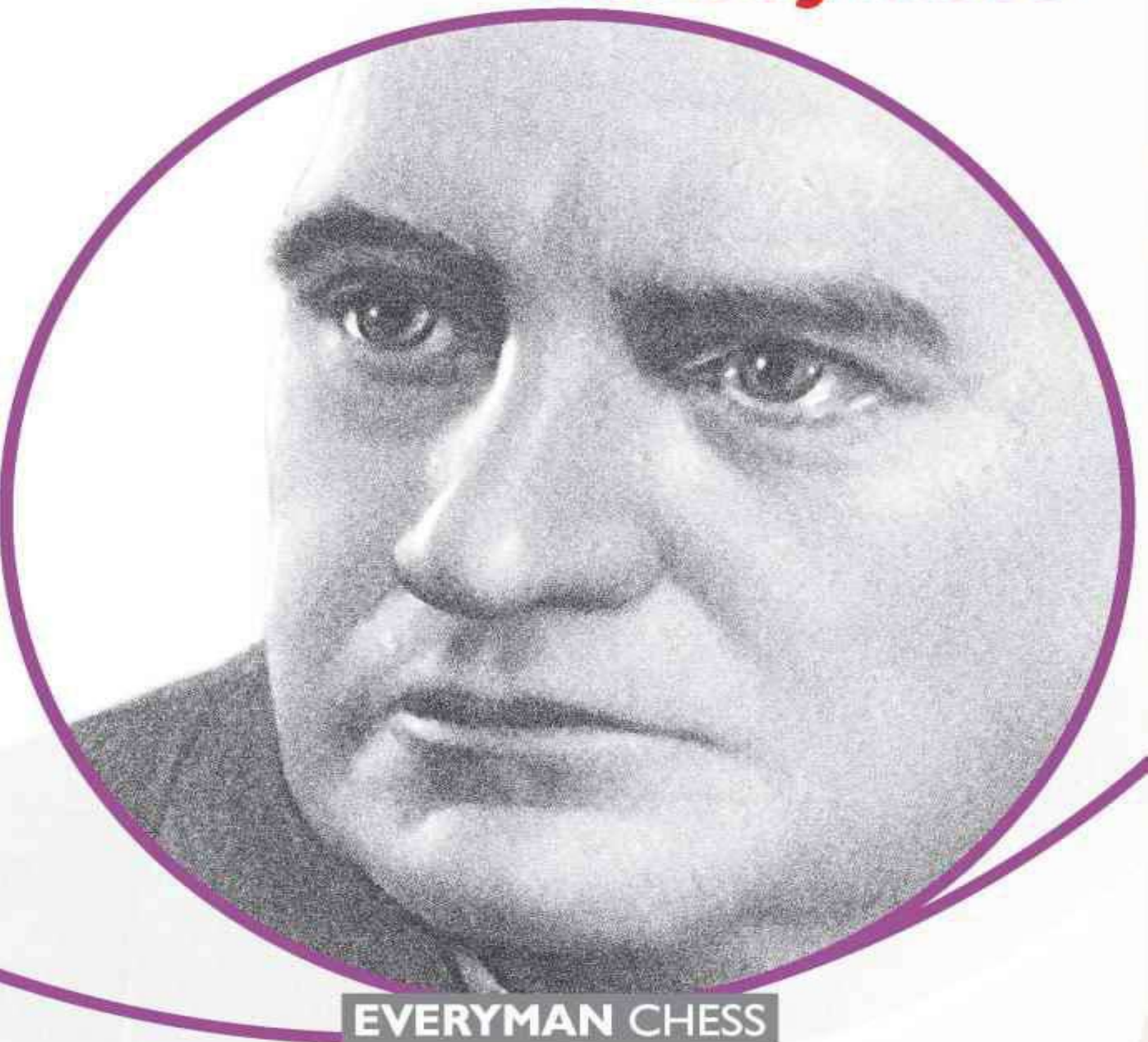


Steve Giddins

# Alekhine

move by move



EVERYMAN CHESS

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[www.everymanchess.com](http://www.everymanchess.com)

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# About the Author

**Steve Giddins** is a FIDE Master and a former editor of *British Chess Magazine*. He spent a number of years of his professional life based in Moscow, where he learned Russian and acquired an extensive familiarity with Russian chess literature and the training methods of the Russian/Soviet chess school. He's the author of several outstanding books and is well known for his clarity and no-nonsense advice. He has also translated over 20 books, for various publishers, and has contributed regularly to chess magazines and websites.

## **Also by the author:**

*The Greatest Ever Chess Endgames*

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*Nimzowitsch: Move by Move*

*Bronstein: Move by Move*

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Solutions

# Bibliography

Alekhine, along with Botvinnik and Kasparov, remains the world champion who chronicled his own career in print most thoroughly. He has been the subject of a huge number of books, in numerous languages, by other authors. Below is a list of the principal items I have consulted in writing this book.

*My Best Games of Chess 1908-23*, A.Alekhine (G Bell & Sons 1927)

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*The Unknown Alekhine 1905-14*, F.Reinfeld (Pitman & Sons 1949)

*Alexander Alekhine's Chess Games, 1902-1946*, L.Skinner & R.Verhoeven (McFarland & Co 1996)

*The Art of Attack*, V.Vukovic (Pergamon 1965)

My analysis engine of chess has been *Fritz 12*.



# Introduction

Alexander Alekhine is one of the immortal names in chess history. The fourth world champion, and the first player to regain the world title after losing it, his life was a turbulent tale. Born into the Russian aristocracy, he narrowly escaped death at the time of the Revolution. Then, after settling in the West, he did what almost everyone thought was impossible, and dethroned the seemingly invincible Capablanca in their epic 1927 world championship match. After several years of the greatest domination of tournaments that the world had ever seen, culminating in colossal triumphs at San Remo 1930 and Bled 1931, he descended into heavy drinking, losing his title to the underrated Dutchman Max Euwe in 1935. Undeterred, he showed his enormous strength of character by sobering up, preparing hard, and thrashing Euwe in the return match two years later. Then his final years were marred by the Second World War, in which he found himself caught in occupied Europe, where his name was to be forever tainted by allegations of collaboration with the Nazis. Finally, scorned by the chess world, he died a lonely death in a hotel room in Portugal, the only world champion to die in possession of the title.

It is a story worthy of the movies; indeed, the Soviet GM and Alekhine author Alexander Kotov even penned a film script about his life. Even some 70 years after his death, many of the controversies surrounding his life have not been resolved. Did he really write the notorious anti-Semitic articles that appeared in the *Pariser Zeitung* in March 1941, for instance? The short answer is that we don't know for sure, although Alekhine's various different and inconsistent accounts of what really happened ("I didn't write them at all", "I wrote them, but the anti-Semitic bits were added later by the editors", "I wrote them because my wife was being held hostage", etc) don't make things look good for him. And even his death has been questioned, with suggestions he may have been murdered by a Soviet hitman. Admittedly, this latter theory has much less substance, and should probably be grouped with those that suggest the moon landings were faked and that Princess Diana was murdered by Lord Lucan, with Elvis Presley (or was it Dick Cheney?) driving the getaway car. Even so, the fact that we should still not know the truth, almost 70 years on, shows what a tangled and controversial life Alekhine led.

There is even a debate about how his name should be pronounced. It is certainly not "Ali-kine" (to rhyme with "bally-line"). Rather, it should be either "AlyEkhin" or "AlyOkhin", with a pronounced stress on the capitalized letter. But which of these is correct remains unclear. Show the name to any native Russian speaker, and they will say "Alyokhin" (I once conducted a straw poll amongst colleagues in the Moscow

office where I worked, and the result was 100% in favour of the latter). But the man himself used to get very angry about this pronunciation, insisting it should be “Alyekhin”, claiming that etymologically it derived from the name of a type of tree that grew near his family estate in Tsarist Russia. Strangely, he also used to claim that Alyokhin was a Jewish corruption of his name, but whenever I have discussed this with native Russian speakers, their reaction has always been that it is Alyekhin which sounds Jewish to their ears, Alyokhin being the natural Russian pronunciation. Ultimately, readers can take their pick which to use, although should you ever meet the departed shades of the great man in an afterlife, you would be wise to call him Alyekhin, if you want to curry favour with him!

But fortunately for us as chess players, there is much less that is unknown about his chess itself. We have the record of his games, which leaves little room for doubt. What we see there is a classic and highly inspiring story of how a player of admittedly enormous natural talent, by dint of a colossal amount of work, turned himself into a great all-round player, able to defeat an apparently unbeatable opponent to win the world championship.

Alekhine’s talent first shone when he was just 15 or 16, in Russian events in and around St Petersburg before the First World War. What stands out from most of these games was his tremendous combinative ability. He was not a match for the best players in positional battles or endgame technique, but his tactical imagination was remarkable, and he had the vision and calculating ability to carry it into effect. But in order to be able to challenge Capablanca and have a realistic chance of beating him, he had to spend a vast amount of time in the 1920s perfecting his positional play and endgame technique, and his account of how he did this, in his famous book *On the Way to the World Championship*, remains one of the classic stories in chess history. Even after all this work, his 6-3 victory over the Cuban was a sensation.

To my mind, it is this story of how Alekhine turned himself into a complete player that makes him such a worthy figure to study, even today. His games provide a complete course in all aspects of chess, and I have therefore tried to choose a representative selection for the present volume. Naturally, his style remained one of a sharp attacking player and a brilliant exploiter of the initiative, and the reader will find many such examples in this book. But he also developed other aspects of his play, and there are some fine positional and technical games to be found here too, the study of which will do much to improve the play of every reader of this book.

In choosing the games, I should say a word or two about what I tried to avoid. I have endeavoured to reduce to a minimum the number of the most well-known Alekhine games included. Naturally, there are certain classics which are simply so good that they are a *sine qua non* of any selection – Games 3 and 10 are two obvious examples. But other very well-known games, such as the various wins against Capablanca in the 1927

world championship match, have been omitted, because I felt they were so well known that there was little point in reproducing them here.

One other factor that I took into account was whether I, aided by the computer, could shed any new light on the games. The tactical nature of many of Alekhine's games means that they tend to be susceptible to computer analysis, and there are many new discoveries to be made by analysing them with the computer. Naturally, I have not done this in any spirit of *schadenfreude*, or a desire to make Alekhine look bad; on the contrary, I am impressed by how often his play and analysis proves to have been very accurate, even under computer scrutiny.

Desire to add something new also explains why there are no games in this book in which Alekhine faced his great rival Capablanca. As well as being very well known, all of these games have been annotated by Kasparov in his *Great Predecessors* series, and there is little or nothing to be added to his notes, so I took the decision to leave these games out. There are others included here which Kasparov also covered, but I have tried to keep these to a minimum, and the ones included are those which I simply felt were indispensable, either because of their brilliance or instructiveness.

I hope that even readers who are familiar with Alekhine's career will enjoy seeing these games analysed once again, with notes which, I hope, emphasize the instructional nature of his play above all. Studying the classics may have gone out of fashion with the top young GMs of today, but for the ordinary player it remains an indispensable tool of self-improvement, as well as a source of great pleasure.

Finally, I should like to thank the Everyman team for their usual efficiency of production; as well as Bernard Cafferty, whose wonderful chess library plugged a few gaps in my own.

Steve Giddins

Rochester, December 2015.

# Game 1

## Verlinsky-Alekhine, St Petersburg 1909

*Game 1*

**B.Verlinsky-A.Alekhine**

St Petersburg 1909

*Ruy Lopez*

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bxc6**

The characteristic move of the Exchange Variation, by which White seeks to achieve an endgame with a favourable pawn formation.

**4 ... dxc6 5 d4!?**

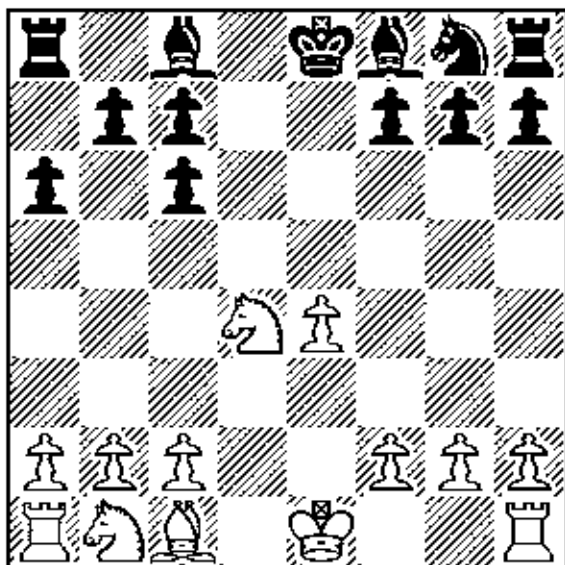
**Question:** What is wrong with this?

**Answer:** There is nothing actually wrong with it, but nowadays it is not regarded as the most taxing continuation for Black. Later, Bobby Fischer popularized the move 5 0-0 which forces Black to do something about his e5-pawn, which is now threatened.

**Question:** Why can't the pawn be taken at once with 5 Nxe5 - ?

**Answer:** Black regains it after 5 ... Qd4, when he has no problems at all; indeed, he even enjoys a small initiative.

**5 ... exd4 6 Qxd4 Qxd4 7 Nxd4**



This is the basic structure White is aiming for in the Exchange Variation. If we look at the pawn formation, we see that on the kingside White has a healthy 4 v 3 majority, which can produce a passed pawn; whereas Black's 4 v 3 majority on the queenside contains a doubled pawn, which means that, without assistance from White, he cannot force the creation of a passed pawn.

**Question:** So that means a pure king and pawn endgame will be lost for him, doesn't it?

**Answer:** I have often seen that claimed, though I have never seen a conclusive analytical demonstration that it is the case. But certainly, *ceteris paribus*, White has a clear advantage and reasonable winning chances.

**Question:** So why doesn't everyone play this as White?

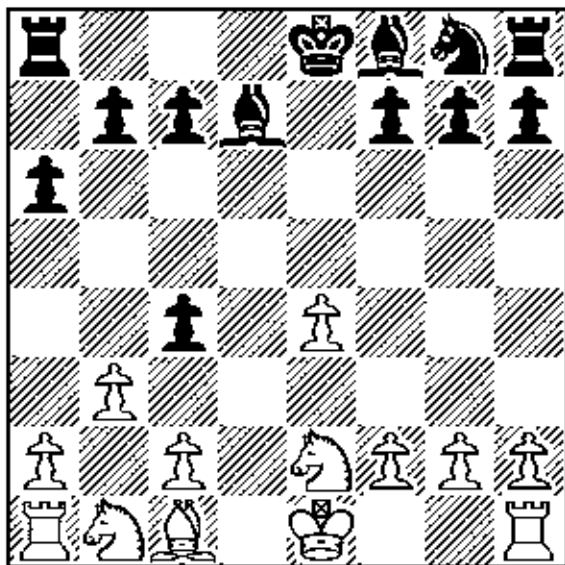
**Answer:** Basically because *ceteris* isn't *paribus*! Although Black has the inferior pawn structure, he has other compensations, notably the bishop pair and a free and easy development. Unless he is very co-operative, he will not end up in a pure king and pawn ending, but instead will play to develop some middlegame initiative, keeping pieces on and denying White the safe simplification that he would like.

**7 ... c5 8 Ne2 Bd7 9 b3**

This position had been reached a year earlier, in the opening game of the Lasker-Tarrasch world championship match. Tarrasch had continued with 9 ... Bc6, and after 10 f3 Be7 11 Bb2 Bf6, a position was reached in which the exchange of dark-squared bishops was inevitable, thus depriving Black of his main trump in this position, the

bishop pair. White still only has a small advantage, and the fact that Lasker went on to win was not the fault of this position *per se*; even so, the young Alekhine was keen to avoid such a scenario. Instead, he finds an original and typically energetic idea.

**9 ... c4!**



**Question:** But that just gives up a pawn! What is the point?

**Answer:** Alekhine's idea is that after White captures on c4, his queenside pawns will be weak and Black is likely to be able to recover the pawn anyway. Even if he does not, Black will have excellent positional compensation, because White will now be the one with doubled pawns.

**Question:** How do you mean?

**Answer:** Well, we explained at move 7 that White's basic strategy here is to leave Black with a 4 v 3 pawn majority on the queenside, containing a doubled pawn, so that he cannot create a passed pawn out of it. After the sacrifice 9 ... c4 and White capturing on c4, Black will not really be any worse off – with his doubled c-pawns, he was effectively a pawn down anyway. Meanwhile, he will have created targets on the queenside.

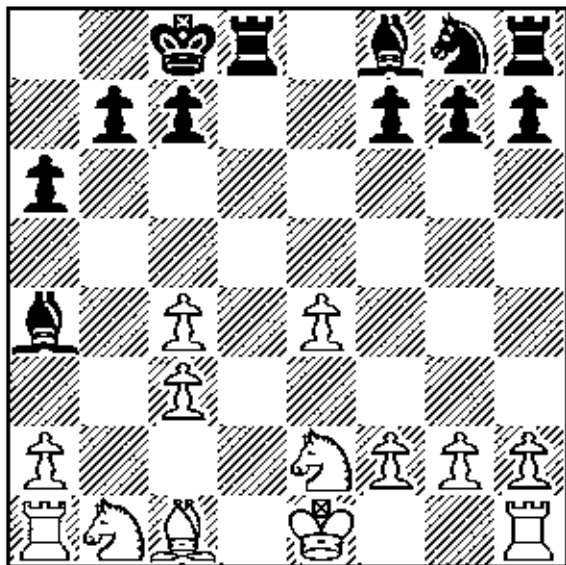
**10 bxc4**

**Question:** So in that case, why does White take on c4?

**Answer:** It is not forced, and there is nothing objectively wrong with a move such

as 10 Bb2. However, psychologically, it is not so easy to make such a move, since White's entire strategy in the Exchange Spanish is to saddle Black with doubled c-pawns. After 10 Bb2, Black would always be able to undouble his pawns by taking on b3 (either at once or later), while retaining the bishop pair. White would thus be abandoning his basic plan in this line, which is never a pleasant thing to have to do. Chances would objectively still be equal, but Black would perhaps be a touch more equal, as George Orwell put it.

**10 ... Ba4 11 c3 0-0-0**



Threatening no more and no less than mate in one! Obviously, the mate is easily stopped, but Black is already ahead in development and clearly has the initiative, in return for the crippled extra doubled white c-pawn.

**12 Nd2**

Alekhine gives a couple of other variations, which illustrate that Black has an excellent game:

a) 12 Nd4 c5 13 Nb3 Re8 14 f3 f5 15 N1d2 Nf6 and Black regains the pawn with a clear advantage.

b) 12 0-0 Bc2!? (the computer's 12 ... Bc5 looks stronger; e.g. 13 Nd2 Nf6 14 Ng3 Rhe8 and Black is again clearly better – it is very hard to find a move for White, which does not surrender the extra pawn) 13 Nd2 Nf6 14 Ng3 (here 14 e5 Nd7 15 Nd4 Bd3 16 Re1 is preferable, holding the balance) 14 ... Bc5.

**12 ... Bc2 13 f3**

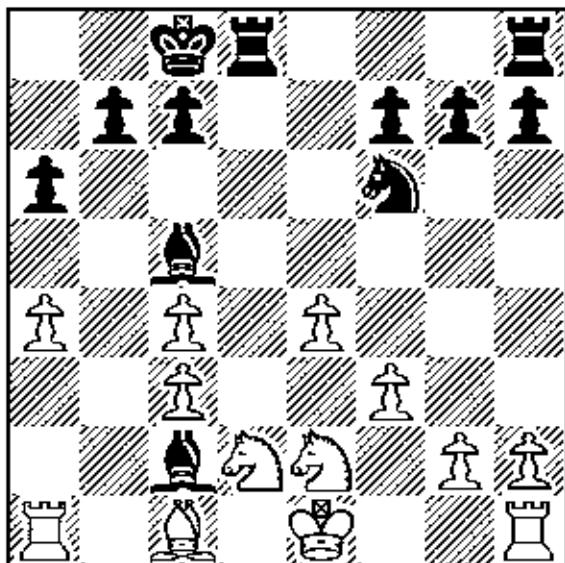
Possibly 13 0-0 is slightly stronger, at least getting the king out of the centre.

**13 ... Bc5 14 a4**

**Question:** What is that move all about?

**Answer:** White wants to prepare 15 Ba3. It is hard to find a constructive plan for him, as the natural 14 Nd4 runs into 14 ... Rxd4! 15 cxd4 Bxd4 and the rook on a1 is trapped. After the further moves 16 Rb1 Bxb1 17 Nxb1 Ne7, Black would retain a small advantage, even if White's position should still be tenable.

**14 ... Nf6**



**15 Ba3**

This is perfectly good. Alekhine suggested White had better drawing chances with 15 Nd4, giving the pawn back at once: 15 ... Bxd4 16 cxd4 Rxd4 17 Bb2 Rd3, although he claims that even here, “Black’s pressure on the d-file would be very harassing”. In fact, the calm computer is not bothered, thanks to the resource 18 Ra2!, when the c2-bishop is menaced by a discovered attack; for example, 18 ... Rhd8 19 Bxf6 Rxd2 20 Bxd8 Rd1+ 21 Kf2 Rxh1 22 Bh4 Bb3 23 Rd2 and the rook and opposite-coloured bishop ending should be a draw.

**15 ... Be3 16 Nf1**

Instead, 16 Nd4 Bxd4 17 cxd4 Rxd4 18 Bb2 would actually transpose into the variation given in the previous note.

**16 ... Ba7 17 a5 Rd3**

**Question:** It looks as though Black is starting to climb all over his opponent.

**Answer:** Maybe, but White is still objectively okay, if he defends accurately.

**18 c5?!**

Although it is tempting to shut out the strong enemy bishop on a7, this allows his position to deteriorate. After 18 Be7 Re8 19 Bxf6 gxf6 20 Rc1 Bb3 21 Nf4 Rd6 22



Nd2, White is holding everything, even if his position is still rather uncomfortable.

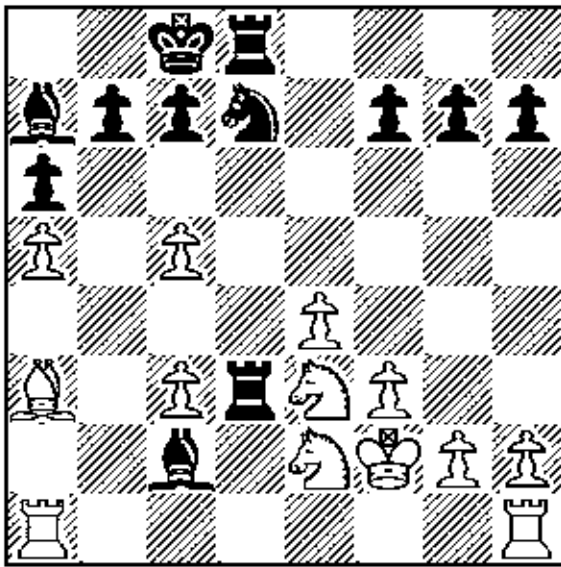
**18 ... Rhd8 19 Kf2?**

Things are starting to get very uncomfortable for White, but the text is a further error. He is still suffering after 19 Nfg3 Nd7, when Black will regain the c5-pawn, with White's other queenside weaknesses remaining vulnerable. Even so, this was probably the best chance.

**19 ... Nd7**

Now this response is even stronger.

**20 Ne3**



**20 ... Nxc5!**

Alekhine's eagle tactical eye strikes!

**21 Nd4**

Why can't White take the bishop with 21 Nxc2 - ?

**Answer:** It allows mate in five: 21 ... Nxe4+ 22 Ke1 Rd1+! 23 Rxd1 Bf2+ etc.

**21 ... Bb3**

This wins for Black, but the computer points out two continuations which were even stronger: 21 ... Rxc3 22 Ndxc2 (or 22 Nexc2 Ne6) 22 ... Nb3, or else 21 ... Nb3 at once; e.g. 22 Nexc2 Nxa1 23 Rxa1 Rxc3 24 Kg3 c5 25 Bb2 cxd4 26 Bxc3 dxc3 and Black has a decisive advantage, since 27 Ra3 is met by 27 ... Bb8+ 28 Kg4 Rd7 29 Rxc3 Rc7.

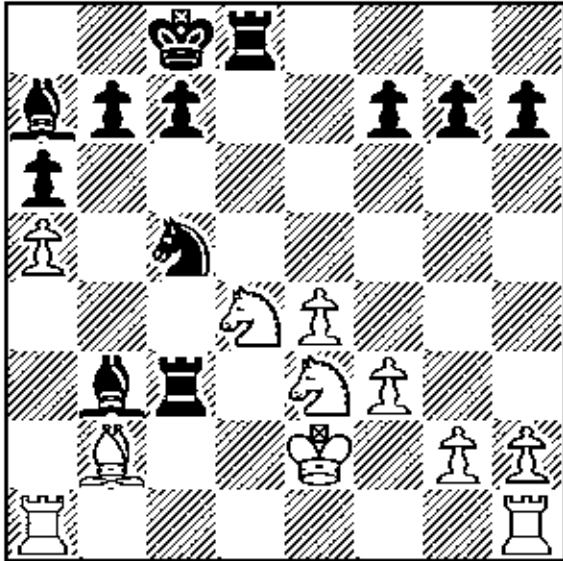
**22 Ke2?**

Choosing the path of least resistance, although even after the computer's offering 22 Bxc5 Bxc5 23 Rac1 Bxd4 24 cxd4 R8xd4, Black should wrap things up without too much trouble. If instead 22 Rhc1, Alekhine himself gave 22 ... R3xd4 23 cxd4 Nd3+ as winning, whereas the computer indicates that the prosaic 22 ... Na4 is much simpler,

simply annexing the c3-pawn for nothing, after which White's barricades on the a7-g1 diagonal are fatally undermined.

**22 ... Rxc3 23 Bb2**

Alekhine points out that "White could have avoided the loss of a piece by 23 Ndf5 which, however, would not have influenced the result". Indeed it would not; after 23 ... Ne6, White is defenceless.



**23 ... Rxe3+**

A final combinative blow, which wins material.

**24 Kxe3 Ne6 25 Ra3**

Alekhine gives 25 Rhd1 Bxd1 26 Rxd1 Nxd4 27 Bxd4 Bxd4+ (27 ... c5 is even stronger) 28 Rxd4 Rxd4 29 Kxd4 b6 and Black wins easily in the king and pawn ending.

**25 ... Nxd4 26 Kf4 Bc5 27 Rha1**

27 Raa1 Ne2+ sees the white king hunted to extinction by the black pieces.

**27 ... Ne2+ 28 Kg4 Be6+ 0-1**

White is quickly mated; e.g. 29 Kh5 f6, threatening ... Nf4+ and mates.

One of several excellent examples in this book of Alekhine conducting a vigorous attack on the enemy king, despite the absence of queens from the board.

## Game 2

### Alekhine-Prat, Paris (simul) 1913

This game is a very lightweight example, taken from a simultaneous display and against what was clearly a weak opponent. I have included it for several reasons:

1. Alekhine was an inveterate player of simul and exhibitions of all sorts, and produced many wonderful combinative games in those circumstances. It seemed only right to include at least one such example in the book.
2. Although Black's play is poor, the game provides a good illustration of exploiting such inadequate opening play.
3. The final announced mate involves a very nice king hunt, of the sort we all enjoy seeing from time to time.

*Game 2*

**A.Alekhine-M.Prat**

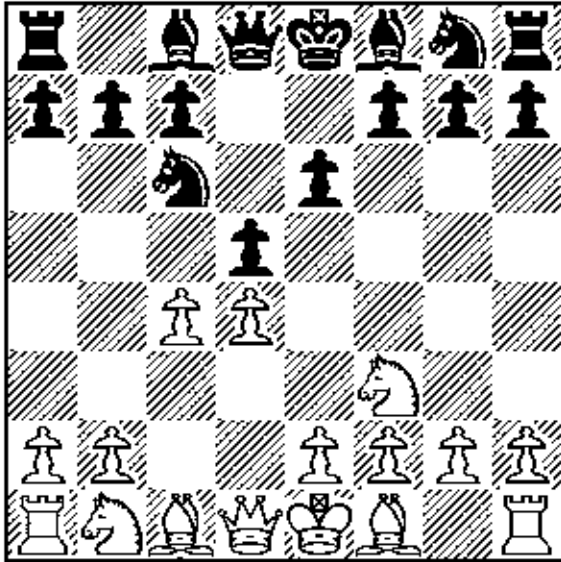
Paris (simul) 1913

*Queen's Gambit Accepted*

**1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nc6**

*MegaBase* inverts Black's 2nd and 5th moves, showing 2 ... Nf6 here. However, Alekhine's book gives the text, and his comments on the opening moves only make sense in that context, so I have taken this as correct. Skinner and Verhoeven also give this move order.

**3 c4 e6?**



**Question:** That looks odd!

**Answer:** Yes, it is just a bad move. Black's second move, although unusual, is not so bad in itself, if used as an introduction to Chigorin's Defence with 3 ... Bg4. Admittedly, the Chigorin has always been regarded with suspicion by most GMs, but it is better than its reputation, and the ever-creative Alexander Morozevich had much success with it, even at the highest level. It is certainly worth using at the club and county level, and the North of England ace Jeff Horner, who dominated the congress scene in the North West for decades, used it as a mass destruction weapon for years.

On the other hand, after his third move in the game, Black just has a bad Queen's Gambit Declined. The knight on c6 is clearly misplaced, obstructing the c-pawn, and makes it impossible for Black to exert sufficient pressure on the centre.

**4 Nc3 dxc4?!**

Another dubious decision, abandoning the centre to his opponent.

**5 e3**

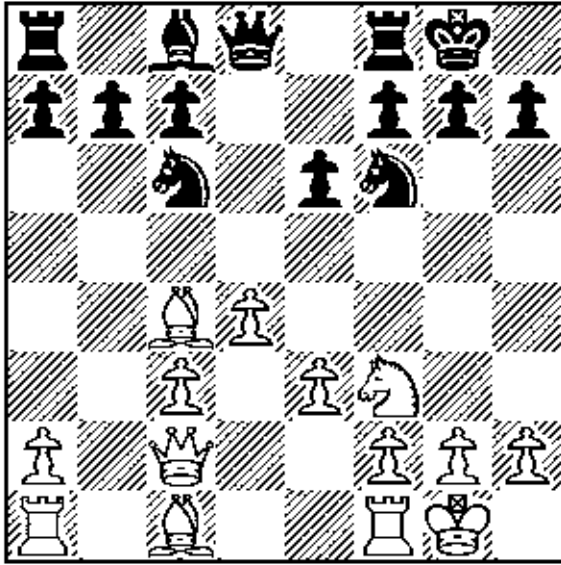
Simply 5 e4 is also very strong.

**5 ... Nf6 6 Bxc4 Bb4 7 0-0 Bxc3?!**

**Question:** Is there any good reason to give up the bishop pair?

**Answer:** Not that I can see. This is typical of many weak players, who tend to fear knights, since they find their movements difficult to track and control. As a result, they have a tendency to try to give up their bishops for the enemy knights wherever possible. In the present case, the exchange also strengthens White's centre.

8 bxc3 0-0 9 Qc2



**Question:** Black's position looks very poor.

**Answer:** Yes, he already has a dreadful game; no central control, a cramped position, and serious trouble developing his queen's bishop and rook. He has given an excellent illustration of how not to play the opening.

**9 ... Ne7 10 Ba3 c6 11 e4 h6**

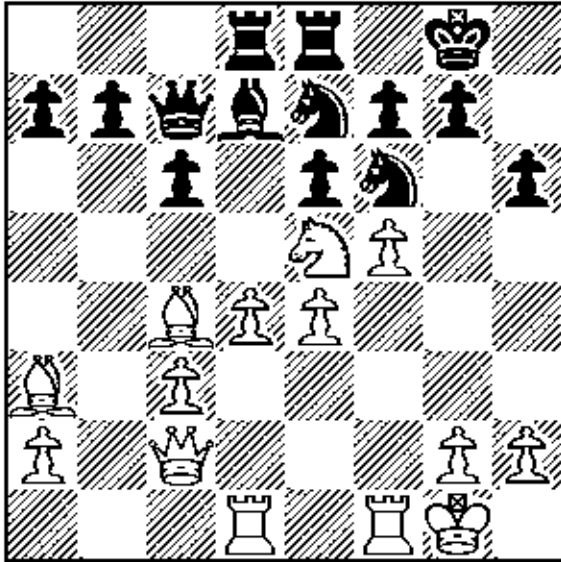
Black was afraid of the threat 12 e5 Nfd5 13 Ng5, but now his king position is weakened and he soon pays a high price for weakening g6.

**12 Rad1 Bd7 13 Ne5**

White's game is very simple and easy to play; even so, it is instructive to see how Alekhine methodically exploits his advantages. He just develops all of his pieces to good squares, then establishes the knight on a powerful outpost, all in classical style.

**13 ... Re8 14 f4 Qc7 15 f5! Rad8**

After a simple and crushing build-up, we reach the point at which White has strengthened his position to the maximum. Now it is time to exploit his advantage by combinative means, and you may like to think about how this can be done.



**16 Nxf7!**

Of course, this is the way. The weakness of f7 cries out to be exploited.

**16 ... Kxf7 17 e5 Neg8**

*Question:* What if he moves the knight?

*Answer:* After 17 ... Nfd5, say, there follows simply 18 fxe6+ Kxe6 19 Qe4 and the king will soon be mated in the centre. Indeed, the computer announces a forced mate in eleven: 19 ... Rf8 (relatively best) 20 Qg4+ Nf5 21 Qg6+ Rf6 22 exf6 and the fact that the desperado queen sacrifice on h2 is now Black's best move says it all!

**18 Bd6!**

*Question:* Not even bothering to regain the piece?

*Answer:* No, Alekhine has bigger fish to fry.

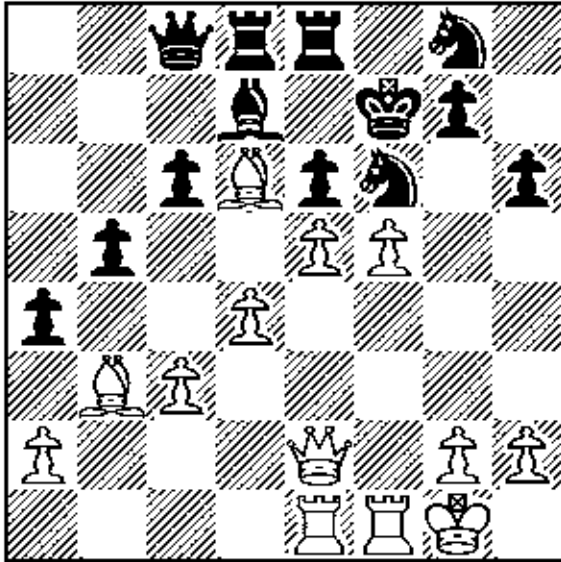
**18 ... Qc8 19 Qe2!**

Taking aim at the weak light squares around the enemy king. The helplessness of Black's stranded monarch is really quite comical.

**19 ... b5 20 Bb3 a5 21 Rde1**

The final link in the chain.

**21 ... a4**



Now the stage is set for Alekhine's party piece. Announcing mate was a fine old tradition in 19th century chess, which has now died out. Admittedly, one could look a bit of a fool if one announced a mate and turned out to be wrong, but Alekhine was not the sort to do so!

Here he announced mate in ten: I invite you, dear reader, to try to calculate it for yourself, without moving the pieces!

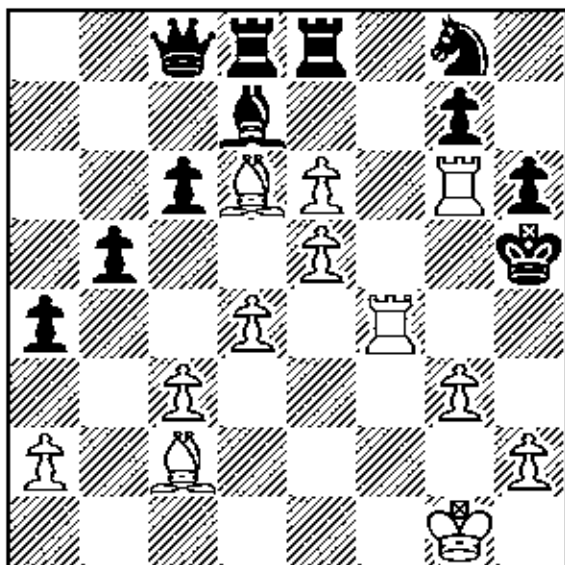
**22 Qh5+!!**

A lovely queen sacrifice to start the ball rolling.

**22 ... Nxh5 23 fxe6+ Kg6 24 Bc2+ Kg5**

Now the black king has to walk the plank.

**25 Rf5+ Kg6 26 Rf6+ Kg5 27 Rg6+ Kh4 28 Re4+ Nf4 29 Rxf4+ Kh5 30 g3! 1-0**



A lovely final touch: there is no defence to 31 Rh4 mate.

A very lightweight encounter, but a thoroughly enjoyable one – the sort of game one can turn to when the present-day diet of Berlin endings gets too much to bear!



# Game 3

## Bogoljubow-Alekhine, Hastings 1922

Game 3

**E.Bogoljubow-A.Alekhine**

Hastings 1922

*Dutch Defence*

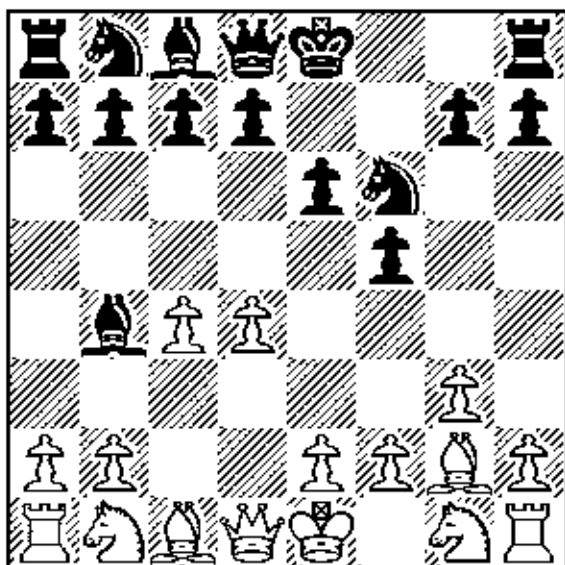
**1 d4 f5**

The Dutch Defence was a rare guest in Alekhine's practice.

**Question:** I should have thought an aggressive opening such as the Dutch would have appealed to him.

**Answer:** Although a very sharp and attacking player, the mature Alekhine was also quite correct in many of his attitudes. He describes the Dutch as "a risky defence", which was in accordance with the orthodoxy of his time. As he explains, he chose it in the present game because a win would guarantee him first place in the tournament. In general, though, he eschewed highly aggressive openings, in favour of solid systems such as the QGD. His genius lay in the way he could work up fierce attacks from such variations.

**2 c4 Nf6 3 g3 e6 4 Bg2 Bb4+**



The two main alternatives are 4 ... Be7 and 4 ... d5, but the text was Alekhine's favourite continuation. He makes an interesting comment about the opening. Alekhine considers White's early 2 c4 to be inaccurate, because it allows this bishop check, aiming to exchange dark-squared bishops. He says this is favourable for Black, because his king's bishop "has only a very limited range of action in this opening."

**Question:** The king's bishop? Surely it is Black's queen's bishop which is restricted in the Dutch?

**Answer:** Yes, I agree. I find Alekhine's comment rather hard to understand.

### **5 Bd2**

Possibly 5 Nd2 is a better try for an advantage, although theory nowadays considers White to have some edge after the text move as well.

