

# **Capablanca the Great Minimalist**

Volume I: 1901–1918

Cyrus Lakdawala

## **Capablanca the Great Minimalist – Volume I: 1901–1918**

**Author: Cyrus Lakdawala**

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## Introduction

“Talent hits a target no one else can hit;  
genius hits a target no one else can see.” – Arthur Schopenhauer

We see our reflection in a mirror, and perceive:

1. The mirror looks like us yet isn't the real thing.
2. We feel a connection to the image, but again, it's not “us.”
3. The reflection is completely familiar, while simultaneously alien.

We are such reflections when playing over the games of great players of the past, since they give us the eerie feeling of merging our consciousness with another's, which is a more refined version of ourselves. “So this is love?” pondered 8-year-old kid-Cyrus when reading my first chess book on Capablanca, which I poured through during Christmas of 1969 while visiting cousins in Blacksburg Virginia, where my Uncle Dinshaw was a professor of engineering at Virginia Tech. I don't remember the book's author yet distinctly do remember the feeling of awe in sensing perfection in Capa's games. So much so that the young Lakdawala lips threatened to burst into joyous song after going through each game.

### Capablanca's Style and the Benefits of Studying his Games

Some of my younger chess students believe that history began on the day of their birth and before that, people didn't exist. They argue in favour of the “Does-anyone-really-care-today-why-Arch-Duke-Ferdinand-was-assassinated?” theory of chess study. I respond that we can learn so much from the great players of the past, since in doing so, we understand the progression of knowledge which arrived at the present. Of course, the greatest players defy categories, since they excel in all aspects of the game. But if pressed, the following is my impression of Capa's style:

1. Intuition is to grasp at a hidden truth which in the present is barely even implied, must less seen. Most of us cut truth into bite-sized, digestible pieces, which make it easier to understand. No so for Capablanca, who had a way of posting his pieces on exactly the perfect squares at the perfect time. For his opponents, it almost felt as if Capa's pieces had a gift for condescension, since they had no need to look for opportunity. Opportunity instead came to them. The position's optimal plan would magically and instantaneously arrange itself into coherent order within Capa's chess mind. Capablanca's understanding didn't arrive via a fixed process of accumulated data, but instead, by a pure, wordless understanding of a Zen Master flash of intuition, which presented him with the position's truth, in a single, sweeping panorama.

2. Capablanca raised the bar on strategic understanding by at least one full generation. Only a handful of players in chess history were a generation ahead

in strategic understanding: Morphy, Steinitz, Capablanca, Fischer, Karpov and Carlsen. The subject of this book and series is the third player on the list. While Capablanca was a player of his time, so advanced were his strategic ideas that he was simultaneously a person of our time as well.

3. There has never been a chess player who played blemish-free chess, yet some came close. At its best, Capa's play appears free from obstacles of any kind. To players of that engine-free era, it sometimes felt as if Capablanca played perfect chess. The first time Emanuel Lasker met Capablanca and played blitz against him, he remarked that to his eyes, Capa never appeared to make a mistake.

4. Can silence be weaponized? Beginners often believe that quiet positions and endings are dead, lifeless realms. Play through Capablanca's games and we see that they teem with life and possibility, since Capa saw hidden meanings in positions where his rivals were blind. Faceless, noiseless threats are far scarier than those we can see and define. He was especially deadly in quiet positions, since he had the unique ability to kill without seeming to strike a blow. By the time his opponents realized the danger, it was often too late to save themselves. His moves had the effect of a slow-acting poison, rather than a war cry. He often defeated weaker players in games devoid of pain, blood or drama. His position would mysteriously improve without the opponent understanding how or why. As if by magic, his pieces always found themselves on the right squares, at the right time. When the detectives arrive, they find the corpse, yet bafflingly, they are unable to find signs of forced entry or a struggle.

5. Few of us associate Capablanca with tactics, but maybe we should. He was one of the most tactically aware players of his era, rivaling both Lasker and Alekhine in this metric. Capa's specialty was short-range combinations, which he almost never missed. He saw these, the way a priest/exorcist feels the presence of evil within the body of the possessed.

6. The lazy among us tend also to be the most efficient, since the lazy seek maximum gain with minimum effort. This is a perfect description of how Capa played chess.

