

101 Endgame Crimes and Punishments

Alexander Galkin

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About the Author

Alexander Galkin was born in 1979 in Rostov-on-Don, Russia. International grandmaster (1997). Russian junior champion in his age-groups (1989 and 1993). Russian under 20 champion (1999). Second in the Soviet junior championship in his age-group (1991). Second in the European junior championship in his age-group (1991). Member of the winning Russian team in the world junior olympiad (1994). World under 20 champion (1999). Member of the winning *Khimik* team in the Russian team championship (1999). Prize-winner in other Russian team championships for various teams (1996, 1998, 2003, 2008). Participant in two FIDE world championships (2000 and 2004) and the FIDE world cup (2007). Member of the Russian team in the European team championship (1999). Outright winner or prize winner in a number of international tournaments.

His pupils include outright winners or prize winners in Russian, European and world championships among juniors and junior girls across the age-groups. He was named Children's Trainer of the Year in 2016 by the Russian Chess Federation. Possesses three university degrees.

Introduction

Chess's status as a logical and mathematical game requires a qualified player to avoid aimless moves and to try to arrange their moves in a logical sequence in order to improve their position, develop an attacking initiative against the enemy king or some other weakness, protect themselves against a concrete threat, and so on. Yet at the same time, each individual move should be thought through to ensure that the player isn't making an obvious blunder or isn't miscalculating a long variation.

One of the most important success factors in chess is a player's ability to exploit their opponent's mistakes, both tactical and positional. Tactical mistakes encompass a miscalculation by one of the players of a variation as a result of which they lose material or get mated. Positional mistakes encompass situations where one of the players incorrectly assesses the position resulting from the analyzed variation, or has followed a plan that does not allow them to extract the maximum potential advantage from their pieces' position. In other words, one of the players could have played better than they did in the game.

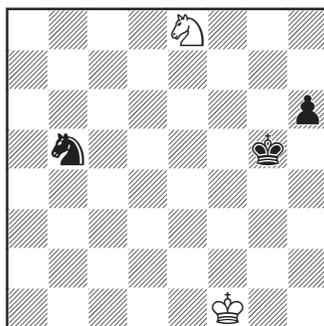
The stronger the players, the lower the likelihood that they will commit a large number of serious mistakes capable of changing the game's outcome. Therefore, the game's outcome may even be settled by one of the players exploiting just one mistake by their opponent.

In the majority of cases, if we are not talking about material blunders or missed simple mates, the reason for mistakes is a failure to properly assess or anticipate the

opponent's counterplay. For example, when calculating a variation, a player misses a move or series of forcing moves by the opponent that radically changes the position's evaluation and often even leads to material losses. Therefore, a strong player not only needs to choose their moves carefully, but should also look at the position through the eyes of their opponent, trying to foresee their action in reply. When calculating variations they should ask themselves if they have missed anything in their thinking. They should avoid any feeling of triumph at the beauty of the variation they have seen, and should not rush to demonstrate it on the board to please themselves and any watching spectators. They should remember the home truths: "more haste, less speed" and "chess isn't checkers, you aren't obliged to capture".

To illustrate these points, I present here a couple of relevant examples from my own play, when one player underestimated his opponent's counterplay.

**GM Sjugirov, S (RUS) –
GM Galkin, A (RUS)
Novokuznetsk 2008**

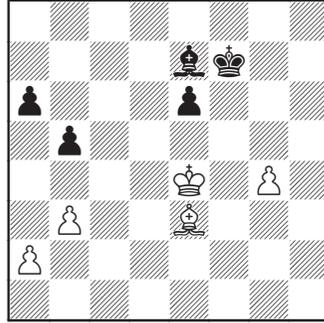


White had defended a tough position throughout almost the entire game, and here he was just one step from finally achieving a draw. All he had to do to achieve this was to draw his king towards the last remaining pawn on the board with the aim of liquidating it.

75. ♔g2! ♔g6 (75...h5 76. ♖g7=) 76. ♔g3 ♔f7 77. ♔h4 ♔xe8 78. ♔h5 and a draw. However, we were now into our seventh hour of play and Grandmaster Sanan Sjugirov, perhaps due to tiredness, with a very confident look played **75. ♖g7** and made it clear with his look that black had run out of winning resources. However, black, without rushing unlike his opponent and having carefully calculated fairly simple variations, replied **75... ♖c7**, and it transpired that white's knight couldn't escape from its imprisonment, instead bringing its place of execution closer. Black threatens the simple ♔g6 and now the white king won't have time to liquidate the last black pawn. So white had to resign. It was obvious that in making his 75th move white underestimated the ability of black's knight to cover the white knight's escape squares (e6 and e8).

Interestingly, we met again, precisely one year later the following September, in the same tournament (the Russian Championship Higher League), with the same colors, again in round 5 (as though by magic!).

