

Alexander Alekhine

Fourth World Chess Champion

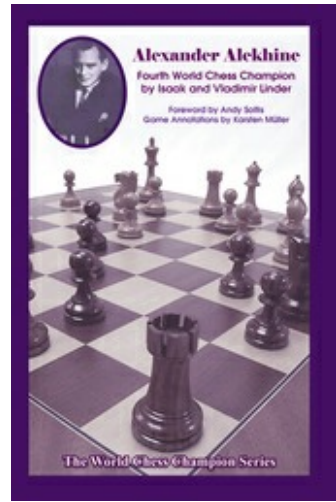
by Isaak and Vladimir Linder

Foreword by Andy Soltis
Annotated Games by Karsten Müller

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World Chess Champion Series

The fourth title in the popular World Chess Champion Series is about the enigmatic Alexander Alekhine. Tracing the Russian-born champion from his youth in Russia, through his assault on the chess Olympus and beyond, this book paints a fresh portrait of the player who was one of the most spectacular tacticians ever to play the game.

The authors do not shy from confronting some of the less savory aspects of Alekhine's life. They stick to the facts and present the issues surrounding the fourth world champion. Rounding out this outstanding biography are over 130 games annotated by German grandmaster Karsten Müller.

“This book clears up some of the mysteries of Alekhine and provides some wonderful details... There are so many intriguing aspects to Alekhine's life that it's easy to forget how much he dominated the chess world... The Linders capture quite well the drama of Alekhine's world championship matches with José Capablanca and Max Euwe. Even the blowouts against Efim Bogoljubow are well-described. Alekhine was the most peripatetic of champions, and this book details many of his travels on simul tours.” – Andy Soltis in his Foreword.

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Game Annotations by Karsten Müller

The World Chess Champion Series



2016

Russell Enterprises, Inc.
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Alexander Alekhine
Fourth World Chess Champion

by Isaak and Vladimir Linder

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Russell Enterprises, Inc.

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Foreword

“War hero” isn’t a phrase you expect to use in describing a chess grandmaster. Neither is “crime scene investigator.”

Or “firing squad candidate.” Or “scoundrel.”

But all of these could be applied to that most complex of world champions, Alexander Alekhine.

So much has been written about the fourth world champion – and so much of it is fanciful, if not wrong. There have been various accounts of how Alekhine got out of German internment at the start of World War I, of whether he faced a firing squad during the Russian Revolution, and how he eventually fled his homeland, never to return. Reuben Fine, for example, said it was Alekhine’s fluency in foreign languages that allowed him “to attach himself to a delegation sent abroad.” Actually, he got out after marrying his second wife, a Swiss journalist who was 13 years older than he, and left her and their son not long after they settled in Paris.

This book clears up some of the mysteries of Alekhine and provides some wonderful details. To name a few:

- He had to give up chess for three youthful years because of encephalitis.
- As a boy he was nicknamed “the quiet one.”
- He was a Red Cross volunteer during the Great War. He was twice wounded and, indeed, was a hero, who received battlefield medals and awards.
- He tried to become a Russian movie actor.
- When that failed he served as a criminal investigator whose job it was to study the scene of a crime and analyze it.
- He was absent-minded and superstitious, being particularly fond of the number 13.
- He nearly killed himself by falling asleep while smoking in bed.
- Six of his teeth had to be removed during the 1927 world championship match.
- He met the popular author S. S. Van Dine in New York and planned to accept the role of playing a chess master in a movie based on one of Van Dine’s detective stories.
- He was 46 when he joined the French army, as an interpreter, at the start of World War II, and he was over 50 when he survived scarlet fever.
- He composed his first problem without sight of the board.
- He attended Carlsbad 1929 to report on it for the *New York Times*.
- And there’s a planet named for him.

There are so many intriguing aspects to Alekhine's life that it's easy to forget how much he dominated the chess world. His career scores against the older generation is impressive: Six wins, seven draws, no losses against Frank Marshall; seven wins, five draws, no losses with Géza Maróczy; Siegbert Tarrasch and Akiba Rubinstein did only slightly better against him.