### **About this Series**

This series will be in three volumes covering the early years, Capa's prime, and finally the later years. I believe a chess book should be a direct, interactive experience rather than a dry, intellectual endeavour which is soon forgotten, never to be implemented in our actual games. In this book, you will be presented with exercises which you can choose to do or not do. They include:

1. The spotting of combinations.
2. Calculation/visualization exercises.

3. Planning. Chess shouldn't lose touch with language, otherwise it turns into a dry arithmetic exercise. I always insist that students verbally describe their intended plan, which should not be: "I go there, he goes there!" The gathering of mass data doesn't always lead to the truth, since in the end it is up to our often-

flawed human brain to assess the data and come to a correct evaluation. In this book we work on the organization and engineering of plans.

4. Decision-making. The reader is also presented with deciding between critical decisions.

In the book I try not to get lost in either nostalgia or hero worship. If Capa's move is a mistake, he gets a "?", the same way his opponents do.

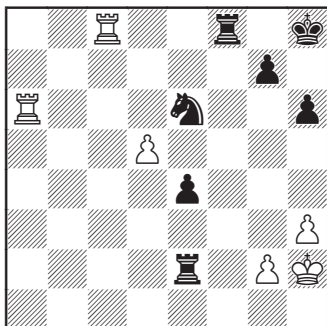
May the reader drink in the beauty of Capablanca's ideas and draw inspiration from his unique chess mind.

**International Master Cyrus Lakdawala,  
San Diego, California, USA. 1 August 2025**

## Game 13

E.B.Burgess-J.R.Capablanca

New York (Republican Club), 1906



**Exercise 22 (planning):** Capablanca just played 38...♖xe6, winning a piece, which in turn prompted his opponent to resign. 0-1. There is only one problem: the position is drawn! What is the saving move White missed?

**Answer:** White had no need to resign and could have saved himself with 39.♖a8!

39.♖a8!

Black's win curdles after this trick. White only saw

a) 39.dxe6?? ♖xc8 and Black is up a rook.

b) 39.♖xf8+?? ♘xf8 and Black is up a piece.

39...♖xc8 40.♖xc8+ ♘f8!

Black actually manages to lose after 40...♔h7?? 41.dxe6.

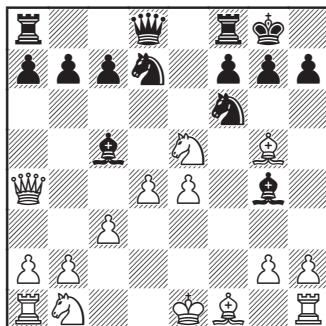
41.♖xf8+ ♔h7

Draw!

## Game 14

A.Pulvermacher-J.R.Capablanca

Casual game, New York, 1907



**Exercise 23 (combination alert):** How did Capablanca exploit his development lead?

**Answer:** Step 1: Exchange on e5, allowing White a pin on the f6-knight.

9...♘xe5! 10.dxe5

After 10.dxc5 ♘d3+ 11.♔xd3 ♙xd3 White must hand over a full queen to avert mate.

10...♘xe4! 0-1

The dray-horse no longer wants to dutifully pull the plough, and instead seeks to roam free.

Step 2: Queen sacrifice. Black ignores the fact that his knight was pinned. 10...♘xe4! 11.♔xd8 (Or 11.♙xe4 ♙d1#) 11...♔f2# This pattern is known as Legal's Mate.

## Chapter 2

### 1909–1910: The Marshall Match

Have you ever seen a bully attempting to push around a timid, small-framed guy who appears to be a milksop? And then to everyone's shock, the milksop turns out to be a fifth-degree black belt who goes on to pummel the bully until he resembles human chutney. Before this match, Capablanca was only known as a talented amateur. Frank Marshall was the king of American chess at the time. Marshall heard the buzz about the new hotshot Cuban who was beating everyone in sight and was sick of it. His intention was to put the upstart in his place. Nobody expected the match to even be close – and it wasn't. Marshall, the reigning U.S. Champion and a player generally believed to be ranked in the top 10 in the world, was utterly humiliated by a score of 8 losses, 14 draws and a single scrawny win. To win the match, a player needed to win eight games, draws not counting.

