Contents

Introduction

Learn from the errors of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself. (Eleanor Roosevelt)

There is nothing shameful in not knowing something; what is shameful is to know that you need to learn something, but not learn it. (Various sources)

This is a book for all chess players, and it is about how they can learn from their errors. It is divided into sections showing games played by amateurs and it aims to shed light on their worst moves.

I have already used Eleanor Roosevelt's saying given above in the past, so I cannot hide the fact that it is one of my golden rules. However, I need to use it once again here, because it goes hand in glove with the aim of this book.

Even before playing chess, we heard pearls of popular wisdom about the importance of errors in learning processes, such as the classic saying: 'The human being is the only animal that trips over the same stone twice.' Its origin is unknown, but we can be sure that the first person to say it was not a chess player, because if he had been, he would have replaced 'twice' with a bigger number. We chess players have soon discovered that making the same error twice is not enough for us to learn the lesson; perhaps two dozen is closer to reality.

No matter how many times an error has to be made, the lesson can be learnt, and it will be learnt much sooner if we stop protecting our ego by making excuses and blaming our defeats on bad luck.

In the world of chess, we are often advised to analyse our games and to find out what errors we are making. Good advice, that some forget and others try to follow, but it would be more effective if it came accompanied by a method. Neither would it do any harm if the errors were classified and if all the books we read about them were consistent.

Most of the books we study consist of model games and brilliant combinations. But should we learn from (other people's) successes or from (our own) errors? And if it is more effective to learn from our own (and if possible other people's) errors, how do we do that?

In our own games, there are excellent examples to help us improve, just as many as in the books or the games of the great chess players of history. And in the games of our fellow club players, there are as many again, which we usually overlook. If we put all this experience together, we shall soon gain more insight.

Learning based on our errors is the most effective because it engages our intelligence... and our emotions. Was that not maybe the route taken by AlphaZero? And isn't artificial intelligence maybe a reflection (with improvements) of our own intelligence?

But as our opening quotation says, learning just from our own errors will not be enough because there are many errors to make, and we have little time. Therefore, it is sensible and necessary to pay attention to other people's errors, although in order to learn from them, it would be useful to engage our emotions in the same way that we already do this automatically with our own errors.

We could even say that errors are the basic units of learning, which form the foundations on which the edifice of our knowledge is built.

Our games are full of errors. But if we exclude errors committed in theoretical positions in the opening or the endgame, we will not reproduce the exact positions of other players' errors. (Perhaps that is why we spend so much time studying openings, where specific errors can be eliminated.) Repeating an error in a basic ending or falling into the same trap in opening theory is '**reprehensible behaviour**', which can be corrected, even quite easily, if one is prepared to take the basic step of adopting an attitude that includes self-criticism, attention and curiosity.

However, the errors which are really important for us to avoid are the others – the ones which are not repeated in the same way, and that requires not only the right attitude but also good tools, although a great attitude is capable of creating such tools. For this, it is fundamental to be able to detect the errors. Formerly, that was a difficult task for anyone who did not have a trainer or a fellow club member of a higher level, but now it is easy because all we need to do is run through our games with an analysis engine. The advent of engines with a high strategic level has been a crucial step in the availability of effective training tools, even though those with a high tactical level were already sufficient to detect most errors.

For detecting errors, I propose the following routine, which works for players of all levels:
The first step is to analyse our games and find an average number of errors – let's say five. In other words, five positions where the evaluation has worsened after your move. If one of your games fails to produce five such errors, it is either one of your very good games, or else you do not need to read this book. Once a reasonable number of games have been analysed, you can establish what level of errors you are making and adjust to looking for those errors. In the future, the errors you find will be less serious, or at least that is what we hope ☺.

The second step, which is also very important, is to classify the errors. And this is where the origin and objective of this book lie. I have been training players for over thirty years. In the last twelve years, while the Spanish age-group championships have been taking place throughout the month of July in Salobreña (Granada), I have been following them live, developing training tasks and analyses. It is there that I have become most aware of how players repeat the same errors, both generally and individually, and I realized that it could be very useful to classify them.

In other words, all players repeat the same errors, and a specific player will repeat his or her 'favourite' errors more often.

The third step, once individual errors have been detected and classified, is the work of correcting them. And in error-based learning, that step towards a solution starts to be made as soon as the problem is identified.

Almost all the errors studied here are also made by great players, except that they make them in more difficult positions and in conditions of greater weakness: time trouble, tiredness, demotivation, etc. Throughout the book, I shall make reference to some high-level games to demonstrate this and to make comparisons.

The causes of errors

Postulates, automatic reactions and poor technique

We are the hollow men, we are the stuffed men, leaning together, headpiece filled with straw... (T.S. Eliot)

I do not know what T.S. Eliot had in mind, more than a century ago now, when he wrote his (now immortal) poem *The Hollow Men*, but I remember what I thought when I heard it recited by Marlon Brando in the closing scenes of the film *Apocalypse Now* and years later I began to perceive a relationship in chess praxis with the over-use of postulates.

Mistakes arising from a lack of theoretical knowledge are important, but do not interest us in this analysis. Neither do errors that are due to serious carelessness, although these cause many games to be lost. I want to investigate more deeply into the causes of the other errors, the ones which can be classified and probably corrected.

Almost all the errors in this group have a psychological component (the only exceptions are errors caused by some extreme difficulty relating to the player's strength). Laziness, fear, extreme optimism, overconfidence, excessive respect for the opponent and other emotions all distort the decision-making process and produce bad moves, while we are capable of making better ones. I have asked a number of players whose games figure as examples in this book about their feelings during the games, and they always mention their opponent's level and the competitive situation. Nevertheless, I do not intend to write a book about psychology, although comments about its influence are inevitable.

Regarding the purely chess-related component, poor technique, in the case of tactics, and adhering too closely to postulates which are false or poorly understood, in the case of strategy, are mainly responsible.

