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주 소: 경기도 용인시 처인구 명지로 116, 명지대학교 바둑학과 내 학회사무국
전 화: 031-330-6255
발행인: 남치형
주 소: 경기도 용인시 처인구 명지로 116, 명지대학교 바둑학과

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Rewriting God's Move: Narrative Revisionism and the Memory Hole in Lee Sedol's *Memoir*

Bae Incheol
Mokwon University, Korea

Abstract

This paper presents a critical analysis of Lee Sedol's 2025 *Memoir*, published a decade after his historic match against AlphaGo. Unlike Garry Kasparov's *Deep Thinking* (2017), which seeks the truth behind defeat, Lee's narrative is characterized by 'narrative revisionism' and memory reconstruction designed to provide a post-hoc justification for a heroic myth. By retroactively framing Move 68 as a pre-planned gambit to justify the *Divine Move* (Move 78), Lee's account exemplifies the cognitive distortions Charan Ranganath warns against and instantiates the logic of the Orwellian memory hole. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, this study examines how Lee's authority as a dominant narrator neutralizes public critical distance and entrenches an unverified narrative. Ultimately, the paper argues that the replacement of criticism with myth leads to a profound intellectual poverty in discourse on human-machine relations in the AI era and calls for a correction

of this constructed and subversive narrative that has taken hold amid collective social silence.

Keywords: Lee Sedol, AlphaGo, narrative revisionism, bug-triggering theory, memory hole

1. Introduction

In August 2025, nearly a decade after his landmark match against AlphaGo, Lee Sedol published a retrospective *Memoir*.¹⁾ This work invites immediate comparison with Garry Kasparov's *Deep Thinking* (2017), which analyzes the chess grandmaster's defeat by IBM's Deep Blue. Both texts open with remarkably similar declarations of revealing unprecedented truths:

“The match against Google's artificial intelligence AlphaGo in March 2016 ended with a final score of 1–4, a victory for AlphaGo. In this book, I am publicly disclosing for the first time the detailed circumstances and feelings I recorded immediately after the match.”²⁾

“There are many books about Deep Blue, but this is the first one that has all the facts and the only one that has my side of the story. Painful memories aside, it has also been a revealing and rewarding experience.”³⁾

While both authors promise unvarnished revelations, a critical divergence emerges in their foundational philosophies regarding defeat. Kasparov follows the advice of his trainer, Mikhail Botvinnik, “to seek **the truth in the heart of every position**,”⁴⁾ delivering an unsparingly objective analysis. He concedes his own psychological missteps and acknowledges that immediate confusion had obscured a more vital inquiry into human-machine collaboration.

This paper argues that Lee's *Memoir* exemplifies a form of narrative revisionism driven by two interconnected mechanisms: memory distortion and symbolic power. Drawing on Charan Ranganath's cognitive science of mem-

1) Lee described the book as ‘autobiography-like’ in a public lecture. Lee Sedol (2026).

2) Lee Sedol (2025), 82.

3) Kasparov, Garry (2017), 14.

4) Ibid. 14. Emphasis added.

ory, it demonstrates how Lee retroactively constructs Move 68 as a calculated gambit to justify the celebrated *Divine Move* (Move 78)—a claim that is both internally contradictory and empirically unsupported by contemporaneous evidence. Through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic power, the paper examines how Lee’s authority as the sole human victor over AlphaGo neutralizes public critical distance, allowing an unverified narrative to harden into historical consensus. Crucially, the paper contends that this revisionism is not merely an individual psychological defense mechanism, but the product of a collective Orwellian memory hole—sustained by a public that, eager for a human champion in the age of AI, became a silent accomplice to an engineered myth. The displacement of critical scrutiny by heroic mythology, it ultimately argues, imposes a profound intellectual poverty on discourses concerning human-machine relations.

To systematically deconstruct this narrative invention, the remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 establishes the technical context surrounding Moves 68 and 78 and identifies the foundational contradictions in Lee’s revisionist account. Section 3 traces the evolution of Lee’s public discourse over the past decade, establishing the baseline of his shifting attitudes toward AI. Section 4 critically dissects the ‘bug-triggering theory’ surrounding Moves 68 and 78, exposing the profound causal disconnect at the heart of his strategic claims. Section 5 broadens the comparative lens, contrasting Lee’s narrative regression with Garry Kasparov’s evolutionary adaptation to algorithmic supremacy. Finally, Section 6 situates this individual revisionism within a broader sociological framework, exploring how the public and the professional Go community acted as silent accomplices in cementing this constructed narrative into an Orwellian memory hole. The paper closes with a Conclusion that consolidates the key findings and situates them

within the broader challenge of sustaining honest intellectual discourse about human-machine relations in the AI era.

