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The Chess Manual of Avoidable Mistakes by Romain Edouard

In this book, the author shares the experiences, setbacks and successes of his career as a professional player. Drawing on his own games, which encompass all stages of his career including that of strong grandmaster, he reveals his thought process at the critical moments and shows the reader how to avoid the most common mistakes. Every chapter is followed by carefully selected exercises on the featured theme.



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Objectivity throughout a chess game

1

§ 1.1 Introduction

Objectivity is what makes the biggest difference between humans and computers. Computer can miss, for example, human sacri-

fices. But all the basic tactics are automatically explored within a few seconds, while fake threats or bad combinations are not even taken into consideration. We, humans, have to take thousands things into consideration during our games, lose time to keep an eye on many things that are actually not working, and have to realize where and when to think about what. This logically makes the task of being objective much more difficult.

The first problem we chess players meet is that we are not always able to objectively assess the possibilities in the position. Sometimes, if we are happy with something

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we can do, we are not looking for more. This is a mistake in many cases.

A second problem we have to face is that we very often miss simple defensive moves when we are under pressure. We do have a nasty tendency to feel like things are going wrong prematurely, usually for no objective reasons. Quite often, our fate can be changed, and the pressure is temporary.

A third problem is linked to nerves, or sometimes laziness. Indeed, we have to force ourselves to calculate as deeply as possible when it is obvious that the moment is important. Sometimes we do not believe that we'll be able to calculate everything until the end and do not even give it a try. This is what makes the biggest difference between top players and the others.

Finally, chess is a game where we have to be ambitious, sometimes even brave, but it doesn't mean that we should overplay a position. In other words, chess is a game in which we have to take risks, but if we lose our objectivity and cannot measure the risks taken, the outcome of the game will rarely be satisfying.

§ 1.2 Try to expect as much as the position deserves

It is not an easy task to know how much you should expect from your position, since you do not know its precise evaluation that you have to access. Though chess players are from time to time too optimistic in a game (see subchapter number 4), they are even more often minimalist.

The first most common situation where chess players get minimalist is when it is possible to get easily a small, but stable advantage against a strong player. Indeed, it is very human to be lazy (or too respectful) and go for the simplest solution if it is quite good. But, you may not realize that you can obtain a much bigger advantage and be happy with the minimum. This will be the purpose of the first two examples in this subchapter.

The second most common situation is when a chess player recovers from a very bad position and loses all kind of ambition in his moves or decisions. This will be the purpose of example number 3.

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Finally, sometimes, you have the feeling that you gave your opponent some unnecessary chances. The human reaction, instead of playing strictly according to the new parameters (which would be enough to win if, for example, the position was totally winning before you gave some chances), is to start to see ghosts everywhere and lose all kind of objectivity. This will be the purpose of example number 4.

I Edouard, Romain (2617)
 J Dorfman, Iossif (2587)
 2010.06.06
 ♣ FRA-TOP 16, round 11
 🌐 FRA

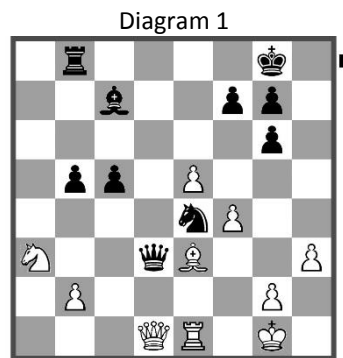
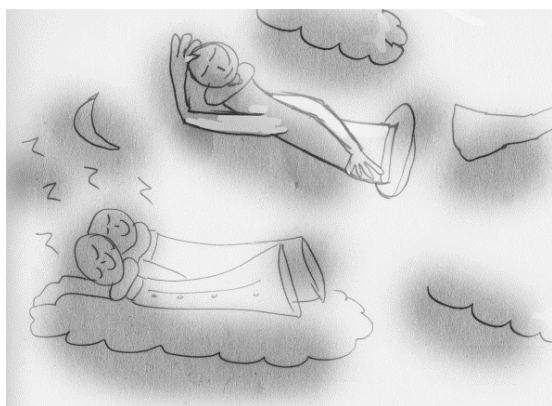
1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. Nc3 dxc4 5. a4 Bf5 6. e3 e6 7. Bxc4 Bb4 8. 0-0 Nbd7 9. Nh4 0-0 10. f3 Bg6 11. Qb3 Qb6

11... a5!? 12. Na2 Be7 13. Nxc6 hxg6 14. Qxb7 Rb8 15. Qa6 (15. Qxc6? Rb6++) 15... c5=

12. Rd1 e5 13. Nxc6 hxg6 14. Ne2 exd4 15. Nxd4 Ne5 16. Nc2 Nxc4 17. Qxc4 Be7 18. a5 Qc7 19. e4 Bd6 20. h3 Be5 21. Qb4 b6 22. Be3 Rab8 23. axb6 axb6 24. Rd2 Rfd8

