

SERGEY VORONKOV

WITH ALEXEI ZAKHAROV

ALEXANDER ALEKHINE

THE RUSSIAN SPHINX: VOLUME II

(1921-1934)

Alexander Alekhine – The Russian Sphinx: Volume II (1921-1934)

Authors: Sergey Voronkov with Alexei Zakharov

Translated from the Russian by Alexei Zakharov

© Elk and Ruby, 2026. All rights reserved

Front cover: Alekhine drawn by graphic artist and illustrator Jan Rotgans
(*Algemeen Handelsblad*, 15th January 1927)

Follow us on Twitter: @ilan_ruby

www.elkandruby.com

ISBN 978-1-916839-13-7 (paperback), 978-1-916839-14-4 (hardback)

CONTENTS

Index of Games	5
Timeline of Key Events	8
“THE COMINTERN AGENT”	10
Transformation of the Ugly Duckling	10
The Game with Trotsky.....	21
The Vicious Circle	33
The Seditious Book.....	43
<i>A. von Aljechin. Chess Life in Soviet Russia</i>	47
Safe Conduct	59
DETHRONEMENT OF THE IDOL	71
Hunting Rubinstein	71
The Race with Nimzowitsch	87
A Pyrrhic Victory	103
Artist Versus Virtuoso	120
The Clash for Leadership	123
There’s Art, and There’s Art.....	136
Letters from Buenos Aires	143
The Match Through Euwe’s Eyes	151
Fear or Hatred?.....	163
The Damaged Mechanism	170
THE PINNACLE OF FAME	174
Is He With Us or Not?	174
A Discovery in the Special Archive	189
Alekhine’s Paris Secrets	201
The Secret Master.....	202
The Search for the Temple at “Yvetka”	205
A Meeting with Alekhine.....	207
A Visit to Croix-Nivert.....	210
“A Truly Magnificent Match”	213
The FIDE Champion	215
The Wiesbaden Warm-Up	224
The Heidelberg See-Saw	241
The Climax of the Match	253
Fire in The Hague.....	267

Contrasts	280
The Artist and the Actor	289
THE TOURING WHIRLWIND	294
New Games from Old Newspapers.....	294
Alekhine loses to a Blind Man!	297
The Unknown Tour.....	302
Alekhine Loses to a Woman!.....	308
The Queen's Indian Sufferings	312
Alekhine Loses to a Schoolboy!	317
Without Sight of the Board.....	323
"One Versus Three Hundred"	329
The Cost of Records.....	338
The New Year's Shotglass Game	346
A Comedy of Errors	351
On the Edge of the Universe.....	358
Unification of European and Asian Chess.....	359
The Thirteenth Labor of Hercules	367
The Australian Trace	381
The Splendors and Miseries of Simuls	384
Tough Nuts to Crack	387
The Endurance Test	394
A Contribution to Opening Theory.....	399
An Alternating Blindfold Simultaneous Display!	406
GUEST OF THE NAZIS	417
In the Homeland of Hans Frank	417
The Art of Losing.....	428
Is Alekhine Not the Same Anymore?.....	440
Bogoljubov's Poor Streak	444
Blow for Blow	453
Failed Hopes.....	459
Coffeehouse Chess of the Best Sort.....	468
With Their Last Strength.....	479
The Lost Annotations.....	486
Bibliography.....	494

Index of Games

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
53	Alekhine	Rubinstein	Fragment	1925
54	Nimzowitsch	Alekhine	Alekhine Defense B02	1926
55	Alekhine	Euwe	Queen's Gambit D34	1927 m/7
56	Euwe	Alekhine	Fragment	1927 m/10
57	Capablanca	Alekhine	Fragment	1927 m/11
58	Alekhine	Capablanca	Fragment	1927 m/22
59	Capablanca	Alekhine	Fragment	1927 m/27
60	Alekhine	Capablanca	Fragment	1927 m/32
61	Capablanca	Alekhine	Fragment	1927 m/31
62	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Fragment	1929 m/2
63	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Fragment	1929 m/3
64	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Fragment	1929 m/4
65	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Indian Defense A50	1929 m/8
66	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Fragment	1929 m/10
67	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Queen's Gambit D51	1929 m/11
68	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Fragment	1929 m/12
69	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Fragment	1929 m/13
70	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Indian Defense E70	1929 m/15
71	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Fragment	1929 m/17
72	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	French Defense C13	1929 m/18
73	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Fragment	1929 m/19
74	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Fragment	1929 m/20
75	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Fragment	1929 m/22
76	Koetsheid, Daum	Alekhine	Vienna Game C27	1923
77	Alekhine	Fleissner	Ruy Lopez C81	1925 <i>Blindfold</i>
78	Alekhine	Cnossen	Sicilian Defense B88	1925
79	van Tuil	Alekhine	Slav Defense D35	1925
80	Alekhine	Deckers	Nimzo-Indian Defense E51	1925
81	Alekhine	Rotballer	Fragment	1930
82	Alekhine	Müller	Fragment	1930
83	Alekhine	Toerber	Queen's Indian Defense E14	1930 <i>Blindfold</i>
84	Alekhine	Oborsky	Queen's Indian Defense E14	1930 <i>Blindfold</i>

Note: Game scores that to our knowledge were previously unknown are highlighted in grey in the above list. Previously unknown games are also found in the introduction to Game 89 and in the notes to Game 112.