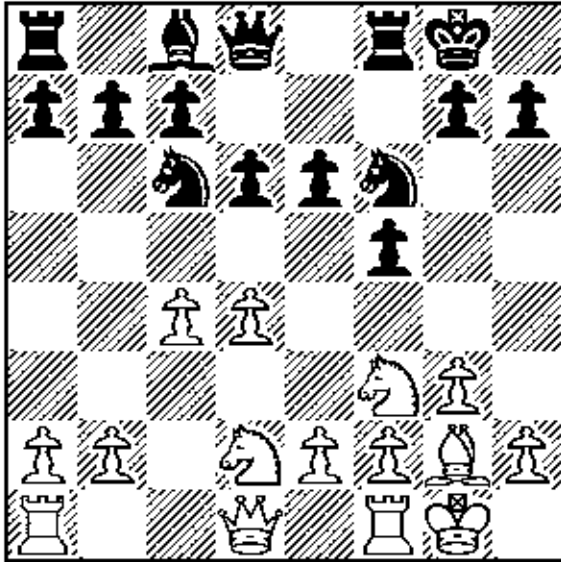
### **5 ... Bxd2+**

A further puzzle regarding Alekhine's comment about 4 ... Bb4+ is that he himself later experimented with 5 ... Be7 here, actually avoiding the bishop exchange which he claimed was favourable for Black! He came a cropper in this variation (not necessarily because of the opening itself) in the famous 26th game of his first match with Euwe, forever known as "The Pearl of Zandvoort", but the idea of such manoeuvres, losing a tempo to draw the white bishop to d2, lives on today, notably in the main line of the closed Catalan.

### **6 Nxd2**

As in similar Queen's Indian positions, White usually wants to take on d2 with the queen if he can, and then play Nc3. In this position, that would guarantee him some advantage. The text leaves the knight on d2 rather passive.

### **6 ... Nc6 7 Ngf3 0-0 8 0-0 d6**



**Question:** So how would you sum up the outcome of the opening?

**Answer:** Black has almost equalized. He cannot be prevented from getting ... e6-e5 in, with a good share of the centre and easy development.

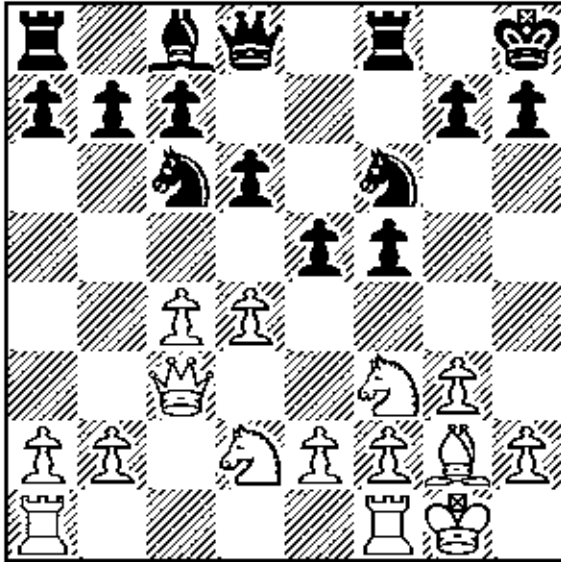
**9 Qb3 Kh8?!**

Kasparov claims that this precaution is unnecessary and that Black could play the immediate 9 ... e5 10 c5+ Kh8, although he does not mention the computer's 11 d5 Ne7 12 cxd6 cxd6 13 Ng5, which does perhaps look a bit better for White.

**10 Qc3?!**

As we will see, this does not actually prevent 10 ... e5. Alekhine suggests that White already lacks a satisfactory move, but this seems grossly optimistic. Kasparov points out the obvious 10 d5 which is just better for White; e.g. 10 ... exd5 (or 10 ... Na5 11 Qc3 c5 12 Ng5) 11 cxd5 Ne7 12 Nd4.

**10 ... e5**



**11 e3**

Obviously, White cannot win a pawn by 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 Nxe5?? because his knight on d2 hangs after 12 ... Nxe5 13 Qxe5.

**Question:** But isn't 11 d5 still good for White?

**Answer:** No, I don't think so. In such positions, Black is generally doing fine, unless White has something at once, such as with Ng5. Here 11 ... Ne7 12 Ng5?! gets nowhere after 12 ... h6 13 Ne6 Bxe6 14 dxe6 Qc8, and otherwise, Black is well placed to develop a kingside initiative.

**11 ... a5**

Holding back White's intended queenside expansion with b2-b4.

**12 b3**

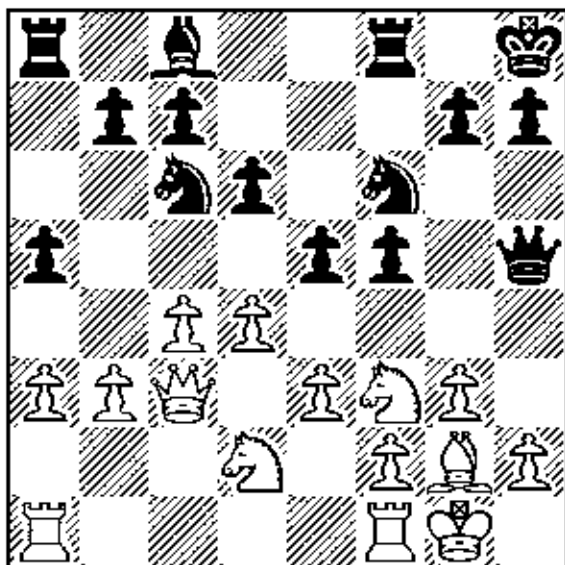
The standard preparation for a2-a3 and b3-b4. The immediate 12 a3?! would allow his queenside to be crippled after 12 ... a4.

**12 ... Qe8**

**Question:** Starting his kingside attack?

**Answer:** Yes, and a very standard manoeuvre in the Dutch Defence, of course. The queen heads to h5, with the idea of attacking with ... f5-f4, ... Bh3, ... Ng4, etc.

**13 a3 Qh5**



**14 h4**

**Question:** That looks odd. There is no direct threat, is there?

**Answer:** No, but there are a few tactical problems. For example, White still cannot win a pawn by taking on e5, because of 14 dxe5 dxe5 15 Nxe5? Nxe5 16 Qxe5 Ng4. Presumably h2-h4 is designed to eliminate this tactic and thus threaten to win the e5-pawn.

**Question:** Instead of this attempted larceny, why doesn't White get on with his planned queenside advance?

**Answer:** That is another tactical problem. 14 b4? fails to 14 ... e4, when moving the knight loses material after 15 Ne1? (or 15 Nh4?? g5) 15 ... axb4, since the knight obstructs the rooks on the back rank. Admittedly, White could bale out with 14 b5, but Black is still doing well after 14 ... Ne7, as it is not clear how White makes further progress on the queenside.

**14 ... Ng4 15 Ng5**

**Question:** And if he plays 15 b4 now?

**Answer:** There is nothing wrong with it now; indeed, Alekhine suggests it is what White should have played. Instead, Bogoljubow wishes to remove the enemy knight from g4 by playing f2-f3, but this is a dubious idea.

**15 ... Bd7 16 f3?!**

Alekhine points out that the very greedy attempt to bag a pawn with 16 Bxc6 Bxc6 17 f3, hoping to take twice on e5, can be met by 17 ... exd4! 18 fxg4 dxc3 19 gxh5 cxd2 “with the better endgame for Black”, which is true enough. Although the simple recapture 18 exd4 maintains the balance in this line, it is hardly worth surrendering the important fianchettoed bishop for no material gain.

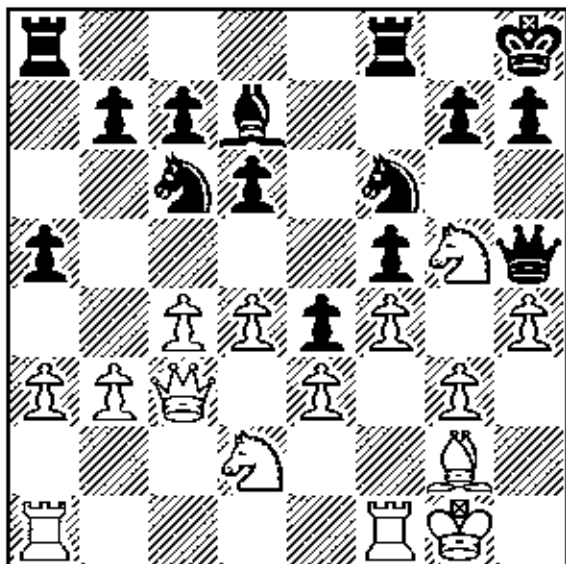
**16 ... Nf6**

White is already in some trouble now, as his kingside has been severely weakened over the past few moves.

**17 f4**

This is pretty much forced, because he cannot allow Black to play ... f5-f4; for example, 17 dxe5 dxe5 18 b4 f4 and the white kingside rapidly turns into a dustbowl.

**17 ... e4**



**Question:** Things seem to have really gone wrong for White over the past half-dozen moves.

**Answer:** Yes, he has been outplayed completely. Now his king’s bishop is dead, and his kingside still very vulnerable. His immediate concern is to save the g3-pawn, which Black threatens to win with ... Qg4 and ... Nh5.

**18 Rfd1**

Freeing the f1-square for his knight, but both Alekhine and *Fritz* agree that White should first have played 18 d5, preventing Black’s 19th.

**18 ... h6 19 Nh3 d5**

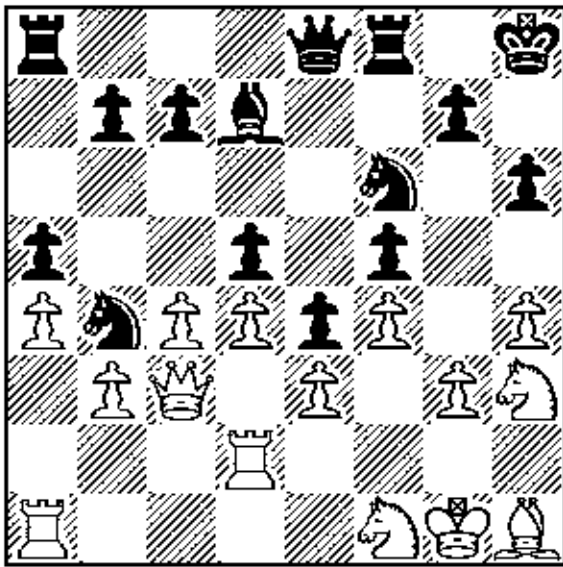
Now White loses any hope of counterplay in the centre and can only concern himself with trying to stop his kingside falling off.

**20 Nf1 Ne7 21 a4 Nc6!**

**Question:** Eh? What was that all about?

**Answer:** It was a subtle two-move manoeuvre, which has secured the black knight a lovely outpost on b4. Black's 20th move threatened 21 ... a4, breaking up the white queenside; in stopping that, White has laid the grounds for his opponent's knight to penetrate to the very heart of his position via b4 and d3.

**22 Rd2 Nb4 23 Bh1 Qe8!**



A nice move, switching targets. Now the a4-pawn is vulnerable to threats of ... d5xc4, when recapturing with the b3-pawn would drop a4.

**24 Rg2 dxc4 25 bxc4**

25 Qxc4 saves the pawn but concedes another knight outpost: after 25 ... Nfd5, Black has a huge positional advantage. Instead, White sacrifices the a-pawn and proceeds with a rather optimistic plan to prepare a break with g3-g4, but this never comes to fruition.

**25 ... Bxa4 26 Nf2 Bd7 27 Nd2 b5!**

**Question:** Why is this so good?

**Answer:** Black continues battling for d5. Now he cannot be prevented from gaining a knight outpost on that juicy central square. As we will see, it is also the prelude to a fabulous combination, one which makes this game one of Alekhine's most immortal achievements.

**28 Nd1**

Defending e3 in anticipation of a later ... Nfd5 by Black.

**28 ... Nd3 29 Rxa5**

White grabs back his missing pawn, but walks into a winning combination. Then again, as Alekhine points out, the preliminary 29 cxb5 Bxb5 is no better, since 30 Rxa5 Nd5 31 Qa3 Rxa5 32 Qxa5 Qc6 gives Black a decisive attack: ... Ra8 is threatened, trapping the white queen, while after 33 Qa1 Ra8 34 Qb1 Ne1 35 Rh2 Nc3 36 Nxc3 Qxc3 37 Qxb5 Qxe3+ 38 Kf1 (or 38 Rf2 Nd3) 38 ... Ra1, Black wins.

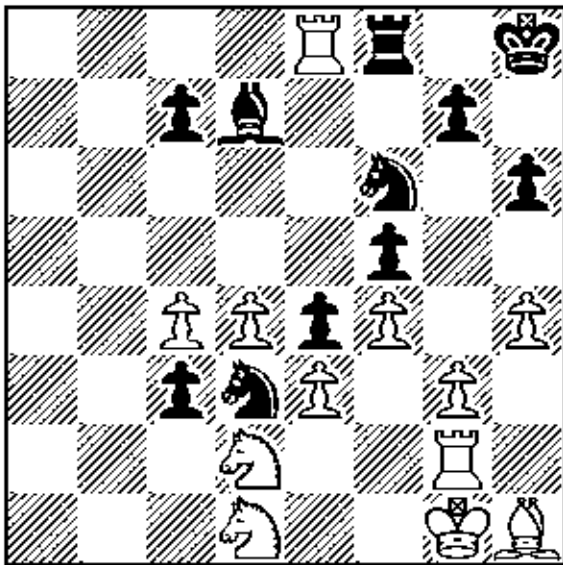
**29 ... b4 30 Rxa8**

Or 30 Qa1 Rxa5 31 Qxa5 Qa8! 32 Qxa8 Rxa8 (Alekhine) and the black rook infiltrates decisively.

**30 ... bxc3!**

All part of Alekhine's grand combination. He says that 30 ... Qxa8 31 Qb3 is much weaker and allows White to defend himself, whereas the computer shows that 31 ... Qa1 still leaves Black with a decisive advantage; e.g. 32 Nf1 Ra8, followed by ... Ra3 etc. Nevertheless, Alekhine's move leads to an immortal finish and can hardly be condemned.

**31 Rxe8**



**31 ... c2!!**

The wonderful point.

**Question:** Offering a whole rook with check?

**Answer:** Yup! The c-pawn is promoting by force, of course. White will have two rooks for the queen, but with his forces so scattered and his minor pieces all crippled, his position is hopeless.



**32 Rxf8+ Kh7 33 Nf2 c1Q+ 34 Nf1**

Forced, since 34 Kh2 Nxf2 35 Rxf2 Ng4+ is obviously hopeless.

**34 ... Ne1!**

Threatening a lovely smothered mate on f3!

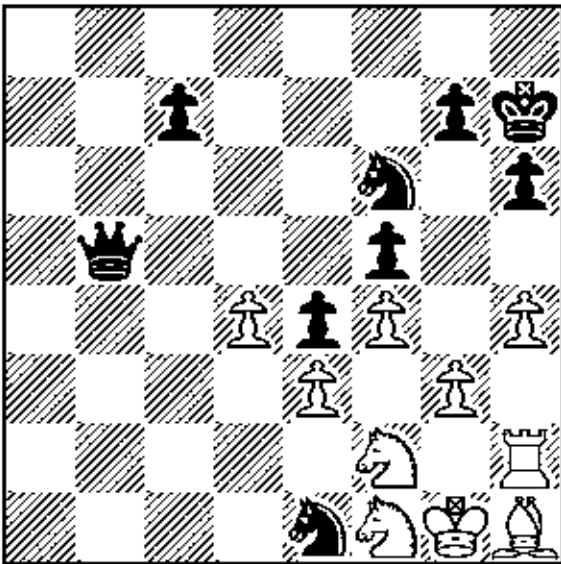
**35 Rh2 Qxc4**

Not merely taking a pawn, also threatening 36 ... Bb5 with a rapid mate (in ten, to be exact, as my little German friend kindly informs me).

**36 Rb8 Bb5 37 Rxb5**

This exchange sacrifice is the only way to stave off mate.

**37 ... Qxb5**



**Question:** So if we survey the results of the battlefield, the upshot is?

**Answer:** The white army has been smashed. White has rook and bishop against the queen, but a mere glance at the pathetic immobility of both his pieces tells all one needs to know about his position. It is simply hopeless.

**38 g4 Nf3+**

38 ... Qe2, followed by ... Ng4, is very strong too; but Alekhine, as always, has a combinative solution in mind.

**39 Bxf3 exf3 40 gxf5 Qe2!**

Once again, Alekhine has created a kind of zugzwang position, where White has no safe piece moves available and will soon run out of pawn moves.

**41 d5**

For example, 41 Nh3 Ng4! 42 Rxe2 fxe2, when the position provides a delightful echo of that after Black's 31st move.

**41 ... Kg8! 42 h5 Kh7!**

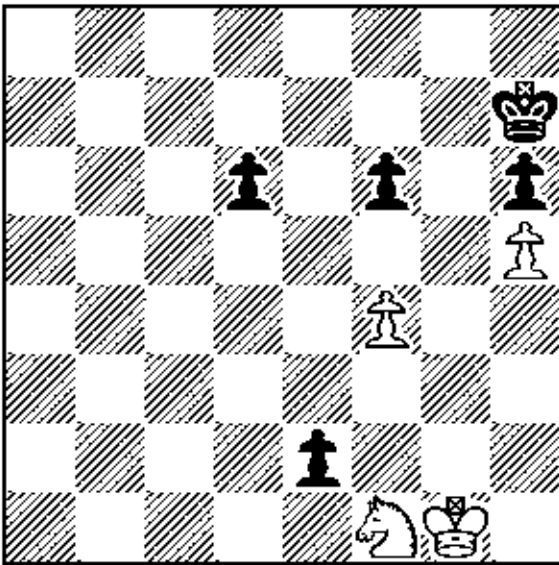
Sadistically showing White that his pawn moves have run out. Further material loss is inevitable.

**43 e4 Nxe4 44 Nxe4 Qxe4 45 d6 cxd6 46 f6**

**Question:** It looks as though White has taken up Suicide Chess!

**Answer:** Well, all of these pawns on d5, f5, etc are indefensible anyway, so Bogoljubow desperadoes them. Resigning would have been an equally logical course of action.

**46 ... gxf6 47 Rd2 Qe2 48 Rxe2 fxe2**



The third such position we have seen in this game!

**49 Kf2 exf1Q+ 50 Kxf1 Kg7 51 Kf2 Kf7 52 Ke3 Ke6 53 Ke4 d5+ 0-1**

A fabulous game, one of the most famously brilliant in the history of chess. It is also gratifying to see that the computer does not greatly change most of the received opinions on the game, unlike some other well-known brilliancies.

# Game 4

## Alekhine-Yates, London 1922

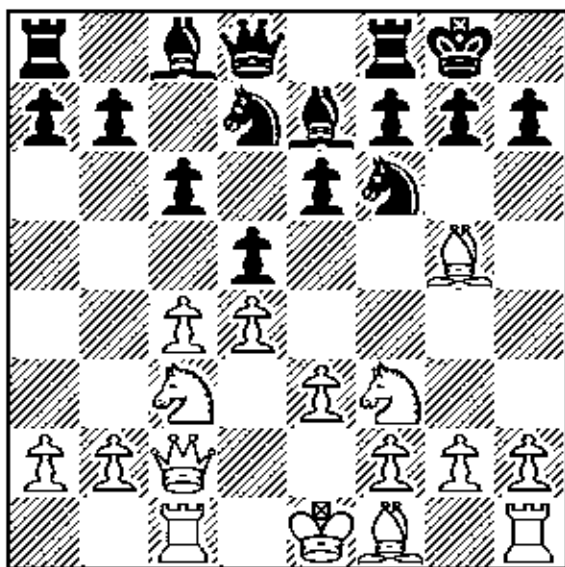
Game 4

A.Alekhine-F.Yates

London 1922

*Queen's Gambit Declined*

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 Nc3 Be7 5 Bg5 0-0 6 e3 Nbd7 7 Rc1 c6 8 Qc2



**Question:** That looks a little unusual.

**Answer:** Slightly, yes. The main line is 8 Bd3 dxc4 9 Bxc4 Nd5 etc. Alekhine's choice is part of the "battle for the tempo", which often sees White trying to avoid committing himself to Bd3 at once in this position. To that end, he sometimes plays Qc2, and also a2-a3 and even h2-h3, in the hope of extracting a micro-concession from Black, in the form of ... d5xc4, while the white bishop is still on f1.

**Question:** Seems reasonable – after all, “many a mickle makes a muckle”, as they say north of the border!

**Answer:** True, but in the first place, this particular mickle is pretty diminutive, and secondly, Black himself is not short of similar semi-useful waiting moves, such as ... Re8, ... a7-a6, etc. In practice, White rarely secures any real gain from these tempo games, but at least it breaks the monotony.

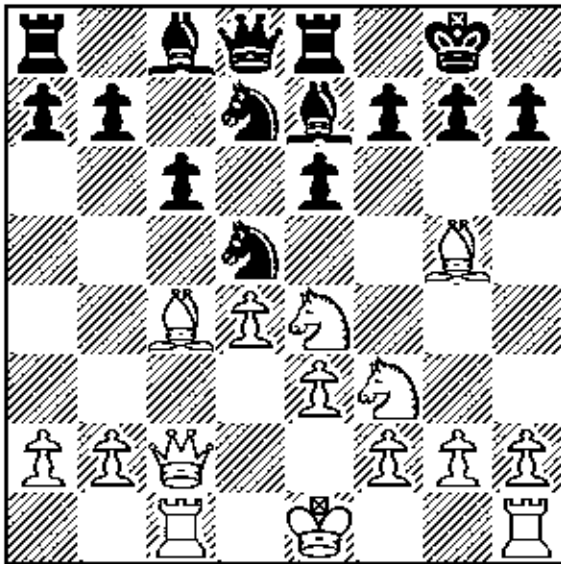
**8 ... Re8**

Like the proud Yorkshireman he was, Yates declines to give away even half a tempo.

**9 Bd3**

Abandoning the games and going back into more normal lines.

**9 ... dxc4 10 Bxc4 Nd5 11 Ne4**



**Question:** Isn't that also unusual?

**Answer:** Yes, although in Alekhine's games, it was pretty much the main line in this and similar positions. He was always very fond of this idea, trying to retain more pieces on the board than after the routine exchange 11 Bxe7. With best defence, the move does not confer any advantage, but it is a useful extra resource, which often bore fruit in his games.

**11 ... f5?**

As it does here! This really is a pretty vile-looking lunge, which creates serious weaknesses on the dark squares in Black's position. It is all the more reprehensible that it should come in a position where Black is already committed to exchanging off dark-squared bishops.

**12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Ned2 b5**

Alekhine condemned this as a further error, whereas the computer actually thinks it

is best.

**Question:** So what did Alekhine recommend?

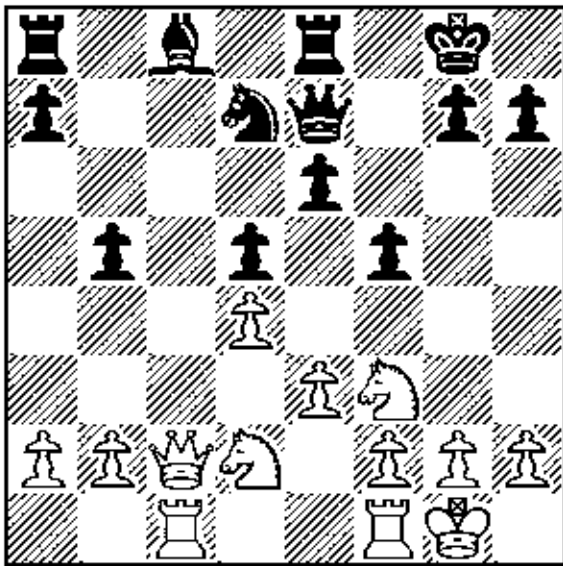
**Answer:** He gave 13 ... N5b6 14 Bd3 g6 “preparing e5”, but this looks very suspicious, as Black is behind in development and has a weak king. Sure enough, after the further moves 15 0-0 e5 16 e4!, White has an obvious advantage and Black still has to solve his development problems.

**14 Bxd5**

**Question:** That is a surprise? Why get rid of Black’s backward c-pawn?

**Answer:** Alekhine is trading advantages. He decides that he will eliminate the backward pawn, but in return will be able to seize control of the open c-file. He was probably influenced by the fact that after 14 Bb3 Bb7 15 0-0 Rac8, Black is ready to advance ... c6-c5, which cannot really be stopped. The position remains murky after a line such as 16 e4 Nb4 17 Qc3 c5, when it is not clear that White has any objective advantage. Alekhine’s course is simpler and secures a safe edge.

**14 ... cxd5 15 0-0**



**Question:** So you think White is better here?

**Answer:** Yes, he certainly has a small, but enduring edge. He controls the c-file and the c5-square is weak, towards which White will direct his knights. In addition, the black bishop on c8, traditionally something of a problem piece in the orthodox QGD, is

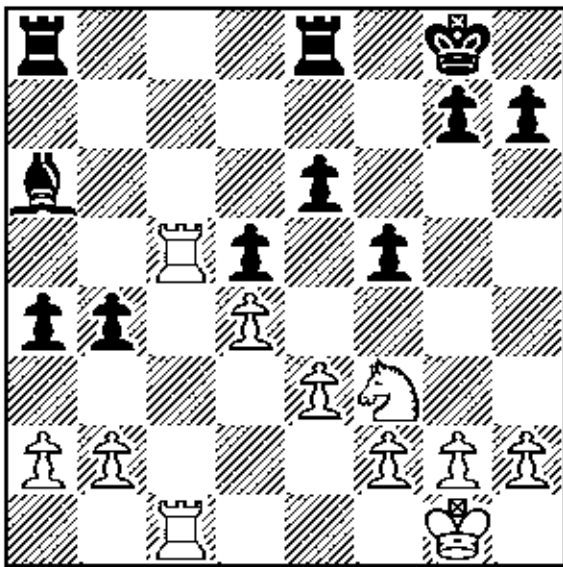
ineffective, hampered by the abundance of black pawns on light squares.

**15 ... a5**

**Question:** Why not just 15 ... Bb7, intending to contest the c-file by bringing a rook to c8?

**Answer:** Then after 16 Qc7 Nb6 17 Rc5, Black's position is quite difficult; e.g. 17 ... Qxc7 18 Rxc7 Rab8 19 Rfc1 Rec8 20 R1c5 a6 21 Nb3 and the prospect of the knight landing on a5 is horrible for Black, while 21 ... Nc4? drops a piece to the tactic 22 Rxb7!.

**16 Nb3 a4 17 Nc5 Nxc5 18 Qxc5 Qxc5 19 Rxc5 b4 20 Rfc1 Ba6**



**Question:** Black seems to have eased his position somewhat – he has exchanged a few pieces and dug his bishop out of mothballs.

**Answer:** True, but his game remains depressingly passive. The exchange of knights has left White with the classic good knight vs. bad bishop scenario.

**Question:** Why is the black bishop “bad”? It looks quite active.

**Answer:** Actually, if you look closer, what is it really doing? It controls the empty diagonal a6-f1, but that is all. By contrast, the white knight, when it lands on e5, will be hugely influential over almost the whole board. In addition, Black's advanced queenside pawns can prove vulnerable and his dark squares stink. This is actually a very unpleasant position for Black, possibly objectively even lost.

**21 Ne5**

This also stops the threat of 21 ... Bc4.

**21 ... Reb8**

**Question:** I don't understand that at all. Why didn't Black challenge the c-file?

**Answer:** As Alekhine himself points out, after 21 ... Rec8 White can simply win a pawn at once: 22 Rxc8+ Rxc8 23 Rxc8+ Bxc8 24 Nc6, with the twin threats of 25 Ne7+ and 25 Nxb4. This is an illustration of what we said in the note to move 20, about the potential vulnerability of the advanced black queenside pawns.

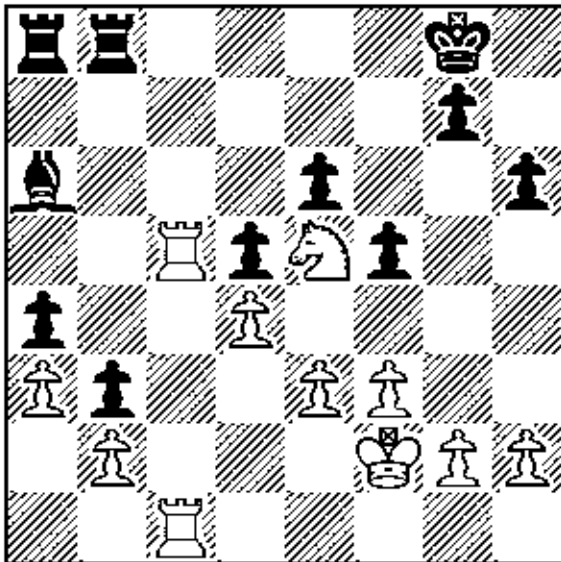
**22 f3**

White prepares his long-term plan of infiltrating with his king via the weakened central dark squares. The fact that Black is entirely passive makes White's task fairly simple, although, as we will see, Alekhine the great artist manages to find a highly attractive way to crown what might otherwise have seemed a rather routine technical process.

**22 ... b3 23 a3**

Exchanging on b3 would needlessly open the a-file, which Black might be able to use for counterplay (going after the b2-pawn, for example). The text keeps a lid on everything.

**23 ... h6 24 Kf2**



**24 ... Kh7**

**Question:** Now that he has got his pawn off the vulnerable b4-square, can't Black challenge the c-file?

**Answer:** That is a good thought, and one Alekhine does not mention. Nevertheless, after 24 ... Rc8, White can just continue 25 Rxc8+ Rxc8 26 Rxc8+ Bxc8 and now 27 Nd3 wins a pawn anyway, since Black does not have time to arrange the defence of both e6 and a4 – the knight will land on c5 next move and win one of them.

**25 h4 Rf8**

**Question:** Black seems to be coming rather quietly! If White intends to advance his king via f4 and e5, can't Black try to stop it with 25 ... g5, for example?

**Answer:** Again, a worthy thought, but this creates new weaknesses and White has several ways to win after that. One of the simplest is 26 Rc7+ Kg8 27 hxg5 hxg5 28 Nf7 and the black g-pawn drops off; 26 hxg5 hxg5 27 Rh1+ Kg8 28 Rh5 is also very strong.

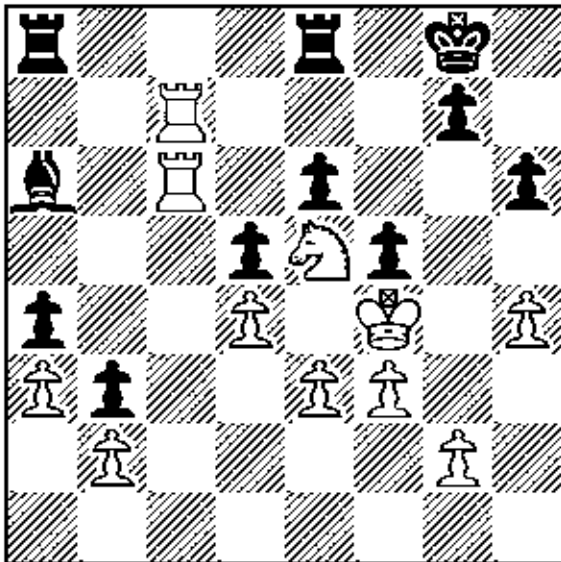
**26 Kg3 Rfb8**

Black is reduced to aimless shuffling, just waiting for the axe to descend on his outstretched neck. Sadly, as we have seen, attempts to play more actively are also doomed, so Yates just asks Alekhine how precisely he intends to break through.

**27 Rc7 Bb5 28 R1c5 Ba6 29 R5c6 Re8 30 Kf4**

White gradually tightens his grip to the maximum.

**30 ... Kg8**



**31 h5**

A nice little move, putting an end to any thought of ... g7-g5 and securing an outpost on g6 for the white knight.

**31 ... Bf1 32 g3 Ba6 33 Rf7**



Now White prepares to double rooks on the seventh rank. Black cannot oppose this, since moving the e8-rook to either f8 or c8 drops the e6-pawn, while moving the a-rook to c8 loses the bishop.

**33 ... Kh7 34 Rcc7 Rg8 35 Nd7!**

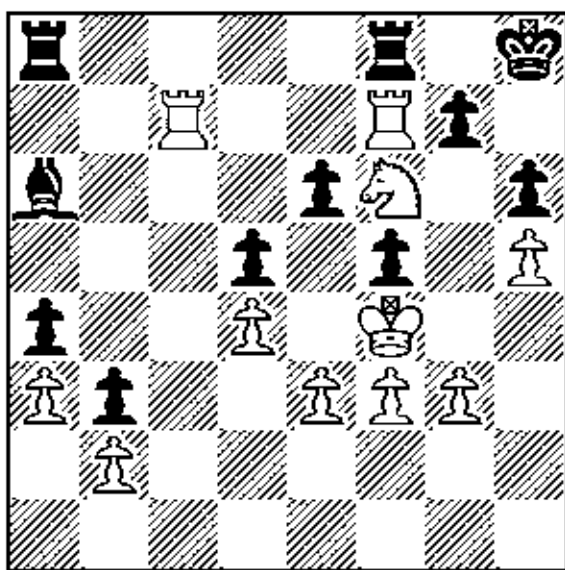
The start of the final combination. 36 Nf6+ is the immediate threat.

**35 ... Kh8 36 Nf6**

Even though not check, this move is playable anyway, since taking the knight allows mate on h7.

**36 ... Rgf8**

Putting the rook anywhere else allows simply 37 Rxd7. The text move is directed against that threat, due to the X-ray attack on f6.



**Puzzle:** Can you find a nice win here?

**37 Rxd7! Rxf6 38 Ke5!! 1-0**

A beautiful and piquant finish. The only way to save the rook on f6 is to put it or its colleague on f8, but that allows mate in two with 39 Rh7+ Kg8 40 Rcg7 mate.

## Game 5

# Tarrasch-Alekhine, Bad Pistyan 1922

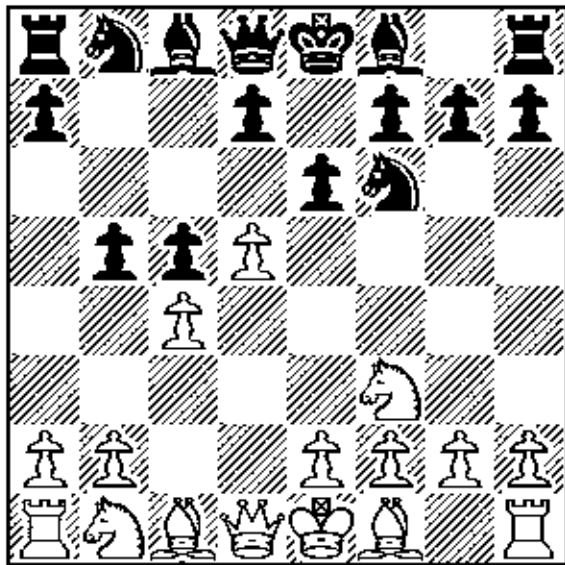
Game 5

S.Tarrasch-A.Alekhine

Bad Pistyan 1922

*Blumenfeld Gambit*

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5



The characteristic move of the Blumenfeld Gambit, a nowadays relatively rare forerunner of the Benko Gambit. Black aims to sacrifice his b-pawn, in order to gain a significant central pawn preponderance.

**5 dxe6**

**Question:** Is White forced to accept the gambit?

**Answer:** No, and for many years (partly as a result of this game) it was regarded as possibly unwise to do so. 5 Bg5 was considered the strongest move for a long time, but things are not so straightforward after the reply 5 ... Qa5+; e.g. 6 Nc3 Ne4 7 Bd2 Nxd2 8 Qxd2 b4 with an unclear position. In the meantime, White's follow-up after accepting the gambit pawn has been improved, so that taking on e6 is nowadays considered to be

an equally valid approach.

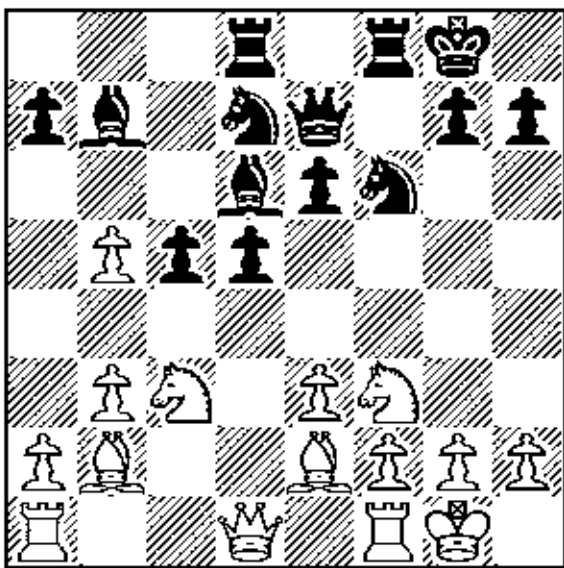
**5 ... fxe6 6 cxb5 d5!?**

This is certainly a very natural follow-up, but in view of the possibility mentioned in the next note, 6 ... Bb7 is regarded as slightly more accurate today.

**7 e3?!**

White's real problem in this game is that he plays far too passively after accepting the gambit pawn, and soon finds himself with a very unpleasant position. As the game shows, in the event of routine development by White, Black's powerful pawn centre gives him excellent compensation, so White needs to adopt more specific and radical measures. Modern theory prefers 7 Nc3! Bb7 8 e4!, trying to return the pawn to disrupt Black's development. After 8 ... d4 9 e5, White perhaps has a small advantage, but this is all the product of many years of subsequent theoretical investigation. At the time this game was played, the Blumenfeld Gambit was barely known, so one should not be too severe in criticizing the players' handling of the opening.

**7 ... Bd6 8 Nc3 0-0 9 Be2 Bb7 10 b3 Nbd7 11 Bb2 Qe7 12 0-0 Rad8**



**Question:** So how do you assess this position?

**Answer:** The computer is relatively optimistic for White, but I am less sanguine. It is true that White has a healthy extra pawn, but it is hard to see too much else to get excited about. Black has a very powerful pawn centre and beautifully developed pieces. It is difficult to see how White can oppose the simple plan of ... e6-e5-e4, when his key defensive knight is driven from f3, and Black will be free to develop a strong attack on the white king. This is indeed the scenario that unfolds as the game develops.

**13 Qc2 e5 14 Rfe1!?**

**Question:** White seems to be playing very calmly!

**Answer:** Yes, and his move has a definite defensive plan attached to it, as we will see. He intends to reroute his knight via d2-f1, from where it will defend the h2-square.

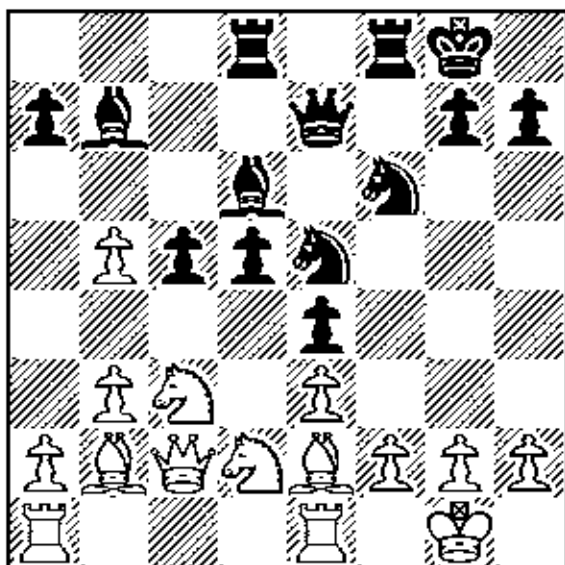
**Question:** Didn't Larsen once claim that "with a knight on f1, you never get mated"?