Capa stated the obvious when he wrote: "I had a fine judgment as to whether a given position was won or lost, and was able to defend a difficult position as few players could, as I repeatedly demonstrated during the course of the match, in repulsing Marshall's onslaughts." We must remember that it was Muhammad Ali who taught us: "It's not bragging if you back it up!" Capa's match victory may have altered the course of chess history, since it led to his invitation a couple of years later to the elite San Sebastian tournament. But more on that tournament later in the book. In the match, Capa outclassed Marshall, both strategically and tactically. Appearances suggested it to be a contest between a master and a club level player, rather than two world class players.

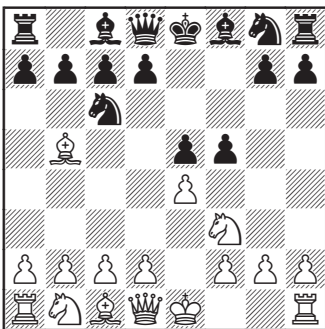
#### Game 15

**J.R.Capablanca-F.J.Marshall**

Match game 2, New York, 1909

*Ruy Lopez*

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 f5!?



Of course, Marshall was the keeper of the faith when it came to risky opening lines. Today, his judgement has been validated by theory and the opening is deemed sound. The Schliemann Variation, at the time in its theoretical infancy, undoubtedly came as a surprise to Capa, who held his own in the opening phase.

4.♘c3!

Remarkably, this is still White's main choice today, although the top players are starting to favour 4.d3.

4...♘f6?!

Today's main line goes 4...fxe4 5.♗xe4 d5 6.♗xe5 dxe4 7.♗xc6 ♕g5 8.♙e2 ♘f6, Draw Carlsen,M-

Nisipeanu, L Bazna Kings 4th Medias 2010.

5. ♖e2?!

5.exf5! is White's most dangerous option, according to current theory. Capa won with this improvement in the 12th game of the match, which we look at a few games later in the book.

5... ♘d4!

Marshall too displays an uncannily high understanding of the line, especially for the time. This move disrupts the natural flow of White's development and is the engine's top choice.

6. ♘xd4 exd4 7.exf5+ ♙e7 8. ♘e4 0-0 9. ♘xf6+ ♙xf6 10.0-0 d5 11. ♙d3

Black generated full compensation for the sacrificed pawn, since White's queenside is not so easy to efficiently develop. In the 10th match game Capablanca played 11. ♖h5 with an eventual draw;

11.g4? is way too greedy, since the game suddenly looks like a reversed King's Gambit where the pawn-up side castles into an attack. Black stands clearly better after 11...c5.

11...c5

Threatening to smother White's bishop with ...c5-c4.

12. ♖h5!?

12.b3 is well met with 12...b5!.

12... ♖c7

More accurate is 12...c4! 13. ♙e2 d3! 14.cxd3 ♙d4! 15.g4 ♖e7. Black has a dangerous development lead and attacking chances for the sacrificed pawn, although the engine still calls the game even.

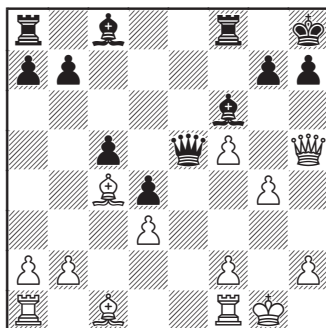
13.c4!?

13.b3 is a decent option.

13...dxc4?

This is an unnecessary concession which allows White to unravel his clogged queenside development. 13... b5! is much stronger.

14. ♙xc4+ ♔h8 15.d3 ♖e5 16.g4!



For Capa, this is a for-profit business endeavour. Marshall, like many current and past world leaders, failed to understand a simple economic factor: wars are not cheap. Capa's last move declares: "I'm keeping what's mine!" Black's position is that scary, blinking cursor on our computer screen warning us that something is wrong and if we don't fix it – whatever "it" is! – quickly, things are about to get a lot wrong(er)! Black lacks compensation for the pawn:

1. White's extended kingside pawns, which earlier could be construed as a liability to White's king, now may be turned into Black's liability. Black's king doesn't appear so safe anymore, *because* of White's unchallenged pawn mass on the kingside.

2. White experiences zero difficulty in deployment and completing queenside development.

16... ♙d7

16...♖e2? 17.f3! Threatening g4–g5, followed by g5–g6. 17...♖e8 Forced. 18.♖xe8 ♜xe8 19.♙f4 ♙d7 20.♙d5! and Black is completely busted in the ending.

### 17.a4

This way Black is denied ...b7–b5 options.

