Capablanca the Great Minimalist

Volume II: 1919–1928

Cyrus Lakdawala

Capablanca the Great Minimalist – Volume II: 1919-1928
Author: Cyrus Lakdawala

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Introduction

There is no universal consensus on the question of which player is our all-time favourite. For me, it has always been Jose Raul Capablanca. Now I finally got the opportunity to write a three-volume series, of which this book is the second. Very few of us are granted unobstructed passage to the fulfilment of our dreams in life. Capablanca clearly refuted the belief that art is born of pain since chess came so effortlessly to him. I once wrote: "If I were a thousand-armed god and wrote simultaneously on 500 laptops for an eon on the benefits of the study of the games of the great Jose Raul Capablanca who was our version of Mozart, it still wouldn't sufficiently cover how beneficial his games are." If you want a personal testimonial, then in my own case when I wrote *Capablanca: Move by Move* in 2011, at age 51, my rating went from the low USCF 2500's, up to 2575. Nobody gets a sudden massive rating boost at age 51! Then after completion of the book, my rating slowly deflated back to where it was before. Unfortunately, we, the ordinary, are forced to be us, a diluted version of our chess hero. However, we do have the power to inch closer to our aspiration through the intense study of the games of the great players. In Volume II, we return to the Capacine era. This book covers Capablanca's games during the height of his powers, from 1919 to 1928. The fear for great players is they may fail in their quest to reach the very top, which may in turn push their legacy into the depths of obscurity. This didn't happen to Capa, since in 1921 he defeated an aging Emanuel Lasker for the ultimate title.

Capablanca's Style and Abilities

When it comes to natural ability, we find four distinct classes:

1. The desperately poor.
2. The middle class, which is where the great majority of us live.
3. The comfortable upper class.
4. The filthy rich, which is where players like Morphy, Capablanca, Fischer and Carlsen reside.

The best way to break free of our programming is to study a wide variety of chess styles. As a natural strategist even from childhood, I was attracted to Capablanca's games. I also studied opposing, aggressive risk-taking styles like Alekhine, Tal and Nezhmetdinov. Yet I always wanted to play like (a wannabe) Capablanca. When club level players clash, the one who often emerges victorious is the player with the lower density of errors and delusion in their move-choices. It's a mistake to believe that our wins always come from deep ideas and perfect play. Instead, most of us win due to committing fewer inaccuracies and outright mistakes than the opponent. One great benefit of going over Capablanca's games is observing how he won games just this way, by committing fewer errors than

his opponents. At a concert, some people analyze the music while others feel it. Capa was a player in the latter category. When it came to simplified positions and endings, Capa was much like Neo from the Matrix: He was The One who inspired a combination of terror and awe from opponents. He excelled in quiet positions since stillness to his opponents usually translated to unreadable. Not so with Capa, who always found a way to improve his position, even in positions where it looked like nothing seemed to be happening. The way we, the ordinary, play chess is that our pieces resemble children at an understaffed daycare centre, where they chase the superficial. In Capablanca's games, his pieces and pawns always feel like they are in harmony, always reaching for the position's hidden essence. Intuition comprehends and sees with a quality more powerful than ordinary sight. As we play through Capablanca's games, we feel that he intuitively understood how to remove a position's embellishments and distractions while grasping firmly to the position's core.

Capablanca's Non-Losing Streak

Capa's long non-losing streak bred a feeling of indomitability. Astoundingly, he didn't lose a single serious game in an eight-year period, from 1916 to 1924, even though he found himself in dire trouble in many of these games. In this book, we look at this skill set of one of the greatest defensive players in chess history.

If you are a fan of Capablanca's chess, then your mind reflects his. May we merge our chess awareness with his.

Chapter 1

1919: Hastings and the Kostic Match

Capablanca had a lot in common with Muhammad Ali, in that both were cocky, both claimed (truthfully!) to be the greatest, and both champions' careers were hampered by war. In Capa's case, WWI cost him valuable years in his prime. Instead of playing Lasker for a match for the title, Capa had to be satisfied with lesser opposition in England. This chapter features some best efforts from the Hastings tournament of 1919, games against the mysterious "Allies," who were top local masters, and finally a match against Boris Kostic, who Capa blanked by a crushing 5–0 score. World War I had just ended. Capa's inclusion was the huge draw of the Hastings tournament. There was speculation that he was a bit rusty due to inactivity during the war. That turned out to be a false rumour! Capa easily won the Hastings tournament by a dominating score of 10.5 out of 11 games. His only draw was against Kostic who placed second, and which led to their match which we examine after this tournament. Here is the wall chart:

Hastings, 1919

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
1	Capablanca	*	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10½
2	Kostic	½	*	½	1	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9½
3	Thomas	0	½	*	½	½	½	1	½	1	½	1	1	7
4	Yates	0	0	½	*	½	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	7
5	Wahltuch	0	½	½	½	*	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	5½
6	Mitchell	0	0	½	0	0	*	0	1	1	1	1	1	5½
7	Scott	0	0	0	0	0	1	*	1	1	1	0	½	4½
8	Olland	0	0	½	0	1	0	0	*	0	1	1	1	4½
9	Marchand	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	*	0	1	1	4
10	Conde	0	0	½	0	1	0	0	0	1	*	0	1	3½
11	Winter	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	*	0	3
12	Cole	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	0	0	0	1	*	1½

Game 1
J.R.Capablanca-F.Yates
Hastings, 1919
Ruy Lopez

Frederick Yates was a 6–time British champion. By 1919, Capablanca was generally recognized as the world's strongest player, even though Lasker held the title of World Champion. In this game, Yates' first encounter with Capablanca, he must have felt the pull of opposing forces in that he must have been fearful of playing the Cuban chess machine. On the other hand, Yates was England's

number one player and wanted to show Capa that he wasn't afraid. This may have been the motivation behind his insanely aggressive move 12... g5?, where he came at Capa with the disposition of an enraged, charging rhino!

1.e4

Do you believe in love at first sight? I do. I knew I was going to marry my wife Nancy after our first date, and I knew I was going to be a lifelong Capa fan, after going over just a single book of his games, when I was eight years old.

1...e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 ♘a5

Most players castle first today.

9.♗c2 c5

We reach Chigorin's Variation of the Ruy Lopez.

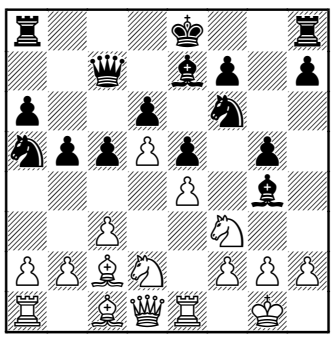
10.d4 ♕c7 11.♘bd2 ♗g4?!

This tends to be a loss of time for Black. Better choices are: 11...0-0; or 11...cxd4.

12.d5!

Now Black will either lose time or the bishop pair, since White will follow with h2–h3 and if the bishop backs up to h5, then Nf1, followed by Ng3.

12...g5?



Like you, I too am concerned by the rise of mental illness in society! Our mind flickers in puzzled misrecognition, since this crazy move comes with the impact of a gong rung next to Capa's ear. Okay then, let's go with brazen defiance. Carsten Hansen and I wrote a book on the iconoclastic IM Michael Basman's games called *Basman's Folly*. He would often open chess games with 1.g4!? and sometimes even with 1... g5!? when he played the black pieces. Only Basman would approve of Yates' last move. The strategic issues with the overly aggressive thrust are numerous:

1. The move is in violation of the Principle: *The more cramped side should not be the one attempting to launch an attack*.

2. The move creates a hole on f5, which can easily be occupied by a white knight after Nf1 and either Ne3 or Ng3.

3. By tossing in the weakening ...g7–g5, Black's king now lacks a safe haven on either side of the board. 12...0-0 was better.

13.♘f1 h6 14.♘g3 ♖d8

I'm not sure what the idea behind this move is. Perhaps Yates didn't like his rook on a8, as long as White has a2–a4 options. But if so, the rook looks better placed on b8.

15.a4

Capablanca opts to confront his opponent on the queenside. White can also try the plan to occupy f5 with 15.h3 ♗d7 16.♘h2! intending Nhf1, Ne3 and then either knight can move into the vacancy on f5.

15...b4?!

This creates further weakness on the queenside. 15...♗d7 is marginally better.

16.cxb4 cxb4 17.♗d3

The bishop attacks the now loose a6–pawn.

17...♗c8 18.♗e3

White is ready to occupy the open c-file with his rook.

18...♘g4

This doesn't really gain a tempo, since White can retreat the bishop to d2, attacking b4, and then gain the tempo back with h2–h3.

19.♖c1

With his last move Capablanca has a combination in mind. Also strong was the simple retreat with 19.♗d2 ♕b6 20.♖f1.

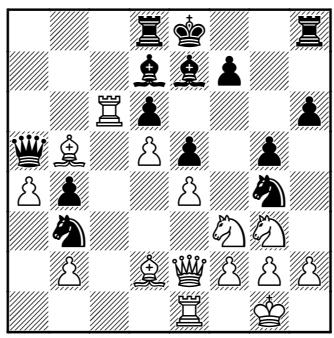
19...♕b8

On 19...♘xe3 Capablanca had the following tactical sequence in mind: 20.♖xc7 ♘xd1 21.♖xd1 ♘b3 22.♗c4 ♘c5 23.♘xe5! dxe5 24.d6! ♗xd6 25.♖xd6! ♘e6 26.♖xd8+! ♔xd8 27.♖xf7 and a hopeless ending for Black.

