Grandmaster Howlers

An Informal Survey of Chess Folly:
Major Analytical Errors by some of the Greatest Players of All Time

by Taylor Kingston

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. — St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, 3:23

The question mark of the annotator often is the only mistake. — GM Savielly Tartakower

Come not between the Nazgûl and his prey! Or he will not slay thee in thy turn. He will bear thee away to the houses of lamentation, where thy flesh shall be devoured, and thy shrivelled mind be left naked to the Lidless Eye. — the Chief of the Nazgûl in The Return of the King *by J.R.R. Tolkien*

We all know how easy it is to make a serious mistake playing chess. Those of us whose ratings have never been anywhere near 2600 can only envy the relatively error-free play of the grandmasters; in fact the lack of tactical error is the main difference between a GM and a rank-and-file player. Yet even the greats sometimes blunder under the strain of competition and the pressure of a ticking clock.

But how about when a GM is not under pressure, when he's analyzing in the peace and quiet of his own home? When he can spend as long as he likes on a position, moving the pieces around, taking notes, consulting books, all free from the haste and tension of actual play? While we would not expect perfection, surely grandmasters would not commit serious errors — the kind of annotational mistakes called "howlers" in chess slang — under such ideal circumstances?

And yet they do, and with today's home computers and analytical software, the silicon-based "Lidless Eye" of electronic scrutiny, it is not hard to find instances of GMs publishing analytical mistakes that would make a Class C player blush. Having edited new editions of several classic books by grandmasters from the pre-computer era, and investigated others simply out of my own curiosity, I have had many opportunities to discover such errors, and have kept records of all of them.

Many of the choicest, ripest, most howling of these howlers have been assembled here. In these pages you will see several World Champions — Lasker, Capablanca, Alekhine, Euwe, Tal, Kasparov — and various top-rank GMs — Bronstein, Fine, Najdorf, Nimzovich, Tartakower, Timman — plus other fine players, write annotations that leave pieces *en prise*, overlook mates, miss elementary combinations, advocate unsound sacrifices, praise bad moves, condemn good ones, fear imaginary dangers or ignore real ones, fail to notice egregious mistakes or decisive opportunities, and in general look like inept editors of a club newsletter instead of the chess elite.

My motivation for publishing these is not ridicule, nor even *Schadenfreude*, that useful German word meaning "joy at the misery of others." Though I have put these chess greats under the Lidless Eye, I do not wish to bear them away to any houses of lamentation, or knock them off their well-deserved pedestals in the chess pantheon. I simply find chess analysis fascinating work, and I enjoy sharing what I

find, whether the result reflects credit or discredit on a given annotator. I feel the cause of objective chess truth should be served, even if on occasion the reputation of a chess hero suffers.

Furthermore, studying such errors and their corrections cannot help but be instructive for the aspiring player. And the analysis often yields some very interesting, even beautiful variations. Not to mention some amusing situations, such as a GM condemning someone else's analysis, and then giving analysis as bad or worse himself.

Full games are not given here, just fragments focusing on the analytical mistakes. Except for grouping these 126 items into several loosely defined categories (see below), I have made no special effort to organize them, though there is perhaps some tendency to go from the simpler to the more complex, both within a given category and across the several categories (*i.e.*, the items in "Overlooking the Obvious" are simpler than those in the "Lost in the Complications" or "Charlie Fox" section).

The items are numbered sequentially, and an index at the end lists which items belong to each annotator. In some cases one item includes several howlers from the same game, while in others one game supplied several different kinds of howler, so they were split into separate items in different categories.

The items are drawn from many different writers and sources. To save time and effort, works cited more than a few times are identified by the following codes:

AAMBG : *My Best Games of Chess 1908-1937* by Alexander Alekhine (game numbers cited here are those from the 2013 Russell Enterprises edition, which combines the original two volumes into one)
AoCA : *The Art of Chess Analysis* by Jan Timman
Cu1962 : *Curaçao 1962: The Battle of Minds that Shook the Chess World* by Jan Timman
CMO : *Chess Marches On!* by Reuben Fine
HM1948 : *The Hague-Moscow 1948 Match/Tournament for the World Chess Championship* by Max Euwe
LMOC : *Lasker's Manual of Chess* by Emanuel Lasker (all references are to the 1947 David McKay edition, which has errors that were corrected in the 2008 Russell Enterprises edition)
MCC : *My Chess Career* by José Raúl Capablanca
MGP1 : *My Great Predecessors Part I* by Garry Kasparov
NY1924 : *New York 1924* by Alexander Alekhine
SEiK : *Schach-Elite im Kampf*, Max Euwe's book of the 1953 Zürich Candidates Tournament
STMBG : *My Best Games of Chess 1905-1954* by Savielly Tartakower (game and page numbers cited are from the 2015 Russell Enterprises edition, which combines the original two volumes into one)
StP1909 : *St. Petersburg 1909* by Emanuel Lasker
T-B1960 : *Tal-Botvinnik 1960* by Mikhail Tal
TWAC : *The World's a Chessboard* by Reuben Fine (later retitled *Great Moments in Modern Chess*)
Z1953DB : *Zurich International Chess Tournament 1953* by David Bronstein
Z1953MN : *Zürich 1953: Fifteen Contenders for the World Chess Championship* by Miguel Najdorf

In most cases — *AAMBG*, *HM1948*, *LMOC*, *NY1924*, *STMBG*, *StP1909*, *T-B1960* and *Z1953MN* — I had already done extensive, systematic analyses of the entire book, usually in conjunction with editing it for publication by Russell Enterprises. *MCC* was also analyzed systematically, though not for any new edition. Two other books, *Z1953DB* and *SEiK*, were examined fairly extensively, though not completely, for comparison with *Z1953MN*. Timman's *Cu1962* was spot-checked in the course of writing a review, and the errors there prompted me to spot-check *AoCA* as well. The errors from Fine's two books just surfaced in unsystematic checking over the years. Most of the books were originally checked some years

ago with Fritz8 or Rbyka 3 UCI; *Stp1909* and *MCC* were checked with Komodo 11.2.2 and Stockfish 8 on a late-model machine capable of much faster and deeper analysis. In the process of preparing this paper, many of the old Fritz/Rybka analyses were checked again with the better machine and software, and some revisions and improvements were made. When I use the "royal we" I am speaking both for myself and the analysis engines.

Numbers at the end of a variation — *e.g.* "15.♘×c3 (+5.30)" — indicate the engine's assessment of the position. If, say, White is one pawn up with no other relevant considerations, the evaluation will be +1.00; if Black is up the pawn then -1.00. An evaluation of +/-3.00 would indicate an advantage of three pawns or a minor piece, +/- 5.00 a rook, etc. Usually anything more than +/-2.00 indicates a winning advantage. While these numerical evaluations are in rare cases not valid, they usually are, and are much more informative than the usual symbols +−, −+, ±, ∓ etc.

Categorizing the Mistakes:

These categories of course are somewhat arbitrary and they overlap to some extent, for example a *Zwischenzug* might occur in a line filed under "Superficiality," or a "Surprise!" might come while the analyst is agog with admiration in an endgame. But we've tried to classify our howlers according to what we considered their most salient characteristic.

Overlooking the Obvious: Short-term blindness involving just a few moves (in some cases just one!), such as missing forced mates or gains of significant material. Also missing resources, in attack or defense, that would affect the outcome of the game, and are apparent enough that many ordinary players could find them, yet somehow the GM did not.

Superficiality: Analyzing a variation to a certain point and giving a verdict, when analyzing a few moves deeper overturns that verdict.

Hallucinations: Inexplicable gaffes that don't quite fit the two previous categories, especially seeing dangers that don't exist.

Zwischenzüge: A German word meaning "in-between moves," this refers to positions where a given line seems to be forced, and most players would automatically follow it, but in fact a threat or check at some point can disrupt the sequence and change the game.

Surprise! Surprise!: Self-explanatory; overlooking an unexpected, unusual move. Often the surprise move completely overturns the GM's analytical verdict. These examples differ from the Superficiality section in the striking nature of the surprise move.

Settling for Less: Recommending a reasonable move or continuation, but missing something much stronger. For example, giving as best a line that wins a pawn or two, when much greater material gain, or even mate, was possible.

Missing the Key: Failing to find the crucial move in a winning or draw-saving line of play, especially after the annotator has already mentioned the key idea.

Asleep at the Wheel: These are mainly errors of omission, where a move that might have changed the outcome of the game is completely overlooked, both by the players and the GM annotator. They are

often seen in a game the annotator himself has won, where he unconsciously (or deliberately?) glosses over a saving move his opponent might have played. Also seen in long stretches where the annotator, out of boredom, laziness, haste, or the assumption that the game was already decided, makes no comment when he should have.

Misevaluation: An overall assessment of a position is given which turns out to be quite wrong, either strategically or tactically.

Agog with Admiration: Cases where a move appears so brilliant or surprising, or a strategic plan appears so all-encompassing and inexorable, that the annotator rushes to praise it without sufficient examination. In some cases this is *amour propre*, the annotator praising his own play.

Always Check for Check: Failure to notice a check that could change the game or refute a recommended line of play.

Endgames: Self-explanatory. Despite the paucity of pieces, some endgames offer many opportunities for an analyst to err.

Long Analysis, Wrong Analysis: A familiar chess truism, reflecting the fact that, except in a clearly forced line, the number of possible relevant moves increases exponentially move by move as a variation is extended. Thus the chance of overlooking something important also increases.

Lost In The Complications: Cases where the annotator gives a wrong verdict, praising a bad move or condemning a good one, or he fails to detect at all a crucial move or to see that a move is especially good or bad, but the position is so complex that his error is not obvious, and proving his error may require the sort of lengthy, in-depth analysis that usually only a computer can provide. This is found most often in difficult middle games, or in endgames where an engine such as Stockfish might see out to 40 ply or more.

Charlie Fox: Cases where an entire note is rife with errors, blunders being piled on blunders. The term has its colorful origin in American military slang, as illustrated by this passage from the novel *Endymion* by Dan Simmons, page 100, where two soldiers discuss an operation where everything went wrong:

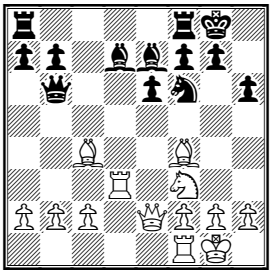
> "We had a phrase for this in the Marines before I joined Swiss Guard, sir."
> "Charlie Fox," says Father Captain de Soya, trying to smile.
> "That's what you polite navy types call it," agrees Gregorius ... "In the Marines, sir," continues the sergeant, not even breathing heavily, "we called it a cluster fuck."

So, without further ado, let us paraphrase the title of a book by GM Andy Soltis, and delve into a Catalog of Analytical Mistakes.

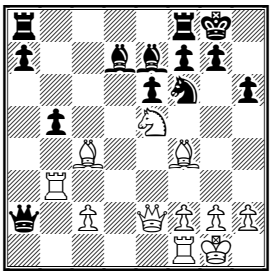
Overlooking the Obvious:

One might think this kind of howler is very rare in GM annotations, but it is not. Pieces left *en prise*, elementary mates overlooked, simple traps and basic combinations going unnoticed, are all too common in chess literature, even when World Champions and top-rank GMs are involved. Thus this section has more entries than any other.

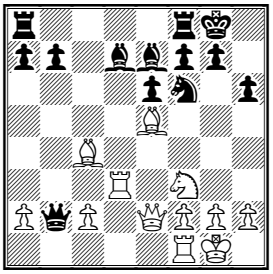
1. An example from *Cu1962* is Tal-Benko, Curaçao Candidates Tournament, round 10. Here, after 14.♖d4-d3,



GM Jan Timman comments "It is too dangerous to capture on b2 at once, as after 14...♕×b2 15.♖b3 ♕×a2 16.♘e5 Black would be in insuperable trouble." While 14...♕×b2 is indeed too dangerous, Timman's needlessly complicated line is not the way to show it. Black plays 16...b5!,

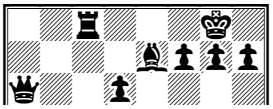


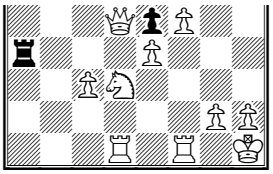
and whatever storms may come, Komodo says Black should do no worse than draw. The real refutation of 14...♕×b2?? is the straightforward 15.♗e5!,



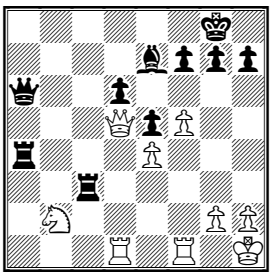
forcing 15...♕b6 16.♗×f6 ♗×f6 17.♖×d7 and White wins a piece. Surprising to see an elite GM like Timman miss such a simple combination, but we will see worse before we're through.

2. Staying with *Cu1962*, at this point in Tal-Fischer, round 4,



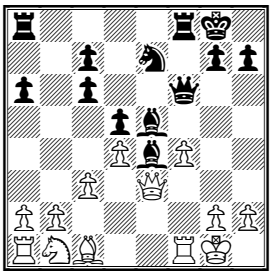


Fischer played 24...♖a5, and later regretted not playing 24...♖×c3, which he said would win (Komodo confirms this). Timman wrote rather peevishly: "I must say ... that I find it rather exaggerated to say, as Fischer did, that Black is winning after 24...♖×c3. If White goes 25.♘b2, he has decent enough chances to hold the game." Um, no. After 25.♘b2??,



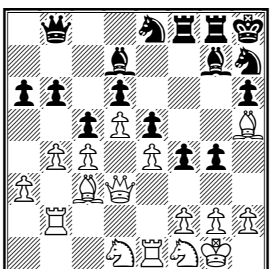
White loses his queen to 25...♖d4 (if 26.♖×d4 ♕×f1#). At the time I reviewed *Cu1962* for ChessCafe.com back in 2005, I showed the diagrammed position to a 1600-rated friend at my local club, and he hit on 25...♖d4! in less than thirty seconds.

3. Another famous Dutch GM, former World Champion Max Euwe, made an even simpler oversight annotating his 11th-round game with Keres in *HM1948*. A note to White's 15th move reached this position after 16...♗d6×♘e5:



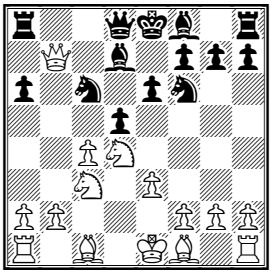
The note then continued 17.f×e5 ♕g6, somehow overlooking that Black could play 17...♕×f1#. This may have been a typo, with 17.d×e5 actually intended, in which case 17...♕g6 makes sense. However, IM Harry Golombek's book on that event also gave 17.f×e5 ♕g6.

4. Lest we seem to be picking only on Dutch GMs, we note that perhaps the most glaring and puzzling case ever of this kind of howler is found in a note by Lasker in *StP1909*. At move 28 of Speijer-Tartakower,



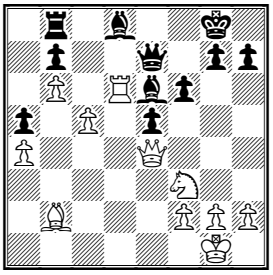
Lasker strangely claims that “Black could here already win a piece by 28...♘ef6,” but obviously White can reply 29.♗g6, losing nothing.

5. Another glaring example from *StP1909* is found in Game 166, Bernstein-Mieses. In the note at move nine, Lasker says that after 9.♕×b7,

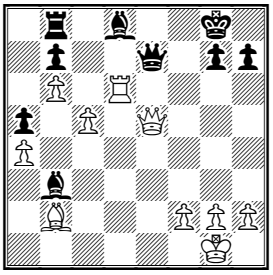


Black draws by 9...♘b4 10.a3 ♖b8 11.♕a7 ♖a8 etc. Surely most players would prefer 9...♘a5 winning the queen.

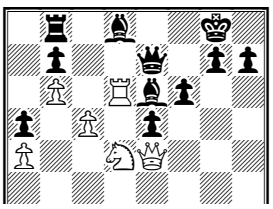
6. A third example from *StP1909* is the note at move 25 of Game 159, Dus-Chotimirsky–Perlis:



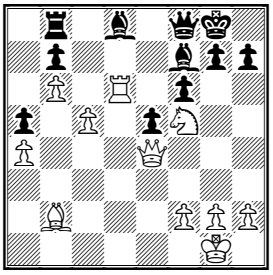
After 25.♘×e5 f×e5 26.♕×e5 ♗b3



Lasker’s 27.♖×d8+?? loses horribly to 27...♖×d8 and the threat of back-rank mate forces White to give up his queen, 28.h3 ♕×e5−+ . Perhaps Lasker gave this bad move intentionally for instructive purposes, but it bears mentioning that 25.♘×e5 was not all that bad, as long as White avoids 27.♖×d8+?? in favor of 27.♖d3!?. However, all this is pretty much academic, because the best 25th move for White went unmentioned by Lasker, to wit, 25.♘d4!:

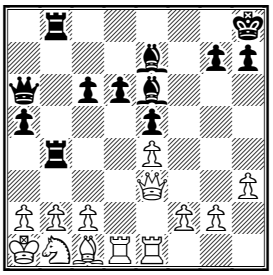


Forced now is 25...♗f7 26.♘f5 ♕f8,

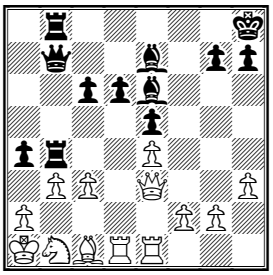


when White has a definite positional advantage (about +1.30) but no material edge as yet.

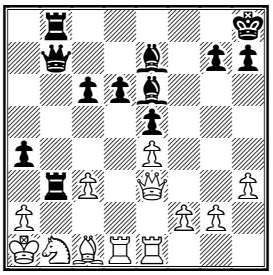
7. And yet another from *StP1909* (there are, alas, many). At move 24 of Game 173, Burn–Dus-Chotimirsky,



Lasker's note is correct that 24...♕b7 was better than the text 24...♕b5, but then he missed the most convincing demonstration of this fact. After 24...♕b7 25.b3 a4 Lasker gives 26.c3,

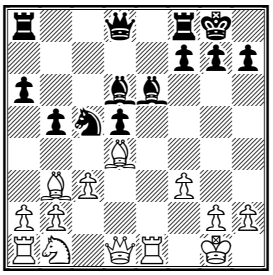


which deserves a "??", but then follows it with the meek 26...♖b6?!. Instead 26...♖×b3! is crushing,



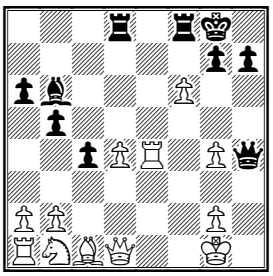
viz. 27.a×b3 ♕×b3 and mate next, or 27.♗a3 ♖×a3 28.♖d2 ♖×a2+ 29.♖×a2 ♗×a2 (-13.65).

8. *LMOC*'s discussion of the Ruy López reaches this position on page 83.

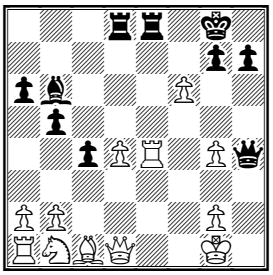


Lasker comments "White still stands weak on the King's side, but he can with impunity reply 16.♘d2 and save the day." But 16.♘d2? would be immediately impugned by 16...♘d3 17.♖e2 ♘×b2, losing a pawn. Correct is 16.♗c2 preventing the knight incursion.

9. Further on in that same line of play, page 84 of *LMOC* reached this position as an illustration of Black's attacking chances:

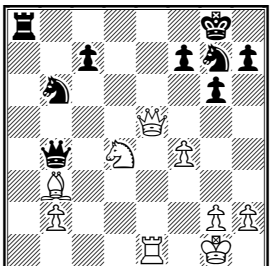


This is completely won for Black; all he need do is the natural 23...♖×f6 and White is defenseless, *e.g.* 24.♗f4 ♖×d4! etc. Lasker, however, gave 23...♖fe8?,

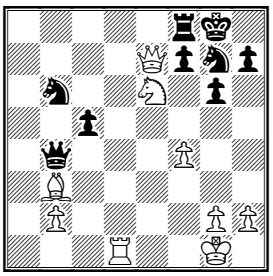


which allows White to draw with 24.♖×e8+ ♖×e8 25.f7+ ♔×f7 26.♕f3+ ♔g8 27.g3, or even try for more with 24.f7+ ♔×f7 25.♕f3+ ♔g8 26.g3 ♕h3 27.♘c3.

10. On page 128 of *LMOC*, Lasker discussed Tarrasch-Burn, Ostend 1907, starting at this position:

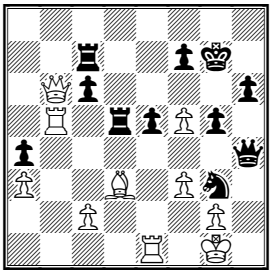


Lasker gave what he considered a drawing line that began 1.♖d1 c5 2.♕e7 ♖f8 3.♘e6??,



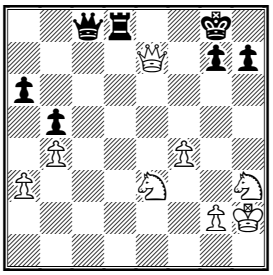
overlooking that instead of 3...♘×e6?!, Black can win a piece with 3...♖e8! (-3.89).

11. In *NY1924*, annotating Ed. Lasker-Bogolyubov, Alekhine's note at move 40 reached this position,



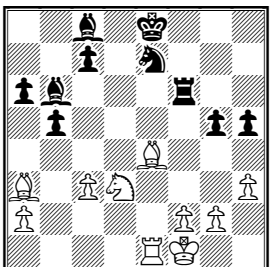
where he recommended 41...c×b5??, which allows a quick mate with 42.f6+, 43.♕b8+ etc.

12. Also in *NY1924*, in a note at move 40 of Ed. Lasker-Em. Lasker,



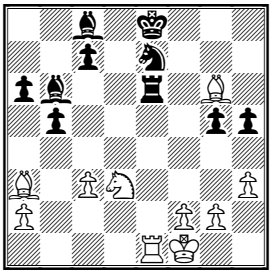
Alekhine recommended 40...♖e8?? overlooking 41.♘f5!, when to avoid mate Black would have to play 41...♖×e7 42.♘×e7 ♔f8 42.♘×c8, or 41...♕×f5 42.♕×e8+ ♕f8 43.♕×f8+ ♔×f8, with an easy win for White either way.

13. One of Capablanca's most elementary howlers is seen in *MCC*'s Game 27, Capablanca-Chajes, New York 1915:



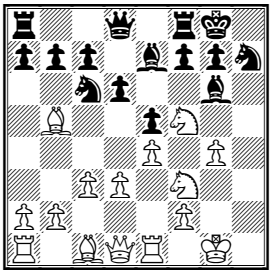
Commenting on 29...♗e6, Capablanca says "29...♖e6 would be no better, for then White would play either 30.h4! or 30.♗g6+!. Thus 29...♖e6 30.♗g6+ ♖×g6 31.♖×e7+ ♔d8 32.♘e5, threatening the rook, and 33.♘f7#."

Komodo quite agrees on the worth of 30.h4!, but 30.♗g6+?? would be a howler of highest degree:

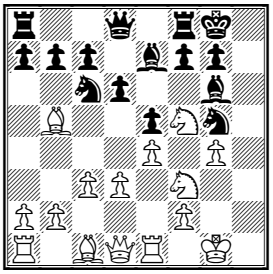


Rather than 30...♖×g6, Black simply plays 30...♘×g6 and White can resign (-4.42).

14. Another Capablanca mistake has been noted enough by others that we almost decided to omit it, but since it has appeared in books by both him and Kasparov, it's included. In *MCC*'s Game 8, Capablanca-Marshall, sixth match game 1909, at move 14,

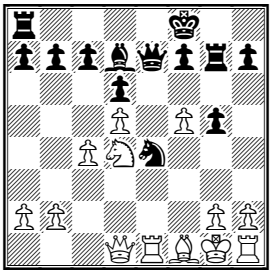


Marshall played 14...♗g5, about as good as anything else. Strangely, though, Capablanca says "I would have preferred 14...♘g5."



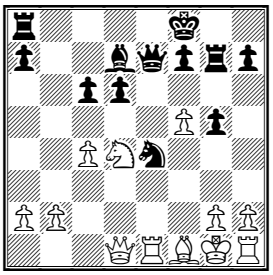
This of course is an elementary blunder that loses a piece to 15.♘×e7+ ♘×e7/♕×e7 16.♗×g5. It may well be that this is a typographical error, and that Capablanca intended 14...♘f6, as Edward Winter surmised in *Chess Notes* #10591 in September 2017. Surprisingly, Kasparov in *MGP1* quotes Capablanca's note without comment or correction. This indicates perhaps that neither Garry himself, nor any assistant of reasonable competence, actually wrote the annotations for this game.

15. Game 16 of *MCC*, Corzo-Capablanca, Havana 1913, has another elementary howler. At move 18,



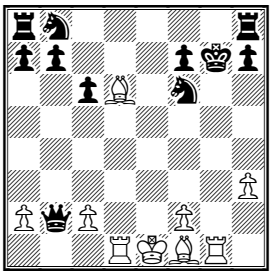
where he played 18...♕e5, Capablanca wrote “Black could also play 18...c5, for then if 19.d×c6 b×c6 and the knight can be defended by 20...d5.”

One would like to have been there if Capablanca did play 18...c5?? 19.d×c6 b×c6,

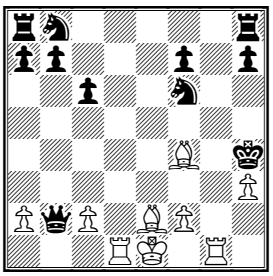


and seen the look on his face when White replied 20.f6! ♕×f6 21.♖×e4+−.

16. Mikhail Tal, annotating game three of his 1960 World Championship in *T-B1960*, cited a training game he had played before the match, which reached this position after White’s 18th move:



The game now continued 18...♘g4, which Tal correctly names the right move. As “significantly worse” he gives 18...♔h6 19.♗f4+ ♔h5 20.♗e2+ ♔h4 21.♗g3+ ♔×h3 22.♗f1+ ♔g4 23.♗e5+ ♔f5 24.♗×b2 “with a very strong attack,” an assessment discussed in the “Misevaluation” section. Here, under “Overlooking the Obvious,” we note that in the middle of Tal’s line, after 20...♔h4,

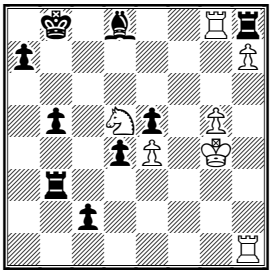


White has two ways for a short forced mate: 21.♗g5+ ♔×h3 and either 22.♖h1+ ♔g2 23.♖h2+ ♔g1 24.♔d2#, or 22.♔f1 ♘g4 23.♖h1+ ♘h2+ 24.♖×h2#.

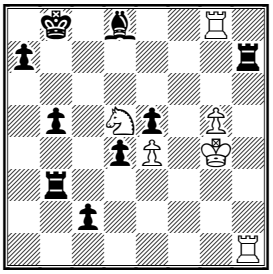
One wonders how a tactical genius like Tal could make such a mistake, but the reason may be that, according to reliable reports, he wrote the entirety of the *Tal-Botvinnik 1960* book *sans voir*. He dictated every move of every game from memory, along with his note variations, never using a board. Under those circumstances it's surprising that his book does not have more errors, but it's remarkably clean.

For other Tal howlers from this same game, see the Superficiality and Misevaluation sections.

17. Annotating Tartakower-Mieses in *StP1909*, one of Lasker's notes reached this position,

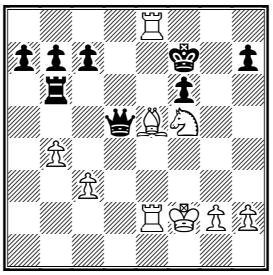


where he wrote "42...♖b1 or 42...♖×h7 and White can draw at best." Yes, 42...♖b1 does draw, but 42...♖×h7?? definitely does not:



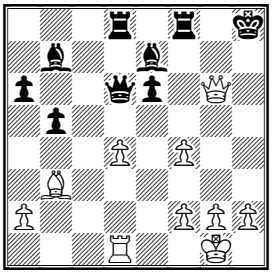
43.♖×d8+ ♔b7 44.♖×h7+ ♔a6 45.♖d6+ ♔a5 46.♖×a7#. White can also win with 43.♖×h7 c1♕ 44.♖×d8+ ♕c8+ 45.♖×c8+ (+24.05).

18. Another Lasker howler in *StP1909* is found a note at move 26 in Game 172, Perlis-Cohn, where in this position,

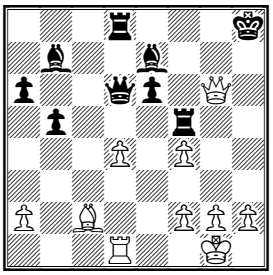


Lasker unaccountably gives 29.♘h6+??, which obviously loses to 29...♔×e8.

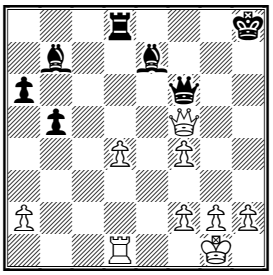
19. From *AAMBG*, Game 63, Alekhine-Selesnieff, Bad Pistyan 1922. The note at White's 21st move includes a line reaching this position,



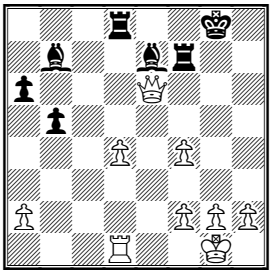
where Alekhine claims 26.♗c2 "mates in a few moves." In fact it does not force mate, and is moreover a serious error which allows Black to win with the desperate but obvious 26...♖f5!,



when the best White has is 27.♗×f5 e×f5 28.♕×f5 ♕f6,

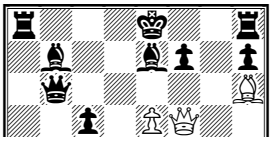


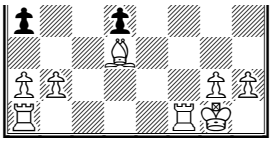
and with two bishops for four pawns, Black will win easily. Correct instead is (from previous diagram) 26.♕h6+ ♔g8 27.♗×e6+ ♕×e6 28.♕×e6+ ♖f7,



when White should win.

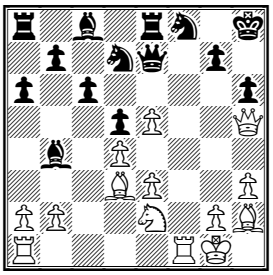
20. In Game 97 of *STMBG*, Tartakower-Maróczy, Nice 1930, Tartakower has a beginner-style lapse in the note at Black's 20th move,





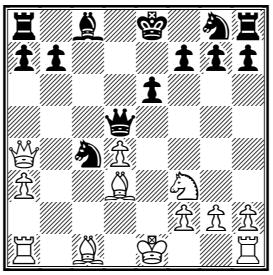
where he gives 21...♕g6 22.♗b5+ "and wins," overlooking that the ♗h6 is *en prise*. Rather than 21...♕g6?? as given, 21...♕×h6 22.♗b5+ ♗c6 holds.

21. Another elementary Tartakower gaffe is seen in Game 71 of *STMBG*, Tartakower-Romih, Spa 1926. In the note to Black's 20th move,



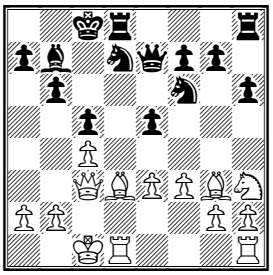
he says Black is threatened with 21.♖f7 ♕e6 22.♗f5, and that the text move 20...♔g8 is the only way to prevent it. In fact any of at least ten moves are playable for Black, and even if it were White's move, in reply to 21.♖f7 Black could simply play 21...♕g5. This note is especially odd given that Tartakower mentions the ♕e7-g5 escape route in the next note.

22. Even more elementary is Tartakower's gaffe in Game 72 of *STMBG*, Tartakower-Crépeaux, Ghent 1926. He says that in this position White wins a piece,

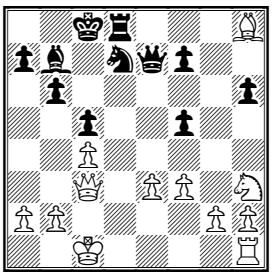


because the queen both gives check and attacks the ♘c4. Yet even a below-average player can see that 11...b5 easily takes care of both problems.

23. In Game 115 of *AAMBG*, Alekhine-Nimzovich, New York 1927, AA's note at move 14 makes a serious oversight in the line 14...0–0–0.

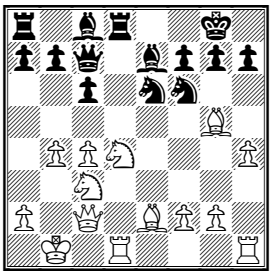


After 15.♗f5 (better 15.♘f2) 15...g6 16.♗×e5 (incorrectly punctuated "!"; better 16.♗c2) g×f5 17.♖×d7? ♘×d7 18.♗×h8,



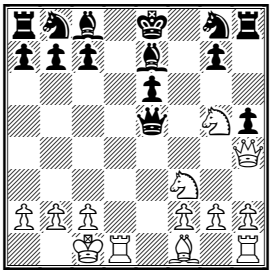
rather than having "a decisive advantage," White simply loses a piece to 18...f6, *e.g.* 19.♘f4 ♕f7 20.♗×f6 ♕×f6−+ . The same mistake is seen in AA's *New York 1927*.