I have shown many of the examples in the book, in lectures and in private conversations, to different types of players, and I have been able to verify that many of them would have made the same error as in the game. So, there is a sort of bias involved, an attraction that is difficult to avoid, and has deep-rooted causes.

The topic of postulates deserves rather more thought. We seek rules to guide us in every situation, and when we find them we cling to them with too much enthusiasm (or maybe it is insecurity), leading us to automatic reactions. We need to be more flexible. Many chess postulates are debatable, even those which are regarded as 'common knowledge'. In explaining some of the errors, we shall challenge some of them.

The key thing is that some of the rules that we have learnt are applicable to fewer positions than we first thought. The rules are not wrong, but we apply them badly because we do so in too many positions. We need to discover other rules of more limited application but then understand them better.

I suspect certain errors would be different (at least in their frequency) with different model games, basic books and postulates.

Experience helps us discover rules (rules of thumb), which must be consistent with the original postulates. When this is not the case, we must replace them.

The material employed and its presentation

After analysing several hundred games from the Spanish Junior Championships in Salobreña every year and noticing how errors were often repeated, I thought that it might be possible to find them all in a small number of games, and I decided to set myself some approximate limits, as an experiment, in order to check it. And so the games I have chosen as examples come largely from Salobreña, almost all from the 21st century, most of them between players rated between 1400 and 2200 and very few above 2300.

I suspect it would be possible to extract all the different kinds of errors from a single tournament, one with many participants, in which thousands of games are played. But that may be an experiment for a future occasion.

Most of the examples presented here begin with the main error, which gives its name to the section of the book. I consider a few alternatives, and continue the analysis for a few moves. I have decided not to analyse the games to the very end in order to avoid accumulating too much material and because I think that in order to understand the error, the moves closest to it are sufficient. Only in a few cases, when the continuation is interesting or very short, or if there are other examples of the same error, have I continued further into the game and, in a very few cases, gone on to the very end. In this way, I have been able to present many examples, but it is possible that in some cases, this might not have allowed me to be convincing. I invite the reader to check over the positions from his point of view, thanks to the fact that at the present time everyone has access to the support of an analysis engine, to such an extent that even Elon Musk's telephone plays better than the World Champion. I invite the reader to look for himself, but I advise him not to decide beforehand what he wants to find.

There are also some examples, albeit a minority, where the error is not a move but is the product of a long process, which implies a mistaken approach. Errors of this kind are hard to correct if one is not aware of them, but once they have been detected they can be tackled, as we shall explain when such cases arise.

In almost all the examples, there is more than one interesting error, which may even be on the same move, so that in some cases, the same game reappears in a different section. In other cases, I have preferred to continue a little further and refer to the other type of error involved. I hope that readers will understand this rather personal method of organisation.

As the curious reader will easily be able to confirm, some of the players featured in the examples have been making progress. Some of them now have international titles and would not now make those same errors, although they will now also be busy correcting others. Perhaps this will inspire the reader to face up to the task at hand.

How to use this book

Each chapter begins with a series of diagrams (these are not the usual tactical puzzles), so if you wish, you can try to test yourself and decide which move you would make in these positions, taking the average thinking time used in games (3 minutes on average; between 1 and 5 minutes). This will help you understand the nature of the error in question and the extent of your own tendency to make it. In the chapter itself, you will see how the games continued from these positions. This will form a part of your self-diagnosis, but the main element must come from analysing your own games.

Next come the examples, which I recommend that you view calmly and with curiosity, maybe with a little smile now and then, trying to learn from other people's errors, which is much more satisfying than doing so from your own. You can try to discover the errors which you identify with, and only afterwards read the advice.

If your rating is below 2200, it is very likely that at least 25 of the 50 errors described here will form part of your play. If you identify them and minimise them (it is naive to think you can already eliminate them in this first stage), it is to be expected that your play will show a marked improvement. If your rating is above 2200, the number of errors you will recognise in your own play will be smaller, but you might discover a few things that you had perhaps not thought about before.

This book cannot be a manual for any of the topics it covers, neither on strategy, nor on prophylaxis, nor on traps, because that is not the objective, nor is there room for it. However, it will touch on ideas related to all those topics, and I will recommend some more specific manuals.

We should not suppose that it is equally easy to correct errors and make progress at the age of 15 as at the age of 45. Chess is a language which our mind adopts, and the younger we are, the more flexible our mind is. It is, however, just as easy to learn the concepts if we are prepared to break postulates, although it may be more difficult to turn them into Elo points.

After each error (in some cases, several are grouped together), I make some recommendations on how to avoid them. It is interesting to observe that these can all be grouped into one of five types which I have put into the following list in order of increasing difficulty:

Types of advice

- Read books;
- Solve exercises;
- Analyse the positions in your own games (and those of close colleagues);
- Avoid biases and postulates;
- Overcome laziness and fears and take decisions objectively.

In the advice on how to correct errors, I suggest books that I consider useful. Although I look at quite a lot of books throughout the year, there will be many that will go unnoticed, or perhaps I will not evaluate them correctly. If any reader finds other books which address the problems caused by his errors and uses them, he will be on the right track in the search for a solution to the problem. Naturally, he should find some that are better than the ones I recommend.

A word about using engines

We have mentioned the use of engines earlier. For quite some time now, the engines have been playing better than the experts, but they have not attained the same level of effectiveness as trainers – not yet anyway. Nonetheless, if used intelligently, they can help a player improve in almost all aspects of the game.

The most obvious use, and the one I recommend above all, is in reviewing your games. When doing this, there is only one indispensable rule: *you must understand every time the difference between the engine's preference and your own moves*.

It is possible (indeed, it occurs frequently) that the engine will suggest an incomprehensible move. This situation can be a source of confusion, but also an opportunity to learn something. When it happens, an extra effort is advisable, trying out moves back and forth and looking carefully to discover the reason. You will often find that the engine's move was not so strange after all.

