David Smerdon

The Complete Chess Swindler

How to Save Points from Lost Positions

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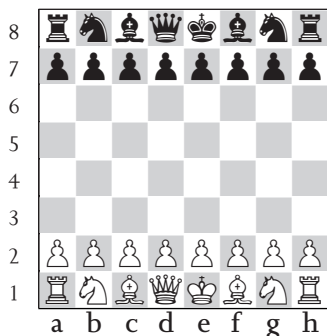
Explanation of symbols

The chessboard with its coordinates:

❑   White to move
■   Black to move
♔   King
♕   Queen
♖   Rook
♗   Bishop
♘   Knight

±   White stands slightly better
∓   Black stands slightly better
±   White stands better
∓   Black stands better
+−   White has a decisive advantage
−+   Black has a decisive advantage
=   balanced position
!   good move
!!   excellent move
?   bad move
??   blunder
!?   interesting move
?!   dubious move

Introduction

Chess is in the last resort a battle of wits, not an exercise in mathematics. Theory helps you; but you have to fight. Hence our contempt for the stupid word 'swindle' in chess. –
C.J.S. Purdy

At the strong Tallinn tournament of 1971, the game between the grandmasters Furman and Smejkal was drawing to a close. White had already mentally given up and was simply going through the motions to conclude proceedings:

Semyon Furman
Jan Smejkal
Tallinn 1971
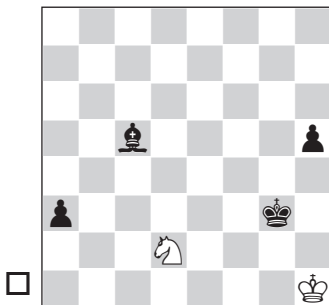
Position after 90...a3

91.♘e4+ ♔f3 92.♘xc5 a2 and Furman soon resigned. For most of the spectators, the finish was rather dull.
For most spectators, that is, except for one: Mikhail Tal. The former World Champion was watching on. As the British writer Leonard Barden recounts, Tal approached the board after the game's end and asked Smejkal, 'What would you have done after 91.♘b3 ?' 'Why, pawn to a2 of course!' was the reply. 'Ah,' said the Magician from Riga, with a twinkle in his eye. 'Then you would only have drawn.' And with his trademark nonchalance, he pushed a few pieces:
91.♘b3 a2?? 92.♘c1!!
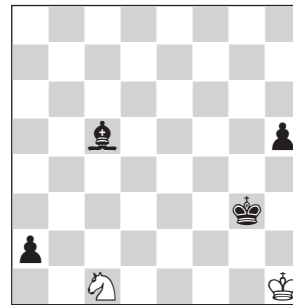
A fantastic drawing idea is revealed, no doubt to both players' horror. Promotion to a queen or rook is stalemate, while getting a new bishop is no help with a rook's pawn, even without the white knight. As Tal started to walk away, Smejkal waved him back, announcing 'Aha! I can still win! Pawn to a1 equals knight!' Unphased, Tal reached back and played
92...a1♘ 93.♘b3!!
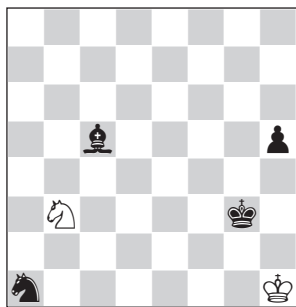
leaving the grandmasters aghast. A picturesque swindle that, alas, never made it onto the scoresheets.

I'll never be able to play like Tal. But let me share with you the closest I've come to imitating him as a spectator. Fast-forward almost 50 years to 2017 and the game that inspired this book, at a less esteemed tournament with less esteemed players and certainly a less esteemed kibitzer:

Yi Liu
Aleksandar Wohl
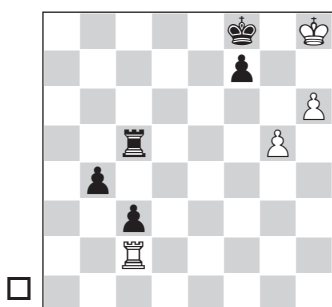Gold Coast 2017

Wohl, a legendary Australian IM, had been steadily outplaying his young opponent in this endgame and had assumed complete control. As a crowd of spectators watched,

myself among them, the result seemed clear on both players' faces. The white player had his head in his hands, looking completely dejected as his final seconds ticked down. From the sidelines, I spotted a cute swindling motif. Yi is a pretty good tactician, and I briefly thought his expressions were all part of some sort of theatrical bluff he was pulling on his older opponent. Alas, the gestures were legitimate angst. As I was trying to evaluate a complicated queen endgame, Yi let his clock run down to zero and resigned in the same motion. The spectators began to disperse.

Allowing a respectful pause, as I assumed Tal had done, I approached and asked Aleks what he would have played if Yi had continued with

38.h7!!