20.♗d2 ♕b6 21.♕e2

Also strong is 21.♖e2! maintaining control over b3.

21...♘b3 22.♖c6 ♕a5 23.♗xa6 ♗d7 24.♗b5!



White will rule the light squares with this powerful exchange sacrifice and Yates' position soon overflows with strategic grievance.

24...♗xc6 25.♗xc6+ ♔f8 26.♕c4?!

This is inaccurate since Black gets a touch of play on the dark squares. White's bind is far more crushing after 26.h3! ♘f6 27.♗e3.

26...♘xd2 27.♘xd2 ♕a7

Yates targets f2, which is easy to defend.

28.♕e2 h5 29.♘f5

Capa's knight occupies the gaping hole on f5.

29...♗f6 30.♘c4

Attacking the d6 base pawn.

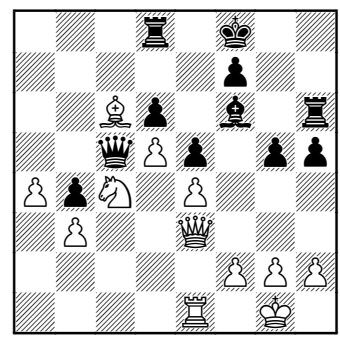
30...♕c5 31.b3 ♘h6!

Yates challenges the monster f5–knight, while setting a clever trap.

32.♘xh6!

Capa avoids a trap. 32.♕xh5? is overly clever and allows Black back into the game. 32...♘xf5 33.♕f3 ♖h4! 34.exf5 ♔g7 35.g3 ♖xc4! 36.bxc4 ♕xc4 37.♗b5 ♕c3 and Black should save the game.

32...♖xh6 33.♕e3!?



Capa's natural inclination was always to try and convert in an ending.

I have a feeling that in the same position, Alekhine would surely have played 33.a5 keeping queens on the board.

33...♖c8

33...♕xe3 34.♘xe3 g4 35.a5 is equally miserable for Black.

34.♖c1

I would be inclined to immediately take the passed and supported d-pawn with 34.♕xc5 dxc5 35.♗b5.

34...♗d8?!

34...♕xe3 is a better try.

35.♕xc5 dxc5 36.♘xe5

White's position is overwhelming, with two pawns for the exchange and a third to come if he wants it, on c5.

36...♔e7 37.♖xc5 f5

37...♔d6 isn't much of a double attack, since it is met with 38.♘d3.

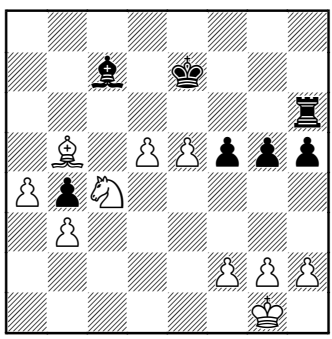
38.♖c4

Attacking the b4–pawn.

38...♗a5

38...fxe4 39.♖xe4 ♔f8 40.♖xb4 is hopeless for Black.

39.♗b5! ♖xc4 40.♘xc4 ♗c7 41.e5



Capablanca's position is a creature arisen from a nightmare. White picked up three passed pawns for the exchange and the conversion technique doesn't require a Capablanca to win it. Even worse news for Black is that a fourth pawn is about to fall, since White simultaneously threatens d5–d6+, and also Ne3!.

41...♗b8 42.♘e3!

Bye bye, pawn number 4. Yates should have done himself a favour and resigned here.

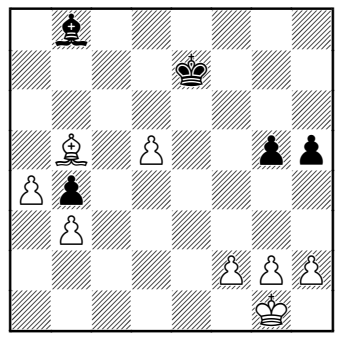
42...♖h7

Fine. Let's hopelessly play on.

43.♘xf5+ ♔f7 44.e6+ ♔f6 45.e7

This of course wins the exchange for only a pawn.

45...♖xe7 46.♘xe7 ♔xe7



Black faces the Big Starve, where corpses outnumber the living in his position. White is up three pawns and the opposite-coloured bishops aren't going to be even a prayer for Black to draw, since White can eventually create a third passed pawn.

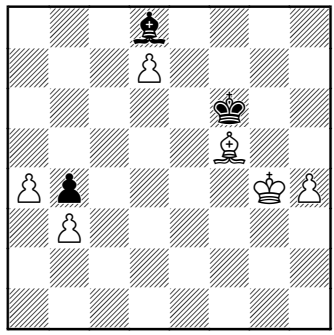
47.g3 ♗c7 48.♔g2 ♔d6 49.♗e8! h4 50.♗f7 ♔e5 51.♔h3!

