

Chess, Bluffs and Human Nature

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1 The 3000\$ bluff

Final round. Thirty minutes. Three grand on the line. He sacrifices a pawn for nothing. Leans back, folds his arms, eyes locked on me like the game's already over. I waste my precious time thinking about his "genius" plan. By the time I move, it's too late! I lost the game. The gold. And 3000\$.

Let's step back a moment. Bird's eye view with one change: No emotion.

Why did he sacrifice a pawn if he knew it was losing? Unlike me, he wasn't playing the position; he was playing me. Tournament finals aren't always won based on skill; sometimes, they are won in your opponent's head.

Why did I take the bait? Make someone believe you have a secret and watch them spend all their resources to find it.

The pawn meant nothing. But my belief did.

2 Why everyone falls for it

Do you think you're immune to manipulation? Let's test it. I'll predict exactly what happens next: you'll keep reading, smirking, because now you have to see if I'm right.

And I am.

I simply turned your curiosity against you. The best in the world get played. How? The "Ghost Army" from World War II fooled their enemies into thinking they had far more troops than they did.

Overconfident people are frequently bluffed because of their ability to "know" everything. Such arrogance makes them easy bait.

Overcautious people get bluffed too. They always second-guess themselves.

Analytical people believe everything happens for a reason. Give them a useless scenario. Watch them twist logic to make sense of it.

What's the common ground? Predictability. And predictability is what separates elites from amateurs.

3 Anatomy of Deception

Here's the thing about bluffs - they're everywhere, just like Morgan Freeman. Be it shoving all in with seven deuce, startup founders pitching impossible timelines, or sacrificing a piece for nothing. Same tricks, different games.

How does it start?

The Setup: They make a questionable move while being too confident.

The Execution: Most people can fake confidence longer than faking calm.

For example, my opponent held his posture for a long time. That's not confidence, that's commitment.

4 Reading the signs

To read anyone, learn their normal. What's their talking pace? Resting face? Usual rhythm? Create a baseline for this behavior. Now, watch for deviations. Defensive poses, tense posture, and weird timings are a giveaway.

Above all, trust your gut. You may not be right every time, but who is?

5 Poker Face

Sure, you've heard about this, right? Most people butcher its meaning. They think having a poker face means showing no reaction. Wrong. It means giving the same reaction every time. Taking out the trash or winning the lottery, same reaction. The ultimate goal is to strip our "tells" so low, leaving our opponent with no clue.

But, only hiding our tells is like running a marathon barefoot. Defense alone isn't enough. To be elite, you need both: Hide your signals and read theirs.

6 Turning the tables

Now you've caught the bluff. People usually react in one of two ways.

1. Go full Detective Lassiter.
2. Flex the "emotional maturity card".

Be neither.

What's the right strategy? Let them oversell their position. Let them dig their own grave without realizing it.

In Poker, hesitate. Act concerned after catching the lie. For Chess, burn time on obvious moves, furrow your brows. Make your uncertainty look like calculation, not doubt. Give them the illusion of being in control. Why? People lower their guard when they think they've outplayed you. That's when you strike.

The next time someone tries to bluff you, you'll spot it from a mile away. Three grand, the pawn never mattered. The game's inside your head all along.

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