



COLUMNISTS

Hoisting the Hippopotamus

Lev Alburt &
Al Lawrence



World Championship Zeitgeist, Part II Talking Movies to Ballistic Missiles

None of us would be the same person without the context and trappings of our era. What's our government like? Are we lucky enough to avoid the ravages of war? How good or bad is the current state of the economy? Then there are the myriad small but omnipresent appurtenances—our Palm Pilots, laptops, cell phones and Email. These “small” innovations become such big parts of our lives that they change us and the way we live in fundamental ways. The changes are fast and pervasive.

In February we took a look at some of the chess world champs as products of their times. We began with Kasparov, since it was one of his remarks that started us thinking along these lines. Then we went back to the first official champ, Wilhelm Steinitz, and worked our way through the highlights and contexts of Emanuel Lasker and Jose Raúl Capablanca. Indeed, this trio took us up to 1927—the year that Warner Brothers put voices in the actors on the big screen. (Or what was then still the big screen. Cineplexes and home big-screen TVs seem to be converging on the same dimensions.) This month, we focus on Alexander Alekhine and Max Euwe—a pair of opposites if there every was one. Yet each was a man of his time and place.

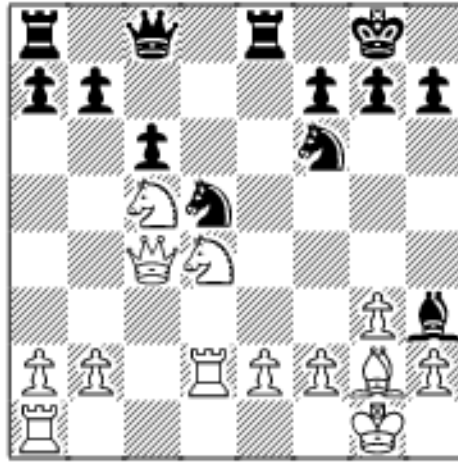
Sixth sense for the combinational

Alexander Alekhine, probably the first truly modern champion in his devotion to the study of chess, was one of the greatest players of all time. In fact, he was a zealot, analyzing, it seems, anywhere and always. While his predecessor Capablanca impresses us with the clear beauty of his play, Alekhine amazes us with the depth and dazzle of his combinations. Since Alekhine was first, foremost—and perhaps exclusively—a chess player, let's start with a sample of his art, his famous game against Richard Reti at Baden Baden.

Alekhine, not yet champ, plays a game that must have struck fear into the heart of the young generation of “hypermodernists.” One would have to think his sacrifices here are at least partly intuitive. As 1965 Dutch champ Lodewijk Prins put it, “Fortune favors the bold, especially when they are Alekhine.”

Richard Réti – Alexander Alekhine Baden-Baden, 1925

1. g3 e5 2. Nf3 e4 3. Nd4 d5 4. d3 exd3 5. Qxd3 Nf6 6. Bg2 Bb4+ 7. Bd2 Bxd2+ 8. Nxd2 0-0 9. c4 Na6 10. cxd5 Nb4 11. Qc4 Nbx d5 12. N2b3 c6 13. 0-0 Re8 14. Rfd1 Bg4 15. Rd2 Qc8 16. Nc5 Bh3!

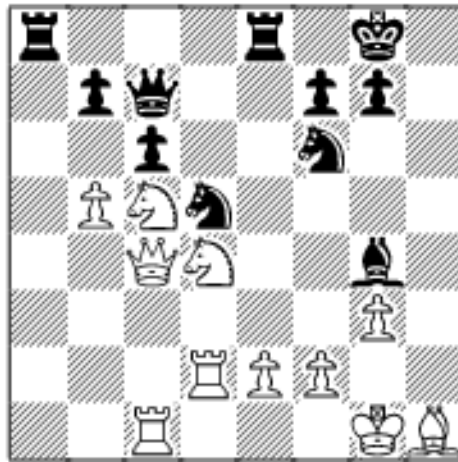


A diabolical concoction! Alekhine serves up his b-pawn, but if White partakes, he dies of indigestion: 17. Bxh3 Qxh3 18. Nxb7 Ng4 19. Nf3 N(d5)e3 20. fxe3 Nxe3 (threatening mate and the queen—this whole line is sonar-reading of what's to come) 21. Qxf7+ Kh8 (if 21. ... Kxf7 Ng4+) 22. Nh4 Rf8, and Black wins the queen, since if Her Lady moves,

Black plays 23. ... Rf1+).

