

SERGEY VORONKOV

WITH ALEXEI ZAKHAROV

ALEXANDER ALEKHINE

THE RUSSIAN SPHINX: VOLUME I

(1892-1921)

Alexander Alekhine – The Russian Sphinx: Volume I (1892-1921)

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Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
1	Arclin	Alexei Alekhine	Scotch Game C45	1910-1912
2	Alekhine	L. Pape	Caro-Kann Defense B15	1929
3	Alekhine	Zhukovsky	King's Gambit C39	1905-1906
4	Vyakhirev	Alekhine	Vienna Game C28	1906–1907
5	Alekhine	Levitsky	Vienna Game C27	1913
6	Lyubimov	Alekhine	Fragment	1906–1907
7	Evenson	Alekhine	Fragment	1916
8	Alekhine	Tenner	King's Gambit C30	1911
9	Levenfish	Alekhine	Queen's Pawn Game A46	1913
10	Alekhine	Gregory	Vienna Game C28	1909
11	Verlinsky	Alekhine	Ruy Lopez C68	1909
12	Alekhine	Romanovsky	Vienna Game C27	1909
13	Alekhine	Daniuszewski	Vienna Game C28	1909
14	Tereschenko	Rotlewi	Bishop's Opening C24	1909
15	Alekhine	Rotlewi	Ruy Lopez C77	1911
16	Alekhine	Schelfhout	Fragment	1913
17	Alekhine	Grinberg	King's Gambit C30	1916
18	Alekhine	M. Fischer (Feldt)	French Defense C11	1916
19	Alekhine	Grigoriev	Four Knights Game C48	1918
20	Alekhine	Kussman	Queen's Gambit D32	1924
21	Grigoriev	Alekhine	French Defense C12	1915
22	Konstantinopolsky	Levenfish	Fragment	1948
23	Alekhine	Hofmeister	Fragment	1917 (?)
24	Alekhine	Zubarev	Nimzo-Indian Defense E32	1915
25	I. Rabinovich	Alekhine	Nimzo-Indian Defense E43	1920

Note: Game scores that to our knowledge were previously unknown are highlighted in grey in the above list.

In addition (i) the full game score is given for Game 8 for the first time (all 40 moves instead of 23 previously known), and (ii) one more previously unknown game is given in the notes to Game 45: Alekhine – Groll (Philidor Defense C41, 1934).

Games 25 and 51 are the same game, but with different annotations.

Note: Games 25 and 51 are the same game, but with different annotations.

Game	White	Black	Opening	Year
26	Alekhine, Schroeder	Janowski, Meyer	Queen's Gambit D26	1923
27	Alekhine	Böök	Fragment	1938
28	Alekhine	A. Kaufmann	Fragment	1919
29	Alekhine	A. Kaufmann	Queen's Pawn Game D02	1919
30	A. Kaufmann	Alekhine	Fragment	1919
31	Grigoriev	Alekhine	Ruy Lopez C67	1919
32	Alekhine	Grigoriev	Queen's Pawn Game D02	1919
33	Grigoriev	Alekhine	Sicilian Defense B29	1920
34	Alekhine	Grigoriev	Vienna Game C29	1920
35	Grigoriev	Alekhine	Philidor Defense C41	1921
36	Alekhine	Grigoriev	Ruy Lopez C66	1921
37	Grigoriev	Alekhine	Philidor Defense C41	1921
38	I. Rabinovich	Blumenfeld	Scandinavian Defense B01	1920
39	Levenfish	Mund	Caro-Kann Defense B13	1920
40	Alekhine	Levenfish	Queen's Gambit D40	1920
41	A. Rabinovich	I. Rabinovich	Ruy Lopez C64	1920
42	Blumenfeld	Zubarev	Scotch Game C45	1920
43	Ilyin-Zhenevsky	Alekhine	Ruy Lopez C77	1920
44	I. Rabinovich	Grigoriev	Indian Game A50	1920
45	Golubev	Alekhine	Philidor Defense C41	1920
46	Zubarev	A. Rabinovich	Ruy Lopez C68	1920
47	Romanovsky	Ilyin-Zhenevsky	Ruy Lopez C70	1920
48	Grigoriev	Zubarev	Scandinavian Defense B01	1920
49	Blumenfeld	A. Rabinovich	Three Knights Game C46	1920
50	Alekhine	Tselikov	English Opening A25	1920
51	I. Rabinovich	Alekhine	Nimzo-Indian Defense E43	1920
52	Mund	Golubev	Queen's Indian Defense E12	1920

GULLIVER'S SHADOW

You should speak respectfully of the living,
but you should speak only truth of the dead!