24. Another inexplicable oversight in *AAMBG* is seen in Game 171, Alekhine-Lundin, Örebro 1935. In the note to White's 15th move, one wonders if Alekhine had the board set up incorrectly, or there were some typographical errors, or he might have imbibed too much (something to which he was prone in 1935). In this position,

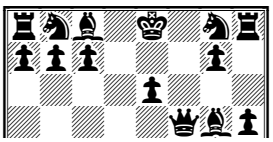


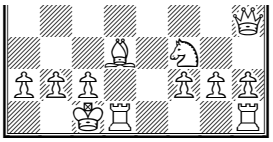
AA amazingly gives 16.a3?? c5?!, saying "Black would obtain a counter-attack." But obviously by 16...♘×d4 Black would obtain a piece.

25. Timman gets sloppy in Game 13 of *AoCA*, Gulko-Timman, Sombor 1974. Here, at Black's 11th move,

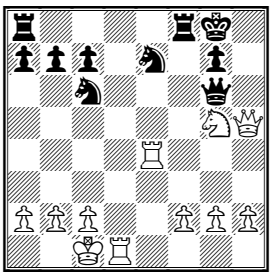


he played 11...♕f6, a perfectly acceptable move, but he comments strangely that "Now it is not possible to aim for the exchange of queens with 11...♕f5 because White mates prettily with 12.♗d3 ♕g4 13.♗g6+ ♔f8 14.♘h7+ ♖×h7 15.♖d8+ and mate next move." But why should Black commit suicide in this fashion? Instead of the horrible 12...♕g4??, he has 12...♗×g5+!,



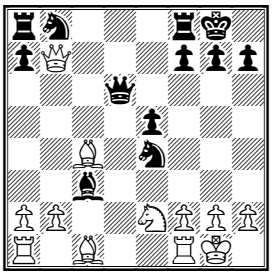


when the best White can do runs along the lines of 13.♘×g5 ♕f6 14.♗c4 ♘c6 15.♖he1 ♘ge7 16.♗×e6 ♗×e6 17.♖×e6 ♕f5 18.♖e4 0–0 19.♕×h5 ♕g6,

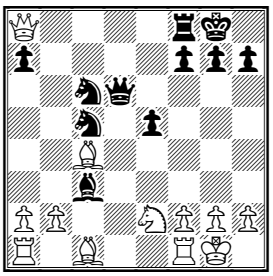


when Black not only is not mated, but has whatever advantage is going (-1.11).

26. Tartakower momentarily seemed to lose his ability to count while annotating Game 177 in *STMBG*, Tartakower-Füster, Budapest 1948. At move 12,

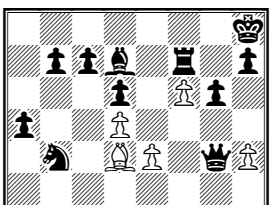


he cautions "if 12...♘c5 then not 13.♕×a8 ♘c6 winning the queen." Yet this caution is needless:

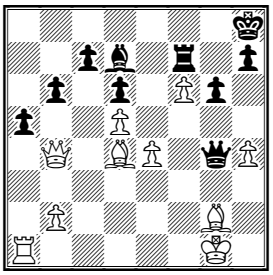


after 14.♕×f8+ and 15.♘×c3 White has two rooks and a minor piece for the queen, more than ample compensation (+5.30).

27. Game 191 of *STMBG* has a dumbfounding howler in a note to White's 30th move in Pirc-Tartakower, Amsterdam 1950. At this point,



where White played 30.♕h6, Tartakower says, incredibly, “If, instead, 30.♖a1 ... 30...b6? 31.♕×b4 and wins,”

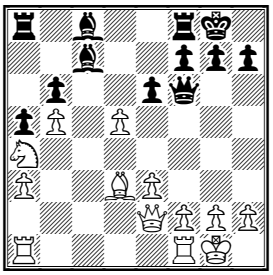


somehow overlooking that the queen is *en prise*. One can only presume that after 31...a×b4 Tartakower thought White had a back-rank mate with 32.♖a8+, but 32...♗c8 stops this. Komodo considers 30.♖a1 probably White’s best move, and 30...b6 the best reply.

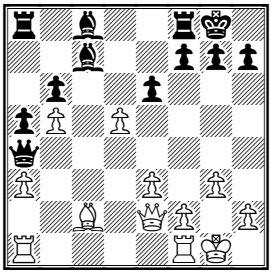
Superficiality:

My experience indicates that many annotations have been written in too much haste. The GM, perhaps under pressure of a publishing deadline (no less a form of *Zeitnot* than what happens in a game), hurries through a variation, reaches a quick conclusion, and puts it in the manuscript, when a few more minutes and a few more moves (or even one!) would show the error of that conclusion.

28. In *StP1909*, annotating move 16 of Salwe-Vidmar, Lasker's note reached this position,

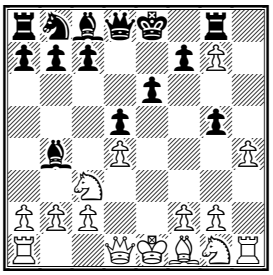


where he rejected the simple 17...d×e5 in favor of 17...♕h4, thinking that the twin threats of 18...♕×h2# and 18...♕×a4 would force White into 18.f4, whereupon Black would play 18...e×d5 with a good game. This overlooked the fact that after 17...♕h4? 18.g3! ♕×a4?? 19.♗c2,

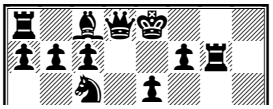


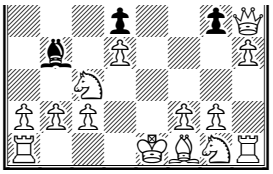
the queen is trapped. Therefore after 17...♕h4? 18.g3 the queen must beat a sheepish retreat to d8 or e7, and White plays 19.d×e6, going a pawn up.

29. Another *StP1909* gaffe is seen in Game 146, Forgács-Spielmann, a MacCutcheon French. At Black's eighth move,

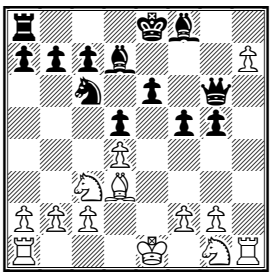


Lasker dislikes Spielmann's choice 8...g×h4 (though it was standard opening theory at the time), saying "It would be simpler to play the pressing. 8...♖×g7 first. If then 9.♕h5 Black develops by 9...♘c6."



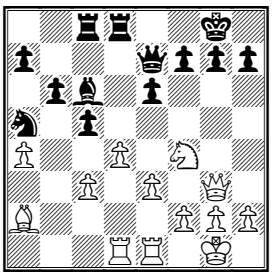


Looking through our collection of opening encyclopedias (which go back to 1843) we found no mention of this continuation. A search for this position through ChessBase 14's nearly seven million games found no matches. And just as well, as Lasker's recommendation of 9...♘c6?? would be disastrous for Black: 10.♕h8+ ♗f8 11.h5 ♗d7 12.h6 ♖g6 13.♗d3 f5 14.♕h7 ♕f6 15.♕×g6+ ♕×g6 16.h7

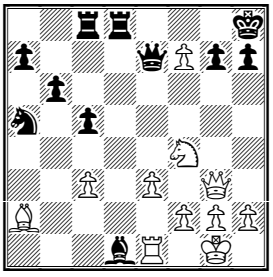


and now either 16...0–0–0 17.h8♕ (+1.68), or 16...♗g7 17.h8♕+ ♗×h8 18.♖×h8+ ♔e7 19.♖×a8 (+1.65). One wonders if Lasker was salting his analysis in hopes of catching a MacCutcheon-playing rabbit some day.

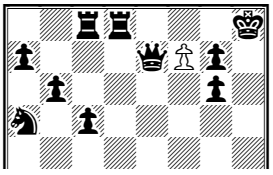
30. In this position in Game 9 of *MCC*, Marshall-Capablanca, eleventh match game, 1909,

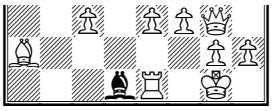


Capablanca wrote "[If] 19.d5, Black could safely reply: 19...♗×a4 20.d×e6 ♗×d1 21.e×f7+ ♔h8,"



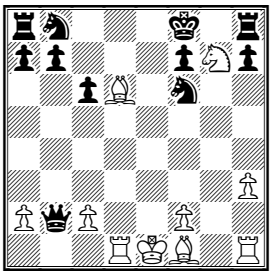
"and there seems to be no way for White to recover the lost piece." True, in the above position, White cannot recover the lost piece, but he does have a forced mate: 22.♘g6+!! h×g6 23.f3!!,



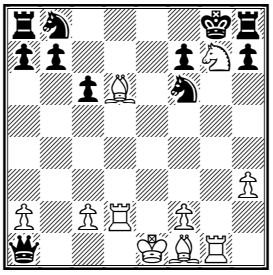


cutting off Black's bishop from h5, and it's mate in nine at most.

31. As mentioned above, Mikhail Tal, in *T-B1960*, cited a training game he had played before the match, which reached this position after White's 17th move:

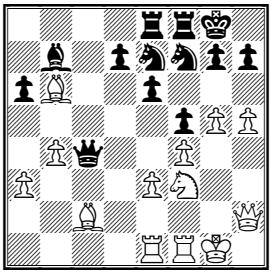


Tal wrote "After 17...♔g8 18.♖g1 Black is defenseless, for example: 18...♕c3+ 19.♖d2 ♕×d2+ 20.♔×d2 ♘e4+ 21.♔e3 ♘×d6 22.♘e6#." But there was no need for 19...♕×d2+??; Black can simply play 19...♕a1+!:



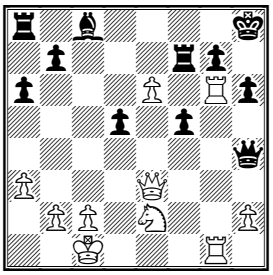
Now presumably Tal thought White could escape perpetual check by 20.♔e2, but in that case Black has the remarkable resource 20...h5! 21.♘f5+ ♘g4! 22.h×g4 h4, and his king gets out of danger with him up a queen for two bishops (-2.43). So White must play 20.♖d1 ♕c3+ 21.♖d2 ♕a1+ etc. with a draw by repetition.

32. In *AAMBG*, Game 141, Alekhine-E. Steiner, Prague 1931, the note to Black's 22nd move gives the impression that White is better in the position resulting from 22...a6 23.b4 ♗×d4 24.♗×d4 ♕×c4 25.♗×b6:

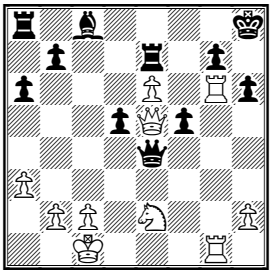


But actually 25.♗×b6?? is a blunder allowing Black to win with 25...♗×f3 26.♖×f3 ♕c6, forking the loose bishop and rook.

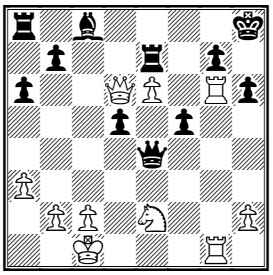
33. In *STMBG*, Game 4, Tartakower-P. Johner, at Black's 25th move,



Tartakower says "After 25...♖e7 … not yet 26.♕e5, because of 26...♕e4,"

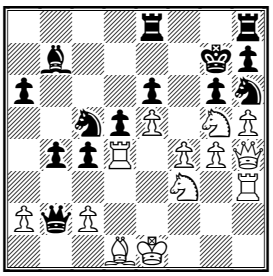


apparently thinking this forces White to exchange queens. In fact White need not fear this, since Black would be crushed after 27.♕d6!,

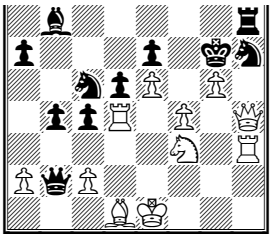


when if, for example, 27...♕×e2 28.♕d8+ ♔h7 29.♖×h6+ forces mate, or if 27...♖×e6 28.♕f8+ ♔h7 29.♕×g7#, or 27...♖e8 28.♖×g7 and mate shortly.

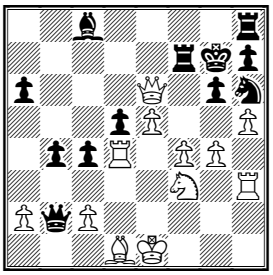
34. Another example of Tartakower's frequent superficiality is seen in Game 172 of *STMBG*, Tartakower-Wood, Southsea 1949. In a note at Black's 31st move,



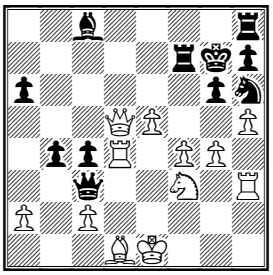
he comments "If ... 31...♖ef8 32.♘×e6+ ♘×e6 33.♕e7+ ♖f7 34.♕×e6 etc." as if White's path to victory was then self-evident. In fact the path to victory was not by way of 32.♘×e6?, but 32.♘×h7! ♖×h7 33.h×g6 ♔×g6 34.g5,



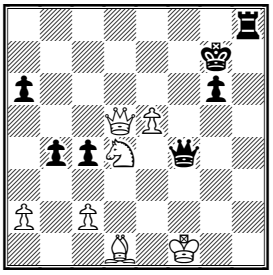
when matters *are* self-evident (+4.60). In contrast, at the end of Tartakower's note variation, the real "etc." is 34...♗b7-c8!!,



forcing 35.♕×d5 ♕c3+ and:

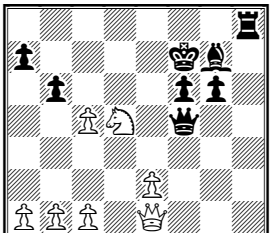


(a) 36.♔f1 ♗×g4 37.♖h2 ♗×f3 38.♗×f3 ♖d8! 39.♕×d8 ♕×f3+ 40.♖f2 ♕h1+ 41.♔e2 ♕×h5+ etc. (0.00);
(b) 36.♔e2 ♗×g4 37.h×g6 h×g6 38.♖g3 ♘f5 39.♖×g4 ♕e3+ 40.♔f1 ♘×d4 41.♘×d4 ♖×f4+,

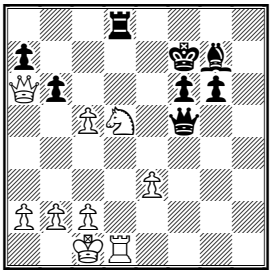


and Black's threats force White to settle for perpetual check.

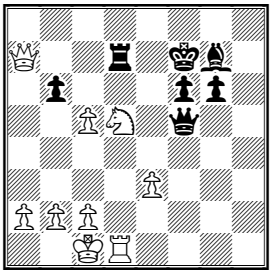
35. In a note to move 23 of Game 189 in *STMBG*, Tartakower-Pilnik, Amsterdam 1950,



Tartakower comments "23.♕a6 could be met by 23...♖d8."



Yes, it could, but so what? White has at least ten winning moves here, the two strongest of which are
(a) 24.c6, and if 24...♖×d5 25.♕c4 ♔d6 26.c7+−, or
(b) 24.♕×a7+ ♖d7 (if 24...♔f8 25.♕e7+, or 24...♔g8 25.♘e7+)

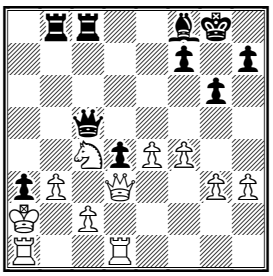


25.c×b6! (or 25.♕×b6 ♖×d5 26.♕b7+ also wins) 25...♖×a7 26.b×a7 ♕c8 27.♘b6+−.

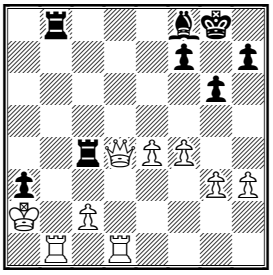
Hallucinations:

Chess, unlike, say, bridge or poker, is a game of "perfect information." Everything one needs to determine the right move is there in plain sight on the board. So it is remarkable how often GMs see something that is *not* there, or fail to see something that plainly is.

36. A strange illusion is found in *STMBG*'s Game 173, Tartakower-Strehle. At move 30,

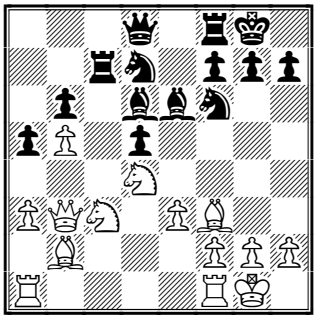


Tartakower played 30.♖ab1 (probably best), but cautioned against 30.♕×d4 because "Black could still play 30...♕×c4 31.b×c4 ♖×c4, and White cannot parry the double threat of 32...♖b2 and 32...♖×c2+." This is completely mistaken. At the end of Tartakower's variation, the supposedly unanswerable double threat is easily handled by 32.♖ab1!,



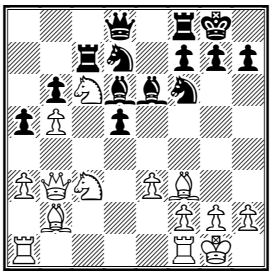
when if 32...♖b2+ ♖×b2 is obvious, or 32...♖×c2+?? ♔a1 and he's down queen for bishop, or 32...♖×d4 33.♖×d4 and Black is down the exchange and two pawns. Also quite playable is 32.♖ac1. After 30.♕×d4 Black is best advised to play 30...♕h5, meekly accepting the loss of another pawn (+1.87).

37. In Game 12 of *MCC*, Capablanca-Janowski, San Sebastian 1911, Capablanca makes a strange comment at move 17,



saying "I could not play either 17.♘×d5, or 17.♘c6, as close analysis will show. I would have lost a piece in either case."

Komodo confirms this for 17.♘×d5?, giving 17...♗×d5 18.♗×d5 ♘c5 19.♕d1 ♘×d5 20.♘f5 ♖d7 21.♗×g7 ♘f6 22.♕f3 ♖e8, when Black has a knight for two pawns (-0.85). However, it sees no such problem with 17.♘c6!,

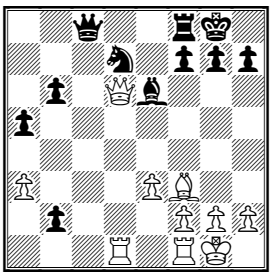


ranking it the best move on the board, *viz.*:

(a) if 17...♕e8? or 17...♕c8?, then 18.♘×d5! with impunity, since after 18...♗×d5 19.♗×d5 ♘c5 20.♕d1 ♘×d5 21.♕×d5 there's nothing to be feared from 21...♗×h7+;

(b) 17...♘c5 18.♕c2 ♕c8 19.♖ad1 ♖×c6 (This is necessary eventually, since Black can't play ♗e6-d7 without losing the d-pawn.) 20.b×c6 ♕×c6 and White has a rook for knight and pawn (+0.99);

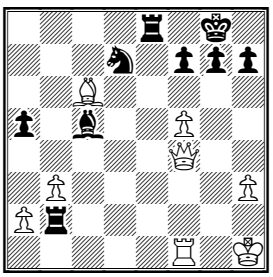
(c) 17...♖×c6 18.b×c6 d4 — Is this what Capablanca considered the refutation? It is not: 19.♕d1 d×c3 20.♕×d6 c×b2 21.♖ad1 ♕c8 22.c×d7 ♘×d7,



and after collecting the stray pawn on b2 White will be up rook for knight (+1.61). It is interesting that Kasparov in *MGP1* just seems to have paraphrased Capablanca's note without really checking it, saying "As is easily verified, 17.♘×d5? and 17.♘c6? both lose material."

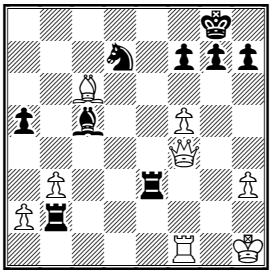
For another howler from this game, see the Lost in the Complications section.

38. A bizarre comment is seen in Game 95 of *AAMBG*, Alekhine-Golmayo de Torriente, exhibition game, Madrid 1922. At move 31,

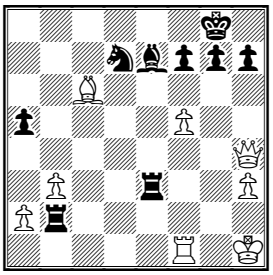


Black played 31...♖e7?? and after 32.f6! g×f6 33.♗×d7 ♖×d7 34.♕g4+ resigned. Alekhine comments

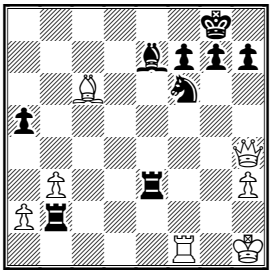
"31...♖e3 would have been a little better." Quite an understatement! A move that maintains equality is more than "a little better" than a move that loses quickly. After 31...♖e3!,



Komodo considers it best for White to defend the h-pawn, 32.♗g2 ♖×a7 or 32.♗f3 ♖ed2, in either case with an even game despite White's nominal ♕-vs.-♜ + ♝ material advantage. Alekhine incorrectly claims that after 32...♖e3 White still wins with 32.♕h4 ♖ee2 33.♕d8+ ♘f8 34.♕c7 ♖e3 35.♗f3 ♖c2 36.♕×a5, but this line gets nipped in the bud if instead of 32...♖ee2?! Black plays 32...♗e7!,

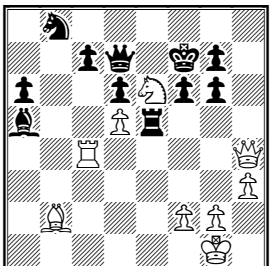


when Black is in no danger and may even have winning chances, *e.g.*
(a) 33.♕g4?! ♘f6 34.♕h4 ♘e4 35.f6 ♗×f6 36.♕×e4 ♖×e4 37.♗×e4 ♖×a2 (-1.47), or
(b) 33.f6 (relatively best) 33...♘×f6 and:

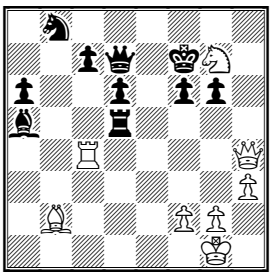


(b1) 34.♗f3 ♖×a2 35.♕c4 g6 (-1.17), or
(b2) 34.♖e1 ♘e4! 35.♖×e3 ♗×h4 36.♖×e4 g5 37.♗d5 ♖×a2 (-1.09).

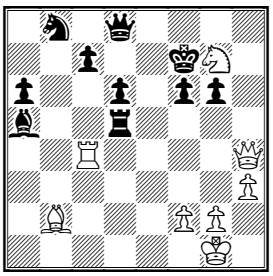
39. An even clearer example of an Alekhine hallucination is seen in *AAMBG* Game 98, Alekhine-Prils & Blaut, consultation simul game, Antwerp 1923. At move 30,



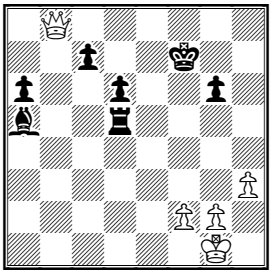
he writes “If 30...♖×d5, White wins by 31.♘×g7!”,



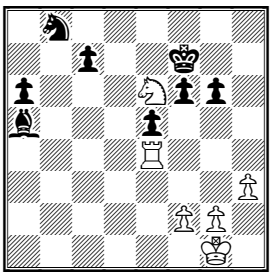
apparently thinking that Black will not be able to withstand the pressure on f6. But after 31...♕d8!,



there is nothing like a clear win, *viz.*:
(a) 32.♖f4?? ♘d7! 33.♕h7 (otherwise the knight is lost) 33...♕g8 34.♕×g8+ ♔×g8 ♘e6 and Black wins with his extra pawns (-2.87);
(b) 32.♖e4 and
(b1) 32...♔×g7!? 33.♗×f6+ ♕×f6 34.♖e7+ ♕f7 35.♖×f7+ ♔×f7 36.♕h7+ ♔f6 37.♕h8+ ♔f7 38.♕×b8,

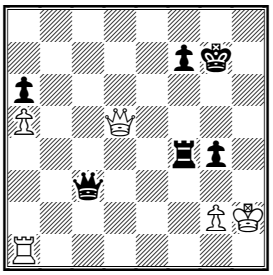


and with rook, bishop and three pawns for the queen, Black may be considered to have a material advantage. White may lose, and winning will be very difficult;
(b2) ♖e5! 33.♗×e5 d×e5 34.♕h7 ♕g8 35.♕×g8+ ♔×g8 36.♘e6 ♔f7,



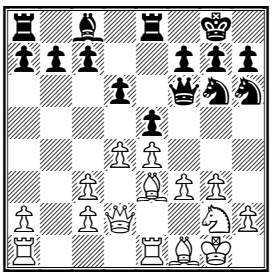
and no matter where the white knight goes, with a bishop and two passed pawns for the rook, Black is a long way from losing (about +0.45 per Stockfish).

40. Alekhine's nemesis Euwe hallucinates annotating Euwe-Reshevsky, AVRO 1938 in *HM1948*. At move 51, the note to Black's move says that after 51...h×g4 52.♕d5 "White would still have gotten drawing chances."

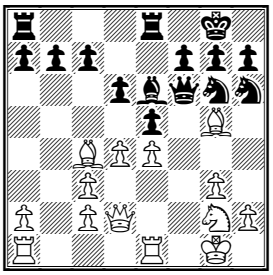


In fact Black then has a forced mate: 52...g3+ 53.♔h3 ♕c8+ 54.♔×g3 ♕g4+ 55.♔h2 ♕h4+ 56.♔g1 ♕f2+ 57.♔h1 ♖h4#.

41. Euwe hallucinates again in *HM1948* at move 18 of Botvinnik-Reshevsky, round 24:

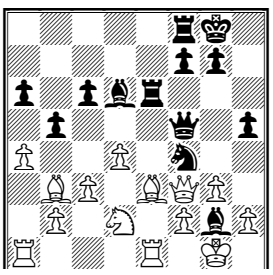


His note there includes the sub-variation 18...♕×f3 19.♗e2 ♕f6 20.♗c4 ♗e6, labeling the last move a blunder with "??" and adding 21.♗g5 as its supposed refutation:

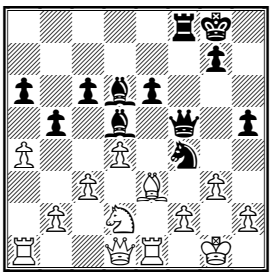


Yet Black is fine; after 21...♕f3 the queen is no immediate danger, *e.g.* 22.♖e3 ♕h5, or 22.♖f1 ♕×e4, or 22.♗e2 ♕×e4. Komodo in fact considers 20...♗e6 not a blunder, but Black's best move at that point.

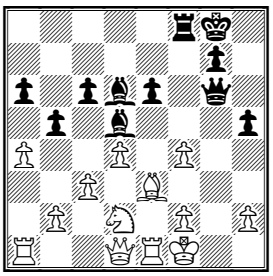
42. Psychoanalyst Reuben Fine seems to have had a mild delusional episode in annotating Christoffel-H. Steiner, Hastings 1945-46 (Game 27 in *TWAC*). In a note at move 24,



he wrote “On 24.♗×e6 f×e6 25.♕d1 ♗d5 Black’s attack is overwhelming.”

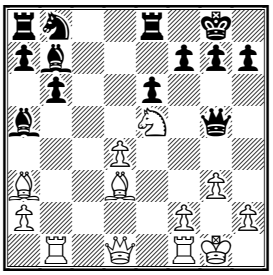


No, any overwhelming quality belongs to White’s defense: 26.g×f4! ♕g6+ 27.♔f1,

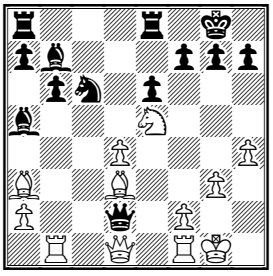


and Black is down a rook with no attack, *e.g.* 27...♕g2+ 28.♔e2 ♗×f4 29.♗×f4 ♖×f4 30.♖f1 and everything is secure (+3.38).

43. Fine hallucinated multiple times annotating Denker-Fine, US Championship 1944 (Game 2 in *TWAC*), in several cases badly underestimating his own defensive resources, in another greatly overestimating his chance of counter-attack. At move 16,

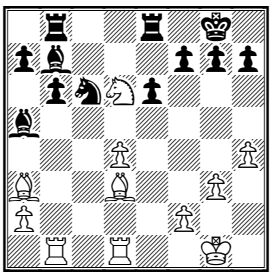


he wrote “On the obvious 16...♘c6 White has no less than two neat wins,” the first being “17.h4! ♕d8 18.♗×h7+ etc.,” the “etc.” being 18...♔×h7 19.♕h5 ♔g8 20.♕×f7+ ♔h8 21.♕×b7+− .The only alternative he considers is 17...♕f6, which is even worse. But there was salvation, in 17...♕g5-d2!:



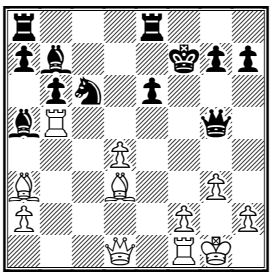
Now 18.♗×h7+? fails to 18...♔×h7 19.♕h5 ♕h6 (-2.46). Komodo indicates White had best settle for a

draw with 18.♘c4 ♕×d1 19.♖f×d1 ♖ab8 (so that Black can recapture on a5 with the pawn if necessary) 20.♘d6

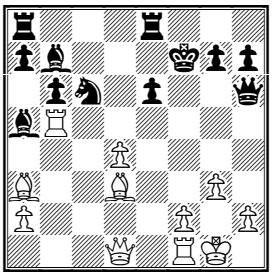


20...♘×d4! 21.♘×e8 ♘f3+ 22.♔f1 ♘h2+ 23.♔g1 (if 23.♔e2? ♗f3+) 23...♘f3+ etc., draw.

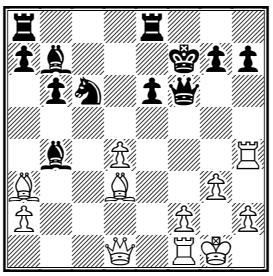
The other "neat win" Fine saw was 16.♘×f7 ♖×f7 17.♖b5,



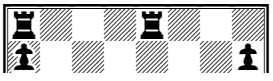
but he considered only two dreadful replies, 17...e5?? (+13.04 after 18.♗f4+, though Fine gave the much less effective 18.♕b3+), and 17...♕f6?? (+5.82). By far the best defense is 17...♕h6!,

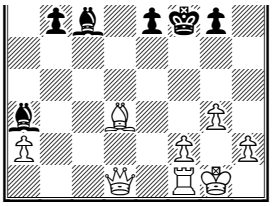


when the best White has is 19.♖h5 ♕f6 20.♖h4 ♗b4



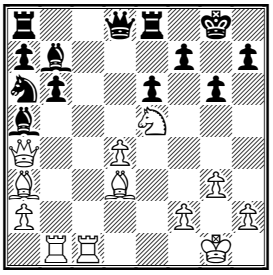
21.d5 (OK for Black is 21.♖f4?! ♕×f4 22.g×f4 ♗×a3, when he has a rook and two minor pieces for the queen.) 21...♗×a3 (21...e×d5? 22.♕h5+ is much worse) 22.d×c6 ♗×c6 23.♖f4 g6 (better than 23...♕×f4 24.♕h5+ ♔f8 25.g×f4 h6) 24.♖×f6+ ♔×f6,





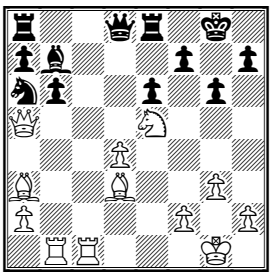
when though White stands better (+1.37), Black still has a fighting chance and there is no “neat win.”

Fine is really seeing things two moves later, in the note variation beginning with 18...♘a6.

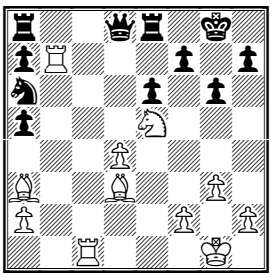


Best here is probably 19.♗×a6 ♗×a6 20.d5 e×d5 21.♕f4 ♖×e5 22.♕×e5 ♕e8 23.♕×d5, with some advantage for White (+1.10). But Fine writes “White has the pretty sacrifice 19.♕×a5!! b×a5 20.♖×b7 ♘b4 (or 20...♕×d4 21.♗b2) 21.♗×b4 a×b4 22.♘×f7 ♕f6 23.♖cc7 ♕g7 (or 23...♔f8 24.♘e5) 24.♘e5 ♕h6 25.♘g4 and wins.”