The king heads for the hole on g4.

51...♗d8 52.♔g4 hxg3 53.fxg3!

In this case the correct recapture is away from the centre. A passed h-pawn will be more potent than a passed f-pawn.

53...♔f6 54.♗e6 ♔g6 55.d6 ♔f6 56.♗f5 ♗b6 57.d7 ♗d8 58.h4 gxh4 59.gxh4



Are we having fun yet? This is a really good time for Black to resign since his chance to erect a fortress blockade on the dark squares is zero.

59...♗c7 60.h5 ♔g7 61.♗e4 1-0

61.♗e4 ♔h6 62.♗f3 ♗d8 63.♔f5 ♔g7 64.♔e6 is an easy win for White.

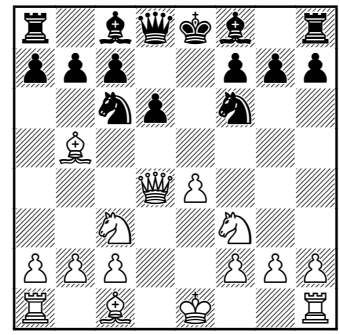
Game 2
M.Marchand-J.R.Capablanca
Hastings, 1919
Ruy Lopez

Please prepare yourself for the dullest game of the tournament. Absolutely nothing happened, and then Capa won since his opponent forgot that he wasn't allowed to take an unlimited amount of time on his moves!

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗b5 d6

We go from a Four Knights to a cramped yet solid Steinitz Ruy Lopez, which was a cage so many players of that era were happy to inhabit.

5.d4 exd4 6.♕xd4!?



This somewhat offbeat recapture was also played by Marchand a year previous to this game. Normal is 6.♘xd4.

6...♗d7 7.♗xc6 ♗xc6

This is the correct recapture. 7... bxc6?! 8.♗f4 ♗e7 9.e5 is in White's favour.

8.♗g5

A novelty at the time. The move isn't so great, since Black will either gain time or a healing swap with ...Be7 and ...Nd7. 8.0-0 ♗e7 9.♘d5 0-0 10.♖e1 ♘d7 11.♘xe7+ ♕xe7 12.♗f4 ♖fe8 13.♘d2 ♕e6 14.♖e3 ♘e5 15.c4 ♘g6 16.♗g3 b6 17.♖ae1 f5! 18.exf5 ♕xf5 and Black easily equalized, ½–½ Marchand,M-Speijer,A Amsterdam VAS Four Masters 2R 1918.

8...♗e7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♖fe1 h6 11.♗h4 ♘d7!

Principle: *Swaps benefit the more cramped side.*

12.♗xe7

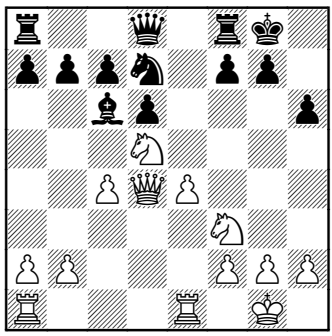
12.♗g3 ♗f6 is also fine for Black.

12...♕xe7 13.♘d5 ♕d8

If there is such a thing as an anti-Eden, then this snoozer game is it. Capa of course is playing for a win

against his lower-rated opponent. He seeks to retain the imbalance of bishop against knight. 13...♗xd5 is awfully drawish. For example: 14.exd5 ♕f6 15.c4 a6 16.♕xf6 ♘xf6 17.♖e7 ♖fc8 18.♘d4 ♔f8 19.♖ae1 b5! 20.b3 bxc4 21.bxc4 ♖ab8 22.♘c6 ♖b2 23.♖1e2 ♖b1+ 24.♖e1 ♖b2 and a repetition draw.

14.c4



We reach the eternal dilemma of the higher-ranked player. Capa equalized yet the position lacks dynamism and it's difficult to visualize Black winning, unless White gets ambitious. With his last move Marchand gains a bit more space, yet no real advantage since there is no way to turn the extra territory into something concrete.

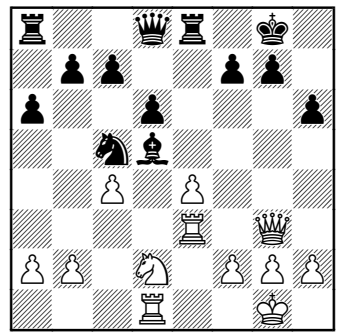
14...♖e8 15.♖ad1 ♘f8

Capa is putzing around, hoping for something to happen.

16.♘d2

16.♕c3!♘e6 17.♖e3♖c8 18.♖de1. It's difficult to envision White ever losing this position, which resembles a chess version of Fort Knox.