### 17...♙e7?

Swinging the bishop to d6 is ineffective. 17...g6! is Black's best defensive option. 18.♖h6! ♙g7 (18...gxf5? 19.♙f4 ♖e7 20.g5 ♙g7 21.♖h3 is lost for Black) 19.♙f4! ♖e2 20.♖h4 gxf5 21.f3! fxg4 22.♞ae1! ♖xf1+! (22...♖xb2?? 23.♞e7! Threatening ♙e5!, among other things. 23...♞xf4 24.♖g5 and Black can resign) 23.♙xf1 ♞xf4 24.♞e7 ♞xf3+ 25.♙g1 ♙f5 26.♞xb7. Threatening ♖e7. 26...♞e3 and conversion won't be so easy for White.

### 18.♙d2

Preparing to place a rook on the open e-file.

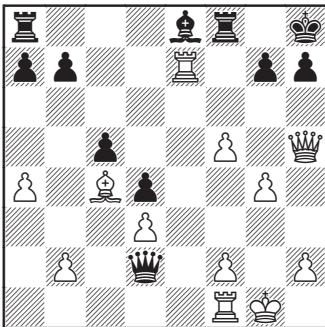
### 18...♖e2

18...♙d6?? 19.♞ae1 forces resignation, since Black's queen is trapped after 19...♖f6 20.♙g5.

### 19.♞ae1! ♖xd2

19...♖f3? 20.♞xe7 ♙c6 fails to 21.♞e4! and White wins.

### 20.♞xe7 ♙e8



### Exercise 24 (combination alert):

Do you see Capablanca's crushing shot?

**Answer:** Queen sacrifice/ overloaded defender/line opening.

### 21.f6! ♖h6

The only move.

a) 21...gxf6?? fatally opens the line to h7. 22.♞xh7#;

b) 21...g6?? is the same. 22.♞xh7#;

c) 21...♙xh5?? ignores a big threat. 22.fxg7#;

d) 21...♞xf6?? Black's rook was overloaded, unable to simultaneously defend e8 and capture on f6. 22.♞xe8+ ♞f8 23.♞xa8 ♞xa8 leaving White up a piece.

### 22.♖xh6!?

Capa's instinct was clarity over complex perfection. He prefers a simple endgame win over a more complex wicked attack after 22.fxg7+ ♖xg7 23.♖h4 ♙f7 24.f4.

### 22...gxf6 23.♞fe1!

Black's f8–rook remains overloaded, unable to capture on f6 due to the loose bishop on e8.

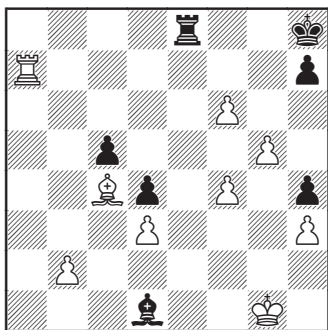
### 23...♙xa4 24.♞xb7 ♞ae8

The e-file must be challenged. 24...♞xf6?? 25.♞ee7 and Black is mated.

25.♞xe8 ♞xe8 26.♞xa7 ♙d1 27.h3 h5 28.g5 h4

Of course, there isn't a one in billion chance that Capa will allow Marshall time for ...♙f3, followed by ...♞e1+ and ...♞h1 mate. 28...♙f3 29.h4 consolidates.

### 29.f4!



**29...♙h5 30.f5 ♖f8 31.♖c7 ♜b8  
32.♜xc5 1-0**

The first domino falls. This was the first of many blows to the head Marshall suffered in this match, at Capa's hands.

### Game 16

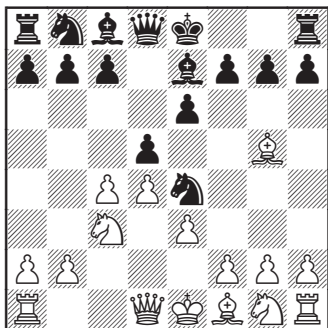
**F.Marshall-J.R.Capablanca**

Match game 3, New York, 1909

*Queen's Gambit Declined*

This masterpiece is Capa's Mona Lisa of the match. It's a dazzling demonstration of his ability as a tactician. I still remember its cognitive-disrupting effect when first playing it over 57 years ago. After playing through it, we understood why Capa got the nickname "The Chess Machine."

