

Invisible Chess Moves

WINNER of the ChessCafe Book of the Year Award

“An excellent book that offers rare insights into unknown chess territory.”
Europa Rochade Magazine

“Highlights the limitations of the human mind and categorizes the typical sources of mistakes like missing diagonal backward queen moves. It has many beautiful examples with really amazing points. A real gem!”
Karsten Müller, author of ‘Bobby Fischer: The Career and Complete Games’

“An outstanding book.”
Lubomir Kavalek, The Huffington Post

“An entertaining and instructive book on an aspect of tactics that is not usually covered.”
Joe Petrolito, Australasian Chess Magazine

“The many training exercises make ‘Invisible Chess Moves’ a tactics training book and, what’s more, numerous games convey the beauty of chess.”
KARL Magazine

“Why is a certain move an ‘invisible chess move’? It can be for all sorts of reasons. I don’t know that it is all based on scientific research, but based on my experience I can understand very well what they mean.”
Richard Vedder, Schakers.info

“An interesting publication, quite different from standard books on combinations.”
Max Euwe Centre, Amsterdam

“In fact, this book is about the price you pay for thinking like a machine, for thoughtlessly following some general rules. Time and again it turns out that sticking to rules of thumb leads to chances missed.”
Hans Böhm, De Telegraaf

“A thoroughly delightful book, full of incredible examples that remind us how challenging chess can be.”
Steve Goldberg, ChessCafe

“It’s great to know about the types of ‘blind spots’ that occur in chess from time to time.”

Arne Moll, ChessVibes

“Exercises in the course of each chapter and an extensive test at the end of the book give the reader the opportunity to engage in an organized way with difficult-to-find moves, so one can get familiar with the instruction material.”

German Correspondence Chess Association

“There are lots and lots of games, extracts and exercises all devoted to why we miss moves.”

Ian Marks, ChessSchotland

“It turns out there are interesting cerebral reasons for overlooking winning moves, like certain geometrical patterns and the aversion to backward moves (..) A unique book.”

B.H.Wilders, Nederlands Dagblad

“The authors deserve the highest praise for the idea behind this book. Something quite original, and I enjoyed it enormously.”

Luc Winants, former Belgian Chess Champion

“An interesting attempt to cover new ground (..) All competitors should call here.”

British Chess Magazine

“A thoroughly original and entertaining argument about why chess players overlook simple wins (..) Through a series of tests Neiman and Afek ensure the reader gets the message even more forcefully.”

Cecil Rosner, Winnipeg Free Press

Yochanan Afek & Emmanuel Neiman

Invisible Chess Moves

**Discover Your Blind Spots and
Stop Overlooking Simple Wins**

Second Edition

New In Chess 2012

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Introduction

While the strength of top chess players has grown significantly, they still often miss apparently simple moves. How can it be that players who are capable of calculating ten moves ahead for hours on end, fail to see a one-move win? More remarkably, in many cases *both* players make these oversights. Of course, it is always possible for a high-level player to make an elementary mistake. But normally speaking the probability of double blindness should be very slight.

Nowadays (in 2011), players calculate like machines, since they are used to working with powerful computer programs. Most of them work directly on a computer, thinking up their moves on a virtual board while keeping a small part of the screen open for a strong program that calculates and evaluates the positions. When a move that is natural for the human analyst is not taken into account by the computer, in most cases the reason will be that some tactic has escaped the attention of the human player. Before checking this with the computer, any ambitious player will check the line for himself. Most of the time he will find the hidden trick and thus make significant progress in tactics. So, a player who keeps training in the old-fashioned way, with a real board, nice wooden pieces, and just books and bulletins, will be confronted with tactically nearly invincible opponents and will have to adapt to a playing level that is considerably stronger than it was in the 1980s, before the age of the computer.

The present book deals with positions where a simple move is missed – often by both players. Our hypothesis is as follows: in chess, certain moves are harder to spot for a human being than other moves. For a beginning human player, clearly knight moves are more difficult to envisage than rook moves. With the rook, forward moves are easier and more natural than backward ones, and horizontal moves are frequently missed.

The chess geometry and the handling of each specific chess piece are difficult for the beginner, but they are no secret for the experienced player. Nevertheless, even grandmasters miss a backward rook move more often than a forward move, and for them, too, horizontal moves are harder to find than vertical moves (see Chapter 2, ‘Geometrical invisibility’).