Another useful application is the art of comparison as a learning strategy. This involves looking at the engine's evaluation of slight variations in the position: removing some pieces or changing the position of a few pawns or pieces. In some examples, you will see what I call **the Stockfish evaluation table**.

But I will allow myself to give an important piece of advice: never use the engine to follow live games in an ongoing tournament. It will restrict your search and cause you to think that some moves, which you would have found if you had looked deeper on your own, are inhuman decisions.

You cannot imagine how much more you will learn if you search for the moves on your own!

Some concepts used in the book

In the book, I refer several times to some concepts that might be confusing for the reader, so I think it will be useful to give short definitions of them here. In that way, they will move from being mysterious expressions to being aids to understanding.

Irreversible moves: These are moves from which there is no going back. There are three types, of which the third is the least forceful conceptually, although just as definitive in practice: **pawn advances, piece exchanges and castling**.

Forcefulness scale: This is a way of classifying the moves that we should consider when calculating, based on their ability to **force** our rival's responses. This is essential for the 'pre-selection' of candidate moves. I propose a scale with four levels:

1) The highest level is the check, because it necessarily forces your opponent to defend;
2) Next are threats of mate;
3) Then come captures;
4) Last come threats to gain material.

It is interesting to note that in most positions, the second level is empty, while the fourth is insufficiently forcing and does not usually facilitate (or make reliable) a long calculation, so that in many positions, 1 and 3 can be used as an abbreviated scale.

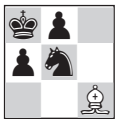
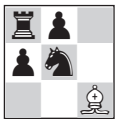
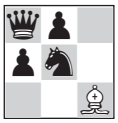
Calculation by objectives: This is a suggestion that can help in calculating when there are few pieces left, and the forcefulness scale is not so useful for pre-selecting candidate moves. It consists of defining an objective and calculating with that as a guide. It is closely related to the concept of **Division of Labour**.

Temptation: This is an immediately attractive objective, capable of making us lose control of the calculating process and making it difficult for us to come up with logical options.

Temptation is a powerful force which can change the course of our thinking. From the moment a player 'feels tempted' to achieve something, it is very likely that he will not manage to stay in control and calculate coolly.

False pin: This is the name we shall give to a type of pin in which the piece being shielded moves in the same way as the (enemy) pinning piece, which might enable a discovered attack. Its importance lies in the frequency with which it leads to errors, perhaps caused by the excessive power of the pin postulate.

See the following sequence, which explains this concept graphically:

These three part-diagrams represent three different types of pins.

The first two are, respectively, examples of an absolute pin and a relative pin. The third is also a case of a relative pin, of course, but it has a special ingredient in that the queen can move in the same way as the bishop, meaning that the situation is dangerous for both sides, which has led me to call this a **false pin**. Naturally, the knight should not move, leaving the queen defenceless, unless it does so forcefully. But this scenario is not all that unusual.

Division of labour: This consists of mentally assigning a task to each piece in order to calculate based on a plan (in that case, the calculation is guided by consideration not of the forcefulness scale but of the objectives). It becomes a more effective procedure as there are fewer pieces left on the board.

Automatic exchange: This is what we shall call an exchange of pieces which is made without any specific objective and merely as a compulsive response to the need to reduce tension/danger.

Candidates or candidate moves: Each of the moves that justify a plan in a specific position, from which an analysis is initiated. This concept was coined by Alexander Kotov in his book *Think like a Grandmaster*, although subsequently it has been subject to multiple refinements and corrections.

Unnatural candidate: A move with which a branch of our analysis could begin but which is hidden from our search because it contains some element which is suspicious (or unusual for a sound move). It might be on the first move of a variation or among the following moves. It is the basis of most errors in calculation.

Analytical compulsion: The tendency to keep delving deeper into the process of calculating, which can go beyond the limits that make it effective.

Prophylaxis: Prophylaxis consists of preventing the opponent's moves, plans or intentions before they represent a threat.

This is a subtle concept that implies a particular way of considering the position. Its application, from the viewpoint of the errors related to it, will be analysed in Chapters 11 and 12.

New or emerging tactic: A tactic for the opponent that appears as a consequence of our last move. See Errors 44 and 49.

Dubious move (indicated by '?!')**:** This use is traditional, but it has always been a dubious concept. I am referring to it here to clarify how I use it in this book. It usually applies to a bad move, but sometimes I apply it either to a move that offers an easier solution to the opponent (even if the position is already a bad one with best possible play), or else to a move that does not actually throw away the win but which makes it more difficult to achieve.

Silent defence: A move that appears to do nothing, because it does not actually prevent a threat, but eliminates its effects. It is a surprising case of an *unnatural candidate*.

Unopposed piece: This always refers to a minor piece. It is an extension of the concept of a piece posted in a forepost/outpost. It is a piece that cannot be expelled or exchanged for a piece of the same value. Its valuation should be assessed as between 4 and 5 points since the only way to eliminate it is to exchange it for a rook (whether or not it also captures a pawn).

Basic-level strategy: The body of doctrine that brings together the most elementary postulates (the value of the pieces, the need for castling, development, etc.), which we learn very early and which are necessary, but which are also at the root of rigidity of thought and are the cause of most of the strategic errors made at the amateur level.

Classical strategy: The one recognised as official, following the theories of Steinitz and the books published in the first half of the twentieth century (by Tarrasch, Réti, Nimzowitsch, Pachman and others).

