap. IF THE ENEMY KING REACHES THE SIDE OF THE BOARD PUT YOUR QUEEN ON THE NEXT ROW. So here the easiest way for White to win is to play 1. Qf6-g7, when play might continue 1... Ke8-d8 2. Kf5-e6 Kd8-c8 3. Qg7-a7 Kc8-d8 4. Qa7-d7# - the KISS OF DEATH again.

Suppose you've just queened a pawn to reach this position. It's your move now. What's the quickest way to win. If you play Kf8-f6 and chase him down the board you'll mate in five moves, but the quickest win is to play Qg8-g3 (a Knight's move away from the King), forcing him back towards you: Kh5-h6 - and then you can mate on either g6 (the KISS OF DEATH) or h4.
The idea of using your Queen next to the King to deliver CHECKMATE is very common. In the diagram on your right Black has castled King-side. Can you see how White can get checkmate? It's easy: Qd3xh7# - the KISS OF DEATH. The Queen could equally well be somewhere on the h-file: h5, h4 or h3.

This one's a bit harder to see. What's the answer? Again, it's Qd3xh7+. This time the Bishop, not the Knight holds the Queen's hand while she delivers the KISS OF DEATH. Again, the Queen could have been on the h-file, but look in the diagram at how the Queen and Bishop are working together on the same diagonal.

It's often a good idea to put a Queen and a Bishop on the same diagonal, or, as in our next diagram, a Queen and Rook on the same file. Where's the mate here? Of course, it's Qh3xh7. And the Queen could just as easily be back on d3.

We change the position again to reach the next diagram. Black's made the mistake of moving Gerry, leaving BLACK HOLES on f6 and h6 which the White Queen and Bishop have occupied. How can White mate in this position. Pipsqueak! It's another KISS OF DEATH. Qh6-g7#. If it's Black's move in this position what should he do? Move the Rook on f8? No: the Queen still mates on g7. In fact there's no way out. All Black can do is delay the mate for one move by playing Qb6xb2+ first.
You see from this example just how dangerous it can be to move your g-pawn when you've castled. Like our other examples this sort of mate happens over and over again. Learn them, remember them and you'll win game after game with mates of this kind.

How can you defend against these mates. Don't castle? No - it's usually much more dangerous to leave your King in the middle. If you can, try to keep a Knight on f6 (f3 if you're White) to stop mate on h7. If this isn't possible you may need to make a pawn move to block off the Queen's line of attack if you see a threat on h7. Going back to the position at the top of the page if it was Black's move he'd have to play f7-f5 or g7-g6, but not h7-h6 which still allows the mate on h7. In the next position, again Black would have to play either f7-f5 or g7-g6, but in the third position the Queen is on the h-file so h7-h6 would be the move.

Finally, we'll set the pieces up for the start of the game and play the moves:

1. e2-e4 e7-e5
2. Bf1-c4 Bc8-c5

Perfectly good, but Ng8-f6 is safer.

3. Qd1-h5 Nb8-c6??

and you should all know what happens next. Yes, it's SCHOLAR'S MATE: Qh5xf7#. And, yes, it's another form of the KISS OF DEATH. Just to recap, what should Black have played on move 3 to stop the mate? No, NOT g7-g6 in this position: White plays Qh5xe5+ (FORK!) followed by Qe5xh8, winning a Rook. White's third move, Qd1-h5 was a QUEEN FORK, with THREATS on e5 and f7. Black has to defend both THREATS which he can do by playing either Qd8-f6 or Qd8-e7.

HELPFUL HINTS

1. You MUST know how to get checkmate with King and Queen against King.

2. To avoid stalemate, when the enemy King is on the side of the board, put your Queen on the next row. Then bring your King towards him and mate him.

3. Watch out for Queen mates on h7 or g7 against the castled King. Use CCT to look for them, both for yourself and for your opponent.

4. If you've castled King-side, try to keep a Knight on f6 (f3) if you can.

5. Make sure you know how to stop SCHOLAR'S MATE
6. You should learn from this lesson how dangerous Queens can be when used close up to the enemy King. Early in the game you must be careful not to bring your Queen out too soon. When pieces have been exchanged off don't be afraid to get your Queen in close to the enemy King - as long as you make sure it's safe before you move it, of course.