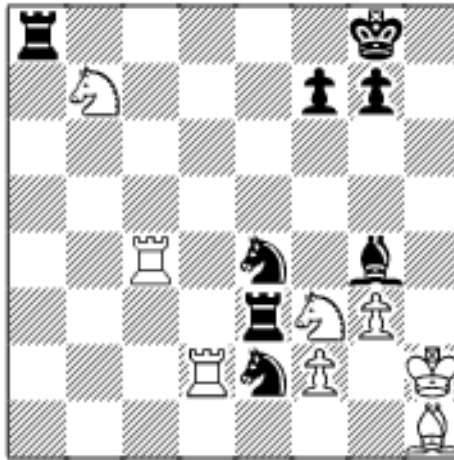
17. Bf3 Bg4 18. Bg2 Bh3 19. Bf3 Bg4 20. Bh1 h5! 21. b4 a6 22. Rc1 h4 23. a4 hxg3 24. hxg3 Qc7 25. b5 axb5 26. axb5

26. ... Re3!



Réti wouldn't occupy the center, so Alekhine did, with an *en prise* rook! He plops it down where it can immediately be taken by White's f-pawn, but if White makes this capture, he can quickly hit the showers after 27. fxe3 Qxg3+ 28. Bg2 Nxe3, when both the White queen and checkmate are threatened, and there isn't a move that handles both threats.

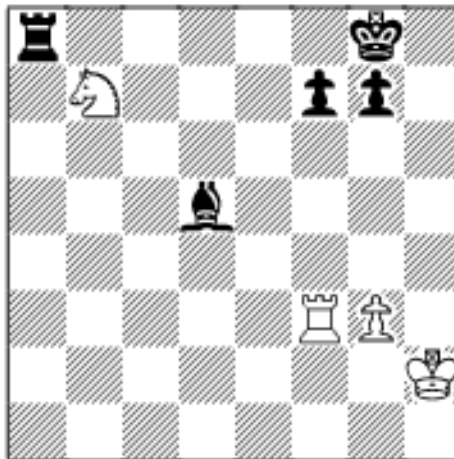
27. Nf3 cxb5 28. Qxb5 Nc3 29. Qxb7 Qxb7 30. Nxb7 Nxe2+ 31. Kh2 Ne4 32. Rc4



It's typical Alekhine that the shot 26. ... Re3! only began the tactics. Through 32 moves, material has stayed even. Black now takes the f-pawn, but his pieces seem to be in danger. Just watch the tactical twists and turns Alekhine steers into and through.

32. ... Nxf2 33. Bg2 Be6 34. Rcc2 Ng4+ 35. Kh3 Ne5+ 36. Kh2 Rxf3 37. Rxe2 Ng4+ 38. Kh3 Ne3+ 39. Kh2 Nxc2 40. Bxf3 Nd4 41. Rf2 Nxf3+ 42. Rxf3 Bd5 0-1

Sixteen moves after his stunning 26. ... Re3! Alekhine pounds in the last nail. Aftermaths, as always, look simple.



Displaced person

Alekhine has generally taken a beating as a human being, and he does seem to have made that very possible. After WWI, he became a symbol of the chess player as the amoral opportunist. There's evidence he was a collaborator for two totalitarian regimes. We'll argue that—with the admission that his scars are wide brushstrokes indeed—he

falls into our pattern, being in this case a Dorian Gray portrait of his tumultuous times.

On a number of occasions, Alekhine was what they used to call a DP—a displaced person. These initials were, in the years following the World Wars, among the most widely known acronyms in the world. Millions were displaced throughout Europe alone. DPs had to learn how to survive where they found themselves. To Alekhine, a true chess fanatic, survival meant playing chess.