2. A Revisionist *Memoir*

Does Lee's *Memoir* similarly confront the objective reality of his match? Although the structural parallel is superficially plausible, the analogy ultimately fails. Lee's account of the celebrated Move 78 in Game 4 is structurally compromised by internal contradictions. Evaluating these claims requires a brief review of the technical context surrounding this move.

Following AlphaGo's loss in Game 4, the DeepMind team found no conventional system bugs. As team member Ioannis Antonoglou remarked, "the bug was Lee Sedol finding a brilliant move."⁵⁾ This raises a technical dichotomy: did Move 78 expose a standard algorithmic bug, or an inherent failure mode?

In June 2016, DeepMind's Aja Huang disclosed that the logical vulnerability exposed in Game 4 had been patched, implying a correctable software defect.⁶⁾ Conversely, analyst David Ormerod and Go journalist Kim Su-gwang argued that AlphaGo's subsequent errors reflected an intrinsic computational limitation typical of Monte Carlo Tree Search (MCTS) architectures.⁷⁾ Kim emphasized that Go AI does not exhaustively calculate all possible moves but relies on computationally realized intuition, rendering Lee's assumption that AlphaGo would simply "calculate all possible moves and err" a fundamental misconception.⁸⁾

5) Metz, Cade (2016).

6) Zastrow, Mark (2016).

7) David Ormerod's analysis is discussed in Metz, Cade (2016).

8) Kim Su-gwang (2026).

Whether classified as a specification-based bug or a fundamental algorithmic limitation, one empirical fact remains undisputed: throughout the five-game match, the only phenomenon plausibly characterizable as a computational failure occurred *after* Move 78 in Game 4.

However, Lee's narrative conflates verifiable algorithmic defects with subjective 'pseudo-bugs'.⁹⁾ The word 'bug' appears fifteen times in the *Memoir's* Special Essay. Lee claims that his overarching strategy across multiple games was strictly dedicated to triggering these errors. Because only one verifiable instance of computational failure was recorded, Lee's account manufactures a series of technical anomalies that never actually occurred. The promised revelation thus devolves into narrative distortion.

More critically, Lee's bug-triggering theory—the assertion that Move 68 was a calculated mechanism to force a computational failure—subverts the established historical consensus. Move 78, universally celebrated as the 'Divine Move', was widely perceived as the apex of human intuition. In Lee's revisionist framework, however, it is relegated to a mere subordinate effect of Move 68.¹⁰⁾

Trailing 3–0 against an opponent with unknown vulnerabilities, Lee's initial defensive stance was entirely rational. Yet, the *Memoir* translates this positional uncertainty into a masterfully engineered trap. The Special Essay constructs a narrative of performed self-deprecation—a superficial pose of helplessness that functions structurally to validate a newly fashioned claim of strategic genius.

9) The term 'pseudo-bug' is introduced here to distinguish between the engineering definition of a bug and the looser usage in which any outcome contrary to a user's expectations is labeled a bug. Lee's own expressions—"bug-like sequence" (p. 95), "bug-like progression" (p. 100), and "a kind of bug pattern" (p. 112)—exemplify this conflation. See Lee Sedol (2025).

10) Lee Sedol (2026), cited above, n.1.

This narrative revision yields immediate internal contradictions. To substantiate his account, Lee cites neurosurgeon Iwatate Yasuo, who analyzed Move 78 as an exemplar of uniquely human intuition.¹¹⁾ However, framing Move 78 as the predictable, dependent variable of a calculated strategy initiated ten moves prior is fundamentally incompatible with celebrating it as a spontaneous explosion of unconscious intuition.

3. The Anatomy of Inconsistency: Dissecting Lee Sedol's View of Go

Prior to his defeat, Lee conceptualized Go as an inviolable art form. In a 2024 *New York Times* interview, he characterized the psychological trauma of the loss as a sensation that his “entire world was collapsing.”¹²⁾ To Lee, algorithmic efficiency shattered not merely his professional standing, but the ontological status of Go itself. This existential anxiety became the governing lens for his subsequent public discourse. Internalizing this trauma, Lee reduced the human-AI relationship to a rigid dichotomy: human creativity versus machine calculation. This epistemological reduction necessitates a critical reconstruction of his current rhetorical positioning.

“People used to be in awe of creativity, originality and innovation. But since AI came, a lot of that has disappeared.”¹³⁾

This statement illustrates Lee's primary logical maneuver: projecting a domain-specific trauma into a universal declaration on AI's cultural impact.