EXERCISES FOR CHAPTER 9

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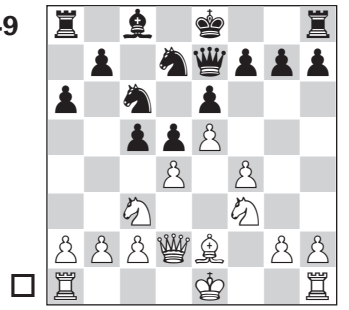

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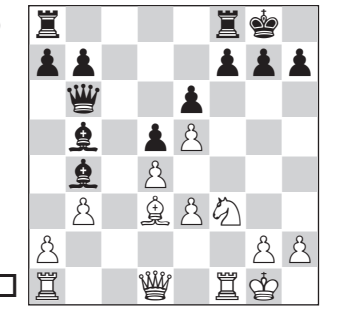

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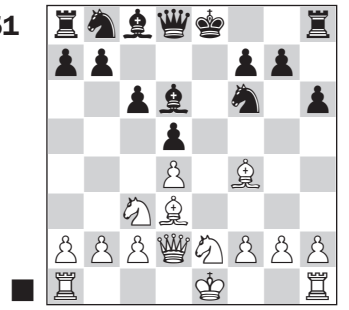

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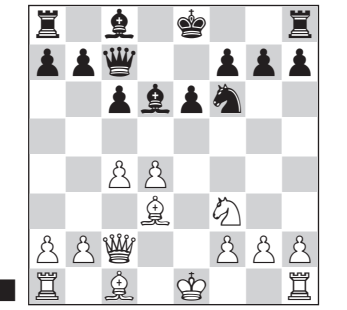

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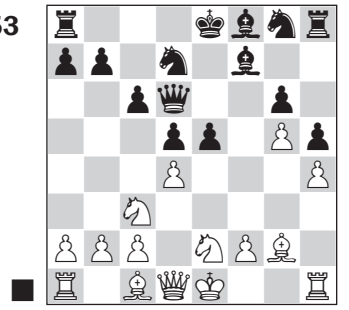

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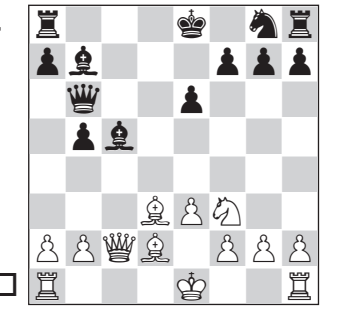


CHAPTER 9

The opening

Many players spend most of their time studying openings, but this is not a good approach in the early years of their chess education. In fact, of the three phases of the game, the opening is the one on which a player should spend the least time until reaching a certain level. What level should that be? There is no consensus regarding the correct answer – some trainers place it at 2400. But there is definitely a consensus that it should not be below 2000. At a more advanced age, with a complete chess culture, the detailed study of opening variations can be done with a lower rating, because by then the player has greater strategic knowledge which will enable him to understand them.

Another important question is what aspects of the opening should be studied in the early stages. Here, the consensus is greater, and the recommendation is to avoid the study of specific variations and to focus instead on the ideas which are important for understanding the play and on the tactical details which have an immediate impact on the result.

What are the reasons for renouncing knowledge of the moves of theory? There are too many: that the moves are not going to be remembered; that it takes up too much time; that it is arid; that it hinders flexibility.

And if we are not going to consider it an error to be ignorant of specific opening theory, then what are the most frequent errors made in the opening? There is no doubt that one of them, and the most striking in its effects, is the lack of knowledge of basic traps. The other two errors we shall study arise from **the misapplication of basic principles**, because we assume that ignorance of these is almost impossible: piece development and king safety, which almost always takes the form of castling.

ERROR 39 Ignorance of typical tactical ideas

The less experience a player has, the more frequently he or she will fall into a trap, whether one cunningly set by the opponent, or just arising by chance. We shall present an ample number of cases, but I am not claiming to conduct a survey of typical traps. There are many instructive and entertaining books devoted to these, and I recommend reading them.

What I do want to do though is to defend the study of traps. For many years, this aspect of chess education has been viewed with some suspicion,

perhaps because it has been considered an unworthy shortcut to achieving a result. But I believe that it is one of the basic stages in the development of any player. If you do not master these ideas, you will not only lose a lot of games frustratingly, you will also have fewer tools with which to understand the strategic concepts of the game.

Perhaps due to this bad press, the study of traps is not treated correctly, and thus many club players, even quite strong ones, are left with gaps in their knowledge.

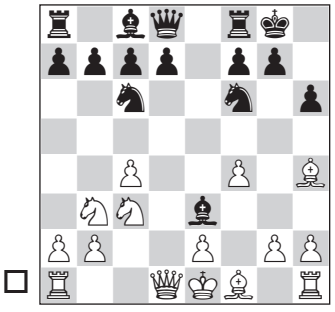
The study of traps should not be made simply to have a few easy wins or to prevent some disappointing losses; this should be a secondary effect. The main reason is to become familiar with the tactical ideas which arise in the first moves of the game and which are common to all the openings, as well as the concepts of development and attack which emerge from these.

Thus, the examples we are going to see are not of well-known traps but of typical tactical ideas, ones which inevitably appear in the famous traps, but also arise in other positions, from different openings.

In some cases, the positions selected have only ever arisen in that particular game, whereas others have arisen many times. The common factor, however, is that the tactical ideas should be known. And as we have already mentioned, being attentive to these ideas will provide, as an added benefit, some easy points, as well as preventing many disappointments.

We begin with an example reminiscent of Legall's mate and pin-breaking combinations in general, which we discuss in the chapter on tactics. From this first example onwards we have chosen cases in which the idea is a well-known one, but the position is not one occurring in one of the famous traps. 'The important thing is to know the idea.'

Game 183
Viviana Galván Cipriani 1963
Pablo Conde Chamizo 1593
Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2019



White is much better thanks to a tactical detail, but it is not the pin on the f6-knight.

10.♘d5?

Overconfident; if White had been familiar with the idea she would have found the continuation 10.♗xf6! ♕xf6 11.♘d5 ♕e6 12.♕d3 ♖e8 13.♘xc7, winning material.

10...♘e4!

Black saw the difficult move, but then failed to exploit the idea and ended up losing the game.