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
85	Alekhine	Stroedter	Queen's Indian Defense E12	1930
86	Alekhine	Nuesken	Caro-Kann Defense B15	1930
87	Alekhine	Glasberg	Sicilian Defense B70	1930
88	Alekhine	Calandron	Ruy Lopez C62	1932 <i>Blindfold</i>
89	Alekhine	Messrs. Le Corre	Queen's Indian Defense E18	1932 <i>Blindfold</i>
90	Alekhine	Blajvas	Queen's Gambit D53	1932 <i>Blindfold</i>
91	Alekhine	Russian U20 team (5 players)	Vienna Game C27	1932
92	Alekhine	Caissa Chess Club (5 players)	Queen's Gambit D06	1932
93	Hein	Alekhine	Tarrasch Defense D34	1933
94	Alekhine	Brachtl	Slav Defense D16	1933
95	Alekhine	Scott	Fragment	1934
96	Alekhine	Beaty	Ruy Lopez C80	1934
97	Alekhine	Aubarede	Petrov Defense C43	1935
98	Alekhine	de Freygang	Queen's Gambit D51	1935
99	Alekhine	Stabins	Slav Defense D29	1935
100	Alekhine	Arendt	Ruy Lopez C65	1933
101	Alekhine	Schenker	Queen's Gambit D36	1933 <i>Blindfold simul</i>
102	Alekhine	Pannekoek	Sicilian Defense B29	1933
103	Alekhine	Hulshoff Pol	Ruy Lopez C73	1933
104	Alekhine	Ouwehand	Ruy Lopez C68	1933
105	Alekhine	Wolthuis	Sicilian Defense B62	1933
106	Alekhine	Pannenburg	Indian Defense A50	1933
107	Alekhine	Siemens	Queen's Gambit D51	1933
108	Alekhine	Fatton	Fragment	1933
109	Alekhine	Essink	Ruy Lopez C80	1933
110	Alekhine	NN	Sicilian Defense B62	1933
111	Alekhine	Mijer	Slav Defense D15	1933
112	Alekhine	Oskam	Sicilian Defense B20	1933 <i>Both players blindfolded</i>
113	Alekhine	Messrs. Oversluizen	Ruy Lopez C79	1933
114	Alekhine	Oskam, van de Pol	Sicilian Defense B62	1934 <i>Blindfold simul</i>
115	Alekhine, Landau	Fontein, Beekman, van Reeuwijk	Sicilian Defense B62	1934 <i>Blindfold simul</i>
116	Alekhine	Kraft	Ruy Lopez C78	1933
117	Alekhine	Kraft	Queen's Gambit D68	1934

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
118	Alekhine	Kraft	Scandinavian Defense B01	1936
119	Alekhine	Rolli	Vienna Game C25	1933
120	Alekhine	Rodeck	Ruy Lopez C64	1934
121	Alekhine	Westermann	Slav Defense D30	1934
122	Alekhine	Wirnser	Alekhine Defense B04	1934
123	Alekhine	Krokisius	French Defense C12	1934
124	Alekhine	Liede	French Defense C14	1936
125	Alekhine	NN	Fragment	1936
126	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Fragment	1934 m/6
127	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Fragment	1934 m/8
128	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Fragment	1934 m/10
129	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Fragment	1934 m/12
130	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Queen's Gambit D24	1934 m/17
131	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Queen's Gambit D27	1934 m/19
132	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Fragment	1934 m/21
133	Alekhine	Bogoljubov	Fragment	1934 m/24
134	Bogoljubov	Alekhine	Dutch Defense A92	1934 m/11

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

Date		Event
1921, July		Won a tournament in Triberg, his first one after leaving Soviet Russia
1921, November		His book <i>Das Schachleben in Sowjet-Russland</i> published in Berlin
1921, 7 th November		First challenge to world champion Capablanca issued
1922, January		Obtained entry permit to France and settled in Paris
1922, August		Took second place (after Capablanca) at the London tournament, confirming his status as a world championship contender
1922, November-December		Shared 4 th –6 th place at the Vienna tournament; Alekhine's biggest tournament failure
1923, April-May		Shared 1 st –3 rd place at the Carlsbad tournament
1924, March-April		Took 3 rd place (after Lasker and Capablanca) at the New York supertournament
1924, 3 rd November		First application for French naturalized citizenship
1925, April-May		Won the Baden-Baden tournament, ahead of the entire chess elite at the time except Capablanca
1926, March		Took second place (after Spielmann) at the Semmering tournament
1926, December-1927, January		Won a training match against Euwe
1927, February-March		Took second place (after Capablanca) at the New York supertournament
1927, September-November		Won the match against Capablanca and became the fourth world chess champion
1927, 5 th November		Naturalized as a French citizen
1928, 24 th May		Joined the Astrée Freemason lodge in Paris
1929, September-November		Won the world championship match against Bogoljubov
1930, January-February		Won the San Remo tournament, 3.5 points ahead of runner-up Nimzowitsch
1931, August-September		Won the Bled tournament, 5.5 points ahead of runner-up Bogoljubov