Aleks looked at me as if I had suggested the moon was made of cheese, and reached out his hand for the b-pawn. But the Australian veteran had known me long enough to appreciate my swindling ways, and he paused to take a second look at the position.
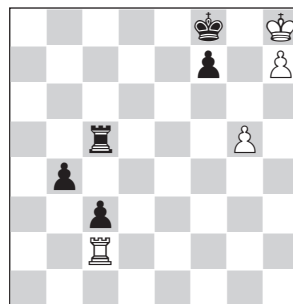
'Ahh!', he exclaimed. It was then that both players realised the game was far from over, and that White has some serious self-stalemate chances: 38...b3?? 39.♖xc3! ♖xc3 40.g6! is immediately a draw, for example. Another pretty line is 38...♖b5? 39.♖xc3 (anyway!) 39...bxc3 40.g6! c2 41.gxf7 and there is still no way to avoid the draw. After a few minutes, Wohl cleverly suggested

38...♖c8!,

which is the only try for Black to keep winning chances. However, White's not out of tricks yet:

39.♖f2![1]
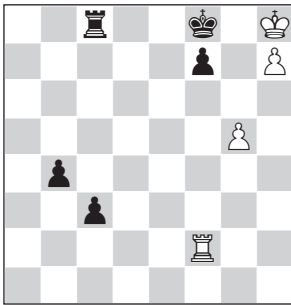
Now g5-g6 is an unstoppable threat.

39...b3

39...c2 40.♖xc2 ♖xc2 41.g6! leads to a draw, while 39...♔e7+ 40.♔g7 b3 41.♖xf7+ ♔e6 42.♖f6+! ♔d5 43.♖f8 ♖c7+ 44.♖f7 ♖xf7+ 45.♔xf7 c2 46.h8♕ c1♕ also splits the point.

40.g6 ♔e7+ 41.♔g7 fxg6 42.♖f7+! ♔e6 43.♖f6+! ♔d5 44.♖f8
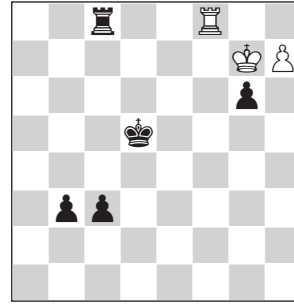
With an endgame that we agreed gave White excellent practical chances. It is notoriously more difficult to calculate how to escape the checks than to give them in these sorts of queen endgames, especially in time trouble. In fact, with the help of tablebases, it turns out that White can hold the draw even against best play:

44...♖c7+ 45.♖f7 ♖xf7+ 46.♔xf7 c2 47.h8♕ c1♕ 48.♕d8+!

with, apparently, a theoretical draw. Perhaps Yi would have held the draw from here, or perhaps not – perhaps it would be lost ninety percent of the time. But this isn't the point. The lesson here is that with a little more grit and a dash of optimism, White could have deployed a fiendishly cunning defensive resource that, at worst, would have made Black sweat hard for the full point, and at best would have secured an immediate draw. Ten percent is better than

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[1]   At the time I suggested the inverted move-order 39.g6 ♔e7+ 40.♔g7 fxg6 41.♖e2+ ♔d6 42.♖f2, but the irrepressibly thorough Belgium FM Helmut Froeyman, who often comments on my blog, later pointed out that the ending after 42...g5!! 43.♖f8 ♖xf8 44.♔xf8 c2 45.h8♕ c1♕ leads to mate in 57 moves!

zero, which is all you can get from resigning.

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That evening, I wondered whether today's energetic young talents, even with – or perhaps because of – their use of computer engines and vast online materials, are somehow less motivated to look for swindles than players of former generations. After the wide research I conducted for this book, I am surprised at how little attention has been paid to swindles in modern chess training. This is especially strange given that this is a part of our game where improvement yields immediate dividends. You may never reap the benefits of, say, learning 20 moves of an obscure opening sideline or memorising the Philidor manoeuvre in the notorious rook-and-bishop versus rook endgame.[2] On the other hand, we all get into lost positions often, and thus stealing an extra half or even full point every now and then will make a dramatic difference to both your rating and your tournament performances.

There are two reasons why the majority of players ignore the study of swindling. The first is, surprisingly, the rise of computer chess. Make no mistake: computers have drastically improved chess training, and today's players advance faster and are much more likely to reach their full potential thanks to technological tools. But an unexpected side effect of these advancements is that we have forgotten the practical nature of the battle. We are obsessed with engine evaluations, treating them as gospel (which, incidentally, has led to the rise of armchair critics – but that's another story). And that influences our own games, in which we strive to always play the 'best' move as evaluated on the screen, to the exclusion of almost all other factors.

I completely agree that a player should try to play the best moves – but I disagree that 'best' always equals the engine's first choice. The computer evaluates a position assuming that our opponent will play perfectly at every turn[3]; it doesn't (and cannot) consider the myriad of important human factors in a contest, such as fatigue, time pressure, risk-aversion, complacency, frustration, impulsiveness... the list goes on. The second reason for the neglect of swindle training is simpler: it's hard! For a coach or a self-taught

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2   Though, see the Endgames chapter.
3   This is true of engines that use alpha-beta pruning algorithms, which includes most engines such as Stockfish, Fritz etc. But this is not exactly true of the new generation of engines that use Monte Carlo tree search, such as AlphaZero, Leela Chess and its commercial clone Fat Fritz. In fact, these engines spit out evaluations in terms of percentages that are much more similar to how humans think about evaluating a position than the cold '0.00' we are all used to seeing.

player, the amount of material available for other parts of the game, such as openings, endgames or tactics, is overwhelming.