11) Iwatate Yasuo (2024), 259–260.

12) Wakabayashi, Daisuke and Jin, Yu Young (2024).

13) Ibid.

The triad of ‘creativity, originality, and innovation’ exactly mirrors the attributes that epitomized his unconventional playing style. Whether analyzing the realm of professional Go or labor market dynamics, Lee systematically employs the fallacy of overgeneralization. His recent rhetorical efforts to disavow the ‘doomsayer’ label by characterizing AI as ‘a god’ function merely as a performative pivot from defeated grandmaster to technological evangelist—a posture riddled with internal contradictions.

A similar strategic plasticity informs his assertion that AI has fundamentally altered the essence of Go. Lee argues that because contemporary players strictly emulate AI from the opening moves, individuality has disappeared.¹⁴⁾ This constitutes a significant logical fallacy: conflating the sociological influence of AI on human training patterns with an intrinsic transformation of the game itself.

Analytically, the artistry Lee mourns may merely be a heuristic label for human cognitive wandering in the absence of computable optima. His lamentation that discovering the ‘right answer’ equates to the ‘death of art’ paradoxically reveals that his cultivated aesthetic value was a fragile construct, predicated entirely on human cognitive limitations. Elevating Go to an absolute aesthetic standard was arguably an illusion sustained by the boundaries of unassisted human computation. Lee remains confined within this obsolete ideological framework:

“I learned to play Go as an art ... But after AI appeared, Go became simply a game of finding the right answer. There is no longer any room for human creativity.”¹⁵⁾

Lee perceives AI as an algorithm that eradicated artistic ambiguity by generating definitive computational optima. This determinism contrasts sharply

14) Yim Jeong-u (2026).

15) Wakabayashi, Daisuke and Jin, Yu Young (2024).

with the pragmatic framework of Shin Jin-seo, the current world number one player. Shin conceptualizes AI not as an oracle of absolute truth, but as a collaborative utility.

“If you only follow the recommended moves, the blue spots that AI points out, your study will become limited. True AI study is about imagining and calculating moves that go beyond those recommendations, constantly evolving your own ideas. It’s about aiming for an answer beyond the answer... There’s no clear answer. However, from my perspective as someone who’s actively competing, I believe it’s more productive to look for positive ways to use AI rather than worry about its impact.”¹⁶⁾

This divergence illustrates that a player’s conceptualization of Go now reflects their broader technological orientation. Analogously, the transcription of a Beethoven symphony into formal notation does not nullify its artistry; the structural execution remains a crystallization of human deliberation. Science fiction author Ted Chiang provides a compelling theoretical counterpoint by redefining the locus of artistic agency:

“What I’m saying is that art requires making choices at every scale; the countless small-scale choices made during implementation are just as important to the final product as the few large-scale choices made during the conception. It is a mistake to equate ‘large-scale’ with ‘important’ when it comes to the choices made when creating art; the interrelationship between the large scale and the small scale is where the artistry lies.”¹⁷⁾

Chiang’s framework dismantles Lee’s dichotomy. If creativity manifests through the continuous execution of micro-decisions, algorithmic recommendations do not eradicate human agency; they merely shift the parameters of

16) Shin Jin-seo (2024), 72-73.

17) Chiang, Ted (2024).

choice. Yet, in his *Memoir*, Lee abruptly adopts a discordant, artificially optimistic register:

“What is clear is that while artificial intelligence can overwhelm humans in terms of skill, the power to create the essence of Go resides in human beings... I believe this is the time to collaborate wisely with it to maximize our strengths.”¹⁸⁾

Contrasted with his prior existential dread, this rhetoric constitutes a facile, manufactured paradigm shift. AI simultaneously operates as the desecrator of his artistic sanctuary and a collaborative utility for maximizing human potential—positions that are structurally irreconcilable.

A critical ideological inversion occurs at this juncture. The same narrator who laments the algorithmic destruction of Go’s artistic sanctity paradoxically adopts a highly mechanistic, engineering-driven rationale—the bug-triggering theory—to validate his most celebrated intuitive achievement. As the following section demonstrates, retroactively classifying Move 68 as a calculated exploit to trigger a system error exposes the profound ambivalence and logical fractures at the core of Lee Sedol’s narrative revisionism.

4. Move 78: Hail Mary Move¹⁹⁾ or Engineered Gambit?

The spring 2016 five-game match between Lee Sedol and AlphaGo concluded in a 4–1 algorithmic victory, conventionally framed as a human

18) Lee Sedol (2025), 8.