16...♘e6 17.♕e3 a6 18.♕g3 ♘c5 19.♖e3 ♗xd5 0-1



In this dull, equal position something strange happened. Marchand, while he was considering which way to recapture on d5, received, to his deep chagrin, a really crappy severance package. The tournament time control was a bizarre one hour and fifty minutes for the entire game. There was no second time control. Marchand was apparently oblivious to this fact and flagged! I have a couple of questions: 1. What did Marchand believe the time control was? 2. Who on earth loses on time, before move 20? Keep in mind that Capablanca did claim that the better player is always lucky!

Game 3
H.G.Cole-J.R.Capablanca
Hastings, 1919
Ruy Lopez

1919 wasn't so far off from the era of the Great Romantics. In this game, Capa's opponent played with an almost spiritual disdain for material when he sacrificed a pawn completely unsoundly.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6

The Berlin variation of the Ruy Lopez.

4.0-0 d6

Ugh! Now we transpose back to the Steinitz line, which is the dullard's paradise. More interesting is to enter the Berlin Wall line with 4...♘xe4 5.d4 ♘d6 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.dxe5 ♘f5 8.♕xd8+ ♔xd8.

5.d4 ♗d7 6.♘c3 ♗e7 7.♖e1

This is White's main line even today. I would be more inclined to try 7.d5 ♘b8 8.a4.

7...exd4 8.♘xd4 0-0

Neither is it easy for White to earn an edge in the line 8...♘xd4 9.♗xd7+ ♘xd7 10.♕xd4 0-0.

9.♗xc6 bxc6

Capa wants the bishop pair.

10.♗g5

This automatic move isn't such a great idea, since it isn't in White's best interest to swap away his dark-squared bishop, either for Black's knight, or e7–bishop. 10.♕f3 is White's most common response today.

10...h6 11.♗h4 ♖e8 12.♕d3

a) 12.h3 can be met with 12...♘xe4 13.♗xe7 ♘xc3 14.♗xd8 ♘xd1 15.♖xe8+ ♗xe8 16.♗xc7 ♘xb2 17.♗xd6 ♖d8 18.♘f5 ♘c4 19.♗c5 a5 20.♖e1. The position is equal and drawish.

b) 12.e5 ♘h7 is okay for Black.

12...♘h7!

Principle: *The cramped side benefits from swaps.*

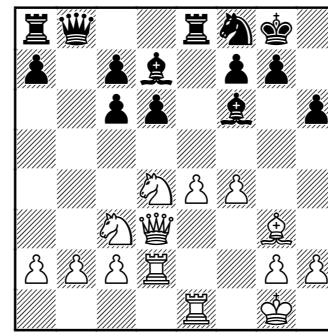
13.♗g3

A novelty. Three years earlier, White played 13.♗xe7, ½–½ Te Kolste,J-Fontein,G NED-ch Amsterdam 1916. Black looks okay after 13...♖xe7.

13...♘f8

13...♗f6 is also possible.

14.♖ad1 ♗f6 15.♖d2 ♕b8! 16.f4?



Why is it that when we are about to do something completely insane, at the moment it feels perfectly normal and logical? We all have that seductive, inner voice who tempts/compels us to do crazy things, by whispering: "Trust me. It will work!" This is the point in the movie where the pipsqueak 17th Century royal court aristocratic fop dramatically removes a glove and slaps the heavily muscled hero across the face, challenging him to a duel. I'm being very kind in giving Cole only a single question-mark for this move. In chess there is no afterlife where we pay for our earthly sins. We pay for our sins in this life and this game, which is a symbol of our life. This is a completely misguided, unsound pawn sacrifice. Correct was 16.b3 ♕b4 17.♖dd1 a5. Black stands no worse.

16...♗xd4+

Capa opts to reduce material before taking the pawn on b2. There was nothing wrong with hanging on to the dark-squared bishop and playing the immediate 16...♕xb2 17.♖b1 ♕a3. White receives zero compensation for the missing pawn.

17.♕xd4 ♕xb2

Thanks!

18.♖b1

Are you overwhelmed by White's compensation? Me neither. In fact, it doesn't even reach the level of whelmed! White received absolutely nothing for his missing pawn and his sacrifice is devoid of even a trace of menace. 18.e5 dxe5 19.fxe5 ♗e6 20.♖b1 ♕a3 21.♕b4 ♕xb4 22.♖xb4 ♖eb8! 23.♖bd4 ♖b2 is a hopeless ending for White.

18...♕a3 19.♖b3 ♕a5 20.f5

Cole inhibits both ...Be6 and ...Ne6.

20...♖ab8 21.♕d3

21.f6 g5 22.♕e3 ♘g6 23.h4 ♖xb3 24.cxb3 ♔h7. There is no danger to Black's king.