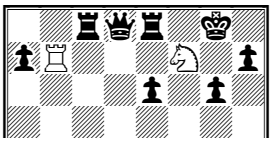
We might have put this note in the Long Analysis, Wrong Analysis section, or even in Charlie Fox, so much is wrong with it. Superficially pretty though 19.♕×a5 may be,

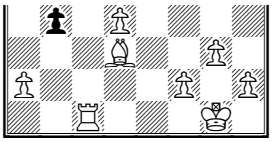


it does not win; in fact Black can draw in both the variations Fine gives after 19...b×a5 20.♖×b7:

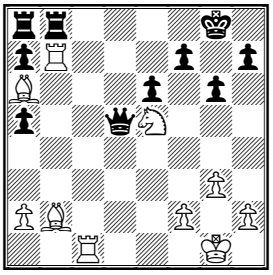


(a) 20...♘b4 21.♗×b4 a×b4 22.♘×f7 and now not Fine’s 22...♕f6??, but 22...♖c8!,

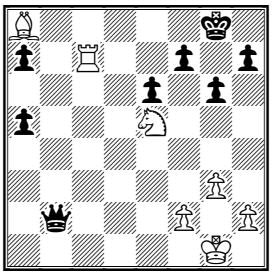




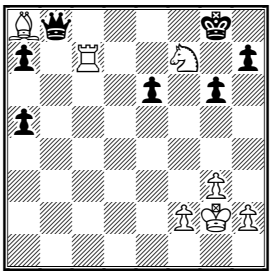
and White must take a draw with 23.♘h6+ etc., since if 23.♘×d8? ♖×c1+ 24.♔g2 ♖×d8 he's down the exchange (-1.74). Fine seems to have forgotten that Black had quite a lot of material to give back if necessary.
(b) 20...♕×d4! 21.♗b2 ♕d5 22.♗×a6 ♖eb8 and:



(b1) 23.♖d7 ♕×a2 24.♗d4 ♖d8 0.00;
(b2) 23.♖cc7 ♖×b7 24.♗×b7 ♕×a2 25.♗×a8 ♕×b2

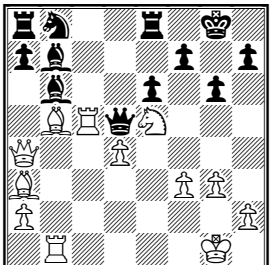


26.♘×f7 (forced; if 26.♖×f7?? ♕×e5, or 26.♘g4?? ♕b8−+) 26...♕b1+ 27.♔g2 ♕b8,

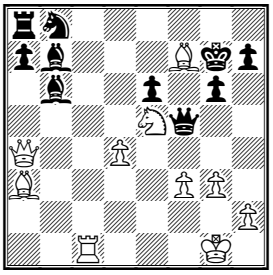


and White must sue for peace with 28.♘h6+ ♔h8 29.♘f7+ ♔g8 30.♘h6+ etc.

Finally, at move 21, Fine suffers his last hallucination of the game,



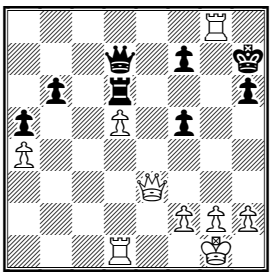
where he writes “There was still a lot of play — and a lot of swindling — left with 21...♕×a2 22.♗×e8 ♕×b1+ 23.♖c1 ♕f5 24.♗×f7+ ♔g7. Black has preserved material equality and has several threats.”



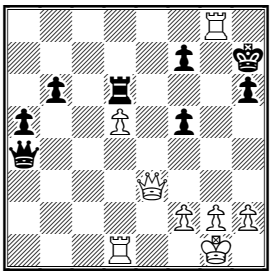
There are threats, in fact if it were Black’s move 25...♕×e5! would be devastating. But it’s not, and the only thing this line threatens is Fine’s credibility, as after 25.♔g2!, unpinning the d-pawn, those threats come to nothing, *e.g.* 25...♘a6 26.♗×g6! ♗×f3+ (if 26...h×g6? 27.♕d7+) 27.♘×f3 h×g6 28.♗d6 ♘b4 (not 28...♘b8?? 29.♗e5+ ♔h6 30.♖c8 +11.78) 29.♕×b4 (+4.70).

Zwischenzüge:

44. This position is from Alekhine-Colle, Baden-Baden 1925. White has just played 45.♖g3×♖g8?! (best actually was 45.♕b3).

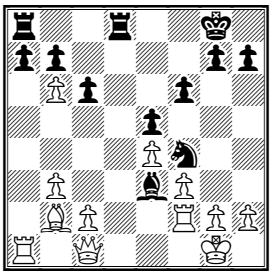


Colle, like 99% of us would do, replied with the seemingly natural and necessary 45...♔×g8, and Lasker, annotating the game in *LMOC*, made no comment. Strange to think that two all-time great World Champions and a player of solid IM strength all missed 45...♕×a4!:



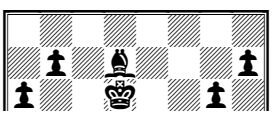
This threatens 46...♕×d1#, so Black will recoup his momentary rook minus next move, having nabbed an important pawn. White now is best advised to force a draw by, say, 46.♖e1 ♔×g8 47.♕g3+ ♖g6 48.♕b8+ ♔g7 49.♕e5+ ♔h7 50.♕e7 ♔g7 (50...♖g7?? 51.d6+−) 51.♕e5+ etc.

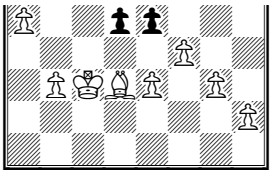
45. Analyzing Game 36 of *AAMBG*, Blumenfeld-Alekhine, match 1908, Alekhine reached this position in a note to White's 18th move:



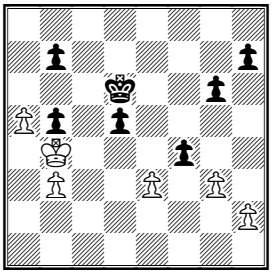
Here he recommended winning a pawn with 23...♗×c1 24.♖×c1 a×b6, but he can do much better with the *Zwischenschach* 23...♘e2+! 24.♔f1 ♘×c1 25.♗×c1 ♗×f2 26.♔×f2 a×b6, and Black is up a pawn and the exchange.

46. In the second game of *AoCA*, Polugaevsky-Timman, Mar del Plata 1971, at Black's 35th move,



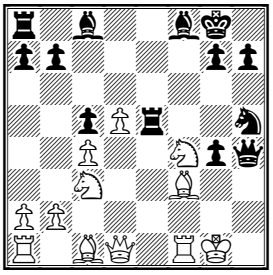


Timman, who had recommended 34...♗d7-b5 instead of the text 34...♔e7-d6 the move before, says "Now the pawn endgame after 35...♗b5 is lost: 36.♗×b5 a×b5 37.♔b4 d4 38.f×e5+ (this is the difference: if the black king were on e6 this capture would not be with check) 38...♔×e5 39.e×d4+, etc." However, Timman overlooked a simple *Zwischenzug* after 35...♗b5 36.♗×b5 a×b5 37.♔b4, namely 37...e×f4!:

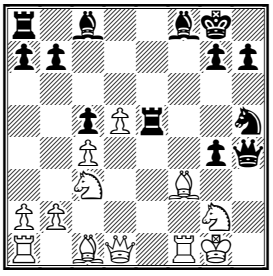


Now 38.g×f4 is forced (if 38.e×f4?? d4−+, or worse 38.♔×b5?? f×e3−+), and after 38...♔c6 White can make no headway and the position is dead drawn.

47. Game 148 of *StP1909*, Bernstein-Burn, reached this position at White's 20th move:



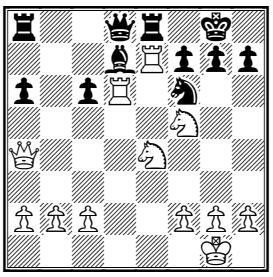
His bishop threatened, Bernstein played 20.♗e4? and ultimately succumbed to Black's attack. Neither he, nor Lasker in the tournament book, noticed the *Zwischenzug* 20.♘g2!,



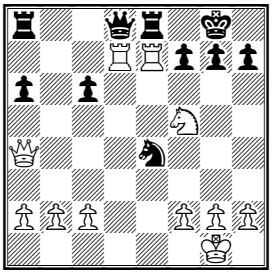
gaining a tempo by the attack on the queen. If now 20...♕g3?! 21.♗e4 ♗d6 22.♘e2 ♕h3 23.♘gf4 ♕h4 and Black is in retreat (+0.71). Best is 20...♕h3 21.♘f4 ♘×f4 22.♗×f4 g×f3 23.♕×f3 ♕×f3 24.♖×f3, and though White is down a pawn he can still make a fight of it (-0.62), which is not the case after 20.♗e4? (-1.69).

Surprise! Surprise!

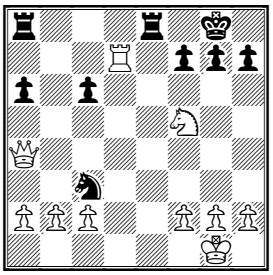
48. In *AAMBG*, Game 218, Alekhine-Kimura, blindfold simul, Tokyo, 1933, Alekhine overlooks two surprise moves in the note to Black's 20th move.



After 20...♘×e4 21.♖d×d7,

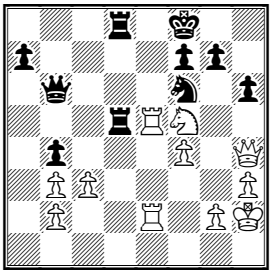


he says Black's situation "would be hopeless." Not so! Black can draw by 21...♕×d7!! 22.♖×d7 ♘c3!!,



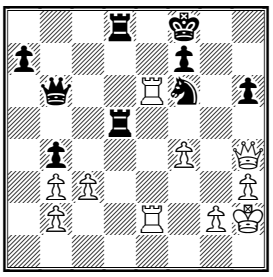
when the threats of 23...♖e1# and 23...♘×a4 force White to take perpetual check: 23.♘h6+ ♔h8 (not 23...g×h6?? 24.♕g4+) 24.♘×f7+ ♔g8 25.♘h6+ etc.

49. Annotating Game 25 in *AAMBG*, Alekhine-Tarrasch, St. Petersburg 1914, AA's note at Black's 37th says that against 37...♘f6,

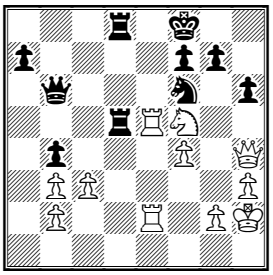


he "had prepared the following pretty winning combination: 38.♘×h6 g×h6 39.♖e6 f×e6 40.♕×f6+ ♔g8

♖×e6" etc. One wishes one had been there in St. Petersburg, that Tarrasch had played 37...♘f6, and that Alekhine had continued 38.♘×h6 g×h6 39.♖e6,

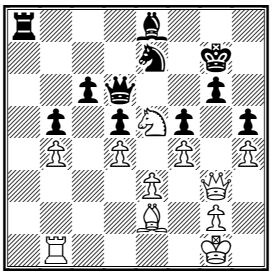


just so one could see the look on AA's face when Tarrasch played 39...♘g4+!, forcing 40.h×g4 f×e6, when White has nothing better than perpetual check by 41.♕f6+ ♔g8 42.♕g6+ etc. We note in passing that after 37...♘f6,

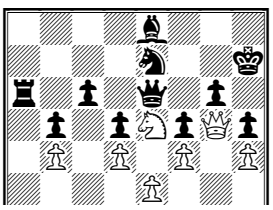


the correct line for White is 38.c4! ♖d2 39.♖2e3 (threatening 30.♖g3) 39...♘g8 40.♕e1 ♕b8 41.♖e8+ ♖×e8 42.♖×e8+ ♕×e8 43.♕×d2, when though White is only one pawn up, it is a protected passed pawn, which along with other advantages gives him a won game (+3.11).

50. In *Z1953MN* Najdorf, annotating Game 179, Taimanov-Kotov, makes the following comment at Black's 38th move:

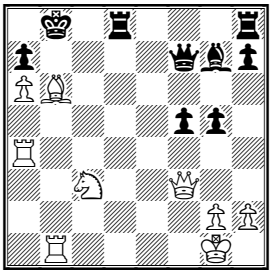


"The threat of 39.♗×h5 require[s] 38...♔h7, and on 39.♕g5 ♕e6! with a resistant position, for example 40.♖c1 ♖a6 and White has no way to break through." Everything Najdorf says is true, up to the last move, where Black should play 40...♖a7 or 40.♕d6 with equality (both moves cover c7). After 40...♖a6??,

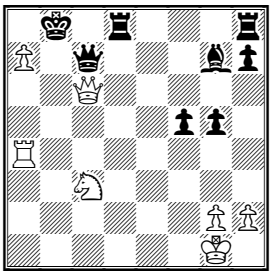


rather than having “no way to break through,” White does exactly that with 41.♗×b5!, when if 41...c×b5?? 42.♖c7 and wins (+8.27). Relatively best is 41...♖a7 42.♗d3 , though White should still win (+1.55).

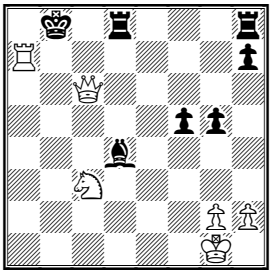
51. At the end of Game 129 in *AAMBG*, Alekhine-Bogolyubov, WCh match 1929, game 17, Alekhine makes a hash of the game’s final note. After 34.♗d4×g6! Black resigned.



To explain what he would have done had Black played on, he gives a strange continuation where mate, easily forced in a few moves, keeps receding into the distance: 34...a×b6 35.♖×b6+ (better 35.♕c6 and mate in six) 35...♔c8 36.♕c6+ (better 36.a7 and mate in six) 36...♕c7 37.♖b8+? (definitely bad; better 37.♕e6+ ♖d7 38.a7 and mate in eight) 37...♔×b8 38.a7+,

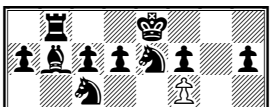


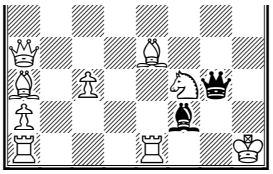
at which point AA announces “mate in two.” Not after 38...♕×a7+! 39.♖×a7 ♗d4+!:



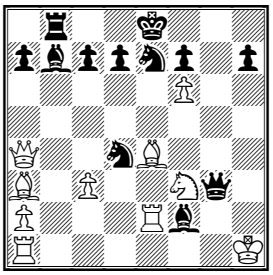
AA clearly overlooked this, expecting instead 39...♔×a7 40.♘b5+ ♔b8 41.♕c7+ ♔a8 42.♕a7#. But now, after 40.♔f1 ♗×a7, checkmate is a long way off, if it ever arrives at all (+1.58).

52. On page 271 of *LMOC*, Lasker discusses the Evergreen Game, Anderssen-Dufresne, Berlin, 1852. One analytical variation reaches this position,



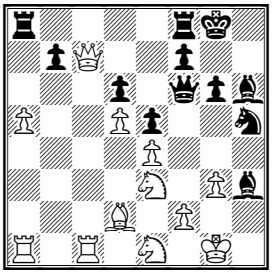


where Lasker says 5.♖e2 wins. But this is actually a terrible blunder, which loses to 5...♘d4!!:

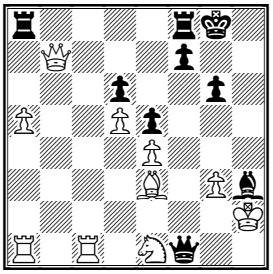


If now 6.c×d4 ♗×e4−+, or 6.♗×b7 ♕h3+ 7.♘h2 ♘×e2 and mate shortly, or 6.♖×f2 ♗×e4 7.♕×d4 ♗×f3+ 8.♖×f3 ♕×f3+ 9.♔g1 ♖b5 10.♕h4 ♘g6−+. Correct is 5.♗×e7, when though the position is very complicated, Komodo sees only a small advantage for White after 5...♕h3 6.♘h2 ♗×e1 7.♖×e1 ♕h4 (+0.58).

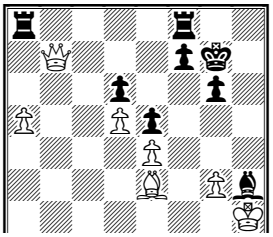
53. Annotating Kotov-Bronstein, Zürich 1953 (Game 61 in both *Z1953MN* and *Z1953DB*), both Najdorf and Bronstein give the same note variation at White's 34th move:



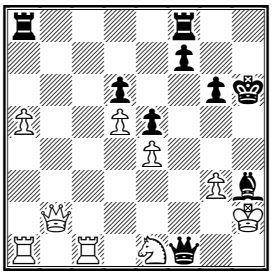
34.♕×b7 ♘×g3 35.f×g3 ♗×e3+ 36.♗×e3 ♕f1+ 37.♔h2, reaching this position:



where they both say 37...♔g7, intending 38...♖h8, wins for Black.

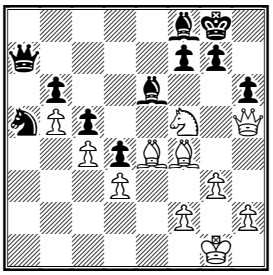


However, this overlooks a saving counter-sacrifice for White, 38.♗h6+! (always check for check!) 38...♔×h6 39.♕b2,

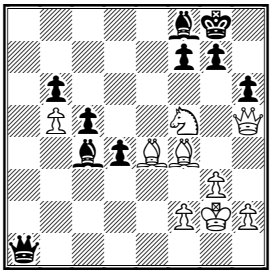


when the h-file is again blocked and Black's advantage, if any, is minimal (-0.35 per Komodo). Bronstein at least mentions the correct alternative to 37...♔g7?!, the winning 37...♖ab8! (-1.84), but he saw it as co-equal with 38...♔g7.

54. With another game from Zürich 1953 we see no fewer than five all-time great GMs missing a surprise move. At move 27 of Kotov-Taimanov,



Black played 27...♘b3?! and eventually lost. Instead he could have played the shocking 27...♘×c4! 28.d×c4 (other moves are no better) 28...♕a1+ 29.♔g2 ♗×c4,

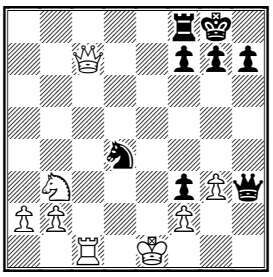


and Black threatens 30...♕f1+ 31.♔f3 ♗e2#. White has only the choice between 30.g4 ♕f1+ 31.♔g3 ♕g1+ 32.♗g2 ♗×b5 when Black has three connected passed pawns and a lot of counterplay, or forcing a draw with 30.♘×h6+ g×h6 31.♕g4+ ♗g7 32.♕c8+ ♗f8 33.♕g4+ etc. A remarkable resource missed by the players Kotov and Taimanov, and the annotators Bronstein in *Z1953DB*, Najdorf in *Z1953MN*, and Euwe in *SEiK*, every one of them among the 50 the greatest players of all time according to Divinsky's *Life Maps of the Great Chess Masters*. (Though perhaps it is not fair to say Euwe also missed it, since he hardly annotated the game at all.)

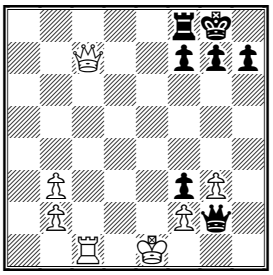
Settling for Less:

Ideally, annotations should point out the optimal move at every important juncture, but often a GM will stop looking after the first reasonably good move he finds, when a much better one was possible.

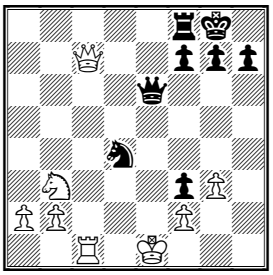
55. A prime example of a line that pays pennies when a fortune might be reaped, is seen in *NY1924*, the note at move 23 of Réti-Marshall, which reaches this position eight ply in:



Here Alekhine continues 27...♘×b3 28.a×b3 ♕g2,

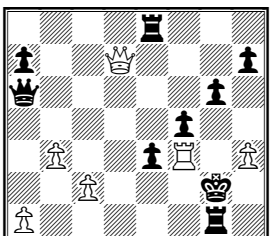


"with a winning position." If so, barely: after 29.♕b6 (the only good move), Komodo sees Black's advantage as slight, only -0.60 at 27 ply, and Stockfish -0.58 at 41 ply. Why would Black settle for this when (from previous diagram), he could gain the whole world with 27...♕e6+!,



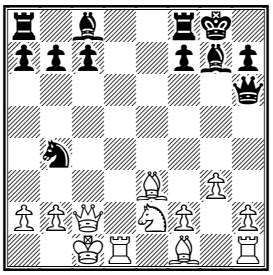
when all White has is a choice of poisons: 28.♔f1 ♖e8 and mate shortly, or 28.♔d2 ♕e2+ 29.♔c3 ♘b5+ 30.♔b4 ♘×c7 and mate shortly too.

56. At this point in Spielmann-Tartakower, Copenhagen 1923,



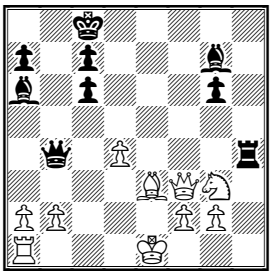
White resigned, for obvious reasons. Analyzing part of the game as "Position V" in *STMBG*, Tartakower says "Black's counter-threats are all-powerful, for if 34.h5 ♕e2." While 34...♕e2 is certainly good enough to win (-7.40), preferable is the quick mate 34...♕×a2+ 35.♔c1 ♕c2#.

57. In *STMBG*'s Game 199, Tartakower-Halberstadt, Paris 1953, at this point in the note at White's 14th move,

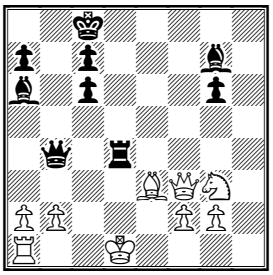


Tartakower allows Black a mere pittance with 15...♕×e3+ 16.f×e3 ♘×c2 17.♔×c2 ♗f5+ (-0.95). The real dividend comes with 15...♕e6!, *e.g.* 16.♕c5 (if 16.♕b1 ♕c6+) 16...♕e4 17.♘d4 (if 17.♘c3 ♕c2#) 17...♘×a2+ 18.♔d2 ♕×h1 19.♗c4 ♕×a2 20.♗×a2 (-4.20).

58. Another case of Tartakower settling for far too little occurs in Game 101 of *STMBG*, Marshall-Tartakower, Liége 1930. In the note at White's 22nd move,

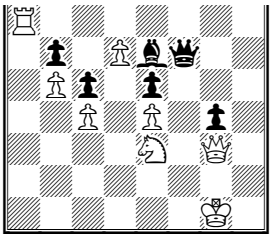


he comments "[if] 22.♔d1 ♕×b2 23.♖c1 ♗b5." Certainly this is good enough to win, but it's peanuts compared to 22...♖×d4+!,

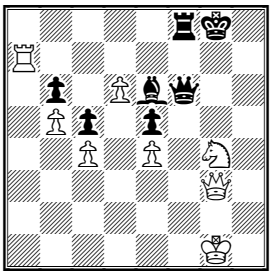


forcing 23.♗×d4 ♕×d4+ 24.♔e1 ♕×b2 25.♖d1 ♗c3+ 26.♕×c3 ♕×c3+ (+21.69).

59. And yet another example from *STMBG* is Position XXI(a), analyzing Tartakower-Winter, second match game, Paris 1938. In the note variation 32...♗e6 33.h3 h5 34.h×g4 h×g4,

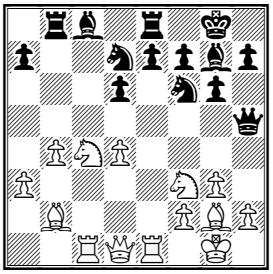


White need not bother with the trifling advantage conferred by 35.♕h2 (+1.48). Instead he can win immediately with 35.♘×g4!,

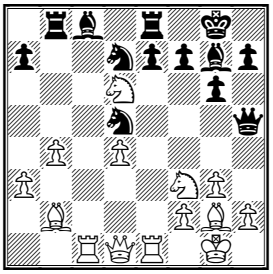


viz. 35...♕f1+ (anything else allows mate in five) 36.♔h2 ♕e2+ (again, anything else allows a forced mate) 37.♘f2+ ♗g4 (same story) 38.♕×g4+ ♕×g4 39.♘×g4, and Komodo says mate in 18.

60. Commenting on Nimzovich-Bogolyubov, Baden-Baden 1925 on page 309 of *LMOC*,



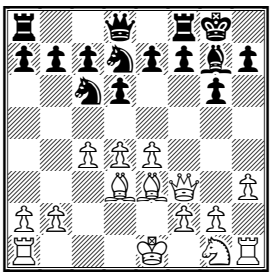
Lasker says "In reply to 16...♘d5 White might have played ♘fe5." True, he might, but why would he settle for that no-profit move? White would do much better with 17.♘×d6!,



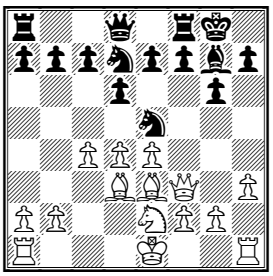
capitalizing on the fact that 16...♘d5? left the ♖e8 undefended.

Missing the Key:

61. A fairly simple example of this kind of oversight is seen in *NY1924*, in a note at move 9 of Marshall-Réti. In this position,



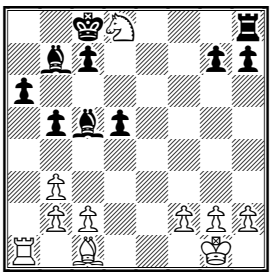
one of Alekhine's sub-variations recommends 10.♘e2 e5 11.d5 ♘d4. However, 10.♘e2?? is actually a serious blun-der, and is best refuted by 10...♘e5! (either knight will do),



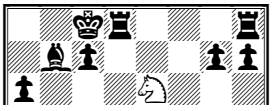
11.d×e5 ♘×e5 12.♕g3 ♘×d3+ 13.♔f1 ♘×b2, and White is down two pawns with a ruined position. Alekhine missed the key fact that the ♗d3 was hanging in empty air and was vulnerable to the knight fork from e5.

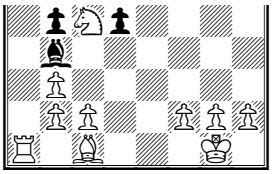
The next several items might be categorized as "Losing the Keys," as they all involve notes where a key move has been mentioned, but it's not played when it matters most.

62. Another example from *NY1924* is Game 10, Yates-Janowski: The note at move 16 goes wrong near the end. After 16...♗×e1 17.♘c5 ♕×e6 18.♘d×e6 ♗b4 19.♘×d8 ♗×c5,

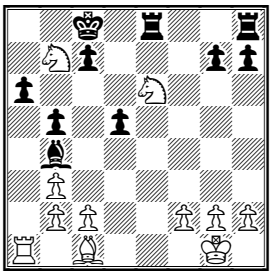


20.♘×b7 is the only playable move. The note's 20.♘e6?? would lose the knight to 20.♖e8, since if 21.♘×c5?? ♖e1#. Oddly, Alekhine seemed to see the key back-rank mate possibility at an earlier point in the note,



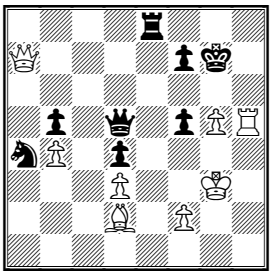


when he rejected 19.♘×b7 “on account of 19...♖de8.”



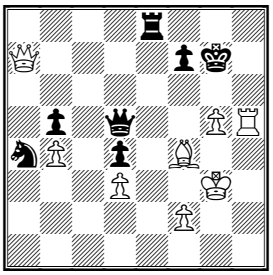
In that case, however, White gets out of trouble with 20.♘bd8!, more or less forcing 20...♖×d8 21.♘×d8 ♖×d8 22.♖×a6, when he may actually have some advantage.

63. *NY1924*, Black’s 41st move in Em. Lasker-Maróczy (Game 96):

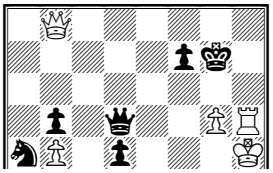


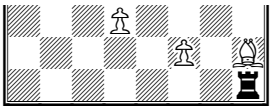
The text move 41...♘c3 was objectively best, but Alekhine wrote “In order would have been 41...f4+ 42.♔h4! (if ... 42.♗×f4 ♖e1) 43...♕h1+ 43.♔g4 ♕g2+ 44.♔f5 ♕d5+ 45.♔g4 ♖e2 46.♕b8! and Black would have to content himself with a draw.”

In fact the recommended 41...f4+ would have been disastrous. Rather than having to play 42.♔h4 as Alekhine thought, White can go right ahead with 42.♗×f4!,



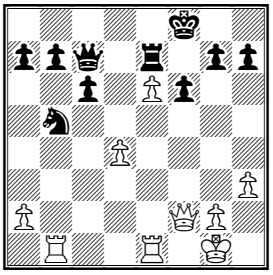
because if 42...♖e1 43.♕b8! ♖g1+ 44.♔h4 ♖h1+ (44...♕h1+ is even worse) 45.♗h2,





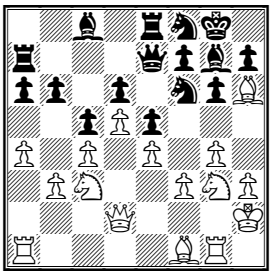
and to prevent mate Black must play 45...♖×h2 46.♕×h2 (+4.38). The key move 43.♕b8!, which both threatens mate and prevents Black from mating by enabling the white queen to cover h2, did not occur to Alekhine at that point, even though he mentioned it at a later point in his note. We note that GM Ludek Pachman, annotating this game on pages 75-78 of *Decisive Games in Chess History* (Dover Publications, 1975), made the same mistake, though whether he was just slavishly copying Alekhine we cannot say.

64. Euwe mislays the key in Reshevsky-Smyslov, Leningrad-Moscow 1939, in *HM1948*. At move 34,



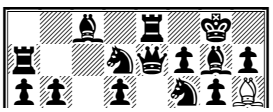
where White played the so-so 34.♕f5, he comments "Even better is 34.♖×b5 c×d5 35.d5." But as a prelude to the pawn advance, the exchange sac is inferior and quite unnecessary (only about +0.80). White can proceed directly with 34.d5!, a sample continuation being 34... ♘d6 (34...c×d5?? 35.♖×b5) 35.♖bc1 a6 36.d×c6 b×c6 37.♕c5 and the c-pawn falls (+2.75).

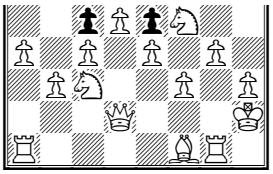
65. This position is from Fine-Helms, Manhattan Chess Club, 1945:



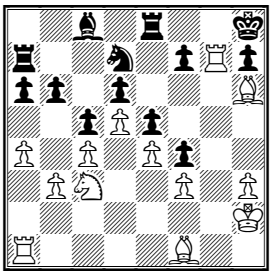
It's not surprising that there would be a missed opportunity or two in this game, since it was one of several GM Fine was playing simultaneously, *blindfold*, at *ten seconds per move* (!). However, it *is* surprising that Fine whiffed again when annotating the game for *Chess Review*, and yet again when the game was included in his anthology *TWAC*. And it is even *more* surprising when we reflect that here, where White has just played 21.♗g2-f1, Fine commented "There is plenty of time for ♘g3-f5."

However, after the reply 21...♘8d7, Fine continued 22.♗×g7?! ♔×g7 23.♗d3, eventually winning in 47 moves without ever playing ♘g3-f5. One might think that, having just made note of the key move, plus also commenting at move 24 that "The threat of ♘g3-f5 will become real some day," Fine might have realized that right now was the time to play it. 22.♘f5!! wins,



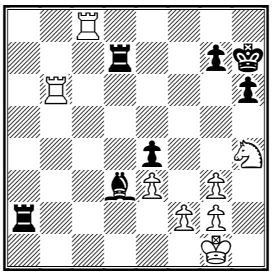


viz. 22...g×f5 23.♕g5! — Better than 23.g×f5?! ♘h5 24.♖g5 ♘df6 25.♕g2 ♔h8 26.♖×g7 ♘g8 27.♖g5 ♘×h6 28.♖×h5 ♘g8, which should also win, but is not nearly as strong (+1.71). — 23...♘×g4+ 24.♖×g4 ♕×g5 25.♖×g5 f4 26.♖×g7+ ♔h8,

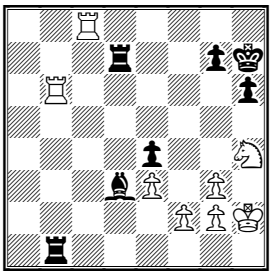


and White is clearly winning (+5.09).

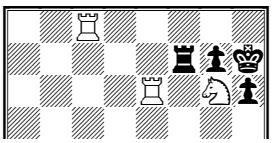
66. A similar example is found in Game 128 of *STMBG*, Tartakower-Rey Ardid, exhibition game, Paris, 1934. After 31.♘h4,

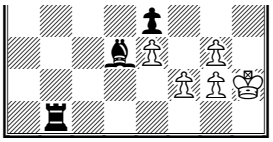


Tartakower remarks "Threatening no more and no less than 32.♘g6 and 33.♖h8#." One must wonder then why, after the further moves 31...♖a1+ 32.♔h2 ♖b1??,



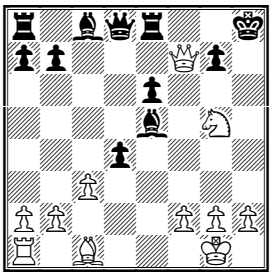
he did not see that he could have played 33.♘g6!!. There are then only two moves that prevent a quick mate, and they both leave Black down a rook: 33...♖×b6 34.♘f8+ ♔g8 35.♘×d7+ ♔f7 36.♘×b6, or 33...♖d8 34.♖×d8 ♖×b6 35.♘f8+ ♔g8 36.♘d7+ etc. Tartakower did finally play it a move later, 33.♖e6 ♖f7 34.♘g6,





but by then it had lost much of its potency. The game was needlessly prolonged, White eventually winning in 51 moves only with further help from his opponent.

