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The Chess Manual of Avoidable Mistakes  
by  
Romain Edouard

## The Chess Manual of Avoidable Mistakes

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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Romain Edouard, currently rated 2665, is part of the new generation of top French GMs. He was taught chess at age five, became the European u-16 Champion, runner-up in the World and European u-18 Championships, an IM in 2007 and a GM shortly after. He was the French co-champion in 2012, winning the strong Al Ain Open that year as well. He helped his team win 2nd place in the 2013 European Team Championship, earning a gold medal for his individual performance on board 3. He just recently won the 2014 Dubai Open and has assisted a former FIDE World Champion at many events. This is his first book.

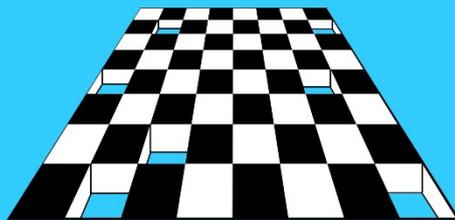
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# Objectivity throughout a chess game

## 1

### § 1.1 Introduction

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

♁ Edouard, Romain (2617)  
 ♚ Dorfman, Iossif (2587)  
 📅 2010.06.06  
 ♠ FRA-TOP 16, round 11  
 🌐 FRA

1. d4 d5 2. c4 c6 3. ♘f3 ♘f6 4. ♘c3 dxc4 5. a4 ♙f5 6. e3 e6 7. ♙xc4 ♙b4 8. 0-0 ♘bd7 9. ♘h4 0-0 10. f3 ♙g6 11. ♚b3 ♚b6

11... a5!? 12. ♘a2 ♙e7 13. ♘xg6 hxg6 14. ♚xb7 ♘b8 15. ♚a6 (15. ♚xc6? ♘b6→) 15... c5=

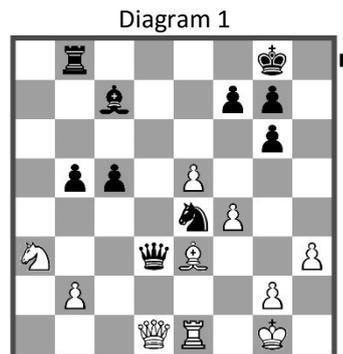
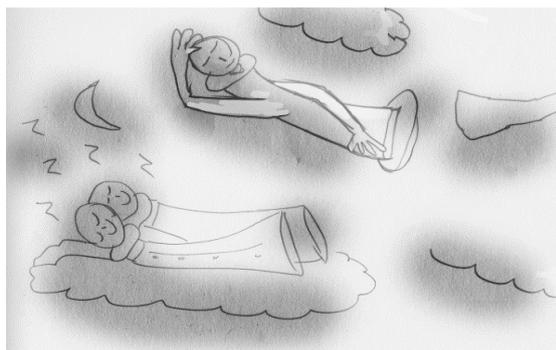
12. ♚d1 e5 13. ♘xg6 hxg6 14. ♘e2 exd4 15. ♘xd4 ♘e5 16. ♘c2 ♘xc4 17. ♚xc4 ♙e7 18. a5 ♚c7 19. e4 ♙d6 20. h3 ♙e5 21. ♚b4 b6 22. ♙e3 ♚ab8 23. axb6 axb6 24. ♚d2 ♚fd8

24... c5!? 25. ♚b5 ♚a8=

25. ♚xd8+ ♚xd8 26. ♚b3 c5 27. f4 ♙c7 28. e5 ♚d5 29. ♚a4 ♘e4 30. ♘a3 ♚d3

30... g5!? 31. ♚d1 b5! 32. ♘xb5 ♚c6 33. ♘c3 ♚xa4 34. ♘xa4 ♚b4 35. ♚a1 gxf4 36. ♙xf4 f6=

31. ♚e1 b5 32. ♚d1



Position after: 32. ♚d1

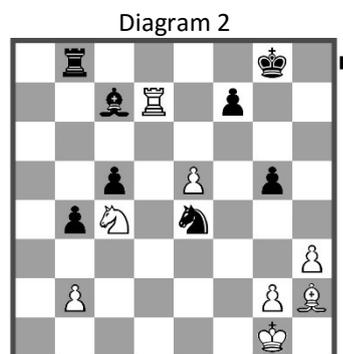
32... ♚xd1?!

32... c4! 33. ♚xd3 cxd3 34. ♚d1 d2 35. ♘b1 g5! =

33. ♚xd1

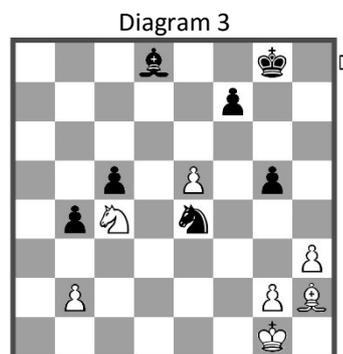
Until now the game had been very unclear, but after a few inaccuracies, Black is suffering and in time trouble.