But where does one start training how to swindle? You can't search a database for games with swindles, and even if you could, what would you learn?

I sympathise with coaches who want to help their students study swindling and chess psychology in general but simply can't find any relevant materials. Most of the advice I've heard or read has been vague, ranging from optimistic sentiments such as 'hang in there, because blunders do happen' to the slightly more useful 'train your tactics so you are ready when opportunities arise'. However, there's a big difference between winning a game because your opponent blundered all on his own, and setting up a swindle that actively encourages the decisive blunder. But a student seeking to learn the valuable art of swindling is liable to wind up disappointed; engines are clueless, databases are useless, and there have been virtually no good books devoted to the topic since the 1950s.

This book has grown considerably since my initial concept of an anthology of beautiful swindles. As I embarked upon my quest

to collect examples, I started to appreciate why past authors have been wary to touch the subject. There are a few collections showcasing chess curiosities that have been meticulously assembled by noted enthusiasts such as Israel Horowitz, Tim Krabbé, Ger van Perlo, Yochanan Afek and Amatzia Avni. I now appreciate what these authors must have gone through in their research, and you will find details of these superbly entertaining resources in the bibliography.

Luckily, thanks to the fact that I am addicted to watching chess tournaments online[4], and that I meticulously file interesting examples on my computer[5], my database of modern swindles was already quite large. But for this book, I wanted more, and so I took a modern approach: crowd-sourcing. On social media, blogs and the like, I put out a call to the chess community to send me their best swindles. The response was overwhelming. Soon, my inbox was flooded with stories of games featuring horrific blunders, outrageous gamesmanship, and even blatant cheating.

The filtering task was much more laborious than I expected. Part of the problem, as Afek noted to me, is that there is not a consistent

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4   Not a good personality trait for a researcher.
5   A significantly more useful personality trait for a researcher.

definition of 'swindle' in chess terminology.[6] I painstakingly filtered through the games until I was left with over 800 examples of the purest gems, resulting in what I am sure is the largest collection of chess swindles in the world. Along the way, I discovered some miraculous escapes and mouth-watering trickery. But more significantly, I noticed familiar patterns among the games. I began to realise that this book could not only redress the glaring lack of material in the chess literature on pure swindles, but could also be a useful instructional tool for would-be Swindlers.

I don't mean to trumpet this book as the godsend to fill this vacuum; I would be very happy if more (and better!) books were written on swindles in the future, as this is a topic that fascinates me. But until then, I've done my best to put together as informative and as entertaining a guide as possible to this wonderful world.

The general flow of the book is as follows. First, we look at the most common psychological biases that affect chess players over the board. Next, we discuss the most important attributes and skills the

Swindler needs to exploit these biases. Finally, we bring these parts together to focus on how to train yourself to become a better Swindler.

To that end, I've added some swindle-specific puzzles at the end of the book that are designed to help train your swindling skills. They are different from most chess exercises in the sense that computers won't be any help to you; in fact, quite often the engine's best move will not be the correct answer, as it often doesn't reflect a player's best chance of setting up a swindle. (On the other hand, there are some puzzles in which you will try to avoid a swindle and win a won game, where, reassuringly, the computer typically agrees with the solutions.)

And along these lines, you'll find that my annotations in the main games often don't match the computer's evaluations. I might award a brilliancy ('!!') for a move that doesn't even make the engine's top choices but sets up a devious swindle, or call a move a blunder ('??') when it technically forces checkmate but drastically narrows the margin for error.[7] Proponents of correspondence chess may shudder at such blasphemy in a chess book –

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6   Jonathan Rogers, writing in *Kingpin* magazine, calls it 'Perhaps the best example of an abused chess word'.
7   Speaking of grammar: I have capitalised 'Black' and 'White' when these words refer to the generic players, while the corresponding adjectives are not capitalised (as in 'the black queen'). I generally stick to the present tense when annotating a game, except when it seems to make more sense to tell an anecdote or a story in the past tense, like in the above examples.

but here, too, I will demonstrate the benefits of learning to swindle by showing some remarkable rebounds within their hallowed world.

A quick note on the structure. I have tried to follow some sort of natural flow, as well as keeping congruence between the sections – for example, each psychological bias maps directly with a specific type of trap that the Swindler can employ to exploit it. The book is made up of several parts, with each part containing several 'mini-chapters'. Some of the chapters are quite short, containing a few or even just one example. This reflects my own preference when reading anything instructional; there are many new and unusual themes discussed in these pages, and I find that it is much easier to absorb a key idea if it is self-contained in its own chapter.