Voltaire

Do you know what made me finally write this book? A sense of duty. Back in 2001, when I published yet another obscure article by Alekhine from a Paris newspaper, I wrote that I felt “guilty before chess fans for being such a dog in the manger,” and promised to publish a compilation called *Alekhine's Paris Autograph* that would include “the rich legacy of the Russian genius scattered among the newspapers of Paris, Berlin, Shanghai, Warsaw, Riga, San Francisco and others.” However, lots of other projects, both joint (*Secret Notes, Russians Versus Fischer*) and solo (*Masterpieces and Dramas of the Soviet Championships, Fyodor Bogatyrchuk: the Dr. Zhivago of Soviet Chess*), pushed the publication further and further back...

And, as it turns out, it was worth it. In the following years, I became a “magnet” for so many unique documents and eyewitness accounts connected with Alekhine's life and work that I can only thank fate that I didn't hurry with the publication.

The first act of “magnetism” happened in 2005, when a stroke of luck got me acquainted with Andrei Rimsky-Korsakov, son of Alekhine's schoolmate, and he sent me the original manuscript of his father's memories, published in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* a long time ago. When I compared the texts, I was horrified! Entire pages, paragraphs, sentences, even individual words were struck out – anything that could cast a shadow over Alekhine. (Actor Grigory Ge's recollections of Chigorin underwent the same treatment in the magazine, and I remember feeling like a criminologist as I compared that text with the original in *Niva* magazine. Yes, dear reader, that's how the canonical images of the “forefather of Russian chess” and the “first Russian world champion” were crafted in Soviet times.)

That discovery got me thinking: what do we actually know about Alekhine as a person, rather than as a chess player? Especially in the Russian period of his life (before his emigration in 1921), when his personality was formed?.. To be honest, next to nothing. So much was written about him, there was even a feature film – but still, something was missing, something important; it felt like a cardboard cutout, a fake... That “textbook” image of Alekhine was too shallow, not matching the cosmic depth of his chess. Simply put, a talented guy with an incredible work ethic and determination – nothing more, nothing less.

I don't think that his biographers did all that on purpose. They simply tried to fit him within their own measurements, and these measurements were too small for Alekhine – even when we write someone else's biography, we're still cloning ourselves in it! In some books, his speech patterns are completely unbecoming of someone who graduated from the Imperial School of Jurisprudence. Yuri Lvovich Averbakh remembered that, after reading the novel *Black and White*, he told the author, "Sasha, look here. Alekhine says in his dream, 'Thanks, *Uncle Lasker*.' Alekhine couldn't have said that! He was from a rich and noble family, even in his childhood, everybody addressed him with the formal 'you'¹." Kotov thanked him and promised to correct that in a new edition, but he never did...

I hope that you now understand why I called my series of articles on the Chesspro website the "Russian Sphinx". I became so fascinated by this topic that in three years (2006–2009), in free time from other projects, I wrote seven big articles, with each of them discovering something new in the world champion's personality. Life gifted me such sources that I was completely awestruck: so much was still hidden in the state and private archives, memoirs, press! Years and years can be spent digging, but we, in our eternal laziness, tend to copy our predecessors and recycle these images anew. That's why books about the "greats" look so similar to each other: with the same old facts, games and photos repeated over and over...

The first memoir attracted another one, even more sensational. "This sounds incredible, but it's true: a highly detailed memoir of another classmate of Alekhine has survived, and nobody has published it before! But let's deal with that one another time..." (I said to myself 18 years ago). I never thought that deciphering the miraculously obtained memoir of Pavel Popov would literally take years. Again and again, I tried to tackle the unclear parts, struggling with the awful handwriting, but I only managed to solve the last riddle five years ago – with some help from my wife... Even though these memories are the most valuable testimony about the young Alekhine, which allow us to look right into his soul!

Another "magnetic attraction" happened very recently. My California friend, chess bibliophile Yakov Zusmanovich, sent me an old and shabby typewritten text with someone's memories of Alekhine. The author's name did not ring any bells (S. P. Angleri?), but it was clear that this person was close to the world champion... It turns out that this was a thinly-veiled "disguise" of Pavel Spengler – a Russian émigré and a big fan of Alekhine who had a close relationship with him in 1936–1943 (he essentially worked as his secretary). But his memories are no eulogy: their value lies in the "truth of life", which he,

¹ Rather than the Russian equivalent of "thou"

despite all his admiration for his idol, tries to convey to us (you'll get to read various Spengler quotes throughout the book, and the manuscript in full will be published in Volume IV)...

The rarities from Kotov's archive, provided to me by his widow, are another gem. I saw some photos of Alekhine for the very first time — for some reason, Kotov hadn't published them himself. He didn't publish the valuable letters from Alekhine's stepdaughter and her husband either... But the fact that Kotov "hid" Alekhine's manuscript containing games from the 1920 Soviet championship amazed me the most! When Elena Maxovna Kotova opened the envelope with these sheets that literally disintegrated in your hands ("It's something chess-related, I thought it would be interesting for you"), I immediately realized just *what* games I was seeing. However, I must admit, I only recognized Alekhine's capital letter "A" at home, even though it's as unique as a fingerprint... The same envelope also contained the scores of his games against Nikolai Grigoriev, many of which were also unknown.