24... c5!? 25. Qb5 Ra8=
25. Rxd8+ Qxd8 26. Qb3 c5 27. f4 Bc7 28. e5 Qd5 29. Qa4 Ne4 30. Na3 Qd3

30... g5!? 31. Rd1 b5! 32. Nxb5 Qc6 33. Nc3 Qxa4 34. Nxa4 Rb4 35. Ra1 gxf4 36. Bxf4 f6=
31. Re1 b5 32. Qd1



Position after: 32. Qd1

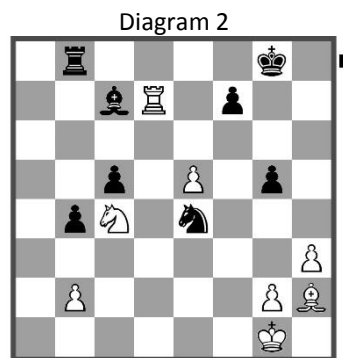
32... Qxd1?!

32... c4! 33. Qxd3 cxd3 34. Rd1 d2 35. Nb1 g5! =

33. Rxd1

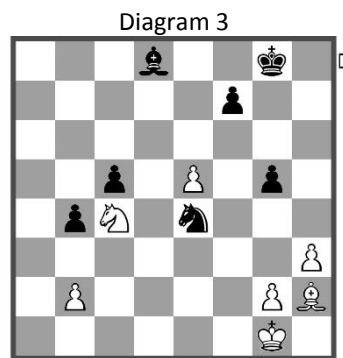
Until now the game had been very unclear, but after a few inaccuracies, Black is suffering and in time trouble.

33... g5 34. Rd7 gxf4 35. Bxf4 g5 36. Bh2 b4 37. Nc4



Position after: 37. Nc4

Now comes the moment we are interested in.



Position after: 38... Bxd8

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37... Rd8?

37... Rc8 was the only move to stay in the game.

38. Rxd8+ Bxd8

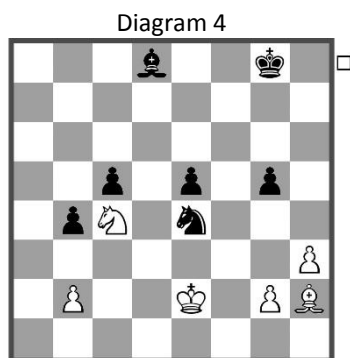
(see Diagram, previous page)

I had realized I should have a better position playing just natural moves, and suddenly decided not even to look for more. I considered that Black is going to play ...f6 next anyway, and that the e4-knight will escape. So I resigned myself to just exchange my bishop against my opponent's knight, in order to get a positional advantage and later see how big my winning chances are.

39. Kf1?

Of course it is not always easy to realize that you can just win a piece when you're playing such a strong and experienced player like Dorfman, but anyway half a minute of concentration would have been enough to notice that after 39. g4! f6 40. e6! followed by Kg2-Kf3 the game would be over: yes, suddenly only two moves are needed to attack the e4-knight!

39... f6 40. Ke2 fxe5



Position after: 40... fxe5

41. Bxe5??

Once again the same problem, not trying to get the most out of the position and favouring superficial concepts.

41. Kd3! Nf6 (41... Nf2+ 42. Ke3+-) 42. Nxe5 followed by Kc4 would still be easily winning.

41... Kf7 42. Kd3 Nf6 43. Bxf6

I finally managed to exchange my strong knight against the bad dark squared bishop: but I simplified so much that the position is a dead draw.

43... Bxf6 44. Ke4 Ke6

We played another 10-15 moves, and agreed to a draw. $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$

I	Naiditsch, Arkadij	(2716)
J	Edouard, Romain	(2602)
	2011.06.04	
	FRA Top 12,	round 10
	Mulhouse FRA	

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. Nd2 Be7 4. Bd3 c5 5. dxc5 Nf6 6. exd5 Qxd5 7. Ngf3 Nbd7 8. b4 a5 9. Bc4 Qh5 10. c3 Nd5 11. Bxd5 Qxd5 12. a4

12. Bb2 axb4 13. cxb4 Rxa2 14. Rxa2 Qxa2 15. Qc1 0-0=

12... b6! 13. 0-0 bxc5 14. b5 Bb7 15. c4 Qf5 16. Bb2 0-0 17. Qb1 Qxb1 18. Rfxb1 Rfd8

△ 18... Nb6

19. Kf1

△ 19. Bc3 Bxf3 (19... Nb6 20. Ne5±) 20. Nxf3 Nb6 21. Ne5 Bf6 22. Rc1 Bxe5 23. Bxe5 Rd7=

19... Nb6 20. Ke2 f6 21. Bc3 e5 22. Rd1 Bc8!? 23. Nb3 Nxc4 24. Rxd8+ Bxd8 25. Nxc5?!