1932, December-1933, May		World tour
1933, 16 th July		Gave a record-breaking blindfold simultaneous display in Chicago on 32 boards
1934, 1 st March		Divorce with his fourth wife Nadezhda Semyonovna Alekhine (Fabritskaya) registered in The Hague
1934, 26 th March		Marriage to his fifth wife Grace Wishaar registered in Nice
1934, 2 nd May		Anneliese Rüegg, Alekhine's third wife, dies in Lausanne
1934, April-June		Won the world championship match against Bogoljubov
1934, July		Won the Zurich tournament

“THE COMINTERN AGENT”

Will I ever return to my homeland?
Of course, but only when the current government
changes into a democratic one.
A. Alekhine

TRANSFORMATION OF THE UGLY DUCKLING

The evolution of Alekhine as a chess player is reflected in his games, and it's enough to simply play them through – year after year, move after move – to see the gradual transformation of a young talent into the greatest player of the world. It's harder to understand how the ugly duckling which his grammar school classmates remembered (sweaty palms, bitten nails...) transformed into a handsome, charming, self-assured macho whom Pawelczak would describe as follows: “In his youth, he was as beautiful as Achilles”. It's almost like a quantum leap – maybe that's how it happens among geniuses when they suddenly become aware of their brilliance? The photos only show Alekhine's appearance, but they cannot convey his charisma, his gaze, manner of speech and movement, his frantic energy – in other words, everything that filled the black and white picture with life and made him Alekhine!

So what kind of person was he?... It's hard to tell in a few words. Alekhine is so complex, multifaceted, contradictory, that the jigsaw simply doesn't fit together – the details don't join with each other, as though they are from different puzzles... So, you'll have to search for an answer in the multitude of voices of his contemporaries: chess players who knew Alekhine for years, journalists who interviewed him regularly, random reporters who only met him once. Scattered around the book, these sketches don't create a complete picture. But taken together, they, like sketches for a portrait, start to complement and clarify each other, and eventually you get a proper image on the canvas...

Algemeen Handelsblad: “A lean, slender figure, sharp features, smart eyes, quick and energetic movements. It seemed to us that his eyesight was not too good because he would lean very low over the boards. But it's also possible that this is simply a consequence of deep mental concentration.” (Amsterdam, 23rd October 1921.)

Taeke Cnossen: “Alekhine doesn't look much like a Russian; by his looks, you may rather think that he was an Englishman or a Dutchman. He's very mobile during play. Gets up often, walks up to other boards or just paces around the hall.” (*De Standaard*, 26th November 1921.)



Berlin, June 1921. Alekhine: "In Berlin, I (...) had to wear a Russian shirt (kosovorotka) and some rather shabby clothes." (Novaya Zarya, 14th May 1929.)

Becsi Magyar Ujsag: "Tall, broad-shouldered, with sharp features, a fair-haired, blue-eyed young man — there's already something extraordinary about his looks. If he weren't competing for the world chess championship, he would

have become world-famous in some other area. He speaks with a harsh Russian accent, but his German and French are very good in all other regards." (Vienna, 26th April 1922.)

La Acción: "Alekhine's appearance is lively and sympathetic, and his piercing gaze seems to try to remember even the smallest details of those he talks with." (Madrid, 26th May 1922.)

Jacob Schumer: "Alekhine [unlike Capablanca] looks every inch a fighter. Of athletic build and aquiline features, he overwhelms his opponent with sledgehammer blows." (*Westminster Gazette*, London, 21st August 1922.)

Heinrich Viktor Klein: "Alekhine is an artistic type. Unlike Rubinstein, he is never completely calm, always in nervous movement and constantly plays with his face: here he furrows his brow, then he smells success, his eyes shine triumphantly, and an observant spectator may notice that his cheeks blush from joy. (...) Overall, he is handsome, as though he'd just stepped out of a painting, and his posture and bearing make him resemble a member of the Germanic-Nordic race more than a Russian." (*Neuigkeits Welt-Blatt*, 8th December 1922.)

Cheltenham Chronicle: "He speaks English well, considering that he only began to learn it two years ago, and has been but little in this country. In appearance he is the opposite of Capablanca, as to hair and complexion, being fair, and decidedly of the Slav type of face – of the intellectual kind. They are alike in being rather above middle height and well-proportioned, and generally 'good looking.'" (Cheltenham, 20th October 1923.)

