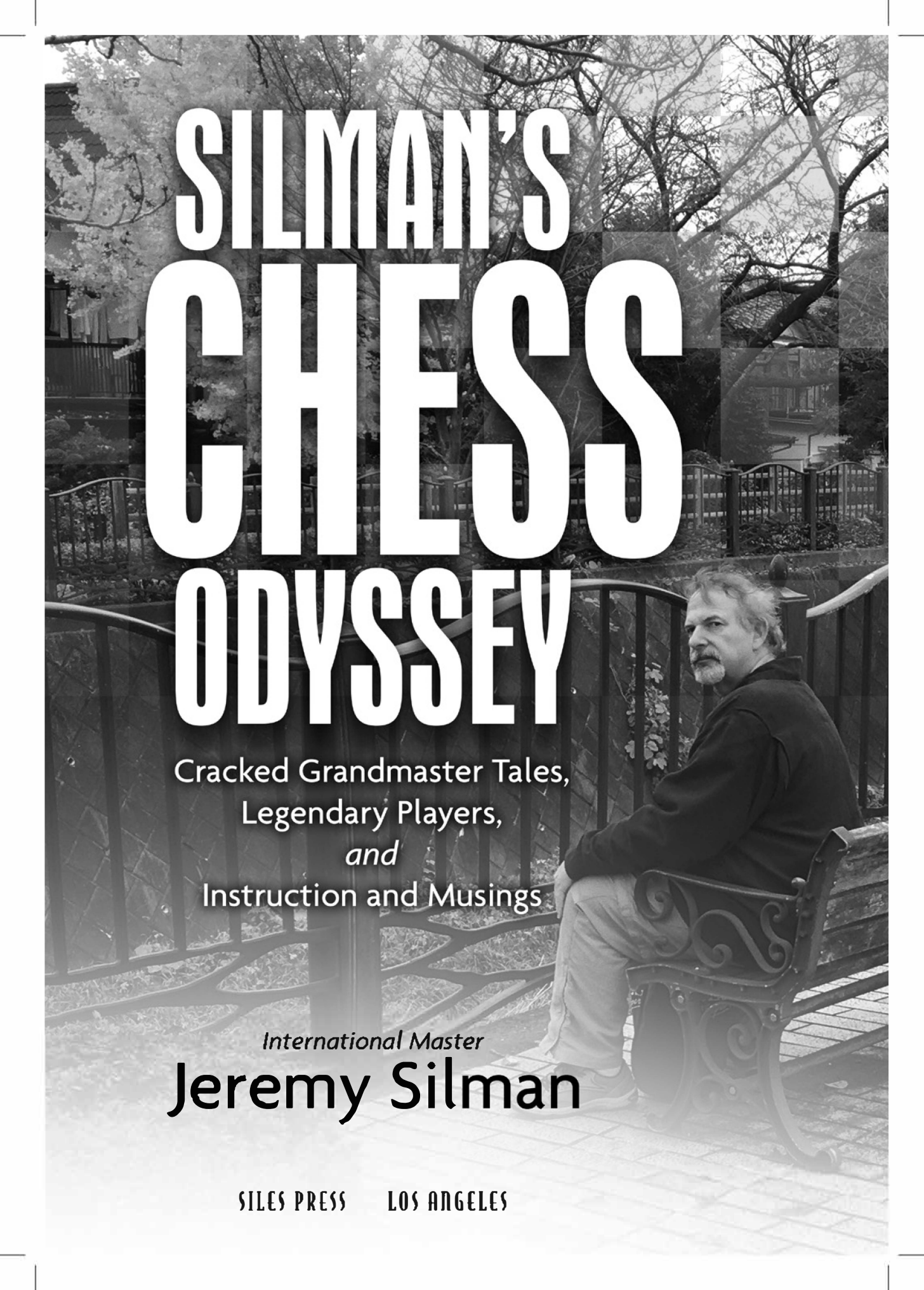




SILMAN'S CHESS ODYSSEY

Cracked Grandmaster Tales,
Legendary Players,
and
Instruction and Musings

International Master
Jeremy Silman

SILES PRESS LOS ANGELES

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First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Silman, Jeremy, author.

Title: Silman's chess odyssey : cracked grandmaster tales, legendary
players, and instruction and musings /
by International Master Jeremy Silman.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021052979 |

ISBN 9781890085247 (paperback) ISBN 9781890085551 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Chess. | Chess--Tournaments. | Chess players. |
Chess--Miscellanea.

Classification: LCC GV1445 .S55 2022 | DDC 794.1--dc23/
eng/20211109

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021052979>

Cover design by Wade Lageose for Lageose Design

SILES PRESS

a division of Silman-James Press

www.silmanjamespress.com

info: silmanjamespress.com

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PART
ONE

Cracked Grandmaster Tales

*A*ll chess players and fans have their favorite chess heroes—they watch their play and go over their games. But are they in touch with the human side of these legends? Are they aware of the sad or crazy or funny or sweet moments that go on behind the scenes—some fun, some unfortunate?

These cracked grandmaster tales are all incidents I witnessed or was a part of—information straight from the "horse's mouth." Keep your eyes open, you'll see trickery, lots of humor, and more.



[top] Thirteen-year-old Sofia and eleven-year-old Judit Polgar; and [middle] Judit and Silman ready to start their game at the New York Open, 1988; [bottom] Silman raves while Judit and Yaz look on. Third Amber Tournament, Le Metropole Palace, Monte Carlo 1994. (Photos: GHF).

12

Silman Draws a Little Girl

The New York Open 1988. I was paired with the most popular player in the event, eleven-year-old Judit Polgar. She was holding her own against strong opposition (including grandmasters) and I was supposed to be her latest victim. What made things particularly unpleasant was that dozens of Judit fans were watching and they wanted blood—MY blood! Of course, I was older, more experienced, and I fully expected to win.

Judit Polgar vs. Silman, New York 1988

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 d6 6.Bc4 Qb6 7.Nb3 e6 8.Be3 Qc7 9.f4 Be7 10.Qe2 0–0 11.0–0–0 a6 12.g4 b5 13.Bd3 Nb4 14.g5 Nxd3+ 15.Rxd3 Nd7 16.Bd4 Re8 17. Qh5 Bb7 18.Rh3 Nf8 19.f5

A typical Sicilian. She wants my King's head, and I'll either counter on the queenside or center, or simply defend and push her attack back.