It's also time to publish the documents of the Freemason lodge that Alekhine was a member of. Yuri Shaburov found them back in 1994, in the former USSR Special Archive, copied some items by hand and published them in his article "Secret of the Astrée Lodge" — and later, in extended form, in his book *Alekhine*. Years went by, but nobody wanted to visit the archives, so I ultimately went there myself. I copied the documents in 2012, when I planned to revive the "Russian Sphinx" online series, but... only publish them now. Together with Alekhine's personal card that I received in 2018 from the Grande Loge de France (the Masonic chapter of Alekhine's life awaits you in Volume II).

I won't spoil all the discoveries here, of course. An expected surprise is not a surprise; let every chapter be a small (or sometimes even big) revelation. I'll only say that I was even surprised myself when I discovered that the book ultimately encompassed Alekhine's entire life, from early years to the postwar negotiations with Botvinnik. I never set myself such a target...

That's where the foreword to the Russian single-volume edition of the book (2020) ended (bar the obvious additions referring to the later volumes). I really did not attempt to "embrace the boundless", limiting myself only to new materials that I managed to find myself. And they — albeit in a dotted line — encompassed Alekhine's entire life. But still, it was essentially a book about his childhood and youth, the development of his personality, the trials and tribulations of war and revolution, his service with the Bolsheviks and his escape from them, his relationships with Stalinist Russia, Hitler's Germany and Russian émigré circles, followed by the tragic final twist of fate.

The English edition might have been the same, if not for yet another "magnetic attraction". The translator of my three-volume *Masterpieces*

and *Dramas of the Soviet Championships* (published in 2020–2022), Alexei Zakharov, sent me various additions and corrections as he worked on the English translation. When he started working on *The Russian Sphinx*, he did this too, and showed me some interesting discoveries from digitized European newspapers in spring 2022. “Should I search for something more?” he asked. I agreed — why shouldn’t we grace the book with something exclusive? One thing led to another, and the flow of information became so immense as though I got a direct link to the noosphere!

The euphoria soon ended, and there was a moment when I wrote to Alexei, “To be honest, I’m not thrilled that I agreed to pull such a heavy cart. I feel that I don’t have enough brains, strength and spirit to sift through this enormous amount of information, extract everything valuable and then build a coherent and interesting narrative out of it. I’ll need a whole team of literary and analytical helpers, like Kasparov had...”

But it was too late to pull back. And those bouts of despair didn’t last long: adrenaline rushes from new “sensational discoveries” recharged me with energy and optimism. And still, if not for the support of Alexei, who is as capable of navigating the text as me and always came up with useful advice, I’m afraid I wouldn’t have been able to handle such a monumental task. Big thanks to him!

The outcome exceeded all expectations: the “translation” of the book took two and a half years, and instead of one volume, we ended up with... a series of four. Now, I can say with confidence, “You’ve never seen such an Alekhine before!”

To be honest, the result was a surprise. The image of the “Russian Sphinx” doesn’t look much like the one we were used to. It’s far more complicated, conflicted and tragic — like so many other Russian geniuses whose lives were crushed by the “Red Wheel”. Some details make you admire him, others make you pity him, still others cast him in an unfavorable light...

Hans Ree, in his article on the 100th anniversary of Alekhine’s birth (*NRC Handelsblad*, 31st October 1992), quoted a sarcastic quip by Botvinnik: “Kotov and Flohr wrote so much about Alekhine that there’s no chance of finding the truth anymore.” I don’t know how truthful Alekhine’s image in this work is, but I can guarantee one thing: I did not hide and did not twist any facts that I knew. The point is, when I start writing a book, I never think about what I “should” get at the end. And how can you know that in advance, anyway? Whatever comes out, comes out... As Pushkin wrote, “And there to see a free romance’s far horizon, still dim, through crystal’s magic glass, before my gaze began to pass.”

Some words on the division of volumes. The first volume encompasses the whole Russian period of Alekhine’s life and ends with his escape from Soviet

Russia (1892–1921), though it additionally contains a detailed discussion of his five wives and a few later games that fit thematically. The central part of the second volume is his match with Capablanca, two matches against Bogoljubov and the start of his “romance” with the Nazis (1921–1934). The third volume includes the two matches with Euwe, negotiations over a match with Botvinnik, Alekhine’s collaboration with the Nazis during the war, and then his escape to Spain (1934–1943). Finally, the fourth volume is the “agony of a chess genius”: his last tournaments and tours, his life as a pariah, a glimmer of hope and, finally, his death in a Portuguese hotel that looks suspiciously like a murder (1943–1946).