△ 25. Nfd2! Be6!? 26. Nxc5 Bd5 27. Nxc4 Bxc4+ 28. Ke1=

25... Bb6 26. Nb3 27. Nfd2

△ 27. Rc1 Rc8±

27... Nxd2 28. Nxd2 Rc8 29. Rc1?!

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29. Ra3 Kf7

29... Bd4 30. Nb1?

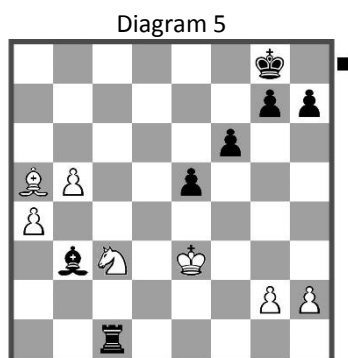
30. Ne4 Rc4

30... Bb3

30... Rc4

31. Kd2 Bxf2 32. Bxa5 Be3+ 33. Kxe3 Rxc1

34. Nc3



Position after: 34. Nc3

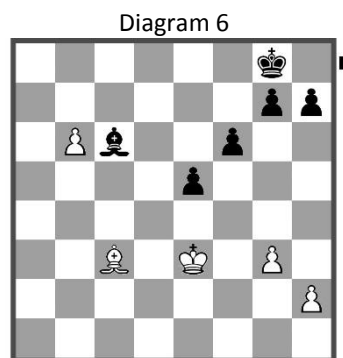
Now comes the moment we're interested in: in this position, I felt like I may have decent winning chances taking on c3, without any risk, and didn't even look for more.

34... Rxc3+??

But using my brain a little bit more, I would have noticed quickly enough that I could win at once: 34... Bxa4 35. Nxa4 Ra1 36. b6 Rxa4 37. b7 Ra3+ Of course, not to take risks is one thing but not to play an immediate and forced win is another! This should not be read as something presumptuous: but this is something I would almost for sure have seen if I hadn't been playing against such a strong player like Naiditsch. What's the point?

35. Bxc3 Bxa4 36. b6 Bc6 37. g3

(see Diagram, next column)



Position after: 37. g3

The endgame is actually a dead draw.

37... Kf7 38. h4 Ke6 39. Bb4 Kf5 40. Bf8 g5
41. hxg5 Kxg5 42. Be7 h5 43. Bd8 Kf5 44.
Be7 Ke6 ½-½

I	Edouard, Romain	(2212)
J	Salgado Lopez, Ivan	(2264)
📅	2004.11.10	
🏆	Monde (G14),	round 8
🌐	Heraklio	

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 c5 4. c3 Nc6 5. Nf3 Bd7
6. a3 f6 7. Bd3 Qc7 8. Bf4 0-0-0 9. b4 c4 10.
Be2 g5 11. Bg3 g4 12. exf6 gxf3?

12... Bd6 13. Ng5 Rf8 14. f7 Nf6 15. Bxg4±
13. Bxc7 fxe2 14. Qxe2 Kxc7 15. b5?

15. Nd2±

15... Na5 16. f7?

16. Nd2±

16... Nh6 17. Qh5 Nb3 18. Ra2 Nc1 19. Rd2
Nd3+ 20. Rxd3 cxd3 21. g4 e5 22. g5 Nf5 23.
dxe5 Bg7 24. f4 Be6 25. b6+?

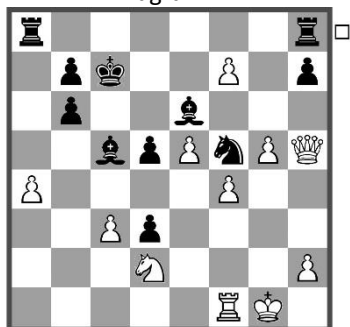
25. Nd2∞

25... axb6 26. a4 Ra8 27. 0-0 Bf8 28. Nd2
Bc5+

(see Diagram, next page)

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Diagram 7



Position after: 28... Bc5+

From a very good position I got in the opening, I played many nonsense moves because I was hating my position (especially on moves 15, 16, and 25). Now my feeling finally became right: I am totally lost!

29. Kh1 Raf8?!

29... Rhf8—+

30. Nb3 Be3?!

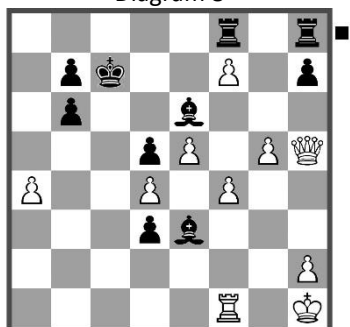
30... Rxf7 31. Qf3 h6—+

31. Nd4?!

31. Qf3 d2! 32. Nd4 Nxd4 33. Qxe3 Nb3

31... Nxd4 32. cxd4

Diagram 8



Position after: 32. cxd4

32... Bf5?