19...e5

Chasing white's Bishop off that dangerous diagonal. I was worried about 19...exf5 20.Bxg7 Kxg7 21.Nd4 Kh8 22.Nxf5 though 22...d5 23.Nh6 Qf4+ 24.Kb1 dxe4 seems to be okay for Black.

20.Be3

20.f6! was probably better.

20...b4 21.g6??

Judit fears nothing, but this actually loses. 21.Nd5 was correct.

21... fxc6 22. fxc6 hxc6??

Sigh, 22...bxc3 wins for Black. I was scared of 23.gxh7+ Kh8 24.Qf7 Nd7?? (I missed 24...Ne6! 25.Qxe6 Bxe4 which refutes White's play.) 25.Rg1 Bf6 26.Bh6 which wins for White.

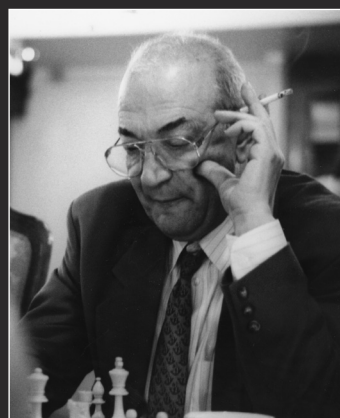
23.Qh8+ Kf7 24.Rf1+??

24.Rf3+ is correct since 24...Ke6 can now be met by 25.Qh3 mate.

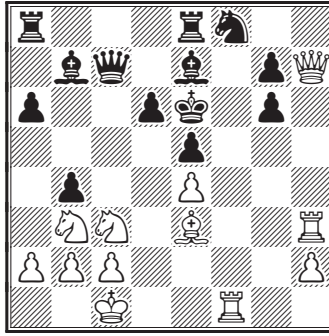
24...Ke6



Seirawan Piket Karpov Korchnoi S. Polgar J. Polgar Ljubojević Anand Kramnik



Third Amber Tournament, Le Metropole Palace, Monte Carlo 1994. [clockwise from left] Kamsky; Nunn; Korchnoi; Hort, Karpov, Ljubojević, and J. Polgar; Karpov and J. Polgar (Photos: GHF).



25.Nd5 Bxd5 26.Qg8+ Kd7 27.Qxd5 Qc6

27...Ne6! left Black in good shape.

28.Rf7

We both missed 28.Nc5+! Kc7 29.Rf7 Qxd5 30.exd5 dxc5 31.Bxc5 with a nice initiative.

28...Ne6, ½–½.

Nowadays, I would have played on since Black is doing well. However, the game was hard on my nerves (especially with the hostile crowd surrounding me) so I was happy to draw and escape the masses!

Afterwards we rushed to the skittles room to analyze the game. I expected a quiet, shy little girl that would listen intently to my “grown up” ideas. Instead, she took over the analysis! Her hands tossed the pieces here and there with amazing authority, and her comments made it clear that she was the one that fully expected to win and I was somehow fortunate to have survived!

It was only then that I realized that she was going to rock the chess world.

13

How Not to Eat Dessert

The 1990s. I was enjoying Venice when I realized there was a tournament that I promised to visit. Leaping in my car, I drove nonstop to the Principality of Monte Carlo, known for its amazing ocean views, world famous casinos, and (most importantly to me) the Third Melody Amber tournament. This super-strong event was sponsored by the Dutch businessman and lover of chess, Joop van Oosterom. He named it after his daughter.

I was there for just a couple days, which were filled with analysis with Karpov and other chess greats, and a very nice visit with my dear friend Yasser Seirawan

PART
TWO

Legendary Players

*A*s a twelve-year-old kid I fell in love with another world. I became enamored with chess and its history. I bought my first chess book, and I looked at it every day. Then another book and after that, another and another. People thought I was crazy, but I couldn't stop!

My first chess god was Alexander Alekhine, whose tactics blew me away! Next was Adolf Anderssen and the Immortal Game. Then I read about Zukertort (it sounded like something to eat), and so it went on and on

My favorite (yes, I do have a favorite!) was (and still is) Emanuel Lasker. This man had it all—tactics, endgame mastery, master of chess psychology, attack, and was World Champ for twenty-seven amazing years!

I've chosen eleven chess legends to present here (not to say there aren't other legends), some household names and some lesser known, that interest me and therefore want to pass on for others to enjoy.

A black and white portrait of Wilhelm Steinitz, a man with a full, dark beard and mustache, wearing round-rimmed spectacles and a dark suit with a bow tie. The portrait is centered at the top of the page.

5

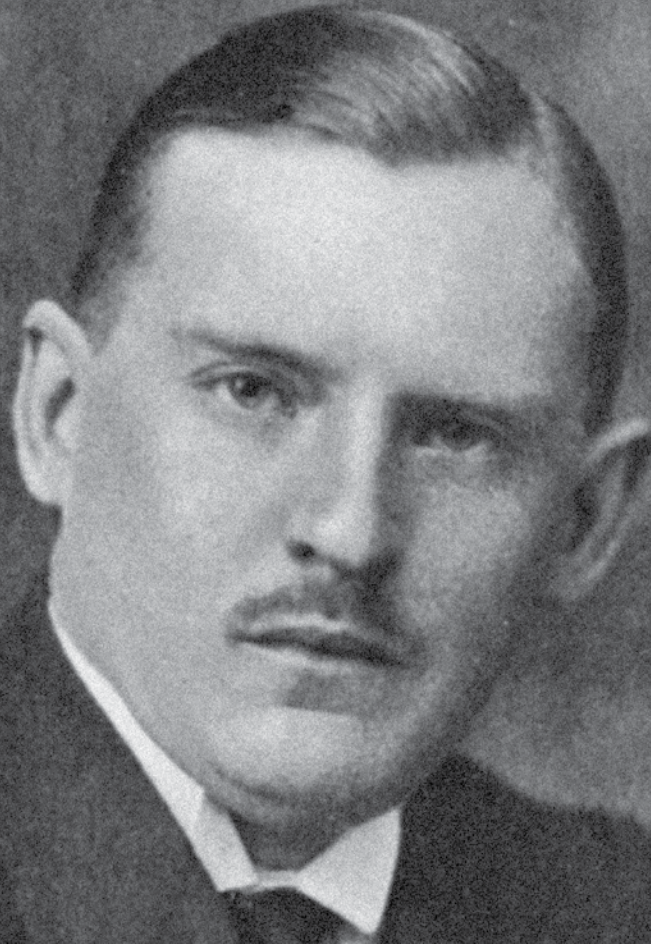
WILHELM STEINITZ

Behold the Austrian Morphy!