19) This coinage of mine draws on the historical event, ‘Hail Mary pass’. It originated from a 1975 NFL playoff game when Dallas Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach threw a desperate, last-second 50-yard touchdown pass to Drew Pearson to defeat the Minnesota Vikings 17-14. Afterward, the devoutly Catholic Staubach told reporters, “I closed my eyes and said a Hail Mary”. Thus a ‘Hail Mary Move’ can be described as a last-ditch attempt with an extremely low probability of success in Go.

defeat. However, collective memory disproportionately elevates a single anomalous event; Move 78. Although post-match analysis revealed this decisive move in Game 4 to be structurally unsound—succeeding only due to an incorrect algorithmic response—it was universally celebrated as a triumph of human intuition. By forcing AlphaGo into a tactical domain beyond its computational reach, Move 78 induced a systemic failure, solidifying Lee’s historical status as the sole human victor over this AI architecture.

While this remains the established historical consensus, Lee’s *Memoir* introduces a revisionist narrative. With the benefit of hindsight, he defines his disposition across the series not as desperate defense, but as a deliberate hunt for software vulnerabilities. While acknowledging a waiting strategy in Games 2 and 3 to “increase the probability of a bug”²⁰, he elevates Game 4 to a masterclass in engineered exploitation:

“The strategy for Game 4 was: minimize variation in the opening and decide everything in the middle game... Move 68 was an extremely composed move, but it was in effect the decisive move... I moved in the direction more likely to produce a bug in AlphaGo rather than the orthodox move. Based on this move, the moment I had been waiting for arrived. White 78, Black 79: a fatal bug occurred in AlphaGo.”²¹

This narrative framework suffers from two critical structural flaws. The first is profound internal illogic. As illustrated in Figure 1, White’s Move 68 is a demonstrably conservative placement; establishing a causal mechanism between this move and the fierce central battle that followed is analytically impossible. Contemporaneously, Move 68 was universally classified as a standard, orthodox regulating move (*jeong-su*). A decade later, however, Lee

20) Lee Sedol (2025), 99, 104.

21) *Ibid.*, 109-111.

retrofits this orthodox placement into the bug-triggering theory. Psychologically, this constitutes a textbook manifestation of hindsight bias, structurally consonant with retrospective teleology: a generalized anticipation of algorithmic error motivated conservative play, and upon the coincidental occurrence of an error, the preceding passivity was retroactively designated as a calculated tactic.

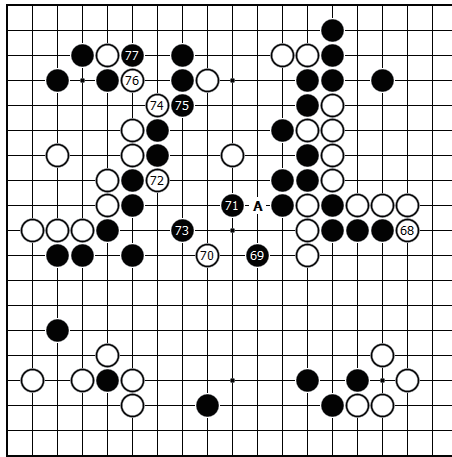


Figure 1

Lee systematically fails to articulate the specific causal mechanics linking Move 68 to Move 78, merely positing that the sequence was “already decided and connected”²²:

“Move 78 was a sequence that was already decided and connected at the moment Move 68 was played... Move 68 stands as the decisive move because it worked; but had it not worked, it would have been the losing move of this game. It was a move played with the single-minded intention of pro-

22) Lee Sedol (2026).

voking AlphaGo’s bug.”²³⁾

This rhetoric of the omniscient strategist appears all the more striking when juxtaposed with the documented reality of 2016. Synthesizing immediate post-match analyses, Benjamín Labatut’s *The MANIAC* provides an accurate reconstruction of the prevailing consensus—Move 78 was an uncalculated flash of inspiration. Lee’s own 2016 press conference testimony firmly established this:

“At that point in the game, it was the only move I could see. There was no other placement. It was the only option for me, so I put it there. I am quite humbled by all the praise I am getting for it.”²⁴⁾