And at the end of that volume, you’ll find the aforementioned “rich legacy of the Russian genius” that once started the whole process. That part is called “The Paris Autograph” and consists of unknown articles penned by Alekhine and his interviews in Russian émigré – mostly Parisian – newspapers. Alas, due to their sizes, I haven’t included in this series the articles about his matches with Capablanca, Bogoljubov and Euwe written by Russian émigré authors. Among those authors, I’ll highlight Znosko-Borovsky – I think that he was the best Russian chess writer of the era (Tartakower is, of course, more witty and brilliant, but his words lack Znosko’s weight and power). Alekhine described his writings perfectly: “Chess poetry, but in prose.” Nabokov also spared no praise: “Znosko-Borovsky writes about chess with taste, vividly and brightly, as any master should write about his art.” And Kuprin’s opinion was even more glowing: “As I read Znosko-Borovsky’s articles, I always thought that many years ago, a most honest and subtle psychological writer died in him, but being the first and foremost chess writer is an equal – or maybe even a greater – honor than being the foremost modern fiction writer.” (*Illustrirovannaya Rossiya*, 14th November 1931.)

I still remember how awestruck I was by Znosko-Borovsky’s articles about the 1935 match – nobody wrote anything better about that epic drama, and probably nobody ever will. The ending was especially powerful: “Alekhine’s collapse demonstrates his true height better than his victories. Only a shadow of him remains. But even a shadow of Gulliver is enough to cover the entire land of the Lilliputians.”

Allow me to introduce the people who made this book possible. The recently departed Artur Avetisyan published the “Russian Sphinx” article series on his site Chesspro, which gave a start to the whole project. Andrei Rimsky-Korsakov and the late Alexander Bokuchava provided unique recollections of Alekhine. The late Elena Kotova gifted me priceless artifacts from Alexander Kotov’s archive. Dmitry Oleinikov sent me archive documents about Alekhine’s

to the text many times, which is indicated by numerous corrections. The text itself was written in purple ink; the corrections were made in light blue ink and a whole bunch of pencils: graphite, black, sometimes blue or red.

Pavel Popov
ON MY FAMOUS SCHOOLMATE

I enrolled in the fifth grade of Polivanov Grammar School in autumn 1906. I chose a seat at random, and my first deskmate was another newbie, Manukhin, who had transferred from a lyceum — a very dull and uninteresting person. And then, two or three weeks after school had started, a disheveled blond boy suddenly arrived in the middle of the lesson and stopped at the doors confusedly, as though not knowing where to put his arms and legs. “Ah, Alekhine,” said the teacher (Gauthier, later an academician), “where have you been?” The whole class made some motion, as though they saw something amusing.

Alekhine’s behavior was nervous. He couldn’t stand or sit still, constantly pulling or twisting his hair with one hand, poorly attached cuffs were always visible from under his jacket sleeves. Bitten nails, red hands. They were unpleasant to touch — they felt like frogs’ legs, cold and wet from the sweat. He also had eczema on one hand. As it turned out later, it was hard for him to get rid of it because he would constantly rub his hands without realizing.

Alekhine’s studies were also erratic. His discourse and use of language were poor — not because of arrested development, but due to agitation and nervousness; he couldn’t find the appropriate words, mumbled, dragged words. He learned the lesson materials during breaks and prepared mediocrely (*Popov first wrote “badly,” but then changed it*). However, he figured stuff out and was certainly not stupid, which attracted my attention, and I decided to sit together with him — he seemed like an interesting guy. Thus, I became his deskmate for three and a half years — in fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Alekhine’s best subjects were Russian and French. He wrote decent and interesting essays. L. P. Belsky, our Russian language teacher, usually commended his writings (*over the crossed-out “gave him 5s”*), only criticizing his handwriting and untidiness. Alekhine’s sheets and copybooks were always covered in ink spots. He never let what he wrote dry, so the pages would stick together, etc. He expressed original opinions in his essays. For instance, we were tasked with comparing *Boris Godunov* and *Macbeth*. We knew parts of *Boris Godunov* by heart, but West European literature wasn’t even a subject in our school, and so Shakespeare seemed like a distant stranger to us. Therefore, I was rather surprised when Alekhine told me, “As I compare the two works, I see that *Macbeth* is superior in everything; Shakespeare is far superior to Pushkin.”

He read French novels fluently and easily. He read Tolstoy's *Resurrection* as soon as the novel came out — Alekhine was not even ten years old at the time. That's how fascinated and intrigued he was with the interests of adults. We were united by our shared love for Chekhov. Among our fun activities, there was a competition: one player would give the name of a Chekhov short story, and the other had to retell its plot in full. Or vice versa: one player tells the plot, and the other tries to remember the name. Later, I realized that it was not that simple. In the last two years, I have studied Chekhov a lot, and I have noticed that I tend to forget the name of the work. But back then, our youthful memory was very lively.