But against contemporaries Alekhine was also deadly – nine wins, three losses and nine draws with Aron Nimzovich. Salo Flohr managed five losses and seven draws in their games. And Paul Keres – who was reaching his peak while Alekhine was well past his when they played – lost five times and won once out of 14 games.

The Linders capture quite well the drama of Alekhine's world championship matches with José Capablanca and Max Euwe. Even the blowouts against Efim Bogoljubow are well described. Alekhine was the most peripatetic of champions, and this book details many of his travels on simul tours.

As usual with the Linders' books, we get a welcome series of mini-biographies of the champion's contemporaries. In this case, they are Euwe, Capablanca, and Bogoljubow, as well as Fine, Nimzovich, Ossip Bernstein, Flohr, Benjamin Blumenfeld, Evgeny Znosko-Borovsky, Boris Verlinsky, Nikolai Grigoriev, Stepan Levitzky, and the unfortunate Alexander Evenson, among others. This book is more enjoyable than the original from which it was excerpted because of the addition of the excellent game annotations.

The authors refrain from value judgments. A lot could be said about Alekhine's double-dealing with his world championship match challengers, his shameful treatment of Capablanca, and his participation in tournaments in Nazi-occupied Europe. The Linders stick to the facts. There are certainly enough amazing ones about Alexander Alexandrovich Alekhine to go around.

Andy Soltis
New York
January 2013

Signs and Symbols

1-0	White wins	!?	a move worth consideration
0-1	Black wins	=	an equal position
½-½	Draw agreed	±	White stands slightly better
+	check	±	White has a clear advantage
#	mate	+−	White has a winning position
!	a strong move	∓	Black stands slightly better
!!	a brilliant/unobvious move	∓	Black has a clear advantage
?	a weak move, an error	−+	Black has a winning position
??	a grave error	(D)	see the next diagram

Publisher's Note

This book originally appeared in Russian, part of the massive historical tome published in 2001, *Korolyi Shakhmatnovo Mira (Kings of the Chess World)*. By the time we had the pleasure of meeting with Isaak Linder and his son Vladimir in Moscow in March 2008, the original single-volume work of almost one thousand triple-column, small-font, large-format pages had been split into individual books, one for each world champion. We quickly reached an agreement with the Linders to bring out these books in what would become in English *The World Chess Champion Series*.

The first in the series was about José Raúl Capablanca, the great Cuban world champion; the book on Lasker was the second in the series.

With the permission and encouragement of the authors, we made some changes to the original Russian edition. The original contained a fine selection of Alekhine's games. We brought in German grandmaster Karsten Müller to provide refreshing new notes to these classic games. Finally, we created indexes of the players, games and openings, and included more complete information in the headers of each game and game fragment.

There is a tendency for modern-day chessplayers either to ignore or fail to appreciate the great masters of the past. We hope this series helps to change that.

**London Tournaments, 1922, 1932.
July 1922**

The London tournament brought together many well-known figures of the chess world. Capablanca marked his first appearance as world champion by putting forward a document of twenty-two items, intended to regulate future world championship matches. The reaction of the players to these regulations for world championship cycles was, on the whole, positive, but some conditions, and particularly the necessity to secure a prize fund of \$10,000, caused discontent. The “London Agreement” was signed by Capablanca, Alekhine, Bogoljubow, Vidmar, Rubinstein, future world champion Euwe, and other grandmasters.

In London, Alekhine and Capablanca met again after an eight-year hiatus and became the main rivals in the struggle for first prize. For a while, they kept abreast, both having five points after five rounds! They met in the ninth round, but there was no fight in that game. Capablanca, who had the black pieces, skillfully neutralized his opponent’s initiative, equalized, and a draw was agreed on move 17. The spectators were naturally dissatisfied. “I traveled over 200 miles to watch the game!” exclaimed one disappointed Englishman. However, Alekhine was possibly under the pressure of their previous encounters, and also the time for principled fights between them in tournaments had not yet come.