Alekhine was born in Moscow in 1892 into a noble family. His father was a land-owning member of the last Duma and his mother, who first taught him chess, was from a wealthy industrial family. In Moscow, he studied for a career in law, but soon gave

it up for the siren's call of the 64 squares. He certainly didn't enjoy the immediate success of Capablanca, or even of Lasker. But he worked at the game zealously, and he began to win tournaments. He was playing in the Mannheim tournament in Germany in 1914 when World War I erupted. The internment of the players near Mannheim is a famous historical episode in chess. Alekhine became a displaced person for the first time. Many of the masters who had convened there after St. Petersburg 1914, including Efim Bogolubov, were forced to stay throughout the war, and a number of tournaments were organized for them. (Bogolubov, incidentally, enjoyed the forced vacation, establishing a lifelong home in the Black Forest, marrying a local woman.) Alekhine, however, was soon released to go home. Later, he invented grandiose tales of an heroic escape. Back in Russia, it's true that he served in the equivalent of the Red Cross on the Austrian front, and was even wounded.

The Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917 left him penniless. He was displaced again. Somehow, despite the fact that he was an ex-noble, and therefore a "White" Russian, he used his schooling to get a job with the Soviet secret police. This was a double-edged opportunity. Alekhine was reportedly at one point scheduled to be shot, but was saved at the last minute by a message from a chess player with high ranking in the Party.

He then played in some Moscow tournaments, winning the Soviet Championship in 1920. He was determined to find a way to be permitted to travel abroad, and with that goal in mind, joined the Communist Party, becoming an interpreter. Alekhine's wife was a "White" Russian who was the mother of his daughter. Now Alekhine made a more politically correct match, marrying a Swiss Communist delegate, thereby getting permission to leave the country.

Unsurprisingly, he split up with his new wife quickly and moved to Paris, where he married yet another woman, the widow of a Russian officer, a wife who would be better received among Russian expatriates (displaced Russians like Alekhine) in Paris. Indeed, these countrymen-in-exile held a dinner in his honor. Playing to their sentiments, Alekhine proclaimed that the Bolsheviks would soon be out of business. Perhaps he didn't anticipate that his remarks would make the headlines and Moscow would find out about his remarks. Later, he tried to patch things up.

Beating Raúl

Working out of Paris, Alekhine amassed an impressive record of victories, eventually finding a sponsor that put up the \$10,000 in gold that his friend Capablanca demanded for a championship

match purse. Few in 1927 expected Alekhine to win, least of all Capa. But Alekhine had worked obsessively to analyze Capablanca's few weaknesses, and to eliminate his own. Alekhine won the match and became the fourth World Champion. From that moment on, his behavior toward Capablanca became adversarial, avoiding talk of a rematch. Alekhine spent the rest of his reign refusing to play in tournaments in which Capa took part. (They played only once more, in Nottingham 1936, where Capablanca won.) Capa took all this very hard.

After winning the championship, Alekhine followed Lasker's example and returned to university life, this time at the famous Sorbonne in Paris where he studied law. He subsequently claimed that he was awarded a doctorate, but there is no evidence of his achievement. Alekhine rolled up an impressive list of firsts in strong tournaments throughout Europe, and even at Pasadena 1932. He remarried yet again, this time to an American-born widow who maintained British citizenship.

Alekhine was a dedicated drinker throughout his life. After he won the championship, his alcoholism got even worse. When he played Euwe in 1935, by most accounts Alekhine was at times quite drunk during actual play. He lost as he had won, amid the surprise of most of the world. The tall, multi-talented Euwe immediately and modestly predicted that he would not be champion for long. A rematch was held in 1937. Alekhine may have loved only one thing more than alcohol—his title as world champion. He applied his considerable will power to getting himself and his game in shape, and he regained the championship relatively easily.