Alekhine was highly literate. Here was a story from our sixth grade: Belsky got angry at spelling mistakes in our essays and gave us a very hard dictation test. For instance, we had to distinguish between the phrases *vedenie dela* ("conducting the case," the first word spelled with two 'e' letters) and *vedenie dela* ("responsibility for the case," the first word spelled with two now obsolete yat letters). And so, we made a lot of mistakes. There were two adjacent desks: Alekhine and I sat at one, Polivanov (the headmaster's son, now a mathematics professor in Gorky) and Ostroumov (a poet and writer) at the other. Polivanov, Alekhine and I got 4s, Ostroumov, the most literate of us, got the only 5, two more guys got 3s, while all the others got 2s or even 1s.

Our intellectual development was relatively high. Belsky once gave us the following topic to write about: "The roots of learning are bitter, but the fruits are sweet." Ostroumov turned the proverb on its head and insisted that everything depended on talent. If you have no talent, you cannot progress no matter how hard you study. The best example was Maxim Gorky: a tramp who became a writer despite a lack of any kind of systemic education. Belsky didn't give him a grade, but criticized the content, arguing that Gorky was an exception. The debate with Ostroumov lasted for almost half an hour. As a result, Ostroumov had to change his essay drastically and reversed his ideology under the teacher's pressure. In sixth grade, Ostroumov wrote a letter to Tolstoy with some questions on the subject of moral character. Tolstoy answered him. Of course, this was a sensation among the students.

Alekhine liked to show off and be original, while I tried to be orthodox and conservative in my thinking, and so I based my essay on the subject of "Generosity and Profligacy" on the Biblical quote, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love."

Not a single school essay by Alekhine has survived (unlike his coursework in the School of Jurisprudence). In Pavel Popov's collection in the manuscript section of the Russian State Library, I managed to find some essays written by his classmates on the

subject “What Benefits Does the New Europe Owe to the Ancient World,” but Alekhine’s essay was not among them. The essays were written on luxurious letterheads, with the name of the school embossed in the top left corner in five lines: “Education institution / with the course of / a grammar school, / founded by / L. I. Polivanov.”

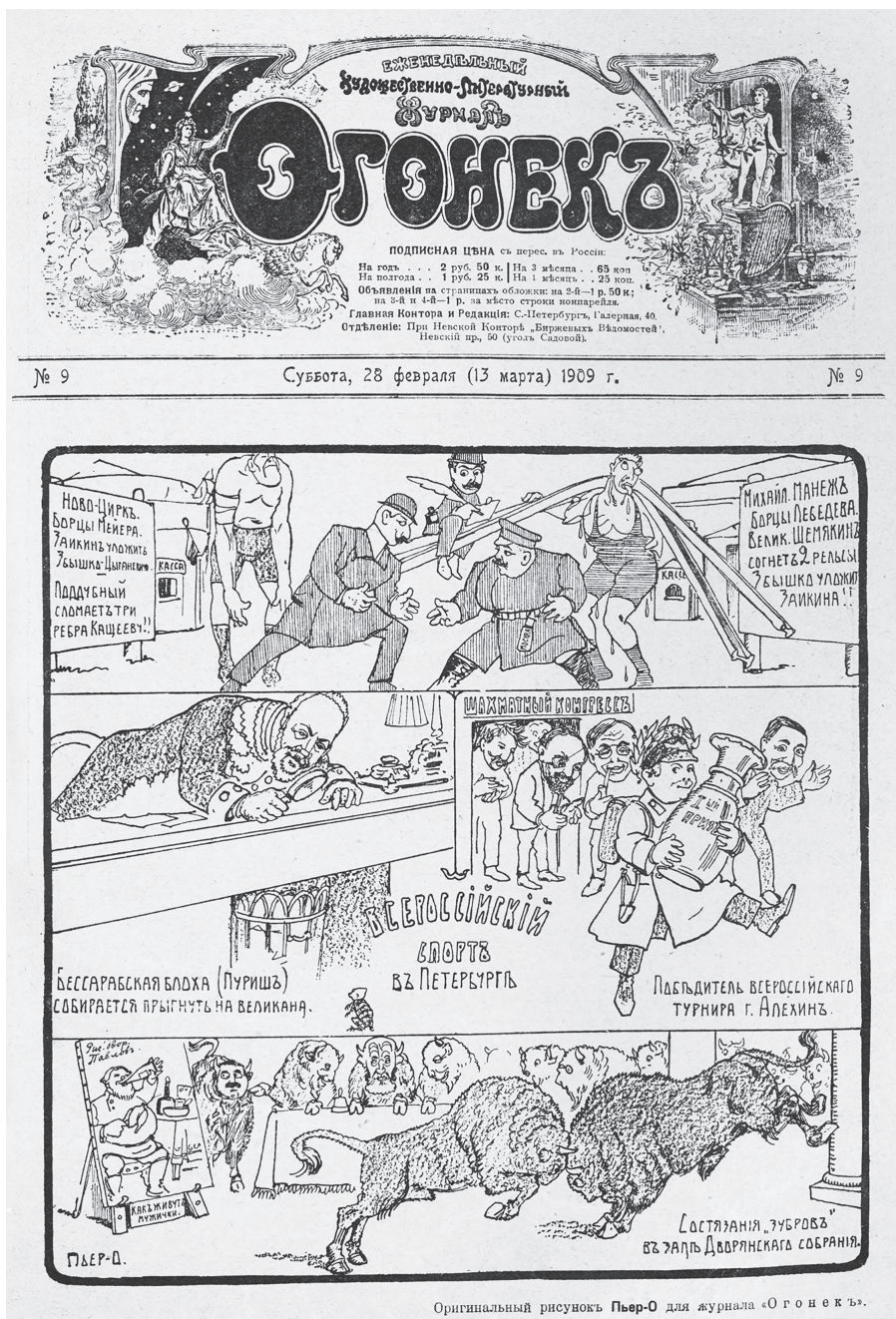
Alekhine gave the teachers grief. When the math teacher made Alekhine erase everything from the blackboard and draw a geometric figure again, he replied to the teacher, as though in parentheses, addressing the whole class, “Whatever toy comforts the child...” Legal studies were taught by the future renowned academic Stepan Borisovich Veselovsky. But he was not a pedagogue at all, so he got mocked and ignored all the time, especially because he was frail and tiny and spoke in a thin tenor that was drowned by the noise in the class. Alekhine said incredibly rude things to him; I was once horrified by Alekhine’s insolent words and disparaging tone. Veselovsky only replied quietly, “Your manners are terrible, Alekhine.”