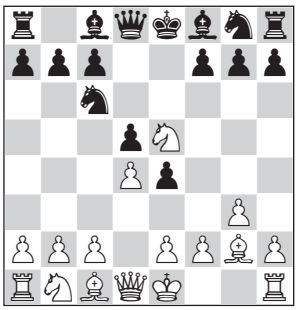
11.♗g3

11.♗xd8? ♗f2#.
11...♘xg3?
A bad exchange. The knight on e4 was far superior to the bishop, and the main reason for Black's advantage lay in the variation 11...♗b6! 12.e3 ♖e8.
12.hxg3 ♖e8 13.♕d3 ♗b6=

In the following example, we shall also encounter a typical idea, but in a less common opening variation.

Game 184
Martin Pascual García 1810
Pedro Tabuenca Mendataurigoitia 1945
Salobreña Spanish Championship U16 2020

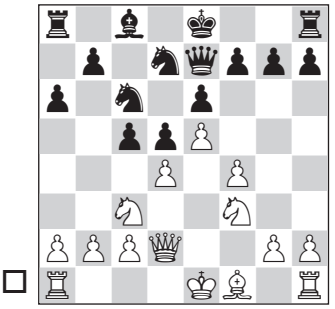
1.g3 d5 2.♗g2 e5 3.♘f3 ♘c6
This position has occurred several thousand times, including a few dozen in which White has continued as in this game.
4.d4?! e4 5.♘e5



White has gained reasonable results here, owing to the fact that Black has usually failed to exploit the drawback of White's last move.
5...♘xe5?!
It appears that the idea of 5...♘ce7!, intending to trap the white knight with the move ...f6, is not sufficiently well known, despite occurring in a large number of openings: 6.f3 f6 7.♘g4 ♗xg4 8.fxg4 h5 9.gxh5 f5 with a clear advantage.
6.dxe5
This position is attractive for White, but still level.

The diagonal check is a tactical mechanism to which trainers constantly draw attention. Nevertheless, every year huge numbers of mishaps occur.

Game 185
Andrea Jausas López 1598
Brais Gerpe Vilas 1763
Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



In this theoretical position, the best move is 10.dxc5, but what interests us here is that there is a very natural and frequently played move which overlooks a well-known tactical idea.
10.♗e2?!
This is often played, with more than 200 games in MegaBase, including a couple involving players over 2400, which suggests that

knowledge of typical tactical ideas is not so extensive, or that players' attention is relaxed in the opening phase. We have arrived at *Exercise 49*.

10...♖b8?

Black does not see it either. The right move was 10...cxd4!, luring the white knight to d4 so that it is in range of a check on h4, a case of the famous diagonal queen check in the opening, which has won so many pieces: 11.♘xd4 ♘dxe5!. Black has won a pawn and although White is still in the game, it is clear that this was not what she was seeking when she played her last move; now if 12.0-0-0, then 12...♘g6!∓.

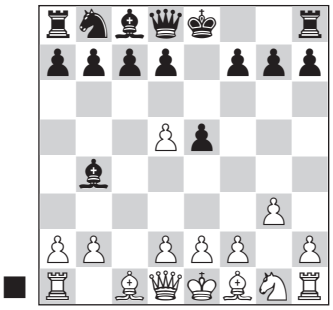
11.0-0±

Let us look at another apparently simple example of the diagonal check.

Game 186

Catalina Colloridi	1517
Parnian Jolani	1651

Spanish Team Championship U14 2022



In this position, on move five of the English Opening, no less than eleven games have continued with:

5...d6?

The most notable thing is that in only five of these games did White win the piece:

6.♕a4+!

It is also curious that this game ends in a win for Black, which is all too common in games featuring a serious mistake in the opening, possibly because the lucky recipient fails to concentrate.

6...c6 7.♕xb4 cxd5 8.♗g2 ♘c6 9.♕b5 0-0 10.e3 a6 11.♕a4 e4 12.♘e2 ♘e5 13.0-0 ♕g5 14.f4 exf3 15.♗xf3 ♗h3 16.♗g2 ♗d7 17.♕f4 ♕h5 18.♘d4 g5 19.g4 ♗xg4 20.♕g3 ♗e6 21.♘f3 g4 22.♕h4 ♘xf3+ 0-1

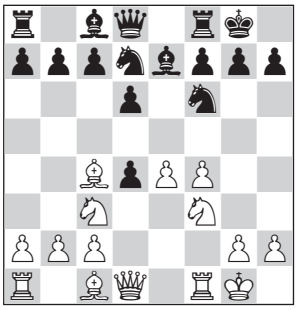
Game 187

Víctor Álvarez Albiol	1819
Lance Henderson de La Fuente	2104

Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2015

1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.f4 d6 4.♘f3 ♘bd7 5.♗c4 ♗e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.d4?! exd4

Now, we shall see a trap which is popular only with the connoisseurs of this opening. However, everyone should know the tactical idea.



8.♕xd4??

The queen and the king are now on the same diagonal; this is a clear case of disregarding this motif (see **Error 42**). Instead, White should play 8.♘xd4=.

8...d5!

Now there is no good defence against both threats, ...♗c5 and ...dxc4.

9.♘a4 dxc4 10.e5 ♘e8 11.♖d1 c6 12.e6 fxe6 13.♕e3 ♔h8 14.♘e5 ♕c7 15.♔h1 ♘ef6 0-1

We will now see an example in which knowing a tactical idea allows us to gain strategic advantages in a theoretical position.

Game 188

Juan Plazuelo Pascual

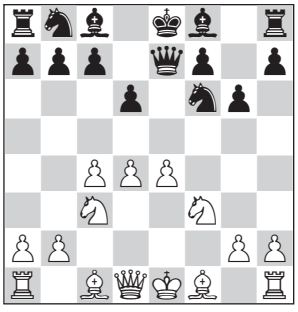
Jose Carlos Redondo Benavente

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 d6 3.♘c3 e5 4.♘f3 e4 5.♘g5 ♕e7 6.f3 exf3 7.♘xf3!