Alekhine had just agreed to a match with Mikhail Botvinnik in 1939 when war goose-stepped throughout Europe, trampling everyone's plans. At first, Alekhine acted patriotically toward his adopted homeland of France. In Buenos Aires at the chess Olympiads captaining the French team, he refused to permit his team to play the Germans. He returned to France, enlisting in the army as an interpreter. When France fell, he fled to the free city of Marseille, where he applied for a visa to Cuba, even offering to play the long-awaited match with Capablanca to get the document! But none was forthcoming and he went to Lisbon, trying there for a US visa. But a series of anti-Semitic articles appeared, attributed to Alekhine, in the Nazi-controlled press. No visa arrived, Alekhine vehemently denied writing the articles, but in the 1950s, the original manuscripts of these articles—in Alekhine's own handwriting—were found in his late wife's belongings. It seems that once again, a displaced Alekhine had hedged his bets.

He voluntarily returned to France, playing in Nazi-organized tournaments. After the war, disgraced, he lived in Portugal in poverty and failing health. He was aware he didn't have much time left. He had severe cirrhosis of the liver and other ailments resulting from years of heavy drinking. He continued to look forward to a match with Botvinnik, studying chess as usual. On March 23, 1946, he received the telegram confirming the match. The next day he died alone, either of a heart attack or from choking on a piece of meat—the reports varied—, while studying his final chess position. A photographer was somehow on the scene and left the world with a grim, posthumous image of the world champion, displaced for the very last time. Evidently cold in his little apartment, he sat at his small table in a winter coat. Empty plates were stacked in disarray in front of him while, on a nearby table, the pieces stood neatly in starting position.

At the time of his death, it seemed no one was in a hurry to claim the honor of burying the chess world champion. Later he was put to rest in Montparnasse cemetery in Paris. In the 1950s, the Soviet Union wished to move his body to Russia, but his widow protested.

Alekhine was the first champion to lose and regain his title, and he was the only to die holding the title. If nothing else, he left the world with many beautiful chess games—perhaps more than any other champion.

Alekhine's accoutrements

Obviously, the Bolshevik revolution, two world wars and their aftermaths had life-changing impact on the fourth world champion. The innovations available to the man in the street, when there *was* an unbombed street in this era, proliferated. At the beginning of his reign, talking movies premiered. Warner Brothers' *The Jazz Singer*, the first feature-length “talkie,” appeared in 1927. The first true all-talking, all-dialogue movie was another Warner production, a gangster film entitled *Lights of New York* that debuted in 1928, the same year the iron lung was invented, which for many years played an important role in saving polio victims in these pre-Salk-vaccine days. Coaxial cable, the electroencephalograph, the generator, and the jet engine—all were patented in 1929. Freon, high-octane gas, nylon, the electron microscope, launderettes, the Richter scale, fiberglass, the fluorescent light, the first jet-aircraft flight, the helicopter and the ballpoint pen were 1930s breakthroughs. Then a host of WWII-driven inventions, such as radar and the automated computer filled the last decade of Alekhine's life, along with aerosol spray (1941), the first nuclear reactor (1942), the aqualung (1943), and the ballistic missile (1944). The first

atom bomb was used in war in 1945, exploded in the air over the populace of Hiroshima, Japan. The post-war Nuremberg trials (1945-6) took place in a German city previously known as the toy capital of the world. The outcome established unequivocally the legal principle that “following orders” is not an acceptable excuse for war crimes.

Consider the changes during Alekhine’s span. In 1892, the year of his birth, African-American Sarah Boone invented (and patented) the ironing board, and another African American, O.E. Brown, patented a horseshoe. By his death in 1946, mankind was already in the rocket age and living under the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Our second Alekhine sampling took place 13 years after his masterpiece against Reti. Alekhine, now in his mid to late forties, had lost and recaptured the world title. Had age, the constant displacement and drinking dulled the edge of his combinative saber? By the way, his Finnish opponent here was no pushover. In fact, he came in fourth in the same strong tournament.