**GM Sjugirov, S (RUS) –
GM Galkin, A (RUS)
Ulan Ude 2009**



This time it was black who had defended with difficulty the entire game, and we reached a bishop endgame. There were various ways to draw. For example, 52... ♖f6 53. ♖d4 (53.g5 ♖c3!? 54. ♖d4 ♖d2 55. ♖f6 ♖c1 56. ♖d8 ♖b2) 53... ♖d8 54. ♖c5 (54. ♔e5 ♖f6+) 54... ♖f6 55. ♖f2 ♖d8 (55... ♖b2 was also possible) 56. ♔e5 ♖c7+. Or 52... ♖d8 and if 53. ♔e5 ♖c7+ 54. ♔d4 ♖b6+ 55. ♔e4 ♖d8 the white king cannot break through to the queenside pawns and there is no other way to win.¹ I saw all of this during the game and it was obvious to me that the game was drawn.

However, I thought that I had found a more precise and faster way to draw, by exchanging the few remaining pawns on the board. So I played the mistaken **52... a5**, with the aim of pushing the pawn further. I recall Sanan then looking at me with surprise, and I immediately sensed that it wasn't for nothing. White played **53.a4!** thereby fixing the weak a5 pawn on the same colored square as the

¹ Note that in this book the symbols “!?” after a move signify that the reader should focus in particular on analyzing that move

bishops. This made me feel somewhat sick – I hadn't thought about his move, hence underestimating my opponent's counterplay. The first thought that hit me was how could a grandmaster with a 2600 rating allow such elementary positional errors?! It may be that even after this move I could have still drawn, but Sanan smartly deployed his king and bishop to create threats against the two weak black pawns, while simultaneously using the potential of his passed pawn. Ultimately, this brought him a deserved win in the game.

The vast majority of chess combination textbooks contain a selection of positions and exercises where the student is asked to find a tactic or carry out an attack against the enemy king. That way, they learn to develop their combinational vision and ability to attack. However, there is not much focus on the mistake by one of the players that led to the critical position where the combination or decisive attack became possible.

In this book, aimed at strong tournament players (1900-2300 Elo or fast improving juniors), I introduce a wider approach to developing the endgame tactics skills that a strong chess player needs. Specifically, I present 101 positions from the games of grandmasters in which I first explain the mistake made by one of the players in underestimating their opponent's counterplay, then I analyze how the game progressed where punishment for the mistake is meted out. After that, I return to the starting position to demonstrate the correct or a more promising continuation. Therefore, the text is structured so that each challenge

contains the starting diagram twice – before the moves in the actual game, and then, on the page overleaf, before the solution. This is the “two-diagram principle” (or “method”) as you may wish to call it.

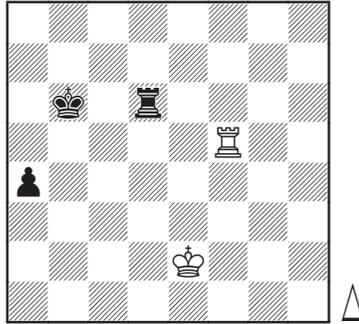
Studying these key fragments from grandmaster games will help a player to develop their endgame approach. Firstly, the student analyzes why a move or series of moves by one of the players was erroneous. What counterplay by the opponent did the player making the mistake underestimate? Secondly, armed with this answer, the student can review the position to try and figure out the better move. If the student is working with a coach, then the coach should first set up the position on the board, demonstrate the erroneous move played, and ask the student to find the refutation to that bad move. After the refutation is found by the student, the coach should once again set up the critical position and ask the student to find the strongest continuation for the initial player. This may be one or more moves, depending on the position. Naturally, in the case of self-study the student can change their approach, either trying to figure out the refutation to the error by covering up the subsequent text, or simply studying the moves in the game before trying to find the better continuation, which is detailed overleaf together with the starting diagram.

Finally, the reader may kindly note that a companion book *111 Middlegame Crimes and Punishments* is being simultaneously published, co-authored by me and Anastasia Travkina.

Grandmaster **Alexander Galkin**
Rostov-on-Don, 30 April 2020

Challenge #1

GM Akobian, V (USA) – GM Jumabayev, R (KAZ)
 Saint Louis 2019



So a rook ending with one pawn left, on the a-file. White's king is cut off, and the American GM decides to help him cross the barrier.

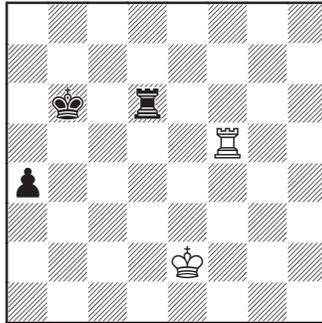
1. ♖f3? ♔b5! 2. ♖d3 He can't save the game with either **2. ♖f8 a3-+ 3. ♖a8 ♖a6** and white cannot exchange rooks, as his king is outside the pawn's square, or **2. ♖a3 ♔b4-+** and the pawn advances.

2... ♖a6! White missed this resource. Exchanging rooks would have led to a draw.