London, 1922

Neither Capablanca nor Alekhine suffered a single loss in the tournament. However, Alekhine made three draws

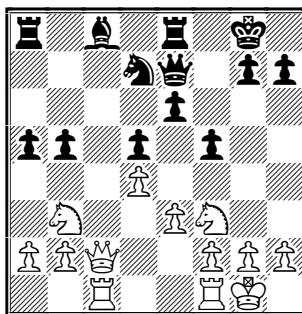
too many and the Cuban, having scored 13/15, took first prize; Alekhine was second with 11½ points.

(52) Alekhine – Yates, Frederick

London 1922

Queen’s Gambit Declined [D64]

1.d4 ♟f6 2.c4 e6 3.♟f3 d5 4.♟c3 ♟e7 5.♟g5 0-0 6.e3 ♟bd7 7.♟c1 c6 8.♟c2 ♟e8 9.♟d3 dxc4 10.♟xc4 ♟d5 11.♟e4 The main line runs 11.♟xe7 ♟xe7 12.0-0. **11...f5?** This weakens the dark squares too much. Instead, 11...♟a5+, as played later in Grünfeld-Yates, Merano 1926, is called for. **12.♟xe7 ♟xe7 13.♟ed2 b5 14.♟xd5 cxd5 15.0-0 a5 16.♟b3 (D)**



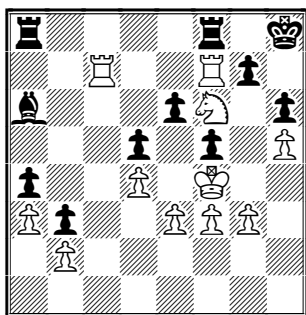
16...a4? 16...♟a6, with the idea of 17.♟xa5 b4 18.♟fe1 ♟b5 to get some counterplay is more in the spirit of the position. **17.♟c5 ♟xc5?** In the following endgame, Black has no counterplay and can only sit and wait for the execution, which will come in the form of an invasion on the dark squares. 17...♟b6 offers better practical chances. **18.♟xc5 ♟xc5 19.♟xc5 b4 20.♟fc1 ♟a6 21.♟e5 ♟eb8 22.f3 b3 23.a3 h6 24.♟f2** Alekhine activates the last weapon – his king. **24...♟h7 25.h4 ♟f8 26.♟g3**

Alexander Alekhine: Fourth World Chess Champion

London 1922

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Total
1 Capablanca	X	½	1	½	1	1	½	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
2 Alekhine	½	X	½	1	½	½	½	½	1	1	1	½	1	1	1	1	11½
3 Vidmar	0	½	X	0	1	½	1	½	1	½	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
4 Rubinstein	½	0	1	X	½	½	1	1	½	0	1	½	1	1	1	1	10½
5 Bogoljubow	0	½	0	½	X	½	1	1	0	1	½	0	1	1	1	1	9
6 Réti	0	½	½	½	½	X	½	½	1	1	½	1	0	1	0	1	8½
7 Tartakower	½	½	0	0	0	½	X	½	1	0	1	1	1	½	1	1	8½
8 Maróczy	½	½	½	0	0	½	½	X	1	½	½	1	½	0	1	1	8
9 Yates	0	0	0	½	1	0	0	0	X	1	1	1	1	1	½	1	8
10 Atkins	0	0	½	1	0	0	1	½	0	X	0	1	½	½	0	1	6
11 Euwe	0	0	0	0	½	½	0	½	0	1	X	0	1	0	1	1	5½
12 Znosko Borovsky	0	0	0	½	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	X	1	½	1	0	5
13 Wahlstuch	0	½	0	0	0	1	0	½	0	½	0	0	X	1	1	½	5
14 Morrison	0	0	0	0	0	0	½	1	0	½	1	½	0	X	0	1	4½
15 Watson	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	½	1	0	0	0	1	X	1	4½
16 Marotti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	½	0	0	X	1½

