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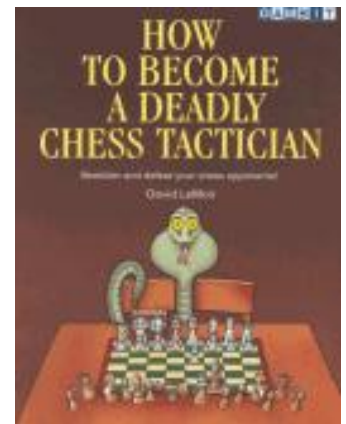
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Tactics for the Masses

Bill Kelleher

How to Become a Deadly Chess Tactician by David LeMoir,
2002 Gambit, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Softcover, 240pp.,
\$19.95

The number of books currently being published on tactics is really remarkable. Perhaps the publishers have noticed how many blunders we all are making, and have banded together to do something about it. Whatever the reason, it is a nice change of pace from the latest book on opening theory. The newest offering on the subject is *How to Become a Deadly Chess Tactician*, by David LeMoir. Mr. LeMoir is unfamiliar to most of us. He is a British amateur who has a love of combinations, and has played quite a number of nice ones of his own. In this, his second book, he has decided to share with us his accumulated experience.



Most books on tactics are based a series of problems for the reader to solve. The idea being that with enough practice even the slowest of us ought to show a little improvement. Mr. LeMoir takes a different approach. He has identified various aspects of combinational play, and has written a book that trains us in those areas. The book is divided into three parts: Motivation, Imagination, and Calculation. These are followed by a section of test problems to see if we have been paying attention.

Motivation seems like a strange way to begin a book on tactics. After all, doesn't everyone aspire to play like Tal? Mr. LeMoir does not think so! He also possesses the democratic prejudice that we all can be good tacticians, if only we can shed our materialistic propensities. As he says in his introduction, "We will seek to understand what makes us materialistic, and try to adjust our own attitude to risk, and the idea of deliberately losing



material.”

Half of the section on motivation is devoted to a history of chess tactics from the 19th century Romantics, to what he calls the “Dynamic Romantics” of today. In between these two golden eras were, according to Mr. LeMoir, long stretches of dreary positional chess. What caused the decline of sacrifice after the 19th century Romantics? According to the author it was money:

The number of tournaments increased, which meant there was more money to be made and more prestige to be gained and lost. Chess professionals espoused the new positional methods, as they took much of the risk out of winning games. At tournament and match-play level, brilliant sacrificial attacks became rare and play became increasingly dour. Players didn’t lack the ability to play to the gallery, they simply lacked the incentive.

This strikes me as a rather skewed perspective. The real reason the old Romantic style became extinct is that chess had evolved, and the unsound sacrifices of the Romantics kept being refuted. Steinitzian principles meant that you had to build up your position before launching a sacrificial attack. Steinitz’s long reign as World Champion demonstrated the superiority of his new ideas.

Of course, writing a history of chess is not what Mr. LeMoir is up to. He wants to inspire us by the beautiful games of the past to create our own mini-masterpieces in the future. Continuing with his populist approach, he tells us in the concluding chapter of the section that, “We can all do it.” In part two he intends to show us *how* to do it.

Part two, *Imagination*, is really the heart of the book. The title only indirectly tells us what the section is about. It is not about imagination *per se*, but about the nuts and bolts of combinative play. The author introduces us to such concepts as line clearance, diversion, and interference etc., with the idea that these sparkling examples will inspire the reader’s imagination.

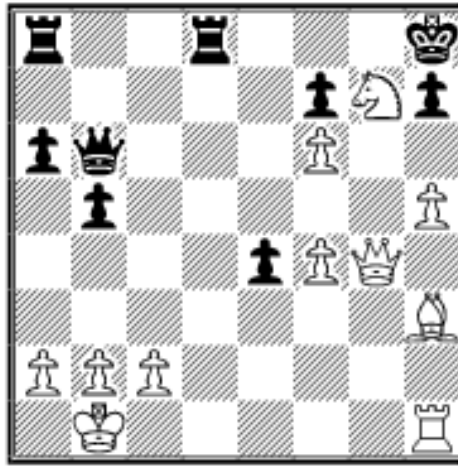
The author also introduces some new terms of his own. Chief among them is the “silent sacrifice” which he defines as “The sacrifice without a capture and without a check.” He gives a simple example of this in Short-Ljubojevic, Reykjavik, 1987.

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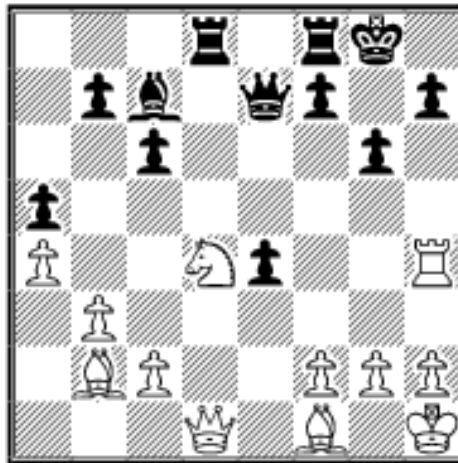
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By the silent sacrifice **29.Ne8**, White clears the g7-square, and sets up mate. Mr. LeMoir then goes on to explaining the various motifs associated with this.

Once the reader has mastered the individual motifs, Mr. LeMoir then gives a section of “complex silent sacrifices” which

combine two or more individual motifs. Vukovic-Anonymous, Simultaneous, 1937 is a cute example of this.