Above all, I've tried not to forget what got me interested in this project in the first place: swindles are fun! I hope the examples in this book will inspire and entertain you as much as they've delighted me. May you always win your winning positions, and may Caissa smile on you for the rest.

GM David Smerdon,
Brisbane, January 2020

The Psychology of Swindles

For the chess struggle nowadays, one needs a subtle knowledge of human nature, an understanding of the opponent's psychology. – Alexander Alekhine

Psychology is one of most debated yet least understood parts of our game. Bobby Fischer famously scoffed, 'I don't believe in psychology. I believe in good moves.' Yet, despite this being one of his most quoted sayings, Fischer spoke often about psychology in chess, stating that 'the object is to crush the opponent's mind'. Judit Polgar has argued that chess is 30 to 40 per cent psychology; but then again, Richard Teichmann quipped that chess is 99 per cent tactics – so somebody's wrong.

Top players often talk about psychological factors in their writings and interviews; Magnus Carlsen and Anish Giri are prominent examples. The classical masters were even more willing to share their thoughts on the subject. In the following game between two of the game's greats, we can learn some fascinating insights into how even a World Champion can be swindled.

Tigran Vartanovich Petrosian
Viktor Kortchnoi
Soviet Union tt 1963 (2)
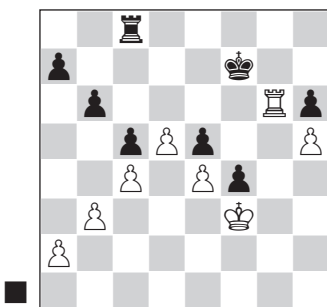
This game was played shortly after Petrosian won the World Championship. White is dominating the endgame. His rook controls the only open file from its powerful outpost and threatens to mop up Black's weak pawns on h6 and e5, while he has his own monster-passer on d5. Black's position seems completely devoid of counterplay.

In Petrosian's own words: 'For a long time I had regarded my position as a winning one. Thus the whole opening phase of the struggle, when Kortchnoi was unable to get out of trouble, had psychologically attuned me to the idea that the ending would be favourable to me.' And indeed it is – perhaps too favourable, for the world's best player no doubt expected a quick capitulation from his opponent. Note (in Petrosian's

assessment) the recognition of the psychological factors at play.

32...♖f8!

Rather than passively defending the h-pawn by 32...♖h8, Kortchnoi 'threatens' to create some counterplay after 33.♖xh6 ♖g8, though in reality the activity amounts to nothing. Rather than calculate, Petrosian prefers the easy path, keeping control of the g-file.

33.d6

Now 34.♖xh6 is certainly threatened, as 34...♖g8 is met by 35.♖g6!.

33...♖h8 34.♔g4 ♖f8!
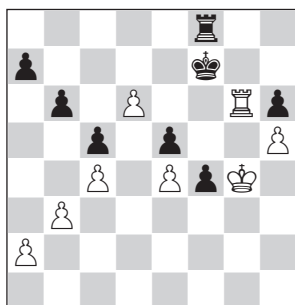
A cunning switchback, and the real set-up of the swindle. Kortchnoi appears to have given up hope. But perhaps this is a desperate attempt to prevent 35.♔f5 – thanks to the sneaky 35...f3! 36.♖f6+ ♔g7! – at the necessary cost of the h6-pawn because, as mentioned above, 35.♖xh6 ♖g8+ 36.♖g6! wins for White.

'That must be it!', thinks Petrosian. This, as we will see, is a fine example of a *decoy trap*, whereby an unwitting victim can be encouraged to ignore his suspicions about the

real swindle after spotting the thin veneer of an alternative trick. Thinking that the trap has been averted, Petrosian decides to put the game to bed:

35.♖xh6?? f3!!
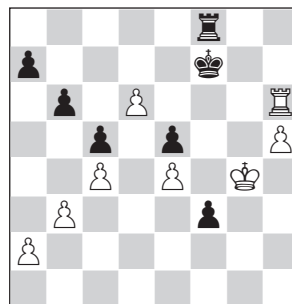
The true trap is revealed, executing the swindle in fine style. Petrosian's comments are telling: 'I did not even see the threat ...f4-f3, possibly because it was in contrast to Black's hopeless position. Personally, I am of the view that if a strong master does not see such a threat at once he will not notice it, even if he analyses the position for twenty or thirty minutes.'

36.♔g5 ♔e8

White resigned.

Psychologists have identified literally hundreds of biases that the vast majority of us have. They are part of what make us human, and it's important to remember that they are not always bad – in fact, some of them are useful rules of thumb that can help us make decisions quickly and that work most of the time. But biases can also be exploited, as anyone in

marketing, politics or real estate will attest.

For our purpose, there are four main biases that can be targeted by the would-be Swindler. I've named them the 'Four Flaws of the Chess Psyche', but only because I couldn't think of a catchier name. Every player is susceptible to one or more of them, depending on their personality, the match circumstances, the position, or even just their mood on the day. It's your job to stay attuned to your opponent's psychological weaknesses and be aware of the possibilities of exploiting them. Later in this book, we'll talk about different techniques to do this. But first, let's meet the four flaws: Impatience, Hubris, Fear and *Kontrollzwang*. They will soon be your new best friends.