Hans Muller: "Aristocratic through and through, tall, broad-shouldered, fair-haired, with bright, serious blue eyes, his whole being full of incredible life force – that's how the spectators of the Vienna 1922 tournament saw him.

Despite his great intellectual gifts, he is able to rejoice like a small child. In a blitz tournament, he managed to outwit Bogoljubov at the last minute. And so great was his joy of winning the already-lost game that he, noble and serious, got so exuberant that he pounded the board with his piece as he made the decisive move, laughing happily." (*Neues Wiener Journal*, 27th October 1924.)

Le Devoir: "His figure, illuminated by piercing eyes, whose look is almost hard but sometimes softens strangely, is striking, invading your visual memory almost by force. His speech – diverse, whimsical, always witty, with lots of bright sparks – is flexible like his whole being. Unlike many other European masters who only know chess, Alekhine is a very cultured man as a whole, and this allows him to knowingly discuss all the major problems of Europe. His knowledge of literature and other arts is also quite broad. In other words, he is a perfect gentleman." (Montreal, 24th November 1923.)

Lorenzo Prince: "A Russian in the most beautiful and noble sense of this world, very cultured, with refined manners, well-groomed – a true Moscow

gentleman, similar to the one I got to meet in Moscow twenty years ago during my trip around the world. Also – noticeable nervousness, but an exotic one, which hides, accumulates inside and rarely manifests externally. (...) Only the barely noticeable blinking of the steel gray eyes that look like they reflect the waters of Baikal, the abrupt clenching of both fists, the slight twitch of the corner of his lips, the sudden jump from the chair and several well-measured steps around the room.” (*La Patrie*, Montreal, 24th November 1923.)

Hermann Helms: “Alekhine has a winning personality that will make hosts of friends for him wherever he goes. His looks betray the unconquerable ambition of youth, and for poise and self-possession he will not be at any disadvantage with Capablanca. The many who will meet him during his stay in our midst and will shake hands with him are hereby duly warned, for he has an iron grip that will make the unprepared one surely wince.” (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 6th December 1923.)

William Spackman: “Alekhine is a fine looking chap – broad and fairly tall, with a cocksure, heavy tread and a fine carriage. He has an amazingly youthful face – his eyes are like a well-bred little boy’s who has had always his own way, laughingly proud, gently condescending, very frank.” (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 3rd July 1924.)

Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmegsche Courant: “Still a young man, beardless, in Schubert glasses. A thinker’s head. Might have passed for a Dutchman. Looks a bit like our Euwe: tall, slender, simple in his behavior. All in all, a pleasant personality.” (Nijmegen, 22nd December 1925.)

Let’s stop our slide show for a bit and look at “footage” of Alekhine from 1922 and 1926. The author hid under the pseudonym “Dr. E.K.”, which was used by the “young, but genius journalist” **Erwin Kondor** – vice-president of the Austrian Chess Federation, president of the Vienna Chess Club and a strong chess player himself.

“The first thing I saw about him was the letter addressed to the organizers of the Vienna Chess Congress. Strange handwriting and signature created the first impression. Good German language, with clear sentences, very polite but resolute – it’s clear that this was not the writing of an ordinary man. Without emphasizing his personality, he still understood how to make others respect him even in his absence. And then he came. I first met him in early November 1922. A slender, elegant figure, swaying gait, clear, shining eyes, fast and clever speech. Friendly, ironic discourse, always accompanied by his smile. All in all, a unique man.

Almost four years have passed since. I met him in Vienna again shortly before the Semmering tournament. And then I talked to him every day in the Panhans Hotel. He hadn’t changed much. Looked as flexible, agile, full of sparkling spirit

as before. Perhaps he looked friendlier and a bit more serious. A star without a star's manners. And it was there when I truly got to know Dr. Alexander Alekhine, the inner world of this unique chess artist.

After a poor start (0.5/3/), the spectators also saw his inner world with their own eyes. Hopes and disappointments, joy and pain, the strength of self-control, the classical greatness of spirit. Fighting heroically, speaking with his vanquisher with a friendly smile and praising his play — this is probably a unique feature among all the masters. After his loss to Gilg, his wife, who always sits near him in the tournament hall, asked why he hadn't given up the hopeless game earlier. Alekhine said, 'Even in a lost position, I should remain as tenacious as a soldier who does his duty.'

His mental resilience that allowed him to score a series of brilliant wins after his unfortunate start is exceptional. The willpower is also extraordinary: this man played a game (*against Janowski*) for more than 13 hours, where anyone else would have agreed to a draw much earlier — because he did his duty.