**1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♙g5  
♙e7 5.e3 ♗e4**



Lasker's line of the Queen's Gambit Declined is in violation of one principle while following another:

1. Don't move the same piece twice in the opening, unless forced to do so.

2. Swaps benefit the cramped side, which in this case is Black. Capa's last move is a precursor to the modern move order, which goes 5...0-0 6.♘f3 h6 7.♙h4 ♘e4 8.♙xe7 ♗xe7 9.♖c1 c6 10.♙d3 ♘xc3 11.♖xc3 dxc4 12.♙xc4 ♗d7 13.0-0 b6 14.♙d3 c5 15.♙e4 ♜b8, V.Kramnik-G.Kasparov, Las Palmas 1996. White's edge – if any – is microscopic.

**6.♙xe7 ♗xe7 7.♙d3**

White can also plan to recapture on c3 with a piece via 7.♖c1.

**7...♗xc3 8.bxc3 ♗d7 9.♗f3 0-0  
10.♗c2 h6**

Capa plays it simply, avoiding messy complications arising out of the line 10...dxc4!? 11.♙xh7+ ♗h8 12.h4.

**11.0-0 c5**

11...dxc4 is also possible.

**12.♖fe1**

It was probably more accurate to toss in 12.cxd5 exd5.

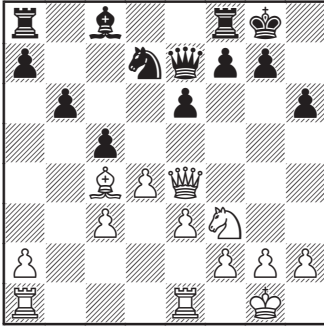
**12...dxc4!**

While this move may feel somewhat obvious to the present-day reader, 12...dxc4! in 1909 would have been considered somewhat eccentric by Marshall, since Black voluntarily cedes central control to White in exchange for freedom to complete queenside development. Capa intuitively understood the hypermodern concept of handing the opponent a big centre, which can later be viewed as a liability if chipped away on the sides. Most players of the time would have gone for the slightly inferior 12...b6?! 13.cxd5

exd5 14.e4!. White opens the game when leading in development.

**13. ♖xc4 b6 14. ♚e4!?**

14.e4 is more natural. Even here, Black looks just fine after 14...cxd4 15.cxd4 ♙b7.



I once wrote: “Marshall was good at what he did, but sometimes what he did wasn’t so good!” Marshall was down a point in the match and frustrated. He seeks complications by transferring his queen to the kingside. However, I don’t believe in this plan for a couple of reasons:

1. Black’s king-position looks quite secure at this stage.

2. Two sets of pieces have been swapped away, which means that White is hoping to attack with a reduced force.

**14... ♖b8**

Black’s rook in the corner was attacked by the white queen.

**15. ♙d3**

Threatening mate in the corner, which is easy to defend.

**15... ♘f6 16. ♚f4**

h4 is another possibility for the queen but Marshall probably didn’t like Black’s option 16. ♚h4 ♘d5.

**16... ♙b7**

This way the b8–rook is covered.

**17.e4**

Preventing ...♘d5 tricks, while seizing a bigger share of the centre.

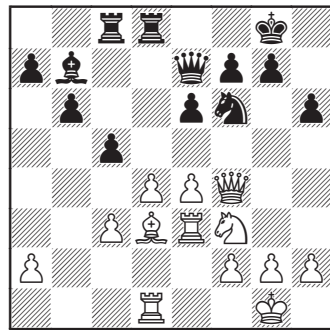
**17... ♖fd8 18. ♖ad1**

18.d5?? is a miscalculation. 18... exd5 19.exd5 ♘xd5! and Black wins material.

**18... ♖bc8**

Slightly more accurate is to first toss in an exchange on d4 with 18... cxd4 19.cxd4 ♖bc8.

