



COLUMNISTS

A Guided Tour of Chess

Tim Krabbé

The World Championship (1)

Band nine: Regicide

At the start of the match between Kasparov and Kramnik, 136 games had been lost by reigning world champions. As the world championship began in 1886, this is a little over one per year. Let me first explain how I arrive at that number of 136.

For one thing, I do not recognize Khalifman as a world champion. From 1972 on, the world champions were: Fischer until 1975, Karpov until 1985, and Kasparov until now. As said, I only count games that the world champions lost *while* holding the title, and only serious games: rapid, blitz, exhibition, computer, consultation, correspondence, cable and Internet games are not included in my number. I also don't count games that were played *in* matches and tournaments for the world championship. The throne must somehow be seen as vacant during such competitions, and there would also be a categorizing problem: if the world champion loses the last game in a match, as did Tal against Botvinnik in 1961, or Karpov against Kasparov in 1985, then did the world champion *lose*, or did the world champion *win* that game?

The 136 true cases of regicide that remain are divided over the 13 world champions as follows.

Steinitz (1886 - 1894): 0. Steinitz never played an official tournament during those years - but there were very few tournaments then. He did lose some games, including both games in a cable match against Chigorin, but he did not lose any games that meet my criteria.

Lasker (1894 - 1921): 17. However few tournaments there were in Lasker's time, he holds the record for 'most losses by a world champion in one year'. In his first full year as world champion, 1895, Lasker lost no less than seven games. On the other hand, during the last 11 years of his reign, Lasker only lost once - but he only played 24 games during that period. Four of Lasker's losses as a world champion were against Pillsbury.

Capablanca (1921 - 1927): 3. With only half a lost game per year, Capablanca is still, if we measure by this criterion, the least beaten world champion.

Alekhine (1927 - 1935 and 1937 - 1946): 21. Four losses against Bogoljubow and, at the end of his career, two against Lupi. This Portuguese player may have been the weakest ever to beat a world champion, and he

certainly is the weakest to beat a world champion *twice*.

Euwe (1935 - 1937): 7. One against 67-year old Lasker (the famous blunder in Nottingham, 1936.) With 3½ losses per year, Euwe is the world champion who lost most often.

Botvinnik (1948 - 1957, 1958 - 1960 and 1961 - 1963): 15. Three losses against Geller. Botvinnik was not a very active world champion.

Smyslov (1957 - 1958): 1.

Tal (1960 - 1961): 1.

Petrosyan (1963 - 1969): 18. Belying his reputation of invincibility, Petrosyan was second only to Euwe in being the most often beaten world champion. Three times against Portisch and Korchnoi each - the latter scored 2-0 against him in an inter-city match, Moscow - Leningrad, 1965.

Spassky (1969 - 1972): 3.

Fischer (1972 - 1975): 0. Of course, Fischer never played a serious game while being world champion.

Karpov (1975 - 1985) 23. Almost 2½ per year, but still a very good record, considering how much he played. Three losses against Timman.

Kasparov (1985 -) 27. Even better than Karpov. He lost 5 games against Ivanchuk (the greatest number of losses of a world champion against one single player) and three against Kramnik.

The player who beat a reigning world champion most often is **Bogoljubow** with 6; 4 against Alekhine, and 2 against Euwe. **Geller, Larsen** and **Ivanchuk** each collected 5 scalps; Geller and Larsen also sharing the distinction of having beaten the greatest number of *different* world champions. Geller beat Botvinnik three times, and Petrosyan and Karpov once; Larsen beat Petrosyan and Karpov twice, and Spassky once.

The other players who committed regicide more than once are:

Four times:

Pillsbury (4x Lasker)
Korchnoi (3x Petrosyan, 1x Spassky)
Portisch (3x Petrosyan, 1x Karpov)
Timman (3x Karpov, 1x Kasparov)

Three times:

Taimanov (2x Botvinnik, Karpov)
Kramnik (3x Kasparov)

Twice:

Blackburne (2x Lasker)
Fine (2x Alekhine)
Lupi (2x Alekhine)
Keres (2x Botvinnik)
Smyslov (2x Botvinnik)

Gligoric (2x Petrosyan)
 Torre (2x Karpov)
 Seirawan (1x Karpov, 1x Kasparov)
 Anand (2x Kasparov)
 Lautier (2x Kasparov)
 Topalov (2x Kasparov)