And his play? His art can easily overshadow his personal qualities. Almost all tournament participants stated that even in such a strong line-up, Alekhine is an extra-class player, close in strength to the world champions, Dr. Lasker and Capablanca. The build-up of his games is deep, sometimes incomprehensible at first glance, but strategically first-rate and full of tactical subtleties. He's equally good in the opening, middlegame and endgame. Lasker's style looks monumental, Capablanca plays with mathematical precision, and Alekhine's game can be called artistic. Incredible combination power is hidden in his moves, which sometimes look bizarre but later turn out to be both highly artistic and subtle and very strong. Such play is something greater than virtuosity: it's the art of the genius that is expressed originally and easily.

Alekhine's dazzling conceptions, clear vision of opportunities hidden in the position and splendor of his ideas are most obvious in the evening analyses and game reviews. Of course, he sometimes lacks the virtuoso precision and technical, mechanical certainty of Capablanca. Which partially explains the setbacks of the Russian-French matador — together with the fact that he tries to avoid draws when possible and always plays for a win. His willpower is incredible! If he is better, the opponent will not escape, and if he is worse, he comes up with dangerous counter-attacks even during the most difficult defense. Originality, willpower and energy often turn his games into works of art." (*Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*, 25th March 1926.)

Erwin Kondor: "Tall and gracefully built, with elegant hands and restless nerves, trembling and excited like a purebred fiery racehorse. The amiable Russian Frenchman with a delicate fair-haired head is an avowed ladies' favorite



Paris, 15th March 1922. Alekhine at the Palais Royale gate before his blindfold simul in Café de la Rotonde. French National Library (Gallica).

who only resent one thing about him: his marriage.” (*Neues Wiener Journal*, 13th September 1927.)

Ole Winding: “He doesn’t look like the sad Baron Kempelen automaton at all. Alekhine, world chess champion, is a tall, broad-shouldered blond man with a frank smile on his kind face. This amazing Russian has blue eyes that look at you as though you are transparent, but we never felt during the whole conversation that this gaze was studying us.” (*L’Intransigeant*, Paris, 24th November 1928.)

Za Svobodu!: “Alekhine, with his fair, somewhat unkempt hair, high open brow, soft Slavic features, lively movement, is very attractive. He’s a completely Slavic type. And it’s rather baffling to hear the purely Parisian, cawing ‘r-r’ in his speech.” (Warsaw, 16th December 1928.)

Rul: “Alekhine is a typical ‘Russian tsar’: broad-shouldered, healthy, young — he’s just 36 years old; his

fair hair is slicked back, a soft smile often adorns his face... His modesty, even shyness, is also very characteristic — until we start discussing chess: then, he becomes very firm and self-assured...” (Berlin, 15th January 1929.)

Arnold Denker: “I can still see Alekhine’s famous piercing look when approaching a board for the first time. He stared at you as if his eyes were snapping your picture.” (From the book *The Bobby Fischer I Knew and Other Stories*.)

Harry Golombek: “He had, too, a deceptively piercing gaze. (...) On every occasion that I played him, I felt that his eyes were boring through me and discovering my secret thoughts — and, whilst this may be all very well on a visit to a psychiatrist, it is the reverse of helpful in over-the-board play. It was only after the third game that I learned that, in reality, Alekhine was extremely short-sighted!” (*Chess Review*, May 1951.)

Lucien Zacharoff: “He enters briskly through the revolving door, his light coat over his arm. He holds a black derby in his hand; his suit is also black,

The chess column in the Harbin-based newspaper was edited by an N. M. Grinev, but the reports, published with a month's delay, were clearly not written by him. Perhaps the author was Znosko-Borovsky, but I can't say that for sure: *Posledniye Novosti* has only been digitized fragmentarily. One article from *Gun-Bao* was signed by him, but this means nothing: they might have credited him that one time and not credited him everywhere else...

I can only imagine how proud “Bogol” (one of his numerous nicknames) was after his second win, considering that he was euphoric even after the first one:

“You should have seen him on the streets of Wiesbaden in the evening after defeating Alekhine. Bogoljubov, who, unlike the champion, had almost never left his hotel before, was laughing joyfully on that day, holding court while gesturing energetically. He must have been in the same mood after his Moscow 1925 triumph, when you couldn't get him to play in any tournament.

Wins, not losses, are the most dangerous thing to him. The latter, of course, give him more zeroes, but the former make him get carried away, carried away with himself, and his strong mind loses the balance necessary for playing and for overall victory. It's scary to think what will happen to him if he becomes world champion for a moment. He surely won't last long on the throne: a chess king cannot suffer from dizziness.” (*Gun-Bao*, 24th October.)

The author (Znosko-Borovsky?) was spot on: Bogoljubov, intoxicated by his success, lost two games in a row! In game 7, he blundered in a position with an extra pawn where the world champion, not he, had needed to struggle for a draw...