Alekhine liked to make pranks. We had a Latin teacher, the unforgettable S. P. Gvozdev. He only started teaching us in seventh grade. Before that, we only knew him as a silent teacher who would always rush through the hall with a bunch of books under his arm. Gvozdev wore very dark sunglasses, was very fat and walked very briskly. Alekhine used to tell me, “Be careful, the wind of death is approaching, he will gore you.” If you asked Alekhine quickly, “Alekhine, do you have a pen?” he would always reply “Of course” and extend his hand, adding “Here, take it.”⁹

Alekhine’s worst subject was math. It may sound paradoxical – chess talent is usually thought to correlate with good mathematical skills. Alekhine, however, did so poorly in math that he had to get help from a tutor. At the final exams he failed to solve the (*written*) trigonometrical problems and messed them up so horribly that he got a 2. He was only contingently admitted to the oral exam. At that exam, the teacher dragged enough of a correct answer from him to award him a 4 at trigonometry, which gave him an overall 3.

Alekhine: “I think that chess is an art, and we are led to it by providence. It’s hard to explain concretely where dominance in chess comes from. It’s not a question of pure technique. It also has no link with mathematical skills. I’m not a ‘numbers man’ at all. I had a philosophical education, then I studied law.” (*Le Jour*, 15th June 1935.)

⁹ In the Russian language, the word *ruchka* (pen) also serves as the diminutive for *ruka* (hand).



Оригинальный рисунокъ Пьер-О для журнала «Огонекъ».

Cover of the *Ogonyok* magazine (No. 9, 1909). The caption says, “Winner of the All-Russian Tournament, Mr. Alekhine.” However, the round-faced student with a cup in his hands, a satchel on his back and a slingshot in his pocket, looks nothing like him... Published for the first time.

to move the NKVD employees from the hotel was made by the Council of People's Commissars on 3rd August, during the Second Comintern Congress, when the question of the delegates' accommodation was raised. I don't know when exactly the new tenants settled into their rooms, but on 19th September a reading room was opened for the ECCI members...

Little is known about Alekhine's work in Comintern. Ilyin-Zhenevsky wrote in the book *The Alekhine – Capablanca Match*: "He worked for Comintern as a translator and at the same time, as a communist, was appointed a secretary of the culture and education department." However, the Comintern didn't have such a department in its structure (and neither did it have any "Organization Bureau" listed by Alekhine in his personal card). The correct name was given by Shaburov: organization and information department. According to the book *Organizatsionnaya struktura Komintern. 1919–1943 (Organizational Structure of Comintern. 1919–1943, Moscow, 1997)*, the department "provided the Comintern congress and ECCI plenum delegates with reference and information materials on the communist, socialist and workers movement, organized tours to the cities of Soviet Russia for the delegates (*so that's why Alekhine went to the Urals and Siberia*), held exhibitions, and organized meetings with workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia."

THE UNKNOWN GAMES AGAINST GRIGORIEV

Even the discovery of an unremarkable simul game played by Alekhine after many years makes his fans awfully happy (by the way, there are dozens of such discoveries waiting for you in later volumes). But what we have here is a veritable treasure trove of Alekhine's previously unknown serious games played in 1919–1921!

