Mastering the Bluff: A Study Guide to Live Poker Aggression

I. Quiz: Short Answer Questions

1. **What are the two key notes Maron emphasizes before diving into his top bluffing spots?** Maron highlights that the most profitable bluff is one where the opponent calls the flop and turn before folding the river, promoting delayed gratification. He also advises against showing bluffs when successful, instead feigning disappointment to maintain a tight image.
2. **In the "range bet wide versus wide" spot, why is check-raising on the flop advantageous, and when should it be avoided?** Check-raising on the flop in this spot is advantageous because opponents often simplify and range bet wide, allowing for a high frequency of folds from weaker hands. However, it should be avoided if the opponent chooses a larger bet size or in early position versus early position scenarios where the three-betting range is tighter.
3. **When bluffing on a wet dynamic board with a clean runout, why does Maron suggest a big bet size on the turn?** Maron suggests a big bet size on the turn in this scenario because the opponent is typically "capped," meaning their range is unlikely to contain very strong hands like two pair or sets, as these would have been raised pre-flop or on the flop. This allows for a large bet to extract folds from weaker, inelastic hands.
4. **In the spot where the flush comes in on the turn, why does Maron advocate for a small bet on the turn, differentiating it from the previous scenario?** In this scenario, Maron advocates for a small bet on the turn because the opponent is *not* capped, as they would not typically raise all their flush draws on the flop. A small bet incentivizes them to raise their stronger flushes while also encouraging calls from a wider, weaker range, setting up a river bluff.
5. **When the flop goes check-check and the turn is an ace, why is it a mistake to bet the turn immediately with no showdown value?** Betting the turn immediately with no showdown value is a mistake because while it folds air, it also allows opponents with Ace-X hands to call easily. By checking, the opponent will bet both their Ace-X hands and their air, allowing for a check-raise that targets those Ace-X hands for a future river bluff.
6. **Explain the rationale behind the large check-raise sizing on the turn when the flop goes check-check and the turn is an ace.** The rationale is to choose a size that encourages Ace-X hands (like Ace King, Ace Queen, Ace Ten) to call on the turn. The air will fold regardless of the size, so the focus is on maximizing the likelihood of a call from hands that can then be bluffed off on the river.
7. **In the number one bluffing spot (opponent donks the flop as pre-flop caller), why does Maron initially advocate for calling on the flop rather than raising?** Maron advocates for calling on the flop because when opponents donk, their range is often weak, consisting of middle pairs, draws, air, or weak top pairs. Calling allows them to continue value betting with weak hands or continue bluffing, keeping their range wide for future streets.
8. **When an opponent donks the flop and then checks the turn, what is the strategy on the river to get them to fold?** On the river, Maron suggests betting very big. The opponent's best hand is likely something like 9x, and a large bet will get almost all such hands to fold, as a value bet in this spot would typically need to be very small to get called.
9. **If an opponent donks the flop and then continues donking on the turn, what is Maron's recommended action and why is the sizing important?** Maron recommends a raise (3x or 4x) on the turn. The sizing is important because while their range is still weak, they might have some weak Jack-X hands. A slightly smaller raise entices these weaker top pairs to call, setting them up to be bluffed on the river.
10. **According to Maron, what is the overall goal of increasing bluffing frequency and success, and how does it relate to the "red line"?** The overall goal is to "turn up the aggression," "boost the red line," and "increase your bluffing frequency and success." The "red line" in poker graphs typically represents non-showdown winnings, so boosting it signifies making money from pots won without showing your cards, primarily through successful bluffs.

II. Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze and compare Maron's approach to bluffing when the opponent is "capped" versus "not capped" on the turn. Discuss how the concept of a capped range influences his bet sizing and overall strategy in different bluffing scenarios.
2. Discuss the importance of maintaining a "tight-knit" image in poker as described by Maron, even when frequently bluffing. How does this image contribute to the success of bluffs, and what specific actions does Maron recommend to cultivate and preserve it?
3. Maron emphasizes the concept of "delayed gratification" in bluffing. Explain what this means in the context of his strategies and provide examples from at least two of his top bluffing spots where this principle is applied.
4. Evaluate Maron's strategic reasoning for using different bet sizes at various stages (flop, turn, river) within his top five bluffing spots. How does bet sizing reflect his understanding of opponent's ranges and the objective of each specific bluff?
5. Maron states, "it's hard to make good hands." Discuss how this underlying philosophy influences his aggressive bluffing strategy and his willingness to pursue pots without strong made hands. Provide examples from the text that illustrate this principle.