**19. ♖e3!?**



Marshall played chess like a guy who is in an eternal mid-life crisis, where he dumps his wife of 30 years for a trophy wife 30 years his junior. He is determined to deliver mate whether the position calls for it or not!

a) 19.e5?? is tempting yet loses. 19... ♘d5 and if 20. ♚e4 g6! Black threatens a terrible discovered attack on c3. 21. ♚g4 ♘xc3! 22. ♙xg6 fxg6 23. ♚xg6+ ♚g7 24. ♚xe6+ ♚h8 25. ♖d3 cxd4 leaves White completely busted. If 26. ♘h4? Black wins on the spot with 26... ♘e2+! Weak back rank. 27. ♚h1 ♘f4 and it’s time for White to resign.

b) 19.d5! is White’s soundest option. 19...exd5 20.exd5 ♚d6 21. ♚xd6 ♖xd6 22.c4 b5! White’s control over d5 is undermined. 23. ♘e5 bxc4 24. ♙xc4

$\text{♖cd8}$  25. $\text{♖c1!}$  and if 25... $\text{♙xd5}$  26. $\text{♙xd5}$   $\text{♘xd5!}$  (26... $\text{♖xd5??}$  hangs a full exchange to 27. $\text{♘c6}$ ) 27. $\text{♖xc5}$   $\text{♙f6}$  the game should end in a draw.

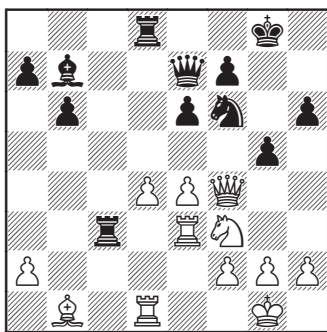
**19... $\text{cxd4}$  20. $\text{cxd4}$   $\text{♖c3!}$**

Principle: *Meet the opponent's attempted wing attack with a central counter.*

**21. $\text{♙b1}$**

21. $\text{g4?}$  is strongly met with 21... $\text{g5!}$ .

**21... $\text{g5!}$**



I live in Southern California, a place where its residents actually welcome low-level earthquakes. Why do we like them? Because the little ones relieve pressure and may avert the dreaded Big One. Capa's last move, while radical, is also strong, since it wins material by force. It essentially induces White into a piece sacrifice where Black should be able to withstand the attack.

**22. $\text{♘xg5}$**

This move is one made by a person who believes that buying lottery tickets counts as a retirement plan.

a) 22. $\text{♖g3}$  fails to 22... $\text{♖xe3}$  23. $\text{fxe3}$   $\text{♙xe4}$ , leaving White down a pawn for zero compensation.

b) 22. $\text{♖e5??}$  loses to a simple fork after 22... $\text{♙g4}$ .

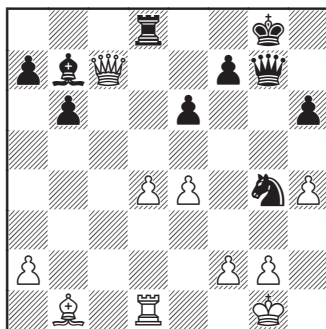
**22... $\text{♖xe3}$  23. $\text{♖xe3!}$**

23. $\text{fxe3?}$  is the engine's choice, which loses without much of a fight after 23... $\text{♙h5!}$  Zwischenzug. White is forced into a dismal ending after 24. $\text{♖xf7+}$   $\text{♖xf7}$  25. $\text{♙xf7}$   $\text{♙xf7}$ . His two extra pawns don't cut it against Black's extra piece.

**23... $\text{♙g4!}$**

Zwischenzug.

**24. $\text{♖g3}$   $\text{♖xg5}$  25. $\text{h4}$   $\text{♖g7}$  26. $\text{♖c7!}$**



Both sides had calculated to this position. Marshall may have believed that his double attack on Black's loose rook and bishop would offer him sufficient play. It doesn't. Capa assessed the aftermath more accurately and Black is winning. In fact, the engine gives two different ways to win.

**26... $\text{♖xd4!}$**

This is winning, yet actually not Black's optimal line. The creeping move 26... $\text{♖f6!}$  is a game-ender. 27. $\text{f3}$  (27. $\text{♖xb7}$  is even worse. 27... $\text{♖xf2+}$  28. $\text{♙h1}$   $\text{♖xd4}$  and White is mated) 27... $\text{♖xd4!}$  and Black gets a far superior version of the game's continuation.

**27. $\text{♖b8+!}$   $\text{♙h7}$  28. $\text{e5+}$**

Interference. At first sight it appears as if Black is just losing. In reality, everything is under control.

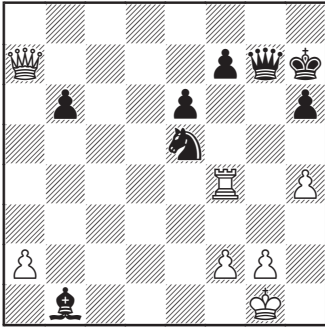
**28... $\text{♙e4!}$  29. $\text{♖xd4}$   $\text{♙xb1}$  30. $\text{♖xa7}$  30. $\text{f4}$   $\text{♙xa2}$  is lost for White.**

30...♞xe5

Threatening a fork on f3.