They were in the envelope brought to me by Elena Maxovna Kotova (see page 10). Yes, yes, this refers to the "sheets that literally disintegrated in your hands" containing the game scores written by Alekhine and Grigoriev. I actually don't even know what's more valuable: 25 games from the 1920 All-Russian Chess Olympiad (which later became recognized as the first Soviet Championship) in Alekhine's handwriting, or nine games that he played against Nikolai Grigoriev in Moscow, written down by his opponent?..

To my amazement, **Kotov** only published two of the games against Grigoriev, and never even mentioned the existence of the other scoresheets: "In Alekhine's archive, which the author received from several chess players who knew and met Alekhine, there were a few small sheets with chess game scores. These were games by Alekhine against a young first-category player, the later well-known master N. D. Grigoriev, played in August 1919. The small match was won 4–0 by Alekhine."



Master Nikolai Grigoriev saved the games he played against Alekhine in 1919–21 for posterity. From the author's archive.

Who gave Kotov Grigoriev's game scores? Probably Ilya Kan, the author of the book *Shakhmatnoe Tvorchestvo N. D. Grigorieva (N. D. Grigoriev's Chess Legacy, Moscow, 1954)*. Further, the four heretofore known games of Alekhine's 1921 match against Grigoriev were published by Kan: three in the second edition of the aforementioned book (however, as it turned out, one of those, played on 4th March, was published by Grigoriev himself in his *Izvestia* chess column, on 9th September 1923; unlike the others, Kan didn't date that game for some reason, and because of that, it was long considered the third game of the match), and one in the *Shakhmatnaya Moskva* newspaper (30th July 1960). And, as though on cue, I found the three remaining

games of the 1921 match in Kotov's papers – including two wins by Alekhine, which make the discovery even more valuable, because all the other games in the 1921 match ended in draws. It's understandable why Kan didn't publish these games, but why did Kotov ignore them?..

So, we've got seven new Alekhine vs. Grigoriev games: three from the 1921 match and four that were played earlier, two in 1919 and another two in 1920. Let's review them in chronological order.

Of the four games from the 1919 match, Kotov had already published two in the first edition of *A. A. Alekhine's Chess Legacy*, but without numbers and dates. It turns out that those two were games number one (3rd August, last move 18.♖xe4) and four (13th and 15th August, 21...♙xe4). By the way, J. Kalendovsky and V. Fiala in their book *Complete Games of Alekhine. Volume 1: 1892–1921* listed them as belonging to the 1921 match, while Skinner and Verhoeven cited, instead of Kotov's book, some 1960 “unpublished manuscript” by L. Abramov and S. Flohr as the source for game 1. Why? They probably used the second edition of *Chess Legacy* (1982), where Kotov omitted that game...

Now, however, we have all four game scores of the 1919 match, with numbers, dates and clock readings. They were recorded in pencil, with short notation, in column, on a ruled sheet sized 18x22 cm that was folded in half,

clearly from some notebook – there are indents from paperclips on the fold. Even though new spelling rules had been introduced a year earlier, Grigoriev still wrote the names and the word “debut” (*“opening” in Russian*) the old way, with a hard sign at the end. His capital “A” letter is distinctive – it looks like a bigger lowercase cursive “a” (Alekhine wrote it similarly in his youth).

Kotov wrote his evaluations above the game scores with a ball pen. Game 1: “Conver[tion] of a mat[erial] adv[antage]. Resourc[efulness] in conver[tion].” Game 2: “Queens[ide] attack,” then crossed that out and wrote “no.” Game 3: “Punishment for unsettling the balance.” Game 4: “Counter-attack.”

I publish games 2 and 3 for the first time here. For the other games (which have already been published in English, see above), I’ll only list the clock readings. No. 1 Alekhine – Grigoriev: 3rd August, 52m – 1h 38m. No. 4 Grigoriev – Alekhine: 13th and 15th August, 1h 50 m – 1h 25m. After white’s 15th move, when the game was adjourned, clock readings are marked with two slashes: 1h 21m – 57 m.

Dmitry Plisetsky helped me with the annotations (the lines with the date, opponents and openings are given in the same style as on Grigoriev’s score sheets). The number of mistakes in these wins by Alekhine, as well as some others, helps explain why Kotov didn’t include them in his book, but it certainly wasn’t an excuse to hide them completely.