**Answer:** Such a quote was attributed to him, yes! Sadly, like all such rules of thumb, it has its exceptions ...

**Question:** I sense you do not really approve of Tarrasch's play. So what should White do?

**Answer:** Actually, I disapprove of Tarrasch's position more than his play. It is really quite hard to suggest a really convincing improvement for White. The computer advocates 14 Na4 e4 15 Ng5, but this does not look hugely convincing to me, and after 15 ... Ne5, Black can continue to build up on the kingside. If pressed for a recommendation, I would have to say that I really don't think White should start from this position.

14 ... e4 15 Nd2 Ne5



16 Nd1

**Question:** That looks rather retrograde.

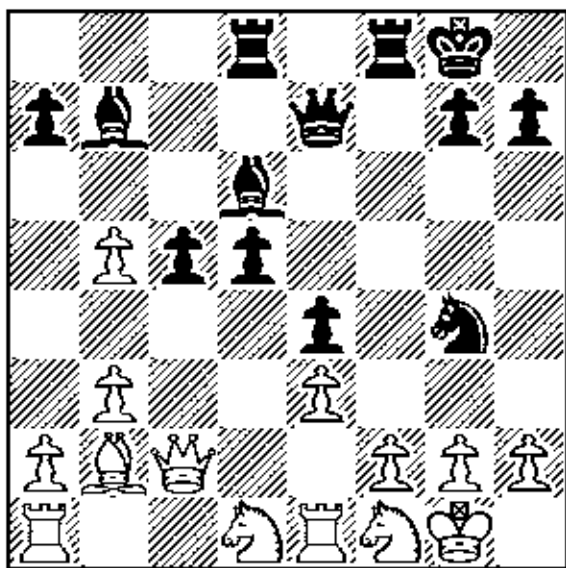
**Answer:** It does, but it is part of Tarrasch's logically thought-out defensive formation. He intends that one knight should defend f2 and the other h2.

**Question:** In view of Black's next move, perhaps White should consider 16 h3, taking the square g4 from the black knights?

**Answer:** That is the computer's preference too, and it may objectively be slightly better, though it does not really solve the longer-term problem. Black continues with something like 16 ... Ng6 and carries on building up the kingside attack.

There is one other factor here: Tarrasch was a disciple of Steinitz and his classical theory of defence, which held that weakening pawn moves such as h2-h3 should always be avoided if humanly possible. Steinitz was always happy to contort himself into knots, putting pieces on the back row, if it avoided permanent long-term pawn moves in front of his king, and I suspect Tarrasch too would rather have cut his own hand off than play h2-h3, unless absolutely unavoidable. As we will see, his defensive scheme was very well thought-out, and only Alekhine's outstanding attacking play revealed its seamy side.

**16 ... Nfg4 17 Bxg4 Nxg4 18 Nf1**



White has reached the sort of position he envisaged. His seemingly vulnerable f2- and h2-squares are securely defended, and it is not obvious how Black can proceed. Alekhine supplies a very logical answer.

**Question:** Which is?

**Answer:** Well, let's be logical ourselves about this. We know that, as a general principle, one should try to attack a position at its least well-defended point. So ask yourself: which square in front of the white king is least well defended?

**Question:** I guess g2.

**Answer:** Precisely. So ...

**18 ... Qg5!**

Alekhine takes aim at the g2-square. Now he intends to increase the pressure against that point further by means of ... Nh6-f5-h4.

**Question:** But that is surely quite slow, isn't it?

**Answer:** Maybe, but White's problem is that he lacks any activity, so it is hard to utilize this time effectively.

**19 h3**

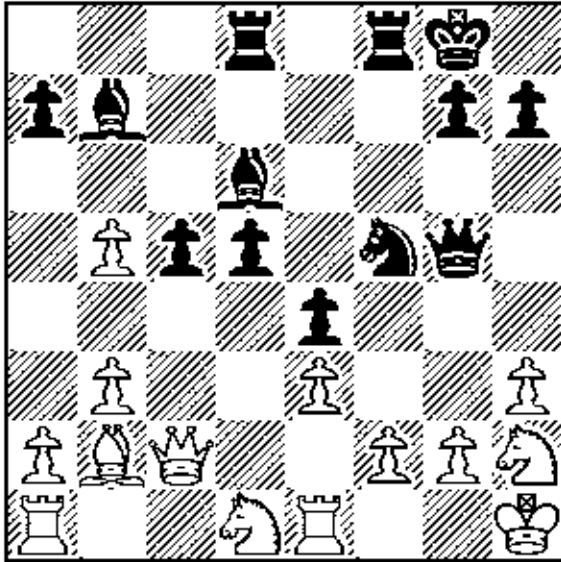
**Question:** So he ends up playing this weakening move after all!

I thought you said he would rather cut off his hand than do this?

**Answer:** I said he would rather cut off his hand than play the move unless absolutely necessary. The trouble now is that, in view of the aforementioned threat of bringing the black knight round to h4, White needs to regroup, in order to be able to defend g2. He plans to bring his rook to g1, and to do that, he needs to move the f1-knight to h2 and put his king on h1.

**19 ... Nh6 20 Kh1 Nf5 21 Nh2**

Now 21 ... Nh4 can be answered by 22 Rg1, continuing to hold his lines. Instead, Alekhine finds a new blow, this time in the centre.



**21 ... d4! 22 Bc1?!**

This should lose at once, though it is impossible to suggest any decent alternative. After 22 exd4, Alekhine planned 22 ... e3! with the threat of mate on g2. Then 23 Nxe3 (against 23 Rg1 Alekhine intended the lovely 23 ... Qg3 which does indeed win, although the silicon spoilsport points out that the prosaic 23 ... exf2 mates in seven!) 23 ... Nxe3 24 fxe3 Qg3 wins: 25 Nf1 (or 25 Ng4 h5) 25 ... Rxf1+ 26 Rxf1 Qh2 mate. It says much that the computer's best offer is the bizarre-looking 22 Rb1.

**22 ... d3**

Strictly speaking, 22 ... Ng3+ 23 Kg1 d3 was even stronger: 24 Qb2 (or 24 Qc4+ Bd5 25 Qa4 Qe5) 24 ... Ne2+ 25 Kh1 (25 Rxe2 dxe2 26 Qxe2 Qe5 annexes another large lump) 25 ... Be5 and White can just resign. Alekhine's move is less incisive, but does not spoil anything.

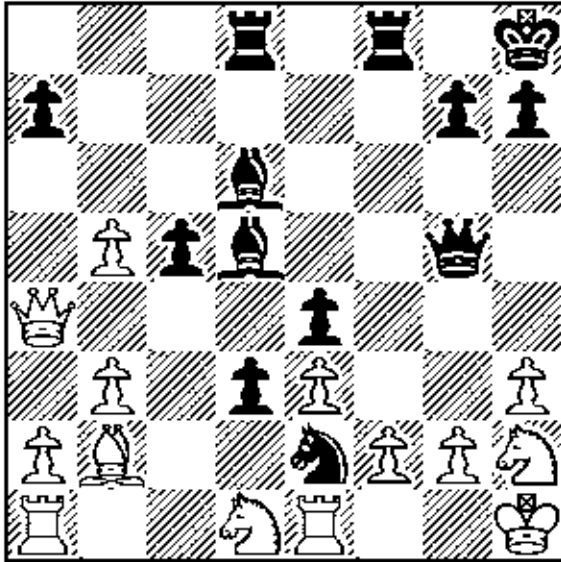
**23 Qc4+**

This is the difference from the previous variation: because Black does not have the tempo-gaining ... Bd5, White at least has time to shore up the a1-e5 diagonal, thus avoiding material losses after a later ... Qe5 by Black.

**23 ... Kh8 24 Bb2 Ng3+! 25 Kg1**

25 fxe3 Qxe3 is again decisive.

**25 ... Bd5 26 Qa4 Ne2+ 27 Kh1**



27 ... Rf7

**Question:** Is he really bothered about defending the a-pawn?

**Answer:** I agree it is rather sadistic, but why complicate things? White has no other counterplay, so Alekhine decides not to bother calculating whether Qxa7 will result in the b5-pawn becoming any sort of problem.

**28 Qa6 h5**

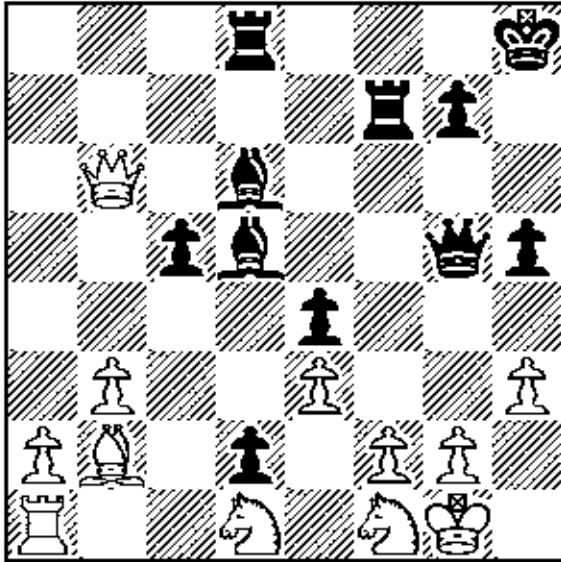
As will become clear, this move is preparing the tactic at move 33, although it is not the only way to win.

**29 b6 Ng3+!**

Alekhine claims that 29 ... axb6 30 Rxe2 would have given White some defensive chances, while the computer points out that this is not really the case due to 30 ... Ra8! 31 Qb5 Ra5 32 Qe8+ Rf8 and White is lost. Even so, the text move is perfectly adequate and had already been calculated out to a win.

**30 Kg1 axb6 31 Qxb6 d2 32 Rf1 Nxf1 33 Nxf1**





Black has won the exchange, but the real point of his play is now made clear.

**33 ... Be6!**

Returning to the attack on g2, which White cannot parry.

**34 Kh1**

Alekhine himself gives the beautiful variation 34 Qc6 Rf3! 35 Qxe4 Bd5 36 Qa4 Qxg2+!! 37 Kxg2 Rg3+ 38 Kh2 Rg2+ 39 Kh1 Rh2+ 40 Kg1 Rh1 mate.

**34 ... Bxh3!**

The final blow. The white kingside is torn apart.

**35 gxh3 Rf3 36 Ng3 h4**

This was the point of Alekhine's 28th move, though in fact both 36 ... Bxg3 and 36 ... Qh4 also win.

**37 Bf6**

An ingenious, if inadequate attempt to confuse Black.

**37 ... Qxf6 38 Nxe4 Rxh3+ 0-1**

Since 39 Kg2 Qf3+ mates, and 39 Kg1 Bh2+ wins the queen.

A great game by Black, which shows the strength of a pawn centre and how to build up a kingside attack under its influence.

# Game 6

## Alekhine-Rubinstein, Carlsbad 1923

Game 6

**A.Alekhine-A.Rubinstein**

Carlsbad 1923

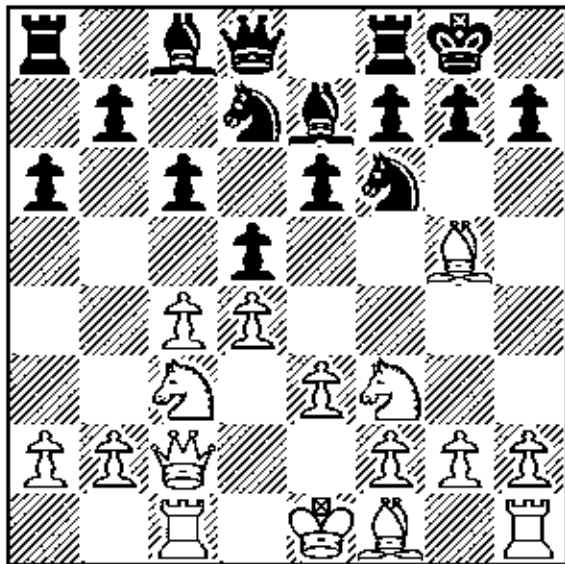
*Queen's Gambit Declined*

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 Be7 5 Bg5 Nbd7 6 e3 0-0 7 Rc1 c6 8 Qc2**

Once again, Alekhine employs this tempo-fighting move, which we discussed in Game 4.

**8 ... a6**

In the aforementioned game Alekhine-Yates, the British master preferred 8 ... Re8. Alekhine himself praised the text as strongest and employed it against Grünfeld in the next game.



**9 a4?!**

**Question:** You don't like this move?

**Answer:** Not really. Although it radically stops Black advancing ... b7-b5, it weakens the white queenside, especially the square b4, and this seems to me more

important.

**Question:** So what should White play?

**Answer:** I am not convinced that he has any means of securing a real advantage, but 9 cxd5 strikes me as best, when 9 ... exd5 10 Bd3 reaches a kind of Exchange Variation. Admittedly, 9 ... Nxd5 must also be considered, but 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 11 Nxd5 exd5 12 Bd3 should give White a micro-plus.

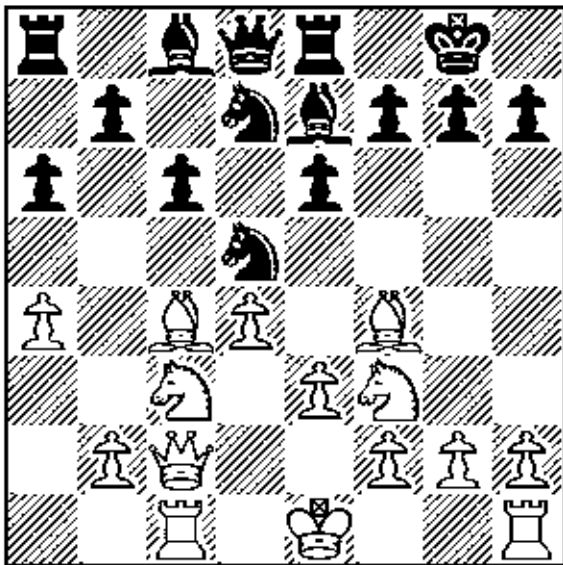
**9 ... Re8**

Here 9 ... Ne4 was Alekhine's recommendation, though it seems that White can still claim a little something after 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 11 Bd3 Nxc3 12 Qxc3 dxc4 13 Bxc4.

**10 Bd3**

After the customary fencing for tempo, we return to typical channels.

**10 ... dxc4 11 Bxc4 Nd5 12 Bf4!?**



**Question:** Wow, that is a surprise!

**Answer:** Yes, it is a relatively unusual way to treat the position. Alekhine was quite proud of the idea and awarded it an exclamation mark, with which Kasparov agrees, although the computer is less impressed.

**Question:** What is the point? White gives up the two bishops and gets his pawns doubled, so it looks a strange choice.

**Answer:** True, but he also gains in development, and the transfer of the pawn from

e3 to f4 gives White enhanced control of the centre, especially the e5-square and the e-file generally. Such ideas have become quite common in other QGD lines, notably those with the bishop being developed to f4, rather than g5. It is a tribute to Alekhine that his positional idea should have proved to have such longevity.

**12 ... Nxf4**

Pretty much obligatory, else the bishop may retreat to g3, leaving Black with a cramped position and still needing to solve his development problems.

**13 exf4 c5**

This move is part of a specific tactical exercise, aiming at removing the f4-pawn and thus weakening White's central grip. In itself, this is a commendable idea, but as Alekhine himself points out, it involves opening the position when Black is behind in development. Instead, Kasparov gives 13 ... Nb6 14 Bd3 with a slight advantage to White.

**Question:** Why is that? After all, Black has two bishops.

**Answer:** Yes, but they're not very active, especially the light-squared bishop, the traditional QGD problem child. It is true that Black's position is solid and contains no weaknesses, but White's extra space and central control give him some initiative – he can castle, put his knight on e5 and try to develop a kingside offensive.

**14 dxc5**

Practically forced, since 14 0-0 cxd4 15 Nxd4 Nb6 is very comfortable for Black.

**14 ... Qc7**

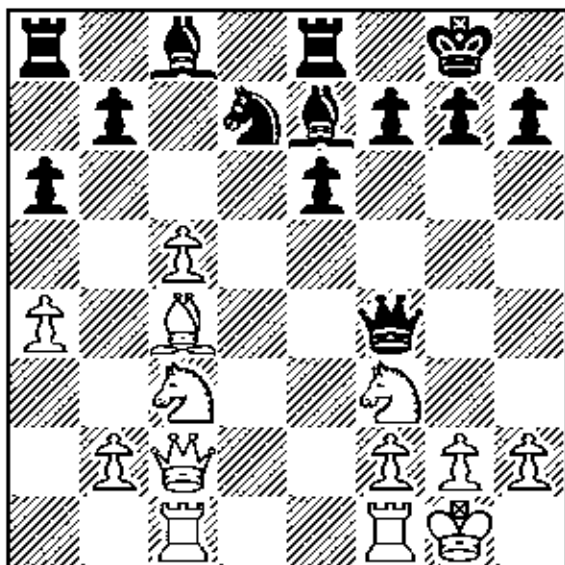
This is the point of Black's idea. Rather than recapturing on c5, he attacks the f4-pawn, which White cannot really defend.

**15 0-0**

**Question:** If the f4-pawn is so important, why can't White just defend it?

**Answer:** The problem with 15 g3?! is that Black has 15 ... Qc6! 16 Be2 e5!, breaking out, exploiting the weaknesses down the long light a8-h1 diagonal.

**15 ... Qxf4**



**Question:** So what is going on here? It looks as though Black is doing well.

**Answer:** It does, and Rubinstein must have been happy with his position. He has regained his pawn, and the white c5-pawn is hard to defend, since b2-b4 can always be undermined by the ... a6-a5 thrust (incidentally highlighting the weakening effect of White's 9th move). Furthermore, Black has the bishop pair, which Rubinstein always adored.

**Question:** So is he better?

**Answer:** It turns out not, because his various pluses are offset by one minus – Black is behind in development. This is, of course, a temporary matter, so White must act quickly to exploit it before it disappears. When it comes to energetic exploitation of an initiative, there have been few players in chess history as adept as Alekhine, and he now gives a masterly demonstration.

**16 Ne4!**

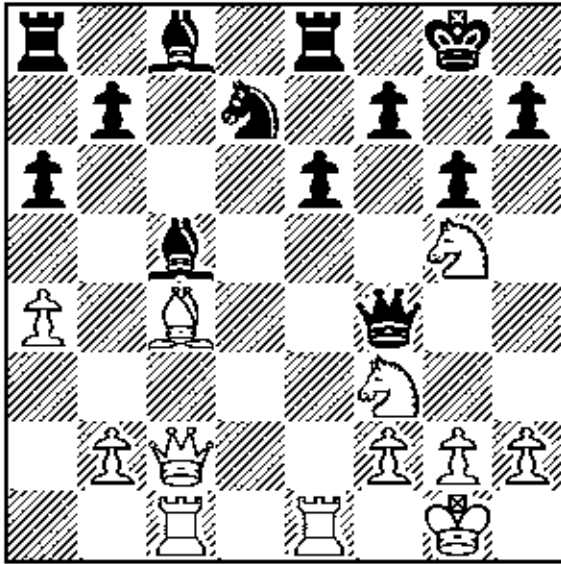
**Question:** Sacrificing a pawn?

**Answer:** Indeed!

**16 ... Nxc5**

**Question:** This is not forced, presumably?

**Answer:** No, although Alekhine thought it best. Against 16 ... Bxc5 he gave the following variation: 17 Neg5 g6 (not 17 ... Nf8? 18 Bd3, attacking both c5 and h7) 18 Rfe1



18 ... Nf6 19 g3 Qd6 20 Red1 Qe7 21 Ne5 “with an overwhelming attack for White.”

However, there are several points to make about this variation. Firstly, even the final position does not seem so convincing – after simply 21 ... Rf8, *Fritz* thinks White has absolutely nothing; e.g. 22 Bxe6 Bxf2+ 23 Qxf2 Bxe6 with equality.

Secondly, in Alekhine’s line, the immediate 20 Ne5! (instead of 20 Red1) is crushing, since 20 ... Rf8 is now refuted by 21 Nexf7! Rxf7 21 Bxe6, with the white rook still on the e-file.

Thirdly, back at move 18, the veteran Soviet GM Kotov, in his classic Russian two-volume work *Alekhine’s Chess Heritage* (a book, incidentally, which is crying out to be translated into English) pointed out that 18 ... Nf8 is stronger, while the computer prefers 18 ... Bf8, and even the pawn sacrifice 18 ... b5 19 axb5 axb5 20 Bxb5 Be7 is quite safe for Black.

Finally, even further back at move 16, there seems nothing wrong with declining the c5-pawn altogether, by means of the prophylactic 16 ... g6 (*Fritz*), when Black appears to have no real problems; for example, 17 b4 a5 18 bxa5 Rxa5 19 Bb5 Rd8 with equality.

**Question:** So are you saying Alekhine’s “initiative” was all just bluff?

**Answer:** Not quite. In all these lines, Black is no more than equal, so we can say that White’s initiative is enough to hold the balance, but it seems it should not have

yielded anything more than that against the best defence.

**17 Nxc5 Bxc5 18 Bd3**

Now White regains the pawn in a somewhat simplified position.

**18 ... b6 19 Bxh7+ Kh8?!**

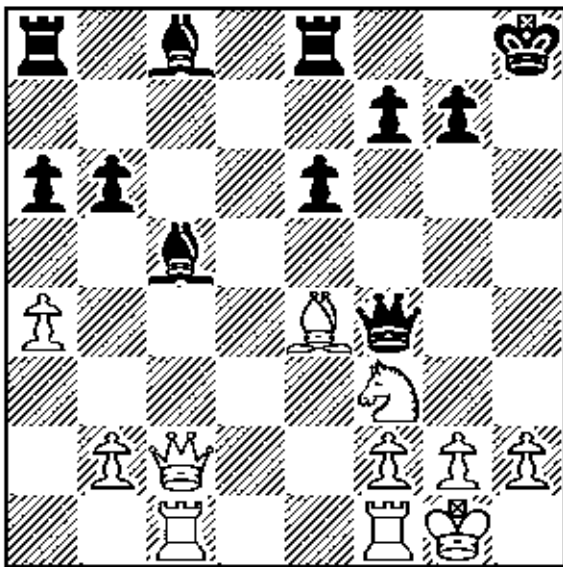
**Question:** Is this natural move wrong?

**Answer:** It is inaccurate, certainly. Alekhine went so far as to claim it was the decisive mistake; as we will see, things are not quite so clear.

**Question:** But after 19 ... Kf8 surely Black is in big trouble? His king looks more exposed there.

**Answer:** It may look like that, but the absence of a back rank threat means it is somewhat less vulnerable on f8 than h8. Even though White would retain some advantage, Alekhine thought “it would have been very difficult for White to show how he could win”. On the other hand, it must be said that *Fritz* is not impressed by Black’s position; after 20 g3 Qf6 (or 20 ... Qxf3 21 Be4) 21 Be4 Ra7 22 a5, it claims a clear advantage for White, with which I cannot disagree.

**20 Be4**



**20 ... Ra7**

Alekhine gives 20 ... Rb8 as a better chance, although he claims a decisive advantage anyway, as follows: 21 g3 Qf6 (or 21 ... Qd6 22 Rfd1 Qe7 23 Ne5 Qc7 24 Qc3, threatening 25 b4, and if 24 ... a5 then 25 Nc6 Rb7 26 Qf3 with the decisive threat of Qh5+) 22 b4 Bd6 (He must prevent 23 Qc7) 23 Rfd1 Qe7 (White is also clearly

better after 23 ... e5 24 Qd2 Be7 25 Rc6 Be6 26 Qb2 – *Fritz*) 24 Bc6 Rd8 25 Rd4 g6 26 Qd2 Kg7 27 Rd1 “and White wins”. However, the computer points out that in this final position, Black has the vicious trick 27 ... Bxb4! with equality.

Instead, *Fritz* recommends 27 Rh4! Qf6 (not 27 ... e5? 28 Qh6+ Kf6 29 Ng5 and wins – Kasparov) 28 Rd1 Bc7 29 Qh6+ Kg8 30 Qh7+ Kf8 31 Qh8+ Qxh8 32 Rxb8+ Ke7 33 Rxd8 Bxd8 34 Re8+ Kd6 35 Rxd8+ Kxc6 36 Ne5+ Kc7 37 Nxf7 and White wins the ending.

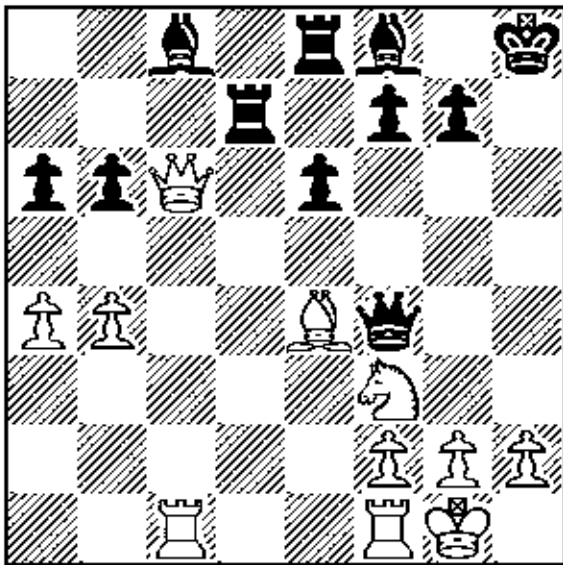
Furthermore, and strangely, the computer also shows that 20 ... Rb8 can be refuted by the same reply as in the game: 21 b4!. For example, 21 ... Bxb4 (or 21 ... Bd6 22 Rcd1 Bd7 23 Rd4) 22 g3 Qd6 (otherwise Black is vulnerable on the seventh rank; e.g. 22 ... Qf6 23 Qc7 or 22 ... Qg4 23 Ne5, followed by Qc7) 23 Bc6 Rf8 24 Qe4 e5 (or 24 ... f6 25 Rfd1 Qe7 26 Nh4) 25 Ng5 and wins.

The text move has the drawback of weakening the back rank, which Alekhine immediately exploits with his characteristic energy.

**21 b4! Bf8**

Not 21 ... Bxb4?? 22 Qxc8 and wins.

**22 Qc6 Rd7**



**Question:** That looks rather clumsy.

**Answer:** True, but Black has to meet the twin threats of 23 Qxe8 and 23 Qxb6, attacking a7. The only other candidate move, 22 ... Rae7, loses in a similar way to the game (except that White’s startling move below comes without the inclusion of Ng5).

**23 g3!**

In so many variations, this little pawn move proves to be a decisive prodding of the



black queen, which has to give up its attack on the e4-bishop.

**23 ... Qb8**

**Question:** Why retreat to the edge of the board?

23 ... Qd6 looks more sensible, challenging the white queen.

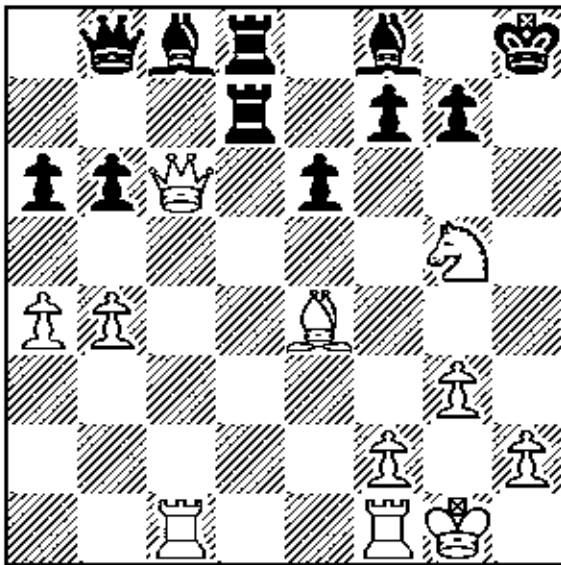
**Answer:** Alekhine analysed this and claimed two winning lines. The first was 24 Qc4 Kg8 25 Bc6 Rc7 26 Rfd1 Qe7 27 Qd3, but in this the computer points out that White only has a small advantage after 26 ... Rxc6 27 Qxc6 Qxc6 28 Rxc6 Bb7 29 Rc3 Bxb4 30 Rb3 a5.

Fortunately, Alekhine's other variation is more convincing: 24 Rfd1 Qxd1+ (Kotov suggested that 24 ... Qe7 could defend, but Kasparov dismisses this with 25 Ne5, while *Fritz* thinks 25 b5 is even stronger; either way, I don't see Black surviving) 25 Rxd1 Rxd1+ 26 Kg2 Bd7 27 Qxb6 Bxa4 28 Qxa6 Bd7 29 Ng5 Kg8 30 Qe2, winning.

**24 Ng5!**

Initiating the final combination. The threat is 25 Nxf7+.

**24 ... Red8**



**Puzzle:** Can you see a beautiful way to crown White's attack?

If you want a clue: White would like to bring his queen to the h-file as soon as possible, to give mate on h7 ...

**25 Bg6!! Qe5**

The point is that after 25 ... fxg6 there follows 26 Qg2! and Black has no defence to the check on h3. Alekhine intended 26 Qe4 instead, which is also decisive, but the

computer shows that 26 Qg2 is actually mate in eleven!

Rubinstein's move prevents the white queen transfer to the h-file, but now Black loses a decisive quantity of material and the rest is just mopping-up.

**26 Nxf7+ Rxf7 27 Bxf7 Qf5 28 Rfd1 Rxd1+ 29 Rxd1 Qxf7 30 Qxc8 Kh7 31 Qxa6 Qf3 32 Qd3+ 1-0**

A brilliant demonstration of energetic exploitation of the initiative, always a hallmark of Alekhine's play.

# Game 7

## Grünfeld-Alekhine, Carlsbad 1923

*Game 7*

**E.Grünfeld-A.Alekhine**

Carlsbad 1923

*Queen's Gambit Declined*

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 d5 4 Bg5 Be7 5 Nf3 Nbd7 6 e3 0-0 7 Rc1 c6 8 Qc2**

Once again, we reach this position, which we have already seen twice in this book (and will see again), with Alekhine as White. This time he takes the black side.

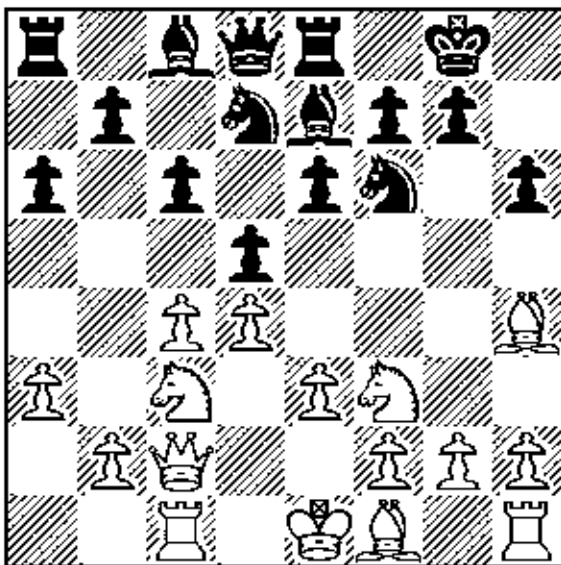
**8 ... a6**

8 ... Ne4 is a perfectly good move here, but Alekhine was probably not particularly keen to simplify and play to hold a draw.

**9 a3**

Against Rubinstein in the previous game, Alekhine himself played 9 a4?!, which weakens the queenside and is not especially to be recommended. Grünfeld's move continues the fight for the tempo, though as soon becomes clear, there is little to be gained by this, as Black is not himself short of useful waiting moves.

**9 ... h6 10 Bh4 Re8**



**11 Bd3**

**Question:** So he finally abandons the fight for the tempo?

**Answer:** Yes, there is really no further useful waiting move.

**Question:** What about 11 h3 here?

**Answer:** That is possible, but it is far from clear if it gains anything for White – it might turn out simply to weaken the kingside. Kasparov then gives the same continuation as in the game, 11 ... dxc4 12 Bxc4 b5 13 Ba2 c5, as fine for Black.

**11 ... dxc4 12 Bxc4 b5**

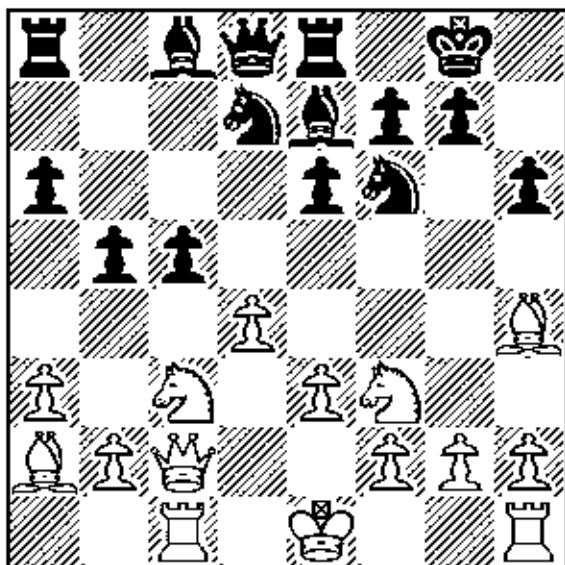
**Question:** I thought the usual follow-up was  
12 ... Nd5, trying to exchange some pieces?

**Answer:** It is, but if Black intends to play that way, he should dispense with the moves 9 ... h6 and 10 Bh4.

**Question:** Why?

**Answer:** Because now White can avoid the bishop exchange with 13 Bg3, keeping pieces on and retaining some advantage. Instead, Alekhine switches to a different plan: he intends to solve the problem of his c8-bishop by playing ... b7-b5, ... c6-c5 and ... Bb7, with a structure very reminiscent of a Queen's Gambit Accepted or Semi-Slav Meran.

**13 Ba2 c5**



### 14 Rd1?!

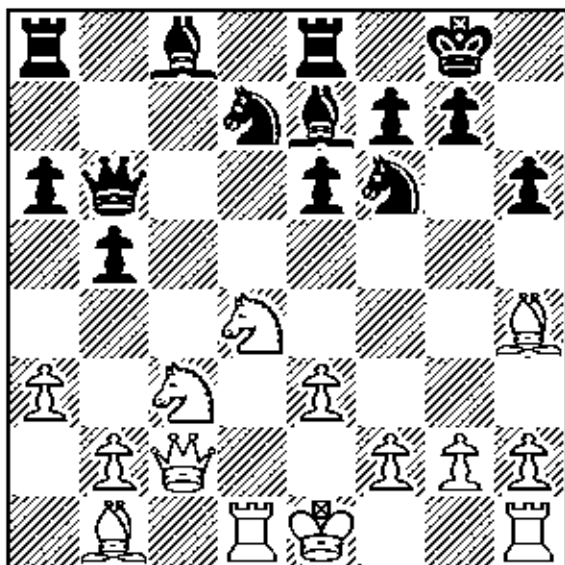
Instead of the text move, White probably does better with 14 0-0 cxd4 15 exd4, as both Réti and Grünfeld played later on in the same tournament.

**Question:** The main line QGD was clearly a “hot topic” at this time!

**Answer:** Indeed. The 1920s saw extensive theoretical development of these variations, culminating in the Alekhine-Capablanca match of 1927, where it featured in no fewer than 32 games out of 34!

Alekhine himself points out that 14 dxc5?! Nxc5 15 Bb1 is not especially good, since Black can ignore the apparent threat to come into h7. After 15 ... Bb7! 16 Bxf6 Bxf6 17 Qh7+ Kf8 18 Nxb5 (18 Qh8+ Ke7 achieves nothing at all), he gives 18 ... axb5 19 Rxc5 Bxb2, which he assesses as “completely in [Black’s] favour.” While that may be true, the computer’s 18 ... Rc8 19 Nc3 Qb6 looks even stronger.

**14 ... cxd4 15 Nxd4 Qb6 16 Bb1**



**Question:** So how do you assess this position? It looks as though Black has some problems, as there is a check on h7 hanging over him.

**Answer:** Indeed, and Alekhine implies that Grünfeld thought he was doing well here but had missed a tactical point.

**16 ... Bb7!**

**Question:** Er, I didn't think that was playable? It seems to allow 17 Ndx b5.

**Answer:** It looks that way, but this is presumably where Grünfeld realized what he had overlooked. Funnily enough, while it seems that 17 ... axb5 18 Rxd7 wins, even this is not clear, since *Fritz* demonstrates an advantage for Black after 18 ... Be4! 19 Nxe4 Nxd7. But the real problem is that Black does not need to take on b5 at all; instead, he has 17 ... Qc6!, defending d7 and so threatening to take on b5 with impunity. After the forced reply 18 Nd4, then 18 ... Qxg2 gives Black a near-decisive counter-attack.

**17 0-0 Rac8**

**Question:** So the upshot is that Black has completed his development without suffering any accidents?

**Answer:** Yes, and his position is already somewhat preferable. The white queen is vulnerable on c2 and Black's excellently-placed pieces will seize the initiative.

**18 Qd2**

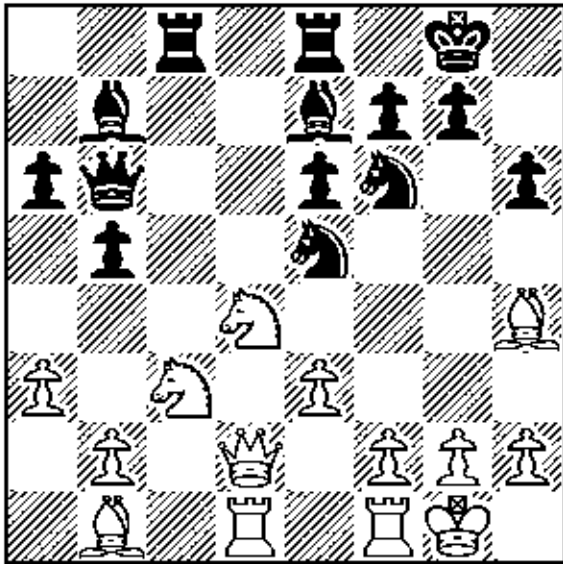
Both 18 ... Ne4 and 18 ... Be4 were unpleasant threats, so the white queen hurries to

leave the c-file.

**Question:** Isn't 18 Qe2 a more natural alternative?

**Answer:** Maybe, but it leaves c3 undefended; Alekhine then gives 18 ... Bxa3 19 Ncxb5 Bb4, winning a pawn.

**18 ... Ne5!**



The knight heads for the excellent c4-square which, as Alekhine points out, shows up the weakness of White's 9th move – with his pawn on a3, White can almost never kick the knight away with b2-b3.

**19 Bxf6**

**Question:** What is that for? Why give up the bishop?

**Answer:** White wants to remove the guard on e4, so he can exchange off the strong enemy bishop on b7. Alekhine describes this as “finely conceived, but insufficient to equalize”, as indeed is the case. Nevertheless, it is difficult to suggest anything better for White, whose position has become quite difficult already.

**19 ... Bxf6 20 Qc2**

**Question:** I thought White wanted to exchange bishops on e4?

**Answer:** He does, but it is not yet tactically possible: 20 Be4? Rxc3! 21 Bxb7 Rd3 wins. Grünfeld had evidently seen this, and the essence of his “fine conception” was the text move, which prepares the exchange.

20 ... g6

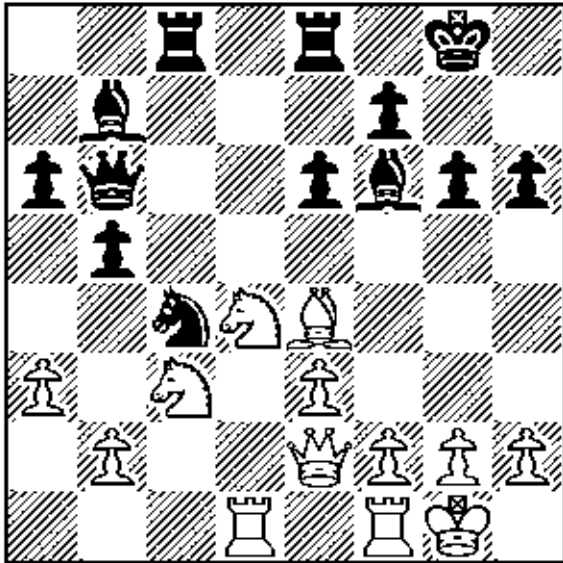
**Question:** Is this necessary? The check on h7 still does not look dangerous.