31.♞f4

31.♞xb6?? walks into 31...♞f3+.



**Exercise 25 (combination alert):**

The position is devoid of sources of natural light. Capa found a deadly blow. Let's see if you can find it:

**Answer:** Move the bishop to e4, where it is tactically protected and where it creates a fatal weakening of the white king's position.

31...♞e4!!

This move was imprinted upon my mind, 57 years ago. I still remember the sense of awe upon playing this game over for the first time.

32.g3

As hideous as this appears, it is White's only practical chance. The floating bishop is tactically covered. If 32.♞xe4? ♞f3+ 33.♞f1 (33.♞h1 ♞a1+ mates) 33...♞d2+ forks. 34.♞g1 ♞xe4 35.♞xb6 ♞a1+ 36.♞h2 ♞xa2 wins.

32...♞f3+

32...♞d5! 33.♞xb6 ♞g6! 34.♞a6 ♞c2 and White deals with too many threats.

33.♞g2!

33.♞f1?? allows mate in 5. 33...

♞a1+ 34.♞g2 ♞g1+ 35.♞h3 ♞h2+ 36.♞g4 ♞e5+ 37.♞h5 ♞g6#.

33...f5

This sets up a clever trap which Marshall avoids. 33...♞xh4+! is even stronger. 34.♞h3 ♞f3! Black's bishop is covered due to a fork on g5. 35.♞xb6 ♞g5+ 36.♞h2 ♞g6! Threatening a deadly check on h5. 37.g4. Forced. 37...♞d5. White's king won't survive for long.

34.♞xb6!

Marshall doesn't fall for the dirty trap 34.♞xg7+?? ♞xg7 35.♞xf3 h5! 36.a3 b5 and Zugzwang. White must give up a full rook.

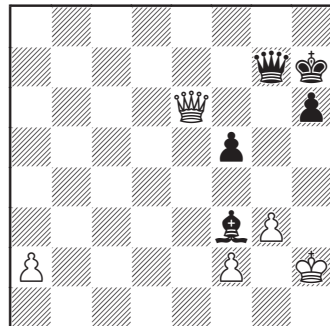
34...♞xh4+

This tempting move isn't best, since it allows Marshall to give up an exchange for a pawn and practical chances at perpetual check. After 34...♞d5! 35.a4 ♞xh4+ 36.♞f1 ♞a1+ 37.♞e2 ♞a2+ 38.♞d3 ♞g2! 39.♞b4 ♞e1+ 40.♞e3 ♞c2 White is mated.

35.♞h2 ♞f3+ 36.♞xf3!

Marshall finds his only prayer, defending with great ingenuity. Black will be up a piece, yet the win won't be so simple, since his soon-to-be exposed king is constantly threatened with perpetual check. White wouldn't last long after 36.♞g2? ♞d5! and an easy win for Black.

36...♞xf3 37.♞xe6



Let's gather data:

1. Black has only two pawns remaining and there is an unspoken, eternal threat of perpetual check if Black's queen wanders too far from her king.

2. White's a-pawn is about to surge down the board in an attempt to distract Black's queen from defending perpetual check against her king.

3. Black's only plan is to work out a way to deliver mate without allowing White perpetual check, which won't be so easy.

Conclusion: The position is deceptive. The engine has Black up a whopping -6.35 — more than a full rook! In real life, with us flawed humans playing, from a practical perspective it is far from easy to get at the white king without allowing White perpetual check.

**37...♙e4**

Black can't wait around all day because White will be busy pushing the passed a-pawn.

**38.f3!**

Marshall deftly disconnects Black's bishop from its emotional support pawn on f5.

**38...♙d3 39.♚d5 ♚b2+! 40.♙g1!**

Marshall remains tactically alert, avoiding the trap 40.♙h3?? ♙f1+ 41.♙h4 ♚h2#.

**40...♙b1 41.a4!**

Marshall sees that queen checks fall into his opponent's trap.

a) 41.♚d7+?? ♚g7 and the g3 and a2-pawns hang simultaneously. If White swaps queens to save one of them, the ending is hopeless. Especially so, since if the position later is a lone black h-pawn and bishop

versus White's king, then Black wins as his bishop is the correct colour for the h1—promotion square.

b) 41.♚f7+?? is exactly the same as line a), after 41...♚g7.