Alexander Alekhine – Eero Böök Margate, 1938

1. d4 d5 2. c4 dxc4 3. Nf3 Nf6 4. e3 e6 5. Bxc4 c5 6. 0-0 Nc6 7. Qe2 a6 8. Nc3 b5 9. Bb3 b4 10. d5! Na5 11. Ba4+ Bd7 12. dxe6 fxe6

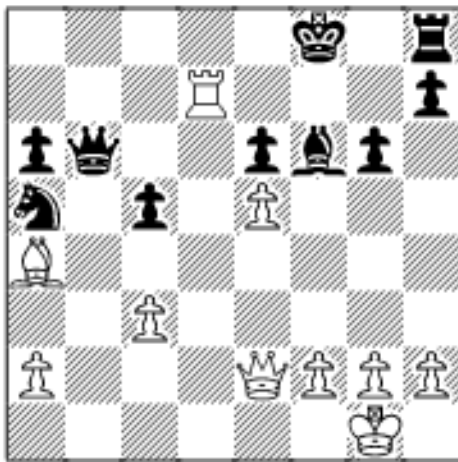
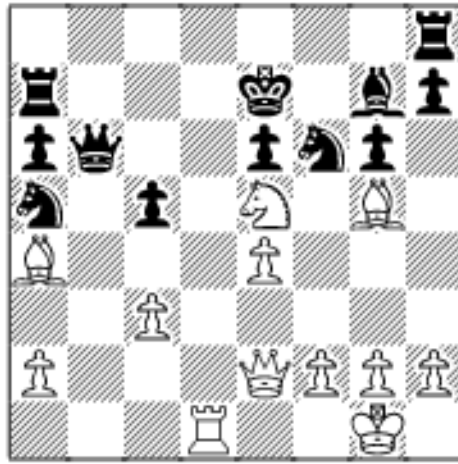


13. Rd1! bxc3 14. Rxd7! Nxd7 15. Ne5 Ra7 16. bxc3!

A cold-blooded move. Alekhine points out that after 16. Qh5 g6 17. Nxc6 hxc6 18. Qxh8 Kf7, Black should win.

16. ... Ke7 17. e4 Nf6 18. Bg5 Qc7 19. Bf4 Qb6 20. Rd1 g6 21. Bg5 Bg7

22. Nd7 Rxd7 23. Rxd7+ Kf8 24. Bxf6 Bxf6 25. e5 1-0



If 25. ... Bg7, then 26. Qf3+ and mate. If 25. ... Be7, then 26. Qf3+ Kg8 27. Rxe7 Qb1+ 28. Bd1 Qf5 29. Qa8+ Qf8 30. Re8.

Reuben Fine said that the Alekhine-Böök game was “the most remarkable tactical conception in chess history.” The compliments Alekhine got, he had to earn. Not many during his later life were

inclined to give undemanded praise. And despite his many brilliant, legitimate combinations, Alekhine didn’t seem above claiming to play a few brilliancies that never actually occurred on the board!

Max Euwe

Machgielis Euwe was born in 1901. Other than Paul Morphy, he was the only amateur ever to be considered world champion. (In fact, in 1928, Euwe won the second and final world amateur championship.) His chess achievements, earned as they were against full-time chess professionals, are an amazing feat for someone with so many other interests (as a young man he was even a boxing champion) and so little time to devote to chess.

Euwe won the Dutch championship at 20 (and then won it 12 more times). In the same year, 1921, he played in his very first strong international event in Vienna, placing second behind Saemisch, and ahead of Breyer, Grünfeld and Maroczy. Euwe was an academic, teaching mathematics from 1924, and earning his doctorate in 1926. In fact, he had sometimes to arrange to play important matches during holidays! During the Christmas

break of 1926-7, he narrowly lost a match to Alekhine (by then world champion) $+2 =5 -3$. During the Easter vacation of 1928, he defeated Colle with $+5 =1$, and then a few days later barely lost to Bogolubov $+2 =5 -3$. In the 1930s, he achieved some notable results in both matches and tournaments, culminating in his 1935 title match win over Alekhine.