**Answer:** Correct, but the text is more about making g7 available for the bishop.

21 Qe2

Now White is ready to play Be4, exchanging off the raking prelate on b7.

21 ... Nc4 22 Be4



22 ... Bg7!

**Question:** Wait a moment! Isn't there a pawn hanging on a3 once again?

**Answer:** Ah, now you have really fallen into Grünfeld's "finely-conceived" idea!

22 ... Nxa3?! is met by the sneaky 23 Qf3!, attacking both black bishops. White wins the exchange after either 23 ... Bxe4 24 Nxe4 Bxd4 25 exd4, followed by Nf6+, or 23 ... Rxc3 24 bxc3 etc.

**Question:** Very sneaky indeed!

**Answer:** Yes. It is easy to underestimate these old-timers, such as Grünfeld. We tend to see them getting beaten up by the Capablancas and Alekhines, and assume they were not really very strong, but of course this is not the case. With no computers, databases, engines, Informants or opening books, they had to do everything by themselves, and were actually very talented, strong masters. It is just that the Capas and Alekhines were geniuses.



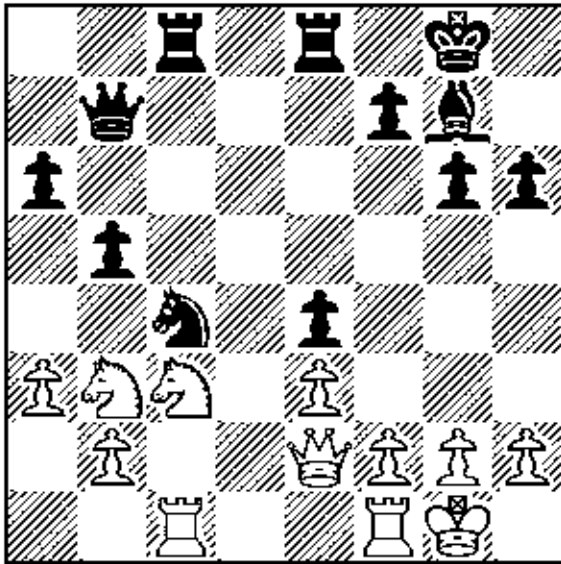
### 23 Bxb7 Qxb7

Thus, White has succeeded in getting the bishops off, but he has not solved all his problems. Now 24 ... Nxa3 is a real threat, hence White's next.

### 24 Rc1 e5

White is confronted with new woes. Black intends to push the pawn to e4 and then plant his knight on the even stronger outpost, d3.

### 25 Nb3 e4



Once again, ... Nxa3 is a threat.

### 26 Nd4 Red8

**Question:** Alekhine's play looks incredibly simple!

**Answer:** Yes, it does, but it is underpinned by enormous tactical penetration.

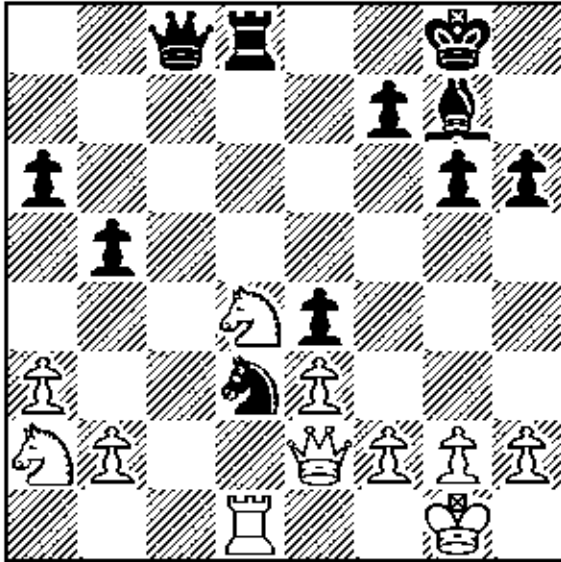
### 27 Rfd1 Ne5 28 Na2?!

Alekhine regards this as the decisive mistake, and says White should have played 28 f3, although 28 ... exf3 29 gxf3 Nc4 gives Black "attacking chances on both flanks and a probable win after a long and difficult struggle."

**Question:** It looks revolting!

**Answer:** I agree. Fritz actually thinks Grünfeld's choice was relatively best.

### 28 ... Nd3 29 Rxc8 Qxc8



### 30 f3?

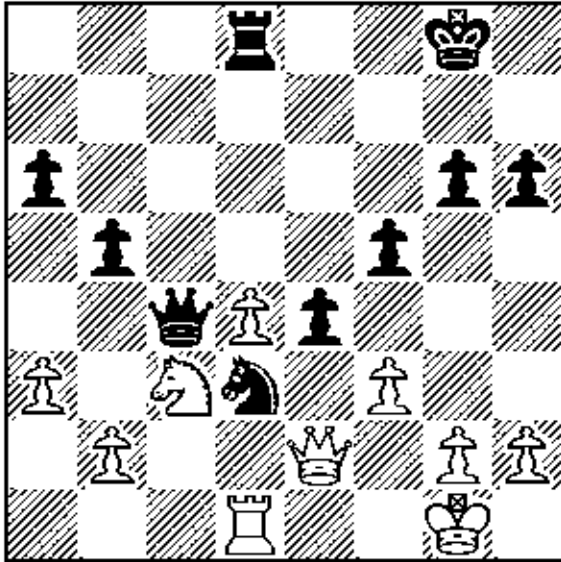
Now this move is definitely too late. Grünfeld was desperate to remove the huge enemy steed from d3, which is understandable, but he should first have inserted 30 Nc3 f5, and only then played 31 f3. Alekhine gives this line too and claims a win with the following long and beautiful variation: 31 ... Rxd4 32 exd4 Bxd4+ 33 Kf1 Nf4 34 Qd2 Qc4+ 35 Ne2 e3 36 Qe1 Bxb2 37 Rd8+ Kf7 38 Qd1 Bxa3 39 Qd7+ Be7 40 Qe8+ Kf6 41 Qh8+ Kg5 42 h4+ Kh5 43 g4+ fxg4 44 Qe5+ g5 and wins.

**Question:** Hmmm. I smell a rat. Didn't Larsen once say long variations are always wrong?

**Answer:** Indeed he did, and the great pragmatist Bent was right again in this case. Unfortunately, as Kotov noted even in the pre-computer era, there is a huge hole in this variation: 36 b3!! actually wins for White; e.g. 36 ... exd2 37 bxc4 Nxe2 38 Rxd2 Bc5 39 Kxe2 bxc4 40 a4 with a winning ending.

**Question:** So are we saying White is okay after 30 Nc3 f5 31 f3 - ?

**Answer:** That was Kotov's conclusion, but Kasparov (assisted no doubt by the computer) points out that just because Alekhine's alleged winning variation isn't winning, that does not mean White can be equal in this position. One only has to look at the last diagram to see that cannot be the case. Instead, Black must be more prosaic, and simply exchange on d4: 31 ... Bxd4 32 exd4 Qc4!.



Now 33 fxe4? loses trivially after 33 ... Qxd4+ 34 Kf1 (or 34 Kh1 Nf2+ etc) 34 ... fxe4, followed by a lethal rook check on f8. Instead, White has two other options:

a) Kasparov gives 33 d5 Qc5+ 34 Kf1 Nf4, “retaining an enormous advantage”; e.g. 35 Qe1 (or 35 Qd2 e3 36 Qe1 Qc4+ 37 Kg1 e2! 38 Rd2 Qc5+ 39 Kh1 Re8 and White is busted) 35 ... Nxd5 36 Nxd5 Rxd5 with a solid extra pawn.

b) 33 Qe3 is *Fritz*’s preference but even here 33 ... Nxb2 34 Rd2 Nd3 35 fxe4 fxe4 36 Qxe4 Qxd4+ 37 Qxd4 Rxd4 gives Black a solid extra pawn in the ending with excellent winning chances.

After the text move, the combination Alekhine wanted to use in the previous variation really does work.

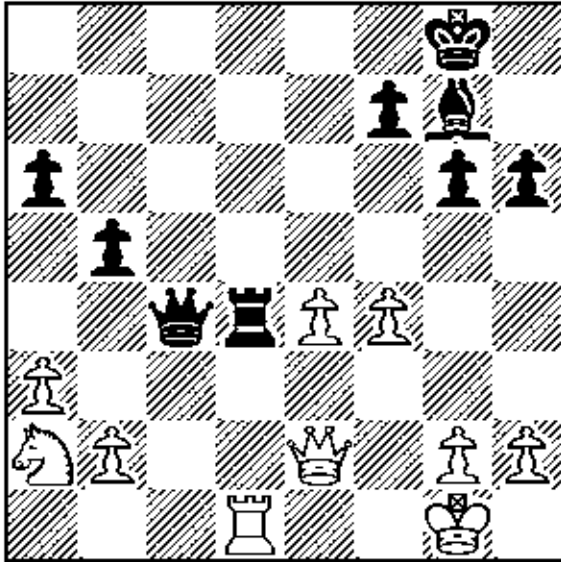
**30 ... Rxd4! 31 fxe4**

Desperation, since 31 exd4 Bxd4+ 32 Kf1 Nf4 33 Qxe4 (or 33 Qd2 Qc4+ 34 Ke1 e3) 33 ... Qc4+ 34 Ke1 Nxe2+ 35 Kd2 Be3+ wins the queen (Alekhine). In this line 33 Rc1 Qxc1+ 34 Nxc1 Nxe2 35 Nxe2 Bxb2 36 fxe4 (*Fritz*) is White’s best chance, but with an extra pawn and bishop vs. knight in an open position with pawns on both flanks, Black should win easily.

**31 ... Nf4!**

As always, Alekhine finishes his opponent off in the most brilliant and spectacular style.

**32 exf4 Qc4**



This deflection move is the point – and the a2-knight is hanging, so White cannot avoid the queen exchange on c4.

**33 Qxc4 Rxd1+ 34 Qf1 Bd4+ 0-1**

# Game 8

## Alekhine-Chajes, Carlsbad 1923

Game 8

A.Alekhine-O.Chajes

Carlsbad 1923

Queen's Gambit Declined

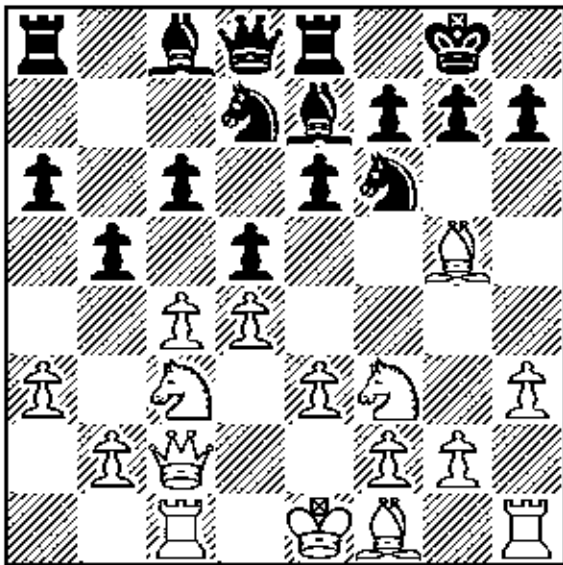
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 d5 4 Nc3 Nbd7 5 Bg5 Be7 6 e3 0-0 7 Rc1 c6 8 Qc2

We are becoming very familiar with this position!

8 ... a6 9 a3 Re8 10 h3

This time, Alekhine goes “all in” with the battle for tempo.

10 ... b5



**Question:** That looks unusual!

**Answer:** It is relatively unusual in this position, where Black usually goes for the exchange on c4. As an idea, ... b7-b5 is not necessarily so bad, but Alekhine points out that it would have made more sense on the previous move.

11 c5 Nh5

Alekhine's point is that, without the white pawn on h3, Black would have the good

reply 11 ... e5 12 dxe5 Ng4. As it is, this is now impossible.

**12 Bf4**

**Question:** That is a surprise.

**Answer:** It is very logical, because White needs to try to stop Black breaking with ... e6-e5, and this is the only way to do so. We saw in Game 6 that Alekhine is not afraid of the doubled pawn structure, after the exchange on f4, as the pawn controls e5 and allows pressure down the half-open e-file.

**12 ... Nxf4**

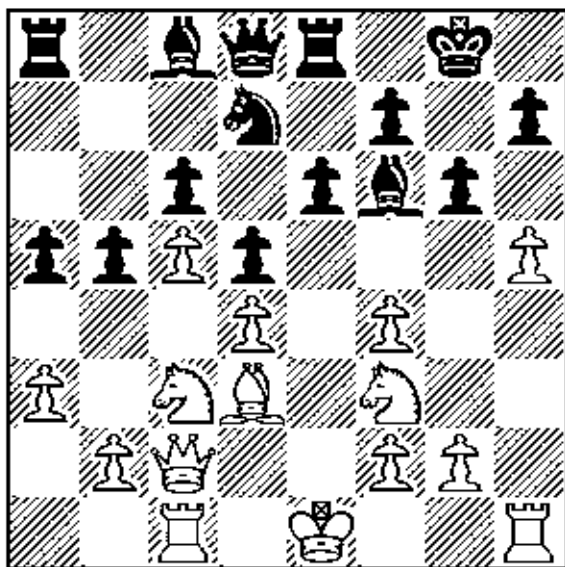
Black, in turn, has little choice other than this exchange, else the bishop will tuck itself in safety on h2.

**13 exf4 a5 14 Bd3 g6 15 h4!?**

**Question:** Going after the black king?

**Answer:** Actually, no. Alekhine says that would be an “illusion”. However, he anticipates a long manoeuvring struggle in this blocked position, and wants to be able to open the h-file at the appropriate moment.

**15 ... Bf6 16 h5**



**Question:** What is the assessment?

**Answer:** White has some advantage, thanks to his extra space and consequently greater manoeuvring room, but Black's position is very solid and a long battle lies

ahead.

**16 ... Nf8 17 g3 Ra7 18 Nd1!**

A nice move, intending to bring the knight to g4, when there would be a constant threat of h5xg6 and Nh6+, forcing off Black's important dark-squared bishop. Consequently, Chajes decides to stop this by putting his pawn on f5, but this is quite a sizeable concession.

**18 ... Bg7 19 Ne3 f5**

Now Black has weaknesses on e5 and e6, and while the latter is easily defended, his position is condemned to passivity. In fact, he has a lousy Stonewall structure, with a very bad queen's bishop.

**Question:** It still looks very solid and hard to storm.

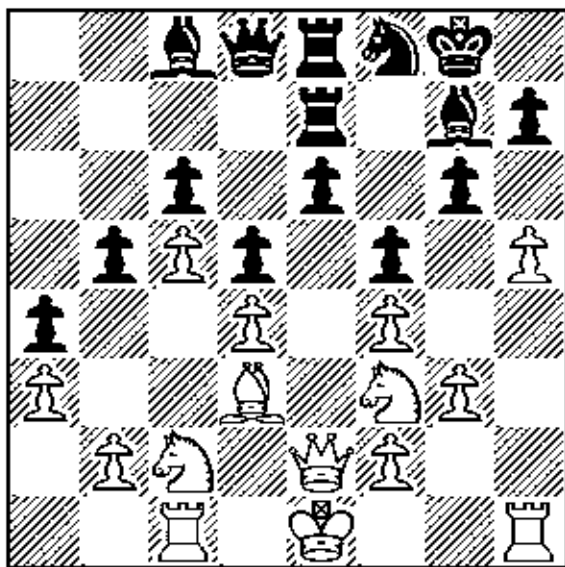
**Answer:** That is certainly true. White will need to manoeuvre patiently to break through, but he has a very nice, risk-free advantage, and can probe to his heart's content, with very little danger of any real counterplay from the opponent.

**20 Qe2 a4 21 Nc2!**

**Question:** What is that for?

**Answer:** White has the longer-term plan of bringing the knight to b4, attacking the weakness on c6, and then possibly transferring it to d3 and e5.

**21 ... Rae7**



**22 Kf1**

**Question:** Another move I would not have played!

**Answer:** It is quite logical. Alekhine explains that he wanted to get the king off the e-file, just in case Black should ever threaten some tactic, involving ... Bxd4 and then ... e6-e5.

**Question:** But that is not working anyway, is it?

**Answer:** Not at present, but it might become a factor later on. In such positions, where one side has complete control and time is not a factor, it makes sense to play such prophylactic measures, preventing any possibility of a tactical problem later on. Nothing is lost, and White saves himself having to calculate such tactical ideas at every move. Of course, having decided to get his king off the e-file, White prefers not to castle, because he wants to leave his rook on the h-file.

**22 ... Bf6 23 Ne5**

Here 23 Nb4 Bb7 24 Bb1 is the natural continuation of White's plan, and Alekhine says he may have been forced to return to that if Black had defended correctly, but the text gives Black a chance to go wrong – another useful psychological ploy in such positions.

**23 ... Bxe5?!**

And Chajes falls for it. This exchange gives up his important dark-squared bishop without reason. Alekhine says that Black should have played 23 ... Qc7, when he does in fact threaten to exchange on e5, since the e-file will now be blocked and the weaknesses at e6 and e5 covered. In that case, Alekhine would have retreated his knight back to f3 and returned to the previously-outlined plan of Nb4-d3, without really having lost anything.

**24 Qxe5 Qc7 25 Qf6!?**

**Question:** I expected 25 Qe3.

**Answer:** That was indeed the most natural move, and would have retained a clear advantage. However, Alekhine has a deep idea in mind. He wants to create a fresh weakness in Black's position.

**Question:** Where?

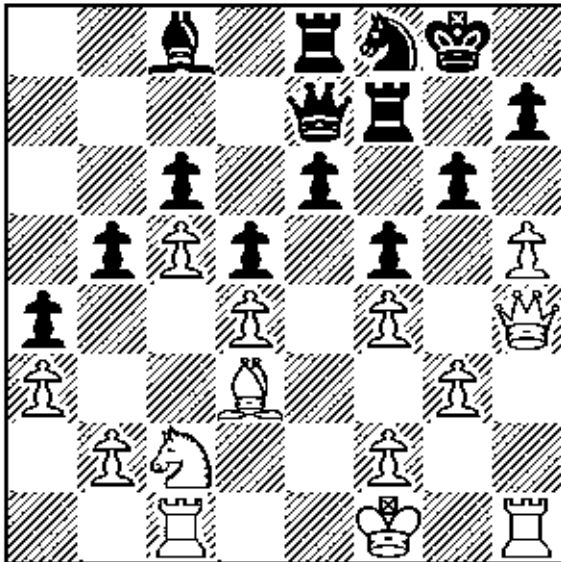
**Answer:** On h7!

**Question:** Eh? How?



*Answer:* Ah well, that will soon become clear.

**25 ... Rf7 26 Qh4 Qe7**



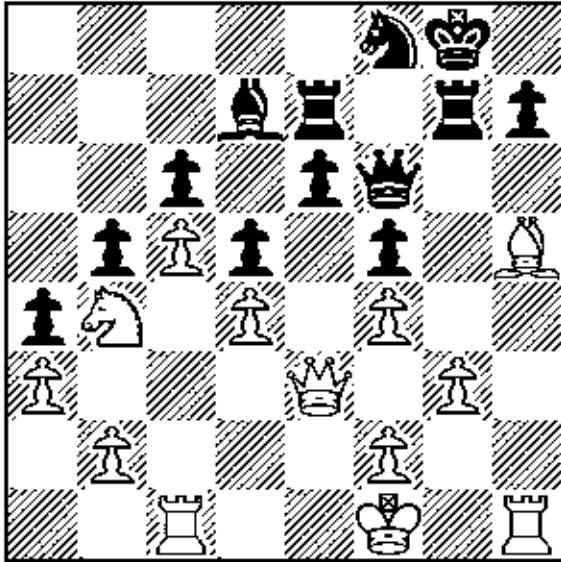
**27 hxg6**

Now we see how. The doubled white queen and rook on the h-file mean that Black cannot recapture on g6 with the pawn, so he has to take with the knight, leaving the weak pawn on h7!

*Question:* Hmmm. All very clever I suppose, but h7 doesn't look like a very severe weakness to me.

*Answer:* It is true that h7 is not so hard to defend, because it is so close to Black's camp. Nonetheless, every little helps. This is the essence of positional play, especially in such blocked, solid positions – one accumulates small advantages, even tiny ones, until in the end they add up to enough for a decisive strike. The pawn on h7 may never actually drop off, but it is one more thing for Black to worry about. One never knows which straw will be the one that breaks the camel's back.

**27 ... Nxg6 28 Qh5 Qf6 29 Be2 Rg7 30 Qf3 Nf8 31 Qe3 Ree7 32 Nb4 Bd7 33 Bh5!**



**Question:** What is going on here? You seem to have gone quiet all of a sudden!

**Answer:** The last few moves have seen a bit of regrouping by White. Alekhine explains at some length how this is the start of a grand strategic plan, embodying several stages. The immediate effect of his last move is to hamper the movement of Black's queen and rooks, but this is very temporary. To make real further progress, he needs something else.

**Question:** So what is that?

**Answer:** Basically, by employing classic two-front strategy. He will feint at a breakthrough on the queenside, and then, having diverted the defensive forces that way, he will aim to penetrate via the h-file. Stage one is to bring the white king over to the centre/queenside, so that, if the queens ever come off, there will be a threat to infiltrate with the king via b4-a5.

**Question:** This all seems incredibly long-winded and unlikely. How can White know that the game will run along the lines envisaged?

**Answer:** Well, to some extent, he doesn't; Alekhine emphasizes that the plan will have to be modified, according to how Black plays. But thanks to the relative lack of opposing counterplay, there is a good chance of the main outlines being realized.

**33 ... Ng6 34 Nd3**

Not immediately 34 Ke2?? due to 34 ... e5! and suddenly Black would be winning!

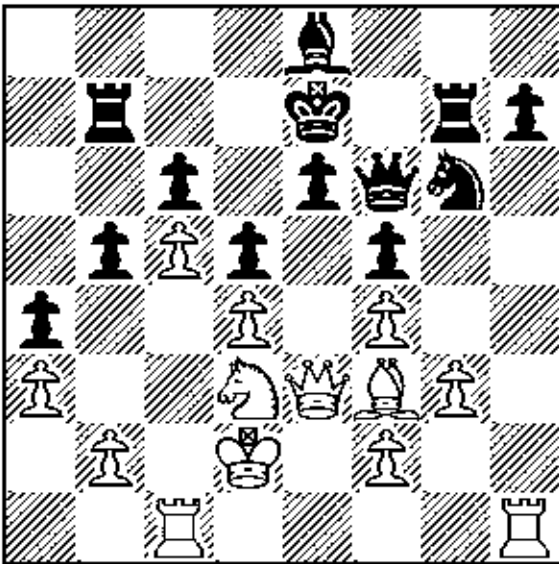
**Question:** Wow! Lightning from a clear sky. One would not think there could be danger for White in such a position.

**Answer:** There is always the potential for danger and one should never relax one's concentration. No matter how great one's strategic and positional play, it will all come to nothing if one's "cheapometer" is not functioning well!

**34 ... Be8 35 Ke2**

Now it is safe for the white king to begin his march.

**35 ... Kf8 36 Kd2 Rb7 37 Bf3 Ke7**



Black in turn centralizes his own king, getting away from any possible danger on the kingside, and "tracking" its opposite number to the other side of the board.

**Question:** That seems sensible enough.

**Answer:** Yes, but note that the king now no longer defends the h7-pawn, which is looking a little weaker than before.

**Question:** It is still adequately defended by other pieces.

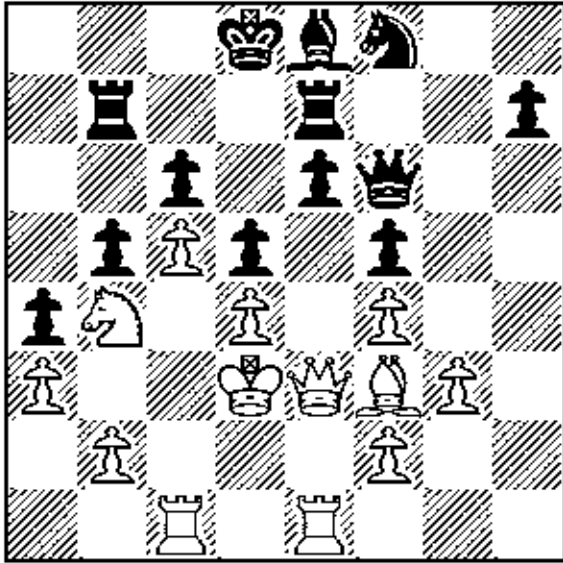
**Answer:** True, but those pieces are now tied down to its defence. As I said before, even if the h7-pawn never drops off, it is something else for Black to worry about. Maybe h7 will drop, maybe the white king will break through via a5-b6, maybe White will penetrate via e5-d6. Who knows which, if any, of these things will happen? But they are all things Black has to concern himself with. Eventually, the pressure of trying

to keep all these balls in the air is likely to prove too much.

**38 Rhe1 Nf8 39 Nb4 Kd8**

White's last move created a threat: 40 Bxd5 cxd5 41 Nxd5+.

**40 Kd3 Rge7**



**41 Qd2!**

Another apparently quiet manoeuvring move, but one which contains another concrete threat: White intends 42 Na6 and 43 Qa5+.

**41 ... Ra7**

**Question:** Black keeps spotting the threats!

**Answer:** He does, but imagine the strain on his nerves and his clock, having at every move to keep looking for all these possible tactics, and deciding which ones are real, which are not, etc. Defenders gradually get worn down by such things.

**42 Rh1 Rec7 43 Rh2**

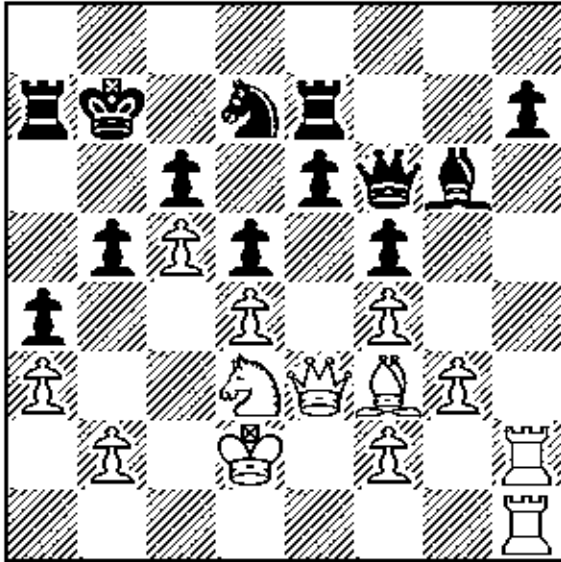
White gets ready to double rooks on the h-file.

**43 ... Bg6 44 Qe3 Kc8**

**Question:** Now what is Black doing?

**Answer:** He wants to free his rooks from the need to defend c6 and the queenside penetration on a5 and a6, so he brings his king over to cover these squares, in order that his rooks will be free to defend h7. But this all takes time, and White is gradually strengthening his position, in readiness for the final breakthrough.

**45 Rch1 Kb7 46 Kd2 Re7 47 Nd3 Nd7**



After a long campaign of preparation, diversionary tactics, and assembling the invasion forces, June 6th, 1944 dawns – D-Day! White’s first act in the invasion of “Normandy” (the black kingside) is to lay a “Mulberry Harbour” across the sea, and eliminate a key enemy defender:

**48 Bh5!**

This exchanges off the vital black bishop which defends h7, an essential step in the invasion.

**Question:** But if you take on g6, the h7-pawn will retake, and there will be no weak pawn to worry about anyway!

**Answer:** The pawn may no longer be on h7, but the square itself will still be there, and will be the landing area for the white pieces to enter Black’s camp.

**48 ... Ra8 49 Bxg6 hxg6 50 Rh7**

Establishing the initial bridgehead.

**50 ... Rae8 51 Ne5! Nf8**

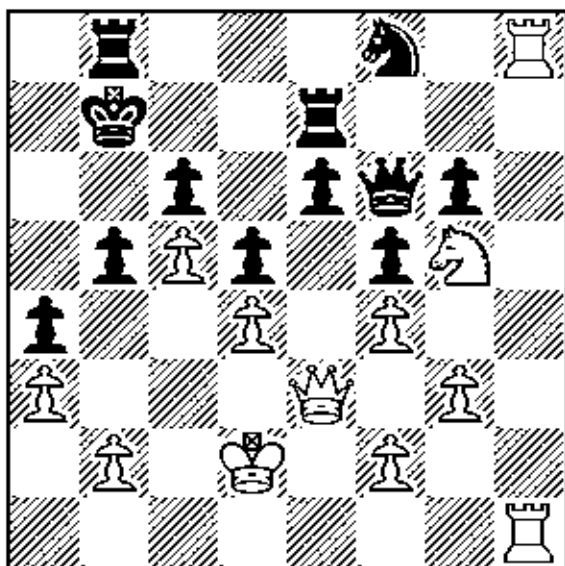
**Question:** I thought Black was always going to take on e5 in such situations, forcing White to block the e-file?

**Answer:** Yes, but White does not mind if he does this now, for tactical reasons. After 51 ... Nxe5 52 fxe5 Qf8 53 Qg5, the g6-pawn is indefensible.

**Question:** So what you are saying is that 50 moves of patient manoeuvring all come down to one lucky tactical break!

**Answer:** “Lucky” is not the word, but you are right that, in order to crown his great strategic build-up, White needs careful and accurate tactical insight. That is the nature of chess – converting an advantage almost always requires concrete tactical play at some point, which is why players who are poor at converting advantages are usually those who are poor at calculating variations.

**52 Rh8 Rg7 53 Nf3 Rb8 54 Ng5 Re7**



**55 Qe5!**

We mentioned back at move 33 that White’s long-term plan envisaged an eventual exchange of queens, and here it comes. Black’s queen is now a vital piece in defending his kingside and the weakness at e6, so White exchanges it off. This will also allow the white king to threaten to take a more active role in penetrating the enemy position, without having to worry about mating threats.

**55 ... Qxe5 56 fxe5 Ka8**

*MegaBase* has 56 ... Ra8 as Black’s move here (as do Skinner and Verhoeven), but Alekhine’s book gives the text, and the next move only makes sense with the king on a8.

**57 Rg8**

As any military commander will tell you, once the bridgehead has been established, the next stage is the breakout and widening of the front. Here, that means doubling rooks on the eighth rank.

**57 ... b4**

**Question:** What is this?

**Answer:** A desperate attempt to create counterplay. Black envisages something like

58 axb4 Re8 59 Rhh8 Rxb4 60 Rxf8 Rxb2+ 61 Ke3 Rxf8 62 Rxf8+ Kb7, when the passed a-pawn might give him some swindling chances, though even that should prove hopeless. However, White has no need to allow even that much hope to his opponent.

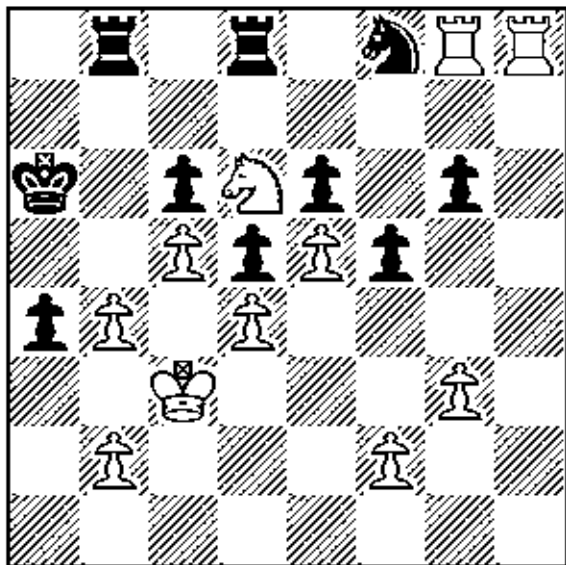
**58 Rhh8 Re8 59 axb4**

Now he can take the pawn in complete safety.

**59 ... Ka7 60 Kc3 Ka6 61 Nf7**

Here 61 Nh7 wins material, as does 61 Nxe6. Alekhine instead plays for mate.

**61 ... Rec8 62 Nd6 Rd8**



**63 Rh1! Nd7 64 Ra1 1-0**

A nice finish. Black has no good defence against the mate threat.

A really great example of patient, long-term manoeuvring, in a position where White had an obvious positional advantage and the opponent no counterplay, but which still required deep and careful play to force a breakthrough. It is the kind of game one associates more with players such as Capablanca, but it shows yet again how well Alekhine developed this aspect of his play during the 1920s, thanks to enormous hard work.

# Game 9

## Alekhine-Opocensky, Paris 1925

*Game 9*

**A.Alekhine-K.Opocensky**

Paris 1925

*Slav Defence*

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3**

A slightly unusual move order, the main benefit of which is seen in this game.

***Question:*** What is the point?

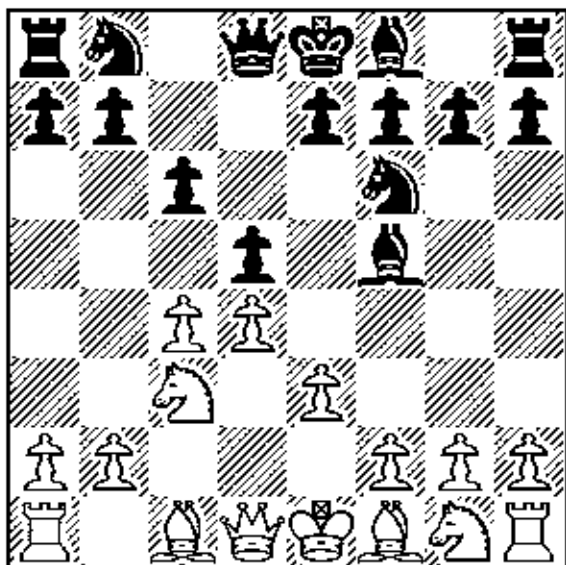
***Answer:*** White seeks to make it difficult for Black to develop his queen's bishop to f5 or g4, as he does in the main lines of the Slav. To this end, he keeps his king's knight back at g1 for the moment.

**3 ... Nf6**

A principled reply to White's last is 3 ... dxc4, with the intention of trying, at least temporarily, to hold on to the pawn by ... b7-b5. The main line then runs 4 e4 (4 a4 is well met by 4 ... e5!) 4 ... b5 5 a4 b4 6 Nce2 Nf6 with an unclear position. However, this is all quite modern theory, which was not known at the time. We will see 3 ... dxc4 in Game 29.

**4 e3 Bf5?!**





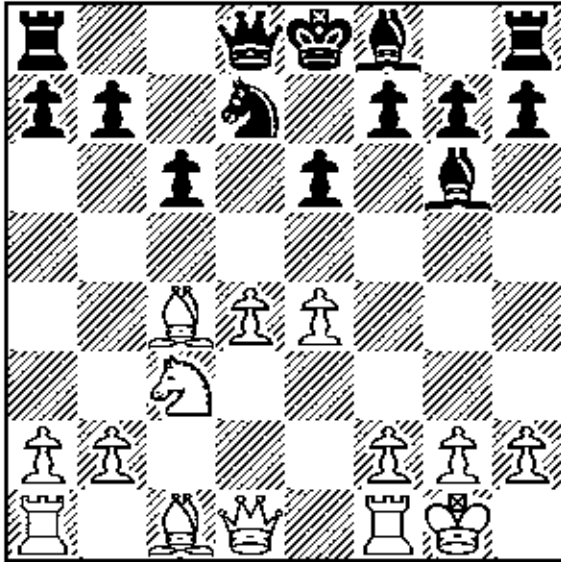
This is what White's move order is designed to meet. Black does better here to transpose into the Meran with 4 ... e6 – or if he is determined not to shut in his c8-bishop, he has a choice between Schlechter's solid 4 ... g6 and the modern Chebanenko system with 4 ... a6.

#### **5 cxd5! Nxd5**

This is the rub. Black would prefer to keep his central foothold with 5 ... cxd5, but then 6 Qb3! leaves him facing an awkward problem defending his b7-pawn, while keeping d5 protected as well. The best move in fact is the retrograde 6 ... Bc8, after which White obviously has some advantage, even if his own queen's bishop is shut in as well.

Opocensky's choice avoids these problems but cedes a central pawn majority, and he will have to lose further time trying to prevent or mitigate the consequences of a later e3-e4 advance.

#### **6 Bc4 e6 7 Nge2 Nd7 8 e4 Nxc3 9 Nxc3 Bg6 10 0-0**



**Question:** So you think White is better here?

**Answer:** Indeed – don't you? He has a nice pawn centre and free development. Admittedly, Black is solid enough, and White's advantage should not be overestimated, but he can certainly be happy with the outcome of the opening.

**10 ... Qh4?!**

**Question:** That looks like a bit of a lunge!

**Answer:** Yes, and I really don't think much of it. Black's idea is to castle queenside, but it looks rather optimistic to say the least. The straightforward 10 ... Bd6 11 Be3 0-0 would have restricted White to only a small positional advantage.

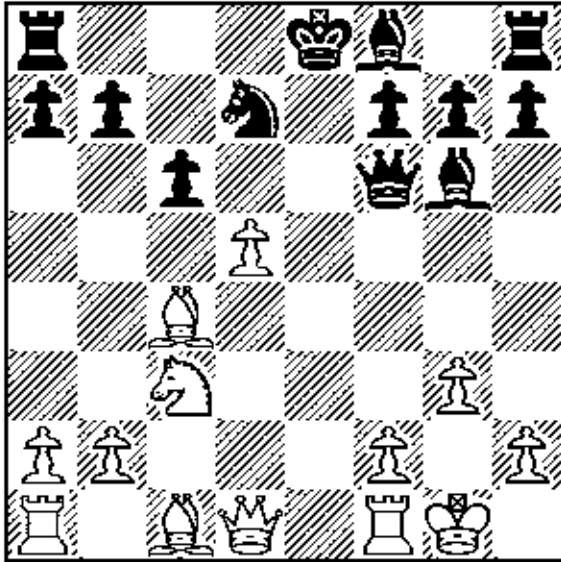
**11 d5!**

Classic stuff from Alekhine. White is ahead in development and the enemy king is in the centre, so he wants to open lines.

**11 ... exd5 12 g3**

This is the point – the black queen cannot maintain the pin along the fourth rank against the c4-bishop.

**12 ... Qf6 13 exd5**



**13 ... Bc5?**

**Question:** Another mistake?

**Answer:** Yes, although Black's position is already very dicey. Alekhine suggested 13 ... Ne5 (?!), with the idea of 14 Be2 and only then 14 ... Bc5. However, unusually, his eagle tactical eye had missed the near-crushing reply 14 dxc6! bxc6 (not 14 ... Nxc4?? 15 Qd7 mate) 15 Nd5!, when Black is getting mashed; e.g. 15 ... Qd8 (or 15 ... cxd5 16 Bb5+ Ke7 17 Qxd5 with a crushing attack) 16 Re1 Bd6 17 Bf4 and now after the practically forced 17 ... 0-0 18 Bxe5 cxd5 19 Qxd5, White simply has a sound extra pawn.

Fritz's 13 ... Be7 is relatively best, though even here Black has problems getting his king out of the centre after simply 14 Re1; for example, 14 ... Ne5 (14 ... 0-0? 15 dxc6 wins) 15 Bf4 Nxc4 16 Qe2 0-0 (not 16 ... Nd6? 17 Be5 Qg5 18 Bxd6, winning) 17 Qxc4 still gives White a clear advantage with his powerful piece initiative.