**41...♚a1!**

Threatening ...♙e4+, winning White's queen.

**42.♚b7+!**

This way Black is unable to block on g7 with the queen, since that would hang the now loose bishop on b1.

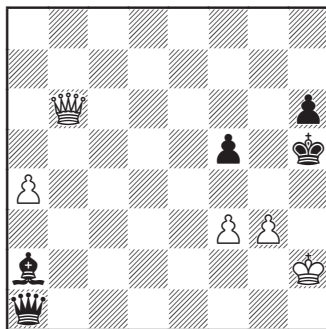
**42...♙g6 43.♚b6+ ♙h5!**

Black's king is weirdly safe from perpetual check, despite the near-wasteland conditions of only two remaining pawns that Black owns to cover his king from queen checks.

**44.♙h2!**

44.g4+? is tempting, since it removes all of Black's pawns from the board. Here is the problem: 44...fxg4 45.fxg4+ ♙xg4 and if 46.♚xh6? then 46...♙d3+ 47.♙f2 ♚f1+ 48.♙e3 ♚c1+ skewers the white king and queen.

**44...♙a2!!**



This stunning, engine-perfect move is not so easy for a human to find.

**45.♚b5**

Intending to give check on e8, while reinforcing the a-pawn.

45...♔g6!

The king refuses to get spooked by White's queen. This is why the bishop was transferred to a2: White's queen check on e8 will be blocked on f7.

46.a5 ♖d4 47.♗c6+ ♖f6 48.♗e8+ ♖f7 49.♗a4

49.♗c6+ is met with 49...♗e6.

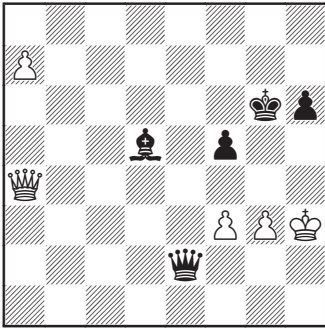
49...♗e6! 50.a6

White's a-pawn creeps dangerously close to the a8—promotion square. At this point the engine says White is mated in 18 moves!

50...♗e2+ 51.♔h3

51.♔g1 lasts longer but White is still mated after 51...♔d5. Amazingly, White's queen has been deprived of viable checks on an open board!

51...♔d5! 52.a7



**Exercise 26 (combination alert):**  
White threatens to promote on a8.  
What should Black do?

**Answer:** Ignore the promotion and chop the f3—pawn with the bishop, threatening ...♗g2+ and ...♗h2 mate.

52...♔xf3! 0-1

a) 52...♔xf3! 53.a8=♖ ♖g2+ 54.♔h4 ♗h1#;

b) 52...♗xf3 wins but is inaccurate and allows White to resist with

53.♗e8+. Now Black must avoid 53...♔f7?? 54.a8=♖! ♗g4+ 55.♔g2 ♔xe8 56.♗xe8+ Draw.

### Game 17

J.R.Capablanca-F.J.Marshall

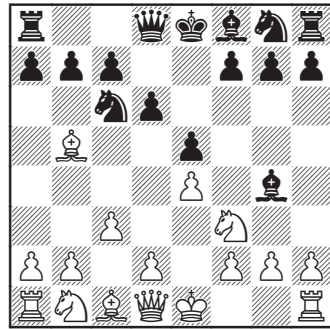
Match game 6, New York, 1909

*Ruy Lopez*

1.e4 e5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♔b5 d6

What was it about the dull Steinitz Defence which so attracted the old lions?

4.c3 ♔g4?!



Today, we know this pin either loses time or the bishop pair and light squares for Black. 4...♔d7 is Black's main line.

5.d3 ♔e7 6.♞bd2 ♞f6

6...♔g5 is well met with 7.d4.

7.0-0 0-0 8.♞e1 h6 9.♞f1

White is ready to gain a tempo with either ♞e3 or h2—h3.

9...♞h7 10.♞e3!?

I prefer the knight on g3 and would go for 10.h3 when 10...♔h5 is met with 11.♞g3.

10...♔h5

10...♔d7 is possible, but then moving the bishop to g4 earlier represented a loss of time.