33... g5 34. ♚d7 gxf4 35. ♙xf4 g5 36. ♙h2 b4 37. ♘c4



Position after: 37. ♘c4

Now comes the moment we are interested in.



Position after: 38... ♙xd8

# The Chess Manual of Avoidable Mistakes

37... ♖d8?

37... ♖c8 was the only move to stay in the game.

38. ♗xd8+ ♘xd8

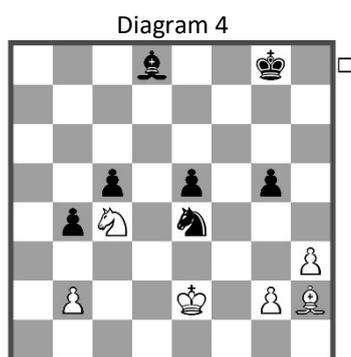
(see Diagram, previous page)

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. ♔f1?

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 ♔g2-♔f3 the game would be over: yes, suddenly only two moves are needed to attack the e4-knight!

39... f6 40. ♔e2 fxe5



Position after: 40... fxe5

41. ♗xe5??

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

41. ♔d3! ♗f6 (41... ♗f2+ 42. ♔e3+-) 42. ♗xe5 followed by ♔c4 would still be easily winning.

41... ♔f7 42. ♔d3 ♗f6 43. ♗xf6

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... ♗xf6 44. ♔e4 ♔e6

We played another 10-15 moves, and agreed to a draw. ½-½

♂	Naiditsch, Arkadij	(2716)
♀	Edouard, Romain	(2602)
📅	2011.06.04	
🏆	FRA Top 12,	round 10
🌐	Mulhouse FRA	

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♗d2 ♗e7 4. ♗d3 c5 5. dxc5 ♗f6 6. exd5 ♗xd5 7. ♗gf3 ♗bd7 8. b4 a5 9. ♗c4 ♗h5 10. c3 ♗d5 11. ♗xd5 ♗xd5 12. a4

12. ♗b2 axb4 13. cxb4 ♖xa2 14. ♖xa2 ♗xa2 15. ♗c1 0-0=

12... b6! 13. 0-0 bxc5 14. b5 ♗b7 15. c4 ♗f5 16. ♗b2 0-0 17. ♗b1 ♗xb1 18. ♖fxb1 ♖fd8

♞ 18... ♗b6

19. ♔f1

♞ 19. ♗c3 ♗xf3 (19... ♗b6 20. ♗e5±) 20. ♗xf3 ♗b6 21. ♗e5 ♗f6 22. ♖c1 ♗xe5 23. ♗xe5 ♖d7=

19... ♗b6 20. ♔e2 f6 21. ♗c3 e5 22. ♖d1 ♗c8!? 23. ♗b3 ♗xc4 24. ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 25. ♗xc5?!

♞ 25. ♗fd2! ♗e6!? 26. ♗xc5 ♗d5 27. ♗xc4 ♗xc4+ 28. ♔e1=

25... ♗b6 26. ♗b3 ♗e6 27. ♗fd2

# The Chess Manual of Avoidable Mistakes

27. ♖c1 ♗c8

27... ♗xd2 28. ♗xd2 ♖c8 29. ♖c1?!

29. ♖a3 ♗f7

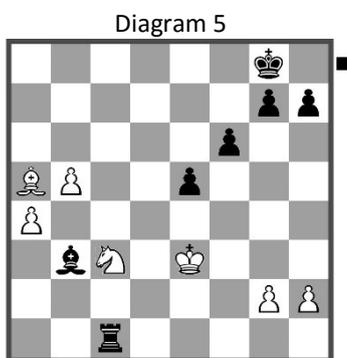
29... ♗d4 30. ♗b1?

30. ♗e4 ♖c4

30... ♗b3

30... ♖c4+

31. ♔d2 ♗xf2 32. ♗xa5 ♗e3+ 33. ♔xe3  
 ♖xc1 34. ♗c3



Position after: 34. ♗c3

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.

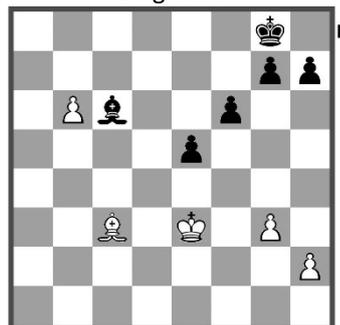
34... ♖xc3??

But using my brain a little bit more, I would have noticed quickly enough that I could win at once: 34... ♗xa4 35. ♗xa4 ♖a1 36. b6 ♖xa4 37. b7 ♖a3+-. 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. ♗xc3 ♗xa4 36. b6 ♗c6 37. g3

(see Diagram, next column)

Diagram 6



Position after: 37. g3

The endgame is actually a dead draw.

37... ♔f7 38. h4 ♔e6 39. ♗b4 ♔f5 40. ♗f8  
 g5 41. hxg5 ♔xg5 42. ♗e7 h5 43. ♗d8 ♔f5  
 44. ♗e7 ♔e6 ½-½

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

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 c5 4. c3 ♗c6 5. ♗f3  
 ♗d7 6. a3 f6 7. ♗d3 ♖c7 8. ♗f4 0-0-0 9. b4  
 c4 10. ♗e2 g5 11. ♗g3 g4 12. exf6 gxf3?