67. We stretch our GM criterion here to include one example from an IM, Vladimir Vukovic. In his famous book *The Art of Attack* (1961, titled *Der Rochade Angriff* in our German edition), a note to Colle-O'Hanlon, Nice 1930, reached this position:

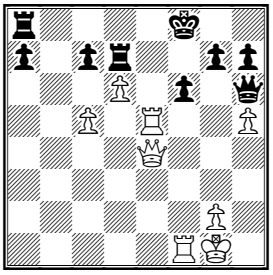


Vukovic said White now has nothing better than perpetual check with 17.♕h5+ etc. Not so! The sneaky, quietly powerful 17.b3! adds the bishop to the attack. There is nothing Black can do about the threat of 18.♕h5+ ♔g8 19.♕h7+ ♔f8 20.♗a3+ when Black must give up his queen, or be mated after either 20...♖e7 21.♕h8# or 20...♗d6 21.♕h8+ ♔e7 22.♕×g7#.

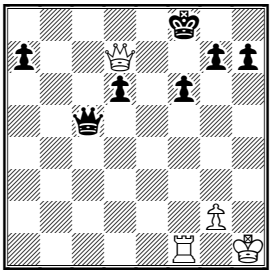
Asleep at the Wheel:

A GM annotator is supposed to point out the crucial junctures of a game, showing the reader the moves that did, or could have, decided the outcome. Yet sometimes he is like a ship's lookout who goes below as an iceberg approaches, or an air traffic controller who takes a coffee break with two jumbo jets on a collision course. The reader is left like Bob Dylan's Mr. Jones, knowing something happened but not what it was.

68. In *NY1924,* at White's 30th move in Tartakower-Alekhine, no comment was made on Tartakower's 30.g2-g4?!, which let the game slip to a draw. Both during the game, and analyzing later, neither found 30.d6!:

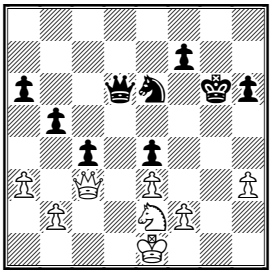


This move, unmentioned by Alekhine, forces 30...♖ad8 (not, of course, 30...c×d6?? 31.♕×a8+) 31.♖e7! ♕×h5 32.♕c6! c×d6 33.♖×d7 ♖×d7 34.♕×d7 ♕×c5+ 35.♔h1,



and though Black has four pawns for the rook, all the winning chances are White's (+2.77).

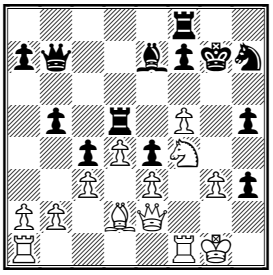
69. Tartakower himself was asleep annotating Game 112 of *STMBG*, Bogolyubov-Tartakower, Bled 1931. No comment is made on White's 41st move, a serious omission, since it was the move that lost the game.



White had stood somewhat worse for much of the game, but was not lost until he played 41.♘g3??, allowing 41...♘g5! when the threats of ...♘f3+ and ...♕d3 were unstoppable. Instead, White had 41.♕h8!, when if, for example, 41...♘g5 42.♘f4+ (both covering d3 and defending the h-pawn) 42...♔f5 43.♕c8+ (0.00 per Komodo), or if 41...♕d3 42.h4! preventing 42...♘g5 (also 0.00), or 41...♕f8 42.♘f4+

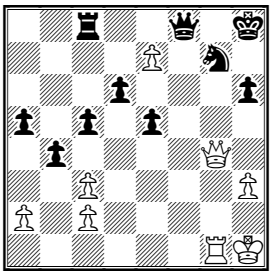
♔f5 43.♕h7+ ♔e5 44.♘×e6 f×e6 45.♕c7+ etc. (0.00). I set Komodo to show its ten best candidate moves while analyzing the position after 41.♕h8, and every one of them showed an evaluation of 0.00.

70. The errors of omission in Lasker's *St. Petersburg 1909* are legion. An example is Game 28, Cohn-Duras. At Black's 28th move,

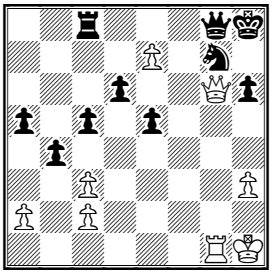


Lasker makes no comment on the losing move, 28...♘h7-g5??, a gross blunder that let White win easily with 29.f6+ ♗×f6 30.♘×h5+ etc. (+6.89). Instead, 28...♖d6! (just the sort of move Lasker himself might have made) would have resisted stubbornly.

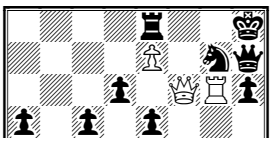
71. Lasker dozes again in Game 53 of *StP1909*, Perlis-Freiman, where there are several major errors of omission, in particular his lack of comment on Black's 46th move:

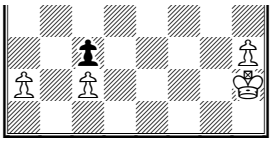


Here Freiman had to play 46...♕×e7, when after 47.♕×c8+ ♔h7 he would have been down the exchange but in no real danger of losing, given his pawn surplus. Instead he played 46...♕g8??, after which White could still have won with the not very obvious but deadly 47.♕g6!!:



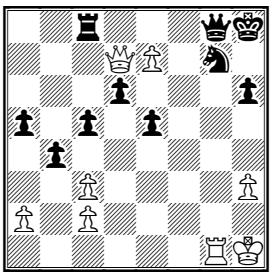
There is then nothing Black can do against invasion of the sixth rank and attack on the h-file, *viz.* 47...♖e8 (47...♕h7 48.♕f6 just transposes) 48.♕f6 (not 48.♕×h6+?? ♕h7 49.♖g6 ♖×e7 and Black wins) 48...b×c3 49.♔h2 (both to defend the h-pawn in lines involving ♕×h6+ and ...♕h7, and to avoid the inconvenience incurred by 49.♖g6 ♕d5+, when White must backtrack with 50.♖g2) 49...♕h7 50.♖g6,





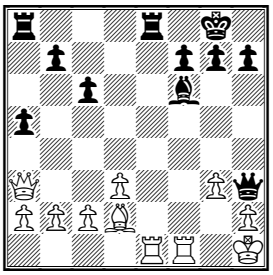
and Black is forced into either 50...♔g8 51.♕e6+ ♔h8 52.♕×d6 ♔g8 53.♕e6+ ♔h8 54.♕f7 ♕×g6 55.♕×g6 ♖×e7 56.♕×h6+ (+3.10), or 50...♕×g6 51.♕×g6 ♖×e7 52.♕×h6+ (+2.70).

Instead, Perlis played 47.♕d7??:

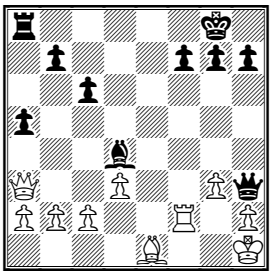


Lasker's only comment is "Threatening 48.♖×g7," never giving any indication that this pseudo-threat is easily handled and that White has just blown the game (0-1, 56).

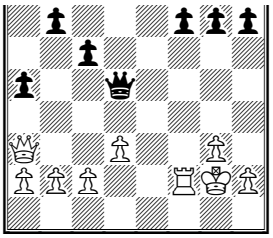
72. A more serious error by Lasker, one of commission, is seen in *StP1909's* Game 117, Znosko-Borovsky–Duras. At move 22,



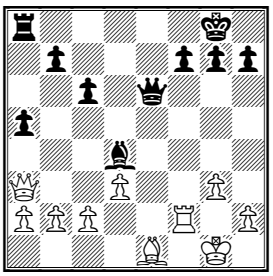
White blundered with 22.♗c3?? and resigned after 22...♖e2, which forces mate quickly. Lasker says "The right move was 22.♖f2." Um, no. Lasker is again asleep at the wheel. 22.♖f2?? is almost as bad as the text move, being refuted by 22...♖×e1+ 23.♗×e1 ♗d4!:



If now:
(a) 24.♖e2 ♕f1#;
(b) 24.♖g2 ♖e8 25.♗d2 (or 25.♗f2 ♗×f2 26.♖×f2 ♖e1+) 25...♖e2 and mate in four at most;
(c) 24.♖f3 ♕h5 25.♔g2 (or 25.♖f4 ♕e2 26.♗c3 ♗f2 -18.46) 25...♖e8 26.♗f2 ♗×f2 27.♖×f2 ♕d5+

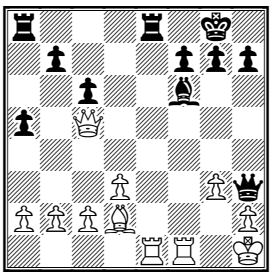


28.♔h3 (if 28.♔f1 ♕h1#, or 28.♔g1 ♖e1+ etc.) 28...♖e6 etc. (-7.35);
(d) 24.♖f4 g5 25.♖f3 ♕e6 26.♗f2 ♕d5 27.♔g2 g4 (-17.31);
(e) Relatively best is 24.♔g1, but then 24...♕e6



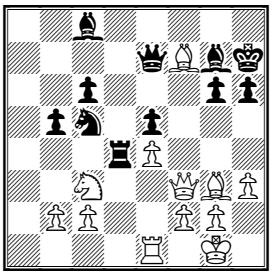
and either **(e1)** 25.♗c3 ♗×f2+ 26.♔×f2 ♖e8 etc. (-7.68), or **(e2)** 25.♔f1 ♕d5 26.♕e7 (if 26.♔g1 ♖e8 -7.85) 26...♕h1+ 27.♔e2 ♗×f2 28.♗×f2 ♕c1 etc. (-4.81), and White is toast.

The actual "right move" was 22.♕c5!?,



when after 22...♗×b2 comes either **(a)** 23.♔g1 ♕d7, or **(b)** 23.♕b6 ♖e2 24.♖f2 ♖×e1+ 25.♗×e1 ♕e6 26.♕×b7 ♖e8 (if 26...♕×e1+?! 27.♔g2 ♕e8 28.♕×b2=) 27.♕×b2 ♕d5+ 28.♔g1 ♖×e1+ 29.♖f1 ♖×f1+ 30.♔×f1 ♕h1+ 31.♔e2 ♕×h2+ 32.♔f3. White stands worse (about -1.10 in either line) but he is far from lost.

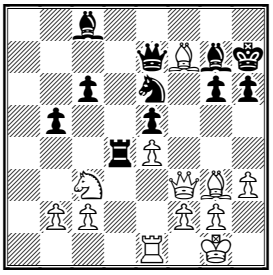
73. Lasker nods off yet again in Game 124 of *StP1909*, Duras-Speijer. At move 31, Speijer had at least ten moves that would have kept the game very close to even,



including 31...♖d2, 31...h5, 31...♗f6, 31...♗d7, 31...♕f8, and 31...♕d6. Lasker comments only on one

of them, 31...b4, giving then 32.♘b1 ♘×e4? (completely unnecessary; better 32...♗f6 -0.45) 33.♖×e4 ♖×e4 34.♗×g6+.

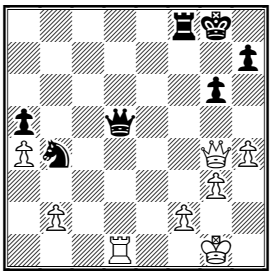
Speijer unfortunately chose 31...♘e6??:



Lasker correctly termed this a miscalculation; it should have immediately lost the game to 32.♗×g6+! (always check for check!) when if 32...♔×g6?? ♕f5#, so Black must accept 32...♔h8 (or 33...♔g8) 33.♗f5 ♘g5 34.♕e3 (+2.67).

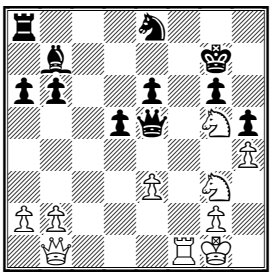
But somehow Duras overlooked this, playing instead 32.♗×e6?! allowing Black back to equality. Lasker made no comment on this, an omission hard to understand, since he had mentioned the possibility of ♗f7×g6+ in the aforementioned note at move 31, another case of "losing the key."

74. A case of four GMs missing a win is found in Euwe-Smyslov, Zürich 1953. At move 37,



in time pressure, Smyslov played 37...♕f3, missing the decisive 37...♘d3!, after which White cannot adequately defend f2, *viz.* 38.♖d2 and Black can either increase the pressure with the unanswerable 38...♕c5, or liquidate to a won ending with 38...♖×f2! 39.♖×f2 ♕h1+ 40.♔×h1 ♘×f2+ 41.♔g2 ♘×g4. We can understand *Zeitnot* causing Smyslov to miss this, but it also went unnoticed by Najdorf in *Z1953MN*, by Bronstein in *Z1953DB*, and by Euwe in *SEiK*.

75. Euwe is asleep annotating Keres-Smyslov, Leningrad 1939 in *HM1948*. At Black's 26th move,



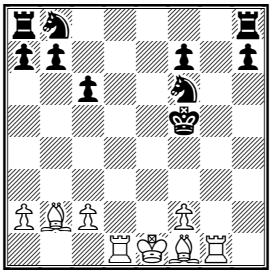
he makes no comment on the fact that the text move 26...♘d6?? was a serious mistake, the decisive one,

allowing 27.♘×h5+! ♔h6 (if 27...g×h6 28.♕h7#) 28.♘f6+−. Black instead could have defended with 26...♘f6!, when White has nothing better than 27.♕d3 with an equal game.

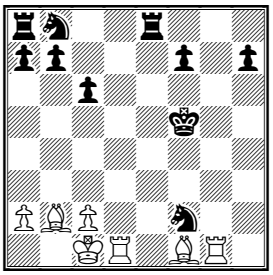
Misevaluation:

Grandmasters are supposed to be especially good at general evaluations of positions, judging who stands better or worse, whether one side or the other should attack or defend, whether the crucial theater is the kingside, queenside or center, etc. etc. And usually they are. But on occasion their judgements can resemble those of a blind baseball umpire.

76. As mentioned above, Mikhail Tal cited a training game in his notes to the third game of *T-B1960*. One note variation reached this position:

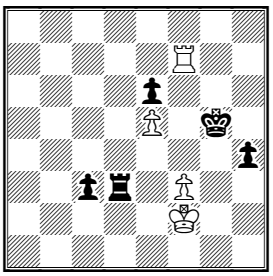


Tal here said White has "a very strong attack." But after 24...♖e8+ 25.♔d2 (Or 25.♗e2 ♘bd7 26.♔f1 ♘e5= (-0.26). White has the bishop pair, but Black is up two pawns.) 25...♘e4+ 26.♔c1 (not 26.♔e1? ♘c3+−+, or 26.♔e2 ♘g5+ 27.♔d3 ♘a6∓) 26...♘×f2,



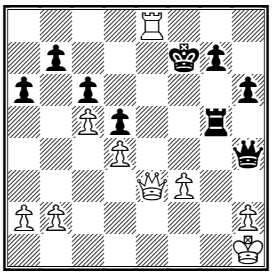
Komodo rates the position only +0.11 if White plays 27.♗d3+, while all other moves are in Black's favor.

77. Annotating Euwe-Reshevsky, Stockholm Olympiad, 1937, in *HM1948*, Euwe calls the text move 39...h5-h4 "something of a blunder."

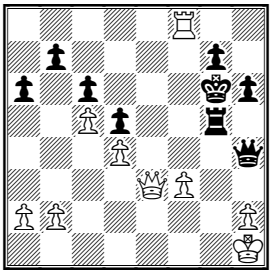


In fact it is no such thing. It is by far the best move on the board, evaluated by Komodo at -6.35, ahead of Euwe's recommendation 39...c2 (-5.03) and 39...♖d1 (-4.60), all at 29 ply. For more on the game, see the Endgames section.

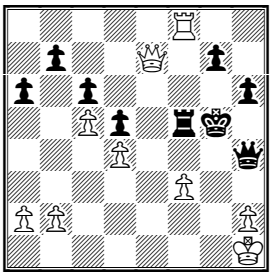
78. Commenting on Rubinstein-Bernstein, Game 139 in *StP1909*, Lasker is very hard on Bernstein's 31...♖g5-g6,



saying "Black ... is tired out and judges the situation wrongly ... He ought to play 31...♔g6." Yet this judges the situation far more wrongly, as 31...♔g6?? loses to 32.♖f8:

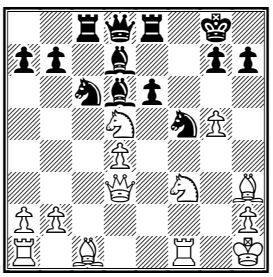


To counter the threat of 33.♕e8+ ♔h7 34.♖h8#, Black must give up major material, *viz.* 33...♖f5 33.♕e8+ ♔g5 34.♕e7+,



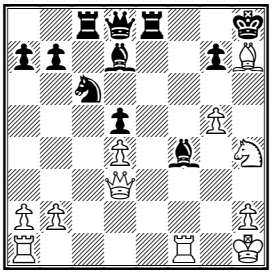
and 34...♔f4 35.♕e5+ (also fine of course is 35.♕×h4+) 35...♔×f3 36.♖×f5+ etc., or 34...♔g6 35.♕×h4 ♖×f8 36.♕g4+ (+9.48), or 34...♖f6 35.♕×g7+ and mate in 16 at most. (We note in passing that Komodo sees 31...♕h3 as probably best, about -0.42.)

79. Annotating Game 31 of *NY1924*, Maróczy-Em. Lasker, Alekhine gives a note at move 22,

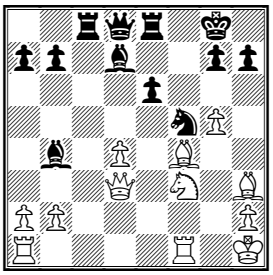


which we quote verbatim: "After 22.♗f4, would follow not 22...e×d5 23.♗×f5 ♗×f4 24.♗×h7+ ♔h8

25.♘h4, but 22...♘b4 23.♘×b4 ♗×b4, with a winning position." One must seriously wonder if AA got his evaluations of these two lines reversed in his mind, because at the end of the first one,

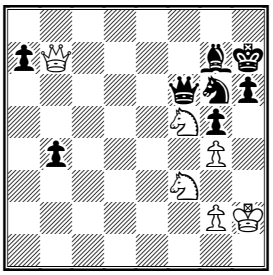


Black is winning handily, *e.g.* 25...♘b4 26.♕f3 ♕×g5 27.♕×f4 ♕×f4 28.♖×f4 ♔×h7 (-3.45), while after the latter line,



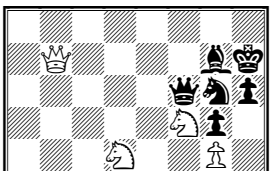
it is indeed a winning position, but for White: 24.♗×f5 e×f5 25.♕b3+ ♗e6 26.♕×b4, nabbing the bishop.

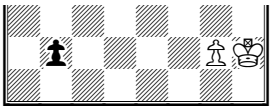
80. Serious misevaluations by Alekhine, both in his actual play and his later annotations, are evident in *NY1924*'s Game 33, Alekhine-Marshall. At move 50,



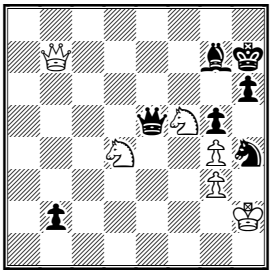
AA erred badly with 50.♕×a7 (better 40.♘×g7 or 40.♕×b4∓), saying "It will soon become apparent that Black, in consequence of his fettered condition, is not so situated as to be able to defend the b-pawn. A few pretty variations are yet to come." But in fact, 50.♕×a7?? immediately drops the evaluation from about -0.40 to -2.60, *i.e.* winning for Black. The "pretty variations" were made possible only because Marshall dropped the ball.

A little further on AA seems to have gotten his evaluations of two variations reversed, as in item 74 above. At Black's 52nd move,



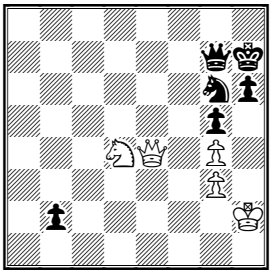


he says “If 52...♕e5+ 53.g3 ♘h4,

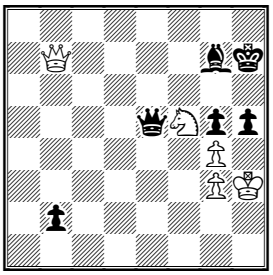


“White would not answer 54.♘×g7 ♕×g7 55.♕e4+ ♘g6, but 54.♔h3 ♘×f5 55.♘×f5 and, after the inevitable exchange of the remaining minor pieces, the queen ending would be drawn.”

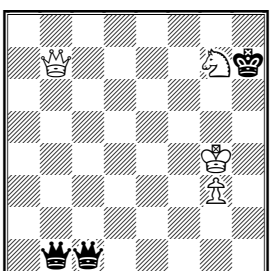
In the first place, 52...♕e5+! was the strongest move, one that should have won it for Black. Secondly, in the above position, 54.♘×g7 is the only move that offers White the least glimmer of hope, though at the end of AA’s variation,



both Komodo and Stockfish consider the glimmer a very dim one (-2.41 and -3.05 respectively). Thirdly and finally, at the end of his second variation, White is totally busted after 55...h5‼:



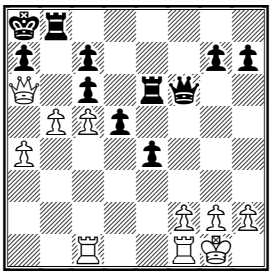
Apparently this decisive move never occurred to Alekhine. Forced now is 56.♘×g7 h×g4+ 57.♔×g4 ♕d4+ 58.♔h5 ♕d1+ 59.♔×g5 ♕c1+ 60.♔g4 b1♕,



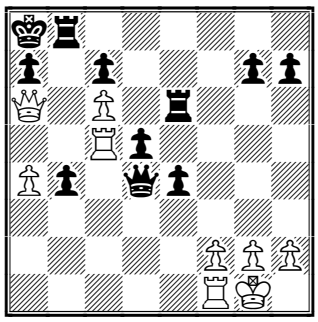
reaching a queen ending that is anything but drawn (Stockfish announces mate in 20). This is why 50.♕×a7?? was so much worse than 50.♕×b4.

81. Annotating Game 4 of *MCC*, against Raubitschek, Manhattan CC 1906, Capablanca makes no comment on moves 21 to 28, giving the reader no hint that the game actually changed hands in that span. The possibilities within that span are complex enough that we might have put this item in Lost in the Complications, and the lack of comment qualifies it for Asleep at the Wheel, but we have the definite impression Capablanca believed he was winning throughout, and so we have placed it here among the misevaluations.

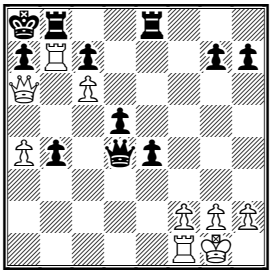
It starts with one of the worst moves Capablanca ever made,



when in this position he played 22.♖c2??. Komodo's evaluation suddenly dips down to -2.01. Best was 22.♕a5 ♖e7 23.♖b1 (-0.38). Play continued 22...c×b5 23.c6 b4 24.♖c5 ♕d4!

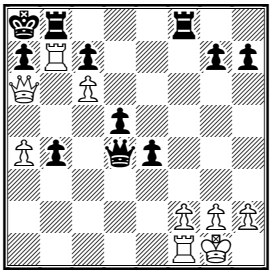


One of Black's three best moves, along with 24...b3 and 24...♖ee8. From d4 the queen creates threats against f2, and defends a7 against mate threats. Despite appearances, the black king is fairly safe for the time being. Then came 25.♖b5 ♖ee8 26.♖b7:

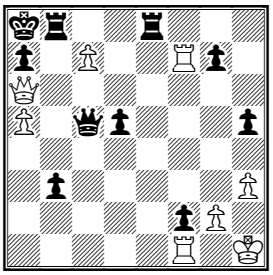


Here Black had two winning continuations:

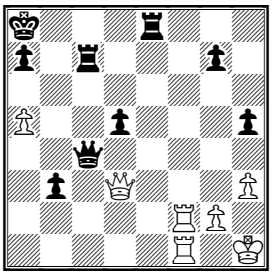
(a) 26...♖f8!



Komodo then sees best play proceeding 27.♖×c7 e3 28.♖b7 e×f2+ 29.♔h1 ♕c5! 30.h3 h5 31.a5 ♖fe8 32.♖f7 b3 33.c7

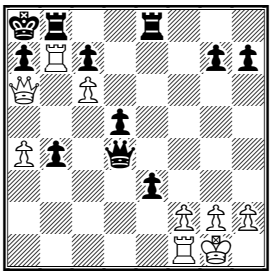


33...♖b7 (or 33...♖bc8 34.♖7×f2 ♖×c7 35.♕d3 turns out the same) 34.♕d3 ♖×c7 35.♖7×f2 ♕c4,

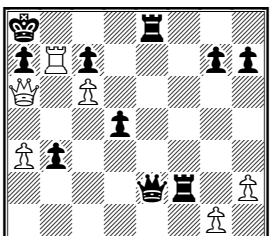


and White's attack has been repulsed and Black's passed pawns should win for him (-1.96).

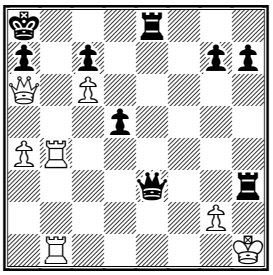
(b) 26...e3!



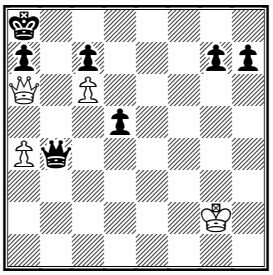
27.f×e3 ♕×e3+ 28.♔h1 ♖f8 29.♖b1 ♖be8 30.h3 ♖f3!!



If now 31.g×f3?? ♕×f3+ 32.♔h2 ♕f4+ 33.♔g2 ♕e4+ 34.♔g3 ♕g6+ 35.♔h2 ♕c2+ 36.♔g3 (or 36.♔g1 ♕×b1+) 36...♖e3+ 37.♔g4 ♕e4+ 38.♔g5 h6+ 39.♔h5 ♖×h3#. Therefore 31.♖7×b4 ♖×h3+!!



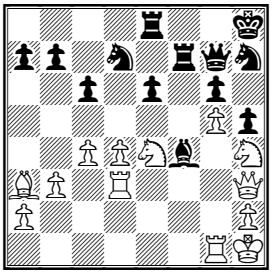
32.g×h3 ♕×h3+ 33.♔g1 ♕g3+ 34.♔h1 ♖e1+ 35.♖×e1 ♕×e1+ 36.♔g2 ♕×b4,



reaching a queen ending obviously winning for Black.

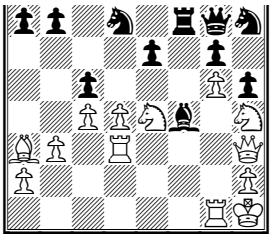
Unfortunately Raubitschek played 26...♕c5?**,** a time-wasting move that lost all his advantage. For more on this game, see the Charlie Fox section.

82. In Game 88 of *StP1909,* Burn-Tartakower, after White's 34th move, Lasker gives what is probably the most bizarre misevaluation of a position we have ever seen from a World Champion (or any high-ranking player, for that matter).

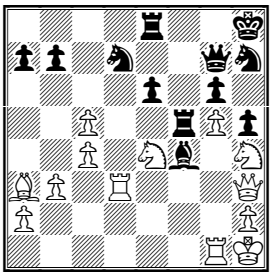


He writes "The knight at e4 is occupied in guarding the g-pawn; the pawn at d4 defends the e5-square, the gate of the center, through which the stream of black pieces would like to flow for the counterattack." In other words, Lasker sees White as being on the defensive! This is something like saying the United States was on the defensive when American bombers were pulverizing Japan in the last months of World War II.

Based on this assessment, Lasker calls Tartakower's 35...c5 "an elegant move, which is, moreover, founded on the logical requirements of the position." Nonsense.

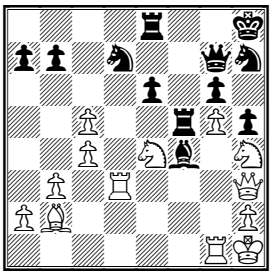


In the first place, Black had better moves, though none satisfactory: 35...♔g8 (+2.06), 35...♗b8 (+2.11), or 35...♗c7 (+2.30). Tartakower's 35...c5? should only have accelerated Black's demise. Secondly, after the natural 36.d×c5 (Burn for once playing the best move) Lasker continues his hallucinatory misjudgement by saying of Tartakower's next move, 36...♖f5,

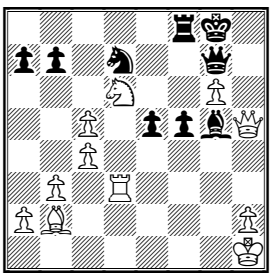


that it was "finely played." Again, utter balderdash. 36...♖f5?? takes Komodo's assessment of Black's already lamentable position down by more than a full rook's worth, from +2.89 to +8.25.

Adding another misevaluation, after 36...♖f5 (see above diagram), Lasker said that White "could not improve the position of any piece materially." This is ludicrously mistaken. White could have greatly improved one piece's position and put a dagger into Black's heart with 37.♗a3-b2!!:

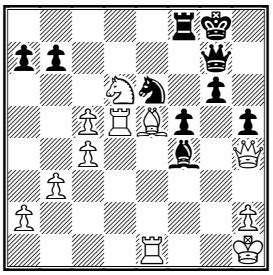


There are only three replies that Komodo initially rates lower than +12.00:
(a) 37...♕×b2 38.♘×g6+ and either 38...♔g8 39.♖×d7 (+8.73), or 38...♔g7 39.♘×f4 (+11.10);
(b) 37...e5 38.♘×f5 g×f5 39.♘d6 ♖f8 40.g6 ♘g5 41.♕×h5+ ♔g8 42.♖×g5 ♗×g5,



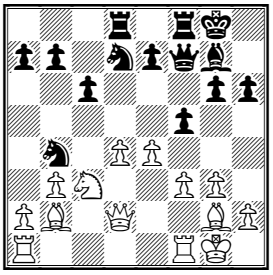
and take your pick of 43.♕×g5 (+16.52), 43.♘f7 (+15.18), 43.c6 (+11.34) or 43.♖h3 (+10.32), not to mention just about any other move;

(c) 37...♘e5 38.♘d6 ♖ef8 39.♘h×f5 e×f5 40.♖d5 ♘×g5 41.♕h4 ♘e6 42.♖e1 ♔g8 43.♗×e5

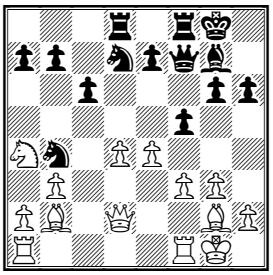


and Black will soon be as extinct as the dodo, the wooly mammoth, and the brontosaurus all put together (+9.32). That this game ended in a draw was due entirely to Burn's ineptitude (he was badly off-form at St. Petersburg 1909), not to any "elegant, fine play" by Tartakower.

83. A strange misjudgement by Timman is found in the very first game in *AoCA*, Portisch-Smyslov, third match game, Portoroz, 1971. A sub-variation of the note at White's 14th move reaches this position,

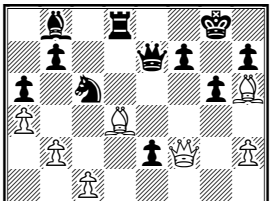


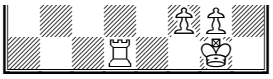
where Timman declares "17.♘a4! and Black loses." What he based this on is not stated and is quite unclear.



While the ♘b4 is attacked, it does have a retreat square. Komodo sees best play as continuing 17...a5 18.a3 ♘a6 19.♕c2 (if 19.♕×a5 ♕×b3) 19...b5 20.♕×c6 b×a4 21.♕×a6 f×e4 22.♖ab1 (not 22.f×e4?! ♕×b3) 22...♖b8 with equality.

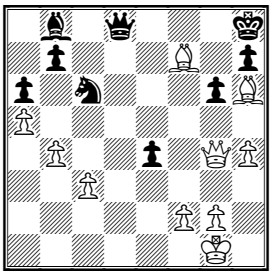
84. In Game 125 of *STMBG*, Tartakower-Domenech, Sitges 1934, Tartakower misjudged a great opportunity. At move 26,





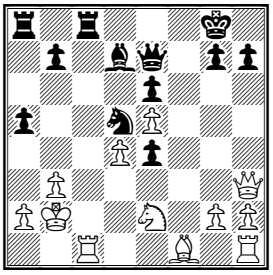
he played 26.♕g5, only the third-best move. Though he contemplated 26.♗×f7+, objectively the best move, he deemed it "a snare and a delusion," saying it would be refuted by 26...♔h8 27.♖×d8+ ♕×d8 28.♕d2 ♕×h4, evaluating that as better for Black, though Komodo rates it +0.82.

That, however, is irrelevant if, after 26.♗×f7+ ♔h8 27.♖×d8+ ♕×d8, White, instead of 28.♕d2?!, plays 28.♕g4!:



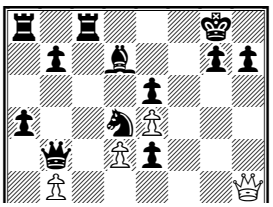
This prevents 28...♕d1# and threatens ♗h6-g5-f6#. There are then two main continuations, both winning for White:
(a) 28...♗e5 29.♗g5 h5 30.♕e2 ♕d6 31.♗b3 ♕f8 32.♕×e4 (+3.61);
(b) 28...♘e5 29.♗g5! ♘×g4 30.♗×d8 ♗e5 31.♗e6 h5 32.c4 e3 33.f×e3 ♘×e3 34.♗c8 ♘c2 (or 34...♗c3 35.♗×b7 ♘×c4 36.♗×a6) 35.♗×b7 ♘×b4 (+4.44).
In both cases White goes up one or more pawns and his bishops dominate the board.