No. 31. Ruy Lopez C67

(No. 2) Date: 8, VIII, 1919

(8th August)

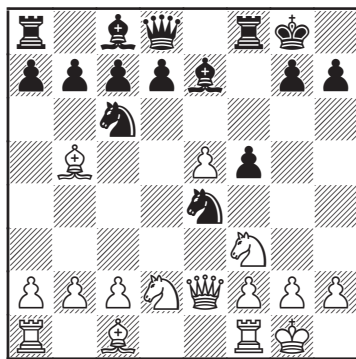
Players: **Grigoriev – Alekhine**

Opening: Spanish

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6
4.0-0 ♗xe4 (4...d6 – see game 36)
5.d4. Not 5.♙e2 ♘d6 6.♙xc6 dxc6
7.♙xe5+ ♙e7!? (7...♙e7=) 8.♙xg7
♙f6 9.♙h6 ♙e6 10.d3 ♗g8 11.♗e1
♙e7 with counterplay for the pawn
(4th game).

5...♙e7 (5...♘d6 is now fashionable) 6.♙e2 f5. The signature system of German master Leonhardt. However, the most solid continuation is 6...♘d6 7.♙xc6 bxc6 8.dxe5 ♘b7 – the Rio de Janeiro variation.

7.dxe5 0-0 8.♗bd2. 8.♘c3! retains the advantage.

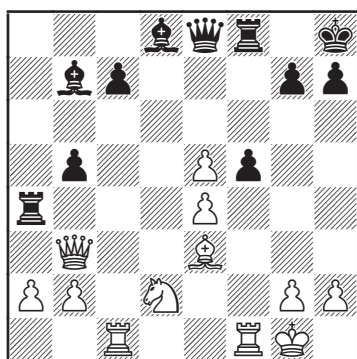


8...d5 9.♘b3 ♙e8 (9...a6!?)
10.c4 a6 11.cxd5? (11.♙a4= was necessary) 11...axb5 12.dxc6 bxc6.
12...♙xc6 13.♘bd4 ♙c4 is also better for black.

13. ♖e3 c5 14. ♜c2 ♜a4 15. ♘fd2 ♙b7? A mistake in return. After 15... c4 16. ♘d4 ♙b7, white's position would have been critical. Now, however, he's even somewhat better.

16. f3! c4 17. fxe4. 17. ♘xe4!? fxe4 18. ♘c5 ♙xc5 19. ♙xc5 ♜f7 20. f4 was more promising.

17... cxb3 18. ♜xb3+ ♙h8 19. ♜ac1 ♙d8? An inaccuracy! The correct move was 19... ♙xe4 20. ♜xc7 ♙d8= (21. ♜c8 ♜xe5).



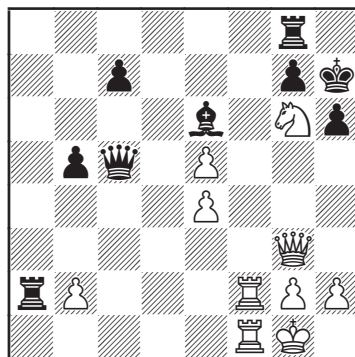
20. ♙c5. It was much better to play 20. ♜xf5! ♜g8 (20... ♜xf5?! 21. exf5 ♜xe5 22. ♜c5+—) 21. e6 c6 22. ♙g5 immediately with extra material and strong pressure.

20... ♜g8 21. ♜xf5 ♙c8 22. ♜f2 ♙e6 23. ♜g3 (23. ♜c3!? ♜xa2 24. ♘f3) 23... ♜xa2. The preliminary 23... ♜h5!, threatening ♙h4, was better.

24. ♜cf1? (24. ♘f3! kept the advantage) 24... ♙e7? An exchange of courtesies. Probably the result of mutual time trouble (see the clock readings at the end). After the simple 24... ♜xb2 25. ♜f8 ♜c6 26. ♜xg8+

♙xg8 27. ♙f8 ♜d7 28. ♘f3 ♙c4, black seized the initiative.

25. ♙xe7 ♜xe7 26. ♘f3 h6?! (dangerous weakening of the g6 pawn) 27. ♘h4! ♜c5 28. ♘g6+ (28. ♙h1!) 28... ♙h7.



29. ♘f8+?? A horrible blunder: the rook is pinned! White kept winning chances after 29. ♘f4 ♙c4 30. ♜g6+ ♙h8 31. ♜f5!, threatening ♘g6+, ♘f8++ and ♜h7#.

29... ♜xf8. White resigned. 2h 0m — 2h 0m.

No. 32. Queen's Pawn Opening D02
(No. 3) Date: 10, VIII, 1919 (10th August)

Players: Alekhine — Grigoriev
Opening: Queen's

1. d4 d5 2. ♘f3 c5 3. ♙f4 (3. c4! Alekhine — Grigoriev, m/4 1921) 3... ♘c6 (3... cxd4 — see game 29) 4. e3 e6 5. c4 ♘f6 6. ♘c3 cxd4 7. exd4 ♜b6? Underestimating his opponent's threats. 7... ♙b4 or 7... dxc4 8. ♙xc4 ♙d6 was more solid. It seems that the dramatic finale of the previous game had greatly unsettled Grigoriev...