III. Glossary of Key Terms

* **Ace-X / A-X:** A poker hand containing an Ace and any other card.
* **Air:** A poker hand with no significant value, no pair, and no draw.
* **Backdoor Draw:** A draw (straight or flush) that requires two more community cards to complete, rather than just one. For example, needing a turn and river card to complete a flush.
* **Barreling:** Betting on successive streets (flop, turn, and/or river) in an attempt to win the pot, often with a bluff or semi-bluff.
* **Big Blind (BB):** The largest of the two forced bets in a round of poker, placed by the player two positions to the left of the dealer button.
* **Blank:** A community card that is unlikely to significantly improve any player's hand or change the board texture in a meaningful way.
* **Bluff:** A bet or raise made with a weak hand or no hand, intended to deceive opponents into folding stronger hands.
* **Button:** The position on the poker table that acts last on every post-flop street, giving a significant positional advantage.
* **Capped Range:** A range of hands that an opponent could hold that does not include the strongest possible hands for that board texture. This often occurs when an opponent fails to bet or raise with their strongest hands on an earlier street.
* **Check-call:** To check on a street, and then call a bet made by an opponent.
* **Check-raise:** To check on a street, and then raise after an opponent makes a bet.
* **Clean Runout:** A turn and/or river card that does not significantly change the board texture or improve many potential draws, often helping a bluffer.
* **Combo Draw:** A poker hand that has both a straight draw and a flush draw simultaneously (e.g., a hand like 9T of hearts on a 78x flop with two hearts).
* **Cut Off (CO):** The position directly to the right of the button.
* **Donk Bet:** A bet made by a player out of position who was the pre-flop caller, leading into the pre-flop raiser.
* **Effective Stacks (Effective):** The amount of chips that can actually be put into play by the two players with the smallest stacks involved in a hand.
* **Equity:** The percentage chance that a player's hand will win the pot at showdown.
* **EV (Expected Value):** A mathematical concept in poker that measures the average outcome of a decision over the long run. A positive EV play is profitable over time.
* **Floating:** Calling a bet with a weak hand or even no hand, with the intention of bluffing on a later street.
* **Flop:** The first three community cards dealt face-up in a poker game.
* **Front Door Flush Draw:** A flush draw that is only one card away from completion (e.g., holding two spades when there are two spades on the flop, needing one more spade on the turn or river).
* **Gapped:** A hand that has a gap in its rank (e.g., 7-9 is gapped by an 8).
* **Gutshot Straight Draw:** A straight draw where only one specific card (an "inside" card) will complete the straight (e.g., holding 7-8 on a 5-6-T board, needing a 9).
* **Inelastic:** In poker, an opponent whose calling range is not highly sensitive to bet sizing; they will call with a similar range whether the bet is small or large.
* **Jam:** To go all-in with all remaining chips.
* **Middle Pair:** A pair made with one of the middle-ranking cards on the board.
* **Open-ended Straight Draw:** A straight draw where two different cards will complete the straight (e.g., holding 7-8 on a 5-6-X board, needing a 4 or 9).
* **Pot Odds:** The ratio of the current size of the pot to the cost of a call. Used to determine if a call is mathematically profitable.
* **Pre-flop Caller:** The player who called the pre-flop raise, as opposed to the player who made the initial raise.
* **Pre-flop Raiser:** The player who made the initial raise before the flop.
* **Range:** The set of all possible hands an opponent could hold in a given situation.
* **Range Bet:** To bet with a wide range of hands, often including both strong hands and bluffs/semi-bluffs.
* **Red Line:** In poker tracking software, the line on a graph that represents non-showdown winnings (money won without showing cards, typically through bluffs and folds).
* **River:** The fifth and final community card dealt face-up in a poker game.
* **Semi-Bluff:** A bet or raise with a hand that is currently not the best but has a good chance to improve to the best hand on a later street (e.g., a flush draw or straight draw).
* **Showdown Value:** The likelihood that a hand will win at showdown if no more bets are made.
* **Small Blind (SB):** The smaller of the two forced bets in a round of poker, placed by the player immediately to the left of the dealer button.
* **Stab:** A small, speculative bet, often a probe bet or a bluff.
* **Top Pair Top Kicker (TPTK):** A hand that consists of a pair with the highest card on the board, and the highest possible accompanying card (kicker).
* **Trap:** To play a strong hand passively (e.g., by checking or calling) in order to induce a larger bet or a bluff from an opponent.
* **Turn:** The fourth community card dealt face-up in a poker game.
* **Underpair:** A pocket pair that is lower in rank than any of the community cards on the board.
* **Value Bet:** A bet made with a strong hand, intended to get opponents with weaker hands to call.
* **Wet/Dynamic Board:** A board texture with many connecting cards or cards of the same suit, creating many potential straight and/or flush draws.
* **Wide:** Referring to a broad or loose range of hands.