*W*henver chess players get together and talk about top players of the past, someone will open their mouth and spew out nonsense about the first World Champion. My favorite is: "If Steinitz were playing today he wouldn't even have a 2200 rating."

Really?

From 1866 to 1894, this guy was far stronger than any other player who ever lived (with the exception of Morphy, though Morphy never played anyone as strong as Steinitz!). After 1894, until his death in 1900, he ran into several debilitating problems: old age, mental and physical illness, and new players who learned how to play proper chess by following Steinitz's teachings.



9

ALEXANDER ALEKHINE

A Dance with Death

*I*t's 1918 and you're one of the strongest chess players on Earth. You live in Odessa, during one of Russia's most chaotic periods. Trying to stay on top of the political upheaval, you take whatever side offers the best chance at survival. Unfortunately, being a captain in the Tsarist army turns out to be the wrong choice, and you find yourself tossed into prison and sentenced to death by firing squad by Trotsky himself.

Doomed and waiting for the axe to fall, four days pass in your cell when the door opens and several people enter. One of them is Trotsky. A guard tells you that Trotsky wants to play a game of chess with you, and a board is set up and you end up with the White pieces. It quickly becomes clear that the “people’s commissioner” is no match for you, but when you can end the game and wipe him out with a few sharp moves you hesitate. What should you do? If you lose, will Trotsky be merciful and let you live? What will happen if you win? In fact, does it even matter? Most likely you’ll be shot in either case. You agonize, play some weak moves so the game can continue, and continue wondering what the best course will be.

What would you do?

This is the dilemma Alexander Alekhine faced. He kept the game going for a while longer, then silently cursed to himself and began the mating sequence that would drag down the black King. And then—he waited. Trotsky resigned, quietly rose up from his chair and left the room. Alekhine was released the next day.¹

Early Years

Born in 1892 into an aristocratic, very wealthy family, Alekhine learned how to play chess at six or seven years of age. When he was nine (in 1902) he watched a simultaneous blindfold exhibition given by Harry Nelson Pillsbury—seeing a foreign superstar give such an exhibition was a big deal for anyone, but it can easily be a turning point for a child. Now hooked on chess, he immersed himself in his brother’s correspondence games and in 1905 he played in several correspondence tournaments himself. Like any beginner, his initial results were poor. However, he carefully analyzed each and every game (his and his brother’s), got stronger and stronger, and eventually was actually winning some of those events!

Alekhine wrote about those early beginnings:

I first heard about simultaneous blindfold games when I was nine. Moscow, my native town, was visited by Pillsbury who played twenty-two simultaneous games without looking at the chessboard. My brother Alexey took part in the event and drew. I viewed Pillsbury’s performance as a miracle! At the age of twelve I started to play without looking at the chessboard myself.

This is significant because Alekhine eventually became one of the greatest blindfold players ever.

At the beginning of 1907, Alekhine joined the Moscow Chess Club—he had to lie about his age to get in! He played his first face-to-face tournament in the spring of that year (his result wasn’t anything special), and he continued his chess education by participating in both tournaments and short matches. Unlike

1 This incident may be apocryphal as there are varying reports as to what transpired in Russia and as to whether or not Alekhine ever met Trotsky.

Capablanca, who seemed to have been born with a silver pawn in his mouth, and unlike modern chess geniuses who earn the grandmaster title by the age of twelve, Alekhine did things the old-fashioned way: he studied hard, used bad results as a learning tool, and by 1909 was quite a strong player (as shown by his clear first place finish in the All-Russian Amateur Tournament).

He followed this with an embarrassing drubbing (0-3) in a match vs. Nenarokov, a comeback wipeout (4 wins, 0 losses, 1 draw) against Blumenfeld, clear first in another correspondence tournament, and first place in two tournaments in Moscow (1909-1910). His big test occurred in Hamburg 1910 when he faced a gauntlet of old and upcoming legends. He ended up in seventh place (there were eighteen players) behind Schlechter, Duras, Nimzowitsch, Spielmann, Marshall, and Teichmann.

In 1911 he had another try at the chess elite, this time ending up in eighth place (twenty-six players) behind Teichmann, Rubinstein, Schlechter, Rottewi, Marshall, Nimzowitsch, and Vidmar. He continued the “win some and lose some” template, carefully mending the flaws in his game. At this point he was clearly in the world’s top twelve.

These sub-par results are the real story behind Alekhine’s journey to the highest title. A tactical genius with a wonderful imagination, his downfall was positional chess and the endgame. By the age of twenty-one (1913) he realized that if he wanted to achieve his goal of world domination he would have to excel in every phase of the game—tactical genius alone wouldn’t get the job done.

His hard work started paying off by 1914 he had put together a string of impressive results (equal first in Paris, equal first in the All-Russian Championship, and third behind Lasker and Capablanca in the legendary St. Petersburg event) that propelled him to the top five in the world.

However, he was honest enough to know that though he wasn’t afraid of anyone, both Lasker and Capablanca were his superiors. Due to Lasker’s age, Alekhine was positive that Capablanca would eventually be world champion, so he dedicated himself to increasing his skills in all the areas Capablanca excelled in. Alekhine knew this would take a long time to accomplish, but it was his life goal and nothing was going to prevent him from achieving it.

Nineteen-fourteen was his coming out party as an elite player, but it also acted as a stumbling block to his success. World War 1 fell on his head during the super-strong Mannheim tournament (he was dominating the event with 9 wins, 1 draw and 1 loss).

This led to eleven Russian players (including Alekhine) being interned in Germany. Some sources say he was released later and made his way back to Russia. Other sources offer a more romantic tale.

Anthony Guest, the chess correspondent of the *Morning Post*, wrote:

[October 1914] — The brilliant Russian master, Alekhine, who was one of the tournament competitors stranded at Mannheim on the outbreak of war, paid a surprise visit to London on Friday (October 9), on his way back to St. Petrograd. Calling at the Chess Divan, 110 Strand, he gave an interesting account of his experiences. Alekhine was the only one of the French and Russian representatives to get away, nine of them still being detained at Baden-Baden, or at Mannheim, where Janowski remains. It is astonishing to hear that the German Chess Association, which has several influential members, left these players to shift for themselves. They were a fortnight in prison, where they were brutally treated by German soldiers who, from sheer savagery, assaulted them with the butt ends of their rifles. These competitors will have to remain in Germany till the end of the war, with the solitary exception of Alekhine, who escaped at the risk of his life. A friend gave him his own pass, and by means of this the young Russian got across the border, knowing that if the deception was discovered he would be shot at once.