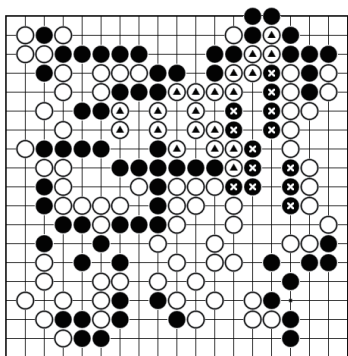


Figure 2

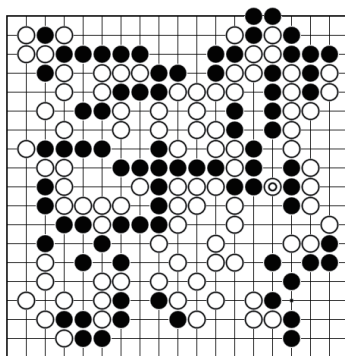


Figure 3

This impromptu, non-calculated nature was universally accepted. In professional Go discourse, such phenomena are conceptualized as instantaneous manifestations of intuition—the subconscious distillation of accumulated ex-

23) Ibid.

24) Labatut, Benjamín (2023), 340.

expertise. The moniker ‘Divine Move’ functioned less as a technical evaluation and more as a symbolic tribute to human resilience in extreme adversity.

A comparative example clarifies this operational definition of intuition. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate an online match between professional players, culminating in a critical endgame capturing race. Under severe time constraints, White instantaneously identified the sole winning variation—a wedge move (©) in Figure 3. The critical distinction between this intuitive brilliance and Lee’s Move 78 is empirical soundness: White’s move is analytically flawless. Conversely, Move 78 was structurally unsound, succeeding only due to AlphaGo’s subsequent algorithmic failure. Nevertheless, its historical value remains undisputed, validating Labatut’s assessment:

“As it turned out, AlphaGo’s networks agreed with Gu Li... it truly had been divine, a touch from God’s hand—only one in ten thousand human players would have considered it. That was the reason AlphaGo had been incapable of dealing with Lee’s wedge move: it was too far from human experience, and past even where AlphaGo’s seemingly boundless capabilities could reach.”²⁵⁾

Notably, the DeepMind development team conceptualized Move 78 in parallel with AlphaGo’s universally acclaimed Move 37 from Game 2. Google co-founder Sergey Brin observed that the architecture generated aesthetically “beautiful” moves exceeding human cognitive capacity.²⁶⁾ The paradigm that deep neural networks can synthesize computational approximations of intuition is now canonical. OpenAI researcher Noam Brown summarized this epistemological shift: “AlphaGo definitively showed that neural networks

25) Ibid., 190.

26) Sergey Brin, quoted in Zastrow, Mark (2016).

can perform pattern recognition better than humans. Neural networks can essentially have intuition that surpasses human beings.”²⁷⁾ Technology journalist Cade Metz documented that the match profoundly transformed human understanding of Go, suggesting that AlphaGo’s brilliance pushed Lee to find ‘God’s Touch’: “The machine that defeated him had also helped him find the way.”²⁸⁾

Why was this ‘meticulous strategy’ concealed for a decade? The contradiction between the humbled protagonist of 2016 and the omniscient strategist of 2025 is irreconcilable. It is highly probable that the contemporaneous narrative served to preserve his status as a surrogate for human intuition, whereas the current revision aims to establish his authority as a master tactician who dismantled a computational architecture. This reversal critically undermines the epistemic reliability of his narrative construction.

The claim of having a ‘pre-planned strategy’ stands as a jarring contradiction within the otherwise sentimental narrative of the day. Fundamentally, this narrative implicitly premises that the abandonment of one’s core competitive philosophy is justified when confronting a non-biological opponent.

Even when accounting for the psychological weight of the 2016 defeat, the compulsion to manufacture the bug-triggering theory remains analytically perplexing. It is highly probable that this narrative construction is inextricably linked to his structurally ambivalent conception of AI. The profound irony is that the same narrator who mourns the algorithmic death of Go’s artistic sanctuary now reframes his magnum opus as a mechanical exploit—a rudimentary hack of a system vulnerability. By validating the intentional triggering of computational errors as a legitimate tactic simply because the opponent is a machine, Lee systematically erases the very artistic dimension of Go he pur-

27) Wilkins, Alex (2026).

28) Metz, Cade (2016).

ports to defend. He effectively volunteered to become a mechanical gambler in order to defeat a machine.

By framing Move 68 as the calculated genesis of a ‘divine’ strategy, Lee consigns the uncalculated reality of the match to an Orwellian memory hole²⁹⁾. Through this mechanism of *ex post facto* justification, the documented history of a profound human struggle is quietly overwritten by a meticulously concocted myth. What, then, was the path taken by another genius who suffered the same defeat?