♖fb8 27.♖c7 ♘b5 28.♖1c5 ♘a6
 29.♖5c6 ♖e8 30.♖f4 ♖g8 31.h5
 ♘f1 32.g3 ♘a6 33.♖f7 ♖h7
 34.♖cc7 ♖g8 35.♖d7 ♖h8
 36.♖f6 ♖gf8 (D)



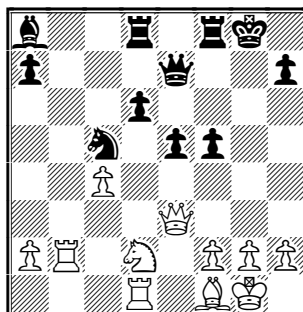
Now, the scene is set for the final small combination: 37.♖×g7 ♖×f6 38.♖e5 Yates resigned because he cannot rescue his rook with 38...♖af8 because of 39.♖h7+ ♖g8 40.♖cg7#. 1-0

February 1-15, 1932

Alekhine won this strong tournament. The distinguishing feature of Alekhine's style was, as before, sparkling combinations that crown his consistently implemented strategic plans. Of special interest was his first encounter with the women's world champion Vera Menchik.

(53) Menchik, Vera – Alekhine
 London 1932
 Queen's Indian Defense [E14]

1.d4 ♖f6 2.c4 e6 3.♖f3 b6 4.e3
 ♘b7 5.♘d3 ♘b4+ 6.♘d2 ♘×d2+
 7.♖b×d2 d6 8.0-0 ♖bd7 9.♖c2
 ♖e7 10.♖fd1 0-0 11.♖e4 g6
 12.♖d2 ♖×e4 13.♘×e4 c6
 14.♖a4 ♖fc8 15.♘d3 c5 16.♖d1
 ♖f6 17.d×c5 b×c5 18.♖e2 ♖h5
 19.♖ad1 ♖f8 20.e4? This weakens
 the dark squares and allows Black's
 knight to invade for no good reason.
 20.♘c2 was called for. 20...♖f4
 21.♖e3 e5 22.♘f1 ♖ad8 23.b4?!
 ♖e6 The alternative, 23...c×b4!?
 24.♖×a7 ♖e6 25.♖e3 ♖c5 26.♘d3
 ♖a8, gives strong positional pressure.
 24.♖b2 ♘a8 25.b×c5 ♖×c5
 26.♖d2 f5 27.e×f5 g×f5 (D)



London 1932

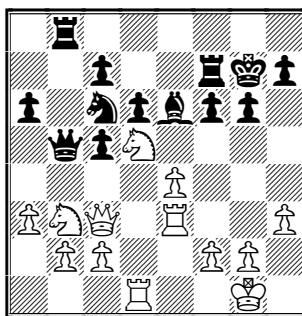
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	T
1 Alekhine	x	½	½	1	½	1	1	1	½	1	1	1	9
2 Flohr	½	x	½	½	1	0	1	1	1	1	½	1	8
3 Kashdan	½	½	x	½	0	½	1	1	1	1	1	½	7½
4 Sultan Khan	0	½	½	x	0	1	½	1	1	1	1	1	7½
5 Maróczy	½	0	1	1	x	½	½	½	½	½	½	½	6
6 Tartakower	0	1	½	0	½	x	1	1	0	0	1	1	6
7 Koltanowski	0	0	0	½	½	0	x	½	1	1	½	1	5
8 Menchik	0	0	0	0	½	0	½	x	1	½	1	1	4½
9 Thomas	½	0	0	0	½	1	0	0	x	½	½	½	3½
10 Milner Barry	0	0	0	0	½	1	0	½	½	x	½	½	3½
11 Berger	0	½	0	0	½	0	½	0	½	½	x	½	3
12 Winter	0	0	½	0	½	0	0	0	½	½	½	x	2½