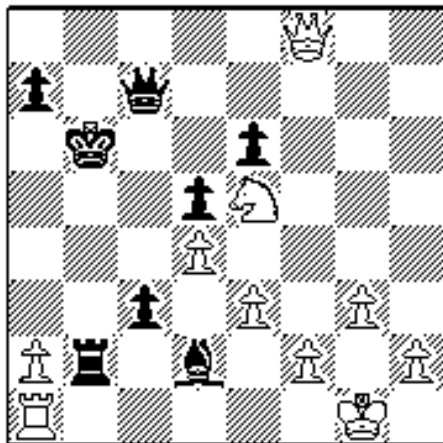
Among the players who never beat a reigning world champion, there are three world champions. Even if their eminences offered them fewer chances than ordinary players, it is still surprising to see who they are: Capablanca, Fischer and Kasparov.

Of course most regicides are well known, sometimes even historical games, but here are three relatively obscure ones.

The first cannot even be found in databases. It was played in a small national tournament in the Netherlands, a few months before the death of the 51-year old White player. In the prewar years, Van Hoorn was a player of some national prominence, coming third in the 1933 Dutch championship, the only time he competed, behind Euwe and Van den Bosch.

Van Hoorn - Euwe, Leiden, 1937

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nf3 Nf6 4.cxd5 cxd5 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bf4 Bf5 7.Qb3 Na5 8.Qa4+ Bd7 9.Qc2 Rc8 10.e3 b5 11.Qd1 Nc4 12.Bxc4 bxc4 According to Van Hoorn, Black is now better. **13.Ne5 e6 14.0-0 Bb4** But here, he should have been more careful with Be7, followed by 0-0. In the following ten moves, a pattern is visible that logically also shows in other losses of world champions against lesser gods; the champion avoids a draw, underestimates his opponent, and goes too far in his efforts to win. **15.Bg5 Qa5 16.Bxf6 gxf6 17.Nxd7 Kxd7 18.Qh5 Ke7 19.Ne2 Rb8 20.g3 Bd2 21.Rfb1 Rb6 22.Nf4 Rhb8** Black still had an easy draw with 22...c3 23.bxc3 Bxc3 24.Rxb6 But he thinks the passed c-pawn that he will create, offers good chances. **23.Qxh7 Rxb2 24.Rxb2 Rxb2** Van Hoorn: 'Almost all spectators thought White was losing. In reality it is White who has the initiative now.' **25.Ng6+ Kd6 26.Qxf7 Qc7 27.Qxf6 c3 28.Qf8+ Kc6 29.Ne5+** Even now, Kb7 would still have given Black drawing chances. **29...Kb6?** (*See Diagram*)



30.Nd3 Based on 30...c2 31.Nxb2 c1Q+ 32.Rxc1 Qxc1+ 33.Kg2 Qxb2 34.Qb8+ That does not keep Black from achieving his goal, which is to win a piece for his passed pawn, but White will have grabbed too many pawns in the meantime. **30...a5 31.Kg2 Rb5 32.a4 Rb3 33.Nc5 Rb2 34.Nxe6 Qc6 35.Qd8+ Ka7 36.Qxa5+ Qa6 37.Qc5+ Qb6 38.Qe7+ Qb7 39.Qc5+ Qb6 40.Qe7+ Qb7 41.Qxb7+ Rxb7 42.Nc5 Rb8 43.Nd3 c2 44.Kf3 Rb1 45.Ra2 c1=Q 46.Nxc1 Bxc1** and White has five pawns

for a badly placed Bishop; Black resigned.

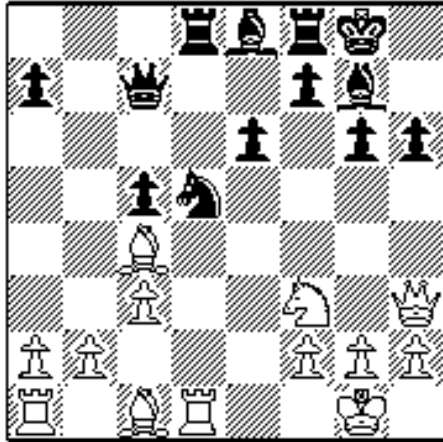
The only game that a reigning world champion lost that cannot be found, is the first of Alekhine's two losses against the Portuguese champion Lupi. This elusive game was played in a strange tournament in December 1945, in Cáceres, Spain - perhaps so strange that the game does not belong in my list. Only Alekhine and Lupi were normal contestants in that tournament; the other four were pairs of consulting players. After he also conceded a draw against one of the pairs, Alekhine only came second behind Lupi.