85. An amusing case in *STMBG* is Game 161, H. Steiner-Tartakower, Hastings 1945-46. At Black's 21st move,

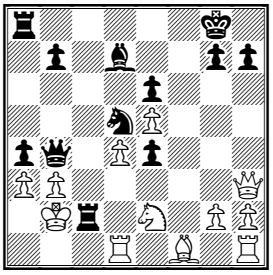


Tartakower played 21...♕g5, giving it an exclam and saying "The key move ... that forces a way inside White's defenses." However, in his notes, he also wrote "A false way of attempting this would be the plausible maneuver 21...♕b4?, because of 22.♖d1 e3 (or 22..a4 23.a3!) 23.a3, and White has succeeded in blunting the head of Black's attack."

Since 21...♕g5 was a good move, quite strong enough to win (-7.33), we can understand why Tartakower did not give 21...♕b4 much attention,

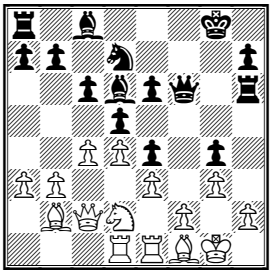


but if he had, he would have seen that it was by far the strongest move on the board, deserving "!!" instead of "?", and that after 22.♖d1 a4! 23.a3, rather than his attack being blunted, he could have won brilliantly with 23...♖c2+!!:



Then comes 24.♔×c2 a×b3+! 25.♕×b3 ♘e3+! and either **(a)** 26.♕×e3 ♗a4+ 27.♔c1 ♖c8+ 28.♘c3 ♖×c3+ etc., or **(b)** 26.♔b2 ♘c4+ 27.♔c2 ♘×a3+ 28.♔b2 ♘c4+ 29.♔c2 ♗a4 etc., mate following shortly in either case. This unplayed combination is a sort of queenside mirror image of a famous Tartakower kingside brilliancy that *was* played years earlier:

Maróczy-Tartakower, Teplitz-Schönau 1922: 1.d4 e6 2.c4 f5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.a3 ♗e7 5.e3 0–0 6.♗d3 d5 7.♘f3 c6 8.0–0 ♘e4 9.♕c2 ♗d6 10.b3 ♘d7 11.♗b2 ♖f6 12.♖fe1 ♖h6 13.g3 ♕f6 14.♗f1 g5 15.♖ad1 g4 16.♘×e4 f×e4 17.♘d2



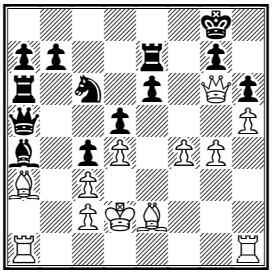
17...♖×h2!! 18.♔×h2 ♕×f2+ 19.♔h1 ♘f6 20.♖e2 ♕×g3 21.♘b1 ♘h5 22.♕d2 ♗d7 23.♖f2 ♕h4+ 24.♔g1 ♗g3 25.♗c3 ♗×f2+ 26.♕×f2 g3 27.♕g2 ♖f8 28.♗e1 ♖×f1+ 29.♔×f1 e5 30.♔g1 ♗g4 31.♗×g3 ♘×g3 32.♖e1 ♘f5 33.♕f2 ♕g5 34.d×e5 ♗f3+ 35.♔f1 ♘g3+ 0–1

Agog with Admiration:

Admiring a great player is as natural for chess fans as it is for other sports fans to admire a great quarterback, pitcher, outfielder or soccer player. And a beautifully played chess game deserves high praise no less than a fine work of art or musical composition. But it can be overdone. Some writers verge into excessive hero worship of their idols (Chernev of Capablanca, for example), and this lessens the objectivity of their annotations. In other cases, a player may admire himself too much — Alekhine and Nimzovich, for example, were famous for their self-regard — and so he may, either unconsciously or deliberately, present his games in glowing colors that mask hidden flaws.

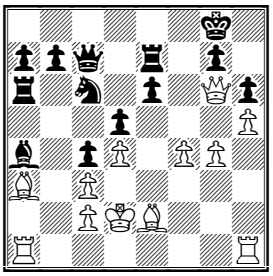
Or a move may seem to show such brilliance, or a game may seem to evince such a wonderfully conceived and perfectly executed plan, that the annotator is carried away, leaving his critical faculties behind. Herewith some relevant examples.

86. In *CMO*, Reuben Fine annotated Smyslov-Botvinnik, 13th USSR Ch, Moscow 1944, in extravagant style. In particular, here at Black's 29th move,

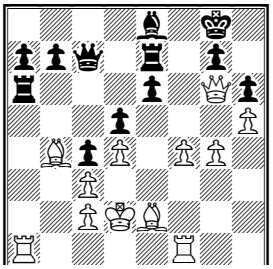


Fine gave three exclams — !!! — to 29...e5. Perhaps Fine was misled by the way this worked out: 30.f×e5? ♘×d4! 31.♗b4 ♕d8 32.♕×a6 b×a6 and 0-1, 40. As Botvinnik himself was later to point out (*Botvinnik's Best Games, Volume 2: 1942-1956*), 29...e5 was actually "a very significant omission," and had White replied 30.d×e5 he would have decent chances to fight on.

As Botvinnik noted, correct instead for Black was 29...♕c7!,

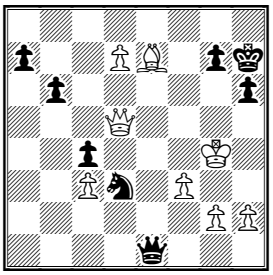


after which he gives 30.♖hf1 (not 30.♗×e7?? ♕×f4+) 30...♘b4! 31.♗×b4 ♗e8,



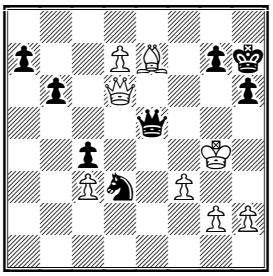
in which Komodo concurs and pegs at -2.86. Unlike Fine, Botvinnik was not agog with admiration for Botvinnik.

87. In the 1953 Neuhausen-Zürich Candidates Tournament, the game Smyslov-Petrosian caused quite a sensation when, in this position,

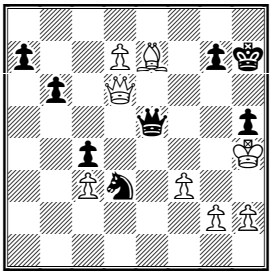


Petrosian played 46...♕e5!? and Smyslov, completely taken aback by the threat of 47...♕f4+ 48.♔h3 ♘f2# (or 47...♘f2+ 48.♔h4 ♕f4#), played 47.♕×d3 c×d3 48.d8♕, and a draw was agreed. All the grandmasters present marveled at Petrosian's ingenuity, including Bronstein and Najdorf in their respective books of the tournament, Bronstein writing "A move of rare beauty" and giving it an exclam, and Najdorf gushing "An admirable game, in which the young grandmaster Petrosian showed his brilliant gifts, and with an endgame of such rare beauty that it seemed to be composed," and giving 46...♕e5 a "!!". (Euwe, to his credit, was not deceived in *SEiK*.)

In fact, however, as a Swedish amateur pointed out some months after the tournament, Petrosian's much-praised 46…♕e5 should not have worked. Instead of 47.♕×d3+?, as actually played, Smyslov had 47.♕d6!,

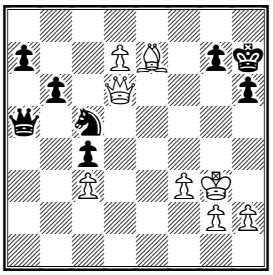


which wins in all variations, for example:
(a) 47...h5+ 48.♔h4

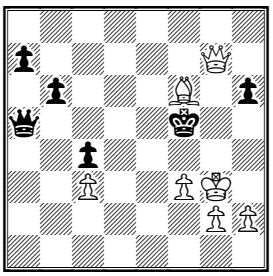


Now we see the main point of 47.♕d6: the white h-pawn is defended. After 48...♕e1+ 49.♔×h5 Black has no more useful checks, and cannot stop the d-pawn from queening. The relatively best try is

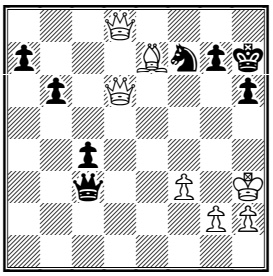
49...♘e5 50.d8♕ g6+ 51.♕×g6+ (better than 51.♔g5 ♘f7+) 51...♘×g6 52.♗f6 ♘f4+ 53.♔g4 and White will win easily.
(b) 47...♕a5 48.♔g3 (better than the immediate 48.d8♕ ♘e5+ 49.♔g3 ♘f7) 48...♘c5



49.♗f6! (better than 49.d8♕ ♘b7) 49...♘×d7 (if 49...g×f6 50.♕e7+ ♔g6 51.d8♕ and mate shortly) 50.♕×d7 ♔g6 51.♕×g7+ ♔f5

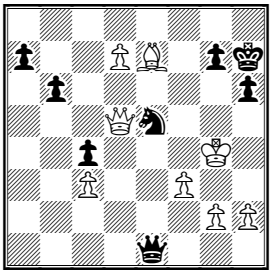


52.♕f7! and Black must give up his queen to forestall mate.
(c) 47...♕×c3 48.d8♕ ♘e5+ 49.♔h3 ♘f7



50.♕d4+−.

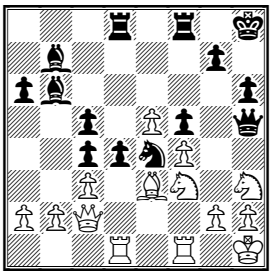
Objectively, Black's best chance lay not in 46...♕e5 but 46...♘e5+,



when after 47.♔f5 ♘×d7 48.♕×d7 ♕×c3, though White is up a bishop for two pawns, Black's three connected passers may give him drawing chances.

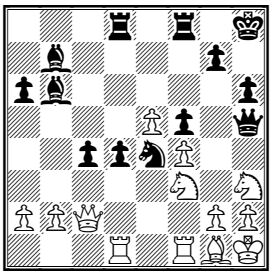
88. Alekhine often annotated his games in a way that made it seem, especially if he won by a sparkling

combination, that his every move must have been a strong link in a logical chain, and his victory the inexorable result of a master plan, when in fact the game was not nearly so harmonious, the plan not infallible, and he won simply because of a lapse by the opponent at a crucial point. A case in point is Torres-Alekhine, exhibition game, Seville 1922, Game 96 in *AAMBG*. After playing 24...d4,



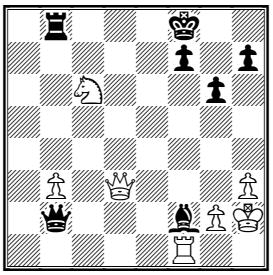
to which he gave an exclam, he wrote "Allowing the sacrifice of the queen on the 28th move, which ... wins a piece or forces mate." This did indeed happen, the game concluding 25.c×d4 c×d4 26.♗×d4 ♗×d4 27.♖×d4 ♖×d4 28.♘×d4 ♕×h3!! 29.g×h3 ♘f2+ 30.♔g1 ♘×h3#. Alekhine's note makes this appear inevitable.

However, if after 25.c×d4 c×d4, White had played not 26.♗×d4?? but 26.♗g1!,

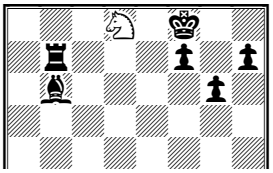


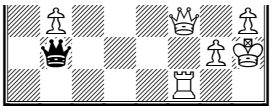
Alekhine's intended continuation becomes entirely evitable. White still stands somewhat worse (about -0.56) and faces a long defense, but he can fight on.

89. In *AAMBG*'s Game 202, Alekhine-Euwe, WCh match 1937, game 22, Alekhine's notes make it clear he was exceedingly proud of his 43rd move, 43.♔g1-h2,

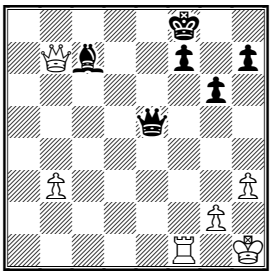


though objectively better was 43.♖×f7. But the note in support of 43.♔h2 is marred by a serious, superficial oversight. He gave 43...♖b7 44.♕f3 ♗b6 45.♘d8,

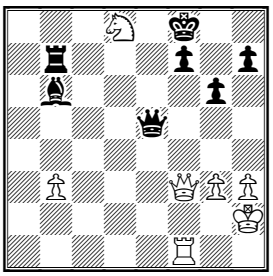




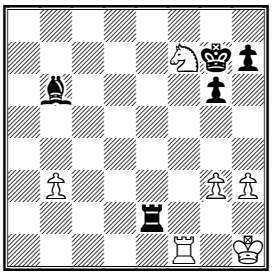
“winning at least the exchange.” But he overlooked that it does him no good after 45...♕e5+! (always check for check!) 46.♔h1 ♗×d8 47.♕×b7 ♗c7!,



when Black threatens mate and forces perpetual check, *e.g.* 48.♔g1 ♕e3+ 49.♖f2 ♕e1+ etc. Nor after 45...♕e5+ does the lone alternative 46.g3 help:



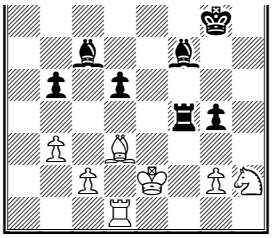
Black still equalizes with 46...♖e7 47.♘×f7 (even less good is 47.♘c6 ♕e2+ 48.♔h1 ♕×f3+ 49.♖×f3 ♖e2) 47...♕e2+ 48.♕×e2 ♖×e2+ 49.♔h1 ♔g7,



and despite White’s nominal extra pawn, the position is dead even.

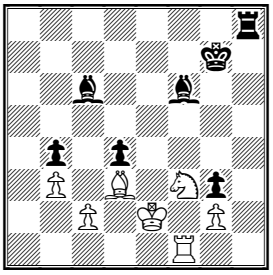
Nimzovich, annotating two of Tartakower’s games in *My System*, showered them with lavish praise, applauding them as models of strategy and endgame technique. Tartakower himself mentioned this with obvious pride in *STMBG*. Yet all the supposedly invincible strategy and technique would not have amounted to a hill of beans without major mistakes by his opponents, mistakes that went completely unnoticed by the two enraptured annotators.

90. The first example is Michell-Tartakower, Marienbad 1925, discussed by Nimzovich on pages 235-236 of *My System* as an exemplar of the bishop pair in action, and by Tartakower as Position IX on page 160 of *STMBG*. At Black’s 49th move,

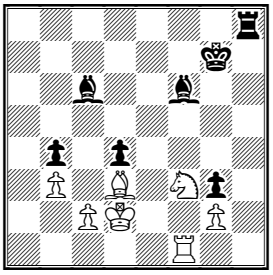


both Nimzovich and Tartakower give 49...g3 an exclam. Tartakower says “Although this renounces the scheme for confining the knight, it clearly defines the pawn on g2 as a point of attack.” Nimzovich comments “Black has quite rightly not pursued further the advantage he got from hemming in the knight; what he has now got is more valuable: White’s pawn at g2 has become a mark for attack, and the white pieces, particularly the knight at f3, are from now on forced to keep perpetual watch over him. This strategical advantage very soon brings a decision.” Stockfish does not agree, pegging the resulting position at 0.00.

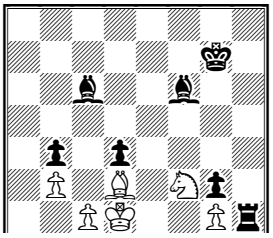
After the further moves 43.♘f3 h5 44.♗e2 ♖e4 45.♗d3 ♖f4 46.♔e2 g4 47.h×g4 h×g4 48.♘h2 g3 49.♘f3 d4 50.♖f1 b4 51.♘d2 ♖h4 52.♘f3 ♖h8 we reach this position,



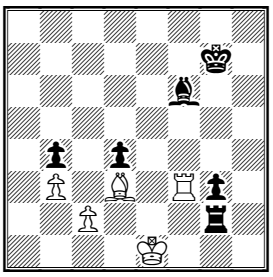
where Tartakower comments that White “is at his wit’s end for a useful move.” Michell may have been at his wit’s end, but Stockfish is not, seeing a 0.00 evaluation for 53.♖a1, 53.♖e1, or 53.♘e1, and nothing worse than -0.18 for four other moves. Michell chose 53.♔d2?!,



on which Nimzovich crows “For — with apologies to Goethe and his translator — where of good moves there’s a failing, a botch steps promptly in as a deputy!” While 53.♔d2 does make White’s defense more difficult (-0.61), it does not deserve such scorn. That should be reserved for White’s next move. After 53...♖h2,

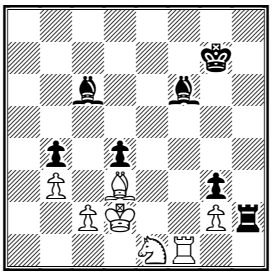


White played 54.♘×h2?? and the game was indeed finally (and needlessly) lost. Nimzovich makes no comment, apparently thinking White had no other choice, while Tartakower says only "If 54.♖f2 ♗×f3," which is a howler in its own right, as then after 55.♖×f3 ♖×g2+ 56.♔e1,



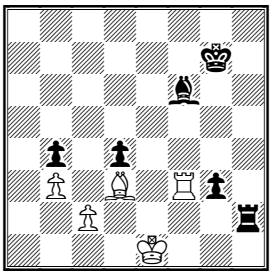
Stockfish says White can still hold the draw (-0.31). Instead after 54.♖f2?? Black has several ways to win, best of which is probably 54...♗h4, when if 55.♖f1 ♖×g2+ (-7.650), or 55.♔e2 g×f2 56.♘×h2 ♗×g2 (-4.53).

But all of this is moot because (returning to the previous diagram) White can still hold with 54.♘e1!:

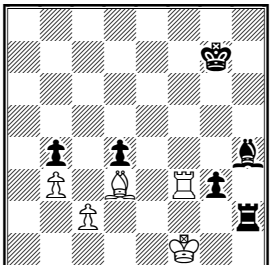


If now:

(a) 54...♗×g2 55.♘×g2 ♖×g2+ 56.♔e1 ♖h2 57.♖f3

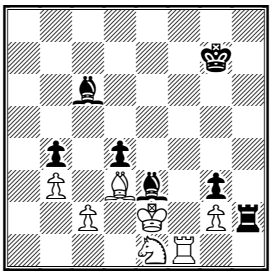


57...♗h4 (or 57...g2 58.♔f2 ♔f7 59.♔g1 ♖h4 60.♔×g2=) 58.♔f1

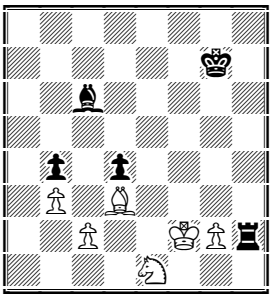


and Stockfish sees no way for Black to make significant progress (-0.48 at 37 ply).

(b) Black's only other serious try after 54.♘e1! is 54...♗g5+ 55.♔d1 ♗e3 56.♔e2,

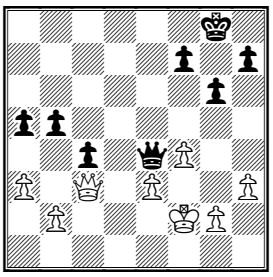


and again Black can make no progress, *e.g.* 56...♗×g2 57.♘×g2 ♖×g2+ 58.♔f3, or 56...♖×g2+ 57.♘×g2 ♗×g2 58.♖f3 ♗×f3+ 59.♔×f3, and Black loses the pawn on which his chance of victory depends. Waiting moves are of no use because White is not in any sort of *Zugzwang*. Black can force the win of the exchange by 56...♗f2 57.♖×f2 g×f2 58.♔×f2,



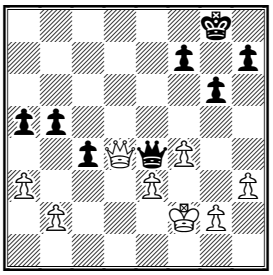
but then again Stockfish sees no way to further progress, even as deep as 40 ply. Tartakower concludes his commentary with "In his work, *My System*, Nimzovich cites this endgame as one of the examples of the activity, sometimes astonishing, of two united bishops." While the bishops certainly were active, the only really astonishing things about this game are the two annotators' howlers.

91. The second example in *My System* is Grünfeld-Tartakower, Semmering 1926, annotated by Nimzovich as Game 27 on pages 318-320, and by Tartakower as Game 66 in *STMBG*. At this point, after move 28,

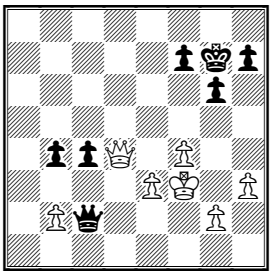


Nimzovich waxes positively florid, saying "The whole ending is played by Tartakower with wonderful precision and truly artistic elegance. Tartakower is, in my opinion, without question the third best end game artist of all living masters." Tartakower demurred modestly, saying "[this] is, without a doubt, an exaggeration," but he still seems to have let Nimzovich's fulsome tribute dull his critical faculties. And both are analyzing by result, thinking that because Black won his victory was inevitable.

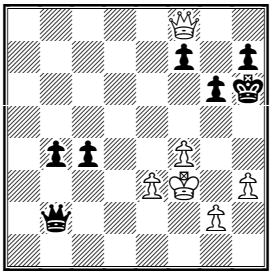
It was not. First off, in the above position, White can pretty much force a quick draw by 29.♕d4!:



If 29...♕×d4? 30.e×d4 and the passed pawn gives White a winning pawn ending. Black is therefore forced to cede his queen's centralized position to White, after which he can make no headway, *e.g.* 29...♕c2+ 30.♔f3 b4 31.a×b4 a×b4 32.♕d8+ ♔g7 33.♕d4+

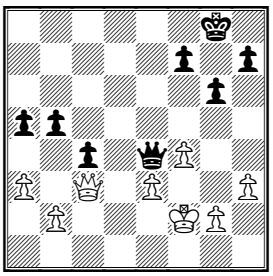


and now Black is best advised to accept a draw by 33...♔g8 34.♕d8+ ♔g7 35.♕d4+ etc., since if he tries for more it can backfire, *viz.* 33...♔h6 34.♕d6 ♕×b2 35.♕f8+

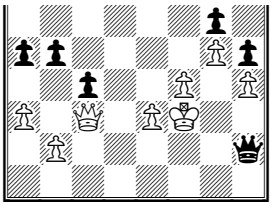


35...♕g7 (not 35...♔h5?? 36.g4+ ♔h4 37.♕h6#) 36.♕×b4 c3 37.♕c5 and White will soon nab the c-pawn and have the better prospects (+0.89 per Stockfish at 33 ply).

Returning to the actual game, from our initial diagram,

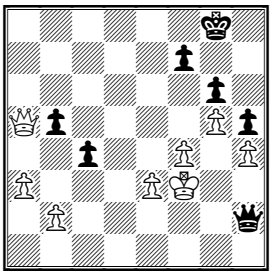


play continued 29...h6 30.h4?! (better again 30.♕d4!=) 30...♕h1 31.♔g3 ♕g1+ 32.♔f3 ♕h2 33.g5 h5,

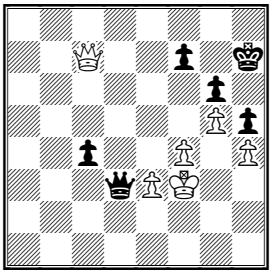


reaching a position which Nimzovich and Tartakower seem to consider virtually won, but Stockfish rates at only -0.24, *i.e.* Black is a whopping quarter of a pawn to the better. It is only here that White lost the game, playing 34.♔e4??, and after 34...♕×h4 35.♕×a5 ♕h1+ 36.♔e5 ♕c6 (best was 36...♕b1) 37.♕a7 h4 38.f5 g×f5 39.♔×f5 ♕f3+ 40.♔e5 h3 41.♔d4 ♕g4+ he resigned. Nimzovich makes no comment on move 34, and Tartakower mentions only one bad, irrelevant alternative, 34.♕f6.

But White could still have drawn, if instead of hesitating with 34.♔e4??, he had immediately played 34.♕×a5!:



If now:
(a) 34...♕×h4 35.♕×b5 and Black must force the draw with 35...♕h3+ 36.♔e2 ♕g2+ 37.♔e1 ♕g1+ etc.;
(b) 34...♕×b2 35.♕d8+ ♔g7 (if 35...♔h7 36.♕f6) 36.♕d5 ♕×a3 37.♕×b5 ♕d3 38.♕e5+ ♔h7 39.♕c7



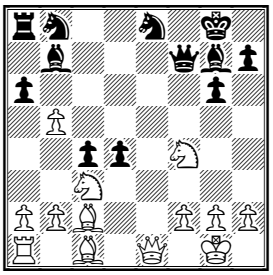
39...♔g8 (if 39...♔g7 40.♕e5+) 40.♕b8+ ♔h7 41.♕c7 etc., draw.

So, all the “wonderful precision and truly artistic elegance” Nimzovich thought he saw was illusory, an effect of the rose-colored glasses he wore when analyzing these games, and which Tartakower in turn put on.

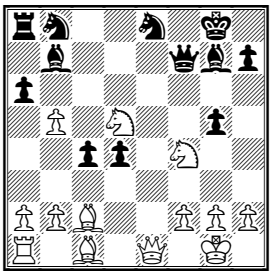
Always Check for Check:

This might be considered a subset of Zwischenzüge, but I felt these examples deserved their own section. In serious games, I would write " √ **4** √ " at the top of my scoresheet to remind myself of this important precaution, which even grandmasters sometimes fail to take.

92. Tartakower, annotating his game with Rubinstein at Teplitz-Schönau 1922 (Game 45 in *STMBG*) makes a serious mistake in the note at White's 20th. In this position,

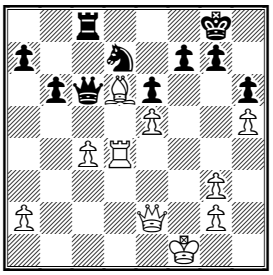


he comments "If 20.♘cd5 g5 and wins." This is indeed an "and wins" situation, but not for Black.

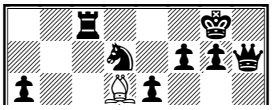


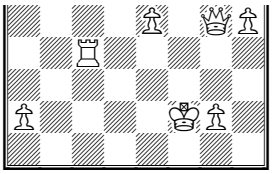
21.♗×h7+! and Black is ruined:
(a) 21...♔f8 22.♘g6+ ♕×g6 23.♕e7#;
(b) 21…♔h8 22.♗g6 ♕d7 (or 22...♕f8 23.♘e6 +12.70) 23.♗×e8 (+10.74);
(c) 21...♔×h7 22.♕e4+ ♔g8 23.♘e7+ ♔f8 24.♘fg6+ ♕×g6 25.♘×g6+ ♔f7 26.♕×b7+ (+21.20).

93. A strange case of two GMs independently missing the same key check is seen in Game 14 of *AoCA*, Gligoric-Portisch, Wijk aan Zee 1975. At move 31,

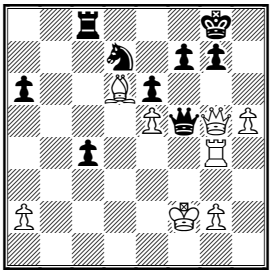


both Timman in *AoCA*, and Lubomir Kavalek in the tournament book, examine the line 31...a6 32.g4 b5 33.g5 h×g5 34.♕g4 b×c4 35.♕×g5 ♕b5 36.♖g4 ♕b1+ 37.♔f2 ♕h7 38.♖×c4,

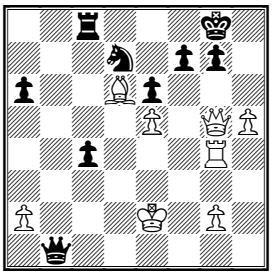




when Timman says “White has all the play,” and Kavalek says all ends well for the white king. But one move back, they both overlook the check 37...♕f5+!,

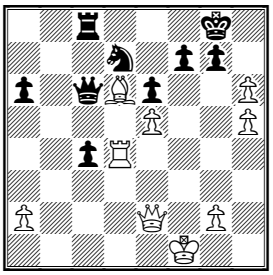


when White cannot avoid an exchange of queens and Black should win with his passed pawn (-1.65). Because of this, it is better after 36...♕b1+ for White to play 37.♔e2,



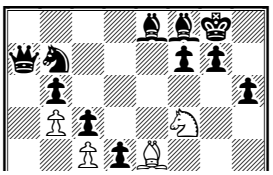
when Black must settle for a draw by 37...♕d3+ 38.♔e1 ♕b1+ etc.

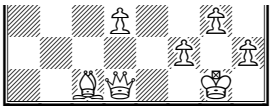
We’ll add that in a sub-variation of this same note in *AoCA*, 33...b×c4 34.g×h6,



Timman has Black playing 34...g×h6??, which allows a quick mate starting with 35.♖g4+. There is no need for this: Black can play his queen to b5, b6 or b7, setting up the ...♕b1+ threat and forcing a draw.

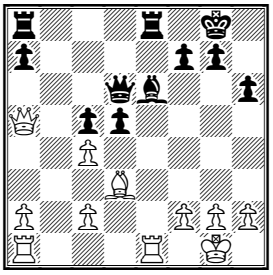
94. Annotating Kotov-Taimanov, Game 74 in *Z1953MN*, Najdorf gives a long note at move 25 discussing variations stemming from 25...♘h5-b7:



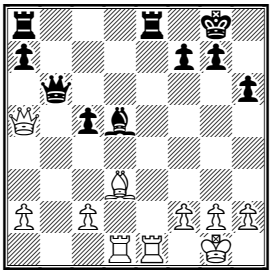


But he looks only at 26.♕g4. While this is a very good, even winning move (+4.25 per Komodo), White can do much better with 26.♘×h6+!! which forces mate, *viz.* 26...g×h6 27.♕g4+ ♗g7 28.♗×h6 ♔f8 29.♗×g7+ ♔e7 30.♕g5+ ♔d7 31.♗f5+ ♔c7 32.♕e7+ ♔b8 33.♕×e8+ ♔c7 34.♗e5+ ♘d6 35.♕c8#, or 26...♔h8 27.♕h5 g6 28.♕e5+ ♔h7 29.♕×e8 ♗×h6 30.♕×f7+ ♔h8 31.♗×h6 etc.

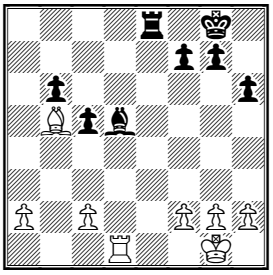
95. Even the Great Cuban Capablanca, also known as The Chess Machine, sometimes failed to check for check. At this point in Game 20 of *MCC,* Blumenfeld & Pavlov-Capablanca, consultation, Moscow 1914,



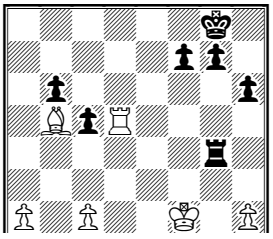
he wrote “If 19.c×d5 ♗×d5 20.♖ad1 ♕b6.” The last move in this variation is a blunder,



which White would joyfully seize on with 21.♖×e8+ ♖×e8 22.♕×b6 a×b6 23.♗b5!



attacking the bishop and rook simultaneously, and forcing 23...♖e5 24.f4 ♖f5 25.g4 ♖×f4 26.♖×d5 ♖×g4+ 27.♔f2,

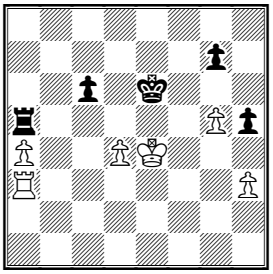


when White has won a bishop for two pawns (+1.94). Rather than 20...♕b6??, correct is 20...♖×e1+ 21.♖×e1 and only then 21...♕b6, with equality.

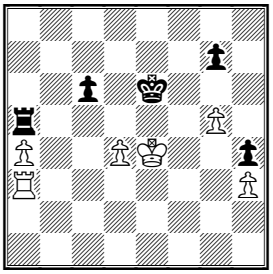
Endgames:

It is one of the paradoxes of chess that positions with few pieces left on the board can be harder to understand and play correctly than middle game positions with many pieces. Of course, some endings are cut-and-dried matters of technique that any well-trained player can handle, but others can boggle even the greatest chess minds, sometimes even computers. Among those we present here are some definite howlers, but also others not so clear-cut, the keys sometimes being subtle and well hidden, included for their beauty and/or instructive value as much as their error content.

96. We'll start with a short, clear endgame gaffe from *AAMBG*, Game 135, Alekhine-Tartakower, San Remo 1930. Alekhine played 34.g5,

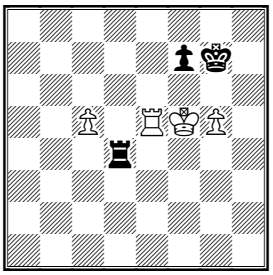


an objectively ineffective move, but psychologically potent due to Black being in time pressure. Tartakower obliged by playing 34...♖×g5?? and after 35.a5 ♖b5 36.a6 ♖b8 37.a7 his doom was sealed. Alekhine mentioned only one alternative, 34...♔d6 35.h4 when, he said, "[Black's] situation would be even worse than before," though frankly Stockfish, looking as deep as 33 ply, sees no breakthrough for White. Completely unmentioned, though, is the best move for Black, 34...h4!,



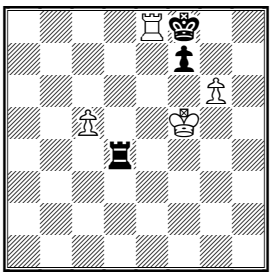
with complete equality. White cannot approach the h-pawn without abandoning his d-pawn, *e.g.* 35.♔f4 ♔d5=.