Based on a tactical idea that we shall see two moves further on, this move practically refutes the opening line chosen by Black. 7.gxf3 is used to be played here, but it is much inferior.

7...g6 8.e4!±



8...♘xe4?

Ignoring White's reply, despite it being thematic. Black had to play 8...♗g7 9.♗d3, as in another game by the player with the white pieces.

9.♘d5 ♘c3+

9...♕d8 loses to 10.♕e2 f5 11.♗g5.

10.♘xe7 ♘xd1 11.♘xc8 1-0

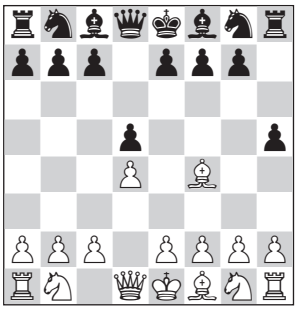
The trap in the following game is very new, but it has already caught hundreds of unwary victims. It has been fuelled by the recent popularity of the London System, and the widespread idea that it is better to play ♗f4 followed by e3, before developing the g1-knight. I want to emphasise that its presence here serves to illustrate two ideas that we will highlight later, not for readers to put it into practice.

Game 189

Michael Leonov	1899
Michail Gkegkas	1415

Germany teams 2021/22

1.d4 d5 2.♗f4 h5?!?



If, in one of your own games, you find yourself surprised by such an outrageous move, then after seeing

this game, you will know what **not** to do.

But if, on another occasion, you are surprised in the first few moves by some other extremely absurd move, *learn to mistrust it, and try to work out what the tactical intention behind it might be*. Above all, *think whether there is any dangerous response to your natural move or any of your natural moves*. This is the first lesson that we should learn from this.

3.e3?

There are more than forty games with this continuation in MegaBase (as for chess.com, I do not even want to think about it). White loses a piece. Of course, White suspected nothing, but do you know the so-called 'Noah's Ark trap'? If you have seen a few examples of it, perhaps you should be wary of this move, which cuts off the retreat of the bishop. This is the second lesson from this game. Instead, 3.♘f3! is solid and good, naturally.

3...e5!

The **unnatural candidate move**.

4.♗xe5 f6 5.♕d3

An attempt to salvage something; the other way was to play 5.♗d3, but after 5...♘e7! the white bishop is lost.

5...♖h6

No one has played 5...♘e7, but it is even better than the text move.

6.♗f4 g5 7.♗e2 ♘e7 8.♕d1 gxf4 9.♗xh5+ ♘g6–+ ... 1-0 (...)

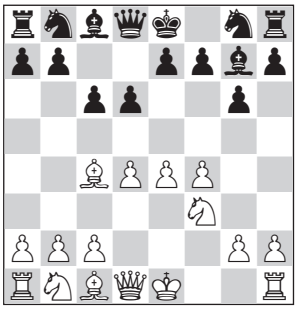
I do not want to miss out on an example of the most common tactical idea in the opening, especially in the games of the youngest players, even if it is elementary. This is the pin-breaking combination based on the concept of the **inappropriate pin**.

Game 190

Álvaro Bayo Milagro	2024
Isaac Lozano Osorio	1767

Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2014

1.e4 d6 2.d4 g6 3.f4 ♗g7 4.♗c4 c6 5.♘f3



5...♗g4?

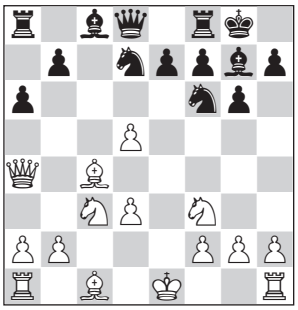
With unfounded faith in the pin.

6.♗xf7+!

Four games reached this point, featuring all the possible replies; White did not always win but did so in this case.

Game 191
Daniel Motos Abellán 2077
Ferrán Solé Pijuan 2306
Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2018

1.c4 c6 2.e4 d5 3.cxd5 cxd5 4.exd5 ♘f6 5.♕a4+ ♘bd7 6.♘c3 g6 7.♗c4 ♗g7 8.d3 0-0 9.♘f3 a6

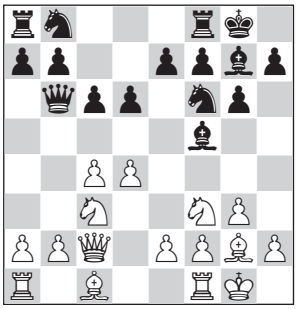


10.0-0?
Even some very strong players have fallen into this trap. There is such great faith in the pin. It was essential for the queen to retreat with 10.♕a3!, with equal play.
10...b5!
And only now does White see that the pin on the a6-pawn can be relieved by means of the intermezzo ...♘b6.
11.♕c2
11.♗xb5 ♘b6, followed by ...axb5.
11...bxc4 12.dxc4 ♘c5 13.b4 ♗f5 14.♕b2 ♘fe4 15.♗d2 ♘a4 0-1

We are approaching the final examples of this theme, and we shall now look at a less well known tactical idea. Once again, I should emphasise that ignorance of the idea is the main cause of this type of error.

Game 192
Alejandro Perez García 2358
Guillem Porta Tovar 2202
Salobreña Spanish Championship U18 2017

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.♘c3 d6 6.♘f3 c6 7.0-0 ♕b6 8.♕c2
So far, everything is quite normal, albeit within a sideline, so both sides would be nearing the end of their theoretical knowledge.
8...♗f5?
We can say that this is quite a serious error, although at the moment, it is only of a strategic nature. 8...♕a6! is the best continuation.