CHAPTER 2

Impatience

So I made what some called my biggest blunder of the tournament. I awakened Fischer.
– Arthur Bisguier, on noticing Bobby Fischer had fallen asleep during their game in the 1963 US Championships. Fischer went on to win both the game and the tournament.

A delayed flight, a slow barista, a queue for the toilets – it can be enough to drive a person crazy. Impatience is one of the most common human foibles, and chess is no exception.

How often have you sat behind a winning position while your oblivious, soporific opponent just sits there instead of resigning? 'My God,' you think to yourself, 'He's not just wasting my time; he's wasting his own, too. What an idiot!' You stare at him until, finally, painstakingly slowly, he reaches out and makes a move. Instantly you bash back your reply and glare back in his face, silently demanding his resignation. Alas, instead, he goes back into his favourite thinking pose, and the dance continues...

Such situations can seem exasperating, but warning lights should be going off in your head. These are first-grade, prime-rib conditions for a swindle. The desire to finish off a game as quickly as possible is perhaps the most common cause of failures to win a won game. One of the most famous examples features the great Samuel Reshevsky in the 1942 US Championships. It's so well known that you've probably seen it before in a puzzle book somewhere:

Carl Pilnick
Samuel Reshevsky
New York ch-USA 1942 (12)
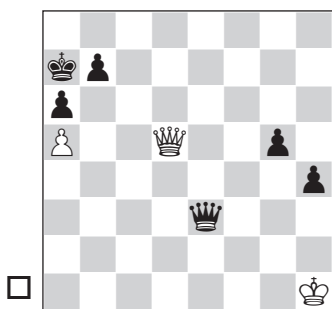
Queen endings are perhaps the most protracted of all endgames, and are frequently a catalyst for impatience (and swindles!). It might seem that the position is devoid of resources, but White finds a way to set up one final trap. Key to its success is the fact that while queen endings are tedious, pawn endings, of course, are much simpler. Pilnick's move offers Reshevsky a chance to be clever and finish the game immediately.

92.♕f5!!

And into the swindle he falls! With
92...g4??

he intends to meet 93.♕xg4 with
93...♕e1+ 94.♔g2 ♕g3+, after which
his king saunters around to capture
the a5-pawn. However, his short-
cut to victory has one huge, gaping
problem:

93.♕f2!!
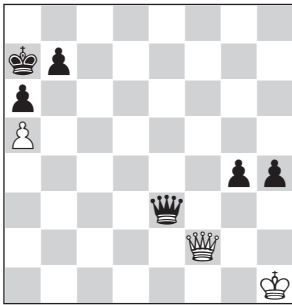
After the forced 93...♕xf2 it's
stalemate: ½-½

We'll see plenty more stalemates
cropping up throughout this book.
But it is the lead-up play – the
swindle set-up – that should really
interest us about this example.
Offer your opponent a fraudulent
shortcut to victory, and you will be
surprised how often they veer off
the winning path.
Reshevsky's impatience caused him
to look for a simple solution. But
ironically, impatience can also lead
a player to look for complications
instead of playing simple chess, so
long as it seems to hasten the end.
Here's a recent example.

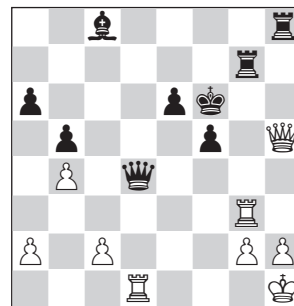| Vlastimil Jansa	2451
Eduardo Iturrizaga Bonelli	**2652**

Benasque 2018 (4)
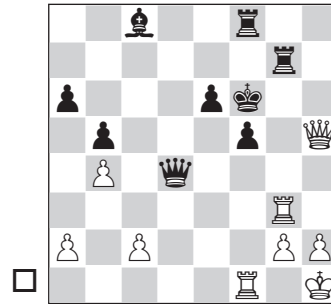
Hopelessly lost, White gives his
higher-rated opponent a chance to
be clever instead of patient:

33.♖d1!

Now almost any sensible move
wins, but the strong grandmaster
thinks he sees a cute timesaver.

33...♖h8??

The rook cannot be captured on
account of back-rank mate, while
the retreats 34.♕f3? ♖xg3! and
34.♕e2? ♕h4! lose on the spot.
And all other moves simplify the
position to a trivial win. All other
moves, that is, except for one.

34.♖g6+!!

Instead of a dazzling victory, Black will find himself a whole rook down after 34...♔e7 35.♖xd4 ♖xh5 36.♖xg7+ ♔f6 37.♖c7. And the more straightforward point is 34...♖xg6?? 35.♕xh8 is CHECK. The stuff of nightmares. **1-0**

In this example, the strong GM playing Black displayed traits of both impatience and hubris, and indeed, these two are often found together when a player is winning against a weaker opponent, as we will see in the next chapter. But impatience also occurs when playing against a *stronger* opponent. The possibility of a memorable victory can lead a player to try to force the issue, perhaps under the impression that 'the longer the game goes on, the more chances there are for me to go wrong'. This may even sometimes be true, but your wily opponent might be wise to your mindset and take advantage of your agitation.