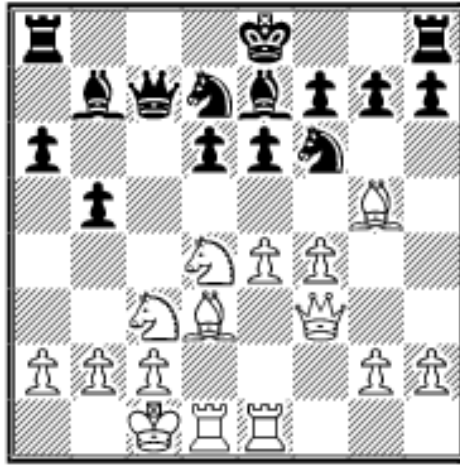


White wins by **1.Nf5!!** threatening mate by 2.Nh6 or 2.Nxe7. 1...gxf5 is answered by 2.Rg4!+ fxg4 3.Qxg4+ Qg5 4.Qxg5#. Therefore Black played **1...Qxh4** threatening mate on h2, but he was shocked by ...**2.Qh5!!** After 2.Qh5 there are two motifs at work. There is *interference* on the h-file (2...gxh5

3.Nh6#), and *diversion* of the queen from guarding the e7-square. (2...Qxh5 3.Ne7#) Black resigned.

However, I did find Mr. LeMoir's propensity for coining too much new chess jargon such as elimination, secondary line-clearance, and substitution etc., somewhat distracting. He doesn't reach the level of Hans Kmoch, the author of *Pawn Power in Chess*, who gave life to such chess nomenclature monstrosities as melanpenia and leucopenia, but it still can be irritating.

Also, he occasionally lets his sacrificial enthusiasm cloud his judgment. For example, consider the following position after Black's 11th move.



This is one of the most heavily analyzed positions in the 6.Bg5 Najdorf. Mr. LeMoir tells us that it occurs in 225 games in *Mega Database 2001*. In 44 of these games White sacrificed his Knight by 12.Nd5, and had a winning percentage of 74%. In the other 171 games White refrained from sacrificing

and scored only 51%. From this Mr. LeMoir concludes that, “There can be no better advertisement for playing sacrifices such as Nd5, *sound or not*, than the statistic that White scored 51% in these 171 games. (Emphasis added.)

Of course as Mark Twain reminds us, “There are lies, damned lies, and then there are statistics.” Here is what GM John Nunn says about this same position in his book, *The Complete Najdorf, 6.Bg5*. “The complications arising from 12. Nd5 are amazing, but its soundness is in serious doubt. 12.Qg3 is also complex, but with the major difference that the main line peters out to a draw. In view of White’s lack of success in these two main lines, a variety of other continuations have been tried.” Interestingly, Mr. Nunn is on the editorial staff of Gambit Publishing.

Nonetheless, the conclusion is obvious: If you play this sacrifice against a prepared player you are going to get a bad position, and probably lose. Mr. LeMoir’s enthusiasm for this sacrifice is all the more strange when you consider that 12. Qg3, with the threat of 13.e5, virtually forces Black to play 12...b4 when White can play 13.Nd5, sacrificing the Knight under more favorable circumstances.

Mr. LeMoir’s database obviously includes a large number of games between weak players. In fact the one game he shows us, which featured 12.Nd5, was played in the U20 Girls Tournament, Guanare 2000!

Part 3, *Calculation*, is the shortest section of the book, occupying only 14 pages. One would think that accurate calculation is the *sine qua non* of the successful tactician, but Mr. LeMoir gives it

surprisingly short shrift, preferring to emphasize motivation, and imagination. In keeping with his everyman approach, he quotes advice from Kotov and Dvoretsky, but then tells us that their methods are really for budding Grandmasters.

Under the heading, *Calculation for Joggers*, he says, “It can be argued that learning how to ‘calculate properly’ is for those who wish to approach perfection, and that specialized preparation is not appropriate for the rest of us.” He then gives the reader a number of tips to guide his or her own calculations. Some of them are pretty obvious such as, trying to discover the drawback of your opponent’s last move, asking what your opponent is trying to do, or looking for forcing lines.

However some of Mr. Lemoir’s suggestions are unique to his approach to chess. For instance, he suggests that we ask ourselves what might be possible if we had several moves in a row. He says the idea is that, “If we find that a combination would be possible after a few preparatory moves, we can start playing them now.” It sounds interesting, but I cannot help but wonder where positional considerations fit into this scheme. Another suggestion of his is to look for moves that lose material. He tells us that the Leningrad master, Chekhover, would begin his analysis by working out which pieces he could put *en prise*. Obviously Mr. Chekhover is a man after Mr. Lemoir’s own heart!

As the heading “Calculation for Joggers” suggests, Mr. LeMoir has written a book for intermediate players (in the range of 1400-2000) who want to improve, but do not necessarily want to become Grandmasters. In this he is successful, and just as important, his book is fun to read.

It bears repeating that this book is obviously a labor of love for Mr. Lemoir. This is shown throughout the book by his unbounded (and occasionally over-the-top) enthusiasm, and his motto that chess should be fun. He has even recruited his father, a freelance cartoonist, to do illustrations for the book. The father has created Hissing Sid, a rather silly looking cobra who peers out at us under the chapter headings, ready to strike at all the unwary chess players. Also Mr. LeMoir’s love of combinations has inspired him to search exhaustively through his databases for them. The result is book full of interesting and unusual positions.

If you are looking for a book that will improve your combinative ability, and is not overly taxing, I recommend *How to be a Deadly*

Chess Tactician. However I do have one caveat: don't sacrifice unsoundly! Remember a tactician can be deadly to himself as well as to his opponent.

[Order](#) *How to Become a Deadly Chess Tactician*
by David LeMoir



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