Now it's my opponent who starts to blunder.

32... Rxf7 33. f5 Rxf5 34. Rxf5 Bxf5 35. Qf7+ Bd7 36. e6 d2—+

33. h4 Kb8?! 34. Kh2 Rc8?! 35. Qh6?

35. e6! Bxe6 36. f5 Bxf7 37. Qxf7 d2 38. Qxd5 Rc1 39. Qe5+ Ka7 40. Qxe3 Rxf1 41. Qxd2 Rxf5 42. Qd3±

35... d2 36. Qf6 Bxf4+?

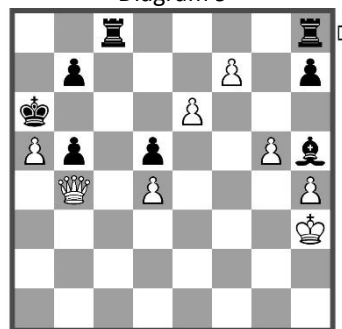
36... Rhf8 37. Qxf5 Rc1 38. Qd3 Rxf1 39. Qxf1 Rxf7=

37. Kg2 Be4+ 38. Kh3

All of a sudden my position is totally winning.

38... Bd3 39. Rd1 Be2 40. Qxf4 Bxd1 41. e6+ Ka7 42. Qxd2 Bh5 43. a5 b5 44. Qb4 Ka6

Diagram 9



Position after: 44... Ka6

Now comes the moment related to this chapter: so happy that I survived this totally lost position, I took a draw here. But every single move is winning for White since, for example, I can bring my king to g7. It does not mean winning would have been fair, but chess is a game where you cannot take such irrational decisions.

45. Qd6+

45. Kg3—

45... Kxa5 46. Qa3+

46. Qxd5—

46... Kb6 47. Qd6+

½-½

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I Edouard, Romain (2334)
 J Barnett, Alexander (2193)
 1 2005
 ♣ YWCC BU16, round 4
 🌐 Belfort

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 a6 5. Bd3 Bc5 6. Nb3 Ba7 7. Qg4 Nf6 8. Qg3 d6 9. Nc3 h5?N (9... Nc6 is the theoretical move.) 10. Bg5 Nc6 11. 0-0-0 Qc7 12. Bf4 Ke7 13. Bxa6! e5 14. Qxg7 exf4 15. Qxh8 Nb4 16. Bb5 Bxf2 17. a3 Be3+ 18. Kb1 Rb8 19. Qh6 Be6

Diagram 10



Position after: 19... Be6

Of course, being so much material up, computer shows between +6 and +10 for almost any white moves. But I started to play not precisely.

20. Rhe1?! (20. axb4+-) 20... Nxe4 21. axb4?! (21. Nd4+-) 21... Nxc3+ 22. bxc3 Qxc3

Diagram 11



Position after: 22... Qxc3

Now comes the moment that is instructive for my book, though it is not the favourite one of my career! Of course, my position is still totally winning, but I gave some very slight counter

chances that were unnecessary. Suddenly, I started to lack time and decided to go for a queen exchange. Not only it is giving back a piece for nothing (which means even the queen exchange would lead to a much less clear position), but I even missed that I get mated.

23. Qh7??

23. Rxe3 would still be completely winning, among many other moves: 23... fxe3 24. Qg5+ (24. Rd3? Qe5↔) 24... Kf8 (24... f6 25. Qg7+ Bf7 26. Rd4+-) 25. Rd3+-

23... Bxb3 24. Qd3 Ba2+! (Oops.) 24... Ba2+ 25. Kxa2 Ra8+- 0-1



IN THE LIMELIGHT

Rule number one

Sometimes it is very tempting to secure a stable/unlosable position against a stronger player. But, if you make a draw, even with Black, because you were not ready to spend energy or to take any kind of risk for winning a superior position, you are still a worse player than your opponent: because in the reverse situation he would not let you the opportunity to escape the same way. A situation where you are willing to secure a draw after being totally lost for a long period is very similar: when you have cards back in your hands, have in mind that your opponent is feeling worse than you!

Finally, in a winning (or much better) position where you have to defend yourself a little bit, you cannot be so unobjective that you're ready to give back a huge part of your advantage (on purpose) in order to make the situation simple again: it would mean your opponent's counter play succeeded brilliantly. It is like running a race: you don't start walking if you are ahead of the others!

Sometimes you may lose a game because of that, but on the long term it will have a very