**Question:** It seems amazing that Black should be in so much trouble so suddenly.

**Answer:** That is what can happen when one neglects development and gets the king caught in the centre. Of course, it requires energetic play to exploit the advantage, and we saw that in the above variations.

**14 Re1+ Kf8**

Thus, Black has been forced to abandon castling rights and will now face insurmountable problems completing his mobilization. Alekhine was lethal in such positions, and he proceeds to give a characteristically powerful display.

**15 Bf4 Nb6 16 Bb3 h5**

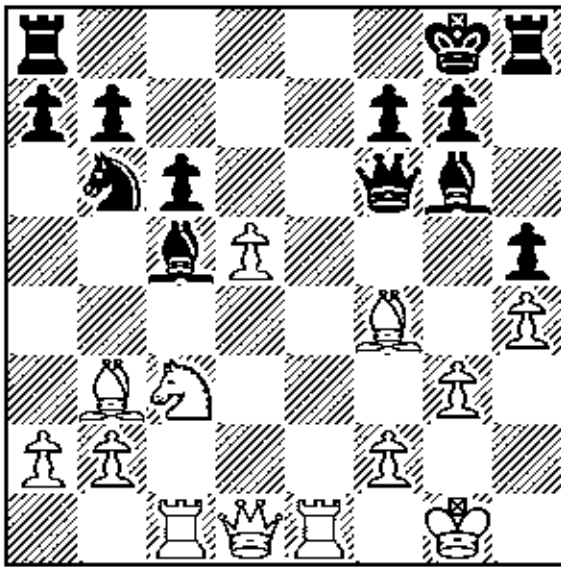
**Question:** What's this? He hopes to mate White?

**Answer:** It is not so much that; rather, Black hopes to be able to play ... Kg8-h7 and unite his rooks, but he will never get the time. 16 ... Rd8 17 Qf3 is no better, mind you.

**17 h4**

Now Bg5 is a constant threat.

**17 ... Kg8 18 Rc1**



Eyeing up the loose prelate on c5 and introducing threats of Ne4. Note how Alekhine operates constantly with threats, not giving Black a breathing space in which to connect his rooks.

**18 ... Bd4 19 dxc6 bxc6 20 Ne4 Bxe4**

Clearly forced, but now Black loses his light-squared bishop, which was a strong piece in the defence of his kingside.

**21 Rxe4 c5**

**Question:** What if he takes the b-pawn?

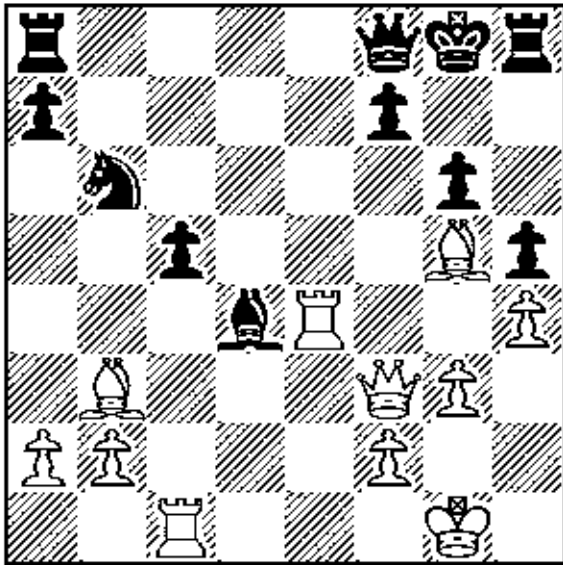
**Answer:** Then Alekhine gives 21 ... Bxb2 22 Rc5! Nd5 23 Bxd5 (the computer's 23 Qc2 is even stronger) 23 ... cxd5 24 Rxd5 with a decisive advantage. Note that Black's intended plan of ... Kh7 now fails because the h5-pawn is hanging.

**22 Qe2 g6**

This is practically forced, since otherwise he can never implement ... Kh7 without dropping the h-pawn. Unfortunately, Black has now decisively weakened his kingside

dark squares, and the punishment is not long in coming.

**23 Bg5 Qd6 24 Qf3 Qf8**



**25 Rxd4!**

This exchange sacrifice screams out to be played. White eliminates the only active enemy piece and leaves the dark squares around the black king fatally weak.

**25 ... cxd4 26 Rc6**

Now g6 is hanging and cannot be adequately defended.

**26 ... Kh7 27 Bxf7 Rc8 28 Rxd4 1-0**

A classic Alekhine crush and a highly instructive example of how to exploit a lead in development.

## Game 10

### Réti-Alekhine, Baden-Baden 1925

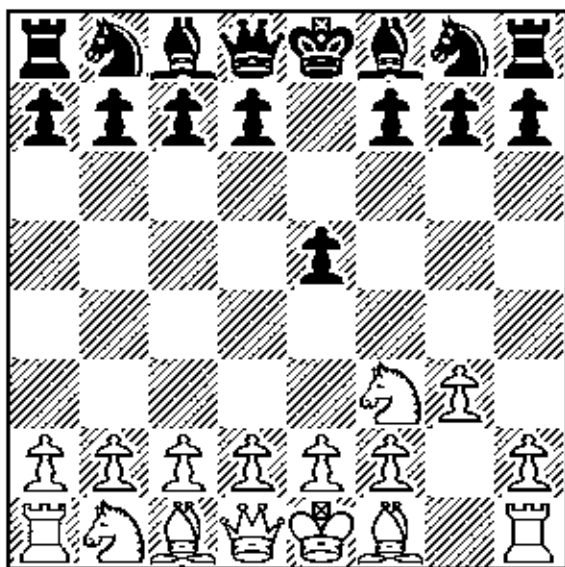
*Game 10*

**R.Réti-A.Alekhine**

Baden-Baden 1925

*King's Fianchetto*

1 g3 e5 2 Nf3!?



**Question:** This looks a bit eccentric!

**Answer:** Yes, and Alekhine criticized it as “an experiment, which Réti never repeated after the present game.”

**Question:** So it is just bad?

**Answer:** Actually, I don't think so. Some forty-odd years after the present game, the restlessly creative Bent Larsen played several games with the move order 2 Bg2 d5 3 Nf3, scoring very handsomely as White against GM opposition. White's play is certainly risky and provocative, but by no means downright bad.

**Question:** It is an Alekhine's Defence with colours reversed and an extra tempo, isn't it?

**Answer:** Yes, which makes it all the more ironic that the man after whom Alekhine's Defence is named should have been so critical of Réti's use of it with colours reversed! Of course, Alekhine's point is that White has committed himself to spending his extra tempo on g2-g3, which is not necessarily going to be the best use of it.

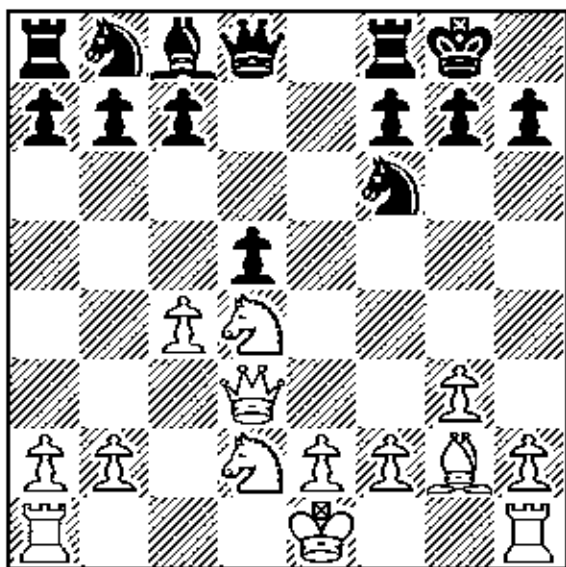
**2 ... e4 3 Nd4 d5**

Alekhine settles for safe development without trying to refute White's play. In his notes, he says he could have obtained more with the line 3 ... c5 4 Nb3 c4 5 Nd4 Bc5 6 c3 Nc6, mimicking the so-called "Chase Variation" of Alekhine's Defence proper, which he claims would bring "*ad absurdum* White's 'development'". However, Kasparov points out that Bent Larsen reached this very position (with the additional moves 2 Bg2 and 2 ... d5) in a 1965 game against Donner, and emerged from the opening with a slight positional plus, which he duly converted.

**4 d3 exd3**

Again settling for a solid set-up. Only a madman would venture the Four Pawns Attack a tempo down with 4 ... c5 5 Nb3 f5.

**5 Qxd3 Nf6 6 Bg2 Bb4+ 7 Bd2 Bxd2+ 8 Nxd2 0-0 9 c4!**



**Question:** So what is the assessment?

**Answer:** White probably has a small plus, thanks to slightly superior development.

His last move strikes at the centre in typical fashion, forcing the elimination of Black's d-pawn, and thus opening the full long diagonal for the fianchettoed bishop.

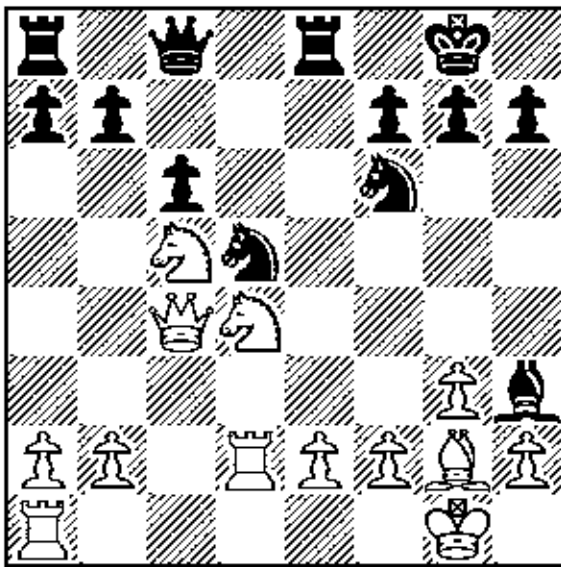
**9 ... Na6**

As Alekhine points out, 9 ... c5?! is not so good after 10 N4b3, since both the black pawns on c5 and d5 are hanging.

**10 cxd5 Nb4 11 Qc4 Nbx d5 12 N2b3 c6 13 0-0**

White has a typical English/Catalan position. He has an extra centre pawn on the e-file, as opposed to Black's queenside majority, and the fianchettoed bishop is a strong piece, exerting pressure on the central light squares. White only has a small plus, but I am sure Réti was very happy with his position at this stage, and rightly so.

**13 ... Re8 14 Rfd1 Bg4 15 Rd2 Qc8 16 Nc5 Bh3!**



**17 Bf3**

**Question:** Was there a pawn to be taken on b7?

**Answer:** There was, but it would be fatal for White to take it: 17 Bxh3?! Qxh3 18 Nxb7? Ng4 19 Nf3 Nde3! 20 fxe3 Nxe3, when even the desperado tactic 21 Qxf7+ does not help after simply 21 ... Kh8 22 Nh4 Rf8 and wins.

**17 ... Bg4 18 Bg2 Bh3 19 Bf3 Bg4**

**Question:** Offering a draw?

**Answer:** Yes, and a clear sign that Alekhine understood that his position is objectively inferior. Fortunately for chess history, Réti decides to play on, resulting in one of the most famously brilliant games ever played, but it should be noted that his

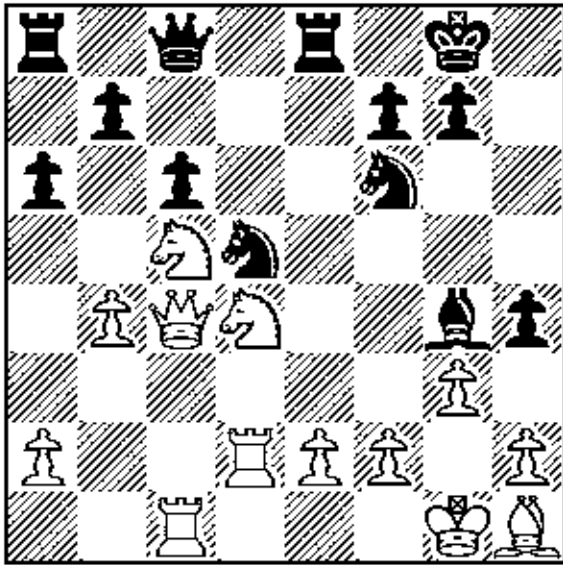


decision was based on more than just psychological considerations – White also has objective grounds for not taking the draw here.

**20 Bh1 h5!**

Alekhine pursues a kingside initiative with all of his customary vigour.

**21 b4 a6 22 Rc1 h4**



**23 a4!?**

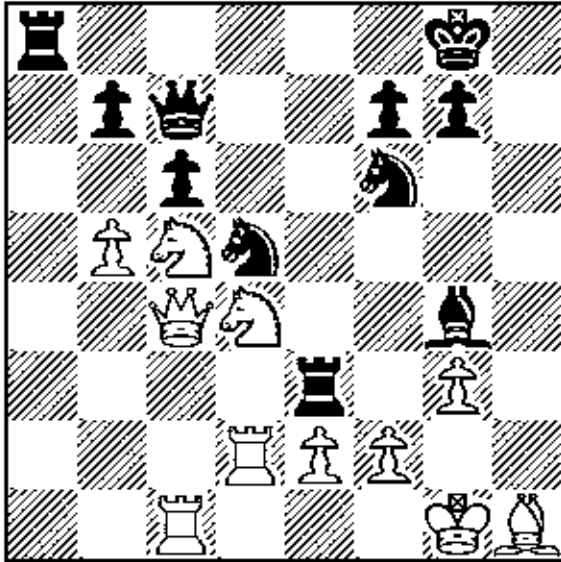
Réti consistently follows up his plan of a queenside minority attack. Instead, the computer's more centrally-based plan of 23 e4 Nb6 24 Qc3 also looks good for White. Réti was presumably worried about weakening his king's position, and especially the f3-square, but this is balanced by the greater central control, which makes it harder for Black to bring his pieces to the kingside.

**23 ... hxg3 24 hxg3 Qc7 25 b5?!**

**Question:** Still pursuing the queenside attack!

**Answer:** Yes, he is nothing if not consistent; but as we will see, it was now time to take Black's kingside attacking chances more seriously. Once again, the central blow 25 e4 was well worth considering. Alekhine claims that 25 ... Nb6 26 Qb3 Nbd7 would give Black sufficient counterplay, but 26 Qd3 Nbd7 27 f4 still looks better for White to me. Admittedly, Réti can hardly be blamed for not seeing Alekhine's extraordinary 26th move.

**25 ... axb5 26 axb5 Re3!**



**Question:** Wow! Lightning from a clear sky!

**Answer:** Alekhine was not short on imagination when it came to finding ways of attacking enemy kings! This move is the start of a famous and fabulous combinative assault, although, in itself, it does not guarantee Black any advantage.

**27 Nf3?**

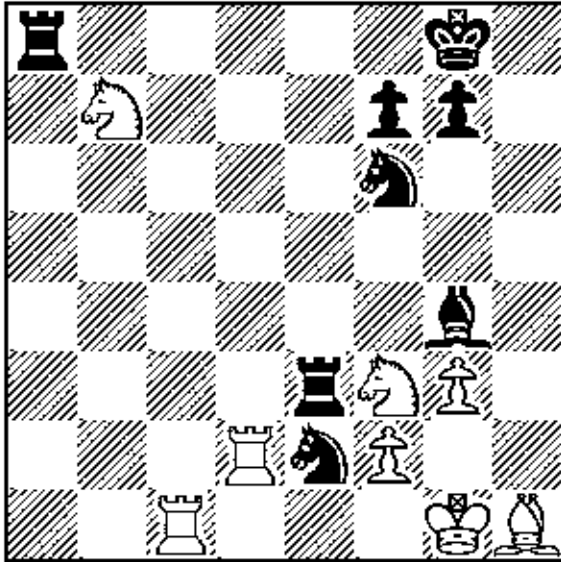
This move turns out to be a serious mistake. Alekhine also analyses 27 Kh2 as insufficient: 27 ... Raa3 28 Ncb3 (not 28 fxe3? Nxe3 and 29 ... Nf1+ will mate) 28 ... Qe5 29 bxc6 bxc6 “with a powerful attack”. However, the computer shows that White is holding after 30 Bf3!. Even 30 fxe3, which Alekhine says loses to 30 ... Qh5+ 31 Kg1 Qh3, is safe enough after 32 Bxd5 Nxd5 33 Qxc6, since Black must force a draw with 33 ... Qxg3+ 34 Kh1 Qh3+. Kasparov’s 33 Nf3 is no more than a draw for Black either.

The best move is 27 Bf3! when, once again, Alekhine was rather too optimistic about Black’s chances. He claims an advantage after 27 ... Bxf3 28 exf3 cxb5 29 Nxb5 Qa5, considering that 30 Rxd5? “would lose immediately after 30 ... Re1+ 31 Rxe1 Qxe1+, followed by Ra1”. But as Kasparov points out, it is White who wins after 32 Kg2 Ra1?? 33 Rd8+ Kh7 34 Qh4+ Kg6 35 f4 Qg1+ 36 Kf3 etc. Black would have to content himself with 32 ... Nxd5 33 Qxd5 Ra1, forcing White to take the perpetual after 34 Qd8+ Kh7 35 Qh4+ etc.

**27 ... cxb5! 28 Qxb5 Nc3! 29 Qxb7**

White cannot maintain his guard on e2 because of 29 Qc4 b5!.

**29 ... Qxb7 30 Nxb7 Nxe2+**



**31 Kh2**

**Question:** Is this forced?

**Answer:** It is best. After 31 Kf1, Alekhine gives the fine variation 31 ... Nxg3+ 32 fxg3 Bxf3 33 Bxf3 Rxf3+ 34 Kg2 Raa3, and although it looks as if we have a “simple” ending with two pawns vs. one on the same side, Black is actually winning the white g-pawn, because the only attempt to defend it with 35 Rd8+ Kh7 36 Rh1+ Kg6 37 Rh3 runs into the elegant trick 37 ... Rfb3! and White is losing a piece, in view of the mate threat from the black rooks!

**Question:** If Alekhine saw that, it is amazing!

**Answer:** I think he did. And as we will see, it was not the only remarkably deep variation he calculated in this game.

After the text, it seems that the attack has run out of steam, since 31 ... Rxf3 32 Rxe2 Rxf3 33 Kxf3 Bxe2 and 31 ... Nxc1 32 fxe3 Ra3 will only leave Black with an extra pawn with all pawns on one side, endings which should be easily drawn. But Alekhine had foreseen a stunning further blow.

**31 ... Ne4!!**

The computer confirms that this is the only move to win.

**Question:** What is the point?

**Answer:** Well, we will see in a minute, but I can reveal at this stage that the whole

point of the combination is the vulnerable knight on b7.

**Question:** You are kidding?

**Answer:** Nope!

**32 Rc4**

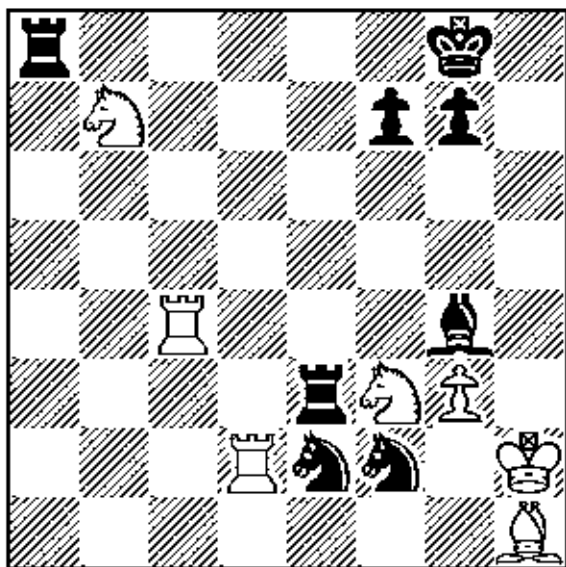
After 32 fxe3 Nxd2, both the c1-rook and f3-knight are hanging.

**Question:** I cannot see how you are going to exploit the undefended knight on b7, but you seem like an honest chap, so I will take your word for it and therefore suggest 32 Rc7, defending it!

**Answer:** A nice try, but that loses most simply to 32 ... Nxd2 33 Nxd2 Re5, simply leaving Black an exchange up; although all the remaining pawns are on one flank, the fact that several extra pairs of pieces are on the board means that White should have no real hope of holding this position (if it were just a single rook vs. a single white minor piece, then he might have some chances).

**32 ... Nxf2!**

Not 32 ... Nxd2? due to 33 Nxd2! (Alekhine) and White is saved, since Black has two pieces hanging.



**Question:** This is a bit head-spinning! What is going on here? Materially, White seems only to be a pawn down, and as you have pointed out already, the fact that we have so few pawns, and all on one flank, should mean he can draw the ending.

**Answer:** I agree in principle; the problem here is that White's pieces are tactically insecure. In fact, it is a classic case of Nunn's Law: *Loose Pieces Drop Off*. For the moment, the f3-knight is hanging.

**Question:** Okay, say I move the knight, with 33 Nd4 for example ... ?

**Answer:** Then we see for the first time that the b7-knight is also a loose piece: 33 ... Nxb1 34 Kxb1 Nxd4 35 Rxd4 Bf3+ and the *LP* duly *DOs*.

**33 Bg2**

This does not defend the Nf3 *per se*, but Black cannot now win a piece with 33 ... Bxf3 34 Bxf3 Rxf3 because of 35 Rxe2.

**33 ... Be6!**

Another attack on a loose piece, this time the c4-rook.

**34 Rcc2**

If the rook moves away at random, such as 34 Rc7, there follows 34 ... Ng4+ 35 Kh3 Raa3 and White will lose the g3-pawn and further material thereafter (including possibly his king).

**Question:** Even in such a simplified position, Black has a raging attack?

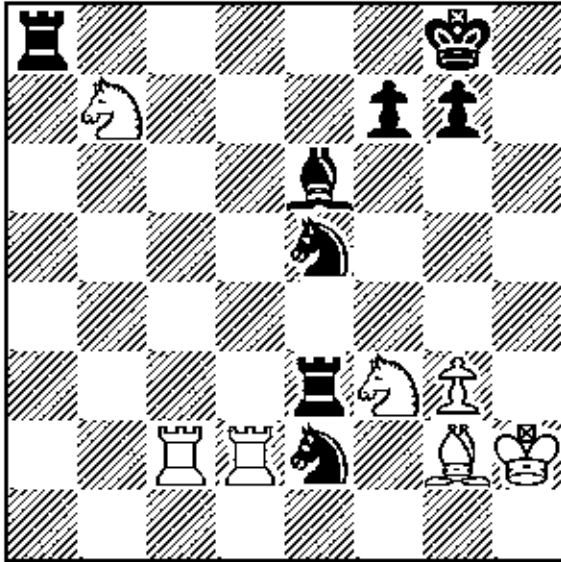
**Answer:** Yes, that is the other reason he is winning. The text tries to defend by counter-attacking against the e2-knight.

**34 ... Ng4+ 35 Kh3**

Stepping into the discovered check is highly unpleasant, but there is no choice at all, since 35 Kh1 Ra1+ forces mate.

**35 ... Ne5+ 36 Kh2**

Again, 36 Kh4 Re4+ forces mate.



**36 ... Rxf3!**

The final combinative blow.

**37 Rxe2**

Here 37 Bxf3 Nxf3+ 38 Kg2 Nxd2 39 Rxd2 Nc3 just leaves Black a piece up.

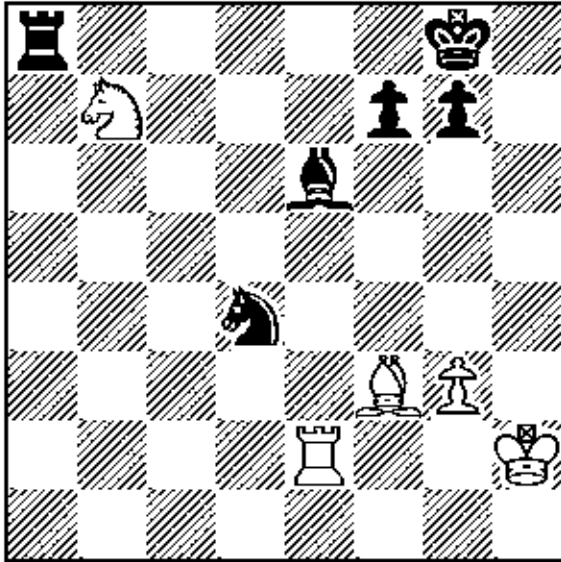
**37 ... Ng4+ 38 Kh3 Ne3+**

It has long been assumed by commentators that this final, beautiful combination is the only way to win. Sadly, the computer points out another, slightly more prosaic finish in 38 ... Rf6. White cannot hold the ending after 39 Rxe6 fxe6 40 Kxg4 with two pieces for a rook, because of the sting in the tail: 40 ... Ra4+!, when White's king is caught in a mating net (e.g. 41 Kh3 Rh6 mate or 41 Kg5 Rf5+ 42 Kg6 Rg4 mate) and he would have to surrender a piece after all with 41 Be4.

**39 Kh2**

Once again, 39 Kh4 Ra4+ is forced mate.

**39 ... Nxc2 40 Bxf3 Nd4! 0-1**



An exquisite final position, and the endpoint of Alekhine's breathtakingly deep combination. After 41 Rf2 Nxf3+ 42 Rxf3 Bd5, the loose colt on b7 drops off, since 43 Rb3 is impossible!

**Question:** You mean Alekhine saw that when he sacrificed his rook on e3?

**Answer:** It is not clear. He does not say so, but I think he must have seen it at least when playing 31 ... Ne4!. Given the complexity of the position, even that is a remarkable piece of combinative vision.

## Game 11

### Davidson-Alekhine, Semmering 1926

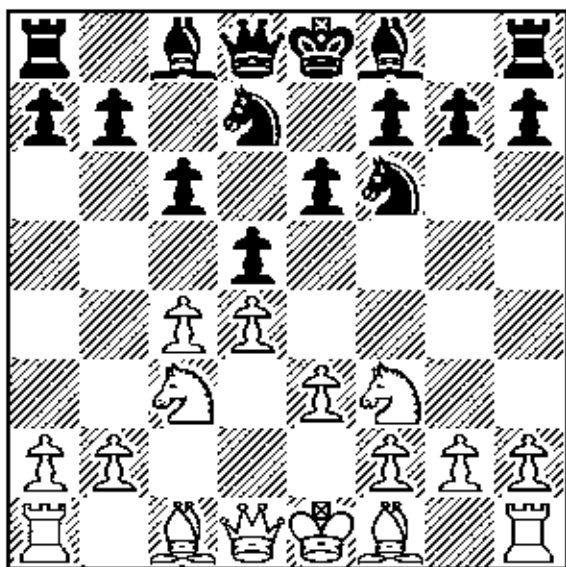
*Game 11*

**J.Davidson-A.Alekhine**

Semmering 1926

*Semi-Slav Defence*

**1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 c4 c6 4 e3 e6 5 Nc3 Nbd7**



We have transposed to the basic position of the Meran system, which was first developed around this time by the likes of Bogoljubow and Rubinstein.

**6 Qc2**

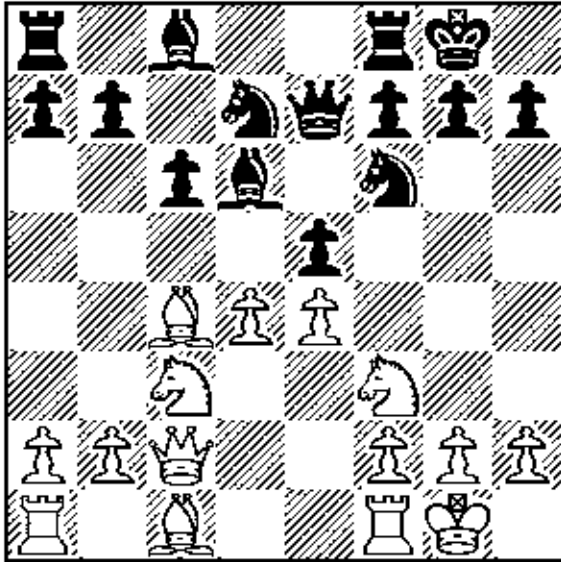
6 Bd3 is the main line, but the text is also very popular nowadays, and was always a special favourite of Anatoly Karpov.

**6 ... Bd6 7 Bd3!?**

7 b3 is a more logical follow-up to White's last. Now the danger is that we will reach a typical Meran position, where the white queen will not be particularly well placed on c2.

**7 ... 0-0 8 0-0 Qe7 9 e4 dxc4 10 Bxc4 e5**





**Question:** How do you assess this position.

**Answer:** I think Black is fine here. The classic Meran plan usually involves taking on c4 and then following up with ... b7-b5, ... Bb7, ... a7-a6 and eventually ... c6-c5; whereas the early e3-e4 by White requires a different approach, and Black is well placed to meet this with ... e6-e5, securing a decent foothold in the centre. As Alekhine himself pointed out, such structures occurred a number of times in the games of Chigorin and are basically fine for Black, if he can reach them. Readers interested in these structures are recommended to look at Andrew Soltis' treatment of them in his outstanding book, *Pawn Structure Chess*.

**Question:** So why doesn't Black play it more often?

**Answer:** Mainly because he cannot reach such a set-up via a standard Meran move order, if White knows what he is doing. For example, 6 Bd3 Bd6 7 0-0 0-0 8 e4 dxc4 9 Bxc4 e5 would allow Black what he wants, but the immediate 7 e4! prevents the same response, because after 7 ... dxc4?! 8 Bxc4 e5? 9 dxe5 Nxe5 10 Nxe5 Bxe5 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8 12 Bxf7, Black loses a pawn.

**11 Rd1 exd4 12 Nxd4 Nb6!?**

Alekhine awarded this move an exclamation mark, but I am not sure it deserves it.

**Question:** Why?

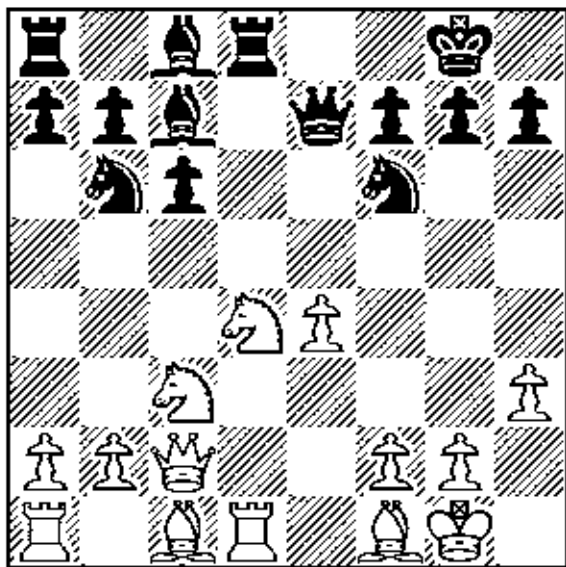
**Answer:** Well, the normal and natural move in such positions is 12 ... Ne5. The

issue in these structures, after the exchange on d4, is whether White can safely drive the enemy forces back with f2-f4 and e4-e5, or whether Black can prevent this by maintaining sufficient control over the key squares e5, f4, d4, etc. Tactics often play a key role in restraining White's advances. Thus, after 13 Bf1, White is threatening 14 f4, so Black must meet this. Alekhine gave the variation 13 ... Ng6 14 Nf5 Bxf5 15 exf5 Ne5 16 Bg5 with an obvious advantage to White; but Black's 13th is weak and should be replaced by the typical 13 ... Rd8, setting up pressure on the d-file. Now the immediate 14 f4? would be bad because of 14 ... Bc5! (e.g. 15 Be3 Neg4 or (or 15 Nce2 Bg4). White therefore has to proceed more cautiously and chances would be about equal.

### 13 Bf1 Rd8 14 h3

Anticipating a typical tactical trick in such positions: 14 ... Bxh2+! 15 Kxh2 Rxd4 16 Rxd4 Qe5+, winning a pawn.

### 14 ... Bc7



### 15 Be3

Once again, the tactic 15 ... Rxd4 16 Rxd4 Qe5 was threatened.

**Question:** It seems surprising that White is constantly facing such tactical threats. Is this a sign he has gone wrong?

**Answer:** Not necessarily, although it is true that his queen is not ideally placed on c2; in general, such tactics are typical of these structures. As we have remarked above, strategically White has the long-term plan of mobilizing his central and kingside majority with f2-f4 and e4-e5, which would drive the black pieces out of the centre and establish a large advantage. Black must fight against this, and the use of constant short-

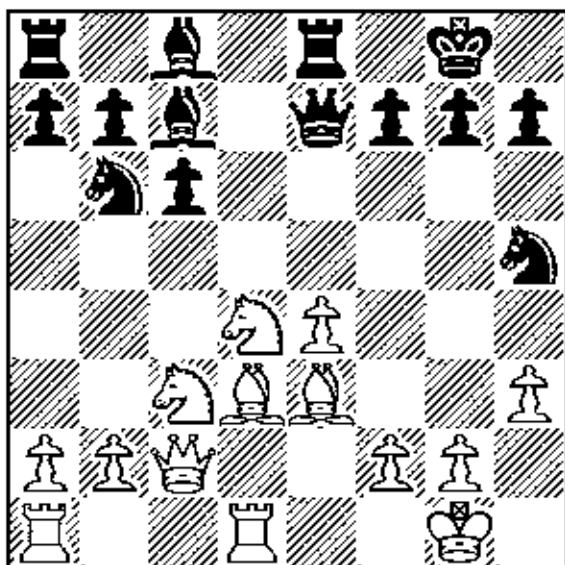
## 15 ... Re8!

**Answer:** It is only inconsistent if Black loses, otherwise it is flexible! More seriously, the rook has done its job on d8, by creating some tactical threats and luring the white bishop to e3 to meet them. Now that the bishop is there, the e4-pawn is harder to defend (White cannot defend it with a rook from e1, for example), so the rook switches to the e-file, attacking e4. Later, Black hopes his other rook will take its place on the d-file.

## 16 Bd3

**Answer:** Yes, I noticed that, but I am not at all convinced. The program will assume White is better in such a structure, if it cannot see a tactical refutation, because of the central pawn majority, but quite often the tactics are just beyond its horizon.

## 16 ... Nh5



**Question:** What is that about? Why put the knight offside?

**Answer:** With his e4-pawn securely defended, White was again threatening 17 f4, so Black prevents it by taking control of the f4-square. At the same time, he creates the possibility of a subsequent ... Qg5 or ... Qh4, looking to create threats on the kingside. Once again, these are typical guerrilla tactics, never giving White a moment of peace.

**17 Nce2 g6**

Alekhine explains that this aims principally to cover the f5-square, so that he can recycle his queen's knight via d7, without running into the unpleasant reply Nf5. This tends to substantiate my criticism of the earlier 12 ... Nb6.

**18 Re1 Nd7 19 Nf3!?**

Alternatively, 19 Rad1 is a sensible move, just completing his development and awaiting events.

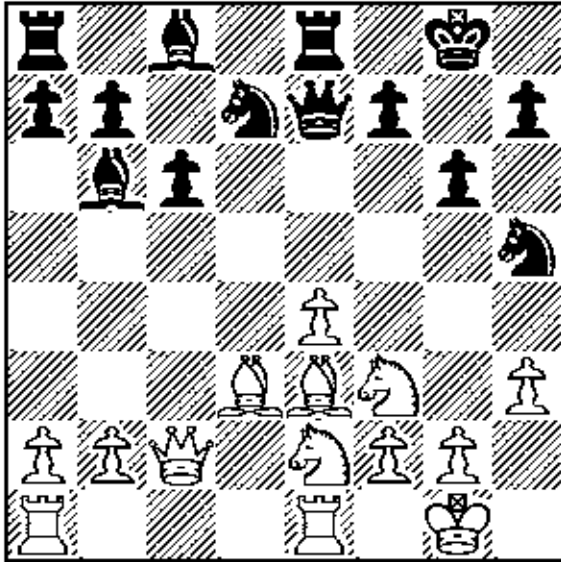
**Question:** Why doesn't White play 19 f4 while he has the chance?

**Answer:** He could – indeed, Alekhine says that was the move he expected, but after his intended 19 ... Ndf6 20 e5 (forced, else there is no way to defend both e4 and f4) 20 ... Nd5 and now 21 Qd2 (Alekhine gives 21 Bd2? Bb6, but then Black has a large advantage) 21 ... Rd8, Black still has a good game.

**Question:** But how come? Hasn't White achieved his strategic aim, by getting f2-f4 in?

**Answer:** In a sense, but White wanted to do so when he could maintain his pawns on e4 and f4, and only push on to e5 when he was ready. In this case, he has been forced to play e4-e5 prematurely, with the result that Black has secured the great outpost on d5 for his knight, and has uncomfortable pressure on the white centre.

**19 ... Bb6**



### 20 Bg5?!

This is a step in the wrong direction. Alekhine himself points out that 20 Bxb6?! axb6! gives Black an excellent game, since he has weakened the dark squares in the white position, and he has the open a-file and an outpost on c5 for his knight. Instead, 20 Ned4 looks a better move, keeping dark-squared bishops on the board, without exposing his pieces tactically.

### 20 ... Qc5

*Fritz* prefers 20 ... Qd6, which is also fine.

### 21 Nc3?

**Question:** Why doesn't White exchange queens? If he is trying to consolidate a static advantage, and Black is trying to resist with tactics, shouldn't the queen exchange favour White?

**Answer:** Other things being equal, one would think so; sadly, that is not the case here, as 21 Qxc5 Nxc5 leaves White with problems defending his e4-pawn. After the forced 22 Nc1, there follows 22 ... f6 23 Bd2 Nxd3 24 Nxd3 Ng3 25 e5 Bf5 and the e-pawn drops off (Alekhine).

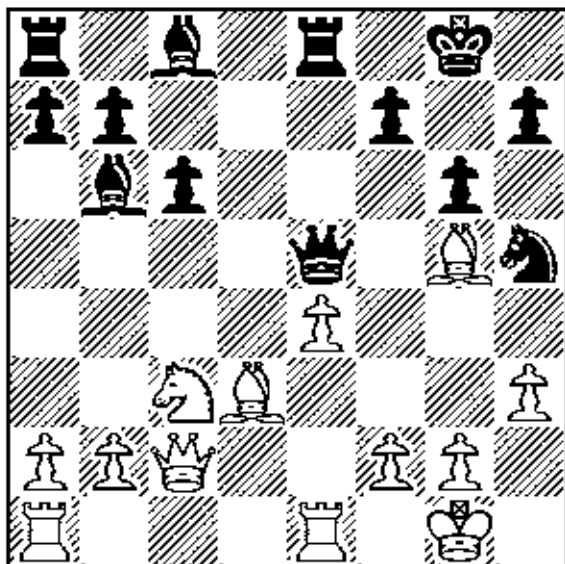
In this line 23 Be3 is slightly better, when after 23 ... Nxd3 24 Nxd3 Rxe4 25 Nd2 Re6 26 Bxb6 axb6 27 Nc4 Rxe1+ 28 Rxe1 Bf5 29 Nc1, the threats of 30 g4 and 30 Re7 offer some counterplay for the pawn. Nevertheless, once again, *Fritz's* preference 21 Ned4 looks like a more serious improvement, when Black may do best to retreat with 21 ... Qd6.

### 21 ... Ne5

All of a sudden, things become very awkward for White. His bishop on g5 is loose,

and the only minor piece which defends his king, the knight on f3, is being removed.

**22 Nxe5 Qxe5 23 Be3 Bc7**



Now White cannot prevent the enemy queen's incursion to h2, and his position is starting to crumble.

**Question:** It seems strange that things should collapse so quickly!

**Answer:** Maybe, but this is what often happens in such positions. One tactical error can be enough to undermine any game, even one apparently rock-solid, and here White's game has already been looking tactically vulnerable for some time.

