

BOOK REVIEW

HOW NOT TO PLAY GO

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The title of this book appealed to me immediately, reminiscent of the Bridge classic by SJ Simon “Why you lose at Bridge”. How much easier it is to improve by eliminating a few bad habits than by studying a thousand tsumego problems or joseki. This, then, is a mandatory read for every kyu player, as we will improve significantly just by reading and digesting a 32-page booklet.

I wrote the above before receiving the book for review and, as a player in the middle of the target market, looked forward to reading the tips that would enable a step forward in my own game. So it was with some surprise that I read that I should not “follow the opponent round the board” — an idea that I had worked out for myself on about my second game ever. The other eight points were not quite as

obvious, but would mostly be well known to 10k and certainly to low kyu. So it rankled somewhat when the author referred to these points as “misunderstandings”.

And yet... Yuan Zhou is not only an experienced professional but an experienced teacher too, familiar with the ways of kyu players, so I worked through the three games in the book — first one between 8k, then 4k, then 1k players. He ignores subtle move choices and focuses simply on the occasions where the nine “misunderstandings” or “bad habits” about the game still occur. And he proves his point that this is where Single Digit Kyu games are lost, even close to dan level.

So what can you learn from the book? Double Digit Kyu players should certainly benefit. Lower than that, I have to wonder why we make these mistakes; if it’s not through misunderstanding or technical weakness, then presumably the reason is emotional control, a situation that is well known in sport, aviation, investing and other fields. Hence it should pay readers to be more aware of where they might have an inbuilt tendency to do the wrong thing.

This is not a book that I would read twice, but it was good to borrow and functions as a sharp and useful reminder about one’s bad habits.

The review copy was kindly provided by Slate & Shell.

¹www.slateandshell.com