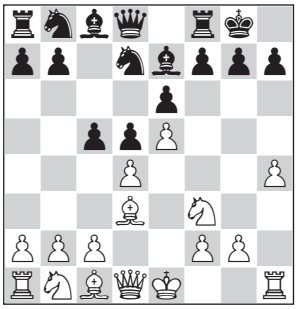
9.e4!
In order to play this, White has to have seen the continuation.
9...♘xe4?
With this move Black completes the error, which was already 'foreseen' on the previous move. There are six games in the online database, in only half of which White exploited the opportunity presented.
10.g4!
A move which is difficult to see, above all because it advances one

of the pawns in front of the castled king (see the list of **unnatural candidate moves** in **Error 9**). White wins two pieces for the rook and gains a large advantage, although not all the games that have reached this point have been won by White. Instead, 10.♘xe4 d5 leads to equality.
10...♘g3 11.gxf5 ♘xf1 12.♗xf1 e6 13.fxe6 fxe6 14.♕e4+–

We should include typical opening tactics here that sometimes arise a little later in the game but which essentially belong to the first phase. The most popular, although perhaps not the most frequent, is the Greek Gift sacrifice, of which we present two examples, one positive and the other negative. There are other typical sacrifices, and all of them should be known, but that is not our goal here.

Game 193
Imanol Toledo Sanz 1853
Ricardo Rodríguez Del Cerro 2041
Spanish Rapid Championship U16 2018

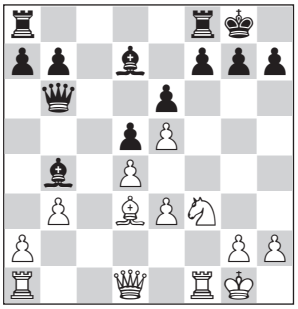
1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.d4 e6 3.e3 ♗e7 4.♗d3 0-0?! 5.e4 d5 6.e5 ♘fd7?
6... ♘e4 is necessary.
7.h4!
White brazenly prepares a typical version of the Greek Gift sacrifice.
7...c5?
And Black seems to ignore it. The excuse that this was a rapid game is invalid with such a common idea. 7...f6? is not a solution either: 8.♘g5 and 8.♗xh7+ both win.
7...h6 is now the best move, but after 8.♖h3, the white attack is tremendous.



8.♗xh7+! ♔h8
If 8...♔xh7, then 9.♘g5+ ♔g8 10.♕h5 ♗xg5 11.hxg5 f5 12.g6, followed by mate.
9.♗d3 cxd4 10.♘xd4 g6 11.♗f4 ♘c6 12.♘f3 1-0

Knowledge of the typical sacrifices should also include awareness of the circumstances in which they do not work. Now, we shall see an example that illustrates this in the case of the Greek Gift.

Game 194
Joseph Quinn
Pawel Stankiewicz
Mureck U10 2005



Black's position is not bad, but it requires a degree of care. For example, he can play ...h6, or ...♗e7, or ...♖ad8. But Black thought that he could defend against the Greek Gift with the following move, and in practice, he was successful.

15...♗b5?

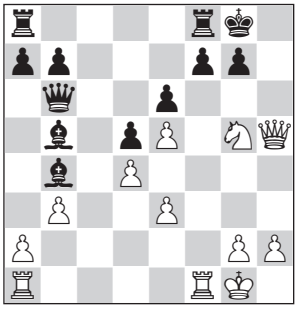
Now, we have arrived at *Exercise 50*.

16.♗xh7+!

White is correct in sacrificing, but he soon shows that he does not know Black's defensive idea.

16...♔xh7 17.♘g5 ♔g8 18.♕h5?

18.♕c2! would have neutralised the typical defence and won the game.



18...♗d3!

The presence of the defender's bishop or queen on the diagonal b1-h7 is one of the typical defences against the Greek Gift and it is equally necessary to know this.

19.♘xf7 ♗h7 20.g4 ♕c7 21.♘g5 g6 22.♘xe6 ♕e7 23.♕g5 ♕xe6 24.♖f6 ♖xf6 25.exf6 ♔f7 26.♔f2 ♔e8 27.f7+ ♕xf7+ 0-1

We shall end with the most amusing (as well as instructive) scenario in this sort of situation. So far, we have focused on what normally happens: a player overlooks a tactical detail and is duly punished (or not). However, the situation can have another twist: a player thinks that his opponent has overlooked an obvious tactical idea, but there is a catch. Or, what comes to the same thing, the trap appears to be an error with a certain degree of subtlety, but it isn't.

Game 195

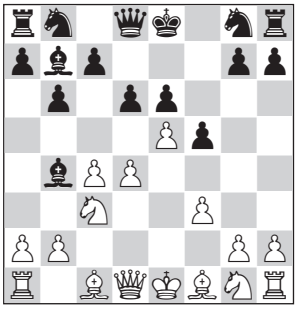
Benedikt Briem

Stephan Briem

Reykjavik 2018

1.d4 e6 2.c4 b6 3.e4 ♗b7 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.f3 f5 6.e5

In this unusual position, several players have tried the curious move **6...d6!?**, which seems to lose a piece.



7.♕a4+

It is curious that only two players have taken the bait. Of course, it would be interesting to know whether the others saw the trap.

7...♘c6 8.d5

What happened next must have been a tremendous surprise:

8...exd5 9.cxd5 ♕h4+ 10.♔e2?

A surprise often generates new errors, like this one. Of course, 10.g3? is even worse due to 10...♗xc3+ and the white queen is hanging, but 10.♔d1 presented much greater resistance; for example, 10...♕d4+! 11.♗d2 ♗xc3 12.♕xd4 ♗xd4 13.dxc6 ♗xc6 14.♖c1 with a slight edge for Black.
10...♕c4+ 11.♔f2 ♗c5+ 12.♗e3 ♗xe3+ 13.♔xe3 ♕xa4 14.♘xa4 ♘xe5∓

How to avoid Error 39

It is not difficult to correct this error; in fact, almost all players manage it, sooner or later, even though they might occasionally relapse.

It is necessary to eliminate the two causes: not knowing the tactical ideas of the openings and making the first few moves of the game in a manner that is too casual. We shall highlight the second in the final two chapters and the first in the following chapter.