The war years were hard on Alekhine, though when he managed to play (only in Russia) he always won (aside from his wartime tournament victories, he crushed Rabinovich in a four-game match via 3 wins and 1 draw, and Verlinsky by the lopsided scored of 6-0). His victory in early 1920 at the Moscow Championship (a clean sweep of 11-0), and his win at the first USSR Championship (9 wins, 6 draws, 0 losses) made his enormous strength clear to all. Nevertheless, he was still a distant third behind those two superhuman monsters, Lasker and Capablanca.

When Capablanca took the world title from an aging Lasker, Alekhine's ultimate goal was clear: continue to improve and take the world championship from the Cuban genius.

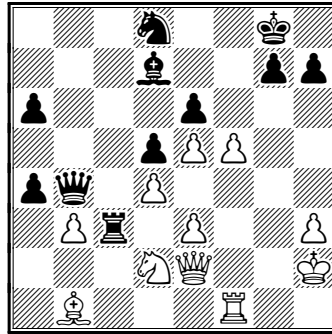
I would like to share an Alekhine loss (when he was fifteen years old) that showed his aggressive style. Fortunately for chess, one-dimensional aggression (no matter how creative it might be) doesn't always lead to victory! Pay special attention to the outrageous pawn structure that occurs!

Alexander Alekhine vs. Vladimir Nenarokov, Moscow 1907

1.d4 d5 2.Nf3 e6 3.e3 c6 4.Bd3 f5 5.Ne5 Qf6 6.Nd2 Nd7 7.f4 Nxe5 8.fxe5 Qf7 9.0-0 Qc7 10.c4 Nh6 11.b3 Bd7 12.a4 Be7 13.cxd5 cxd5 14.Ba3 Bxa3 15.Rxa3 0-0 16.Ra2 Rac8 17.Qe2 Qb6 18.Rc2 Rxc2 19.Bxc2 Rc8 20.Bd3 Qb4 21.h3 Nf7 22.Rb1 Rc3 23.Kh2 a6 24.Qf1 Qa3 25.Rd1 Qb2 26.Qe2 Nd8 27.Rb1 Qa3 28.Rf1 Qb4 29.Bb1 b5 30.g4

Rome is burning on the queenside, so Alekhine goes all-in on the opposite wing!

30...bxa4 31.gxf5??



At that time Alekhine's credo was "No retreat, no surrender!" I might add, "No defense!" The older, more mature Alekhine would have realized the attack wouldn't work and played the sane 31.bxa4 Bxa4 32.Qe1! Bc2 (32...Bb5 33.Rg1) 33.gxf5 exf5 (33...Bxb1 34.Qxb1 Qxb1 35.Rxb1 [Threatening 36.Rb8] 35...Kf8 36.Nb3! Rxe3 37.Nc5 exf5 38.Ra1 Nc6 39.Ne6+! Kf7 40.Rxa6 Kxe6 41.Rxc6+ and White is okay) 34.Ba2! Qa5 35.Nb1! Bxb1 36.Bxb1! g6 37.Rg1 Ra3 38.Qh4 Ra1 39.Qe7 Rxb1 40.Rxb1 Qa2+ 41.Kg3 Qxb1 42.Qxd8+ =.

31...Bb5

Now Black is winning.

32.Nc4 Rxb3 33.fxe6

Do or die, all or nothing!

33...dxc4 34.Qf3 Rxb1 35.Rxb1 Qxb1 36.e7 Ne6 37.d5 Qg6 38.dxe6

Quadrupled pawns! Incredible and very rare.

38...Qe8

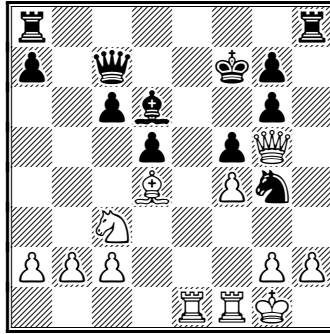
Oh well, that ends all the threats. White resigned in a few more moves. So much for the power of quads.

In the game that follows Alekhine was in serious trouble. But Black made a mistake and his tactical skills bailed him out. He commented about this game:

It is possible that this game exerted a profound effect on my subsequent play and development. Certainly it stimulated my ambition and my desire to improve. On the other hand it endowed me with a curious psychological weakness which I had to work hard and long subsequently to eradicate—if I ever have eradicated it!—the impression that I could always, or nearly always, when in a bad position, conjure up some unexpected combination to extricate me from my difficulties. A dangerous delusion!

Alexander Alekhine vs. Vasily Ronsanov, Moscow 1907

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nxc6 bxc6 6.Bd3 d5 7.exd5
 cxd5 8.0-0 Be7 9.Nc3 0-0 10.Bg5 c6 11.Qf3 Bg4 12.Qg3 Bh5 13.Qe5
 Bg6 14.Bxg6 hxd6 15.Rad1 Bd6 16.Qd4 Qc7 17.Qh4 Nh7 18.Be3 f5
 19.f4 Kf7 20.Bd4 Rh8 21.Rde1 Nf6 22.Qg5 Ng4



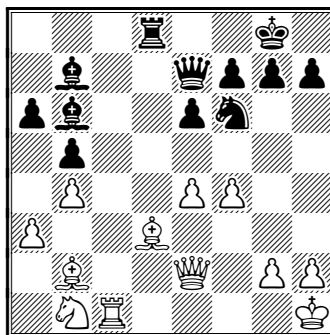
23.Re6!! Kxe6

23...Rh6 24. Rfe1 Nxe2 (24...Bxf4 25.Re7+ Kg8 26.Rxc7 Bxg5 27.Rxg7+
 Kf8 28.Rb7 [threatening Bg7+] 28...Rxe2 [28...Bf6 is better, though after
 29.Bxf6 Nxf6 30.Re6 Black is in a bad way.] 29.Re6 and Black is toast.)
 25.Bxg7 Bc5+ 26.Kh1 Kxg7 27.Re7+ Bxe7 28.Rxe7+ Qxe7 29.Qxe7+
 Kg8 30 Kg1 with excellent winning chances.