The stature of that tournament is further illustrated by the fact that when Pablo Moran, the author of *Agonia de un genio*, where I found these facts, tried to find the games of that tournament, the surviving participants told him they had not kept the scores.

A month later, in January 1946, Alekhine played a 4-game match against Lupi. The first game was drawn; this is the second game.

Lupi - Alekhine, Estoril 1946

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 dxe4 4.Nxe4 Nf6 5.Bd3 Nbd7 6.Nf3 Nxe4 7.Bxe4 Nf6 8.Bd3 b6 9.0-0 Be7 10.Ne5 Bd7 11.c3 0-0 12.Be3 Be8 13.Qe2 c5 14.Rfd1 Nd5 15.dxc5 Qc7 16.Nf3 bxc5 17.Ng5 g6 18.Bc1 Rd8 19.Bc4 Bf6 20.Qf3 Bg7 21.Qh3 h6 22.Nf3 (See Diagram)



22...Nxc3? Based on an oversight.

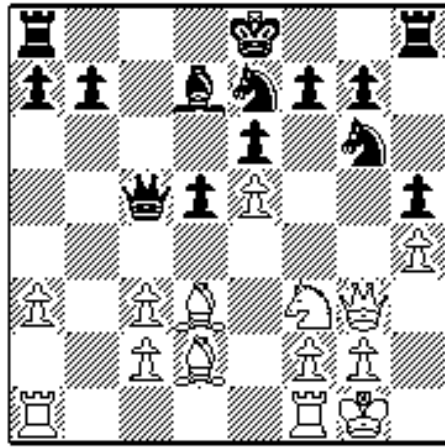
23.Rxd8 Qxd8 24.bxc3 Bxc3 25.Rb1 Qd1+ 26.Bf1 Qc2 Seems to win back the piece, but: 27.Qxh6 Guarding the Bishop and at the same time threatening mate with Ng5. 27...Bg7 28.Qh3 Perhaps Alekhine had overlooked that even now, Qxb1 is met by 29.Ng5 and mate. The rest is indeed agony. 28...g5 29.Nd2 Qxa2 30.Bd3 f5 31.Bc4 Qc2 32.Bxe6+ Bf7 33.Bxf5 Qd1+ 34.Nf1 Qh5 35.Qxh5 Bxh5 36.Be6+ Kh7 37.Rb7 Re8 38.Bf5+ Kg8 39.Bxg5 Re1 40.g4 Be8

41.Bd2 Re2 42.Bd3 Rxd2 43.Nxd2 a5 44.Bc4+ Kh7 45.Nb3 a4 46. Nxc5 Kh6 47.g5+ Kg6 48.Bd3+ and Black resigned. 1½ - ½ for Lupi, but Alekhine won the last two games, and the match, with 2½ - 1½

The quickest regicide was:

Liberzon - Petrosyan, Moscow 1964

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.Nc3 Bb4 4.e5 Ne7 5.a3 Bxc3+ 6.bxc3 c5 7.Qg4 Ng6 8.h4 h5 9.Qg3 Qa5 10.Bd2 Nc6 11.Bd3 Nce7 12.dxc5 Qxc5 13.Nf3 Bd7 14.0-0 (See Diagram)



14...Bb5?? A terrible blunder. **15.Be3** and Black resigned. Against a lesser opponent, that would have been early. After 15...d4 16.cxd4, White 'has the pawn and the compensation', as Roman Dzindzichashvili used to say, but Black could struggle. Suprisingly, he could even have struggled after 15...Qc6; 16.Nd4 Bxd3 17.Nxc6 Nf5 18.Qg5 Bxf1 19.Nd4 Nxd4 20.cxd4 Ba6 etc. and White still has some work to do. Understandably, Petrosyan did not fancy being subjected to that kind of work, and

was probably too disgusted anyway.

Copyright 2000 Tim Krabbé. All rights reserved.



[\[The Chess Cafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Reviews\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Studies\]](#) [\[The Ninth File\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About The Chess Cafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2000 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.
"The Chess Cafe®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.