Euwe is sometimes very incorrectly disparaged, perhaps because of Alekhine's drinking during their first match. The truth is that Euwe was a powerful player. He found time to play in four outstanding tournaments (and a less important event) during his two-year reign, always placing among the top finishers—he came in first in two of the events, second in one and third in another. In these competitions, he placed ahead of the likes of Alekhine, Keres, and Flohr. During this period he scored two wins and a draw against the former champ. It's true that in 1937 Alekhine beat him handily in their return match. However, even after the war in 1946, Euwe placed second at Groningen, behind Botvinnik but ahead of Smyslov, Najdorf, Szabo, Flohr and Boleslavsky. (Photo: *World Champion Max Euwe in his later years.*)



Chess trivia to the Max

When Alekhine died in 1947, FIDE delegates assembled to deal with the world championship vacancy. They decided that Euwe should have the crown. But the Soviet delegations, delayed en route, showed up the next day and forcefully nullified the previous day's decision—the throne was declared vacant. So, for one day in 1947—the same year that the Polaroid camera was invented, and that legendary test pilot Chuck Yeager, flying the Bell X-1, broke the “sound barrier,” Euwe was a re-crowned world champion.

After that, his professional duties, other interests and age kept him from being truly competitive at the top level. Euwe had a distinguished career away from chess, and also served as president of FIDE from 1970 to 1978. One of his duties was to preside as the supreme arbiter of the 1972 Fischer-Spassky match. Euwe died in 1981.

According to Alekhine, no mean judge, Euwe was a first-class tactician who seldom made a bad combination. Here's one of Euwe's games, important to his winning the title. It's sometimes known as the “Pearl of Zandvoort.”

**Max Euwe – Alexander Alekhine Wch16-NLD (Zandvoort)
(26), 1935**

**1. d4 e6 2. c4 f5 3. g3 Bb4+ 4. Bd2 Be7 5. Bg2 Nf6 6. Nc3 0-0 7.
Nf3 Ne4 8. 0-0 b6 9. Qc2 Bb7 10. Ne5 Nxc3 11. Bxc3 Bxg2 12.
Kxg2 Qc8 13. d5 d6 14. Nd3 e5 15. Kh1 c6 16. Qb3 Kh8 17. f4
e4 18. Nb4 c5 19. Nc2 Nd7 20. Ne3 Bf6 21. Nxf5 Bxc3 22.
Nxd6 Qb8 23. Nxe4 Bf6 24. Nd2 g5 25. e4 gxf4 26. gxf4 Bd4
27. e5 Qe8 28. e6 Rg8 29. Nf3 Qg6**



**30. Rg1! Bxg1 31. Rxd7 Qf6
32. Ng5 Rg7 33. exd7 Rxd7
34. Qe3 Re7 35. Ne6 Rf8 36.
Qe5 Qxe5 37. fxe5 Rf5 38.
Re1 h6 39. Nd8 Rf2 40. e6
Rd2 41. Nc6 Re8 42. e7 b5
43. Nd8 Kg7 44. Nb7 Kf6 45.
Re6+ Kg5 46. Nd6 Rxe7 47.
Ne4+ 1-0**

The great Mikhail Botvinnik quickly took possession of the throne vacated by the death of

Alekhine. Our next column on the world champions will concentrate on the life and times of Botvinnik, co-author Lev Alburt's chess mentor.

Here are some books you can go to for more information on the world champions and their matches (in some cases, more recent editions are likely available):

The Kings of Chess, Hartston, Harper and Row, 1985

The Oxford Companion to Chess, Hooper and Whyld, Oxford, University Press, (2d ed.) 1992

The Adventure of Chess, Edward Lasker, Dover, 1949

Kings of Chess, William Winter, Pittman Press, 1954

Please Email suggestions for future columns and other comments to AlForChess@aol.com. We enjoy your comments and learn from your criticism.

Copyright 2001 Lev Alburt and Al Lawrence. All rights reserved.

All seven volumes of Lev Alburt's *Comprehensive Chess Course* are available in [The Chess Cafe Online Store](#).



[\[The Chess Cafe Home Page\]](#) [\[Book Reviews\]](#) [\[Bulletin Board\]](#) [\[Columnists\]](#)
[\[Endgame Studies\]](#) [\[The Skittles Room\]](#) [\[Archives\]](#)
[\[Links\]](#) [\[Online Bookstore\]](#) [\[About The Chess Cafe\]](#) [\[Contact Us\]](#)

Copyright 2001 CyberCafes, LLC. All Rights Reserved.
"The Chess Cafe®" is a registered trademark of Russell Enterprises, Inc.