24.Qxg6+ Kd7 25.Qxf5+ Kd8 26.Qxg4 and White has turned a poor
 position into an advantageous one. He went on to win in forty-two moves.

Fedor Duz-Khotimirsky vs. Alexander Alekhine, Moscow consultation game 1907

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 c5 4.e3 Nf6 5.Nf3 Nc6 6.a3 a6 7.dxc5 Bxc5
 8.b4 Bd6 9.Bb2 dxc4 10.Bxc4 b5 11.Bd3 Bb7 12.0-0 0-0 13.Rc1 Ne5
 14.Nxe5 Bxe5 15.f4 Bc7 16.Qe2 Bb6 17.Rfd1 Qe7 18.Kh1 Rac8 19.e4
 Rfd8 20.Nb1 Rxc1 21.Rxc1



21...Rxd3!!

PART
THREE

Portraits and Stories

2

THE AMAZING ARGENTINIAN CHESS TRAGEDY

The Gothenburg Interzonal (Sweden) in 1955 was a twenty-one player round robin that was held from August 15 to September 21.

The top group was the Soviet players (in no particular order): David Bronstein, Efim Geller, Paul Keres, Tigran Petrosian, Boris Spassky, and Georgy Ilivitsky. Ilivitsky had come in third by tiebreaks in the Soviet championship earlier that year, half a point behind Smyslov and Geller (Geller beat Smyslov in the playoff), but ahead of Spassky, Petrosian, Botvinnik, Taimanov, and Keres.

The second strongest group was Argentina, which at that time was considered a chess powerhouse: Oscar Panno, Miguel Najdorf, Herman Pilnik, and Carlos Guimard.

The other players: Arthur Bisguier, Wolfgang Unzicker, Jan Hein Donner, Bogdan Śliwa, Miroslav Filip, Luděk Pachman, Braslav Rabar, László Szabó, Andrija Fuderer, Gideon Ståhlberg, and Antonio Medina Garcia.

In the first part of the tournament Keres beat Panno in a variation of the Najdorf Sicilian. Since all three players from Argentina intended to use that opening as Black, they had little time to find a new way to play.

Here's the Keres vs. Panno game.

Paul Keres vs. Oscar Panno, Gothenburg Interzonal 1955

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6

Keres wrote: "The variation in the Sicilian Defense chosen by Black here was very popular at Gothenburg and new methods of development were discovered, both for White and for Black. In the present game White employs a continuation that is nowadays very well known but was practically new territory at Gothenburg."

6.Bg5 e6 7.f4

In 1955 the popular move was 7.Qf3.

7...Qb6 8.Qd2 Nc6

8...Qxb2 is the critical move, but since the position after 8.Qd2 was first played in 1954 in the game Nezhmetdinov vs. Shcherbakov (it was drawn), the whole thing was pretty much unknown. Daring to chop by 8...Qxb2 against an attacker like Keres would probably feel like suicide to a positional player like Panno. Thus, Panno avoided it. I will add that a few rounds later Fuderer tried this same line against Keres and, instead of Panno's 8...Nc6, he braved 8...Qxb2. Unfortunately Black lost in eighteen moves!

9.0-0 Qxd4 10.Qxd4 Nxd4 11.Rxd4 Nd7 12.Be2 h6 13.Bh4 g5 14.fxg5 Ne5 15.Na4 Be7 16.Nb6 Rb8 17.Bg3 hxg5 18.Rhd1 f6 19.c4 0-0 20.R4d2 f5 21.c5 f4 22.cxd6 Bxd6 23.Rxd6 fxg3 24.hxg3 Rf7 25.Kb1 Rc7 26.Rd8+ Kg7 27.Rc1 Nc6 28.e5 Kg6 29.Bd3+ Kf7 30.Rh8 Ke7 31.Bg6, 1-0 since 32.Re8 mate was threatened.

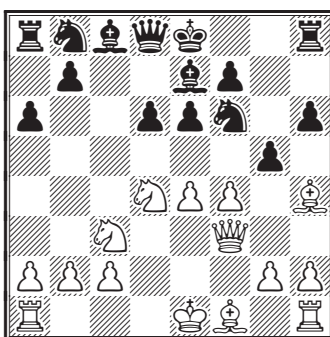
To Live or Die!

After this blow, and after the Argentinians realized that the Russians would all play the new (and apparently very powerful) 7.f4 (it was also first played in 1954), they understood that they needed to come up with something themselves.

On their off day they desperately looked for another Najdorf line that would suit their tastes, and when they realized that Pilnik had tried (after 7.f4) 7...Be7 8.Qf3 h6 9.Bh4 g5 in an earlier game in 1955 against Friðrik Ólafsson (White won!), the Argentinian players decided that they could fix what went wrong in the Ólafsson game. After hours and hours of analysis they walked away in confidence, hoping that someone would walk into their opening trap.

What they didn't know was something extremely bizarre would occur, which was given the name: The Argentinian Tragedy!

The line that both sides would live or die on!



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 h6 9.Bh4 g5

Geller wrote (in his wonderful book, *Application of Chess Theory*):¹

Several times in my career situations have occurred which are known by the name of ‘twin games.’ This was the case when in the nineteenth USSR Championship two games were played, between Geller vs. Flohr, and Petrosian vs. Smyslov, which up to a certain point were identical.

In one of the rounds of the 1956 USSR vs. Yugoslavia match the games Geller vs. Karaklajić and Averbakh vs. Ivkov coincided, and at the international tournament in Budapest in 1973 the same happened in Geller vs. Karpov and Hort vs. Hecht.

Finally, the present game had simultaneously two ‘twin brothers’: Keres vs. Najdorf and Spassky vs. Pilnik—a unique instance in the history of chess! Subsequently it received the name of the “Argentinian Tragedy.”

In twin games it is in principle more advantageous to occupy the second position, since it is possible to introduce corrections using the experience of one’s neighbor. Unfortunately it has never worked out that way: it has always been me who has had to commit himself first. Sometimes this was provoked by an urge to solve the problems of the position myself, sometimes because I learned of the existence of the ‘twins’ later than my colleagues.

At times I had to pay for the ‘haste’ (against Flohr and Karaklajić), whereas my neighbors, Petrosian and Averbakh, achieved more. In the present game, on the other hand, priority was rewarded by a quicker win than in the other games.