3. ♖d8 The blockade won't last long after **3. ♖a3 ♔b4 4. ♖a1 a3 5. ♔d2 (5. ♖b1+ ♔c3) 5...a2 6. ♔c2 ♔a3 7. ♖e1 ♖c6+ 8. ♔d2 ♔b2-+** or after **3. ♔d2 a3! 4. ♖b3+ ♔c4 5. ♖b1 a2 6. ♖a1 ♔b3-+**. While white's king cannot cope with the pawn on its own **3. ♔d1 a3 4. ♔c2 a2-+**.

3...a3 and white resigned

Position for analysis



He loses with 1.♖h5? a3! 2.♖h3 a2 3.♖a3 (3.♖b3+ ♔a7 4.♖a3+ ♖a6--+) 3... ♖h6! 4.♔d2 (4.♖xa2 ♖h2+; 4.♔f2 ♖h1) 4...♖h1 5.♖xa2 ♖h2+ winning the rook.

He loses in a similar way with 1.♔e1? a3 2.♖f3 a2 3.♖a3 ♖h6--+ 4.♖xa2 (4.♔f2 ♖h1 5.♖xa2 ♖h2+; 4.♔d2 ♖h1 5.♖xa2 ♖h2+) 4...♖h1+ 5.♔d2 ♖h2+

He would have drawn with the standard defense of moving his rook behind the pawn: **1.♖f8!? ♔a5** (1...♔b5 2.♖b8+; 1...a3 2.♖a8) **2.♖a8+ ♔b4** (2...♖a6 3.♖xa6+ ♔xa6 4.♔d2=) **3.♖b8+ ♔c4 4.♖c8+ ♔b3 5.♖b8+ ♔a2** (5...♔c2 6.♖c8+) **6.♖b4** the black king is cut off and it's now a well-known draw. **6...a3 7.♖b8 ♔a1 8.♖b7 a2 9.♖b8 ♖h6 10.♔d2 ♖h1 11.♔c2 ♖b1 12.♖h8=.**

White can also draw with **1.♖f1!? ♔c5** (1...♔b5 2.♖d1!= ♖a6 3.♔d2) **2.♖c1+!** (he loses immediately with 2.♖d1? a3--+) **2...♔b4 3.♖d1!** and the white king joins the battle against the passer.

A) 3...♖h6 4.♔d2=;

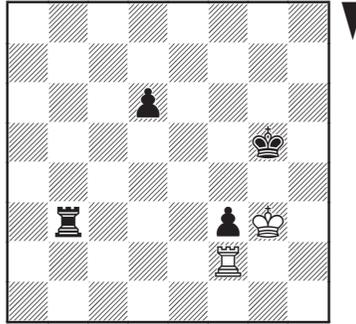
B) 3...♖c6 4.♔d2 a3 5.♖b1+! (5.♖c1? a2) **5...♔a4 6.♖c1!= ♖b6 7.♖c4+** (7.♔c2? a2 8.♖h1 ♖b3--+ 9.♖h8 ♖a3) **7...♔b3** (7...♔a5 8.♖c3 ♔b4 9.♔c2=) **8.♖c3+ ♔a2 9.♖c8!? ♔b2 10.♖c2+ ♔a1 11.♖c1+ ♖b1 12.♖c8=** (12.♔c2? a2--+ 13.♔d2 ♔b2 14.♖c2+ ♔a3) **12...a2 13.♔c2;**

C) 3...♖a6 4.♔d2 ♔b3 (4...a3 5.♔c2 a2 6.♔b2) **5.♖b1+ ♔a2 6.♖b8=;**

D) 3...♖xd1 4.♔xd1 ♔b3 5.♔c1=

Challenge #2

GM Vitiugov, N (RUS) – GM Wang Hao (CHN)
Douglas 2019



Black is two pawns up, which should deliver him victory. However, in order to achieve that he needs to figure out how to coordinate his pieces.

1...♖d3? An attractive, yet mistaken idea, which comes upon a refutation.

2.♖f1! He loses with 2...♖xf3? ♖xf3+ 3.♔xf3 ♔f5.

2...♔f5 After 2...d5 white can now capture the pawn 3.♖xf3=.

3.♖e1! Now it transpires that black can neither bring his king in support, nor advance his pawns without losing them. The Chinese GM was probably counting on 3...♖xf3+? ♔e4!-+.

3...d5 4.♖e8 ♖c3 It's a draw after 4...♖d1 5.♔xf3 ♖f1+ 6.♔e2=.

5.♖e7 d4 The rook cannot be chased from the 5th rank: 5...♔f6 6.♖e8 ♔f7 7.♖e5.

6.♖e8! ♖a3 The pawns also get caught after 6...d3 7.♔xf3 d2+ 8.♔e2 ♖d3 9.♔d1=, and after 6...♖e3 7.♖xe3 dxe3 8.♔xf3.

7.♖e7 and black admitted he couldn't win this.