12... ♗d6 13. ♗g5 ♖f8 14. f7 ♗f6 15.  
 ♗xg4±

13. ♗xc7 fxe2 14. ♖xe2 ♔xc7 15. b5?

15. ♗d2±

15... ♗a5 16. f7?

16. ♗d2±

16... ♗h6 17. ♖h5 ♗b3 18. ♖a2 ♗c1 19.  
 ♖d2 ♗d3+ 20. ♖xd3 cxd3 21. g4 e5 22. g5  
 ♗f5 23. dxe5 ♗g7 24. f4 ♗e6 25. b6+?

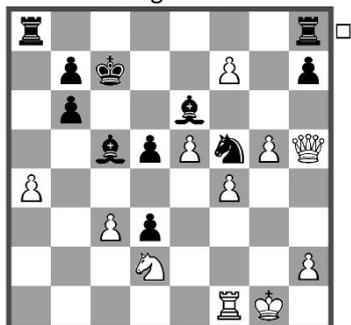
25. ♗d2∞

25... axb6 26. a4 ♖a8 27. 0-0 ♗f8 28. ♗d2  
 ♗c5+

(see Diagram, next page)

# The Chess Manual of Avoidable Mistakes

Diagram 7



Position after: 28... Qc5+

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. Qh1 Rf8?!

29... Rf8+-

30. Nb3 Qe3?!

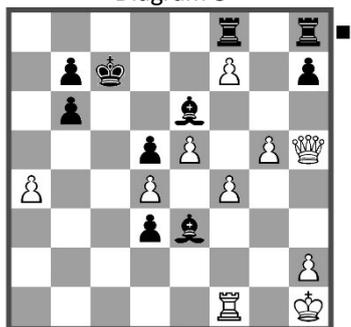
30... Rxf7 31. Qf3 h6+-

31. Nd4?!

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

31... Nxd4 32. cxd4

Diagram 8



Position after: 32. cxd4

32... Qf5?

Now it's my opponent who starts to blunder.

32... Rxf7 33. f5 Rxf5 34. Rxf5 Qxf5 35. Qf7+ Qd7 36. e6 d2+-

33. h4 Qb8?! 34. Qh2 Rc8?! 35. Qh6?

35. e6! Qxe6 36. f5 Qxf7 37. Qxf7 d2 38. Qxd5 Rc1 39. Qe5+ Qa7 40. Qxe3 Rxf1 41. Qxd2 Rxf5 42. Qd3±

35... d2 36. Qf6 Qxf4+?

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

37. Qg2 Qe4+ 38. Qh3

All of a sudden my position is totally winning.

38... Qd3 39. Rd1 Qe2 40. Qxf4 Qxd1 41. e6+ Qa7 42. Qxd2 Qh5 43. a5 b5 44. Qb4 Qa6

Diagram 9



Position after: 44... Qa6

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. Qg3+-

45... Qxa5 46. Qa3+

46. Qxd5+-

46... Qb6 47. Qd6+

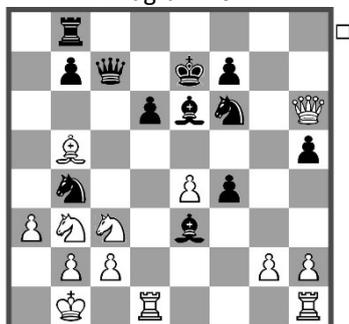
½-½

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Edouard, Romain (2334)  
 Barnett, Alexander (2193)  
 2005  
 YWCC BU16, round 4  
 Belfort

1. e4 c5 2. f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. xd4 a6 5. d3 c5 6. b3 a7 7. g4 f6 8. g3 d6 9. c3 h5?N (9... c6 is the theoretical move.) 10. g5 c6 11. 0-0-0 c7 12. f4 e7 13. xa6! e5 14. xg7 exf4 15. xh8 b4 16. b5 xf2 17. a3 e3+ 18. b1 b8 19. h6 e6

Diagram 10

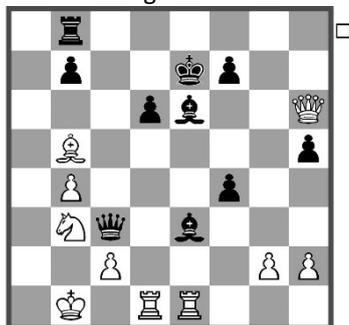


Position after: 19... e6

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. he1?! (20. axb4+-) 20... xe4 21. axb4?! xc3+ 22. bxc3 xc3

Diagram 11



Position after: 22... xc3

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. h7??

23. xe3 would still be completely winning, among many other moves: 23... fxe3 24. g5+ (24. d3? e5+-) 24... f8 (24... f6 25. g7+ f7 26. d4+-) 25. d3+-

23... xb3 24. d3 a2+! (Oops.) 24... a2+ 25. xa2 a8+- **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!

(...)