97. Another short and clear example is Game 185 from *STMBG*, Tartakower-Trifunovic, France-Yugoslavia match, Paris 1950. At move 45,

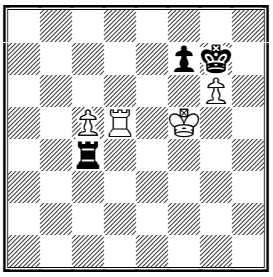


Tartakower gives his 45.g6 an exclam, even though its strength (like Alekhine's 34.g5 against

Tartakower above) is purely psychological rather than objective. After 45.g6, he claims that if 45...♔f8 46...♖e8+! wins,

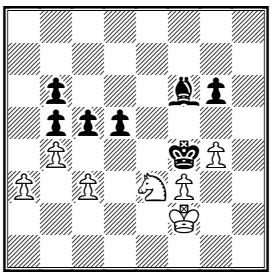


but this is true only if Black blunders with 46...♔×e8?? 47.g7 etc.; instead 46...♔g7! retains the draw. In the actual game, after the further moves 45.g6 ♖c4 46.♖d5,



Tartakower makes no comment on 46...f×g6+??, which was the actual losing move, allowing 47.♔e6. Instead, moving the rook to c1, c2, or c3 would have held the draw: if White moves his king then 47...f×g6 can be safely played, while if 47.♖e5 ♖c4 and further rook moves yield nothing better than threefold repetition.

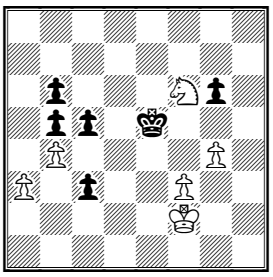
98. An amusing case of an annotator being hoist on his own petard is found on page 138 of *LMOC,* where Lasker says "It is ... the function of the critic to give recognition to and to bring into prominence that which is valuable, to correct that which is well meant but weak, to speak with a loud voice against what is pretentious and a sham." He then discusses the ending of Bird-Steinitz, 8th match game, London, 1866, starting with this position:



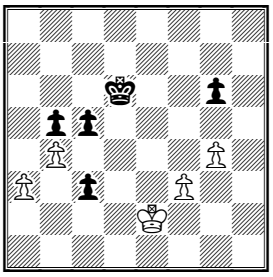
He quotes Steinitz's biographer Ludwig Bachmann's remarks on Steinitz's next move, 1...d4. "Steinitz conducts this difficult ending to victory with admirable correctness and a nice judgement of position. A game equally remarkable for the excellent attack of the victor and the obstinate defence of the loser."

In high dudgeon, Lasker declaims "Nothing of all that is true. If Bird had played rightly he would easily have drawn ... It is no exaggeration to say that the literature of chess abounds with faults of the above description." Tough talk! Yes, Bird indeed could have drawn after 1...d4 (better 1...♔e5), but Lasker

botches his supporting analysis at least as badly as Bachmann did. After the further text moves 1...d4 2.♘d5+ ♔e5 3.♘×f6 d×c3,

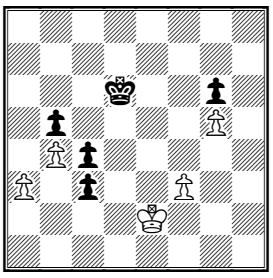


Lasker comments "[White] should now not have played 4.♔e3 but 4.♘d7+ ♔d6 58.♘×c5 b×c5 59.♔e2,"

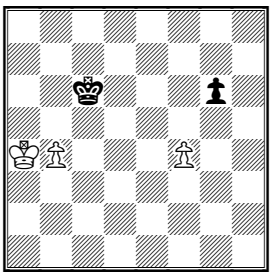


"Whereupon 6...c4 would actually lose." Yes, it would, but Bachmann may enjoy some posthumous *Schadenfreude* at the fact that Lasker's continuation also fails, and "abounds with faults of the above description"! After 6...c4, Lasker's line (with our punctuation) runs 7.♔d1**?** ♔e5**??** 61.♔c2**?** ♔f4**??** 62.♔×c3 ♔×f3 63.a4. To tackle each error in turn:

After 6...c4, Lasker's 7.♔d1? only draws. Correct is 7.g5!,

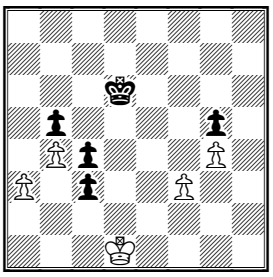


when a likely continuation is 7...♔e5 8.♔d1! ♔f4 9.♔c2 ♔×g5 10.♔×c3 ♔f4 11.a4 b×a4 12.♔×c4 a3 13.♔b3 a2 14.♔×a2 ♔e5 15.♔a3 ♔d5 16.f4 ♔c6 17.♔a4

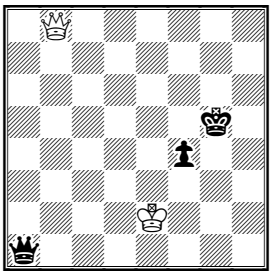


17...♔b6 (if 17...♔b7 18.♔b5+−) 18.b5+− . Stockfish says White mates in at most 14 from this point.

Returning to the note line, after 7.♔d1? Black need not roll over with Lasker's 7...♔e5??. Instead he can take advantage of White's failure to play 7.g5 by playing it himself, 7...g5!:

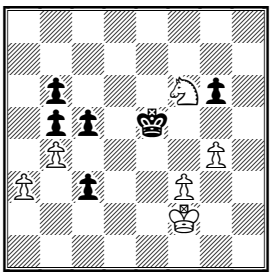


Stockfish now sees no way for White to win. A sample line is 8.♔c2 ♔e5 9.♔×c3 ♔d5 10.♔c2 ♔d4 11.♔d2 c3+ 12.♔c2 ♔c4 13.f4 g×f4 14.g5 ♔d5 15.♔×c3 ♔e5 16.♔d3 ♔f5 17.♔e2 ♔×g5 18.a4 b×a4 19.b5 a3 20.b6 a2 21.b7 a1♕ 22.b8♕,

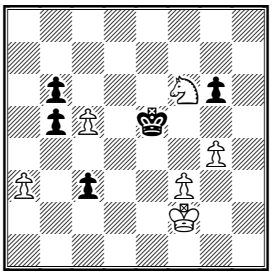


with a book draw, confirmed by Nalimov. The same consideration applies at move eight: if White plays 8.g5 he wins; if he does not and Black plays 8...g5, it's a draw. So, while Lasker was busy throwing stones at Bachmann, he was also building himself an analytical glass house.

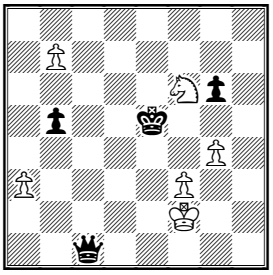
Going back a few moves, to the position after 3...d×c3,



White had, besides 4.♘d7+, another way to draw, which we give here not as the correction of a howler but just because it's interesting in its own right. At first glance 4.b×c5! looks suicidal,

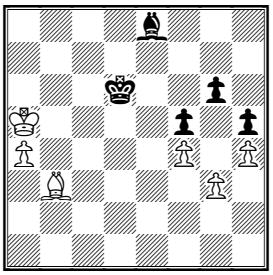


since it allows Black to queen his c-pawn with a tempo to spare, but after 4...c2 (if 4...♔×f6 5.c×b6 c2 6.b7 both sides queen and it's a draw) 5.c×b6 c1♕ 6.b7,

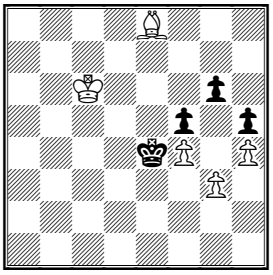


and now if 6...♕c7?? 7.b8♕! ♕×b8 8.♘d7+ +− . Black has nothing better than 6...♔×f6 7.b8♕ again reaching a drawn queen ending.

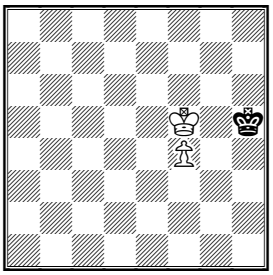
99. In *STMBG*'s Game 135, Tartakower-Keres, Warsaw Olympiad 1935, at White's 52nd move,



Tartakower explains why he played 52.♔b4 rather than 52.♔b6, giving the continuation 52...♗×a4 53.♗×a4 ♔d5 54.♗e8 ♔e4 55.♗×g6 ♔f3 56.♗×f5 ♔g3 57.♗g6 ♔×f4 "and draws." However, White can win if at move 55 he plays 55.♔c6!:

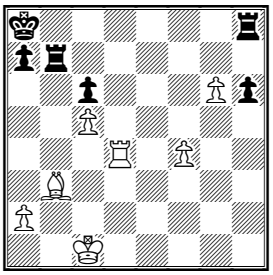


Equally good are 55.♔c7 and 55.♔c5. The idea is for White to end up with an f-pawn rather than an h-pawn after all the pawn-gobbling is over, *e.g.* 55...♔f3 56.♔d6 ♔×g3 57.♔e5 ♔×h4 58.♗×g6 ♔g4 59.♗×h5+ ♔×h5 60.♔×f5,

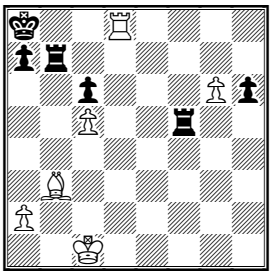


with an easy win. Komodo immediately announces mate in at most 18 moves once 55.♔c5/c6/c7 is played. Tartakower's 52.♔b4 was also good enough to win, but did not particularly deserve the exclam he gave it, and it could have prolonged the game had Keres been stubborn.

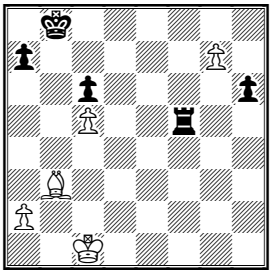
100. Alekhine was an excellent endgame player, but he was not always right. A case in point is Alekhine-Flohr, Nottingham 1936, which reached this position after 50.g5-g6:



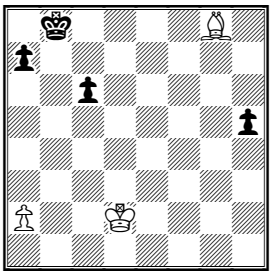
Black played 50...♖g8 and resigned seven moves later. In the tournament book, AA himself said that in the event of 50...♖f8, he intended 51.f5 ♖×f5 52.♖d8+



"followed by the exchange of rooks and by g6-g7." This actually would have thrown away the win. Following his recommended course, 52...♖b8 53.♖×b8+ ♔×b8 54.g7, we reach this position,

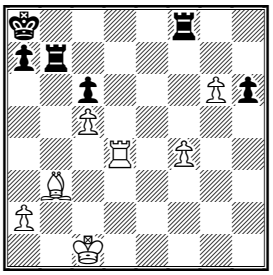


where after 54...♖×c5+ 55.♔d2 ♖g5 56.g8♕+ ♖×g8 57.♗×g8 h5,



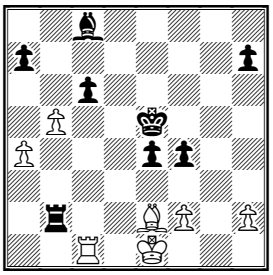
though White is up a bishop for two pawns, soon to be just one after the h-pawn goes, he cannot win. Both Stockfish and Komodo rate this position at about +1.15 to +1.35 as deep as 40 or 50 ply. In other words White's material advantage is not enough to win, because he can never force promotion of his one remaining pawn.

Instead, after 50...♖f8,

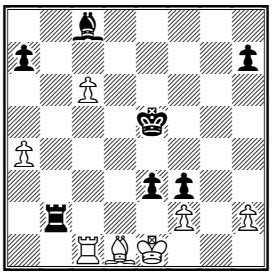


rather than Alekhine's line, White has several ways to win, of which probably the clearest is 51.♗c2! h5 52.f5 ♖e7 53.♔d2 ♖c7 54.♖d6 h4 55.f6 h3 56.♗e4 ♔b7 57.g7 ♖g8 58.♖×c6! ♖f7 (if 58...♖×c6?? 59.f7) 59.♔d3 etc. (+14.76 per Stockfish).

101. Another Alekhine example is from Game 60 of *AAMBG*, Yates-Alekhine, The Hague 1921. The note at move 36 overlooks a saving resource.

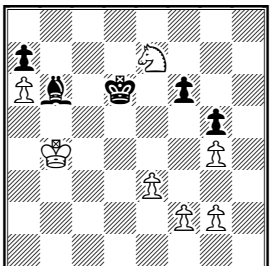


After 36.b×c6 (instead of the text 36.♖×c6) 36...f3 37.♗d1 e3,

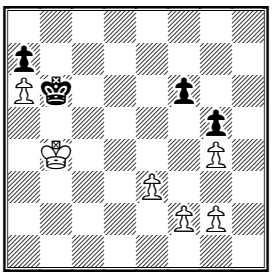


the note's howler 38.♗×f3?? allows mate in at most 12. But after 38.♖c2! there is no way Black can win, *e.g.* 38...♖b1 39.f×e3 ♗g4 40.♖f2=, or 38...♖×c2 39.♗×c2 e×f2+ (not 39...e2? 40.♗×h7+−) 40.♔×f2 h6=.

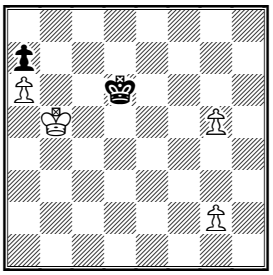
102. Yet another Alekhine endgame howler is found in Game 74 of *NY1924*, Maróczy-Ed. Lasker. At move 69,



where White played 69.♘g8, AA incomprehensibly claims that "After 69.♘c8+ and 70.♘×b6, the pawn ending would result in a draw." This is grossly and obviously wrong. While 69.♘g8 is good enough to win, 69.♘c8+! is by far the strongest move, and after 69....♔c6 70.♘×b6 ♔×b6 (70...a×b6 is worse),

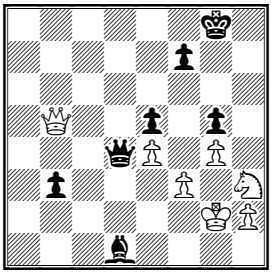


of White's nine possible moves, five win easily: 71.♔c4 or any pawn move, for example 71.♔c4 ♔×a6 72.♔c5 ♔b7 73.♔b5 ♔b8 74.♔a6 ♔a8 75.f4, or 71.f4 g×f4 72.e×f4 ♔c6 73.g5 f×g5 74.f×g5 ♔c6 75.♔b5 etc.,

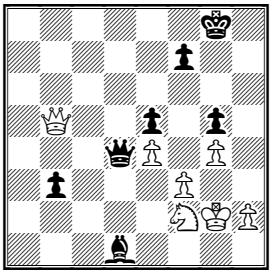


an elementary ending even a novice could win.

103. Game 15 of *MCC*, Kline-Capablanca, New York 1913, reveals an amazing endgame drawing resource neither player ever dreamed existed. At move 44, Capablanca played 44...b4-b3?:



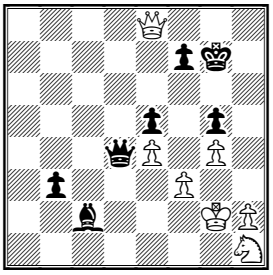
not realizing that this allowed White to draw with the seemingly innocuous 45.♘f2!!:



This threatens 46.♘×d1 ♕×d1 47.♕e8+ ♔g7 (or 47...♔h7 48.♕×f7+) 48.♕×e5+ etc., drawing. Surprisingly, Black has no way to avoid a draw, *viz.*:

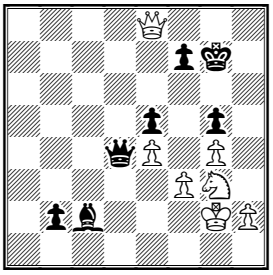
(A) 45...♕d2 46.♕e8+ etc. as described above;

(B) 45...♗c2 46.♕e8+ ♔g7 47.♘h1!



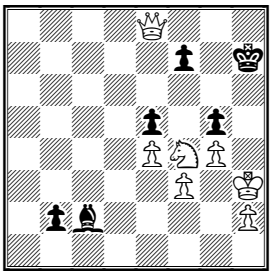
and now:

(B1) Amazingly 47...b2?? actually *loses* to 48.♘g3!:



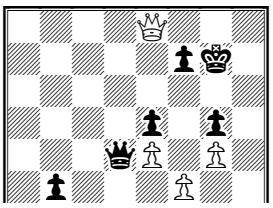
This threatens 49.♘h5+ ♔g6 (or 49...♔h7 50.♕×f7+) 50.♕g8+ ♔h6 51.♕g7#. If Black plays:

(B1a) 48...b1♕?? 49.♘h5+ and mate as above.
(B1b) 48...♕c4 or 48...♕a7 (to defend the f-pawn), then comes 49.♕×e5+ ♔g6 50.♕×b2 (+3.53);
(B1c) 48...♕d2+ 49.♔h3 ♕f4 (anything else allows mate in at most five) 50.♘h5+ ♔h7 51.♘×f4



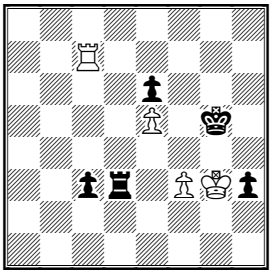
51...♗b3 (if 51...b1♕ 52.♕×f7+) 52.♘d5 ♗×d5 53.♕b8+−.

(B2) So, it turns out the black queen is actually overburdened, needing to defend the e-pawn and keep the knight from getting to g3.

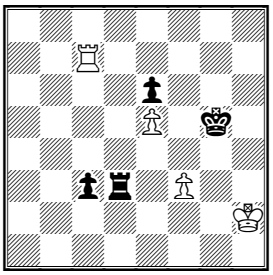


It cannot do both, so Black has nothing better than forcing repetition by, say, 47...♕d2+ 48.♘f2 ♕d4 49.♘h1 ♕d2+ etc. One wonders if Kline ever knew what an opportunity he had missed.

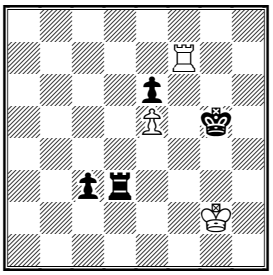
104. Annotating Euwe-Reshevsky, Stockholm Olympiad 1937 in *HM1948*,



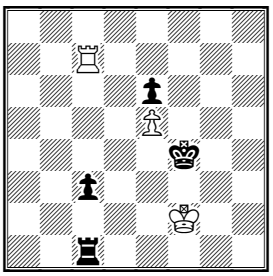
Euwe faults Reshevsky's 41...h2, claiming it throws away Black's winning chances, when in fact it is perfectly fine (-7.10). The game ended in a draw because of later mistakes: 41...h2 42.♔×h2



42...♖×f3?! (winning is 42...♔f4! 43.♖f7+ ♔×e5 etc.) 43.♔g2 ♖d3 44.♖f7

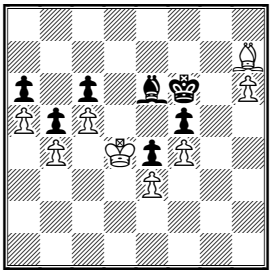


44...c2? This is what really lets the win slip. Instead 44...♖d1! 45.♖c7 ♖c1 46.♔f2 ♔f4:



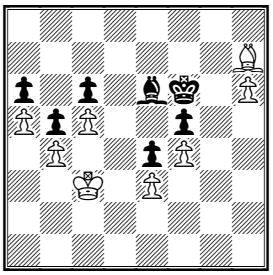
And now:
(a) 47.♔e2 ♔×e5 etc. (-6.36);
(b) 47.♖c5 c2 48.♔e2 ♖h1 49.♔d2 (or 49.♖×c2 ♖h2+) 49...c1♕+ 50.♖×c1 ♖×c1 51.♔×c1 ♔×e5−+.

105. An interesting endgame misevaluation is seen in Game 178 of *STMBG*, Tartakower-Pirc, Saltsjöbaden Interzonal 1948. A note at White's 34th move had called 34.♔d4-c3 "a cunning gain of a tempo," and six moves later, after 40.♔c3-d4,

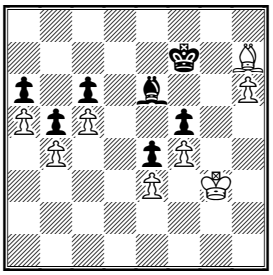


Tartakower says "The point of White's 34th move can now be understood, for if the White king [had been] already on d4, then 40.♔c3 ♔f7 41.♔d4 ♔f6 etc. would lead only to a draw." Play continued 40...♗d7 41.♗g8 and Black resigned, for if 41...♗e6 42.♗×e6 ♔×e6 h7+−, or if 41...♗e8 42.h7 ♔g7 43.♔e5 and the White king breaks through.

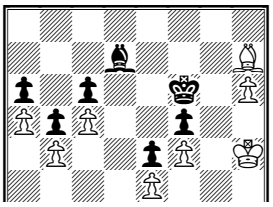
However, Tartakower's drawing line is mistaken. It assumes that e5 is White's only entree into Black's position, but it is not. Imagine, as Tartakower's note does, that it White's move in the above position, and he has been forced to play 40.♔c3:



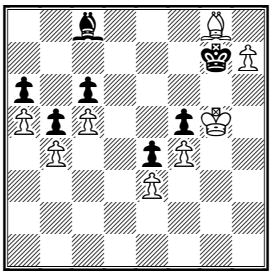
Even with this temporary retreat, Black can do nothing but shuffle his king on the back ranks or have his bishop roam through empty air, but White, meanwhile, can cheerfully march over to the kingside and win, *viz.* 40.♔c3 ♔f7 41.♔c2 ♗c8 42.♔d2 ♗d7 43.♔e2 ♗e6 44.♔f1 ♗c8 45.♔g2 ♗e6 46.♔g3



46...♗d7 (or 46...♔f6 47.♔h4 ♗f7 [if 47...♗d7 48.♗g8+−] 48.♗×f5+−) 47.♔h4 ♔f6

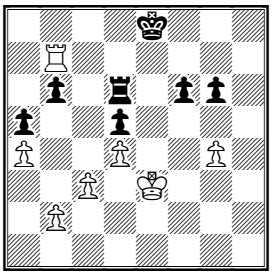


48.♗g8 ♔g6 49.h7 ♔g7 50.♔g5 ♗c8

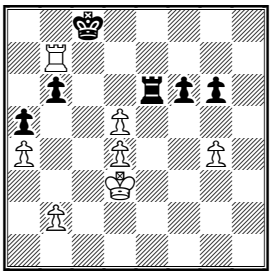


51.♗f7! ♔×h7 (or 51...♗d7 52.♗g6+−) 42.♔f6 and wins.

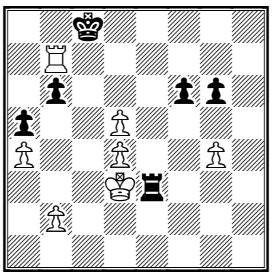
106. Reuben Fine, the man who wrote one of the first endgame "bibles," *Basic Chess Endings*, errs badly annotating the ending of Botvinnik-Boleslavsky, USSR Absolute Championship 1941 (Game 17 in *CMO*) — not just once but many times. At Black's 38th move,



he neglects to point out that Boleslavsky's 38...g5? was a mistake, then he botches analysis of the correct move, 38...♖e6+, giving 39...♔d8 40.c4 ♔c8 41.c×d5 "!":



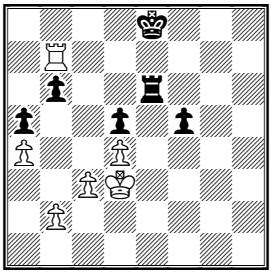
apparently expecting 41...♖d6? 42.♖f7+− or even 41...♔×b7?? 42.d×e6+− . But he failed to check for check: 41...♖e3+!:



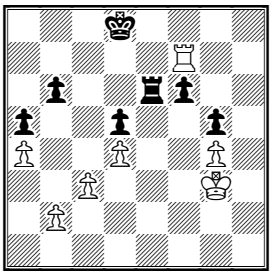
42.♔×d3 (or 42.♔d2 ♔×b7 43.♔×d3 makes little difference) 42...♔×b7 and White can never get

anywhere, *e.g.* 43.♔f4 ♔c7 44.♔e3 ♔d6 45.♔e4 ♔d7 46.♔f4 ♔d6 etc. White can even lose if he's not careful, *viz.* 43.d6 ♔c6 44.♔e4?? ♔×d6 45.♔e3 ♔d5 46.♔d3 f5−+.

Correct after 38...♖e6+ 39.♔d3 is not Fine's 39...♔c8?! but 39...f5! 40.g×f5 g×f5,

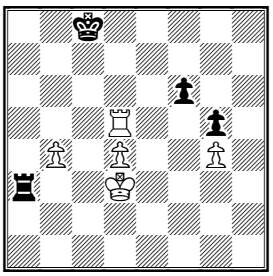


which Stockfish pegs at only +0.34 at 35 ply. And if White's king goes the other way, 39.♖e6+ 39.♔f4 ♔d8 40.♖g7 ♖e4+ 41.♔g3 g5 42.♖f7 ♖e6,



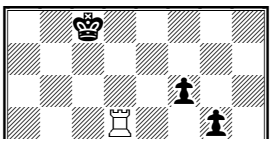
it's even closer, 0.00.

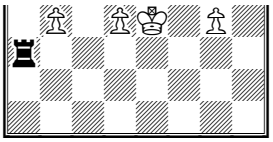
At move 45, where Black played 45...♖a6-a1, Fine gives a note that, besides this section, could have gone under Long/Wrong or even Charlie Fox. "The problem is far more complicated after 45...♖a3+; in fact, White wins by a hair." The problem is indeed more complicated than Fine realized, and White does not win in the lines he gives. We give his note verbatim with our punctuation in red, starting after 45...♖a3+:



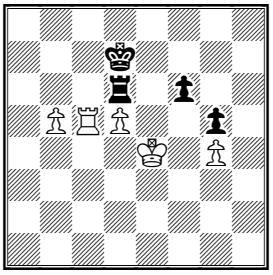
46.♔c4**?!** ♖g3 47.♖f5 ♖×g4 48.♖×f6 ♖g1 49.♖g6 g4 50.♔c5 g3 51.♔c6 ♖c1+ 52.♔b6 ♖g1 (52...♖c4 53.♖g8+! (s/b **?**) ♔d7 54.b5 etc.) 53.b5**?** g2**??** 54.♖c6+**?** ♔d7 55.♖c2 ♔d6 56.♖a2 ♔d5 57.♔a6 ♔×d4**??** 58.b6 ♔e3 59.b7 "and the extra tempo is sufficient." We'll take each error in turn.

Stockfish (and Botvinnik, in volume 1 of *Botvinnik's Best Games*) much prefers 46.♔e4!,

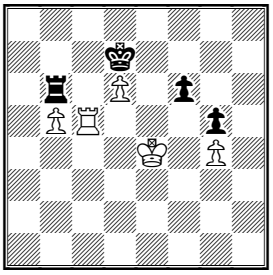




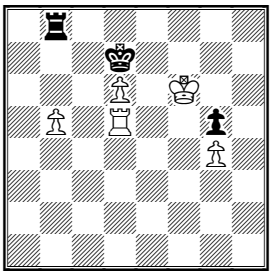
and sees White's winning method proceeding along the lines of 46...♖a6 47.♔f5 ♖b6 48.b5 ♔c7 49.♖c5+ ♔d7 50.d5 ♖d6 51.♔e4!



51...♖b6 (if 51...♔e7 52.♖c7+ ♔e8 53.♖c6 +−) 52.d6!

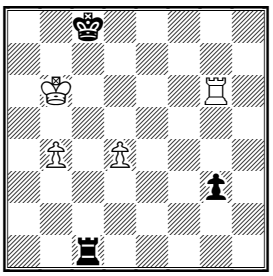


52...♔e6 (if 52...♖×d6?? 53.♖d5, or 52...♔×d6?? 53.♖c6+) 53.♖d5 ♔d7 54.♔f5 ♖b8 55.♔×f6

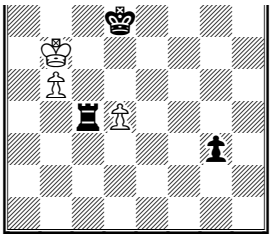


and White is obviously winning.

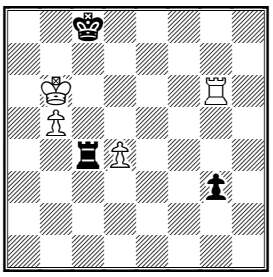
At move 52 for Black, the note line reaches this position:



Where Fine gives the sub-variation "52...♖c4 53.♖g8+! ♔d7 54.b5 etc.,"

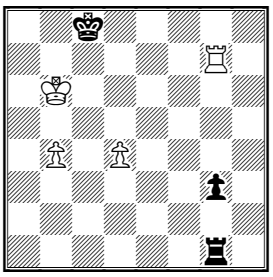


as if it's obvious that White wins. Actually it is, except in one line, 54...♖c3!!, when even as far out as 35 ply Stockfish sees nothing at all close to win for White (+0.08). What does win for White in this sub-variation is an earlier deviation: not the wrongly exclammed 53.♖g8+?, but 53.b5!:



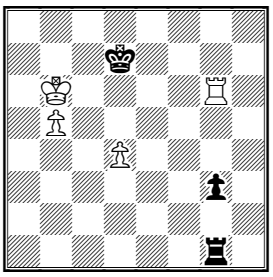
viz. 53...♖c3 54.♖g7 ♖d3 55.d5! ♖×d5 56.♖×g3 with the kind of win Fine probably demonstrated in *Basic Chess Endings*.

Returning to the note's main line, the next mistake is 53.b5?, which allows Black to draw. Correct instead is 53.♖g7!,



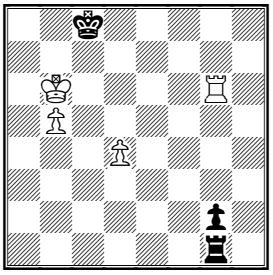
winning easily, *e.g.* 53...♖b1 54.b5 ♖b3 55.d5 ♖c3 56.d6 etc. (+14.83).

The problem with 53.b5 becomes apparent if, instead of 53...g2??, Black plays 53...♔d7!,

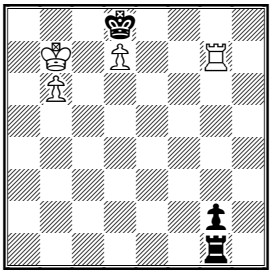


e.g. 54.♔b7 ♔e7 55.♔c6 (or 55.b6 ♔f7 56.♖c6 ♖f1 57.♖c2 ♖f2) 55...g2, threatening 56...♖c1+ and 57...g1♕, and whether the white king goes to the b- or the d-file, he can make no progress.

Even after having Black play the egregious 53...g2??,

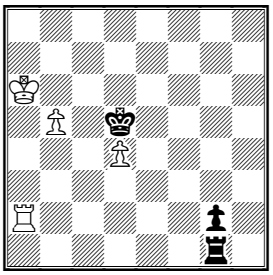


he does not show the right way for White to exploit it, which is not 54.♖c6+?, but either 54.♖g7! or 54.d5!. One illustrative line shows the winning method in either case: 54.d5 ♔d7 55.d6 ♔c8 56.♖g7 ♔d8 57.♔b7 ♔e8 58.d7+ ♔d8 59.b6,

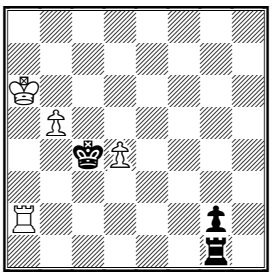


and Black must move his rook and after, say, 59...♖b1 60.♖×g2 ♔×d7 we have a Lucena position that a GM can win in his sleep.

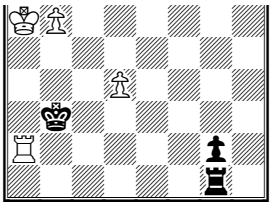
But, surprisingly, 54.♖c6+? lets Black off the hook. Continuing with Fine's line, after 54...♔d7 55.♖c2 ♔d6 56.♖a2 ♔d5 57.♔a6, we reach a position where,



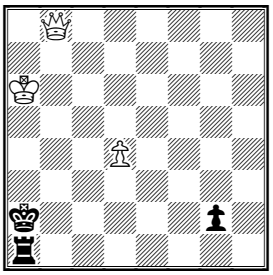
as back at move 54, Black has one saving move. It is not Fine's 57...♔×d4??, but 57...♔c4!!:



Amazingly, this move, which seems to let White's passed pawns advance freely, is the key to salvation, because of a neat tactical finesse, which we see in the continuation 58.b6 ♔b3,

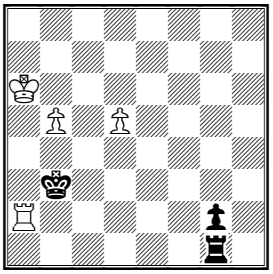


and now if 59.♖e2?? ♖a1+ 60.♔b7 g1♕−+, while if 59.b7 ♔×a2 60.b8♕ ♖a1!,



and it's a draw after 61.♕g8+ (or 61.♕h2 ♔b3+) 61...♔b2+ 62.♔b6 g1♕ 63.♕×g1 ♖×g1 64.d5. If instead 59.♖a5, to prevent ...♖a1+, then 59...♔c4 60.♖a2 ♔b3 etc. and a draw by repetition.