**24 Ne2**

*Fritz* gives 24 g3 Bxh3 as White's best chance, though as Alekhine himself says, there is no reason to believe Black should not win in the end. Rather than surrender a pawn for nothing, Davidson elects to allow the enemy queen into h2, hoping to be able to ward off the threats, but this does not look like a strategy very likely to succeed, especially against an attacking master of Alekhine's calibre.

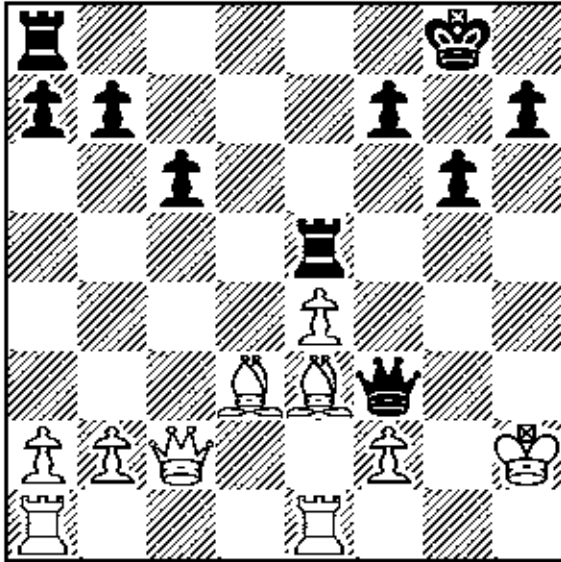
**24 ... Qh2+ 25 Kf1 Bxh3!**

Bang! This screams out to be played. Black gets several pawns and a huge attack, with all of his pieces contributing. The rest is a rout.

**26 gxh3 Qxh3+ 27 Kg1 Bh2+ 28 Kh1 Nf4**

Alekhine describes this as "doubtless the shortest way to a win", which is not strictly true. The computer shows that 28 ... Bf4+ 29 Kg1 Re5 is marginally stronger, though it is largely a matter of taste; Alekhine's solution is more than adequate.

**29 Nxf4 Bxf4+ 30 Kg1 Bh2+ 31 Kh1 Qf3+ 32 Kxh2 Re5**



The mate threat on h5 forces White to surrender the queen.

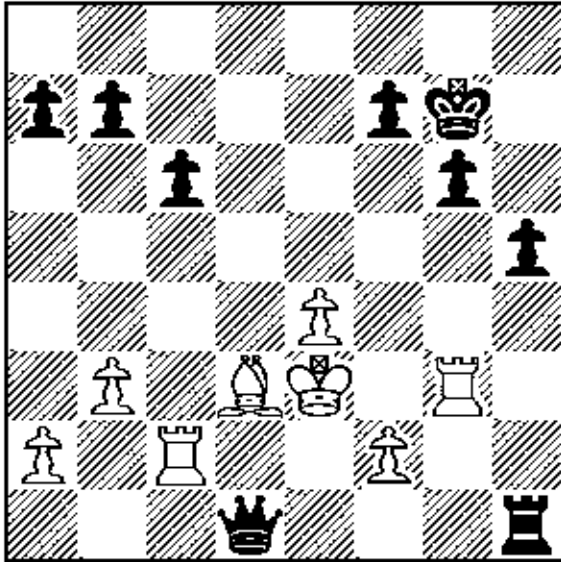
**33 Qc5 Rxc5 34 Bxc5 Qh5+**

The final sting in the tail – rather than rook and two bishops for his queen, White will only have rook and bishop. With two additional pawns as well, Black's remaining technical task is straightforward.

**35 Kg2 Qxc5 36 Re3 Re8 37 Rae1 Qe5 38 R1e2 Re6 39 b3 Rf6 40 Rg3 Kg7**

Alekhine is in no hurry, and White could simply have resigned, but the Dutch master insists on being shown.

**41 Bb1 Rf4 42 Bd3 Rh4 43 Kf3 Qf4+ 44 Kg2 Qc1 45 Kf3 h5 46 Rc2 Qd1+ 47 Ke3 Rh1**



The gradual infiltration of the black major pieces, combined with the advance of the passed h-pawn, is decisive.

**48 Kd4 h4 49 Re3 Re1 50 Rxe1 Qxe1 51 Re2 Qa1+ 52 Kc4 b5+ 0-1**



## Game 12

# Rubinstein-Alekhine, Semmering 1926

*Game 12*

**A.Rubinstein-A.Alekhine**

Semmering 1926

*Queen's Indian Defence*

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 b6**

At the time of this game, the Queen's Indian Defence was a relatively new and popular line, introduced by Nimzowitsch as part of the Hypermodern revolution. Rather than occupying the centre with pawns, Black seeks to control it by piece play from afar.

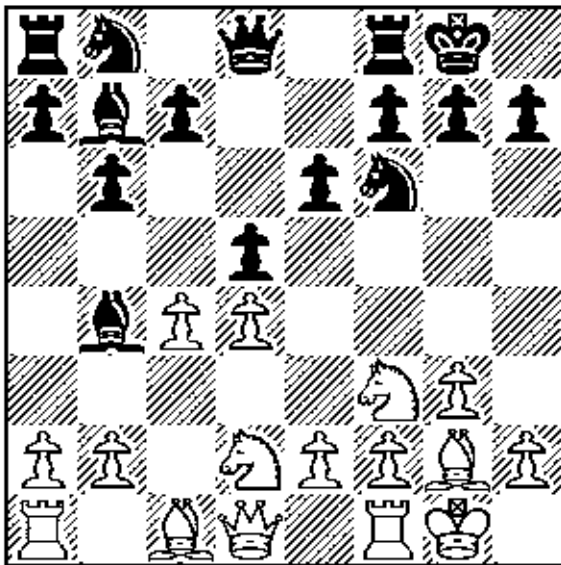
**4 g3 Bb7 5 Bg2 Bb4+**

Here 5 ... Be7 has always been the main line, but various move orders involving a check on b4 have also been popular at various times over the years.

**6 Nbd2**

6 Bd2 poses Black more problems equalizing.

**6 ... 0-0 7 0-0 d5**



**Question:** What do you think of this position?

**Answer:** Black has no problems at all. I have actually played this position as Black a number of times myself and never experienced any difficulties. The rather passive white knight on d2 does not exert any pressure against d5, which makes Black's development simple and straightforward.

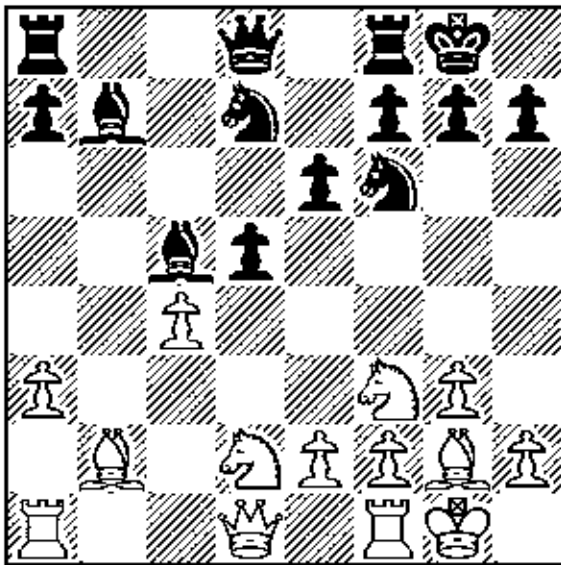
**8 a3 Be7 9 b4 c5!**

This counter-attack in the centre ensures Black good play.

**10 bxc5 bxc5 11 dxc5**

Inserting 11 Rb1 Qc8 is also fine for Black.

**11 ... Bxc5 12 Bb2 Nbd7**



**13 Ne5?!**

**Question:** What is wrong with the text? It looks natural enough.

**Answer:** It leads to the loss of the initiative. The position would be pretty equal after 13 Rb1 Qc7 14 Nd4.

**13 ... Nxe5 14 Bxe5 Ng4!**

From here on, Black's attack builds up with remarkable speed.

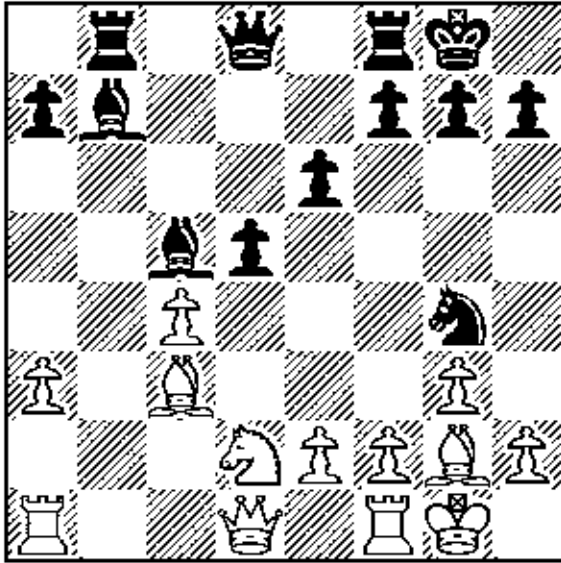
**Question:** So are you saying White is already worse here?

**Answer:** Objectively, no, but he already needs to be careful. Rubinstein, who always seemed to have a lot of trouble against Alekhine in the 1920s, fails to cope with the task on this occasion.

**15 Bc3 Rb8**

**Question:** What is that for?

**Answer:** Black defends his b7-bishop, so as to be able to push ... d5-d4. As Alekhine points out, the immediate attack on f2 with 15 ... Qb6 would be adequately met by 16 e3.



**16 Rb1?!**

**Question:** Why don't you like this? It seems like a logical attempt to prevent Black's intended ... d5-d4 advance.

**Answer:** Yes, it is a logical try, but as we will see, it does not necessarily succeed in stopping the pawn advance. Having said that, White still should be able to maintain equality, so Alekhine's criticism of the move is possibly exaggerated.

Instead, Alekhine gives the line 16 h3 Nxf2 17 Rxf2 Qg5 and now 18 Nf1 Bxf2+ 19 Kxf2 dxc4, which he assesses as good for Black. This is arguable in itself but, more to the point, 18 Nf3 looks stronger, when both 18 ... Bxf2+ 19 Kxf2 and 18 ... Qxg3 19 Bd4 favour White. In view of this, Black should probably answer 16 h3 by the simple retreat 16 ... Nf6 with equality.

Alekhine also mentions 16 cxd5, which he regarded as best, intending 16 ... Bxd5 17 Ne4, followed by a later h2-h3 with equality. That is fair enough, but his criticism of the alternative 17 e4 is perhaps not so fair. After 17 ... Nxf2 18 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 19 Kxf2 Qb6+, he considers only 20 Kf1 Bb7, when the threat of ... Ba6+ leaves Black clearly better, whereas *Fritz's* paradoxical-looking 20 Kf3 is probably enough to hold the balance.

**16 ... d4 17 Rxb7?**

This is the real mistake. As Alekhine correctly points out, and the computer confirms, White should have played 17 Bb4 Bxg2 18 Kxg2 Qc7.

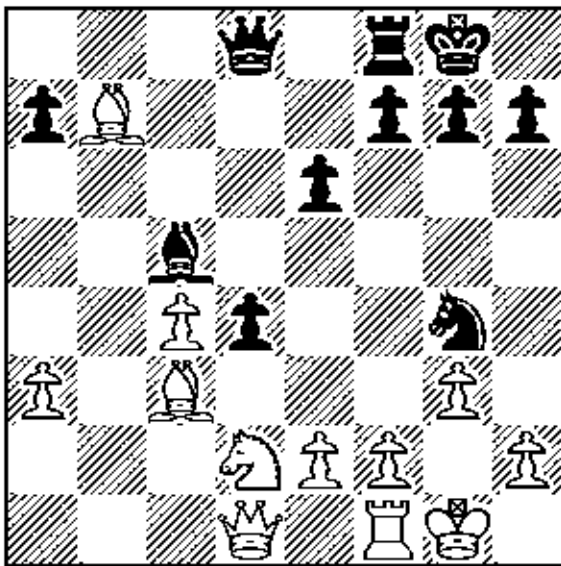
**Question:** And what do you think of this position?

**Answer:** Alekhine claims an advantage for Black, while *Fritz 12* just gives it as equal.

**Question:** And you?

**Answer:** I am inclined to think Black is somewhat better. The pawn on c4, although passed, is actually a weakness, and the white king is slightly more exposed than its opposite number, so I don't really see why Black should not be at least a bit better. But I would agree that his advantage is not that great.

**17 ... Rxb7 18 Bxb7**



**18 ... Nxf2!?**

This is the move Rubinstein had overlooked, and it is indeed good for Black, though Alekhine's double exclamation marks are misplaced. Both he and Rubinstein had assumed that 18 ... dxc3 19 Ne4 was ineffective, but the computer points out the bone-crunching 19 ... Ne3!!, which both players (and all subsequent annotators that I am aware of) had missed.

**Question:** But what is the point? Why is this so strong?

**Answer:** The trouble is that, if the knight is taken, the c3-pawn costs White a rook:

20 fxe3 Bxe3+ 21 Kg2 Qxd1 22 Rxd1 c2 etc.

**Question:** And other moves?

**Answer:** Well, for a start 20 Qxd8 Rxd8 21 fxe3 Bxe3+ 22 Kg2 c2 is no better.

**Question:** In the above line, can't White just exchange queens and then move the rook to c1?

**Answer:** No, 21 Rc1 c2 still costs White a rook because of the threat of ... Rd1+.

So, after 19 ... Ne3!!, White has nothing better than to surrender the exchange with a move such as 20 Qc1, but after 20 ... Nxf1 21 Kxf1 Bd4, he is just losing.

**Question:** So Alekhine's brilliancy was not really necessary?

**Answer:** It seems not. But his move is also winning for Black, as we will see.

**19 Kxf2**

**Question:** Wow! That looks pretty desperate!

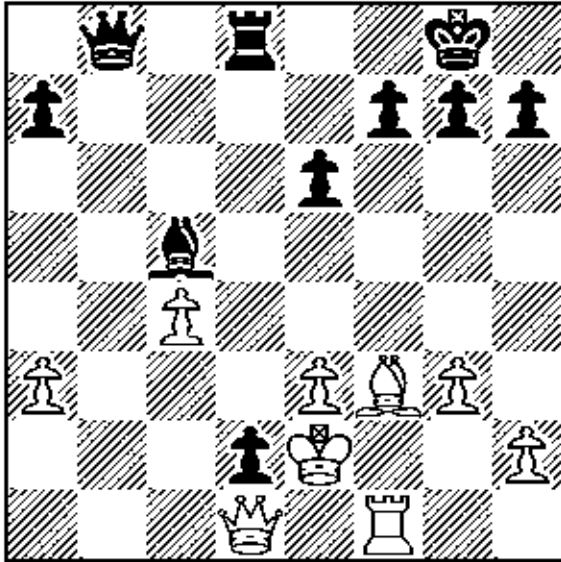
**Answer:** It is, but White has no good alternative. 19 Rxf2 dxc3, with a decisive double pin, is obviously hopeless. Alekhine mentions 19 Qa1 dxc3 20 Nb3 and now rather than his 20 ... Ng4+ 21 Nxc5 Qd4+ etc, simply 20 ... Be3 wins easily.

According to *Fritz*, 19 Ba5 is the best try, which Alekhine also analyses. He gives 19 ... Nxd1 20 Bxd8 d3+ 21 e3 Nxe3! winning, and the computer concurs.

**19 ... dxc3+ 20 e3**

Here 20 Ke1 cxd2+ 21 Qxd2 would at least eliminate the enemy d-pawn, but the position remains hopeless after 21 ... Qc7.

**20 ... cxd2 21 Ke2 Qb8 22 Bf3 Rd8**



Black obviously has a decisive advantage – a huge extra passed pawn on d2 and a hopelessly exposed white king. The opposite-coloured bishops are no help in the presence of queens and rooks; indeed, they only serve to strengthen the attack.

**23 Qb1 Qd6 24 a4 f5 25 Rd1 Bb4 26 Qc2 Qc5 27 Kf2 a5 28 Be2 g5 29 Bd3 f4! 0-1**

Alekhine justifies White's resignation with the variation 30 Bxh7+ Kh8 31 Qe4 Qxe3+ (of course, 31 ... fxe3+ is also winning) 32 Kg2 f3+ 33 Kh3 (or 33 Qxf3 Qxf3+ 34 Kxf3 Kxh7) 33 ... Qe2! 34 Qg6 g4+ 35 Kh4 Be7+ 36 Kh5 Qxh2+.

## Game 13

### Rubinstein-Alekhine, Dresden 1926

This game should be examined in conjunction with Game 18, and the notes thereto. The two form a nice pair of examples on how to unbalance the position, when faced with rock-solid openings.

*Game 13*

**A.Rubinstein-A.Alekhine**

Dresden 1926

*London System*

**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 e6 3 Bf4**

Alekhine runs up against a club player's favourite, the highly solid London System; and this time not from a substantially weaker player, but Akiba Rubinstein, one of the all-time greats. It is thus all the more instructive to see how, even against such an opponent, Alekhine finds a way to unbalance the game and create non-standard problems.

**3 ... b6 4 h3!?**

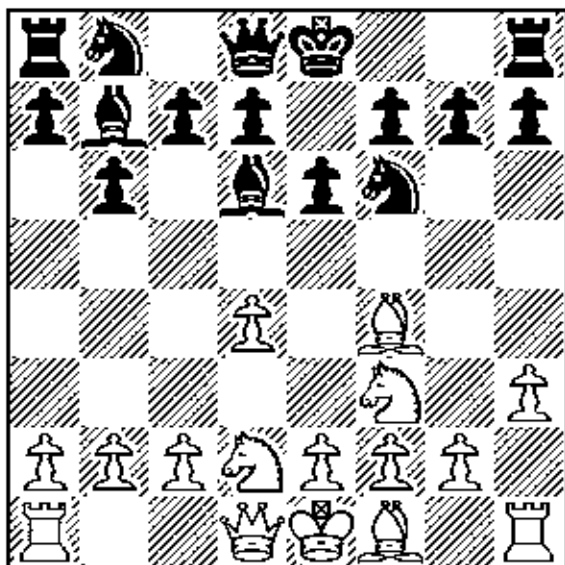
**Question:** Why do you question this move? I thought it was a standard idea in these systems, to stop the bishop being exchanged by ... Nh5 - ?

**Answer:** That is correct, but there was no need to play the move just yet. He could have played 4 e3 first, since 4 ... Nh5 can be met by 5 Bg5. Generally speaking, ... Nh5 is only a threat after Black has played ... Be7, when the reply Bg5 is no longer available.

**Question:** Okay, I see that. But does it make any difference? Sooner or later, h2-h3 will be necessary anyway.

**Answer:** Ah, well, you might think so, but ...

**4 ... Bb7 5 Nbd2 Bd6!?**



A typically creative Alekhine idea. Taking advantage of the specifics of the position, in this case the inclusion of an early h2-h3, he produces an unusual response.

#### **6 Bxd6**

With the pawn on h2, White could play just Bg3, but that is not available here, since 6 Bg3? Bxg3 7 fxg3 would spoil his pawn formation. 6 Bg5 is another option, but after 6 ... h6, he would have to capture on f6, surrendering the bishop pair, since 7 Bh4 g5 8 Bg3 Bxg3 9 fxg3 is similarly unattractive.

#### **6 ... cxd6**

**Question:** What is going on now? It sounds as if you like Black's position, despite his doubled pawns.

**Answer:** I don't think the position is any more than equal, but I do approve of Black's play. Firstly, the doubled pawns are no problem; indeed, they add to Black's central control, without hampering the actions of his pieces. But more important than that is the way Alekhine has once again managed to avoid the standard, somewhat mechanical and turgid manoeuvring which tends so often to be characteristic of the London System. After only half a dozen moves, he has succeeded in reaching a non-standard structure, where the players must think for themselves.

#### **7 e3 0-0 8 Be2!?**

**Question:** 8 Bd3 seems more natural to me.

**Answer:** Yes, I tend to agree. Alekhine explains the slightly strange-looking text by the fact that it anticipates Black playing ... d6-d5 and ... Ne4, whereupon White wants

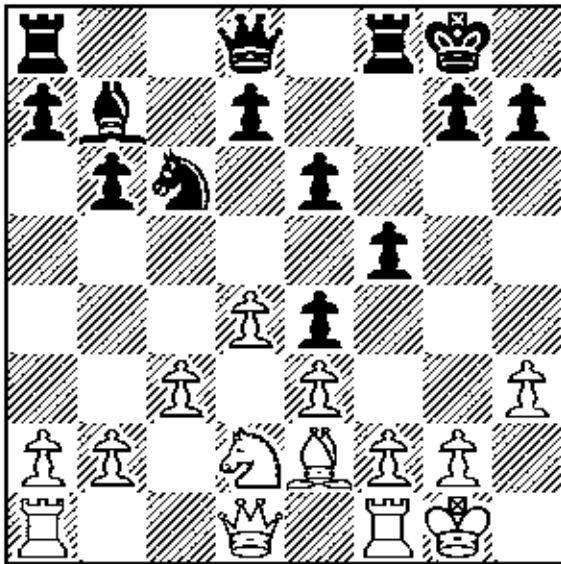


to capture with Nxe4. It all seems a bit passive though.

**8 ... d5 9 0-0 Nc6 10 c3**

Again, slightly passive. I assume Rubinstein did not want to play c2-c4, because that would undouble Black's pawns and open the long diagonal for his bishop, but the text does not leave White with any obvious plan of active play. This mindset is always a danger for players who choose lines like the Colle or London System, incidentally. If the White player is motivated by a desire for safety first (which he does not have to be in these lines, but in reality, quite often is), he can easily start playing too passively and gradually lose the initiative.

**10 ... Ne4 11 Nxe4 dxe4 12 Nd2 f5**



**Question:** How do you assess the position?

**Answer:** It is basically just equal, although it soon becomes clear that Rubinstein is in too passive a state of mind, and he rapidly drifts into trouble. Black is already starting to seize the initiative.

**13 f4**

This gives Black something to “bite on” and allows him to open the g-file. Rubinstein was presumably worried that, if he did not play this move at once, it would become impossible after 13 ... Qg5.

**13 ... g5!**

**Question:** That looks a bit loosening in front of his own king.

**Answer:** Maybe, but White is far too passively placed to be able to exploit it.

Although the computer thinks the position is equal, I already prefer Black.

**14 Nc4 d5 15 Ne5 Nxe5 16 dxe5 Kh8**

Black's play is very logical. He intends simply to bring his heavy pieces to the g-file and target the white king.

**Question:** Doesn't he still have a bad bishop?

**Answer:** It is true that Black has his centre pawns fixed on light squares, hampering his bishop. On the other hand, I don't think the white bishop is in reality any more active than its opposite number, since it has no targets to attack. Indeed, as we will eventually see, the black bishop is not as dead as it may appear, as there are tactical possibilities of ... d5-d4, followed by ... e4-e3, opening the long diagonal.

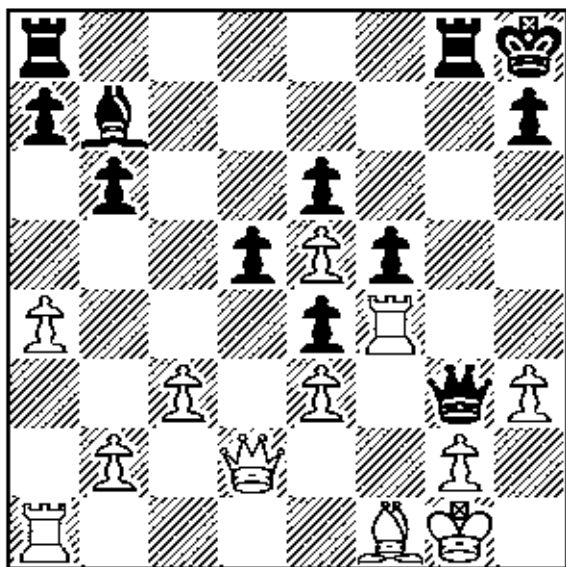
**17 a4?!**

Rubinstein at last starts some active play on the queenside, but Alekhine condemns this move and says White had to seize his last chance to play 17 g3 Rg8 18 Kh2. After the text, that will no longer be possible.

**17 ... Rg8 18 Qd2 gxf4! 19 Rxf4**

This is what Alekhine meant. White loses the chance to take on f4 with the e-pawn, since 19 exf4? Qh4 now threatens both 20 ... Qxh3 and 20 ... Rxg2+!.

**19 ... Qg5 20 Bf1 Qg3!**



**Question:** Why is that so good?

**Answer:** It is a subtle way to gain a tempo, as will become clear.

**21 Kh1**

Forced, since 21 ... Qxh3 was an obvious threat.

**21 ... Qg7**

**Question:** It appears that Black has lost a tempo, rather than gained one – compared with 20 ... Qg7, White has gained the move Kh1, hasn't he?

**Answer:** Yes, except that the king will soon be required on g1, so Kh1 will actually prove to be a lost tempo, rather a gained one.

**22 Qd4 Ba6! 23 Rf2**

Forced, in order to cover g2.

**23 ... Qg3!**

See the previous notes. Black gains a tempo since the f2-rook is undefended, which would not have been the case with the king on g1.

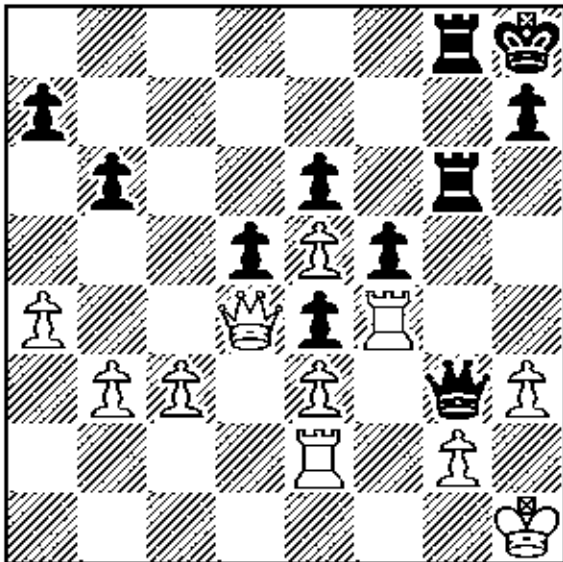
**24 Rc2 Bxf1 25 Rxf1 Rac8!**

As usual, Alekhine is relentless in his exploitation of the initiative. As he himself says, Black works with tempo gains the whole time. Now he threatens to win the a-pawn with ... Rc4.

**26 b3 Rc7**

Thus Black has gained a tempo to prepare the trebling of his major pieces on the g-file.

**27 Re2 Rcg7 28 Rf4 Rg6!**



*MegaBase* and some other sources give a repetition of moves here with 28 ... Rc7 29 Rc2 Rcg7 30 Re2, returning to the text position. Skinner and Verhoeven are not categorical about which score is correct, but I have followed that in Alekhine's book, *My Best Games 1924-1937*, despite being fully aware that the great man was not above

occasionally “cleaning up” some of his game scores when publishing them!

**Question:** So what is the text move about? How is Black going to break through?

**Answer:** Alekhine’s play nicely combines attacks on all of White’s weaknesses – including, vitally, the e5-pawn. His immediate threat is 29 ... Rh6 30 Qd1 Qg7 31 Qd4? Rxh3+! and wins. In fact, the more one looks at the position, the more one realizes that White is virtually in zugzwang. For example, the e2-rook cannot move because of 29 Rc2 (or 29 Ref2 Rh6) 29 ... Qe1+ 30 Kh2 Rh6 and there is no defence to 31 ... Rxh3+!.

**29 Qb4 Rh6**

Again, there is no defence to ... Rxh3+, so White has to surrender a pawn.

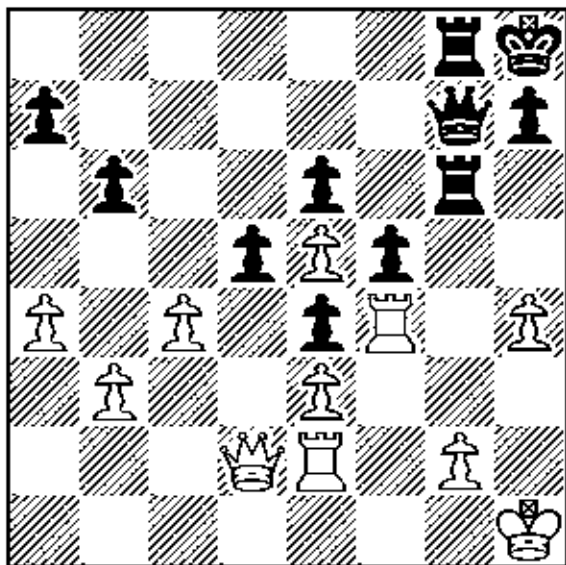
**30 h4 Qg7**

Naturally, 30 ... Rxh4+ was also winning.

**31 c4**

Or 31 Qd4 Rg6 32 Rff2 Rg4 etc.

**31 ... Rg6 32 Qd2**



**32 ... Rg3?!**

Alekhine gives this an exclamation mark, but it is actually an inaccuracy. Black can win crushingly, as well as thematically, by 32 ... d4! 33 exd4 e3 34 Qc2 Rg3 35 c5 Rh3+ 36 Kg1 Qg3 and mate follows.

**33 Qe1?**

Alekhine’s note to his previous move says that the threat is 33 ... Rh3+ 34 Kg1 Qg3, but this is not so clear; after 33 cxd5 Rh3+ 34 Kg1 Qg3 35 Ref2, White is still fighting. However, Rubinstein clearly believed his opponent and, in trying to stop the “threat”, just loses at once.

### **33 ... Rxc2 0-1**

Mate follows rapidly. A great example of Alekhine finding a way to unbalance the position and obtain chances for double-edged play, when faced with a solid white opening system.

## Game 14

### Alekhine-Asztalos, Kecskemet 1927

*Game 14*

**A.Alekhine-L.Asztalos**

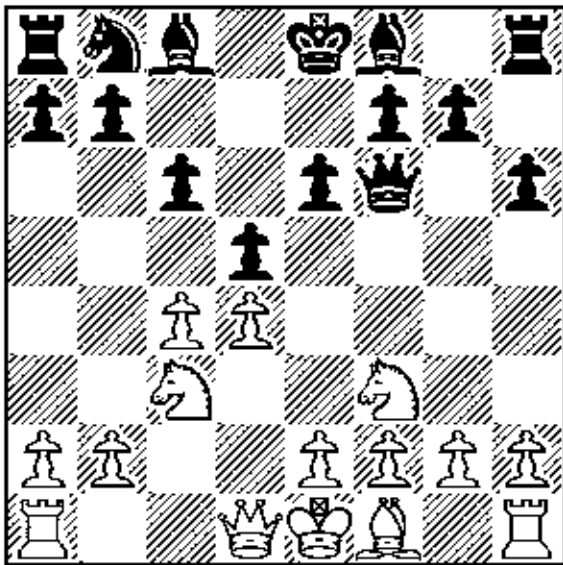
Kecskemet 1927

*Semi-Slav Defence*

**1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 d4 Nf6 4 Bg5 h6**

This was condemned at the time, including by Alekhine himself, on the grounds that Black's bishop pair does not compensate for his space disadvantage. Modern theory takes a different view, and we in fact transpose into a popular modern variation.

**5 Bxf6 Qxf6 6 Nc3 c6**



By transposition, we have reached the so-called Moscow Variation. White has surrendered the bishop pair, but in return he hopes to get e2-e4 in, either in one move or a little later, after first developing with e2-e3, Bd3, 0-0 and only then e3-e4. Either way, he will enjoy greater space, although Black will be very solid and his bishop pair might become active later in the game. A long manoeuvring battle is frequently the order of the day.

**7 Qb3**

**Question:** If White wanted to push his e-pawn to e4, why doesn't he do it at once?

**Answer:** The problem is that the immediate 7 e4 can be met by 7 ... dxe4 8 Nxe4 Bb4+, when there is no convenient way to meet the check. Hence the text; White takes control of the b4-square, preventing the bishop check, and intends e2-e4 next move.

**7 ... Nd7**

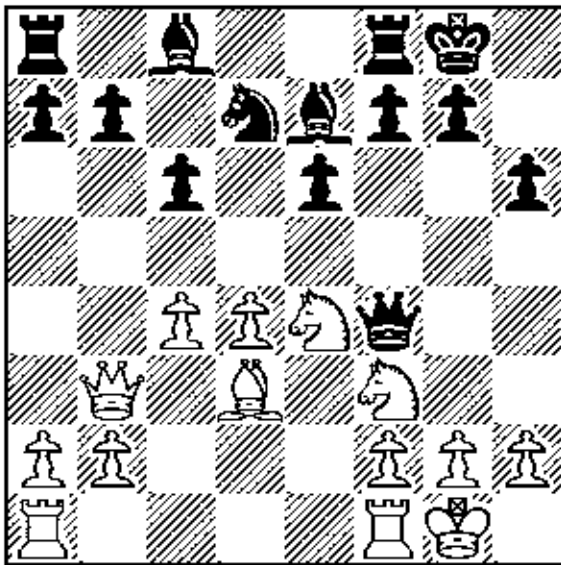
This falls in with White's plans. Nowadays, 7 ... a5 is a popular move here, renewing the threat of a bishop check; i.e. if White continues 8 e4 dxe4 9 Nxe4 then 9 ... Bb4+ is again possible.

**8 e4 dxe4 9 Nxe4 Qf4**

**Question:** Is this correct? The queen looks exposed here.

**Answer:** It can be, but Black usually manages to tuck the queen back on c7 later on; whereas retreating straight away with 9 ... Qd8 is a trifle passive and allows White a freer hand.

**10 Bd3 Be7 11 0-0 0-0**



**Question:** So how would you assess this position?

**Answer:** White has a small advantage in the shape of his extra space, but Black is very solid and has no weaknesses.

**Question:** His bishop pair does not look very impressive!

**Answer:** That is true, but “he who has the bishops has the future”, as the old saying goes. Black will have to show patience, often manoeuvring within his first three ranks, with moves such as ... Rd8, ... Nf8, ... Bd7-e8, ... Rac8, etc. In effect, he plays “possum”, inviting White to show his cards, and preparing to counter-attack, usually by an eventual ... c6-c5 break, especially if White overextends.

**12 Rfe1 Rd8 13 Rad1 Qc7 14 Ng3 Nf8 15 Qc3!?**

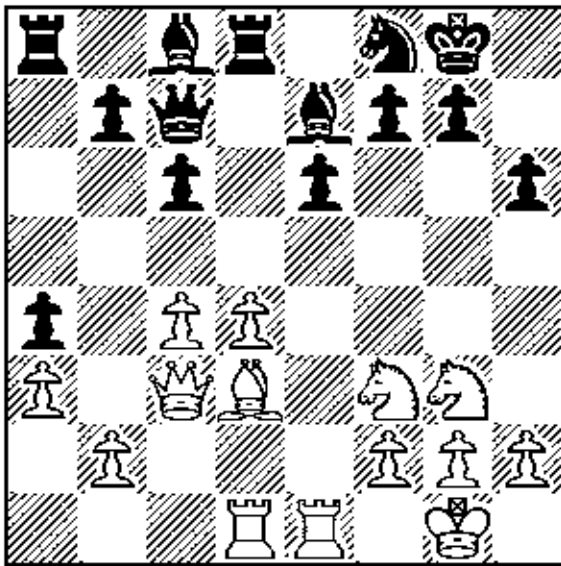
**Question:** What is the idea of this?

**Answer:** White wants to play Ng5 and d4-d5, forcing a major weakening of the enemy kingside. Alekhine awarded himself an exclamation mark for this move, which is possibly a touch generous, but it is an interesting idea. With Black so solid, White has to manoeuvre around a find a way to induce some weaknesses in the enemy position before he can hope to launch a successful attack. Simply throwing pieces at the black king would likely rebound on White, and the chief value of this game is as a classic example of a slow and patient attacking build-up.

**15 ... a5**

Threatening ... Bb4.

**16 a3 a4**



Now Black is ready to meet 17 Nh5 with 17 ... Qa5, forcing the queens off. Alekhine claims that, in doing so, Black has been forced to compromise his queenside pawns, which White can later exploit.

**Question:** You sound as though you are not convinced!



**Answer:** I'm not. One could argue that the advance ... a7-a5-a4 has disrupted the white queenside, since the space-gaining b2-b4 is now ruled out, which would also have hampered Black in achieving the ... c6-c5 break. It is not entirely clear to me who has gained most from the last couple of moves.

**17 Ne5 Qa5 18 Qc1**

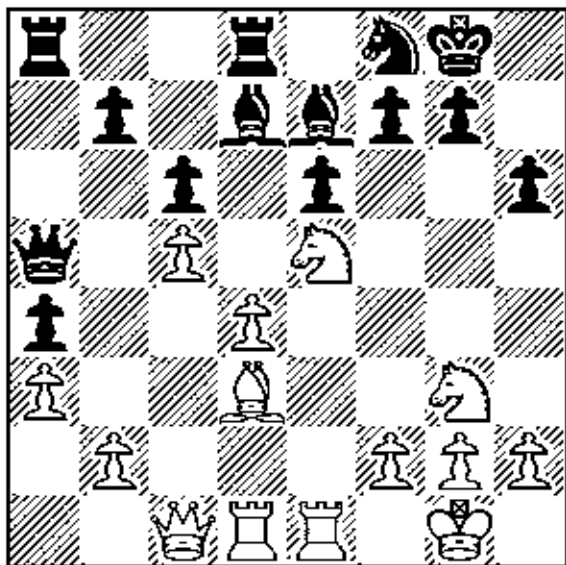
**Question:** So White does not want to exchange queens?

**Answer:** No, that would be quite wrong in this position. His space advantage is only of use in the middlegame, if he can exploit it to develop an attack on the king. Once the queens come off, Black could easily take the initiative in the ending. Note that the only weak pawn on the board is the white pawn on d4, which could become a target in an endgame.

**18 ... Bd7**

Of course not 18 ... Rxd4?? 19 Bh7+ etc.

**19 c5!**



A major strategic decision, and a good one.

**Question:** Why?

**Answer:** White puts paid once and for all to any hope Black had of playing ... c6-c5, freeing his position and giving his bishops some scope. He also sets up a potential Nc4-d6/b6.

**Question:** Okay, I see that, but doesn't White also leave his d4-pawn backward

and concede an outpost on d5? The black knight would be very strong there.

**Answer:** That is true, but there are two points here. As far as the backward pawn on d4 is concerned, it is no weaker than it was previously – in either case, it lacks pawn support and must be defended by pieces. Nothing has really changed in that respect. And as regards the prospective outpost, a key factor in White's decision is that the black knight is a long way from d5. How it is ever going to reach that square? To do so, Black would have to move the d7-bishop, and then play ... Nd7-f6-d5, a total expenditure of four tempi, which is an awful lot. I think we can assume that if the knight were standing on f6 already, Alekhine would not have played 19 c5.

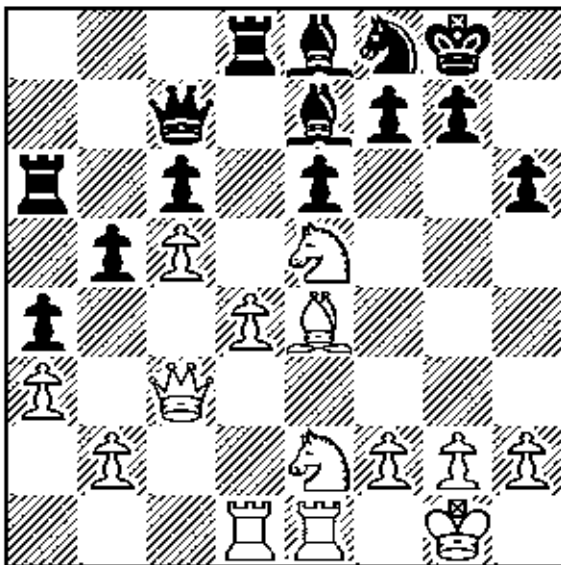
**19 ... b5!?**

Alekhine states that this is forced, in view of the threat of Nc4-b6, but it is an awful commitment. The c6-pawn is badly weakened and Black abandons any chance of ever challenging White's pawn phalanx with ... b7-b6. On the other hand, the computer's slight preference, 19 ... Be8, gives Black a terrible-looking position after 20 Nc4 Qc7 21 Nb6 Ra7. Apart from anything else, the a4-pawn is just dropping off after, say, 22 Qc2.