The last game of the Wiesbaden leg is famous for Alekhine's final combination. But it attracted the attention of Max Euwe, whose annotations were unearthed in *Tijdschrift van den Nederlandschen Schaakbond* (January 1930), for a different reason. They were published in the “Theory and Practice” rubric, and thus are conceptual in nature, differing considerably from the usual ones — including Alekhine's canonical annotations to this game. Unfortunately, Euwe did not annotate the opening — but this gives us reason to quote Alekhine's notes from the *New York Times* (22nd September) and... from the article “Theoretical Review of My Match with Bogoljubov”, written exclusively for *Tidskrift för Schack* (July 1930).

By the way, **Alekhine** intended to write a small book about the match at first — he shared his plans after the San Remo tournament: “He's now busy writing annotations for the great battle against Bogoljubov, which he is going to publish as a booklet named *Chess Thoughts During the Games with Bogoljubov*.” (*Neues Wiener Journal*, 23rd February 1930.)

No. 65. *Indian Defense A50*
BOGOLJUBOV – ALEKHINE

World championship match

Wiesbaden (m/8),

19th September 1929

Annotated by M. Euwe

1.d4 ♖f6 **2.c4** b6. *A sideline that was popularized by Alekhine. “I, this time, decided in favor of an immediate development of my queen’s bishop, but achieved only a half satisfactory result inasmuch as the pawn formation adopted in the center by Bogoljubov in the fourth and sixth games – f3-e4 – again seemed to serve his purpose.”* (NYT)

In those games, black played 2...e6 3.♖c3 ♗b4 4.♔b3! “I recommended this move countless times. Its point is very simple: it forces black to either simplify the situation in the center immediately (with 4...c5), or trade the b4 bishop which only makes white happy because he can recapture with the queen, without weakening his pawn structure (unlike Saemisch’s move 4.a3).” (Tidskrift för Schack.)

3.♖c3. *The move 3.♖f3 enables the usual 3...e6, but the “reckless” line 3...♗b7 4.g3 e5?! had also been tried (Teichmann – Alekhine, Berlin (m/3) 1921).*

3...♗b7 (3...♗a6 – see game 106) **4.f3.** *Avoiding 4.d5 (Bogoljubov – Olsson, Stockholm 1920), 4.♗g5 (Bogoljubov – Alekhine, Triberg (m) 1921) and the currently fashionable 4.♔c2!? (Teichmann – Alekhine, Berlin (m/5) 1921).*

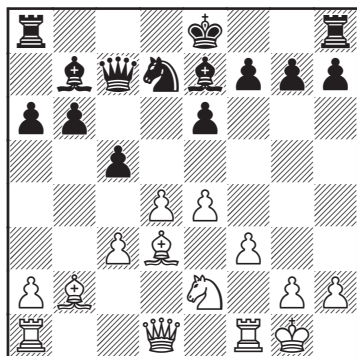
4...d5 5.cxd5 ♖xd5 **6.e4** ♖xc3 **7.bxc3** e6 **8.♗b5+** ♖d7 (8...c6=) **9.♖e2** ♗e7 **10.0-0** a6 **11.♗d3** c5. *“The preponderance of white in the center threatened to become so menacing that I decided, for the time being, to dispense with castling, which would have exposed my king to direct attack. I therefore initiated a demonstration of the queen’s wing, beginning with 11...c5.”* (NYT)

“The fact that the game was won by black has nothing to do with the opening, which is very unpleasant for black.” (Tidskrift för Schack.)

12.♗b2. *“A truly bad move, showing complete lack of understanding of demands of that position. White had a choice, at the very least, between two good bishop moves: 12.♗e3 or 12.♗f4. Another move worth considering was 12.a4, to fix black’s small weakness on b6.”* (Alekhine.) *Shortly after the game, he recommended 12.e5, “which would have netted him a promising game”* (NYT). *“Bogoljubov, on the other hand, thinks that he had to play 12.♖g3!, maintaining the advantage.”* (Knoch) *Of all the moves listed above, the computer approves only of 12.♗e3 and 12.a4!*

“[Bogoljubov] played the opening well, but his 12th move is way too deep,” te Kolste noted ironically. *“It would have looked more in place in a Nimzowitsch game, rather than his.”*

12...♔c7. *12...b5!? was more energetic.*



Let us try to identify the factors that determine the strength of white's center. It looks stunning at first glance: the d4 and e4 pawns are supported by the c3 and f3 pawns, so there's no reason to fear weaknesses. This makes the fact that the game was essentially won by black around move 20, without white making any blunders, even stranger. Our goal is to find the hidden reasons that led to white's quick demise.

13.f4. Almost the whole chess community gave this move a question mark, which was probably deserved, even though the reasons for that were either not stated at all or stated very vaguely. The most popular explanation is as follows: f3-f4 is wrong because it weakens the e4 square. Clear as day; however, on the other hand, you can then say that the move f3-f4 with the pawns on d4 and e4 is always wrong, but surely nobody would say that white can win by leaving the pawns on d4, e4 and f3 until the end of the game!