Levon Aronian	2772
Magnus Carlsen	2870

London 2019 (2.2)
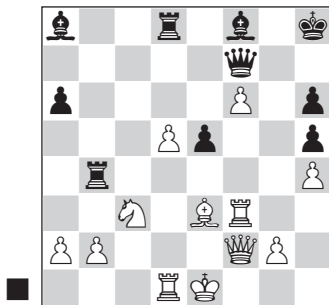
The World Champion is two pawns down with a horrible position to boot. His bishops are hopelessly hemmed in by White's commanding pawns on d5 and f6, and his kingside is in tatters. Knowing that he has minimal survival chances following a normal course of events, Carlsen makes a calculated gamble:
34...♗xd5!!
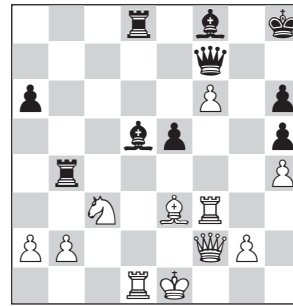
Snatching White's trump card, Black also puts himself in a seemingly paralysing d-file pin. The pin is so debilitating that White wins slowly with any 'normal' move, such as 35.♖f5! (eyeing up the pawns on e5 and h5) or 35.a3!, evicting Black's most active piece. But Aronian thinks he spots an immediate execution, and, after only 90 seconds of thought, he plunges head-first into the trap:
35.♗c5??
Seemingly crushing. If 35...♗xc5 36.♕xc5, Black loses his bishop on d5. But moving the rook on b4 anywhere allows 36.♗xf8 and Black would in any case need to remove a key defender from the d5-bishop, losing material. Did I say 'anywhere'?

35...♖d4!!

The brutal point of Black's play. With one beautiful swoop, Carlsen simultaneously cuts off the lines of communication on the d-file and the g1-a7 diagonal. No matter how White captures next, a cruel intermediate move awaits him. If 36.♗xf8 ♖xd1+! and Black saves the piece, while 36.♖xd4 ♗xc5! turns the pinner into the pinned.

A *zwischenzug* followed Aronian's choice as well:

36.♗xd4 ♗xf3! 37.gxf3 exd4

And, although White retains an edge, the tables have certainly turned. The game was eventually drawn, Aronian's impatience having cost him a famous victory.

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There are many causes of impatience at the board: trying to win a won game, catching the last train home, a hot date[17]... but for some people, impatience is just an unshakeable personality trait. As we saw above, it often occurs along with hubris, which is no less a weakness for the eager Swindler to exploit. Turn the page.

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17   See the chapter on Gamesmanship.

CHAPTER 13

Window-Ledging

You must take your opponent into a deep dark forest where two plus two equals five, and the path leading out is only wide enough for one. – Mikhail Tal

We've seen how a Trojan Horse exploits impatience, the Decoy Trap exploits hubris and a Berserk Attack exploits fear. Only a creative name will do to describe the tool to exploit *Kontrollzwang*.

Unfortunately, I couldn't think of one. But a friend of mine, a fiction author, came to my rescue. In many a classic action film with sword-fighting, the weaker swordsman, facing imminent death, climbs out onto a precarious window ledge. The implication for the dominant swordsman is clear: follow into a terrain where risk, uncertainty and deadly perils are rife for both, or give up the pursuit – and with it the advantage.

That's the idea of *Window-Ledging* that I want to convey in this chapter. Our opponent is cruising towards victory, completely in control. We need to change the environment into one where both sides can easily slip up. We need complexity; we need complications. We need chaos.

| **Malcolm Armstrong**	2126
Thomas Rendle	2416

Liverpool 2007 (4)
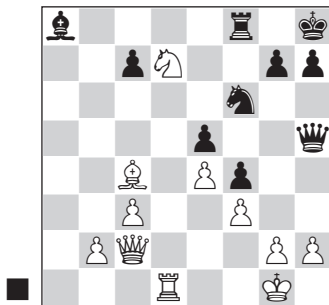
Tom later told me that he knew that 25...♘xd7 was objectively forced, but he didn't trust himself to hold the draw against his lower-rated opponent. Indeed, the resulting position is pretty grim and,

importantly, quite easy to play for White, as Black has virtually no counterplay. Instead, Tom steers the game into the sort of positions in which a lower-rated player feels very much not at ease: being under attack! **25...♗xe4!! 26.fxe4 ♘g4 27.h3 ♘e3**
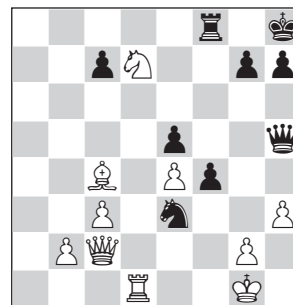
A colossal fork. The beauty of this swindle is that White appears to have such an obviously winning

100

move in 28.♕e2 that he doesn't bother to search for alternatives. Without such an obvious candidate, perhaps he would have found the crushing 28.♘xf8!! ♘xc2 29.♖d8, capping off a splendid upset. Instead, the weaker player falls prey to his instincts and jumps at the opportunity to swap the queens.