5. Two Paths: Lee Sedol and Garry Kasparov

The bug-triggering theory presented in Lee Sedol’s *Memoir* serves as the antithesis to the trajectory of another genius who confronted a similar algorithmic defeat: Garry Kasparov. Kasparov’s *Deep Thinking* (2017), published two decades after his 1997 loss to IBM’s Deep Blue, perfectly contrasts with Lee’s narrative. While both grandmasters share the trauma of machine subjugation, their subsequent conceptualizations of defeat diverge into two distinct archetypes: the evolutionary strategist and the fallen artist.

Initially, their trajectories aligned. Convinced that Deep Blue’s anomalous Move 37 (Be4) in Game 2 was computationally impossible without human intervention, Kasparov publicly insinuated that IBM had cheated, famously likening it to Maradona’s “Hand of God”.³⁰⁾ This initial denial closely parallels Lee’s contemporaneous mystification of AlphaGo’s unfathomable moves.

However, their subsequent paths radically diverged. Through rigorous

29) The specific sociological context and implications of the ‘Orwellian memory hole’ are discussed in detail in Section 6.

30) Kasparov, Garry (2017), 22.

post-match analysis, Kasparov systematically dismantled his own suspicions, concluding after twenty years of self-reflection that Deep Blue had not cheated.³¹⁾

Conversely, Lee's *Memoir* and recent interviews demonstrate a retreat into narrative distortion. Despite the absence of contemporaneous evidence, he retroactively frames Move 68 in Game 4 as a calculated tactic:

“If you run the 68th move through an AI, I come out worse. It's not the jeong-su [the correct move]... **With the sole intention of inducing a bug**, I played an extremely strange move.”³²⁾

Lee's contemporary justification rests solely on AI analysis verifying the move's objective disadvantage. However, numerical disadvantage does not constitute empirical evidence of intent to trigger a system error.

Figure 4 illustrates a simulation generated by KataGo, indicating that strong resistance at Move 68 was optimal. The difference in win rate for Lee's actual move is merely 2.4 percentage points. While this quantifies a minor positional disadvantage, it provides zero evidentiary basis for the claim that the move was a calculated tactic to trigger a bug. Furthermore, this AI-recommended variation portends a fierce battle, directly contradicting Lee's assertion that he avoided standard play because he “believed AlphaGo had the advantage in combat.”

31) *Ibid.*, 352.

32) Lee Sedol et al. (2026), 25. Emphasis added.

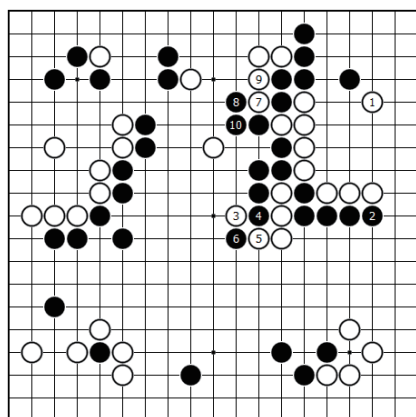


Figure 4

Why persist in propagating this logically flawed bug-triggering theory? The psychological impetus driving this narrative revisionism is the necessity to restore the historical event to his locus of control. Establishing this narrative—framing the Game 4 victory as a calculated strategy rather than an uncalculated, serendipitous anomaly—is necessary for Lee to claim total intellectual ownership of the historical event. Humans inherently prefer outcomes generated by calculated agency over victories born of desperation. Lee seeks to reconstruct memory into a controllable scenario to mend his fractured professional esteem.

In sharp contrast, Kasparov demystified Deep Blue, conceptualizing it not as an infallible oracle but as a specialized algorithmic tool. Moving beyond mere capitulation, he pioneered Advanced Chess, investigating how algorithmic integration could maximize human creativity. Kasparov viewed AI not as a replacement for human intelligence, but as a utility liberating humans to pursue higher-order creativity. Quoting Pablo Picasso—“Computers are

useless. They can only give you answers”—Kasparov posits that authentic creativity manifests when human strategic discernment (the “power of the question”) is integrated with mechanical precision.

Lee, however, remains trapped in his dichotomy, equating algorithmic mastery with the erasure of human creativity. While he formally retired, claiming AI eradicated his capacity to enjoy the game, his rhetoric collapses into contradictory ambivalence. He simultaneously mourns the loss of Go’s “philosophical depth” due to AI study³³⁾ and vaguely hopes for the “birth of a new aesthetic” through AI collaboration.³⁴⁾ Lacking a logically consistent framework, he conflates the evolution of computational tools with the extinction of essential human value.