The first recommendation is to read several books on opening traps, enjoy them and familiarise yourself with all the themes, not with the idea of winning games effortlessly, although that effect will be achieved from time to time without striving for it, and I must admit that this is very pleasant. Among the tactical ideas that arise in the opening we should include the typical sacrifices, even though these sometimes occur in the middlegame. I am not going to recommend any specific books, because they all seem good to me, but I am going to insist that you should read more than one of them.

The second recommendation is to concentrate harder in the first few moves of the game and to be suspicious of any strange move made by your opponent. Remember the following rule:

If you cannot work out why your opponent made that strange move, you will almost certainly regret it!

Turning the argument around, to be successful in setting our own traps (in the opening and indeed in any phase of the game), it is an important skill to be able to hide our intentions.

ERROR 40 Mistimed castling

This is an error you surely were not expecting to find in this book. Logically, I wasn't expecting it either, but I ended up being convinced. Castling quickly is another postulate of classical chess. It is one of the rules that all beginners have heard thousands of times and broken even more times, with a few disasters as punishment in each personal experience.

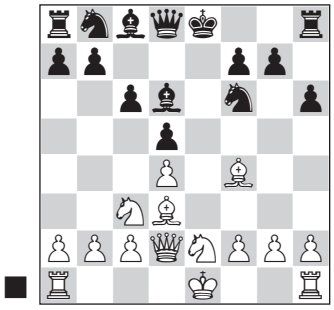
But again, this rule has a more limited application in today's chess. Of course, it remains true that castling quickly is appropriate in most positions, or at least not wrong. But now, the positions in which you should not castle, without a little thought, are much more numerous than before, although such positions have always existed.

In the examples we are about to analyse, we will survey various scenarios in which castling is not only not necessary or useful, it is also an error. The purpose of this is to help you recognise such situations when they arise in your own games.

Let us remember that castling is the third type of **irreversible move**, and we have already seen that the other two types (pawn advances and piece exchanges) can lead to a multitude of errors.

Some of the following positions could be considered as belonging to the middlegame, but the decision to castle is typical of the opening, and it is often considered that castling marks the end of the opening phase. That is why I have preferred to include it in this chapter, although it could fit equally well in the chapter on strategy.

Game 196
Francisco Orantes Taboada 1939
Daniel Motos Abellán 1679
Salobreña Spanish Championship U14 2014



This position (*Exercise 51*) is even more surprising than usual because the e-file is open, Black can castle kingside, and queenside castling would require slow preparation.

9...0-0?

Black agrees to a scenario of opposite-side castling, which clearly works against him due to the superior activity of the white pieces and the position of the pawn on h6. Despite the fact that kingside castling can be executed in one move and the e-file is open, there are several better moves:

9...♗xf4! is the most logical move: 10.♕xf4 (10.♘xf4 ♕e7+ 11.♘fe2 ♗e6 12.0-0-0 ♘bd7 followed by ...0-0-0 with an acceptable position) 10...♗e6 (10...♘bd7 11.0-0-0 ♘f8 12.♖de1 ♘e6 13.♕d2 0-0 is a rather more solid version of kingside castling, but it is still dangerous) 11.0-0-0 ♘bd7 12.♖de1 ♕b6⩲, followed by queenside castling. Nevertheless, the reader might be surprised that kingside castling is such a bad move here. It is interesting in such cases to apply the routine of investigating similar positions and consulting the

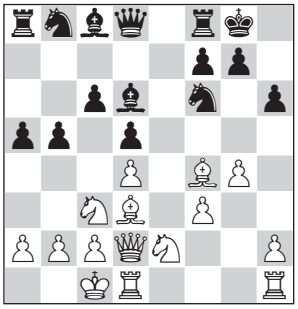
judgement of the engine, as we suggested in the introduction.

Table of Stockfish evaluations at depth 30		
1	The game position (after 9...0-0)	0.90
2	The position with the pawn still on h7 (no hook on h6)	0.35

10.f3?!

10.0-0-0 b5 11.g4! is preferred by the engines, focusing immediately on the g5 break, without worrying about the g-pawn being captured: 11...♘xg4 (11...♗xg4? 12.♗xh6!) 12.♖dg1, with a strong attack.

10...b5 11.0-0-0 a5 12.g4



White's attack is much faster, thanks to the 'hook' on h6.

12...♗xf4?!

This exchange accelerates the enemy attack, although giving Black any good advice was already hard:

A) 12...a4?! allows a rapid assault with 13.♖dg1 b4 14.♘d1 b3 15.a3 and White continues with the g5 break;

B) 12...♘a6 is scarcely any better due to 13.♗xd6 ♕xd6 14.♘g3 a4 (14...b4?! allows 15.♘a4, blocking the attack) 15.♔b1 a3 16.b3 ♗d7 17.♖dg1±, followed by h4 and g5.

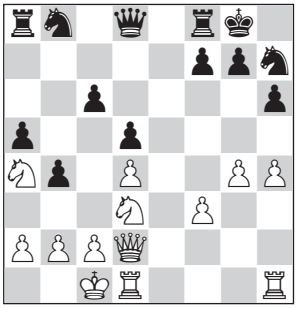
13.♘xf4 b4?!

13...a4 14.♖dg1 b4 15.♘ce2 was slightly better, but although the black pawns have also arrived quickly, there is a big contrast in the activity of each sides' pieces.

14.♘a4 ♗a6 15.h4!

Preparations for the break are now complete, and the effect of g5 will be devastating.

15...♗xd3 16.♘xd3 ♘h7



17.♖dg1

The immediate 17.g5! appears stronger, and if 17...h5, then 18.f4 is winning.

17...♕d6

And now, instead of the game continuation 18.f4?!, which creates a weakness on e4, White could have gained a decisive attack with **18.g5 h5 19.♘e5**.

The decision about castling usually occurs in the first few moves. Therefore, in this section, we shall encounter positions which have been played quite a few times, though they are not a popular part of opening theory.