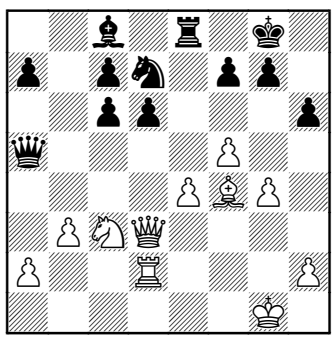
21...♖xb3

Capa is happy to keep swapping since he is up a clean pawn.

22.cxb3 ♗c8!

d7 is cleared for the knight, which then seizes control over the e5–hole.

23.♗f4 ♘d7 24.g4!?



White reached the "I have to do something" stage, since he realizes that he got nothing for his pawn sacrifice. The problem is this push only weakens White's position.

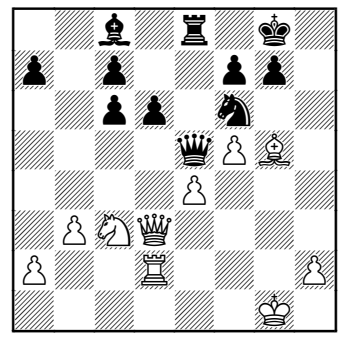
24...♘f6! 25.g5

25.h3 ♕b4! 26.♔h2 ♗b7! 27.g5 ♘h5 28.♗e3 c5! 29.gxh6 ♗xe4 30.♘xe4 ♕xe4 is hopeless for White.

25...hxg5

25...♘h5 26.♗e3 ♗a6 27.♕c2 hxg5 28.♗xg5 d5! 29.exd5 ♖e1+ 30.♔f2 ♖f1+ 31.♔g2 ♕c5 32.♖f2 ♗d3! White's queen must continue to protect the rook on f2. 33.♕d2 ♖xf2+ 34.♕xf2 ♕xc3 wins a piece and the game.

26.♗xg5 ♕e5



Capa is winning and, from this point on, it's all just muscle memory. White is hopelessly busted for the following reasons:

1. He is down a pawn.

2. He overextended on the kingside, which means his king is exposed and vulnerable.

3. The e4–pawn is chronically weak.

4. Numbers 2 and 3 on the list, coupled with Black's powerfully centralized pieces, means that White's chances of a successful attack down the open g-file are near zero.

27.♖e2 ♘d7

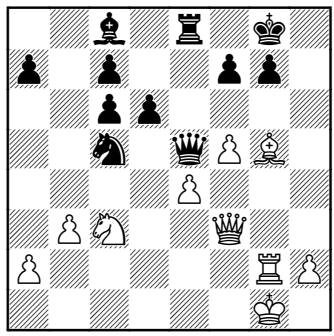
27...♗b7! is stronger.

28.♖g2

White prays that he can get something going along the open g-file.

The problem with this move is that it fails to defend the wobbly e4–pawn. 28.♕e3 was better but wouldn't have saved White.

28...♘c5 29.♕f3?



Exercise (combination alert): To claim that White's position lacks charm would be a colossal understatement. White wants to play Bh6 next move. Black can play 29... Nxe4 and head for a two-pawns-up opposite coloured bishops ending. Look closer. Black has a much stronger option:

Answer: Sacrifice the bishop on f5. White's last prayer was to try the ending with 29.♕g3 ♘xe4 30.♕xe5 ♖xe5 31.♘xe4 ♖xe4 32.♗h6 ♔h7! 33.♗xg7 ♗xf5.

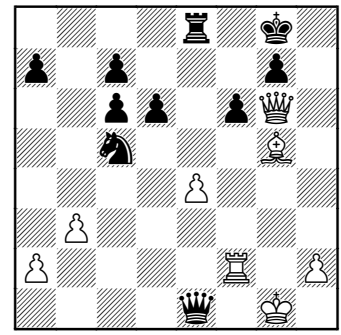
29...♗xf5!

29...♘xe4 transposes to the note above, which leads to the won ending after 30.♘xe4 ♕xe4 31.♕xe4 ♖xe4 32.♗h6 ♔h7! 33.♗xg7 ♗xf5.

30.♕xf5

30.exf5 ♕e1+ 31.♕f1 ♕xc3. Threatening ...Re1, pinning and winning White's queen. 32.♗h4 ♖e4 33.♗g3 ♕d4+ 34.♔h1 ♕d5 35.f6 g6 and White is hopelessly busted.

30...♕xc3 31.♖f2 f6 32.♕g6 ♕e1+! 0-1



33.♖f1 ♕xe4 leaves Black up three pawns. On top of that, White is forced to swap queens, otherwise he loses his bishop.