Also, a lot of elements in the games of experienced players are mechanical. In the opening: develop quickly and castle. In the middlegame: be careful with unprotected pieces. In the endgame: centralize the king. The quality of a player can be established by the number of such integrated

principles that he knows. The stronger the player, the better he will be able to break such automatic rules if that is necessary. Professional players are always ready to take exceptions and paradoxical moves into account. Even so, in this book we will see many examples of missed opportunities, where such ‘illogical’ moves are not taken into account (Chapter 3, ‘Technical invisibility’).

Another difficulty lies in the psychological aspect of the contest. Sometimes a player may focus on the probable result of the game. According to his state of mind, he will expect to win, draw, or even lose, for example against a superior opponent. In such situations, moves that question the ‘normal’ result will be overlooked, even when they are elementary; they are ‘repressed’, like in Freudian theories about the unconscious. Here technical factors are overpowered by psychological factors. They may depend on the evolution of the actual game, earlier confrontations between the two protagonists, their status, titles, ratings etc. Such psychological cases of blindness are frequently reinforced by technical or geometrical difficulties; then a hard-to-find move will become an invisible one due to certain stressful circumstances (Chapter 4, ‘Psychological invisibility’).

Obviously, other objective factors can explain mistakes, such as, especially, a lack of time to think. That is why we generally try to avoid showing mistakes from rapid, simultaneous and blindfold games as well as *Zeitnot* mistakes. We want to focus on games where both opponents had enough time to make a responsible decision.

The present book is organized as a treatise, but for each diagram the question is the same: What is the best move for White/Black?, and we can assume that probably the player was not able to find it in the actual game. For a good understanding of our theme, it is necessary to look for the right move for a certain amount of time – the same amount you would use in order to make a decision during a normal game. So before looking for the solution, try and discover the right move that Kasparov, Karpov, Kramnik, Anand, Topalov or Carlsen wasn’t able to find. Only then will you be able to figure out how ‘obvious’ it was.

Let’s look at some examples in order to specify what we mean – and what we don’t mean! – by an ‘invisible move’.

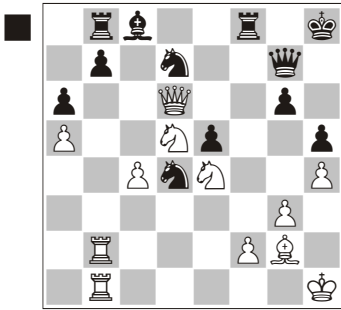
Question 1:

What is the difference between an invisible move and a blunder?

A blunder is a big mistake, like leaving the queen en prise in one move.

Petrosian, Tigran Bronstein, David

Amsterdam ct 1956 (2)



A well-known example is this game where the Armenian player, in an advantageous position, did not consider the threat concealed by his opponent's last move.

After

36. ... ♖d4-f5

Petrosian played the cool

37. ♗e4-g5

and resigned after

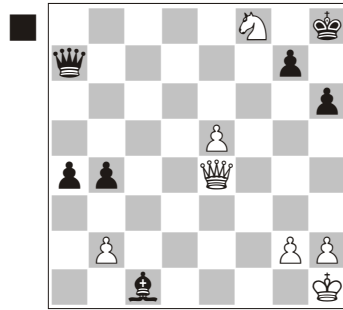
37. ... ♗f5xd6

Instead, **37. ♖c7** would have given White a decisive positional advantage.

This kind of mistake is called a 'blunder'. There's nothing much to say about it – it happens at all levels. Such blunders are frequently decisive for the result of the game, while invisible moves are frequently the result of a double blindness, and generally do not affect the final result.

Comp Deep Fritz 10 Kramnik, Vladimir

Bonn m 2006 (2)



Moments of distraction can happen to even the very best players. A more recent example is shown here. In this game, after a good opening Kramnik was constantly striving for the advantage. Black continues to press, forgetting that his opponent is threatening mate in one.

34. ... ♖a7-e3

After **34... ♖g8** White would have had to save half a point by giving perpetual check after **35. ♗g6 ♖e3 36. ♖d5+ ♖h7 37. ♗f8+ ♖h8 38. ♗g6+=**.

35. ♖e4-h7#

Still we can draw some conclusions from these two games: in both of them, the author of the blunder had been dominating throughout the game, and forgot to consider the first real threat of his opponent. Such blunders are not much unlike the positions we give in Chapter 4 ('Psychological invisibility'), but

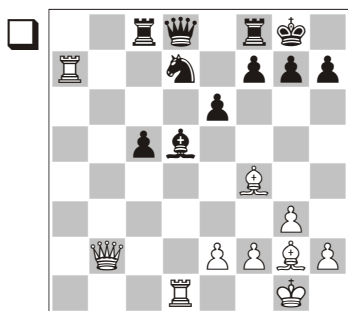
A – Quiet moves

The more ‘brutal’ a move is (a check, a capture, a direct threat), the easier it is for a player to find it. A serious player begins his analysis by checking forced sequences – that is, series of moves that are the most compelling for the opponent and, in a way, the easiest to calculate¹. It also happens that in a favourable position, there is no direct move that is satisfactory.