Still, it would be correct to say that the game move introduces an important change in the center: this

is the first step towards dynamic usage of the central structure. Everybody knows that the strength of the center lies in its mobility; a stationary center allows you to maneuver within your own position, but if you want to obtain an advantage, the pawns should go forward. So, the question is in the choice of the moment: when should you strike the bell calling for action? By general opinion, Bogoljubov acted too hastily. Why? Probably because the game ended with the words, "White resigned." Otherwise, the whole chess press would have been filled with statements such as, "Bogoljubov converted the advantage of his solid central structure in an extremely powerful way," etc. We won't settle for such generalities, but try to indicate the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen move.

As we already stated, the game move leads to a significant change of the center: the completely invincible center (we call it Type I center) turns into a center with at least one weakness (Type II center). However, as usual in such cases, there's also an opposite effect: a) the e5 square is now attacked twice, therefore the e6-e5 break is impossible; b) the dynamic features of the center improve in view of the possible f4-f5; c) the pieces get more space for maneuvers. Bogoljubov carefully considered all these factors and probably decided that black threatens to neutralize white's advantage with e6-e5 (13...e5 14.d5 c4 and ♖c5+

is likely not good for white). If there were no such threat, perhaps it would be expedient to delay the movement of the f-pawn until white pieces take better positions. (...)

Most analyses do not answer the question: what to play, if not f3-f4? 13.♘g3 with the idea 13...e5 14.♘f5 is, of course, possible, but then black can play 13...♙d6, forcing e4-e5, 13...♙h4 or even 13...h5!, so it's not clear if this is an improvement. The knight on e2 is indeed getting in the way somewhat, and this is an indirect consequence of the central structure that provides only the d3 and e3 squares as good stations for the knight. However, the problem of improving the position of the e2 knight without sacrificing the strong center proved to be insolvable.

Everything stated above shows what troubles white had to face, so we cannot say for sure if the move 13.f4 was the root cause of the loss.

"13.e5 was the lesser evil, limiting the activity of the d7 knight for a time." (Alekhine) This is well met with 13...0-0-0, threatening ♘xe5 (for instance: 14.♙c2 cxd4 15.cxd4 ♙xc2 16.♙xc2 ♘xe5). 13.a4! e5 14.♙a3 or 13...0-0 14.♘g3 looks more promising.

13...♘f6. Black immediately targets white's weakness.

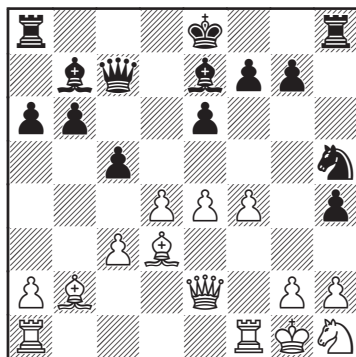
14.♘g3 h5! A new attack on e4. *"As soon as he gets a chance to attack, the world champion immediately sends all his forces into battle. His every move is a mighty blow." (Kmochn)*

15.♙e2. Now the e4 pawn is well-protected, and any further attack on it

is useless. From this point of view, the transition from Type I center to Type II center did no harm, but white is now up for a bitter disappointment: his knight is driven to the worst square on the board. Therefore, a question arises: wasn't it better for white to change his central structure now by playing 15.e5 ♘d5 16.♙e2 ? In this case, h5-h4 could be always met with ♘g3-e4, with the knight getting to a good square.

The line 16...h4 17.♘e4 h3 18.g3 b5! is better for black.

15...h4 16.♘h1 ♘h5! A very correct move (*the computer prefers 16...b5!?*). Kicking the knight away to h1 would have been worthless if black hadn't found some means of hobbling it for a long time.



17.♙g4. *The decisive mistake!* "White could have probably still equalized if he admitted his mistake on move 12 and put his bishop back on c1." (Alekhine) Indeed, after 17.♙c1! g6 (17...0-0-0?! 18.♙xa6, and if 17...♙d6, then 18.e5 ♙e7 19.f5 h3 20.♙e4=) 18.a4!, he probably got a roughly equal position: 18...♙d6 19.e5 ♙e7 20.♘f2

♘g7 21.♔a3 (defending the d4 pawn beforehand) 21...♘f5 22.♚fb1 or 18...0-0 19.♚b1 ♚ad8 20.♔e3 etc.

17...0-0 18.♚ae1. White cannot get his knight back into the game through f2 without harming his central structure, so he tries to maintain dynamic activity in the center with his pieces. The immediate 18.f5 is dubious because of 18...♘f6! 19.♚e2 (19.♚xg7? ♚h7 20.♚g5 ♘xe4) 19...exf5 with a good position for black, for instance: 20.exf5? ♔d6 or 20.e5 ♚de8! 21.exf6? ♔d6 22.♚d2 ♔xh2+ 23.♔f2 ♚g3+!! 24.♘g3 hxg3#.