In attempting to reclassify a miraculous anomaly as a controlled intellectual triumph, Lee paradoxically reduces the sublime artistry of Go to a mechanical exploit targeting a software vulnerability. While Kasparov utilized his defeat as a blueprint for the future, Lee committed to rationalizing and distorting history to preserve his defeat as a relic of past glory. The silhouette of a hero who refuses to evolve, opting instead to guard a defunct sanctuary, appears increasingly tragic.

However, the story of Lee Sedol transcends the self-contradiction of a single grandmaster. The fact that these glaring internal inconsistencies have remained uncontested by the public and the media for an entire decade is the truly uncomfortable question that we, as a collective, must now confront.

33) Lee Sedol (2025), 286.

34) Lee Sedol et al. (2026), 28.

6. The Orwellian Memory Hole: Selective Remembering and Reconstruction

“But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.” (George Orwell, *1984*, 1949, Part 3, Chapter 6)

In George Orwell's *1984*, the 'memory hole' functions as the ultimate instrument of narrative control—an incinerator where any record contradicting the Party's shifting reality is turned to ash. This erasure, however, is not merely a top-down imposition; it is sustained by the collective 'Doublethink' of a society that finds the comfort of a sanctioned myth more palatable than the friction of objective truth. Just as Winston Smith finds hollow peace in submitting to Big Brother, contemporary society has sought comfortable refuge in the hero-narrative of Lee Sedol. Lee's narrative fabrication is not merely an individual defense mechanism; it is the byproduct of a collective memory hole, sustained by a society that, hungry for a human champion, became a silent accomplice to this engineered myth.

This mechanism aligns with Charan Ranganath's thesis in *Why We Remember* (2024): memory functions not as a passive archive, but as an adaptive utility serving present psychological needs. We selectively reconstruct the past to support current identities and goals. Consequently, the collective silence regarding the glaring causal disconnect between Move 68 and Move 78 is not a mnemonic failure, but a functional choice. This 'social remembering' prioritizes the preservation of human triumph over the uncomfortable reality of algorithmic supremacy. Society collectively incinerated the evidence of a computational exploit to protect the illusion of an inviolable sanctuary of human creativity.

This collective acquiescence stems from three primary factors. The first is psychological solace. The public and the professional Go community strongly desired Lee to remain a symbolic bastion, and maintaining his status as the sole human to defeat AI mitigates the collective existential anxiety of the algorithmic era. To challenge his narrative is to threaten that comfort directly.

The second factor is structural marketability. Institutions frequently deploy Lee as a symbolic asset, and his legacy functions as an unparalleled tool for attracting audiences. To preserve the marketability of this national hero, the establishment has systematically ignored his self-contradictions. Rigorous verification is an inconvenient friction; silence is a profitable commodity.

The third, and perhaps most troubling, factor is professional complicity. Despite recognizing the technical inconsistencies, experts within and outside the Go community have largely refrained from public verification. By choosing to assimilate into an established power structure rather than resist it, they appear to have allowed the name 'Lee Sedol' to solidify into a near-unquestionable institutional authority.

The convergence of these factors activates what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu terms 'symbolic power'. Lee's linguistic capital derives from his decade-long dominance in the professional Go world (*champ*) and the profound symbolism of Game 4. When these capitals converge, his discourse becomes virtually irrefutable in the broader public sphere:

"It is true that the definition of the symbolic relation of power ... can be the subject of negotiation ... But it goes without saying that the capacity to manipulate is greater the more capital one possesses, as is shown by the strategies of condescension."³⁵

Lee strategically exploits the intimate nature of the *Memoir* format. He ap-

35) Bourdieu, Pierre (1991), 71.

pears deeply immersed in his self-contrived bug-triggering theory, exporting private reminiscence as historical testimony. When his claim of executing a deliberate tactic to trigger a bug is accepted as fact without critical scrutiny, the profound value of uncalculated human intuition—symbolized by Move 78—is systematically erased. He reinforces this during public appearances:

“... the true seung-bu-su [decisive gamble] of this match was actually move 68 ... Did I have to compromise my philosophy and convictions just to win this game? It was, of course, a human decision. I was cornered at the time... Had I thought of it as my personal defeat alone, I likely would not have played move 68.” (Lee Sedol, ‘OhMyForum 2026’)³⁶⁾

Here, unverified assertions acquire absolute authority solely through the speaker’s identity. By framing a mechanical exploit as a heroic sacrifice made for humanity (“Had I thought of it as my personal defeat alone...”), it may be argued that Lee’s address functions, at least in part, as an emotional appeal that deflects critical scrutiny. According to Bourdieu’s field theory, this symbolic authority manifests dangerously on two levels.