And if instead of 58.b6 White tries 58.d5, then after 58...♔b3 he's even worse off,



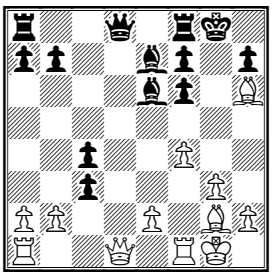
having to play immediately 59.♖×g2 ♖×g2=, as any other move loses, *e.g.* 59.♖a5?? ♖h1 and 60...g1♕−+.

This all seems to bear out the old adage "All rook endings are drawn!"

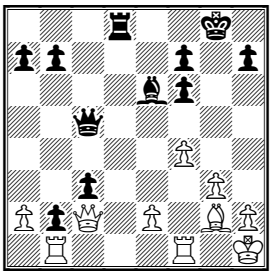
Long Analysis, Wrong Analysis:

With the advent of strong computer programs that keep dozens of long variations stored in their perfect memories, it became possible to analyze at length without fear of serious error. But the old GMs were on their own.

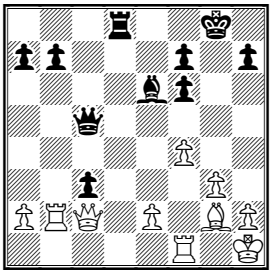
107. In Game 44 of *StP1909*, Rubinstein-Perlis, Lasker gives a long note at White's 15th move,



to explain why the text move 15.b×c3 is better than 15.♗×f8. It is, but his supporting analysis is seriously flawed. After 15.♗×f8 c×b2 16.♗×e7 ♕×e7 17.♖b1 c3 18.♕c2 ♕c5+?! (better 18...♕b4) 19.♔h1 ♖d8,

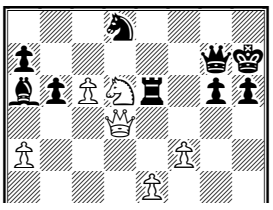


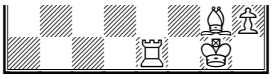
Lasker incomprehensibly gives 20.♖bd1?? ♖×d1 21.♖×d1 ♗×a2−+ (-4.87). Instead, White can save himself with 20.♖×b2!



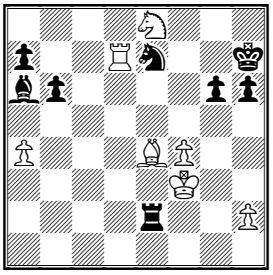
20...♖d2 (of course not 20...c×b2?? 21.♕×c5) 21.♕×d2 c×d2 22.♖×d2=.

108. In *AAMBG*, far down in a note variation in Game 86, Alekhine-Thomas, Carlsbad 1923, Alekhine is bitten by the long/wrong bug. At this point in the game,

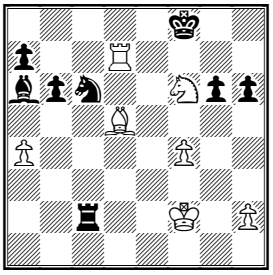




AA reports he spent more than half an hour in detailed analysis, primarily of the line "33...♕c3! 34.♖d1! ♖×e3! 35.♕d2! ♕×d2 36.♖×d2 ♖c3 37.♘e4! ♖c1+ 38.♔f2 ♘×c6 39.♖d7+ ♔g8! 40.♘f6+ ♔f8 41.♗d5 ♘e7 42.♖d8+ ♔g7 43.♘e8+ ♔h7 44.♖d7 ♖c2+ 45.♖f3 ♖e2 46.♗e4,

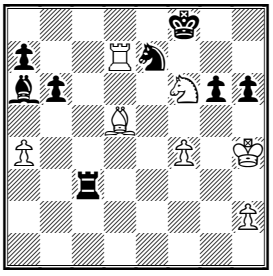


"and White wins a piece and the game." True enough, in that position. But, leaving aside for the moment AA's punctuation, some of which is questionable (for example 35.h3! is preferable to 35.♕d2?!; see below), that position cannot be forced. Back a few moves, if Black does not play AA's 41...♘c6e7??, but first gives the *Zwischenschach* 41...♖c1-c2+!,



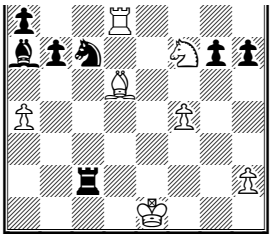
he gets out of trouble (Always check for check!). There are two main branches:

(a) Attempting to escape kingside by 42.♔g3 or ♔f3 leads to a forced draw, *viz.* 42.♔g3 ♖c3+ 43.♔h4 ♘e7! (threatening 44...♘f5+ 45.♔g4 ♗e2+ and Black wins):

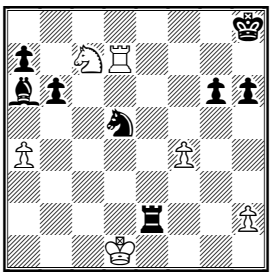


White must play carefully now to draw, *e.g.*
(a1) not 44.♗e4?? ♗c8 45.♖d8+ ♔f7 46.♘g4 ♗×g4 47.♔×g4 ♖c4−+;
(a2) nor 44.f5? g5+ 45.♔h5 ♖h3+ 46.♔g4 ♖h4+ 47.♔f3 ♖f4+ 48.♔e3 ♘×f5+∓, but:
(a3) 44.♗e6 ♗c8 45.♘h7+ ♔e8 46.♘f6+ ♔f8 47.♘h7+ etc., or
(a4) 44.♖d8+ ♔g7 45.♘e8+ ♔h7 46.♘f6+ etc., with perpetual check in either case.

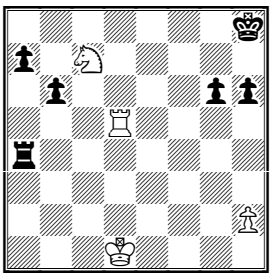
(b) White can avoid an immediately forced draw by heading in the other direction with 42.♔e1,



but that accomplishes little more after 42...♘e7! (preventing the threatened 43.♖f7#) 43.♖d8+ (anything else leads to a draw or advantage for Black) 43...♔g7 44.♘e8+ ♔h7 45.♖d7 ♖e2+ 46.♔d1 ♔h8 47.♘c7 ♘×d5,

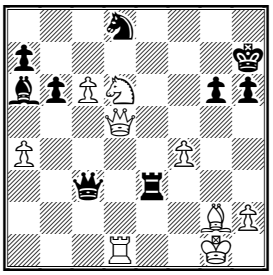


and if
(b1) 48.♘×d5 ♖e6=, or
(b2) 48.♖×d5 Black still draws, despite losing a piece, with 48...♖f2 49.♘×a6 ♖×f4 50.♘c7 ♖×a4,

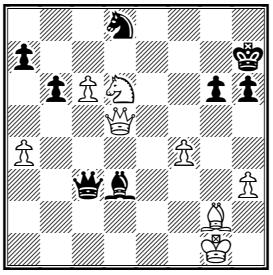


when White simply does not have enough pawns left to win.

Does this mean that Alekhine could not have won against 33...♕c3, the move he worried most about, analyzing at the board for more than half an hour? No! The win was still there, after 33...♕c3 34.♖d1 ♖×e3,

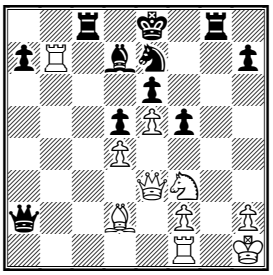


but now, instead of the erroneously exclammed 35.♕d2, White must play 35.h3!, a quietly lethal dual-purpose move, giving his king *Luft* and threatening 36.♘e4 and 37.♕d7+. Then 35...♖e1+ fails to 36.♖×e1 ♕×e1+ 37.♔h2. About the only other way to avoid serious damage, according to Komodo, is 37...♖d3 38.♖×d3 ♗×d3,

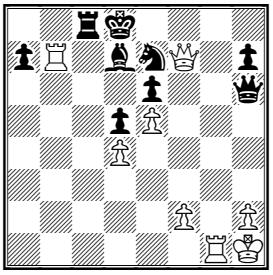


but in that case White can:
(a) liquidate to a winning minor piece endgame by 37.♕e5 ♕×e5 38.f×e5 ♘e6 39.♗f1 ♗c2 40.♗c4 ♗×a4 (or 40...♘c7 41.♘b5) 41.♗×e6 (+1.75), or
(b) win a piece for two pawns with 37.c7 ♕×c7 38.♕×d3 ♕c1+ 39.♔h2 ♕×f4+ 40.♕g3 (+1.64).

109. Another long/wrong instance in *AAMBG* is Game 100, Muffang-Alekhine, match, 1923. At Black's 23rd move,

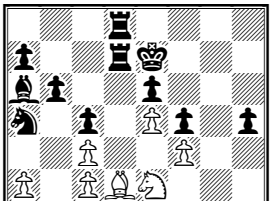


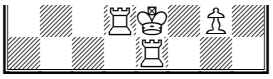
the note variation (b), 23...f4 24.♕×f4 ♖f8 25.♕e3 ♖×f3 26.♕×f3 ♕×d2 27.♕h5+ ♔d8 28.♕f7 ♕h6 29.♖g1, concludes that "White should win."



Yet in fact Black draws with 29...♖c1!, when the best White can do is accept immediate repetition by 30.♖×c1 ♕×c1+ 31.♔g2 ♕g5+ etc., or simplify to an equal position with 30.♕f6 ♖×g1+ 30.♔×g1 ♕×f6 31.e×f6 ♘g6 32.♖b8+ ♗c8. Black is fine on other attempts, *e.g.* 30.♖×a7 ♖×g1+ 31.♔×g1 ♕g6+ 32.♕×g6 h×g6 (about -0.80 per both Komodo and Stockfish).

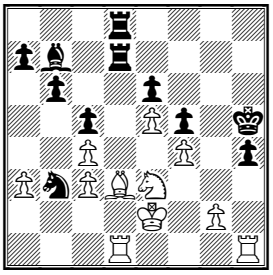
110. Euwe, analyzing Botvinnik-Reshevsky, The Hague-Moscow 1948, round 14, in *HM1948*, gives a long variation at move 34,



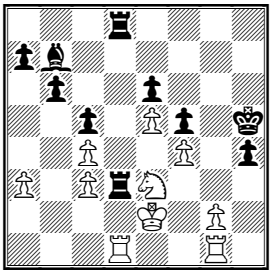


where White played 34.♖ed1. Euwe writes “The squeeze is complete. Better, although also insufficient, was 34.♖dd1 ♘b3 35.♖h1 ♔f7 36.♖hg1 (36.♖×h5 ♖×d3!) 36...♗b7 37.♖h1 ♔g6 38.♖hg1 h4 39.♖h1 ♔h5 40.♖hg1 ♘c1+ 41.♖×c1 ♖×d3 42.♖cd1 ♗e4!, and wins.”

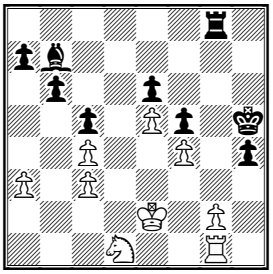
There are enough mistakes on both white and black moves that we might have included the whole note in the Charlie Fox section, but in our mercy we will just focus on the last moves as an illustration of the Long/Wrong effect. At move 40,



40.♖hg1?? is dreadful; instead 40.♗c2! ends Black’s pressure on the d-file and leads to a probable draw. Instead, after 40.♖hg1?? ♘c1+ 41.♖×c1 ♖×d3 42.♖cd1,



the note’s last move, 42...♗e4?!, is its final mistake, leading only to a small advantage and a difficult endgame (-0.75). Instead Black has the quickly decisive 42...♖×d1 43.♘×d1 (if 43.♖×d1 ♖×d1 followed by 44...♗×g2! no matter how White recaptures on d1) 43...♖g8!

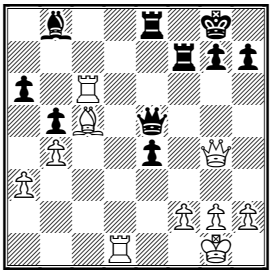


and whether White tries 44.♔f1 ♖f4 (-5.41) or 44.♘e3 h3! (-5.68) his position falls apart.

Lost In The Complications:

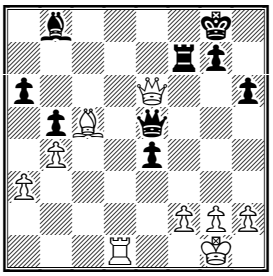
It is surprising how often great players such as Lasker and Alekhine, who were known for their over-the-board calculating ability, go astray when analyzing complex positions at leisure. To show all we've found would swell the size of this work with a plethora of labyrinthine possibilities, so we present just a few of the less complex instances here. (See the Charlie Fox section below for others.)

111. In *StP1909* Lasker frequently mishandles tactical complications. A relatively simple example is Game 150, Salwe-Forgács. At move 26,



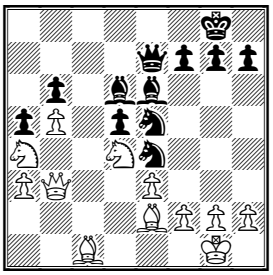
Salwe's text move 26.♖e6? does not deserve the lavish praise Lasker gives it ("an elegant move, which decides the game at once"). Correct instead was 26.♖c8! h6 27.g3 ♔h7 28.♖×e8 ♕×e8 29.♖e1 and White wins the e-pawn (+1.46).

The inelegance and ineffectiveness of 26.♖e6? would have been apparent if, instead of 26...♕×h2+??, Black had simply played 26...♖×e6! 27.♕×e6 h6!,



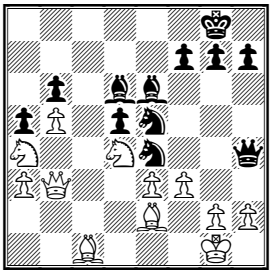
and after either 28.♕×e5 ♗×e5, or 28.♕c8+ ♔h7 29.g3 ♗a7 30.♗×a7 ♖×a7, White's advantage is negligible (+0.23). And of course not 28.♖d8+ ♔h7 29.♕×f7?? ♕a1+ and mate next. It is hard to understand how Lasker missed this simple answer to Black's problems.

112. Capablanca could also lose his way in tactically charged variations. At this point in Game 12 of *MCC*, Capablanca-Janowski, San Sebastian 1911,

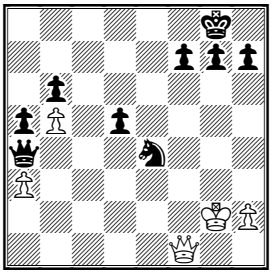


where Capablanca played 23.♗b2, he commented “Perhaps either 23.f3 or 23.♘×e6 f×e6 24.f3 would have held the game.” In fact, either variation is disastrous for White, viz.:

(a) 23.f3 ♕h4 (also good is 23...♘g4; see variation b):

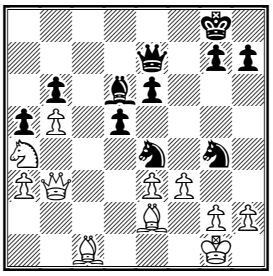


This threatens 24...♕f2+ 25.♔h1 ♕e1+ 26.♗f1 ♕×f1#, and therefore forces 24.g3 ♘×g3! 25.♕c2 ♗h3 26.f4 ♘e4 27.♗f1 ♕e1 28.♕e2 ♕×c1 29.f×e5 ♗×e5 30.♘b3 ♕b1 31.♘d4 ♗×d4 32.e×d4 ♕a1 33.♕d3 ♗×f1 34.♕×f1 ♕×d4+ 35.♔g1 ♕×a4,



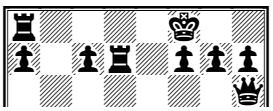
and Black wins easily (-10.56).

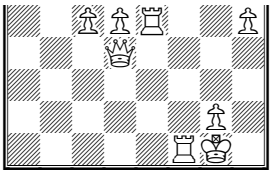
(b) 23.♘×e6 f×e6 24.f3 ♘g4!:



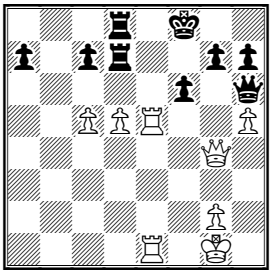
(b1) 25.f×g4 ♕h4 26.g3 ♗×g3! and mate very soon;
(b2) 25.f×e4 ♕h4 26.h3 ♕e1+ etc.;
(b3) 25.g3 (the only move that does not allow mate in single digits) 25...♗×g3 26.h×g3 ♕c7 27.f4 ♕×c1+ and mate in at most seven. In *MGP1* Kasparov quotes Capablanca’s note but without comment, seemingly endorsing it by his silence.

113. Few players were ever better at handling complications than Alexander Alekhine, yet on occasion even he got lost. A relatively short example is found in *NY1924*, the game Tartakower-Alekhine, in a note at White’s 29th move.

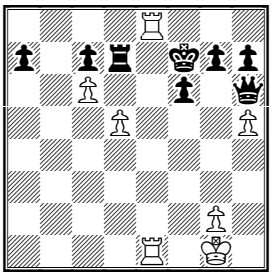




Here Tartakower played 29.♕e4, which was best and should have won (see the Asleep at the Wheel section for that). Of the main alternative Alekhine wrote dismissively "After 29.♕g4 (suggested as a winning line by some critics) Black could have saved himself more easily, for instance 29...♖ad8 30.♖fe1 f6 31.c6 f×e5! 32.c×d7 ♕b6+! 33.♔h1 ♕f6." We might well have placed this note in the Charlie Fox section, as from Black's 29th through his 31st three of the four moves — 29...♖ad8?? (correct is 29...♖dd8), 30...f6??, and 31.c6? — are serious mistakes, but we'll consider just the last one here, in the position after 30...f6:

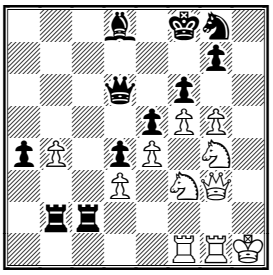


Rather than Alekhine's 31.c6?, which only draws, White has a forced win with 31.♕×d7! ♖×d7 32.♖e8+ ♔f7 33.c6!,



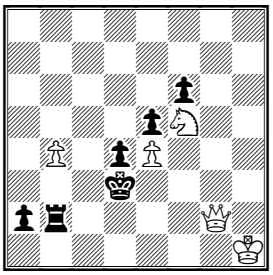
when if 33...♖d6 ♖1e7#. Black has nothing better than 33...♕×h5 34.c×d7 ♕×d5 35.d8♕ ♕×d8 35.♖×d8, so he might as well resign. One wonders if Alekhine's tendency to make himself look good was at work here, consciously or subliminally.

114. In his famous book *Think Like a Grandmaster* (1971), Soviet GM Alexander Kotov examined at length a position from the fourth game of the 1893 Chigorin-Tarrasch match, a game of great complexity that has challenged many analysts over the years. Starting here, after 47...♕a6-d6,



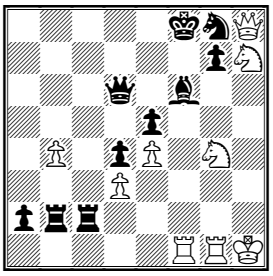
where Chigorin played 48.g×f6 and lost, Kotov gives the 24-move variation 48.♕h3 a3 49.♕h8 f×g5

50.f6 ♗×f6 51.♘×g5 a2 52.♘h7+ ♔f7?? 53.♘h×f6?! ♘×f6 54.♘h6+ ♔e6 55.♖×f6+ g×f6 56.♕g8+ ♔d7 57.♖g7+ ♕e7 58.♕d5+ ♔c8 59.♕a8+ ♔d7 60.♕b7+ ♖c7 61.♖×e7+?! ♔×e7 62.♕×c7+ ♔e6 63.♕c8+ ♔e7 64.♘f5+ ♔f7 65.♕d7+ ♔g6 66.♕g7+ ♔h5 67.♕h6+ ♔g4 68.♕h4+ ♔f3 69.♕g3+ ♔e2 70.♕g2+ ♔×d3

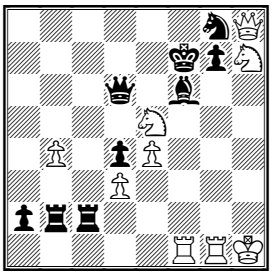


71.♕×b2 and wins. Our punctuation in red indicates where Komodo found a blunder or an inferior move. We will examine each of them.

At move 52,

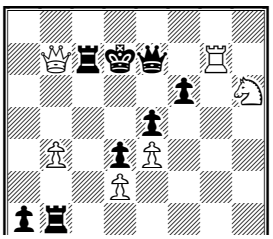


52...♔f7?? makes things easy for White. Relatively best but still by no means any salvation is 52...♔e7 53.♘h×f6 g×f6 54.♕g7+ ♔d8 55.♕×g8+ ♔c7 56.♖×f6 etc. (+4.76). After 52...♔f7?? the remaining nineteen moves of Kotov's analysis become superfluous, as rather than 53.♘h×f6?!, White can wrap things up with 53.♘×e5+!,



which forces mate quickly, *e.g.* 53...♕×e5 (other moves are no better) 54.♖×g7+ ♔e6 55.♕×g8+ ♔d6 56.♖×f6+ ♕×f6 57.♕d5#.

Finally, after 60...♖c7,



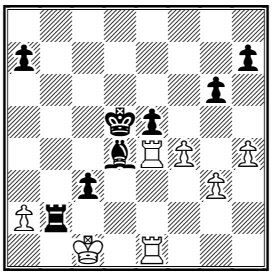
while Kotov's 61.♖×e7+?! does eventually win, much more efficient is 61.♕d5+ ♔e8 62.♖g8+ ♕f8 63.♕e6+ ♖e7 64.♕c8#.

In fairness to Kotov, we should note that after his analysis he said "After further examination of the position I found a quicker win for White," though he does not give it in the book. Also his goal in presenting his analysis was not so much to find the ultimate truth of the position, as to illustrate for the student an analytical exercise of the kind he used in training himself to reach GM strength. So our goal here was not to say "Aha! Howler!", but to find the objective truth of this famous position.

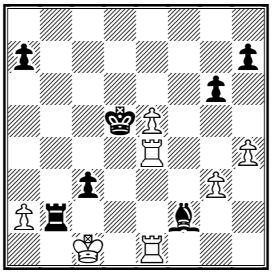
Charlie Fox:

We have saved the worst for last. These annotations are not just wrong, but repeatedly, multiply, serially wrong, one mistake following another like a parade of blind cripples, or a veritable cluster of ... um ... follies.

115. In *Z9153MN*, Najdorf appends a note to White's 45th move in Game 152, Keres-Kotov, in which three of the six moves are blunders. Here,

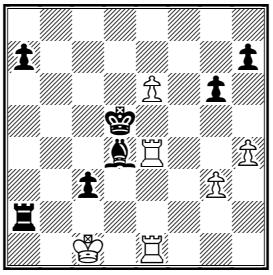


Najdorf comments (his punctuation highlighted in red) "if 45.f×e5 ♖×a2 46.e6 ♔c4**!** 47.e7**?** ♔b3." Correctly punctuated this would read 45.f×e5 ♖×a2**??** 46.e6 ♔c4**??** 47.e7**??** ♔b3. We'll take the errors one at a time. First, after 45.f×e5 (as good as any other move), Black must play 45...♗f2!:



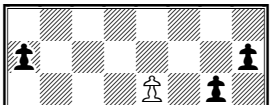
This draws, *e.g.* 46.e6 ♗×e1 47.♖×e1 ♖b8 (0.00), or 46.♖1e2 ♗c5 47.e6 ♗a3 48.♖a4 ♖×e2+ 49.♖×a3 ♔×e6 (0.00).

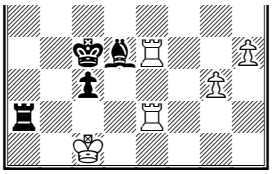
Continuing with the note line, after 45...♖×a2?? 46.e6 Black is lost,



but 46...♔c4??, incomprehensibly given a "!", only makes things worse (+4.50); the least of evils is 46...♖a1+ 47.♔c2 ♖a2+ 48.♔b1 ♖b2+ 49.♔c1 ♖b8 (+2.29).

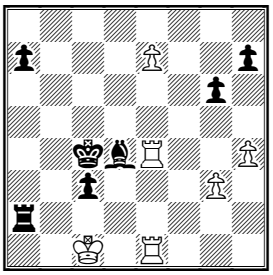
After 46...♔c4??, correct for White is not 47.e7?, but either 47.♖1e2 (+5.87),



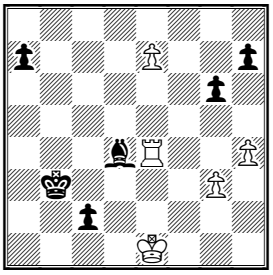


or 47.♖4e2 (+3.39), both of which win handily.

Concerning 47.e7??,

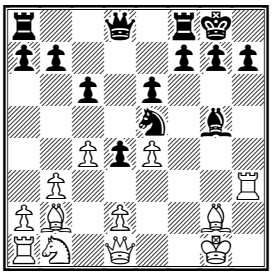


one wonders why Najdorf would put in the note a move he knew was bad. This is sometimes done to illustrate an idea, but in this case it serves little purpose, and he is remiss in not giving the correct continuation. Moreover, the move is even worse than he thought, allowing Black to win: 47...♔b3 48.♔d1 (anything else allows mate) 48...♖a1+ 49.♔e2 ♖×e1+ 50.♔×e1 c2,

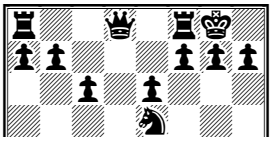


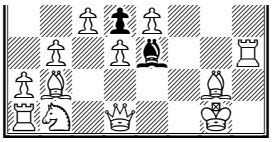
and White is busted (-3.22 at best).

116. A case of a double-howler by both Najdorf and Bronstein is seen their notes at move 18 of Smyslov-Bronstein, Zürich 1953 (Game 76 in both *Z1953MN* and *Z1953DB*).

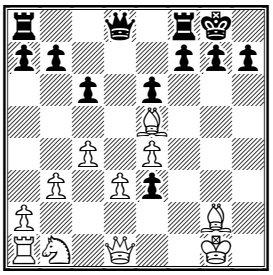


Both GMs say in the event of 18.d3, Black should play 18...♗e3+ 19.♔h1 f5 followed by 20...♘g4. Two problems with this. One, after 18.d3 ♗e3+??,

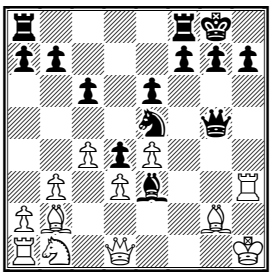




White should not meekly move his king, but play 19.♖×e3! d×e3 20.♗×e5,

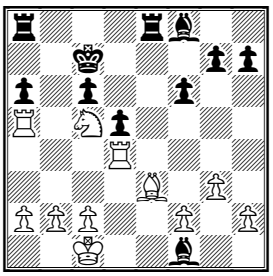


with a considerable, probably winning advantage (+1.82). Two, if White is so foolish as to play 19.♔h1, then rather than 19...f5? (which again allows 20.♖×e3!), much stronger is 19...♕g5!,



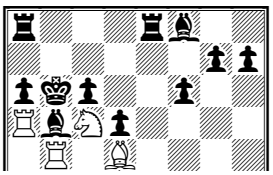
with a winning attack (-2.90).

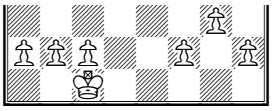
117. In *HM1948*, a note in Euwe-Botvinnik, round 7, goes badly awry three moves in a row in one short sub-variation. At move 28,



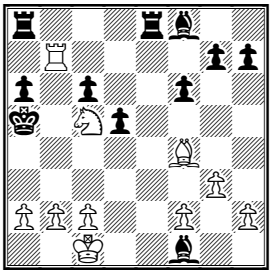
Euwe writes (our punctuation in red) “Now 28.♗f4+ would still be met by 28...♔c8!, and not by 28...♔b6 in view of 29.♖b4+**??** ♔×a5**??** 30.♖b7! (s/b **??**), and mate.”

While Euwe is correct to prefer 28...♔c8 over 28...♔b6?, his proposed refutation resembles the Hindenburg’s landing at Lakehurst. After 28.♗f4+ ♔b6, White must not play 29.♖b4+??, since rather than 29...♔×a5?? as given, Black has 29...♗b5!,

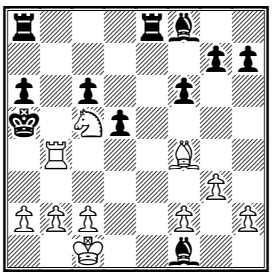




winning at least the exchange. Furthermore, after 29.♖b4?? ♔×a5??, the note move 30.♖b7??,

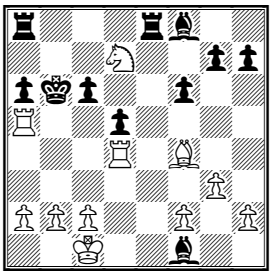


which supposedly forces mate, does nothing of the sort, losing to 30...♖e1+ (always check for check!) 31.♔d2 ♖e2+ 32.♔c3 ♗×c5 (-9.64). Even without this possibility, the obvious 30...♗×c5 would stop mate and leave Black slightly better. If he avoids 30.♖b7?? White *can* mate,

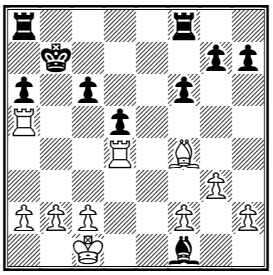


but only by 30.a3 or 30.c3, protecting the rook, when Black cannot stop all three of the threats – ♗c7#, ♘b3#, and ♘b7# – and has only a few spite checks to delay the end.

The best move after 28.♗f4+ ♔b6 goes completely unmentioned, to wit, 29.♘d7+!:

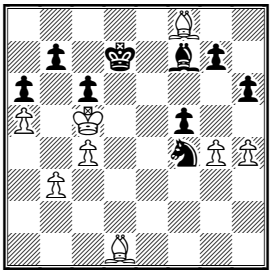


If then 29...♔×a5?? 30.♗c7+ ♔b5 31.a4#, ergo 29...♔b7 30.♘×f8 ♖×f8



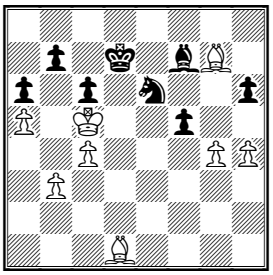
31.♖b4+ ♗b5 (if 31...♔c8? 32.♖c5 ♔d7 33.♖b7+ etc., winning) 32.♗e3 (if 32.a4 ♔b6 33.♗d2 c5) 32...♖fe8 with a definite if not great advantage for White (+1.37).

118. Tartakower provides an error-ridden note at move 45 of Tartakower-Christoffel, Hastings 1945-46 (Game 163 in *STMBG*). Here,

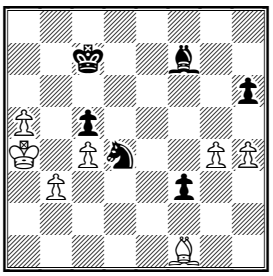


his note reads "If 45.♗×g7?, 45...f×g4 46.♗×g4+ ♗e6! 47.♗×h6 ♗×g4 48.♗×f4 and Black can hold the draw." Correctly punctuated (our added marks in red) and annotated, this would read "If 45.♗×g7? f×g4**??** 46.♗×g4+**?!** ♗e6! 47.♗×h6**?** ♗×g4 48.♗×f4, and both sides have missed winning opportunities." Taking the errors one by one:

45.♗×g7? is indeed a bad move (Tartakower actually played the strong 45.g×f5 and won), but his 45...f×g4?? is not the right reply. Instead, Black can win with 45...♘e6+!:

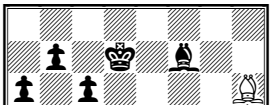


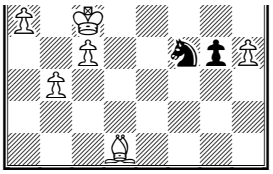
viz. 46.♔b6 ♘×g7 47.♔×b7 f4 48.♔×a6 ♔c7 49.♗e2 c5 50.♔b5 ♘e6 51.♔a4 (if 51.a6?? ♘d4+) 51...♘d4 52.♗f1 f3



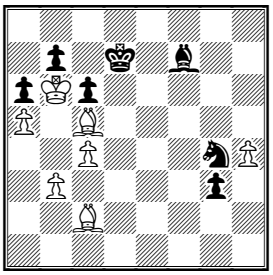
and wins (-7.38). It's odd that Tartakower overlooked the knight fork here, since he had already pointed it out in a note at move 43.

Continuing with the note line, after 45...f×g4??, Tartakower's 46.♗×g4+?! makes winning more difficult. Best instead is 46.♗×h6!,



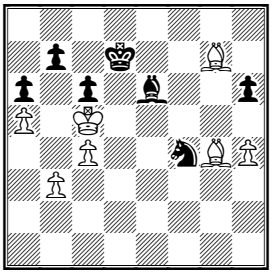


when both Komodo and Stockfish see best play proceeding 46...♘d3+ 47.♔b6 ♘f2 48.♗c2 g3 (if 48...♔c8? 49.♗f5+ ♔d8 (not 49...♔b8?? 50.♗f4+ ♔a8 51.♗c8 and 52.♗×b7#) 50.♔×b7 +8.52)49.♗e3 ♘g4 50.♗c5 and wins,



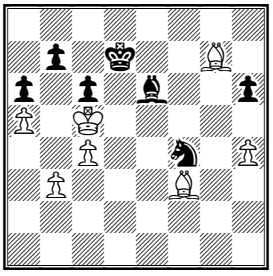
since White's dark-squared bishop keeps tabs on the g-pawn and Black is about to lose his b- and a-pawns (50...♔c8?? 51.♗f5+). Stockfish rates the position +6.59 at 30 ply.