Instead of 20.e5?! (20...h3! 21.♔xa6 hxg2, but not 20...♚de8? 21.♔xa6), the correct move is 20.♚xf5=. But 18...♘f6 is not the best: 18...♔d6! 19.e5 ♔xe5 20.dxe5 ♚xd3 with an overwhelming position. At any rate, white's 18th game move is even more hopeless.

18...♔b8! "As it soon turns out, this defensive-looking move actually serves an attacking purpose. Such moves are a privilege of only the greatest masters." (Kmochn)

19.f5. A dynamic move that delivers nothing, but it's hard to recommend anything better. 19.e5 leads to a weakening of the d4 square after 19...g6 20.♘f2 ♘g7 21.♘e4 ♘f5, and 19...h3! also looks strong (or 19...f5! 20.exf6 gxf6).

19...e5 20.d5. Forced; the center has changed significantly yet again and has now become immobile — a Type III center. This center gives an advantage of a greater freedom

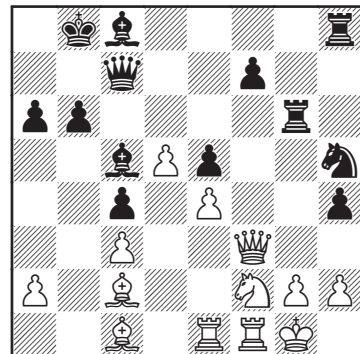
of movement for the pieces, the opportunity for breaks (if the pawn were still on f3 white could play f3-f4) and a protected passed pawn. But all these advantages are nullified because black now seizes the c5 square and can open the g-file. These two factors give black greater freedom to maneuver, and the second one directly leads to a decisive attack on the king.

20...c4 21.♔c2 ♔c5+ 22.♘f2. The ill-fated knight doesn't feel too well here either.

22...g6! A very strong move that opens up both a diagonal (♔b7-c8) and the g-file.

23.fxg6 ♚dg8 24.♔c1. White pieces cannot go out in the open, and the protected passed pawn is useless without them.

24...♔c8 25.♚f3 ♚xg6. Black now threatens to win the queen with 26...♔g4. White is completely tied up.



26.♔h1? Hastens the defeat, but there was already no satisfactory defense.

26...♘g3+ 27.hxg3 hxg3+ 28.♘h3 ♔xh3 29.gxh3 ♚xh3+. White resigned.

At a lecture given after the 8th game, **Milan Vidmar** said that the result of the first stage of the competition “completely matched his expectations”: “Neither Bogoljubov, nor the smart Nimzowitsch, nor the bizarre genius Rubinstein are strong enough to defeat Alekhine. The solid and deliberate game setup, like Capablanca’s, scientific combinations, like Lasker’s, and then, when the position is ripe, a thunderous blow is delivered — only Alekhine can now play like that.” (*Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11th October.)

The German press was quite stingy in its reporting. Still, some material is available. Here’s a report from *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (20th September):

“Bogoljubov almost constantly sits at the board in the quiet room of the beautiful Paulinenschlosschen Palace. He rarely gets up. And when he gets up, he tells the journalists with his characteristic optimism, ‘What does he want? Even if I sacrifice a pawn, I’ll have a draw,’ or, ‘He declined my draw offer, but he’ll get fed up with it after a few moves.’ Bogoljubov plays with a strong will to win. The challenger, who does not like playing cards too much, is not seen in the evenings — he analyzes the games in his room and goes to sleep early.

It seems that a “strong will to win” was precisely the thing that he lacked. To defeat a strong opponent, you need to be fully concentrated on the game, but Bogoljubov — at least outwardly — did not take the games too seriously and even flaunted that attitude:

“The reasons for Bogoljubov’s popularity in Germany don’t lie solely (or maybe at all) in the fact that he lives there and is apparently going to become a German soon. He’s liked for his joyful, gregarious, balanced personality, for his simple manners, for being easy and ‘amenable’. (...) When he makes a move and walks around the hall, he doesn’t just greet everyone amiably, finding a pleasant word for everyone regardless of their chess prowess, but behaves as though the game is a trifling matter for him, as though it does not require any effort, as though he doesn’t think on it at all. As soon as he leaves his board, he stops being a chess player ‘sweating’ over the game and immediately becomes a sweet and affable man, laughing heartily at a simple joke and always ready to share some witticism.

More serious fans even criticize him for his carefree attitude towards the game and the match, reproach him for breaking his playing mood himself. ‘Ah,’ he replies. ‘It’s nothing! There’s nothing hard there!’ And he’s surrounded by everybody, and they are excited because instead of an augur, a solemn priest, they see a man who’s like them, who does not boast of his superiority and is not discouraged by defeats.” (*Gun-Bao*, 5th November.)

World champion Alekhine is the polar opposite of his calm opponent. He nervously taps his fingers on the table. In the spectator hall, he silently