

1. e4 e5 (Secret Solution)

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Two interesting things were unused in the initial puzzle: The large "??" on the first page, and the fact that player 2 won every game. ?? in algebraic chess notation indicates a blunder. In each game, player 1 committed one blunder that caused them to lose the game. They are as follows:

Game	Move	Blunder	Letter
Connect Four	1	Connect Four is a fully solved game, and player 1 can force a win starting by opening in the middle column. Opening in the 2nd column from the left allows player 2 to force a win	A
Jenga	14	The move where the tower fell over (Also clearly a strategic mistake, as it removed both the middle and one side block from the same layer)	N
Xiangqi	19	Allows player 2 to capture the Chariot on move 20	S
Candy Land	2	Forced to move backwards (While not technically a "blunder" because the game has no choice, it is the closest equivalent in Candy Land in that it is a very bad turn for player 1)	B
Battleship	18	Calls a space that could not possibly contain a ship based on previous guesses (As player 1 was within 1 shot of winning in the end, this wasted turn lost them the game)	R
Clue	21	Made a guess that allowed player 2 to show a card that player 1 already saw before. (Furthermore, if player 1 had called for a different weapon, they could have confirmed Mrs. White was the right suspect, and had all the information needed to make a correct accusation on move 22.)	U
Fluxx	20	The action "Everybody gets 1" allows the player to draw 2 cards, and decide who gets which card. Player 1 decided to give player 2 a goal card that let them win immediately.	T
Sorry	26	Player 1 could have used the 11 card to move their last pawn 11 forward to home and win, but instead decided to use the "swap places" option on that card, moving themselves backwards and player 2 forwards	Z
Yahtzee	5	Had a large straight after turn 2, but rolled it away	E
Uno	18	Forgot to say "Uno" when down to one card, and had to draw 2	R
Checkers	15	Allows player 2 to force a trade of 2 pieces for 1, also giving player 2 a piece that cannot be stopped from kinging	O

Converting the move number by A1Z26 gives **ANS BRUT ZERO**.

Author Notes

This puzzle came close to an editor rejection due to the amount of grind expected from solvers, and ultimately was the hardest secret answer of the hunt. As some mitigation to the slog, I tried where possible to provide mechanisms to find the blunder without a full simulation of the game:

- Connect Four, Jenga, Uno: Blunders used "gimmicks" that really didn't require grinding through
- Xiangqi, Checkers: The blunder occurs shortly before player 1 gets a material disadvantage, and that point can be found by skimming for "capture" moves.
- Clue: Only the moves that make guesses really matter, and those can be skimmed to see the repeated card
- Fluxx: Given that the game does not retain much state across many turns, the very end of the game is a compelling place to look for how player 1 lost
- Battleship, Yahtzee: No shortcuts really, but at least the games are short-ish?
- Sorry: Sorry, there wasn't really an alternative to the slog.

And as with the base path, the hope was that solvers would prioritize games that felt friendliest to them, and wheel of fortune the answer before 100% completion.

The second challenge with writing this puzzle was that I had to get good enough at all of these games to play out reasonable games while only inserting the intended blunder. Jenga I did not play out physically, but it felt just as nerve-wracking selecting pieces to take that would not obviously collapse the tower. For games with cards or die rolls, I used real randomization as much as possible to produce statistically believable games, only deviating when needed to move the game to the desired outcome. Still in Clue, both players needed to get quite unlucky in their guesses to make the game last to move 21 with good play. Xiangqi and Connect Four I used computer engines (in the case of Connect Four, one that implemented perfect play). Checkers was the hardest of all, as I didn't find a good engine. After spending hours on youtube tutorials and only sort of getting it, I resorted to finding a tournament-level game that ended in a draw (Desmond Maughan vs. Kevin Burks 2018, thanks guys!), which I followed up to the move where I needed a blunder.

The third challenge with writing this puzzle was the massive amount of fiddly content prone to errata. When this puzzle was about to release, I set the over/under for the number of errata on this puzzle to 2. My teammates all supportively guessed "under", but the actual count was 4. Fortunately, none were particularly load-bearing toward either the base or secret answers (aside from potential red herrings for teams who hadn't figured out the secret mechanism)

Huge thanks to Chris Yu for fact checking much of this puzzle (remaining errata are mine), and to Zach Barnett as editor for talking through the initial pitch.

I stand by the decision to include this puzzle in the hunt, as the secret content truly was meant to be Hard Mode, but (1) I wish it had occurred later in the hunt, (2) for my own sanity, I should avoid pitching another puzzle with this level of grind in the future (unless it really is that good?)