One of the “twins” that Geller referred to was a later round in the Gothenburg tournament when Keres was White against Najdorf, Spassky was White against Pilnik, and Geller was White against Panno. The Argentinian players were delighted since they were sure that at least one of the Soviet players would walk into their analysis. As it turned out, ALL three Soviet players entered the opening trap!

So what occurred? The position after **9...g5** appeared on all three boards at the same time, and as all three players reached the position after **10...Nfd7**, Spassky and Keres pondered whether or not to sacrifice on move eleven, while Geller did it quite quickly.

And from that moment on, Spassky and Keres simply watched Geller’s board and copied everything he did!

Efim Geller vs. Oscar Panno, Gothenburg Interzonal 1955

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7 8.Qf3 h6 9.Bh4 g5

[Geller]: “This advance is the idea of the defense worked out by the Argentinian players. They wanted, by exchanging the f4-pawn, to obtain the

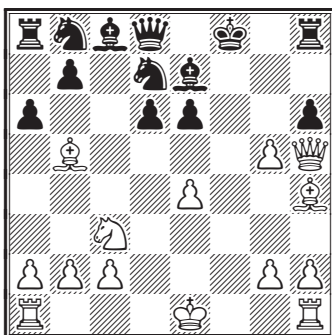
1 Efim Geller, trans. by Ken Neat, *Application of Chess Theory*. London: Everyman, 1984.

eternal square e5 for a Knight, which in their opinion, should compensate for White's superior development."

10.fxg5 Nfd7 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Qh5+ Kf8

[Geller]: "And here something unexpected occurred. The point was that at this moment Spassky and Keres were still deliberating over whether to sacrifice the Knight on e6, and their opponents Pilnik and Najdorf were observing our game and animatedly discussing something. Then Najdorf came up to me and very brusquely, interrupting my thoughts, declared: 'Your game is lost; all this has been analyzed by us!'"

13.Bb5!!



[Geller]: "Aimed indirectly against the future black Knight at e5, on which Black's entire system of defense is based. The quiet 12.Be2 or 12.Bd3 would have allowed him after 13...Ne5 14.0-0+ Kg7 15.Bg3 to support the Knight at e5 with his other Knight via 15...Nbc6. But now White will take on c6, then on e5, and will give mate!"

13...Ne5 14.Bg3!

Let's have Geller tell us why 14.Bg3 was so strong

[Geller]: "In their preparations the Argentinians had assumed that after 14.0-0+ Kg8! 15.Bg3 hxg5 White's attack would misfire. They overlooked that, after the move order employed in the game, 14...Kg8 fails to 15.Bxe5 and 16.Qg6+, while 14...Kg7 could have been met by 15.Bxe5+ dxe5 16.0-0 Qg8 17.Be8, etc.

"Incidentally, Najdorf and Pilnik awaited the development of events in our game, saw that things were bad for Black, and diverged from their prepared analysis by playing 13...Kg7. This merely enabled them to prolong their resistance."

14...Bxg5 15.0-0 Ke7 16.Bxe5 Qb6+ 17.Kh1 dxe5 18.Qxf7+ Kd6 19.Rad1+ Qd4 20.Rxd4+ exd4 21.e5+ Kc5 22.Qc7+ Nc6 23.Bxc6, 1-0.

A possible continuation: 23...bxc6 (23...dxc3 24.b4+ [24.Bxb7+ and 24.Be8+ also mate in 4] 24...Kc4 25.Bb5+ Kxb4 26.Rb1+ Ka3 37.Qa5 mate) 24.Qa5+ Kc4 25.b3 mate.

Here's what happened to Keres:

Paul Keres vs. Miguel Najdorf, Gothenburg Interzonal 1955

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7
8.Qf3 h6 9.Bh4 g5 10.fgx5 Nfd7 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Qh5+ Kf8 13.Bb5!!
Kg7 14.0-0 Ne5 15.Bg3! Ng6 16.gxh6+ Rxh6 17.Rf7+ Kxf7 18.Qxh6
axb5 19.Rf1+ Ke8 20.Qxg6+ Kd7 21.Rf7 Nc6 22.Nd5! Rxa2

Keres: "It is interesting to observe that, up to now, the game was gone exactly as in the Spassky vs. Pilnik encounter. Here Spassky played 23.h3, rekindling the threat of 24.Nxe7 followed by 25.Bh4, but there is of course no noticeable difference between the two pawn moves. Black was still faced by the same difficulties wwwthat were present on the previous move."

23.h4 Qh8 24.Nxe7 Nxe7 25.Qg5, 1-0.

The same continuation (with White's pawn on h3 instead of h4) in the Spassky game could still have occurred, but Najdorf had enough and resigned.

And here's Spassky's game:

Boris Spassky vs. Herman Pilnik, Gothenburg Interzonal 1955

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bg5 e6 7.f4 Be7
8.Qf3 h6 9.Bh4 g5 10.fgx5 Nfd7 11.Nxe6 fxe6 12.Qh5+ Kf8 13.Bb5!!
Kg7 14.0-0 Ne5 15.Bg3! Ng6 16.gxh6+ Rxh6 17.Rf7+ Kxf7 18.Qxh6
axb5 19.Rf1+ Ke8 20.Qxg6+ Kd7 21.Rf7 Nc6 22.Nd5! Rxa2

22...exd5 23.Qxd6+ Ke8 24.Qg6 dxe4 (24...Kd7 25.exd5 Na5 [25...
Rxa2 26.dxc6+ bxc6 27.Bd6] 26.d6 among other moves.) 25.Rg7+ Kd7
26.Qd6+ Ke8 27.Rg8+ Kf7 (27...Bf8 28.Rxf8 mate) 28.Qg6 mate.

23.h3

In his game, Keres played 23.h4, which led to the same basic position.

23...Qh8 24.Nxe7 Nxe7 25.Qg5 and here Najdorf resigned to Keres.

Pilnik decided to continue the game:

25...Ra1+ 26.Kh2 Qd8 27.Qxb5+ Kc7 28.Qc5+ Kb8 29.Bxd6+ Ka8
30.Bxe7 Ra5 31.Qb4, 1-0.

After this the variation was named the Gothenburg Variation.

Fischer Finds a Draw

This line seemed to have been refuted and everyone avoided it. However, in 1958 the great Svetozar Gligorić was shocked when a fifteen-year-old Bobby Fischer walked right into the "refuted" line!

PART
FOUR

Musings, Theory, Instruction, and FAQs

Do Titled Players Blunder?