**20 Be4**

Immediately attacking the freshly-created weakness on c6.

**20 ... Qc7 21 Qc3 Be8 22 Ne2! Ra6**



**Question:** This all looks a bit strange!

**Answer:** Black's last few moves are all in preparation for ... Nd7, challenging the strong enemy knight on e5. But meanwhile, the other white knight is coming round to

replace its colleague.

**23 Nc1 Nd7 24 Nxd7 Rxd7 25 Nd3**

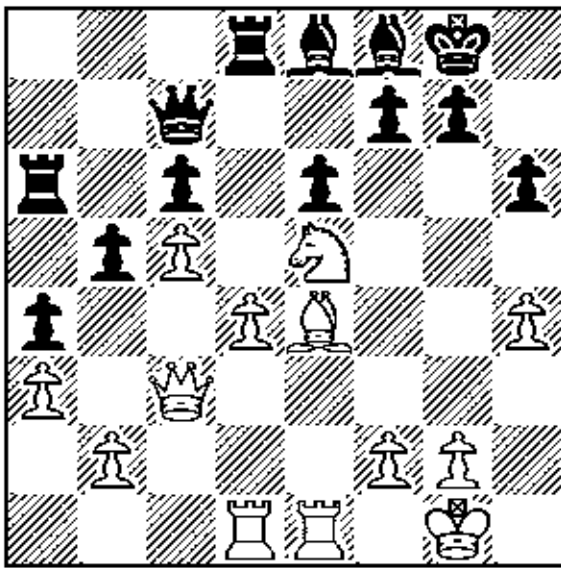
Now 26 Nb4 is an incidental threat, winning the c6-pawn.

**25 ... Rd8 26 Ne5 Bf8**

**Question:** What about playing 26 ... f6 to keep the white knight out of e5?

**Answer:** It is possible, but the weakening of the e6-pawn clearly put Black off this course. One suspects that e6 would prove impossible to defend in the long term – White can regroup with something like Nd3, followed by g2-g3 and Nf4, plus Bb1-a2, for example. Aszталos instead decides to avoid creating any further weaknesses, waiting to see how White will strengthen his position. This is a valid strategy, because it is still not entirely obvious how White will do so. The one weakness on c6 is easily defended, so White has to find a way to create play on the kingside.

**27 h4!**



This game was analysed in some detail by Vladimir Vukovic in his classic book *The Art of Attack*. Vukovic uses it as a perfect example of how to build up an attack against a solid position, without making a premature commitment. As he points out, although Alekhine has been intending a kingside attack ever since the opening, White's last move is the first that really commits him in that respect. He has waited almost 30 moves, and has first laid down various preconditions for a successful assault:

1. He has waited until the black kingside is weakened by ... h7-h6.
2. He has tied various black pieces down to the defence of the weak pawn at c6.
3. All of the white pieces are aggressively placed and can easily take part in the attack.

Only having created these preconditions does Alekhine finally commit himself. The thrust of the h-pawn puts paid to any ideas Black may have had of regrouping with ... g7-g6 and ... Bg7.

**27 ... Raa8 28 Bb1 h5**

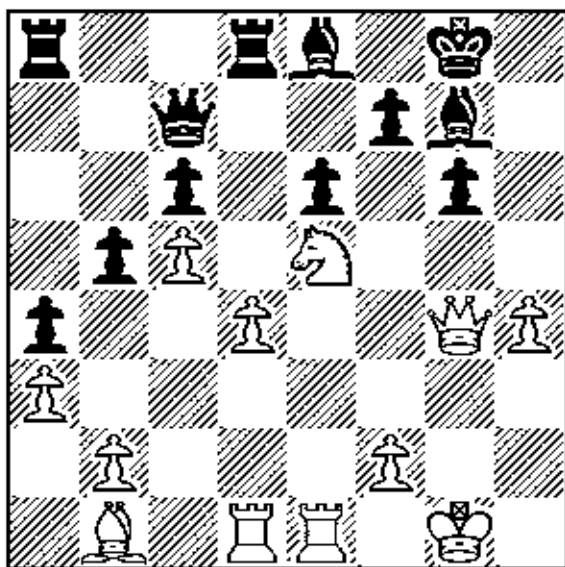
**Question:** Hmmm. I thought one was taught not to move pawns in front of one's king?

**Answer:** That is a general rule, but Black had little choice. There was a threat of h4-h5, followed by Qc2, when he would not be able to defend satisfactorily against the mate on h7.

**29 Qf3 g6**

Note how White's last few moves have provoked additional weaknesses in the black kingside – another example of gradual preparation for an attack. Only now, having forced as many concessions as he can, does Alekhine strike with an out-and-out attacking blow.

**30 g4! hxg4 31 Qxg4 Bg7**



**32 Ba2!**

Both Alekhine and Vukovic strongly approve of this move, which aims to prevent the black f-pawn advancing. Interestingly, the computer does not think White has much here! Instead, 32 h5 gxh5 33 Qxh5 f6 34 Qh7+ Kf8 would be unclear, and is the sort of variation White is trying to avoid.

**32 ... b4 33 Bc4**

33 axb4 would permit counterplay after 33 ... a3.

**33 ... bxa3 34 bxa3 Qa5**

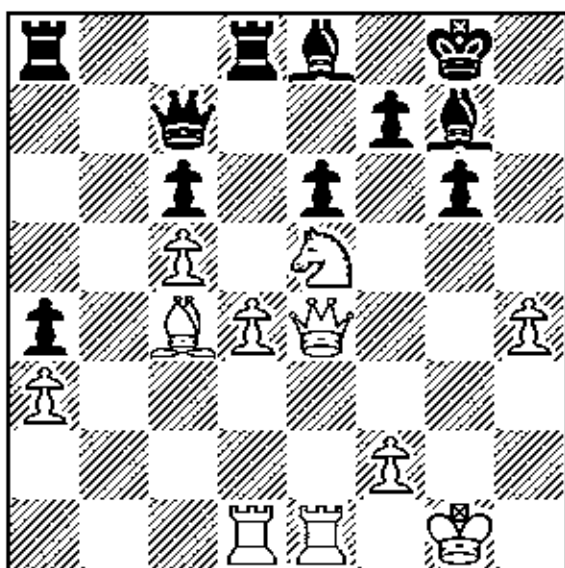
**Question:** Asztalos seems to be putting up a fight.

**Answer:** Yes, indeed. It is notable that his last few moves have been heartily approved of by the computer. However, the usual “horizon effect” now kicks in – at this point, *Fritz* suddenly decides that Black is in real trouble after all.

**35 Qe4!?**

Alekhine claims this as best, but it may be that *Fritz*’s 35 h5 gxh5 36 Qf4!, followed by Re3-g3 (or Kh2 and Rg1), was even stronger. Not 36 Qxh5? Rxd4, which favours Black.

**35 ... Qc7!?**



**36 Qf4**

**Question:** What is that about?

**Answer:** Alekhine says it is “preparing the following pawn move”, though I am not sure it is necessary. I can only assume he thought the immediate 36 h5 might allow 36 ... g5; e.g. 37 Qg4 Qe7 38 Nf3 Bh6. This still looks very good for White, but I guess there is no reason to permit it. White can afford one more preparatory move, before forcing open the g-file.

**36 ... Rab8 37 h5**

The black king’s pawn cover is finally destroyed.

**37 ... gxh5 38 Kh1**

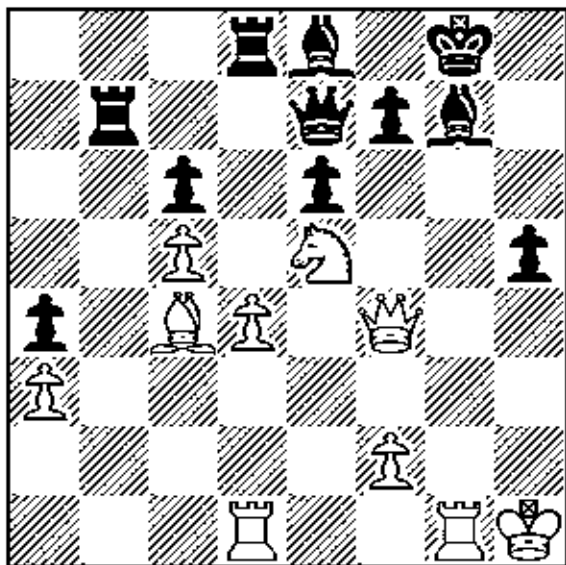
A simple follow-up, which makes room for the rook on g1.

**38 ... Rb7**

**Question:** Was there anything better?

**Answer:** Not really. For example, 38 ... Kh7 39 Rg1, with the threat of 40 Rxd7+! forcing mate: 40 ... Kxd7 41 Rg1+ Kf8 42 Ng6+ Kg7 43 Ne7+ Kf8 44 Qf6 etc.

**39 Rg1 Qe7**



Now comes the same final blow as in the previous note.

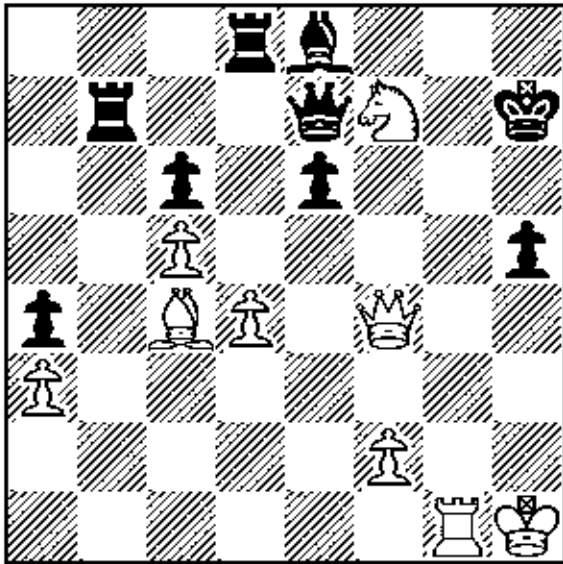
**40 Rxd7+!**

To the experienced player, this sacrifice cries out to be played; for the less experienced, there is a useful device which I have seen Kasparov quote when explaining his games, and which can help in such cases. Looking at what happens after this sacrifice, we can see that White exchanges one attacking piece (the g1-rook) for one defensive piece (the d7-bishop). Okay, the two are of slightly differing values generally, but it is not much, and in this context the difference is irrelevant. After the sacrifice, White will immediately replace his attacking piece with its colleague from d1, whereas Black is unable to replace the missing d7-bishop!

**Question:** It all sounds a bit “Janet and John”!

**Answer:** Maybe, but it is 100% logical. If you listen to some of Kasparov’s demonstrations of his games, you will often hear him use such logic, counting the number of attacking pieces versus the number of defending pieces, etc. And if it is good enough for GK, then it is good enough for the rest of us!

**40 ... Kxd7 41 Rg1+ Kh7 42 Nxf7! 1-0**

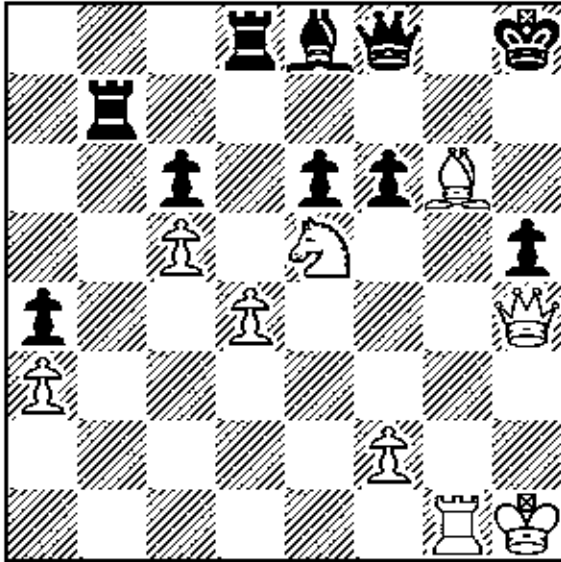


It is not often that a move which brings about instant resignation becomes the subject of controversy, but such was the case here. Alekhine claims that this is the only winning move, whereas Vukovic, in his aforementioned book, says it was not fully correct! With the aid of the computer, we can now hope to settle this dispute once and for all.

Firstly, is Alekhine's sacrifice correct? His analysis runs 42 ... Qxf7 (42 ... Bxf7 43 Bd3+ is mate in six) 43 Bd3+ Qg6 (or 43 ... Kh8 44 Qh6+) 44 Bxg6+ Bxg6 45 Rxg6? (my punctuation; Alekhine gave an "!") 45 ... Kxg6 46 Qe4+ Kg7 47 Qe5+ "and Black, after a few further checks, would inevitably lose one of his rooks." However, even in the pre-computer era, Vukovic showed that this is not the case after 47 ... Kg6! (the only move; 47 ... Kf7 48 Qxh5+ Ke7 49 Qh7+ or 48 ... Kf6 49 Qh4+ etc is the sort of variation Alekhine had in mind). If Black keeps his king on g6 and g7, he can avoid loss of a rook, as the computer confirms. For example, 48 Qxe6+ Kg7 49 Qe5+ Kg6 50 Qe6+ Kg7 51 Qxc6 Rb1+! 52 Kg2 Rxd4 53 Qc7+ Kg6 and White remains better, but it is not 100% clear he is winning, as his own king is exposed to checks from the enemy rooks. This is all analysis by Vukovic, which is confirmed by the computer.

Question two is "Does Alekhine's 42nd move actually throw away the win?" Vukovic also answered this question correctly: No, it doesn't. The fault lies with 45 Rxg6?. Instead, 45 Qf6! Rg8 46 Qxe6 is winning, albeit not instantly. Once again, the computer confirms Vukovic's conclusions.

The third and final question was whether Alekhine was correct in saying that his 42nd move was the only way forward. Here, too, Vukovic disagreed with him, and appears to have been correct. He gives 42 Qg3 as winning, his analysis running as follows: 42 ... Qf8 43 Qh4! f6 44 Bd3+ Kh8 45 Bg6!



45 ... Rh7 (or 45 ... fxe5 46 Qxh5+ Kg7 47 Bxe8+ Kf6 48 Qg5 mate) 46 Bxh7 Kxh7 (or 46 ... fxe5 47 Qxd8 – Vukovic; and 47 Rg8+ Qxg8 48 Bxg8 Rxd4 49 Qe7 is even better) 47 Ng4 Bg6 (or 47 ... Kh8 48 Nxf6 Bf7 49 Nxh5) 48 Nxf6+ Kg7 49 Nxh5+ and mates.

Once again, every one of these variations is confirmed by *Fritz 12*, so Vukovic gets 10/10 for the accuracy of his analysis in this complicated position, all done back in the days when *Fritz 12* was no more than a glint in the programmer's eye!

**Question:** Impressive stuff!

**Answer:** Indeed. Vukovic's book, *The Art of Attack*, is still one of the finest chess books ever written.

Overall, this was a great game by Alekhine and a highly instructive example of gradually building up a kingside attack against a solid enemy position.



# Game 15

## Alekhine-Steiner, Bradley Beach 1929

Game 15

**A.Alekhine-H.Steiner**

Bradley Beach 1929

*Queen's Gambit Accepted*

**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 d5 3 c4 dxc4 4 e3 e6 5 Bxc4 c5 6 0-0 a6 7 Qe2 Nbd7?!**

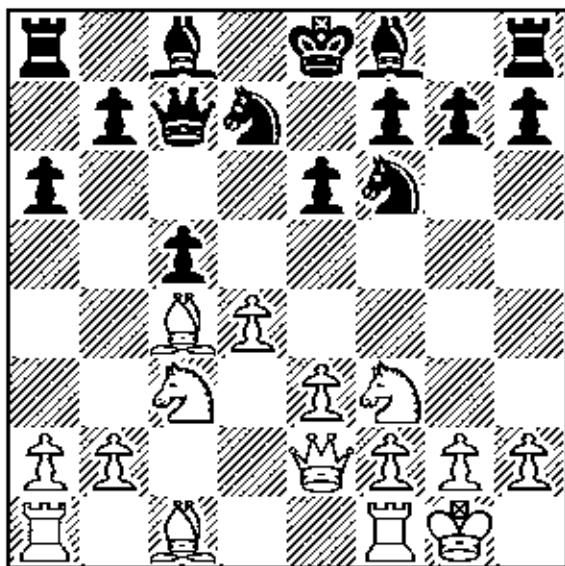
Black fails to follow the correct move order in this QGA main line and soon falls into trouble. Modern theory (building in part on games such as the present one) has established that the best move here is 7 ... b5 8 Bb3 Bb7, when Black can hope to equalize.

**8 Nc3**

Here 8 a4! looks more critical, exploiting Black's failure to play ... b7-b5 and also the fact that his knight is somewhat misplaced on d7, from where it cannot reach b4 very easily.

**8 ... Qc7**

Again, 8 ... b5 9 Bb3 Bb7 is best.



**9 d5!**

**Question:** Why is this good?

**Answer:** It is a typical breakthrough idea in these structures, made stronger here by the position of the black queen on c7.

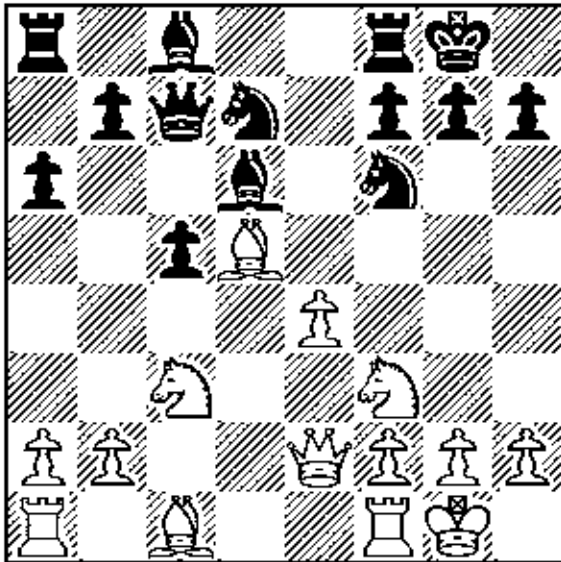
**9 ... exd5?!**

The computer's 9 ... Nb6 seems a better defence, when Black would avoid any serious trouble; e.g. 10 dxe6 Nxc4 11 Qxc4 (not 11 exf7+?? Qxf7 and wins) 11 ... Bxe6 with equality.

**10 Bxd5!**

This is the point. The bishop is powerful on this square, but exchanging it off will also cost Black a tempo, due to the enemy knight recapturing on d5.

**10 ... Bd6 11 e4 0-0**



**Question:** So what is the assessment?

**Answer:** White is somewhat better, even if his advantage is not huge. He has more space and his bishop on d5 is a powerful piece. Black still needs to sort out his queenside development, although structurally, he has no weaknesses.

**Question:** Alekhine seemed to specialize in these positions!

**Answer:** Yes, he was exceptionally strong in exploiting the initiative in such situations.

**12 Bg5 Ng4?!**

**Question:** Is that good?

**Answer:** Alekhine implies that it is almost forced, as Black needs to deal with the potential threat of Bxf6, followed by e4-e5. He also needs to be able to move his queen's knight, so as to develop the rest of his queenside; in order to do that, he appears to need first to move the king's knight, so as to avoid Bxf6, breaking up his kingside.

**Question:** You say "appears to need" – does that mean that he doesn't in fact need to?

**Answer:** Possibly! The computer makes the interesting suggestion 12 ... Ne5!? 13 Bxf6 gxf6, which it assesses as only slightly better for White, much the same as after the game continuation.

**Question:** But isn't the black king going to be vulnerable?

**Answer:** It is not so easy to exploit; for example, after 14 Nxe5 (or 14 Nh4 Ng6) 14 ... Bxe5 15 g3 Bd7, Black is not too badly off. It is at least an interesting thought.

**13 h3 Nge5 14 Nh4**

This is the trouble with Black's chosen plan. He is cramped, so White avoids exchanges and prepares to drive the enemy knight from the centre with f2-f4. The black pieces are tripping over each other.

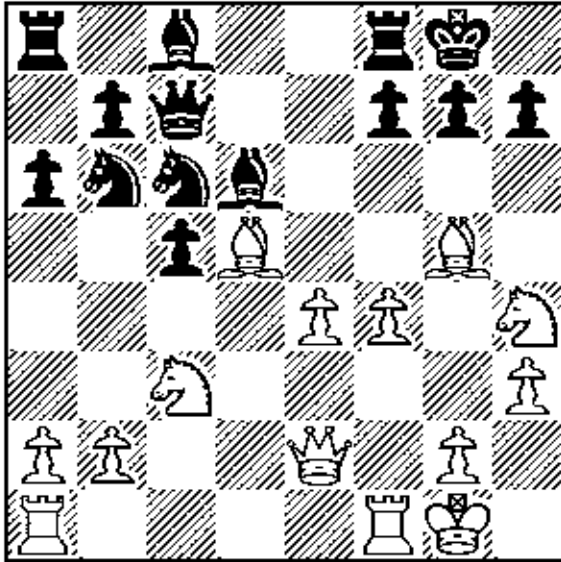
**14 ... Nb6 15 f4 Nc6**

**Question:** Black's pieces seem to be straying a long way from his king!

**Answer:** Quite correct.

**Question:** Are there any alternatives?

**Answer:** There is 15 ... Ng6, but then the simple sequence 16 Nxc6 hxc6 17 e5 Be7 18 Bxe7 Qxe7 19 Qf3 leaves White comfortably on top.



**16 f5!?**

**Question:** That is a surprise! I expected 16 e5.

**Answer:** That is indeed the most natural move, and may be objectively strongest. Alekhine dismissed it as leaving White “with but an insignificant positional advantage”, though it seems to me that White is comfortably better after 16 ... Be7 (as Fritz points out, 16 ... Nd4 17 Qh5 Be7 18 Bf6! is dangerous for Black) 17 Bxe7 Nxe7 18 Be4.

Alekhine was very proud of the paradoxical text move, which cedes the e5-square to the black pieces but continues White’s kingside attack – or so he believed. The computer is more sceptical.

**16 ... Ne5?!**

Alekhine does not comment on this move, but the computer prefers 16 ... Nb4, when Black can eliminate the strong d5-bishop without allowing a white knight to replace it. It is not clear that White has so much after this.

**17 Qh5**

The immediate 17 f6 looks stronger, and if 17 ... g6, then 18 a4! keeps up White’s initiative.

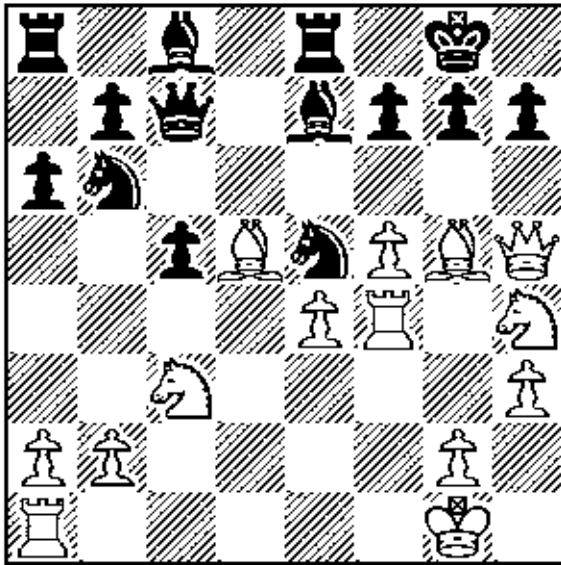
**17 ... Re8 18 Rf4?!**

Black’s defensive idea is to meet 18 f6 g6 19 Qh6?? with 19 ... Bf8, as Alekhine points out; but the text is dubious and should have seen the advantage pass to Black. White should settle for 18 Rad1, retaining the better of it.

**18 ... Be7?**

Presumably missing the force of the reply. Instead, 18 ... c4! would have turned the

tables and left White with problems. For example, after 19 f6 g6, White has nothing better than 20 Qe2 Nd3 21 Rf3 Be6 22 Bxe6 Rxe6, when Black has a clear advantage.



**19 f6! Bf8**

**Question:** Why not the obvious 19 ... g6 - ?

**Answer:** That must have been what Steiner intended, only realizing here that White has a decisive sacrificial attack starting with 20 Nxg6!!, as Alekhine demonstrates: 20 ... hxg6 (or 20 ... Nxg6, when Alekhine gives 21 Bxf7+ Kxf7 22 Qxh7+ Ke6 23 Qxg6 and wins, which is true, though 22 fxe7+ would force mate in nine, and 21 Rh4 mates even more quickly!) 21 Bxf7+! Kxf7 (or 21 ... Nxg6 22 Qxg6+ and 23 Qg7 mate) 22 fxe7+ Ke6 (or 22 ... Kg8 23 Rf8+ Rxf8 24 exf8Q+ Kxf8 25 Qh8+ Kf7 26 Qh7+, winning the queen), when the computer confirms that 23 Rf6+ again forces mate in nine; e.g. 23 ... Kd7 (or 23 ... Kxe7 24 Qh7+ etc) 24 Qd1+ Kxe7 25 Nd5+ Nxd5 26 Qxd5 and so on.

**20 fxg7**

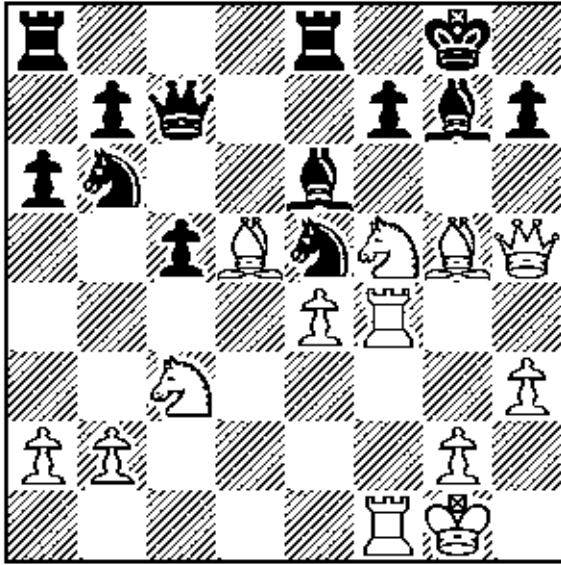
Now that the black king's defences have been torn open, the rest is a massacre.

**20 ... Bxg7**

**Question:** What about 20 ... Bd6, hoping to cover the king with the enemy g-pawn? Isn't an enemy pawn in front of one's king often an effective defender?

**Answer:** It is, but in this instance, the computer points out the stunning winning move 21 Ng6!!; for example, 21 ... Nxg6 22 Bxf7+ Qxf7 (or 22 ... Kxg7 23 Qh6+ Kh8 24 Bf6 mate) 23 Rxf7 and wins.

21 Raf1 Be6 22 Nf5



All the white pieces come pouring in.

**22 ... Bxd5**

Or 22 ... Bxf5 23 Rxf5 and f7 cannot be defended.

**23 Nxg7 Ng6**

23 ... Kxg7 24 Bf6+ Kg8 25 Qh6 mates.

**24 Nxe8 Rxe8 25 Nxd5 1-0**

A crushing finish by Alekhine, but the resource for Black at move 18 would have changed the course of the game.

## Game 16

# Alekhine-Bogoljubow, World Championship (Game 5) 1929

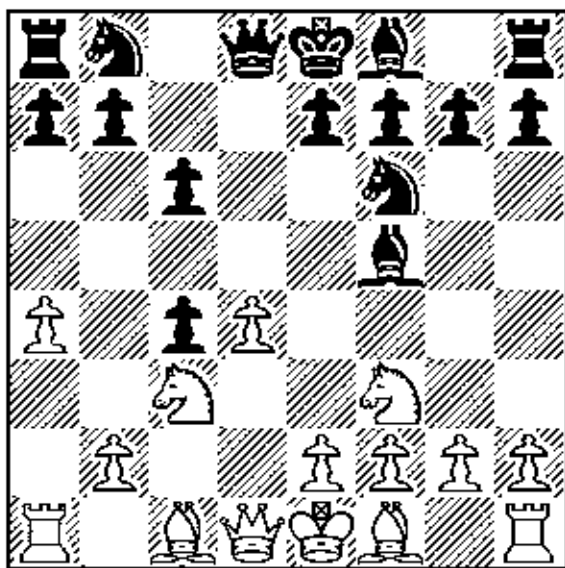
Game 16

**A.Alekhine-E.Bogoljubow**

World Championship (5th matchgame), Germany/Netherlands 1929

*Slav Defence*

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 dxc4 5 a4 Bf5



The main line position of the Slav Defence. This became very popular during the 1930s, and featured especially strongly in Alekhine's two world championship matches against Euwe, with both players using it as their primary defence to 1 d4.

**6 Ne5**

This is one of two main options here, the other being 6 e3 e6 7 Bxc4 Bb4.

**Question:** So what is the point of the text. I thought one was not supposed to move the same piece twice in the opening?

**Answer:** That is a decent general rule, but like all other such rules of thumb, it is

for “the obedience of fools and the guidance of wise men”! White’s idea is to build a strong pawn centre with f2-f3 and e2-e4, which will also shut out the Black’s light-squared bishop from the centre. This is strategically a strong basic plan, and Black needs to play accurately to meet it, if he is not to fall into a bad position.

**6 ... e6**

A great deal of theoretical water has flowed under the bridge since this game was played, but the text is still regarded as one of the two best moves here. The alternative, which is somewhat more popular at the time of writing, is 6 ... Nbd7 7 Nxc4 and now both 7 ... Qc7 and 7 ... Nb6 are regarded as good enough for approximate equality.

**7 Bg5**

Alekhine’s move is logical enough, pinning the knight and hoping to achieve e2-e4, but Black can equalize with accurate play.

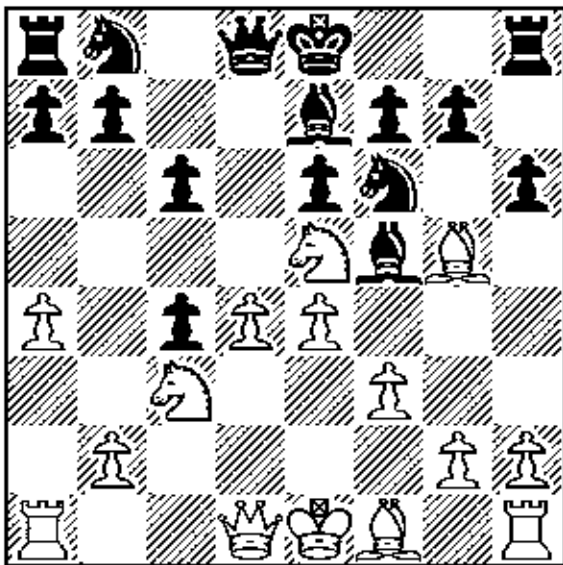
**Question:** I thought White would continue 7 f3, which is surely the consistent follow-up to his previous move?

**Answer:** Yes, and it is nowadays the main line. There is a great deal of theory on the resulting positions, the piece sacrifice 7 ... Bb4 8 e4 Bxe4 9 fxe4 Nxe4 being one line, and the central counter-attack 7 ... c5 being another.

**7 ... Be7?!**

This is solid, though a tad passive. Black can equalize more easily with Alekhine’s own recipe 7 ... Bb4 8 f3 h6.

**8 f3 h6 9 e4**



**9 ... Bh7?!**



**Question:** This looks anything but forced. What about the alternatives?

**Answer:** Alekhine himself offers the variation 9 ... hxc5 10 exf5 exf5 11 Bxc4 0-0 12 h4 as good for White, while the computer's 12 Qb3! is even stronger, with a crushing advantage.

However, Black's play is too helpful in Alekhine's line. Instead, the computer claims equality after 10 ... Nbd7 11 fxe6 fxe6.

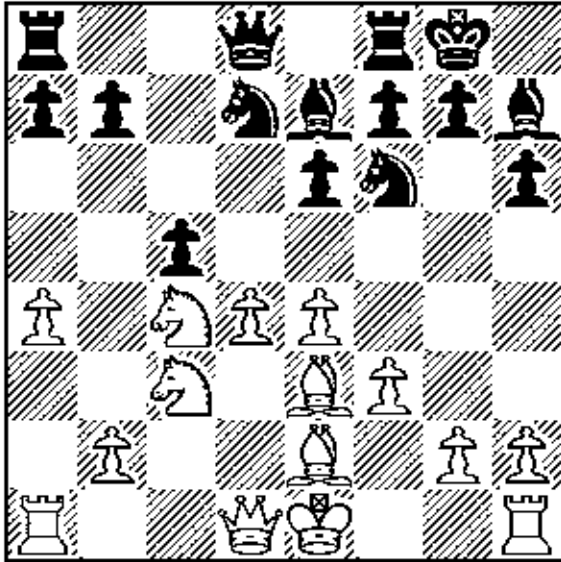
**Question:** Really? It looks a bit risky for Black.

**Answer:** I agree, but the concrete variations appear satisfactory. *Fritz* gives the following remarkable line, ending in perpetual: 12 Qc2 Nxe5 13 dxe5 Nd5 14 Qg6+ Kf8 15 Qxe6 Nxc3 16 Qf5+ Bf6! 17 exf6 Qd4 18 fxg7+ Kxg7 19 Qxg5+ Kf8 20 Qf5+ Kg7 etc. Of course, a wild computer sequence like this is of little practical significance in an over-the-board human contest. Nevertheless, it seems to support the claim that Black is objectively okay.

More to the point, Black also has 9 ... Bxe4, which Alekhine does not mention. This seems adequate for equality too; e.g. 10 Bxf6 (10 fxe4? hxc5 is simply good for Black) 10 ... gxf6 11 Nxf7 Kxf7 12 fxe4 Qb6 and the vulnerability of the white centre, particularly the d4-pawn (which will come under attack after ... Rd8), gives Black sufficient counterplay.

Bogoljubow's move is far too passive and co-operative. As a result, his queen's bishop is shut out of play on h7, which is always a *leitmotif* of White's strategy against the Slav, and the rest of the game is a textbook example of how to exploit such a situation.

**10 Be3 Nbd7 11 Nxc4 0-0 12 Be2 c5**



**Question:** How do you assess this position?

**Answer:** White has a clear positional plus, thanks to the dead enemy bishop on h7. White effectively has an extra piece in play in the centre and on the queenside. Black's last is a standard freeing move, which leads to exchanges and would normally be a good way to equalize, but here, as Alekhine points out, it actually helps White.

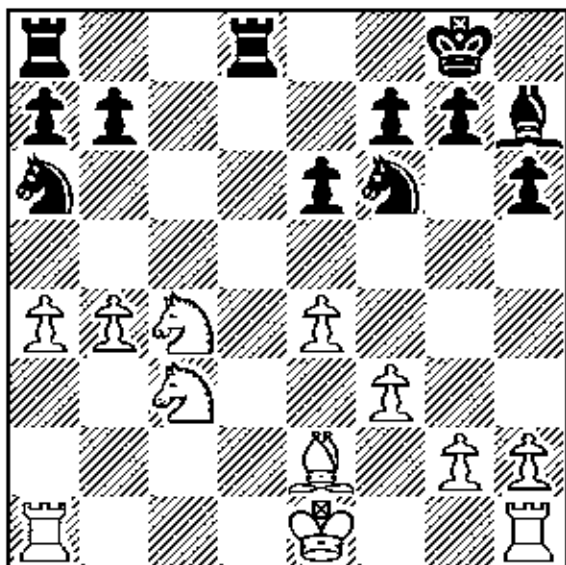
**Question:** Why?

**Answer:** Because his strategy is to exchange off the active black pieces, and leave him with the dead prelate on h7. We will see this strategy unfold as the game proceeds.

**13 dxc5 Bxc5 14 Bxc5 Nxc5 15 b4 Na6**

Black can try to seek a tactical solution with 15 ... Qxd1+ 16 Rxd1 Nxa4 17 Nxa4 b5, but then 18 Ncb6 axb6 19 Bxb5 (Alekhine) retains a solid plus for White. Nothing has essentially changed – despite the equal material Black is still effectively a piece down, as his h7-bishop is just a spectator.

**16 Qxd8 Rfxd8**



**17 Na2!**

**Question:** That looks rather a clumsy move!

**Answer:** Yes, but it is an effective one. The point is that 17 b5?! lets the enemy knight become active after 17 ... Nc5, while 17 Rb1 runs into the tactical blow 17 ... Nd5! when 18 exd5?! Bxb1 19 Nxb1 exd5, followed by ... Nxb4, gives Black rook and two pawns for two minor pieces, and he has rid himself of the problem bishop on h7. Alekhine's move maintains his grip.

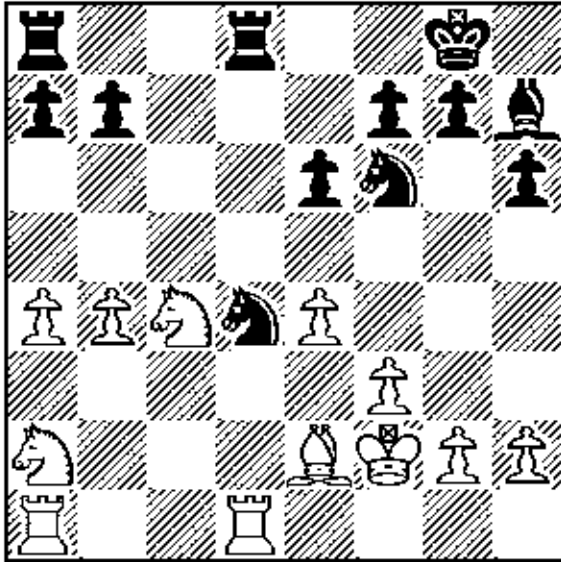
**Question:** Fritz doesn't seem to think White really has anything here.

**Answer:** Yes, I noticed that, but I do not believe its assessment. It is another case where the nature of White's advantage, namely the dead h7-bishop, is rather too long-term for the computer to appreciate. There are no immediate threats, and Black has plenty of reasonable, solid-looking moves, but he has no way to solve the essential problem of that bishop, which will eventually start to tell.

**17 ... Nb8?!**

Bogoljubow did not like 17 ... Rac8 on account of 18 Na5 Rd7? 19 Nxb7!, winning a pawn, but the counter-attack 18 ... Rc2 gives Black decent counterchances here. White does better to play 18 Kf2!, as in the game, retaining a small but stable plus.

**18 Kf2 Nc6 19 Rhd1 Nd4**



**Question:** Black appears to have made some progress over the past few moves – he has recycled his knight from a6 to a powerful square on d4.

**Answer:** True, but the improvement in his position is merely cosmetic. The basic underlying problem of the h7-bishop is still there, and White will just organize his pieces and begin exerting pressure on the queenside, at which point his effective extra piece will be felt.