Take this position from the rapid game Kramnik-Leko. At this speed of play, the best move for White is virtually invisible².

Kramnik, Vladimir
Leko, Peter

Budapest rapid 2001 (3)



White is a pawn down, but the position is extremely favourable for him, with the advantage of the bishop pair and the great position of his rooks: one on the seventh rank and the other one on the open file, pinning Black’s minor pieces.

It is precisely in this type of position that we should look for a forced win. Let’s analyse some moves. The main idea is to take on d5 with the bishop and take back with the rook in order to win the pinned knight.

A) The simplest option is to take on d5 first. But after **20. ♖xd5 exd5 21. ♖xd5** Black has **21... ♖b6!** attacking queen and rook, enabling him to unpin with tempo. This is the basic variation;

B) **20. ♖d6 ♖e8 21. ♖xd5 21. ♖b5 ♘f6. 21... exd5 22. ♖b7 (22. ♖b5 ♘e5)** looks strong, but Black can save himself with the surprising **22... ♖f6! 23. ♖xd7 ♖cd8;**

C) In case of **20. ♖b5** the same counterattack on the a7 rook and the queen does the job: **20... ♖b6! 21. ♖xd7 ♖xg2** and in case of the erroneous **22. ♖xg2?** the lack of protection of the other rook on d1 tells after **22... ♖cd8** and suddenly Black is much better;

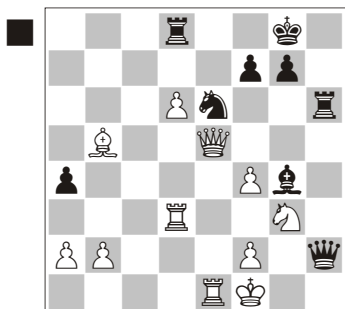
- 1 See ‘L’oeil tactique’, E. Neiman 2003, 2010, Payot.
- 2 In general we only deal with ‘normal games’ with a time control of e.g. 2 hours per player. The beauty and subtlety of the present example moved us to include it in the book.

A – Horizontal effect

Horizontal moves are the hardest to see. In chess clubs, sometimes players joke ‘patzer cannot see the horizontal’. In the following examples, we can see that this difficulty also affects players at a higher level.

Ivanchuk, Vasily Svidler, Peter

Nanjing 2008 (1)



White is two pawns up but his position looks critical. White's king is surrounded by enemy pieces, including the black queen, and has no escape, e2 being under the control of the g4 bishop. The only protection against the imminent checkmate threat is the knight on g3. White's pieces are scattered all over the board. Notably the rook on d3 and the bishop on b5 are exposed. Once you take into account the alignment on the fifth rank you may spot an immediate win. However, in this game, with eight minutes left on the clock, Black chose to give perpetual check with **34... ♖h3+** **35. ♔g1 ♖h2+** **36. ♔f1 ♖h3+** **37. ♔g1 ♖h2+** and a draw.

The move with the horizontal point

34. ... ♖h6-h5!

35. ♕e5-e4

(35. ♘xh5? ♕h1 is mate)

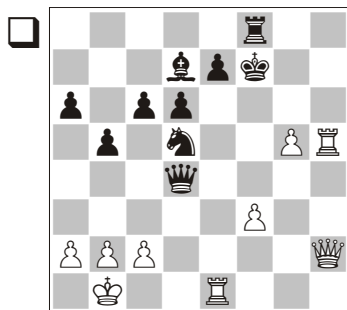
35. ... ♖h5xb5

won easily, as Black gains a material advantage while keeping strong attacking possibilities.

Naiditsch, Arkadij Svidler, Peter

Khanty-Mansiysk 2009 (3.6)

This example is taken from a crucial game from the World Cup, during the rapid playoffs. Black had to win this game, but White, to move, missed a nice win here. Can you spot it?



1. ♖h5-h4!+-

The rook is used with horizontal effect.

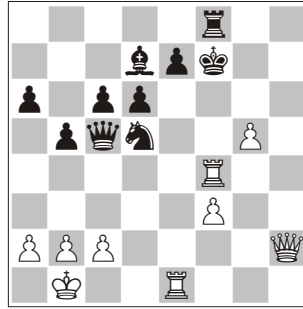
1.g6+ was played in the actual game, with an eventual win for Black, and with this victory Svidler qualified after the blitz session.