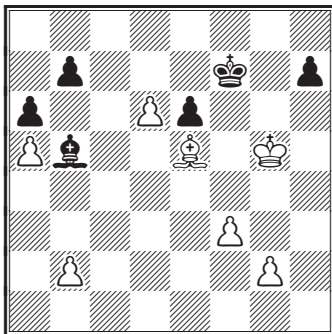
Question: Do international masters and grandmasters ever make beginner mistakes in tournaments? How often do they blunder? For example, one could have had too much to drink the night before a game and just give away a free piece (like a Knight or Bishop) simply because they didn't see something, and not because of a inspired tactic played by the opponent.

Titled players do make mistakes, and though some blunders may appear to be the same as ones beginners make, they're NOT! A large percentage of beginner's blunders happen because they don't understand basic positional ideas and/or basic tactics. Whereas titled players make horrific errors due to exhaustion, drunkenness, chess blindness (somehow the mind short circuits and you simply hang something), time pressure (which makes everyone look like a fool), emotional duress, or a momentary loss of concentration (caused by a tidal wave, a two-foot long insect's mandibles clamping onto your ankle, and other common scenarios of this sort).

For some reason, many players think that grandmasters would never make a double question mark move. However, they all do from time to time. Here's one where Anand tossed a key game in his World Championship match vs. Topalov:

Veselin Topalov vs. Viswanathan Anand, World Championship (8) 2010

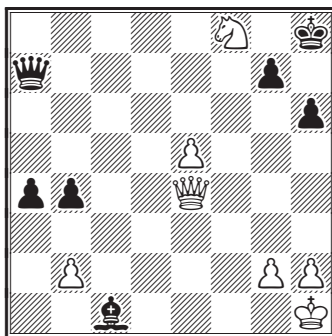
1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.Nc3 dxc4 5.a4 Bf5 6.Ne5 e6 7.f3 c5 8.e4 Bg6 9.Be3 cxd4 10.Qxd4 Qxd4 11.Bxd4 Nfd7 12.Nxd7 Nxd7 13.Bxc4 Rc8 14.Bb5 a6 15.Bxd7+ Kxd7 16.Ke2 f6 17.Rhd1 Ke8 18.a5 Be7 19.Bb6 Rf8 20.Rac1 f5 21.e5 Bg5 22.Be3 f4 23.Ne4 Rxc1 24.Nd6+ Kd7 25.Bxc1 Kc6 26.Bd2 Be7 27.Rc1+ Kd7 28.Bc3 Bxd6 29.Rd1 Bf5 30.h4 g6 31.Rxd6+ Kc8 32.Bd2 Rd8 33.Bxf4 Rxd6 34.exd6 Kd7 35.Ke3 Bc2 36.Kd4 Ke8 37.Ke5 Kf7 38.Be3 Ba4 39.Kf4 Bb5 40.Bc5 Kf6 41.Bd4+ Kf7 42.Kg5 Bc6 43.Kh6 Kg8 44.h5 Be8 45.Kg5 Kf7 46.Kh6 Kg8 47.Bc5 gxf5 48.Kg5 Kg7 49.Bd4+ Kf7 50.Be5 h4! 51.Kxh4 Kg6 52.Kg4 Bb5 53.Kf4 Kf7 54.Kg5



And here Anand “forgot” that he needed to be able to defend h7 with his Bishop (54...Bd3 drew) and literally tossed the game away with
54...Bc6?? 5.Kh6 Kg8 56.g4, 1-0.

Deep Fritz 10 vs. Vladimir Kramnik, Germany, Man vs. Machine match (2) 2006

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e4 b5 4.a4 c6 5.Nc3 b4 6.Na2 Nf6 7.e5 Nd5 8.Bxc4 e6
 9.Nf3 a5 10.Bg5 Qb6 11.Nc1 Ba6 12.Qe2 h6 13.Be3 Bxc4 14.Qxc4 Nd7
 15.Nb3 Be7 16.Rc1 0-0 17.0-0 Rfc8 18.Qe2 c5 19.Nfd2 Qc6 20.Qh5
 Qxa4 21.Nxc5 Nxc5 22.dxc5 Nxe3 23.fxe3 Bxc5 24.Qxf7+ Kh8 25.Qf3
 Rf8 26.Qe4 Qd7 27.Nb3 Bb6 28.Rfd1 Qf7 29.Rf1 Qa7 30.Rxf8+ Rxf8
 31.Nd4 a4 32.Nxe6 Bxe3+ 33.Kh1 Bxc1 34.Nxf8



Now 34...Kg8 35.Ng6 Bxb2 36.Qd5+ Kh7 37.Nf8+ Kh8 38.Ng6+ is a forced draw. However Kramnik had been playing for this position for several moves and felt his queenside pawns should give him serious winning chances (since he can make a passer with ...a4-a3). When looking at this position several moves back, he had decided that 34...Qe3 was crushing since he would be threatening white's Queen and also a back rank mate. So he calmly played...

34...Qe3??

No doubt thinking he was going to win, one can only imagine his horror when...

35.Qh7 mate was the reply!

ChessBase.com reported that, “Fritz operator Mathias Feist kept glancing from the board to the screen and back, hardly able to believe that he had input the correct move. Fritz was displaying mate in one, and when Mathias executed it on the board Kramnik briefly grasped his forehead, took a seat to sign the score sheet and left for the press conference, which he dutifully attended.”

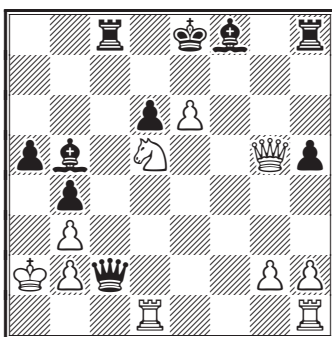
A couple more examples of self-immolation:

Silman vs. Jim McCormick, Berkeley 1974

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bg5 e6 7.Qd2 a6 8.0-0-0 Bd7 9.f4 h6 10.Bh4 Rc8 11.Nf3 Qa5 12.Bc4 b5 13.Bb3 b4 14.Bxf6 gxf6 15.Ne2 Qb6 16.f5 Na5 17.Nf4 Nxb3+ 18.axb3 h5 19.Kb1 a5 20.e5 fxe5 21.Nxe5 Bb5 22.Nxf7 Kxf7 23.fxe6+ Ke8 24.Nd5 Qc5 25.Qg5 Qxc2+

Now I reached for my King, thinking that he would resign after either of my two legal replies.