Game 4
J.R.Capablanca-G.Thomas
Hastings, 1919
Ruy Lopez

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 d6

"I will never leave you my love!" murmured every single chess player in the world in 1919, when it came to their opening choices. "Nor I, you!" responded the Steinitz Lopez, who for some reason speaks like a Victorian era lover. The Steinitz Lopez resonates with adventure-seekers worldwide. I'm joking, of course! Today we study opening lines which are miserably difficult to master and harder than passing the bar exam. Not so in the good old days, when everyone believed that it was the law to meet the Ruy Lopez with the Steinitz Defence.

4.♘c3 ♘f6 5.d4 ♗e7

Every Chessbase version of this game I have seen seems to come with

this faulty move order. Of course, it's a double question mark, but I don't believe that Sir George played it. It has to be a Chessbase input error and Thomas very likely played the correct sequence 5...♗d7 6.0-0 ♗e7.

6.0-0 ♗d7

Now we reach the game's true position.

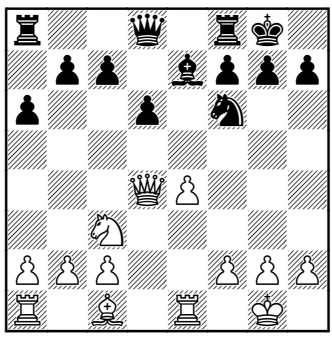
7.♖e1

7.d5! is White's optimal path to an advantage.

7...♘xd4

In this version, Black doesn't get the normal "little center" which we see so often in this line.

8.♘xd4 exd4 9.♕xd4 ♗xb5 10.♘xb5 a6 11.♘c3 0-0



Sure, White picked up a bit of extra space in the centre. Yet Black's position remains weakness-free and I doubt that White's edge even adds up to a "+=".

12.♗g5 ♘d7?!

This natural move loses time and offers White an edge. 12...h6! 13.♗h4 c6 14.♖ad1 ♕a5 is equal.

13.♗xe7 ♕xe7 14.♘d5 ♕d8 15.♖e3!

Capa hopes to build a kingside attack, using his central space as a launching pad.

15...♘e5

There is no reason to give White a coming f2–f4 for free. Surely it's more accurate to play 15...♖e8.

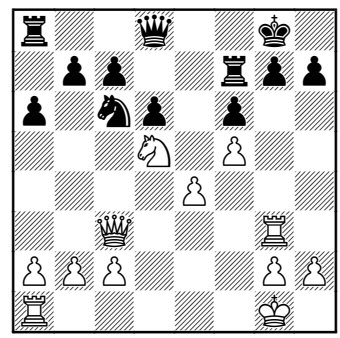
16.♖g3!

f2–f4 is scary for Black, who is induced into weakening e6 with his next move.

16...f6 17.f4 ♘c6 18.♕c3! ♖f7

18...♖e8?? is of course unplayable due to 19.♘xf6+.

19.f5!?



Radical stuff. It was Bobby Fischer who said that, in chess, we must give up something to get something in return.

1. Capa offers his opponent a big hole on e5, as well as a backward e-pawn.

2. With a push to f5, White gets kingside attacking chances and also the option to shift his knight into e6, via f4. 19.♖e1 is more flexible.

19...♕f8?!

There is no reason to go passive like this. Better was 19...♘e5 20.♘f4 ♕d7.

20.♕b3!

Dual threats: Qxb7 and Nxf6+.

20...♔h8?

a) 20...♖b8?? hangs a key pawn to the trick 21.♘xf6+!;

b) 20...♕d8! Now if 21.♕xb7!? (White's best move may actually be the restrained 21.♘f4!) 21...♘d4! threatening ...c7–c6, as well as ...Ne2+, followed by Nxg3. 22.♔h1! c6 leads to huge complications and can be met with 23.♘xf6+! ♔f8! 24.♘xh7+ ♔g8 25.♕b4 ♘xc2 26.♕c3 ♘xa1 27.♘g5 ♖aa7 28.h3 ♕e8 29.b3 ♕e5 30.♕xe5 dxe5 31.♘xf7 ♔xf7 32.♖c3 ♖d7 33.♖c1 ♖d4 34.♖xa1 ♖xe4. Black will easily hold the draw in the pawn down ending. Black can also go for the safer line 22...♖b8 23.♕xa6 ♘xc2 24.♖b1 ♘b4! 25.♕c4 ♘xd5 26.♕xd5 ♕e8!. According to the engine, Black has nearly full compensation for the sacrificed pawn, due to pressure on e4.

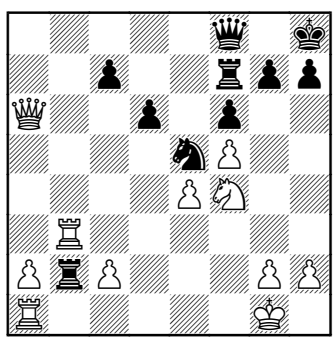
21.♘f4?!