28.f3? The plan to protect the kingside and the invade with the rooks on the queenside does not really solve the problems of the position. It is better to fight against Black's attack in the center with 28.♖b3 f4 29.♖h3 ♗e6 30.♖c3, but Black still has the initiative after 30...♗g5. **28...♗g7 29.♖db1?! ♖h8 30.♖b3 ♗e6 31.♖d2 ♗g5 32.♖h1 ♖g8 33.♖f2 ♖de8 34.♖d1 ♖e6 35.f4?** Opening all roads for Black's attack, but there is no defense in the long run anyway. **35...e×f4 36.♖d4 ♖e5 36...♗h3 37.♖×g7+ ♖×g7 38.♖fd2 f3** wins as well. **37.c5 d×c5 38.♗×c5 ♗h3 39.♖c2 f3 40.g3 f2+** and White resigned in view of 41.♗g2 ♖e1+ 42.♖×e1 f×e1♖+ 43.♖g1 ♖×g1#. "The longest check given with a bishop which I have ever seen in my life," was Alekhine's comment on the last move. **0-1**

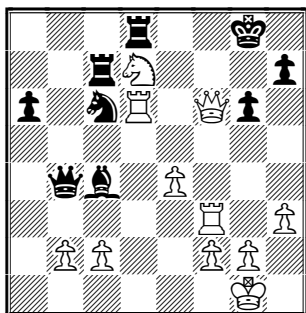
One of Alekhine's beautiful sacrifices – the one made against American master George Koltanowski – has entered the golden treasury of chess art.

(54) Alekhine – Koltanowski
 London 1932
 Ruy Lopez [C73]

1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♖b5 a6 4.♖a4 d6 5.♖×c6+ b×c6 6.d4 e×d4 7.♗×d4 ♖d7 8.0-0 g6 9.♗c3 ♖g7 10.♖e1 ♗e7 11.♖f4 0-0 12.♖d2 c5 13.♗b3 ♗c6 14.♖h6 ♖e6 15.♖×g7 ♖×g7 16.♗d5 f6 17.♖ad1 ♖b8 18.♖c3 ♖c8 19.a3 ♖b7 20.h3 ♖f7 21.♖e3 ♖b5? (D) If Koltanowski had seen the following shot coming, he would have chosen 21...♖e8 with approximate equality.



22.♗×c7!! A powerful blow that demolishes the outer wall of Black's house. **22...♖×c7 23.♖×d6 ♖c4? 23...♖e8** was forced, but White keeps the initiative after **24.a4 ♖b7 25.♗×c5 ♖c8 26.b4 ♗e5 27.♖×a6. 24.a4!** The first powerful pawn move. **24...♖×a4 25.♗×c5 ♖b5 26.♖×f6+ ♖g8 27.♗d7 ♖d8 28.♖f3 ♖b4?!** (D)



And now Alekhine destroys the defensive setup with another little pawn move with great explosive power: **29.c3!** ♖b5 **30.♗e5 ♜dc8 31.♗×c6** and because of 31...♞×c6 32.♞d8+ ♞×d8 33.♖×d8+ ♞g7 34.♖f8#. Koltanowski threw in the towel. **1-0**

Hastings Tournaments, 1922, 1925-26, 1933-34, 1936-37

The first of these tournaments was not a traditional Christmas chess congress. It just followed the tournament at London.

September 10-21, 1922

The participants of this small double round-robin event were the veteran Tarrasch, two challengers (Alekhine and Rubinstein), Bogoljubow, and the two strongest British masters (Thomas and Yates). A real gem of the tournament was the game Bogoljubow-Alekhine (See, Celebrities).