28.♕e2 f3!!

White's kingside, so unassailably secure a few moves earlier, is being ripped apart. In fairness, White may have seen this resource in advance, but missed Black's later blow. After all, Black is sacrificing almost his entire army, while the promotion square is still defended by the bishop. How bad can things really get?

29.♕xe3??

29.♖f1!! is a tough move to find, but it was the only way to win.

29...f2+ 30.♔h2 ♕xd1 31.♘xf8
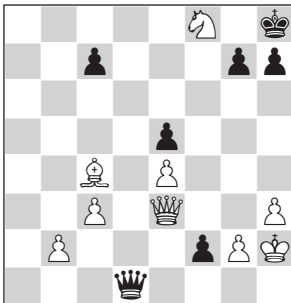
31...♕g1+!!

The killer tactic, without which Black can resign.

32.♔g3 f1♘+ 0-1

Black's sacrificed knight rises like a phoenix to deliver a sweet finish. The prosaic 32...f1♕ was also sufficient, but who could resist the underpromotion? An educational victory by one of England's trickiest masters.

Window-Ledging can be an especially effective technique when your opponent is short of time. After all, every move requires a lot more care when you're standing on a ledge.
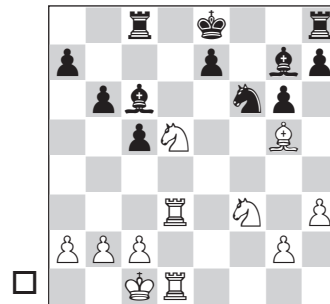
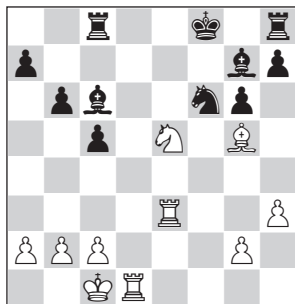| **David Smerdon** | 2521 |
| **Jakob Aabling Thomsen** | 2370 |

Helsingor 2013 (4)

White's pawn sacrifice has fizzled out and Black is only a few moves away from consolidation. Behind on material and behind on the clock, I made a practical decision to muddy the waters.
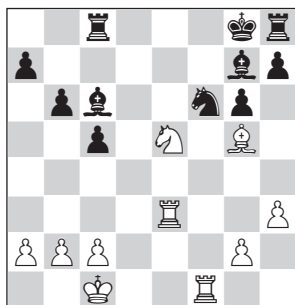
21.♘xe7!? ♔xe7 22.♖e3+ ♔f8 23.♘e5

Setting Black problems. My talented opponent rose to the challenge and played the next few moves accurately, but spent valuable minutes in the process.

23...♔g8 24.♖f1!

Hoping for 24...♘d5?? 25.♘xc6!, when Black can't take either piece without allowing checkmate.

24...♗xg2

A natural clarifying move in light of White's window-ledging. More precise was 24...♘d7!, which looks risky in light of 25.♘xc6 ♖xc6 26.♖e8+. But although he is tied up temporarily, Black can hold fast with 26...♘f8! (not 26...♗f8?? 27.♗h6!) and White's compensation will eventually evaporate.
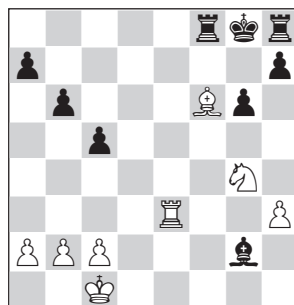
25.♖xf6! ♗xf6 26.♗xf6
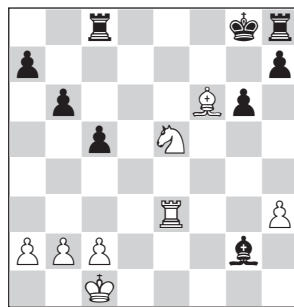
26...♖f8

Hoping to get a favourable endgame after 27.♗xh8, and some much-needed fresh air for his kingside pieces.
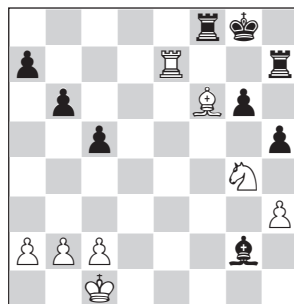
27.♘g4!

Blitzed out without a pause. This was important, as it gave my opponent the opportunity to conclude that I had blundered. With only a momentary hesitation, he fell into temptation.

27...h5??

27...♖xf6! would have maintained a decisive advantage.