1. ... ♖d4-c5

1...♖g7 2.♖h7.

2. ♖h4-f4+!

The point of the rook manoeuvre. With this exchange sacrifice White makes his way toward the black king. The knight holds Black's position together.



2. ... ♘d5xf4

If 2...♔g8 3.g6 and mate;
 If 2...♔e8 3.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 4.♖h8+ ♔f7 5.♖h7+ ♔f8 6.g6 ♔e6 7.g7+ ♔e8 8.♖g6+! wins.

3. ♖h2-h7+ ♔f7-e8

4. ♖h7xe7#

B – Blunders in World Championship matches

World Championship matches are a rich source of mistakes, for several reasons. One is the objective pressure on the players' nerves, which affects their play and creates ideal conditions for blunders to occur. The second is a consequence of the match formula: extensive preparation is done in order to exploit one's own strengths, but the opponent's main goal will be to avoid this, so generally this is not very relevant.

Another big part of the preparation consists in detecting the opponent's weaknesses, and finding means to play in a style that does not suit him. Both players will try to go for positions where the opponent may play badly, even if his does not mean exploiting their own strong points. For example, against Topalov in 2010, Anand more or less repeated Kramnik's match strategy against the Bulgarian in 2006, playing a lot of the same openings. In two games he agreed to enter an open fight in the Grünfeld-Indian. He was crushed in the first game and in great danger of losing in the second.

The third idea consists in a kind of mutual confidence between the two players. Once (in a rapid game) Ivanchuk missed a mate in one. He explained his omission by the quality of his opponent: 'I could not imagine that he would let me mate him', he said.

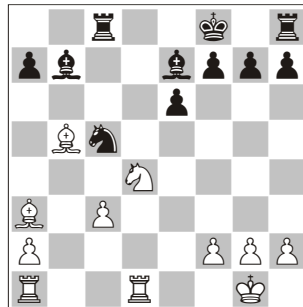
Something similar happened in this crucial last rapid game from the play-offs of the World Championship match in 2006, one of the most tense in history. Each player had won a game, a third one was drawn.

Kramnik, Vladimir Topalov, Veselin

Elista Wch m rapid 2006 (4)

- | | | |
|----|--------|--------|
| 1. | d2-d4 | d7-d5 |
| 2. | c2-c4 | c7-c6 |
| 3. | ♘g1-f3 | ♘g8-f6 |
| 4. | ♘b1-c3 | e7-e6 |
| 5. | e2-e3 | ♘b8-d7 |
| 6. | ♙f1-d3 | d5xc4 |
| 7. | ♙d3xc4 | b7-b5 |
| 8. | ♙c4-e2 | ♙c8-b7 |
| 9. | 0-0 | ♙f8-e7 |

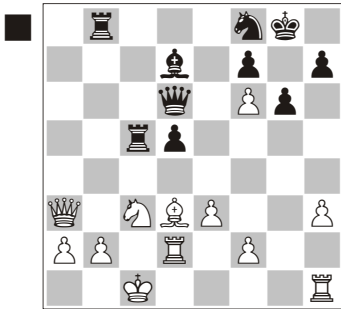
- | | | |
|-----|---------|--------|
| 10. | e3-e4 | b5-b4 |
| 11. | e4-e5 | b4xc3 |
| 12. | e5xf6 | ♙e7xf6 |
| 13. | b2xc3 | c6-c5 |
| 14. | d4xc5 | ♘d7xc5 |
| 15. | ♙e2-b5+ | ♙e8-f8 |
| 16. | ♙d1xd8+ | ♙a8xd8 |
| 17. | ♙c1-a3 | ♙d8-c8 |
| 18. | ♘f3-d4 | ♙f6-e7 |
| 19. | ♙f1-d1 | |



Introductory step

29

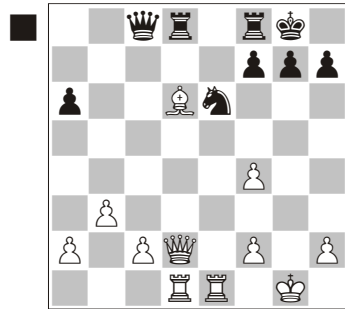
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Desperate measure

30

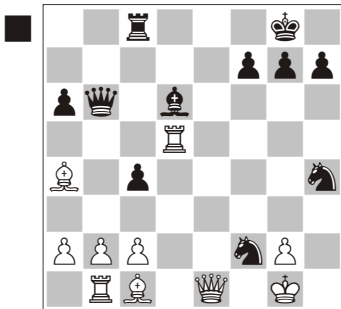
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The right diagonal

31

**



The invader

32

**