December 18, 1925-January 5, 1926

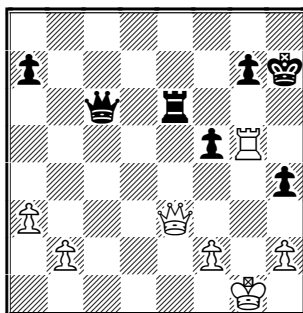
This tournament, and the tournament at Birmingham, were crucial growth periods for Alekhine. As he admits:

Since none of these tournaments had any major sporting significance, I was mainly concerned (when playing there) with perfecting my style of play further. It was

necessary to disclose, and then eliminate the shortcomings still inherent in my play vis-à-vis Capablanca's play. In my games against Yates, Znosko-Borovsky and Janowski, I especially paid attention to the moment of transition from the opening to the middlegame. The last of these games, just as my game against Colle (in Scarborough), gave me the chance to study the character of the struggle in ♖+♞ vs. ♖+♞ positions. My knowledge of this field subsequently proved very useful in my match with Capablanca.

(55) Janowski, Dawid – Alekhine

Hastings 1926 (D)

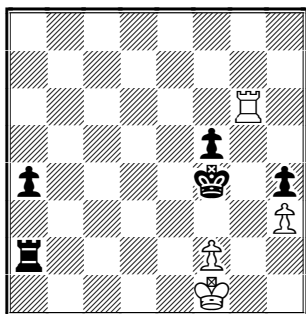


34.♖c3? Equivalent to capitulation because White's rook is too misplaced. Janowski could save himself with 34.♞h5+ ♖g8 35.♖b3=. **34...♖×c3 35.b×c3 g6!** White's rook really has a difficult life on g5. **36.♖f1 ♜c6 37.♞g1 ♞×c3 38.♖e2 ♞×a3 39.♞c1 ♖h6 40.♞c7 ♖g5 41.♞c6 a5 42.♞a6 a4 43.h3 ♖f4 44.♞×g6 ♞a2+ 45.♖f1** (D)

Now, a mating attack follows: **45...♖f3! 46.♖g1 ♞×f2 47.♞c6 ♞e2 48.♞c3+ 48.♞a6 ♖g3 49.♖f1**

Hastings 1922

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1 Alekhine	X	½1	11	11	1½	0½	7½
2 Rubinstein	½0	X	½1	11	1½	½1	7
3 Thomas	00	½0	X	½½	½½	11	4½
4 Bogoljubow	00	00	½½	X	1½	11	4½
5 Tarrasch	0½	0½	½½	0½	X	1½	4
6 Yates	1½	½0	00	00	0½	X	2½



♖e4-+ 48...♗e3 49.♗c5 f4 50.♗a5 a3 51.♝f1 ♗b3 52.♝e1 ♝g2 0-1

1933-1934

The only one of the four tournaments at Hastings in which he played where Alekhine finished behind the winner, Flohr, by half a point, sharing 2nd-3rd places with Lilienthal.

1936-1937

The year that Alekhine was to play his return match with Euwe started well for him. He was victorious at the Hastings tournament, scoring eight points out of nine (+7 -0 =2), including the one against his principal competitor in the struggle for the first prize, American grandmaster Reuben Fine.

Margate Tournaments, 1923, 1937, 1938

Three times Alekhine had the chance to play at this English resort, where, beginning in 1923, small international events were held in spring.

1923

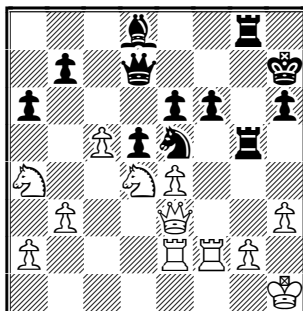
Being out of form, Alekhine only scored 4½ points out of 7 and shared 2nd-5th places behind Grünfeld.

1937

This time he finished third with 6/9 (+6 -3 =0), behind Keres and Fine, who tied for first and second.

(56) Alekhine - Foltis

Margate 1937 (D)



Alekhine opens the way for his inactive a4-knight with **32.c6!?** **bxc6?** 32...♗xc6 33.♗c5 ♗c8 34.♗dx6 ♗e5 fights better against White's mighty knights, but Alekhine remains on top after 35.♝f4 of course. **33.♗c5 ♗d6** **34.♗cx6 ♗g3?** (D)