Moving on to the next wrong move, after 46.♗×g4?! ♗e6 (for once T does give the best move!),

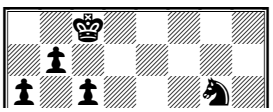


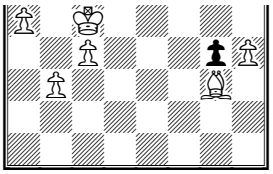
Tartakower's 47.♗×h6? throws away the win, after either his 47...♗×g4 48.♗×f4 (+0.77), or Stockfish's preference 47...♘d3+ 48.♔d4 c5+ 49.♔×d3 ♗×g4 (+0.57 at 46 ply), when opposite-color bishops should ensure a draw in both variations.

Best instead is 47.♗f3!,



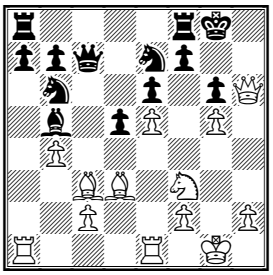
when White can still win, though the process requires more care and finesse than in the 46.♗×h6! line. Both engines give 47...h5 48.♔b6 ♔c8 49.♗e5 ♘g6 50.♗g3 ♗g4 51.♗×g4+ h×g4 52.♔c5,





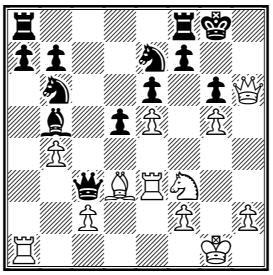
and Stockfish says White will win (+6.60 at 34 ply).

119. Annotating Em. Lasker-Maróczy, Game 96 in *NY1924*, Alekhine wrote a note we could have put in Overlooking the Obvious, Hallucinations, Always Check for Check, or Settling for Less, but because it commits all those sins we put it here. After 21...♘c4-b6,



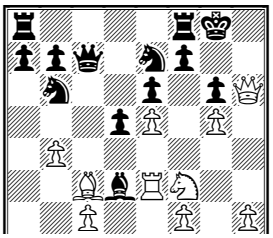
Alekhine says (with our punctuation in red): "The point of the ingenious defense. It is no longer possible for White to bring his rook over to h3, for instance 22.♖e3**?** ♗×d3! (**?!**) 23.♘d4**??** ♘f5**?!** 24.♘×f5 ♗×f5, followed by ...♘c4 or ...f6." What a mess! Taking it from the top:

22.♖e3? simply drops material. Better 22.♗×b5 ♘f5 23.♕h3 ♕×c3 24.♗d3 with a roughly even position. The correct reply to 22.♖e3? is not AA's 22...♗×d3?!, but the rather obvious 22...♕×c3:

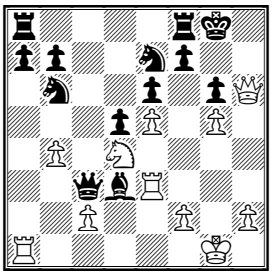


One suspects AA rejected this because of 23.♗×g6, threatening mate and attacking the queen, but that is an hallucination which fails to check for check: 23...♕×a1+! 24.♖e1 (if 24.♔g2 ♕f1+ 25.♔g3 f×g6 and mate in seven) 24...♕×e1+ 25.♘×e1 f×g6 with a huge material advantage for Black (-8.82). Least of evils for White after 22...♕×c3 is 23.♘e1 ♖fc8 (to give the king an escape; not 23...♗×d3?? 24.♖h3+−) 24.♖h3 ♕×e5 25.♕h7+ ♔f8 26.♕h6+ ♕g7 27.♗×b5, but that still leaves him down a pawn and probably lost (-1.94).

Returning to the note line, after 22...♗×d3?!,

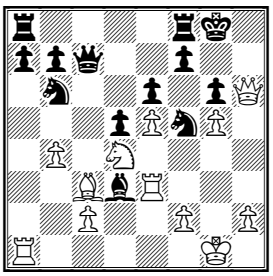


White should simply play 23.♖×d3 (about -0.80). Alekhine's 23.♘d4?? is refuted by the obvious 23...♕×c3 (again!),



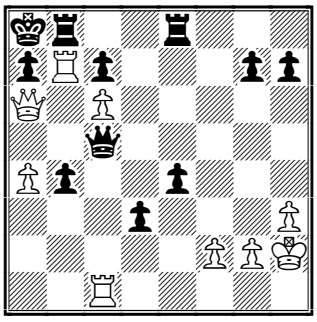
when White doesn't even have the ♗d3×g6 try and must accept either 24.♘b3 ♘f5 25.♖×d3 ♕×a1+ 26.♘×a1 ♘×h6 27.g×h6 (-8.20), or better, 24.Resigns.

Finally, after 23.♘d4?? AA has Black settling for far too little with 23...♘f5?!,



when after 24.♘×f5 ♗×f5 Black is still winning, but his advantage is much less than it could have been (only -3.31). By the way, going back to the starting point, after 22...♘b6, the pragmatic Lasker simply played 23.♖a3, defending the ♗c3.

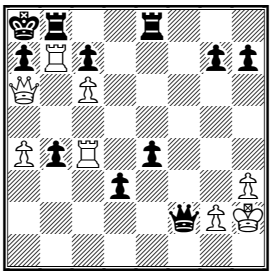
120. We return now to Game 4 of *MCC*, (see the Misevaluation section for the other entry), Capablanca- Raubitschek, Manhattan CC 1906. At move 29,



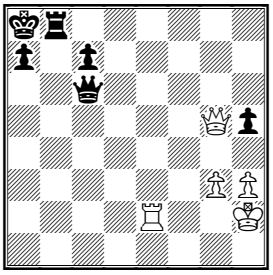
Black played 29...♕×f2?. Capablanca wrote "Black's only chance was to play: 29...♕d4 30.♖c4 ♕b6 31.♖×b6 ♖×b6 32.♖×e4 (best) 32...♖×e4 33.♕c8+ ♖b8 34.♕×c7 and it would be a hard game to play.

Capablanca is correct about 29...♕d4, it is Black's only drawing chance, but his supporting analysis is badly flawed. Properly punctuated and evaluated, with our changes in red, this line would read: Black's only chance was to play: 29...♕d4**!** 30.♖c4 ♕b6**??** 31.♖×b6 ♖×b6 32.♖×e4**??** (terrible) 32...♖×e4 33.♕c8+ ♖b8 34.♕×c7 and White is lost. We'll take the corrections in order.

After 29...♕d4 30.♖c4, there is no need to give up the queen with 30...♕b6??. Correct instead is 30...♕×f2!:

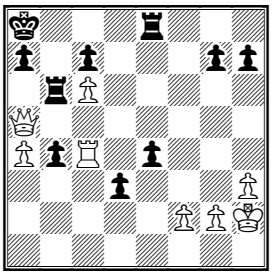


The difference here compared to the move before is that 31.♖f1 is not possible. If now:
(a) 31.♖c×b4 ♕f4+ 32.♔g1 ♕e3+ 33.♔h1 ♕c1+ 34.♔h2 ♕f4+ etc., draw. This is White's best option.
(b) The only other move Komodo sees as not giving Black a clear advantage is 31.♖×e4, but even that may land White in trouble, *e.g.* 31...d2 (not 31...♖×e4?? 32.♖×b8+ ♔×b8 33.♕b7#) 32.♕d3 ♖ed8 33.♖b×b4 h5 34.♖b7 g5 35.♖×b8+ ♖×b8 36.♖e2 ♕f4+ 37.g3 ♕×a4 38.♕×d2 ♕×c6 39.♕×g5,

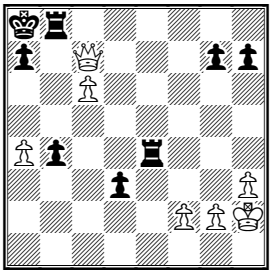


and things would seem to favor Black (-1.03 per Stockfish at 27 ply).

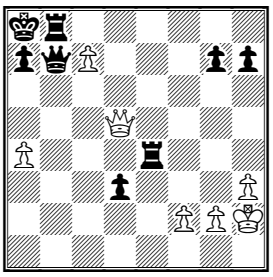
Continuing with the note line, after 31.♖×b6 ♖×b6, correct is not 32.♖×e4?? but 32.♕a5!,



viz. 32...b3 33.♖c1 ♖d8 34.♕d2 and Black's pawns are stalled (+2.58). Instead, after 32.♖×e4?? ♖×e4 33.♕c8+ ♖b8 34.♕×c7, we reach the end of Capa's note line,

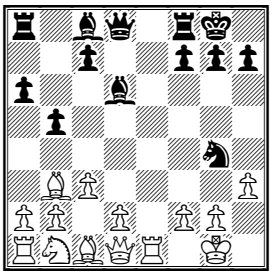


where he says “it would be a hard game to play.” Not really; after, say, 34...b3 35.♕f7 b2 36.c7 b1♕ 37.♕d5+ ♕b7,



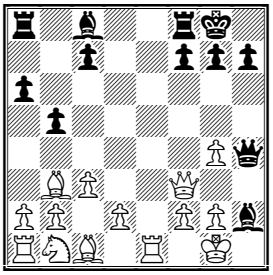
White can relax and resign, being down a rook (-4.61).

121. Game 31 in *MCC*, Capablanca-Marshall, New York 1918, has two notes with a surprising number of bad moves. First, we give Capablanca’s note at move 14,



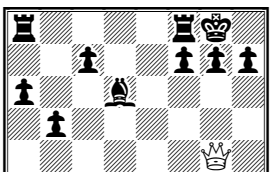
with our punctuation and commentary in red: “The knight cannot be taken because of 14.h×g4 ♕h4 15.g3 ♘×g3 16.f×g3 ♕×g3+ followed by 17...♘×g4 wins, or 14.h×g4 ♕h4 15.♕f3 ♕h2+**?** 16.♔f1 ♘×g4 17.♕×g4 ♕h1+**??** 18.♔e2 ♖ae8+ and wins [not!].”

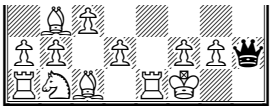
It is true that the knight should not be taken, and the note’s first variation is correct. The second, however, has three howlers. After 14.h×g4 ♕h4 15.♕f3, Black must not play 15...♕h2+?. Correct is 15...♘h2+!:



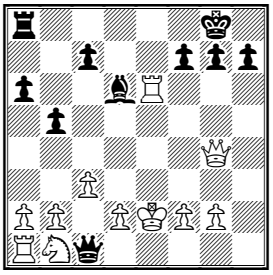
Forced then is 16.♔f1 ♘×g4 17.♕e4 ♘f4 18.g3 ♕h2 19.g×f4 ♘h3+ 20.♔e2 ♖ae8 and Black is clearly winning (-3.08).

Instead, after 15...♕h2+? 16.♔f1 ♘×g4 17.♕×g4,



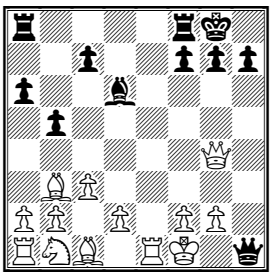


objectively the best Black can do is 17...♖fe8 18.♗e6 ♖×e6 19.♖×e6 ♕h1+ 20.♔e2 ♕×c1,

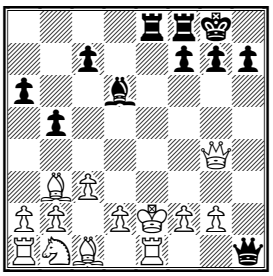


when after 21.♕e4 ♖f8 (not 21...f×e6?? 22.♕×a8+) 22.♖×d6 c×d6 Komodo indicates the game is perfectly even (0.00 at 25 ply).

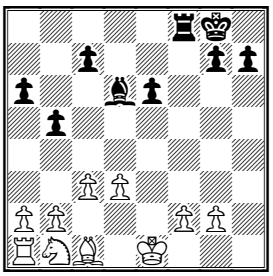
Capablanca instead commits the note's second howler with 17...♕h1+??,



and compounds it by saying 18.♔e2 ♖ae8+ "and wins."

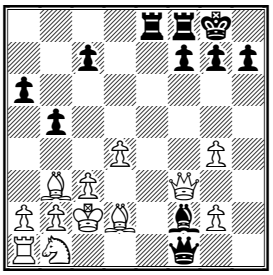


Not at all! 19.♗e6! ♖×e6+ 20.♕×e6 ♕×e1+ 21.♔×e1 f×e6 22.d3,



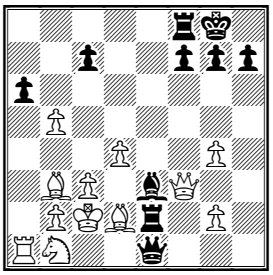
and Black can resign (+4.12). It is strange that Capablanca overlooked 19.♗e6, since he used the same move in a note two moves later.

122. Further on Game 31 of *MCC*, Capablanca gives another error-ridden note at move 25,

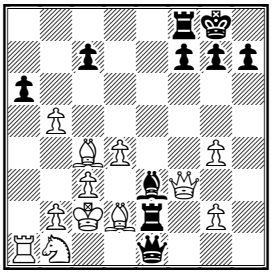


saying "25...♖e2 would be met by 26.a4! ♕e1 27.a×b5! ♗e3 28.♗c4! ♖×d2+ 29.♘×d2 ♕×d2+ 30.♔b3 and Black's game is hopeless, since he cannot play 30.a×b5 because of 31.♕×f7+!."

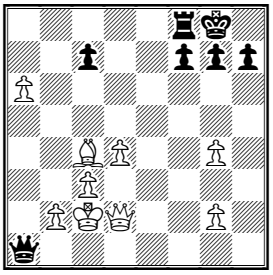
After 25...♖e2 26.a4! ♕e1 27.a×b5! ♗e3,



rather than the puny 28.♗c4? (mistakenly given an exclam by Capablanca), White can wrap things up with 28.♕×e3! ♖×e3 29.♗×e1 (+6.21). The problem with 28.♗c4? is seen if,

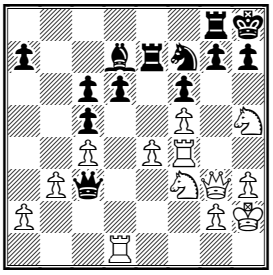


instead of Capablanca's 28...♖×d2+??, Black plays 28...♖f2!, and the best White can get is 29.♕d1 ♗×d2 30.♘×d2 ♖×d2+ 31.♕×d2 ♕×a1 32.b×a6,

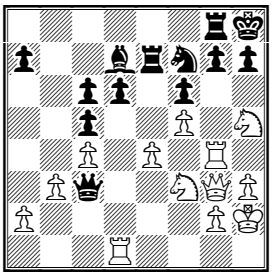


when he has only a bishop and two pawns for a rook (+0.35).

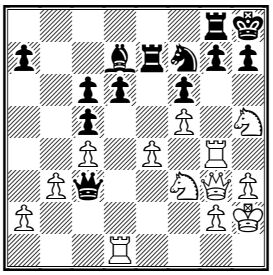
123. *StP1909* has several notes of the Charlie Fox variety, of which the note at White's 38th move of Game 51, Lasker-Salwe, is the book's first example. At that point,



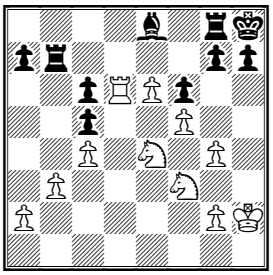
Lasker is correct that his text 38.♖h4 was the better move (in fact the best on the board), but his line purporting to show the inferiority of 38.♖g4, to wit 38...♘h6**?** 39.♖h4**?!** d5**?** 40.c×d5 c×d5 41.♖×d5**?!** ♗c8**?** (our punctuation) is wrong at almost every point, and ends up proving the opposite of what he intended.



First off, rather than the note's 38...♘h6, better is 38...♘e5 39.♘×e5 ♕×g3+ 40.♖×g3 d×e5 41.♖gd3 ♗e8 42.♘g3 and there is still some life in Black's position (+1.30). After 38...♘h6,

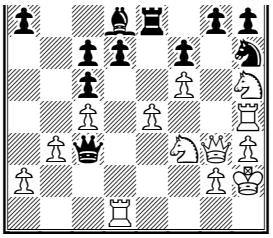


the correct reply is not Lasker's 39.♖h4, but 39.♕×d6! ♘×g4+ 40.h×g4 ♖f7 41.e5 ♗e8 (if 41...f×e5?? 42.♘×e5 ♗e8 43.♖d3 ♕c1 44.♕e6 ♖b7 45.♖d8 etc.) 42.e6 ♖b7 43.♘g3 ♕a5 44.♖d2 ♕c7 45.♘e4 ♕×d6+ 46.♖×d6



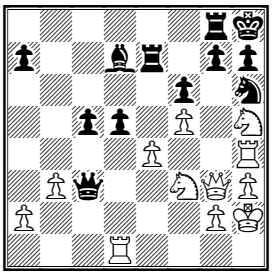
and it's obvious Black is helpless (+3.39).

After 39.♖h4?!,



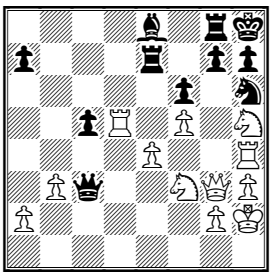
rather than 39...d5, much better is 39...♗×f5!? 40.e×f5 ♘×f5 41.♕f4 ♘×h4 42.♕×h4 ♖d8, and Black is not too bad off (+0.78).

After 39...d5? 40.c×d5 c×d5,



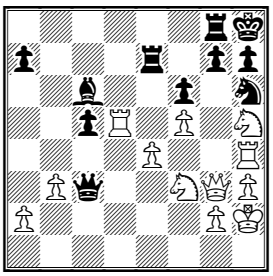
instead of the note's 41.♖×d5?!, strongest is 41.♕d6 ♖ge8 42.♖×d5 ♘f7 43.♕g3 ♘h6 44.♕f2 ♕b4 45.♕×c5 ♕×c5 46.♖×c5 ♖×e4 47.♘×f6 g×f6 48.♖×h6 (+2.30).

Relatively best after 41.♖×d5 is not 41...♗c6 but 41.♗e8,

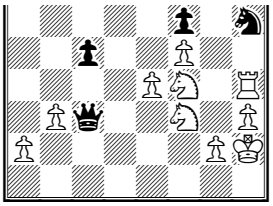


when Black is definitely inferior but still lives (about +1.50).

In contrast, 41...♗c6?,

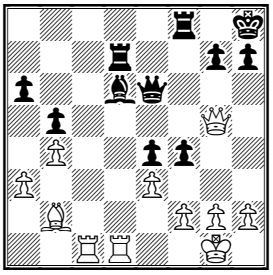


with which Lasker concludes his analysis, leaving the impression that White must move his rook and Black is OK, actually loses to 42.♕d6! ♗×d5 43.♕×e7 ♗f7 44.♘f4,



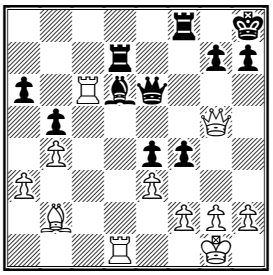
and White is clearly winning (+3.17 at 26 ply).

124. Another shambles in *StP1909* occurs in Game 91, Dus-Chotimirsky–Freiman, the note at move 26:

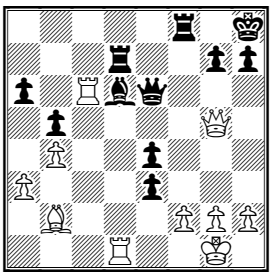


While the text move 26.e×f4 was not optimal, it by no means gave White a lost position as Lasker claims. The only two alternatives he gives, 26.♗e5 and 26.♖c6, are dreadful, and he says nothing about 26.h3, 26.g3, 26.♖d4, or 26.♕h5, all of which maintain equality.

And the supporting analysis for one of his alternatives is badly flawed. After 26.♖c6,

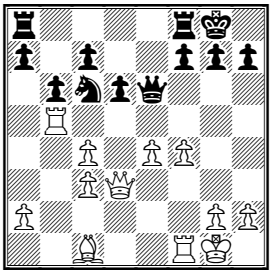


Lasker's 26...h6? would actually give the advantage back to White: 27.♗×g7+ ♖×g7 28.♖d×d6 ♕×d6 29.♕×g7+ ♔×g7 30.♖×d6 and White is fine (+1.10). Correct instead is 26...f×e3!,

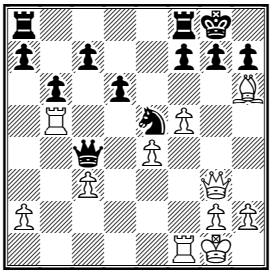


and if **(a)** 27.f×e3 ♕b3! 28.♖b1 (not 28.♖c×d6?? ♕×d1+ 29.♖×d1 ♖×d1#, nor 28.♖d×d6?? ♕d1+ 29.♖×d1 ♖×d1#) 28...♗e5 and White loses at least the bishop, or **(b)** 27.♕×e3 ♗×h2+ 28.♔×h2 ♕×c6 29.♖×d7 ♕×d7 30.♕×e4 and Black is up ♜-for-♗.

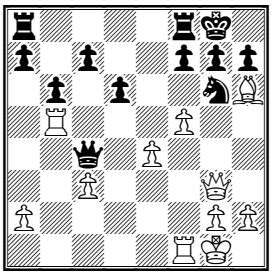
125. Lasker again shows us how wrong a World Champion can be in Game 143 of *StP1909*, Cohn-Speijer. At White's 18th move,



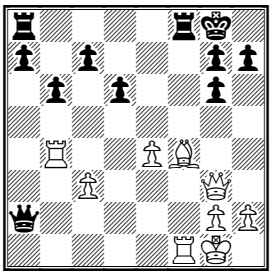
he examines a variation beginning 18.f5 ♘e5 19.♕g3 ♕×c4, which he then splits into two sub-variations, 20.♖×e5? (on which we will not dwell), and 20.♗h6 (on which we will):



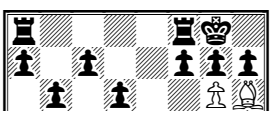
Simplest and probably best now is 20...g6 21.♖×e5 d×e5 22.♗×f8 ♖×f8 23.♕×e5 a5, with virtually deadeye equality (-0.09). Lasker, however, gives the more problematic 20...♘g6,

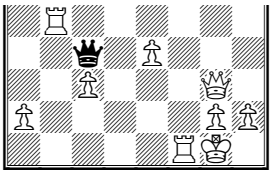


which after the correct continuation 21.♖b4! ♕×a2 22.f×g6 f×g6 23.♗f4,

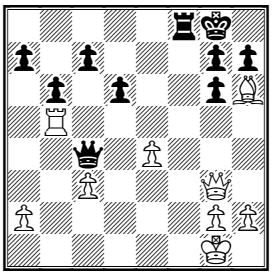


leaves White with an extra bishop, Black with three extra pawns, and Komodo with an unclear verdict, +0.26 at 25 ply. But Lasker does not have White playing the correct continuation; instead he gives 21.f×g6??:



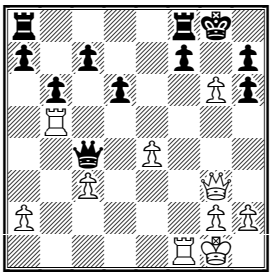


This is simply a blunder which loses to 21...f×g6! (threatening mate at f1) 22.♖×f8+ ♖×f8,



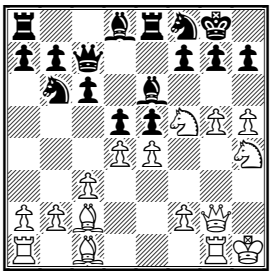
again threatening mate, and forcing White into either 23.♖b1 ♕×a2 24.♖e1 g×h6 (-3.33), or 23.♖f5 g×h6 24.♖×f8+ ♔×f8 (-2.78).

But Lasker doesn't have Black playing 21...f×g6!; instead he follows one blunder with another, the ghastly 21...g×h6??,

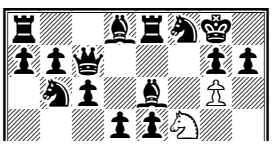


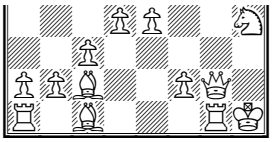
which loses ingloriously to 22.g×f7+ ♔h8 23.♖bf5 ♕×e4 24.♕f2 (+4.91).

126. Probably *StP1909*'s worst multiple-howler note is in Game 161, Teichmann-Speijer, move 26.



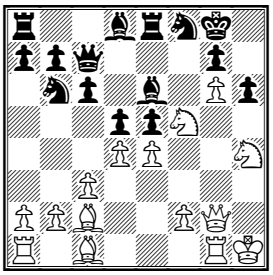
Here Lasker comments (with our punctuation in red): "26.g6 was tempting, but Black would have replied 26...f×g6 27.h×g6**?!** 28.♗×h6**?!** e×d4**??** 29.c×d4**?!** d×e4**??** 30.♗×e4**?!** ♗d5**?!**." We have three howlers and four dubious moves in the space of an eight-move comment. We will take them one by one. After 26.g6 f×g6 27.h×g6,



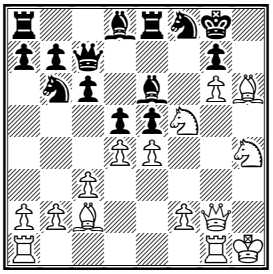


Black need not play 27...h6?!; best is 27...♗×f5 28.♘×f5 h×g6 29.♘g3 ♗f6 30.♗e3 and he is OK (-0.35).

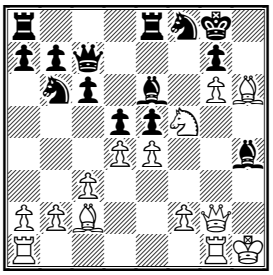
Then after 27...h6,



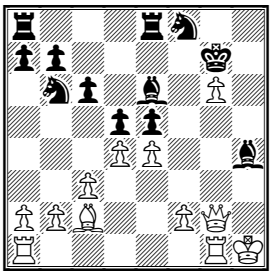
Lasker's 28.♗×h6?! is not really effective, and White is better off with 28.♕h2. But in the event of 28.♗×h6,



Black must not play Lasker's 28...e×d4??; necessary instead is 28...♗×h4!,

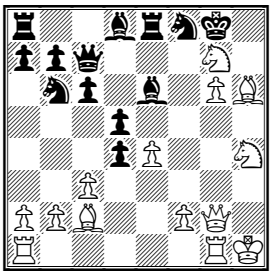


with then two variations:
(a) 29.♘×h4 g×h6 30.f4 d×e4 31.d×e5 and White has compensation for the sacrificed piece (+0.35);
(b) 29.♘×g7!? ♕×g7 (forced, for if 29...♖e7 30.♘h5 +4.14) 30.♗×g7 ♔×g7,

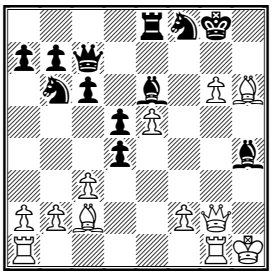


when we have an unusual material imbalance of ♕+♙+♙-vs-♗+♘+♘, and a rather unclear position (+0.31).

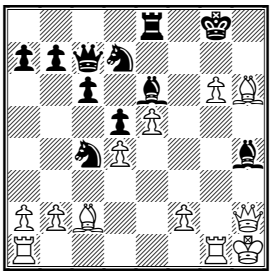
The problem with 28...e×d4?? appears if White avoids the knee-jerk recapture 29.c×d4?!, and plays 29.♘×g7!:



Forced then is 29...♗×h4 30.♘×e8 ♖×e8 31.e5:

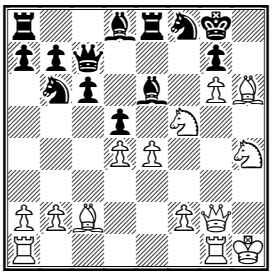


Now if 31...♕×e5?? 32.g7 ♘fd7 33.♗h7+! ♔f7 (or 33...♔×h7 34.♕g6+ ♔g8 35.♕×e8+ etc.) 34.♖ae1 ♕f6 35.g8♕+ (+13.73). So the best Black can do is 31...♘fd7 32.c×d4 ♘c4 33.♕h2,



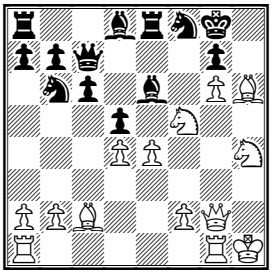
when if 33...♗e7?? 34.g7! etc. as in the previous variation. So Black might as well resign, since the best Komodo says he can do is 33...♘c×e5 (+6.54).

Returning to the note line, if White is so unobservant as to play 29.c×d4?!,

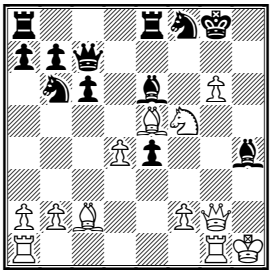


then as at move 28 Black must reply 29...♗×h4, and after 30.♘×h4 d×e4 31.♗×e4 ♕d8 32.♗g5 ♕×d4 he is not all that bad off (+0.31).

However, if Black does play the note move 29...d×e4??,

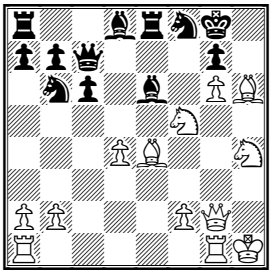


he is soon very bad off, *viz.* 30.♗×g7! ♗×h4 31.♗e5



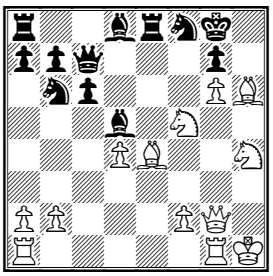
and now forced is 31...♕×e5 (if 31...♕d8?? 32.♘h6#) 32.d×e5 ♗×f5 33.♗×e4 (+4.40).

But Lasker, in his inattentive mercy, has White playing 30.♗×e4?!,



which again lets Black off the hook by (you guessed it!) 30...♗×h4.

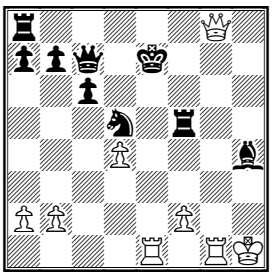
But Lasker then caps off this cavalcade of miscalculation by having Black play 30...♗d5??,



and commenting “though White would have gained a pawn his position would be insecure and his attack would have been beaten off.”

Has a World Champion ever made a more mistaken assessment of a position? (We would have placed this in the Misevaluation section, but for the fact that it flowed from the error-fraught previous moves.)

Far from White being insecure and beaten off, after 31.♗×d5+ ♘×d5 32.♗×g7 ♗×h4 33.♗e5 ♖×e5 34.g7 ♖×f5 35.g×f8♕+ ♔×f8 36.♕g8+ ♔e7 37.♖ae1+,



it is Black who has been beaten like a rug, an egg, a drum, a rented mule, or whatever simile you prefer (+12.47). Throughout this note Lasker just seems to have made pawn captures and recaptures automatically, reflexively, never considering that they were not at all forced and better moves existed.

We'll conclude with a set of aphorisms from chess literature's greatest wit, GM Savielly Tartakower, a man who, as we have seen here, is well qualified to discuss this topic.

What is a Mistake?

How is it possible that some games are lost by a small mistake (perhaps not even a real mistake, merely a supposed one), while on the other hand, a completely wrong plan or undeniable mistake may incur no disadvantage, and in the dark labyrinth of practical play may even allow error to triumph?

What went wrong here ? It seems clear that the secret of losing lies not in the mistakes, but more in the good moves.

Some aphorisms:

Every mistake contains something right.

Often a second mistake comes without the first.

Only a strong player can (and may!) make mistakes.

The mistakes are often very hard to find.

One learns in chess only by making mistakes.

The mistakes are there to be made.

Pessimistic outlook: You lose only by making strong moves, and win by mistakes.

Metaphysical outlook: There are no mistakes, only unforeseen events.

Positive outlook: Sacrifices are usually proof that mistakes were committed first.

To become a winner is not difficult – but to stay a winner is very hard.

A chess game is usually a fairy tale of 1001 mistakes.

There are flattering moves, noisy moves, and groaning moves. The last are the most dangerous.

The existence of chess is justified only by mistakes.

The one absolute rule in chess is – the exceptions.

The variation kills.

The whole game of chess might be built upon only one single mistake.

An often applicable postulate in chess is: How do I become unenergetic?

The second best move is often the only right one.

The final culmination of chess theory is – the wrong move.

Tragedy of errors – tragedy of passions!

In chess there are also “Hippocratic moves.”

With mistakes one can construct splendid arguments; with mistakes one can build a system.
In chess there is only one mistake: Overestimating your opponent. Everything else is either bad luck or weakness.

There are mistaken victories and glorious losses.

The question mark of the annotator often is the only mistake.

I err – therefore I exist!

The worst mistakes are the avoidable ones.

Index of annotators (not players; numbers refer to items)

Note: The fact that some annotators are listed far more often than others does not necessarily mean that they are worse analysts; it simply reflects the fact that I have systematically examined much more of their work. Were I to subject, say, Fine, Nimzovich or others to the same level of scrutiny by the unblinking, lidless silicon eye as I have Alekhine, Lasker, and Tartakower, their howler lists might be just as long.