26.Ka2??



26.Ka1 would have forced resignation since after ...a4 a subsequent capture on b3 would not be with check, thus giving White an extra move.

26...a4, drawn since White can force perpetual check.

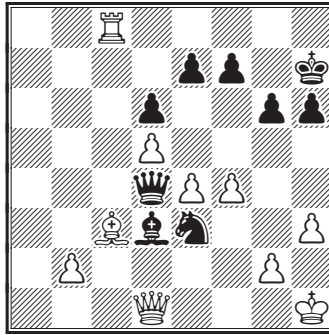
I'll finish with a game I played in Wijk aan Zee. It was a must win for me, and when my opponent arrived fifty-nine minutes late (one minute before being forfeited!), I thought it was going to be easy.

Silman vs. Tom De Jong, Wijk aan Zee 1989

1.d4 Nf6 2.c4 g6 3.Nc3 Bg7 4.e4 0-0 5.Be2 d6 6.Bg5 c5 7.d5 b5 8.cxb5 a6 9.a4 axb5 10.axb5 Rxa1 11.Qxa1 Nbd7 12.Nf3 Bb7 13.Nd2 Qc7 14.Qa2 Ra8 15.Qb3 Nb6 16.0-0 Bc8 17.Nc4 h6 18.Bf4 Nfd7 19.Ne3 Ne5 20.Bg3 Ra5 21.f4 Ned7 22.Kh1 Qa7 23.Be1 Bd4 24.Bd2 Nf6 25.Qd1 Bd7 26.Qb1 c4 27.Nxc4 Bxc3 28.Bxc3 Nxc4 29.Bxc4 Bxb5 30.Bxa5 Bxc4 31.Rc1 Ng4 32.Be1 Qd4 33.h3 Bd3 34.Rc8+ Kh7 35.Qd1 Ne3

I've been winning for most of the game, and now one way to ice the game was 36.Bf2 Qxe4 37.Bxe3 Qxe3 38.Rc3 Be2 39.Rxe3 Bxd1 40.Rxe7. However, something strange occurred. I had been moving fairly quickly (a stupid thing to do, which earns me full baboon status) since I felt the game was over. And here I zipped out one of the worst blunders of my life.

36.Bc3???



36...Qxc3 37.Rxc3 Nxd1 38.Rxd3 Nf2+

Suddenly reality hit me in the face. Hysterical, I resigned, stormed out of the hall and slammed the door behind me—on my foot! I broke a toe. Hobbling in the snow and cursing the gods of chess, I went to the pizza parlor and ordered a large one so as to drown my sorrows in food. However, I forgot about the European habit of putting olives on their pizzas with pits. I bit down on one and my tooth exploded! Rushing out of the restaurant in a fully lobotomized state, I slipped and fell face first into a puddle of “arctic” water. It was one of those days that you never forget.

Over the years I’ve noticed that whenever a grandmaster hangs his face, the masses online (with fake-names) go berserk and not only berate the unfortunate player but toss sick (and completely ignorant) accusations his way:

- ♦ “He lost on purpose! It’s a fix!” (Apparently you forgot to take your meds.)
- ♦ “He has insulted the chess community and needs to apologize to all of us!” (No, you have insulted the chess community by making chess fans look like fools, and *you* need to apologize.
- ♦ “If he had studied the Russian school of chess, this wouldn’t have happened. Real grandmasters, with real knowledge, are hard to find nowadays.” (Polite people, who are smart enough to know when they don’t understand something, are hard to find nowadays.)
- ♦ “His blunder is unforgivable!” (No, a blunder is no big deal. Your idiotic comment is unforgivable.)

So, what causes grandmasters blunder?

The easiest answer is that they are human, and humans make mistakes for a variety of reasons.

Here are a few:

- ♦ For one quick moment, they stop paying attention (and then it’s too late).

- ♦ Being overly tired. An exhausted brain is capable of any bozo act.
- ♦ Your wife left you, your dog picked her over you, and your bank account was emptied right before the game started. How would YOU play in that situation?
- ♦ Depression. When a strong player has a bad tournament, usually his bad tournament gets worse and worse as it progresses.
- ♦ Your blood sugar crashes, turning you into a temporary zombie (sadly, this often happened to me).
- ♦ Stress! An important game can be extremely stressful. And, when you are overwhelmed with stress during a tough battle, you can (and often do) miss things that you would normally see in a blitz game.
- ♦ The brain does flip-flops and you hallucinate (takes us back to tiredness, depression, and a drop in blood sugar).

The fact is everyone blunders! Everyone!

Okay, that is some crazy stuff. But I am sure old legends like Petrosian and Bronstein wouldn't miss such elementary things. Right?

White to move and Black has been in bad shape for a long time, and it was quite clear that the legendary Bronstein was going to be another victim of Petrosian's slow death technique. In the present position Black is completely busted and I'm sure he entertained resignation. However, why not play on for a while? Who knows, maybe Petrosian will hang his Queen (Black is threatening ...Nxb4)? Anything is possible!

Tigran Petrosian vs. David Bronstein, Candidates Tournament 1956

1.c4 Nf6 2.Nc3 g6 3.g3 Bg7 4.Bg2 0-0 5.Nf3 c5 6.0-0 Nc6 7.d4 d6 8.dxc5 dxc5 9.Be3 Nd7 10.Qc1 Nd4? 11.Rd1 e5 12.Bh6 Qa5 13.Bxg7 Kxg7 14.Kh1 Rb8 15.Nd2 a6 16.e3 Ne6 17.a4 h5 18.h4 f5 19.Nd5 Kh7 20.b3 Rf7 21.Nf3 Qd8 22.Qc3 Qh8 23.e4! fxe4 24.Nd2 Qg7 25.Nxe4 Kh8 26.Rd2 Rf8 27.a5 Nd4 28.b4 cxb4 29.Qxb4 Nf5 30.Rad1 Nd4 31.Re1 Nc6 32.Qa3

Okay, no Queen hang. But Bronstein decided to keep playing so he could watch Petrosian do his thing.

32...Nd4

Bronstein has decided to move his knight back and forth to c6 and d4 and, when Petrosian decides to finish him off, Bronstein will give up.

33.Rb2

Typical Petrosian. He's saying, "If you're having fun here, I'll let you suffer for a long, long time."