28.♖e7! ♖h7

29.♘h6+!
An abrupt perpetual.
29...♖xh6 30.♖g7+ ♚h8 31.♖f7+
½-½

It's uncomfortable out on the window ledge, especially if you're the sort of player who loves being in control. That pretty much describes all chess players, even up to the World Champion.
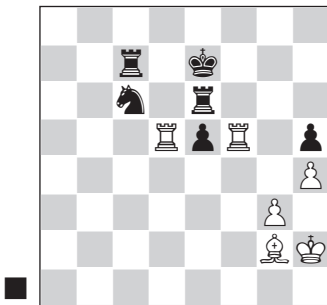
Magnus Carlsen 2840
Anish Giri 2773
Wijk aan Zee 2017 (7)

Black has been thoroughly outplayed and now faces a lost endgame against the world's best player. The most stubborn defence is 49...♖h6, but after 50.♖b5 this will almost certainly lead to a rook endgame where White is two pawns up, and Magnus would be expected to win this 95 times out of 100 against any player on earth. Instead, Giri uses the concept of Window-Ledging to create the maximum chances of a swindle. His next two moves are frowned upon by the computer; but if his

position is objectively lost in any case, does this really matter? More importantly, he narrows the path to victory that Magnus must follow.
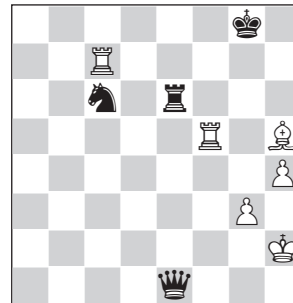**49...e4! 50.♖xh5 e3!**
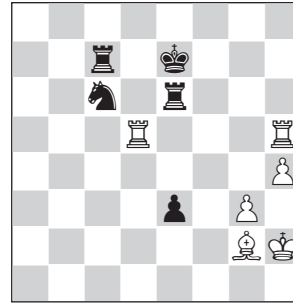
Believe it or not, after this move White can force mate in no more than 25 moves (technology, hey?). But there's little room for error out on the ledge; Magnus needs to be accurate, or else...
**51.♖h7+ ♚e8 52.♖xc7 e2 53.♗f3! e1♕ 54.♗h5+ ♚f8 55.♖f5+ ♚g8**

56.♗f7+?
It is likely that Magnus calculated this variation when choosing his 50th move, because he played the bishop check instantly, overlooking an elementary mate: 56.♖c8+ ♚g7 57.♖f7+ ♚h6 58.♖h8#. I'm not sure if Giri had also missed this, or

instead had seen it and decided it was still worth the gamble. If the latter, then his swindle deserves even more kudos.
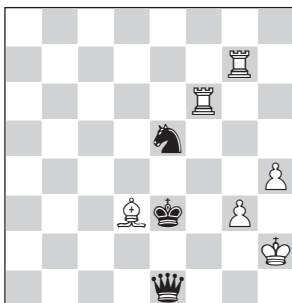
56...♔h8 57.♖h5+ ♔g7 58.♗xe6+ ♔f6
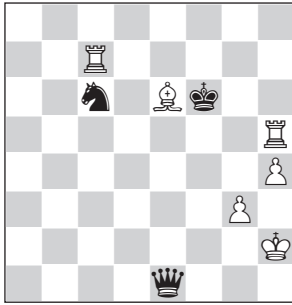
Magnus had calculated to this point and evaluated it – correctly – as winning. But one final accurate move is required, and here the champion falters:

59.♖h6+??

59.♗c4! is the only winning move, covering e2 and renewing the threat on the black knight. There is no defence: 59...♘e5 60.♖h6+ ♔f5 61.♗d3+!! ♔g4 62.♖g7+ ♔f3 63.♖f6+ ♔e3
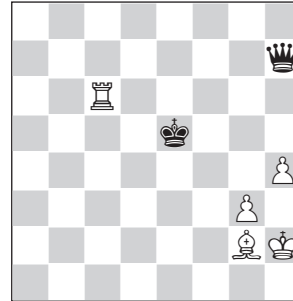

<p align="center">analysis diagram</p>

64.♗f1!! with the lovely point that 64...♘f3+? loses to 65.♖xf3+ ♔xf3

66.♗g2+ and the queen is lost. Of course, all of this was too hard to fathom in advance, but the point of Giri's play is clear: by sharpening the position, the chances of a blunder (by either player) increase dramatically.

59...♔e5 60.♗h3 ♕d2+ 61.♗g2 ♕xh6 62.♖xc6 ♕h7

The smoke has cleared, and the swindle has been successful. While Magnus pressed for another 60 moves, Giri was able to hold the endgame with little trouble. A fantastic example of using the window-ledging technique to maximise one's chances, and against no less than a World Champion.

There are many examples of Window-Ledging among the games of the great tacticians, such as Tal, Kasparov etc. But our final example is from one of my favourite amateur players, the German FM Olaf Steffens, whose unbreakably upbeat outlook on life is reflected in his optimistic chess. A diehard fan of 1.b4 with the white pieces and similar offbeat openings as Black,