This maintains an advantage yet isn't White's optimal continuation. Capa should go for it with 21.♕xb7! ♘e5 22.♘f4 ♖b8 23.♕xa6 ♖xb2 24.♖b3! ♖xc2 25.♘e6 ♕g8 26.a4!. White has a winning position due to the passed a-pawn.

21...♘e5?

21...♕e8! was correct.

22.♕xb7! ♖b8 23.♕xa6 ♖xb2 24.♖b3!



24...♖xc2

24...♖xb3 25.axb3 leaves Black down a pawn and busted.

25.♖ab1

Suddenly, Black must worry about a white rook invasion to b8.

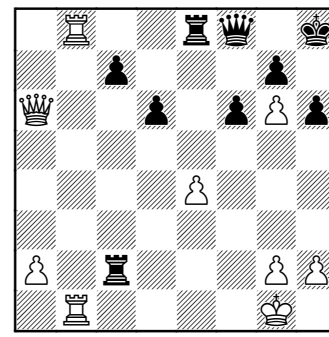
25...h6?

Black had to try 25...♖e7. But he is still busted after 26.♕a7! ♖e8 27.♖b8 ♖c1+! 28.♖xc1 ♖xb8 29.♕xc7.

26.♘g6+!

A white pawn on g6 creates fatal threats along Black's back rank. 26.♖b8? is met with the counter shot 26...♖c1+. Overloaded defender. 27.♔f2 ♖xb1 28.♖xb1 ♔h7 and Black should be okay.

26...♘xg6 27.fxg6 ♖e7 28.♖b8! ♖e8



Exercise (critical decision): The scary part of any adventure is the not-knowing part at the end of it. Capablanca is winning but *only* if he finds the correct queen move. Should he move his queen to a8, or to b5? One move wins while the other allows Black a swindle which holds the draw. Which one would you play?

Answer: Moving the queen to b5 works while moving her to a8 allows Black a giant swindle.

29.♕a8?? 1-0

Who does the queen think she is, Boudica, Queen of War? This move allows Thomas an amazing swindle which should have held the draw. When our combination arises, we only get this single chance to see it. Miss it, and it's the same as resigning. Thomas, believing that he was dead lost, resigned in a drawn position! In reality, the position, like many people, leads a double life and nothing is as it seems on the surface.

a) 29.♕b5! is actually the path to "enhanced interrogation" techniques. The move is a game-ender, since it effectively exploits Black's weak back rank, while dodging Black's own drawing trap. 29...♖xb8 30.♕xb8 ♖c1+! 31.♔f2! ♖c2+ 32.♔f1 ♖c1+ (32...♔g8 33.♕b3+ pops the loose rook on c2, via a double attack) 33.♔e2! ♖c2+ 34.♔d1 and it's time for Black to resign.

b) 29.♕a8?? Capa's move is a big blunder, since Thomas could have played 29...♖xa2!!. An opponent who is demon-possessed is a dangerous enemy since normal weapons may not kill him. 30.♕xa2. There is nothing better. How depressing when our painstaking work of art is defaced by the opponent's dirty trap! (30.♖xe8 ♖xa8 31.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 32.♔f2 ♔g8 is just fine for Black) 30...♖xb8 31.♖xb8 ♕xb8 32.♕d5 and the game should end in a draw.

Publisher's note: Sir George Thomas, British Chess Champion, was also the world's top badminton player and one of its top tennis players, reaching the Wimbledon men's doubles semi-final; he also saw active war service. The fascinating biography of this "confirmed bachelor" and aristocrat is forthcoming from Elk and Ruby.

Game 5
W.Winter-J.R.Capablanca
Hastings, 1919
Four Knights Opening

If Capa's best games were paintings, some - like this one - would be on display in the Louvre. As a kid, this game, one of the most strategically instructive I ever played over, boggled the young Lakdawala mind as a strategic revelation. It demonstrated to the kid-Cyrus that even a single non-functional piece can take down a player's otherwise healthy position the way our good reputation can be ruined through association with a criminally-inclined friend. It's a case of guilt by association. I won many games as a kid simply by repeating/copycatting Capa's plan in this game, which is one of the most instructive in the book.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗b5 ♗b4 5.0-0 0-0 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.d3 ♗d6!?

Here is yet another example of Capa's curious lack of feel for the opening phase of a chess game. More harmonious is 7...♘d7! intending ...f6.

8.♗g5

This is natural now that Capa moved his bishop away from e7, yet Winter will later come to regret the meanderings of this bishop. White can also try 8.h3 c5 9.♘d2, W.Hug-W. Unzicker, Bad Homburg 1996.

8...h6 9.♗h4 c5

Capa suppresses White's d3–d4 options.