First, the over-generalization of singular experience. Lee frequently projects his personal trauma onto universal AI discourse, oscillating between lamenting the death of Go’s creativity and espousing vague AI optimism. Ranganath warns that each time a memory is recalled, it is “subject to edits and updates, so that, over time, our memories can drift further and further from that initial event.”³⁷⁾ When such distorted memories are recurrently voiced by a dominant authority figure, they contaminate public perception. As Ranganath notes, collective memory is not random; it becomes “especially skewed toward those of the loudest voices in the room”, allowing the most

36) Lee Sedol (2026).

37) Ranganath, Charan (2024), 177.

confident speakers to overwrite shared history.³⁸⁾

Second, the transgression of epistemic boundaries. Lee extends his symbolic capital into domains where he lacks professional expertise, such as AI ethics and the philosophy of writing. Audiences suspend critical distance due to the “trap of familiarity”—where fame provides an unearned aura of trust and expertise.³⁹⁾ Because humans are highly susceptible to inheriting memory errors from trusted figures, Lee leverages this familiarity to bypass critical scrutiny, making his distortions incredibly difficult to root out from the shared narrative.⁴⁰⁾

Just as the protagonist in *1984* found twisted solace in surrendering his memory to Big Brother, contemporary society has grown accustomed to the artificial sweetness of unverified hero narratives. Lee Sedol’s distorted narrative is a co-constructed product of a society eager to indulge in that very sweetness.

The core issue transcends Lee as an individual. An individual’s psychological desire to reconstruct defeat into myth is comprehensible; however, the societal failure to challenge this narrative fabrication for an entire decade is profoundly disturbing. In a space where the intersection of AI and humanity demands rigorous contemplation, unverified narratives have been elevated to credible testimony. Where criticism vanished, myth moved in; and where myth solidified, questioning was branded as sacrilege.

The subversiveness of Lee’s narrative lies not merely in its factual distortion, but in the collective silence that legitimized it. When the discourse on human-machine interaction is monopolized by the most assertive, rather than

38) Ibid., 229-230.

39) Ibid., 142.

40) Ibid., 234.

the most accurate, voice, the resulting intellectual poverty burdens the entire society. Ultimately, this paper serves as a critical intervention, seeking to correct an engineered myth that has masqueraded as history amid collective social silence.

7. Conclusion

This paper has sought to demonstrate that Lee Sedol's 2025 *Memoir* is not merely a personal recollection but a strategically constructed revisionist narrative—one that retroactively recasts a contingent historical outcome as a premeditated strategic achievement at the expense of documentary accuracy. Through close analysis of the internal contradictions surrounding Moves 68 and 78, it has shown that Lee's 'bug-triggering theory' is both empirically unsupported and logically incoherent: Move 68 cannot simultaneously constitute a deliberate gambit and a spontaneous response to AlphaGo's anomalous behavior. The cognitive distortions Charan Ranganath identifies—whereby memory is reconstructed to serve the narrator's present needs—offer the most parsimonious explanation for this revisionism.

Yet the paper has also argued that Lee's narrative could not have hardened into consensus without structural complicity. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, it has traced how Lee's authority as the sole human victor over AlphaGo effectively foreclosed critical scrutiny, while the professional Go community and a public hungry for a human champion colluded in silence. The result is an Orwellian memory hole: a manufactured account that has displaced the documented record and now risks calcifying into the authoritative version of events.

The contrast with Garry Kasparov's response to his defeat by Deep Blue is instructive. Where Kasparov's *Deep Thinking* (2017) models a form of intellectual accountability—honestly confronting the reality of machine superiority while extracting genuinely productive lessons for human-AI collaboration—Lee's *Memoir* retreats into self-serving mythology. This retreat, as the paper has argued, is not merely an individual failure but a symptom of a broader cultural anxiety: the difficulty of sustaining honest discourse about human-machine relations when the stakes of human dignity feel impossibly high.

The displacement of criticism by myth carries real intellectual costs. As AI systems continue to reshape domains of human expertise—not only Go but creative, analytical, and professional fields of every kind—the frameworks we develop for understanding these encounters matter enormously. Narratives that subordinate historical truth to consolation impoverish those frameworks and foreclose the more rigorous reckoning that the AI era demands. This paper calls for a critical re-examination of the revisionist narrative that has consolidated under collective social silence: one that honors the genuine complexity of the AlphaGo matches, acknowledges what they revealed about both human and machine intelligence, and resists the temptation to resolve that complexity through the consoling fiction of retrospective strategic mastery.

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