**20 Rac1 Kf8**

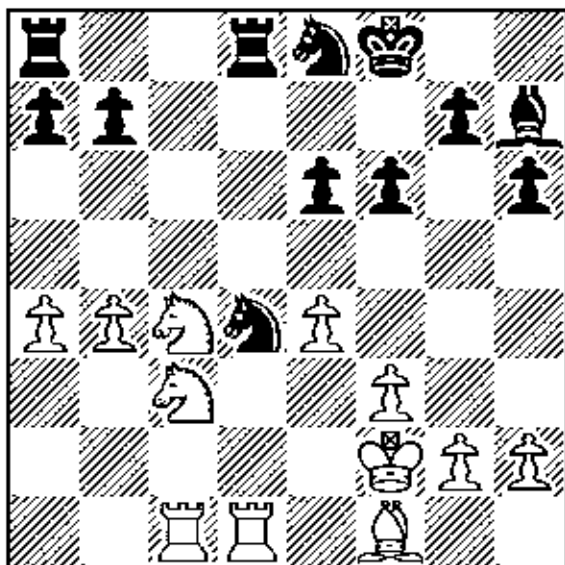
**Question:** Is this just a case of centralizing the king for the endgame?

**Answer:** Partly; though as Alekhine points out, it is also the start of a plan to dig the bishop out of mothballs. Black hopes to be able to play ... Bg8, move the f6-knight somewhere, then ... f7-f6 and ... e6-e5, allowing the bishop to see the light of day again.

**Question:** Seems rather long-winded!

**Answer:** Quite right. That is the problem; he will not get time to implement the plan.

**21 Bf1 Ne8 22 Nc3 f6**



### 23 Na5!

White begins his assault on the queenside. Black must do something about the threat to his b-pawn.

### 23 ... Rab8?

Bogoljubow's abiding sin in this game is passivity and this move is a further example. He should have tried 23 ... b6. Alekhine gives the following variation: 24 Nb7 Rd7 25 Bb5 Rxb7 26 Rxd4 Rc7, and now 27 Ne2 Rxc1 28 Nxc1 Rc8 29 Nd3 "with some possibilities of defence, in spite of the indisputable advantage of White." This last assessment seems rather optimistic – after 29 ... e5 30 Rd7 Rc7, Black has no real problems at all. Instead, going back a bit, both 27 Ba6 and 27 Rdd1 (intending 27 ... Rac8 28 Ba6) are much stronger and retain a clear plus for White.

### 24 Nb5!

Now the proud steed on d4 (Black's only really active piece) is eliminated and his position quickly collapses.

### 24 ... Nxb5

**Question:** Can't he defend the knight with 24 ... e5, also letting his bishop out via g8?

**Answer:** The problem is that the resulting pawn on d4 will be indefensible: 25 Nxd4 Rxd4 (or 25 ... exd4 26 Rc4) 26 Rxd4 exd4 27 Rc4 and the pawn just gets rounded up. Even so, this might have been a slightly better defensive chance than the game continuation, though White would have a solid extra pawn and every reason to hope to convert it to the full point.

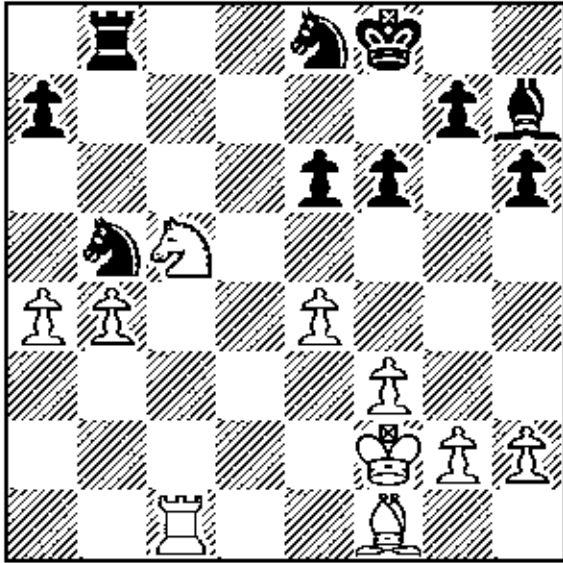
### 25 Rxd8 Rxd8 26 Nxb7!

This zwischenzug is the point of White's play.

**26 ... Rb8**

Or 26 ... Rd2+ 27 Ke3 Nd4 28 Kxd2 Nb3+ 29 Kd1 Nxc1 30 Kxc1 with an extra pawn, which should decide the ending.

**27 Nc5!**



A final tactical point – the threat of 28 Nd7+ means that Black has no time to rescue his knight.

**Question:** Very sharp play by Alekhine, in such a quiet-looking ending!

**Answer:** Well, that is one of the secrets of good technique. Many club players make the mistake of thinking that tactics only matter in sharp positions, whereas, in reality, the top-quality technical play of the likes of Capablanca and Karpov is founded crucially on alert tactical vision and accurate calculation of variations. This is why solving endgame studies regularly is such good training for playing technical positions – studies depend all the time on such accurate tactical variations.

**27 ... Ke7 28 axb5!**

**Question:** That is a bit surprising. Why double his pawns?

**Answer:** The point is that the black a-pawn is now very weak.

**28 ... Nd6 29 Ra1 Nc8**

After 29 ... Nxb5 30 Bxb5 Rxb5 31 Rxa7+, White wins easily because more black pawns fall with check or an attack on the h7-bishop. Note that the latter still remains a spectator, as it has been since move nine!

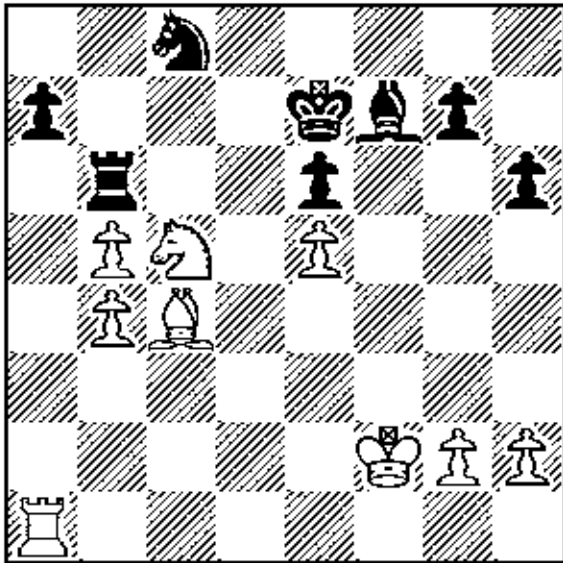
**30 Bc4 Bg8 31 f4**

Black is a pawn down and tied hand and foot. White just needs to show due care to wrap up game.

**31 ... Bf7**

Black is finally ready to play 32 ... e5, but White slams the door on that.

**32 e5 fxe5 33 fxe5 Rb6**



Black is almost move-bound; White needs only to find a way to increase the pressure, by getting his king into the game.

**34 Ke3 Be8 35 Ra5 Bd7 36 Kd4 Be8 37 h4 Bd7 38 Be2 Rb8 39 Nxd7! Kxd7 40 Bf3**

Preventing Black from playing ... Rb7-c7, trying to keep the white king out.

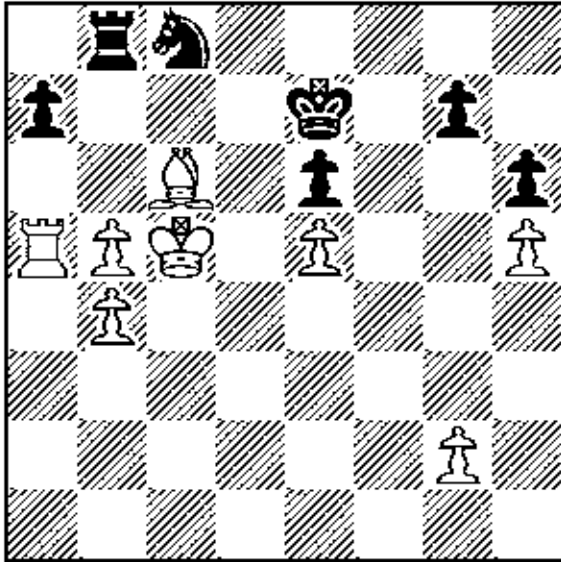
**40 ... Rb6 41 Kc5 Rb8**

Black is still reduced to shuffling to and fro.

**42 h5**

Now 42 ... Rb6 would allow the tactical blow 43 Rxa7+!.

**42 ... Kd8 43 Bc6 Ke7**



#### **44 Ra3!**

A decisive switch of front. Now Black must reckon with Rg3, should his king stray from the g-pawn, or Rd3 and a penetration via d7.

**44 ... Kf7 45 Be4 Ke7 46 Kc6 Kd8 47 Rd3+ Ke7 48 Kc7 1-0**

The ultimate illustration of the precept that “the king is a strong piece in the endgame”.

A highly instructive positional display by Alekhine, who right from the opening, set up the long-term strategic plan of shutting the enemy queen’s bishop out of the game, and then executed it to perfection.



## Game 17

# Alekhine-Nimzowitsch, San Remo 1930

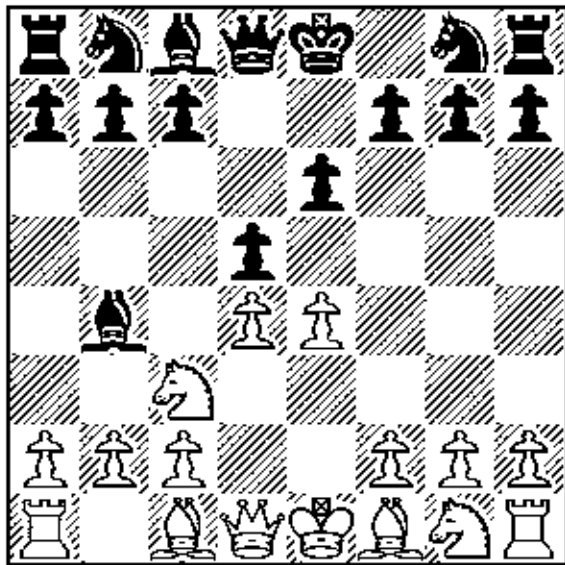
*Game 17*

**A.Alekhine-A.Nimzowitsch**

San Remo 1930

*French Defence*

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4**



This is the Winawer Variation, also known (particularly in continental Europe) as the Nimzowitsch Variation. Black pins the knight and thus forces White to do something about the threat to the e4-pawn.

**Question:** Didn't Bobby Fischer once say the Winawer was bad?

**Answer:** Yes. In *My 60 Memorable Games*, he makes the comment that "I may yet be forced to admit that the Winawer is playable, but I doubt it. It is anti-positional and weakens the kingside."

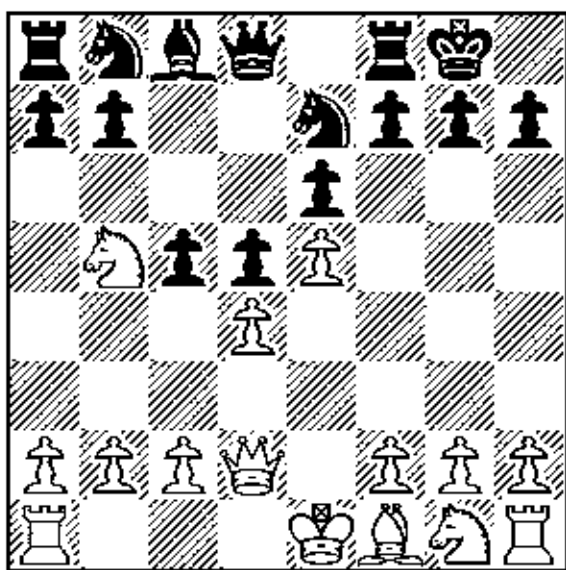
**Question:** What did he mean by "anti-positional"?

**Answer:** Well, Black puts his central pawns on light squares, and then usually exchanges off his dark-squared bishop, which leaves his dark squares very weak. However, in return, he doubles the white pawns and obtains some compensating positional advantages. For a much fuller discussion, see my Everyman volume *The French Winawer: Move by Move*.

**4 e5 c5 5 Bd2**

This quiet move, avoiding the doubling of White's pawns, is generally attributed to Bogoljubow. Although a solid and respectable choice, which has even been played by Karpov (albeit only once), it does not pose Black any real opening problems. The main line is 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 Ne7 and now 7 Qg4 is the most testing move.

**5 ... Ne7 6 Nb5 Bxd2+ 7 Qxd2 0-0**



**Question:** So is White better here? It looks as if his knight will have a great outpost on d6.

**Answer:** Not really; the knight can easily be challenged by ... Nf5 or ... Nc8. This position has been quite extensively tested in practice, and it has been established that Black has no problems here at all.

**8 c3**

White tries to maintain his pawn centre, but this should not produce any great dividends. The alternative, which is somewhat more popular these days, is to clear the d4-square for the knight with 8 dxc5, although 8 ... Nd7 regains the pawn with equal chances.

**8 ... b6?!**

**Question:** What is wrong with this? It seems logical enough, defending c5 and preparing to get the bad bishop out to a6.

**Answer:** Yes, such an exchange of the bad bishop is a standard plan in many French positions. The trouble here is that it simply doesn't work. Black should prefer 8 ... Nf5, as Nimzowitsch later played in his classic win against Emanuel Lasker at Zürich 1934. This covers the d6-square and gets ready to drive the white knight back with a subsequent ... a7-a6 or ... Bd7 and ... Qb6. Black has a fine game in that case.

**9 f4**

White continues with the strategy initiated by his last move, namely establishing a powerful pawn centre.

**9 ... Ba6 10 Nf3 Qd7 11 a4!**

This is the flaw in Black's strategy. White maintains the knight on b5, and thereby prevents the exchange of light-squared bishops.

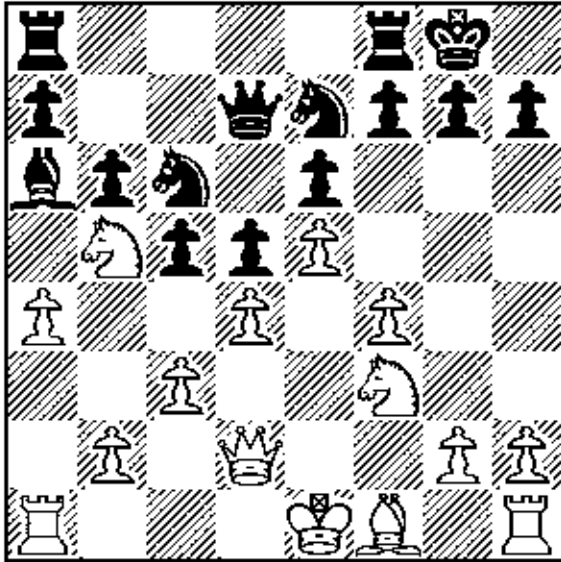
**Question:** Black could give up his bad bishop for the knight, couldn't he?

**Answer:** Yes, and I think that is perhaps what he should have done last move. Black would still be positionally worse, but he would at least offload his bad bishop and ease the cramp in his position.

**11 ... Nbc6**

**Question:** What about 11 ... c4, attacking the knight?

**Answer:** Alekhine does mention this, as an inferior continuation on the next move. The problem is that ... c5-c4 is usually wrong strategically in such positions, because it releases the pressure against d4 and deprives Black of the chance to open the c-file with a pawn exchange. As a result, it is much harder for him to build up any counterplay on the queenside, while White has an obvious superiority on the other flank. Kasparov gives as a plausible continuation 12 Nd6 Nc8 13 Nxc8 Rxc8 14 Be2 "and Black has a bad French". In addition to his lack of counterplay, the traditional bad light-squared bishop is even worse than normal, and it is clear that the plan of exchanging it for its opposite number, begun with 8 ... b6, has failed completely.



**12 b4!**

**Question:** That is a surprise – I thought White was playing on the kingside?

**Answer:** Well, he is going to potentially; inserting the advance b2-b4 first is a typically modern piece of strategy. At the time, it created something of a sensation, with Tarrasch describing it as “highly original”. Alekhine’s point is that Black was threatening ... Na5-c4, trying to set up some counterplay, which the text prevents.

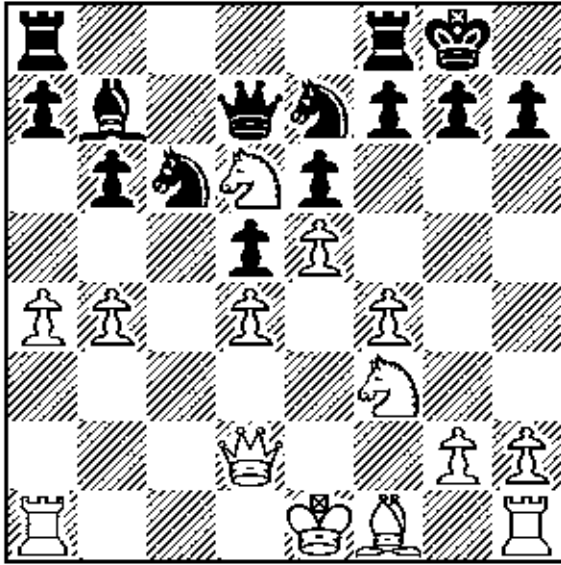
**Question:** But isn’t opening the c-file going to help Black?

**Answer:** Actually no. The point is that White can bring his own rooks to the c-file more easily than Black can do. White has the annoying move Nd6, which, if played at the right moment, will disrupt Black’s attempt to double rooks on the c-file. Overall, b2-b4 is a characteristically undogmatic piece of play, of the sort that Kotov, Romanovsky and other Stalinist propagandists of the Soviet school used to hail as the hallmark of the Chigorin influence.

**Question:** I take it you are not a fan of their stuff, then!

**Answer:** Actually, some of their books are highly instructive, but the emphasis on this continuous line of development from Chigorin, through Alekhine, to Botvinnik and others, is grossly exaggerated. The bottom line is that b2-b4 is just a good move, and good players tend to play good moves, regardless of whether they are disciples of Chigorin, Tarrasch or anyone else.

12 ... cxb4 13 cxb4 Bb7 14 Nd6



14 ... f5?

This is a serious positional blunder, which Alekhine described as “decisive”.

**Question:** Why? Isn't it logical to try to stop the white kingside attack?

**Answer:** Ah, but, as Alekhine says, a kingside attack was now the one thing Black did not need to fear! The position has changed and it is the queenside that Black must worry about. It was essential to take timely counteraction on that flank, before it was too late.

**Question:** So what should he have done?

**Answer:** Alekhine himself points out the only chance, which is to attack the slightly vulnerable white b-pawn: 14 ... a5 15 Bb5! (the only try for an advantage; 15 b5?! Nb4 gives Black good chances) 15 ... axb4 16 0-0, when White has some initiative, but will have to spend some time regaining the b-pawn.

**Question:** So is he better here anyway?

**Answer:** Actually, not very much, no. Kasparov continues the variation with 16 ... Nc8! 17 Nxb7 Qxb7 18 Bxc6 Qxc6 19 Rfc1 Qb7 20 Qxb4 Ne7 21 a5 Ra6 and Black is equal.

**Question:** So what about the criticism of Black's earlier play?

**Answer:** Well, that criticism is still justified; it just goes to show how great the drawing margin is in chess. Black has made a couple of inaccuracies, but in such a closed position, these do not add up to enough for him to be in serious trouble, as long as he then starts playing accurately. This is something the computers have especially taught us – although it must be said that some great players of the past, notably Emanuel Lasker, clearly understood this all along. There is a highly instructive section in *Lasker's Manual of Chess*, where he discusses what he calls “the principle of proportion”. Without going into a lot of detail, the basic argument is that one or two minor errors are not usually enough to lose a game, contrary to the impression one gets from many old-style annotators, such as Irving Chernev. Lasker convincingly proves his point with some analysis of a game of Réti's, where Chernev claims that a minor inaccuracy in the opening leads White inevitably to defeat “against the technique of a modern master”, etc. Lasker points out that the rook endgame reached 40-odd moves later was an elementary draw!

**15 a5!**

Now, however, White really does have a serious positional advantage. The pawn will come to a6, thereby securing the powerful b5-square for his light-squared bishop. Black's game is starting to become very unpleasant indeed.

**15 ... Nc8**

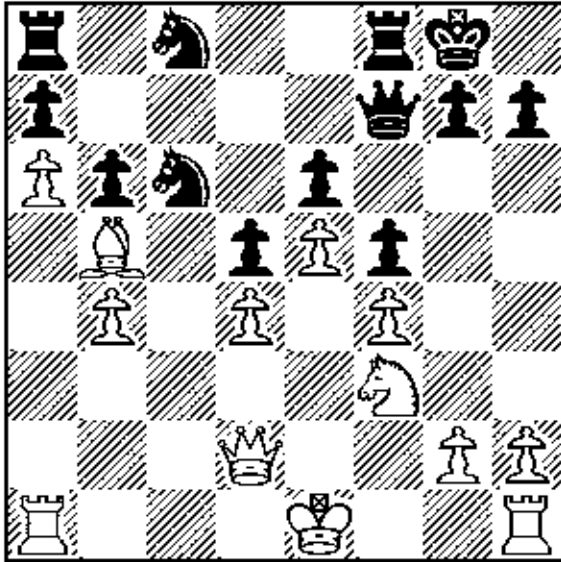
Instead, 15 ... bxa5 would avoid what follows, but the a7-pawn is then a serious weakness after 16 b5 Nd8 17 Rxa5.

**16 Nxb7**

**Question:** That is a surprise! Why eliminate the bad bishop?

**Answer:** Again, this is flexible strategy. White intends to use the c-file and tie Black up badly with the pin after Bb5. Paradoxically, the “bad” light-squared bishop would be a more useful defensive piece for Black than the c8-knight, so White exchanges the bishop off. I agree that this would be a hard decision for the average player to take, but such flexibility of thinking is a hallmark of great players.

**16 ... Qxb7 17 a6 Qf7 18 Bb5**



Now we see that Black is going to be defenceless against a penetration by White down the c-file to c7.

**18 ... N8e7**

18 ... N6e7? loses at once to 19 Ng5, and the e6-pawn falls.

**19 0-0 h6**

Defending against the knight raid mentioned in the previous note, but it no longer matters. White will double – and, if necessary, treble – his major pieces on the c-file, and force an entry.

**20 Rfc1 Rfc8 21 Rc2 Qe8**

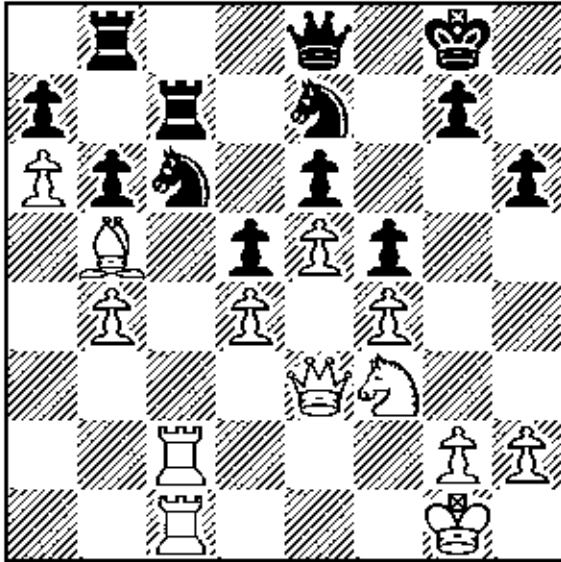
**Question:** What about 21 ... Nd8, getting the knight off the vulnerable square?

**Answer:** Alekhine mentions that in his notes. He intended simply 22 Rac1 Rxc2 23 Rxc2 and if 23 ... Rc8 then 24 Rxc8 Nxc8 25 Qc3 Ne7 (the only way to save the knight!) 26 Qc7 with a decisive advantage.

**22 Rac1**

Alekhine himself, always hypercritical of his own play, points out that he could have achieved his desired formation with the saving of a couple of tempi by 22 Ra3!, intending Rac3 and Qc1. However, Black is so tied up and bereft of constructive ideas that it makes no essential difference to the game.

**22 ... Rab8 23 Qe3 Rc7**



**24 Rc3!**

**Question:** Why does that deserve an exclamation mark?

**Answer:** It is the final stage in implementing a formation commonly referred to as “Alekhine’s Gun”. When trebling major pieces on an open file, it is frequently best to have the queen behind the rooks. Alekhine demonstrated this several times in his games, of which the present example is the most famous.

**24 ... Qd7 25 R1c2 Kf8 26 Qc1 Rbc8**

Black has managed to shore up his barricades on the c-file for the time being, at the cost of tying his pieces in knots. Now a simple move introduces a decisive threat and forces material gain.

**27 Ba4!**

This simply threatens 28 b5, exploiting the pin on the c-file. Black’s reply is totally forced.

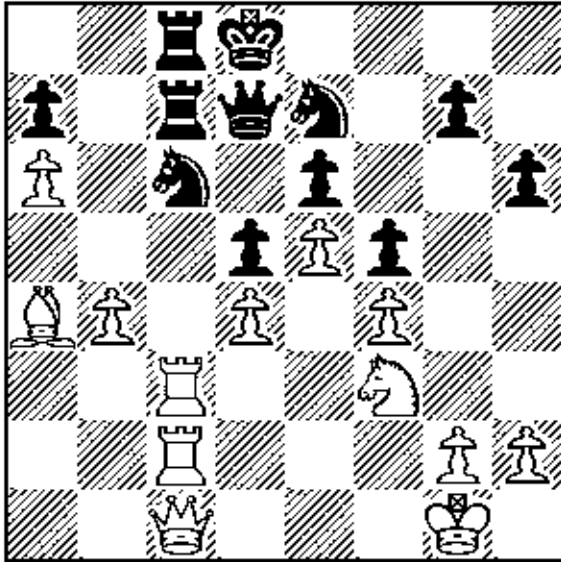
**27 ... b5**

Giving up a pawn, in order to gain a couple of tempi to get his king to d8, from where it defends the c7-rook.

**28 Bxb5 Ke8 29 Ba4 Kd8**

Now the threat of 30 b5 is met, as the knight could move away from c6.





**Question:** So how does White break through?

**Answer:** Well, just ask yourself what Black can play. He cannot move any of his pieces – the c6-knight is pinned against the queen; his king, queen and c8-rook all have to stay put to keep c7 defended; and the e7-knight has to stay there to defend c6. So Black is perilously close to zugzwang, and has only pawn moves left.

**30 h4! Qe8**

Black could delay the end by a couple of moves with 30 ... g6 31 g3 h5, but then, as well as the direct 32 Ng5, White could win more sadistically by making any waiting move, such as with the king – Black must then move a piece with fatal effect.

**31 b5 1-0**

A beautiful positional crush by Alekhine. It is rather ironic that Nimzowitsch, whose name is indelibly associated with the “immortal zugzwang game” against Sämisch (at Copenhagen 1923), should himself be hoist by his own petard.

## Game 18

### Ahues-Alekhine, San Remo 1930

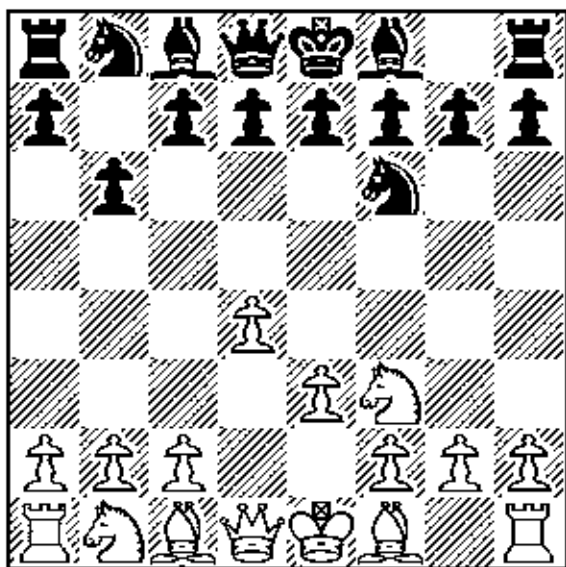
*Game 18*

**C.Ahues-A.Alekhine**

San Remo 1930

*Colle System*

**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 b6 3 e3**



**Question:** Ugh! The dreaded Colle System! I always hate playing against this!

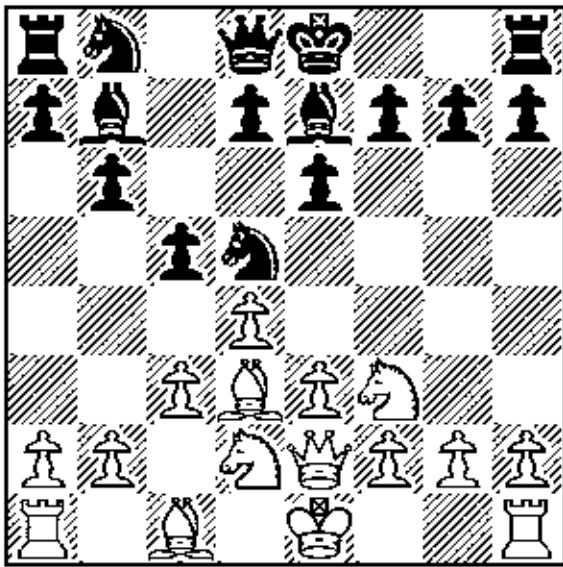
**Answer:** That is one reason I decided to include this game in the present book. The Colle is a favourite amongst club players, principally because it offers a simple, easy-to-learn system of development, which at the same time is rock-solid. It is also extremely hard for the opponent to interfere with White's scheme and create any concrete difficulties at an early stage, which is one reason stronger players usually dislike facing weaker opponents in the line – it almost always seems to guarantee a long evening of grinding away, in a solid, boring position, where the opponent knows what he is doing. This is what makes Alekhine's games against such players extremely instructive, because he was able, like almost no other great master, to find a way to

pose non-standard problems for White. In this respect, Game 13, which features the London System (another club player's stand-by) is also worth careful examination.

**3 ... Bb7 4 Nbd2 c5 5 Bd3 e6**

With the move order chosen by Black, 5 ... g6 is also an excellent continuation here, leaving the Colle bishop on d3 biting on granite down the b1-h7 diagonal. But Alekhine's move is good too, and makes the game of particular interest to players whose opening repertoire might mean that they reach this position with their pawn already committed to e6.

**6 c3 Be7 7 Qe2 Nd5!?**



**Question:** Hmmm. I don't think I would have thought of that.  
I was always taught not to move pieces twice in the opening.

**Answer:** Well, this is what is always so instructive about Alekhine's handling of such positions. He was always prepared to break standard rules of thumb, in the interests of exploiting the specific features of the position, and posing his opponents unusual problems.

**Question:** But what does the move do, exactly?

**Answer:** It does not really threaten anything, but it has a couple of points. The first is to provoke White. The moment 7 ... Nd5 appears on the board, White tends to want to kick the knight with e3-e4 or c3-c4, each of which, if played immediately, would allow the knight a jump to a good square (f4 or b4 respectively). So White starts thinking of taking steps to prepare these advances, and this means he is already having to think

outside his standard Colle System box. Rather than just castle, play Re1, then e3-e4, etc, he is now forced to think in terms of specifics.

Secondly, one can see 7 ... Nd5 as in one sense, a high-class waiting move. Alekhine wishes to postpone short castling, because he has ideas of perhaps castling long and attacking on the kingside. It is not clear whether this will really ever be good, so he does not wish to commit himself yet, but he does want to retain the possibility. So he seeks something other than the routine 7 ... 0-0.

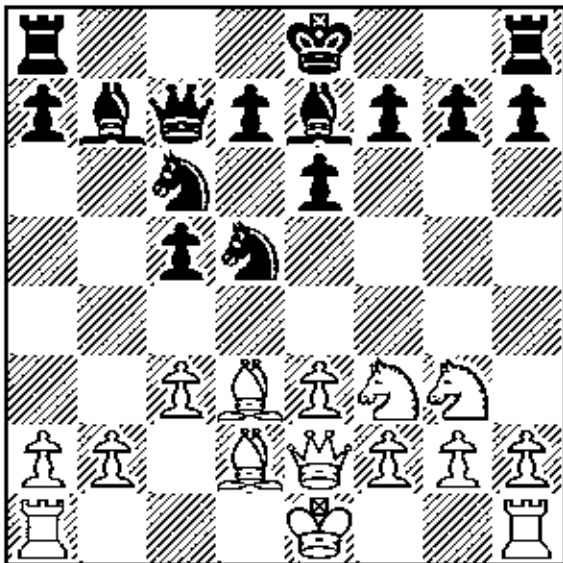
**8 dxc5!?**

There was nothing wrong with simply 8 0-0, but, as Alekhine explains, Black's last move has provoked White into an elaborate plan of preparing c3-c4, followed by Bd2-c3, putting his bishop on the long diagonal. Although there is nothing wrong with White's 8th move in itself, psychologically the Black player can already be satisfied, in that he has dragged his opponent out of his standard Colle routine. This is the secret of playing successfully against such lines, especially when they are played by weaker players – with such opponents, the more they think, the more mistakes they make!

**8 ... bxc5 9 Nf1?!**

A bit retrograde, but all part of White's plan to play c3-c4 and Bd2-c3.

**9 ... Qc7 10 Ng3 Nc6 11 Bd2**



White is finally ready to play c3-c4, but now Alekhine reveals why he has carefully refrained from castling short.

**11 ... g5!**

**Question:** Crikey!

**Answer:** Yes, it must have come as quite a shock to White. But it is very logical –

by his manoeuvre Nd2-f1-g3, White has put his knights in the path of the black kingside pawns, and so a pawn storm on that flank is likely to gain tempi. Meanwhile, the black king will go to the queenside, where White has relatively few attacking pieces.

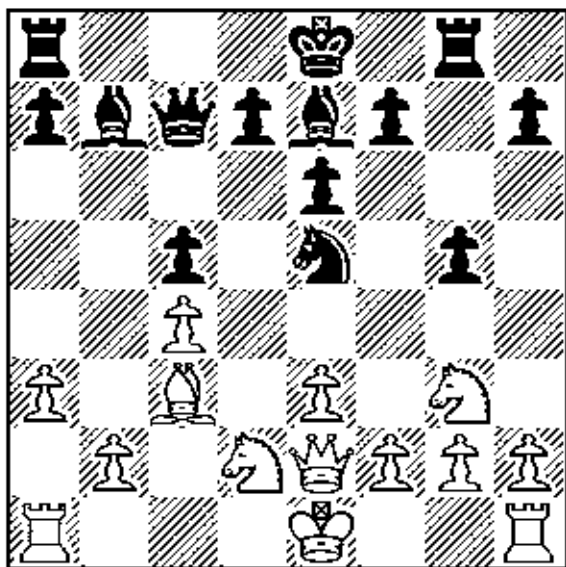
**Question:** So do you think Black is better here?

**Answer:** Not necessarily, no. White has not done anything so seriously wrong as to be worse; and Black cannot expect just to get the advantage, in the absence of very poor play from his opponent. Rather, the most he can hope for is a sharp position, where White is unable to hold a quiet balance with standard moves. That is what Alekhine has achieved here, and what he was in general so adept at doing against these sorts of lines. And psychologically, such a double-edged game must have been the last thing White expected, or indeed wanted, when he chose his solid opening.

**12 c4 Ndb4 13 Bc3 Nxd3+ 14 Qxd3 Nb4 15 Qe2**

Alekhine quotes the following as the main line he had expected: 15 Qb1 f6 16 Nxd5 Bxd5 17 Rg1 Bb7 18 Nxd7 (the computer's 18 a3 Nc6 19 Qd1 looks better at first sight, but then 19 ... h5 20 Nxd5 0-0-0 21 Nxf6 Rhf8 again gives good compensation) 18 ... 0-0-0 with excellent play for the pawn. Note that the white king is stranded in the centre.

**15 ... Rg8 16 a3 Nc6 17 Nd2 Ne5**



The position remains balanced, but Black is the more aggressive, which certainly will have suited Alekhine. Now White goes wrong.

**18 Qh5? 0-0-0!?**

Alekhine himself says that the more forceful line was 18 ... Bxg2 19 Rg1 Bc6 20 Qxh7 0-0-0 with advantage to Black, but in this variation White does better to replace

the avaricious capture on h7 with 20 f4!; e.g. 20 ... Nd3+ (or 20 ... Ng6 21 fxg5; not 20 ... gxf4? 21 Bxe5 and wins) 21 Ke2 gxf4 22 Nge4! Rxf1 23 Rxf1 0-0-0 with unclear complications

The text allows White to back out and castle short, protecting g2, although once his queen has to retreat, he will have lost two whole tempi. From now on, Black builds up his attack very quickly and energetically.

**19 0-0 f5**

Now 20 ... g4 is a threat, cutting off the white queen, which therefore hurries to scurry back.

**20 Qe2 h5!**

***Question:*** Going for it!

***Answer:*** Alekhine never needed any encouragement to go “all in” when it came to pursuing the initiative. In any case, this pawn sacrifice is entirely logical – as we pointed out above, the white knight on g3 is an obvious target for the onrushing black pawns.

**21 Nxh5**

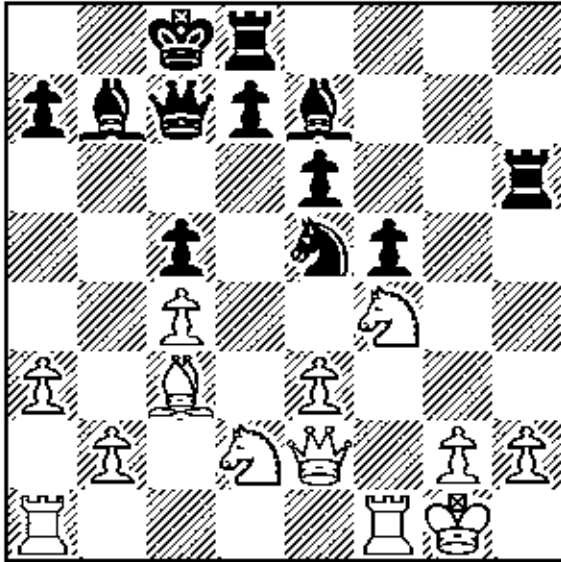
***Question:*** Can it be right to open the h-file against his own king?

***Answer:*** I agree it is not an attractive option, but White is short of other moves. Alekhine considered the text to be forced; and after the computer’s second choice, 21 e4 fxe4 22 Ngxe4 d5, Black is just better for no material investment at all.

**21 ... Rg6**

Preparing to double rooks on the h-file. White cannot stand idly by and watch this happen, so Ahues strikes back, at the cost of opening the g-file as well.

**22 f4 gxf4 23 Nxf4 Rh6**



White's defensive knight on f4 is very strong. Unfortunately, as Alekhine points out, it can be removed quite easily, after which the weakness of g2 becomes critical. Then again, it is impossible to suggest anything better for White. The manner in which Alekhine has wrenched the game out of standard Colle channels is quite remarkable.

**24 h3?**

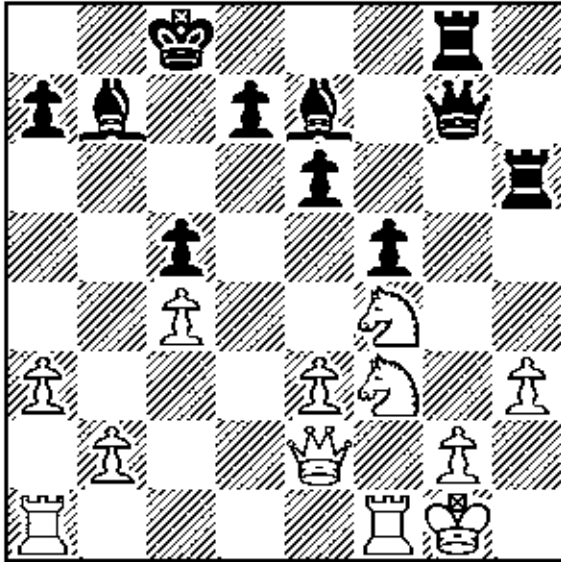
This further weakens the kingside. White would do better to play 24 Rad1 Rg8 25 Nf3!? Nxf3+ 26 Rxf3 Bxf3 27 Qxf3 with a pawn for the exchange and some drawing chances.

**24 ... Rg8 25 Bxe5**

**Question:** That seems a rather sad end for the proud bishop on c3!

**Answer:** It is indeed, especially given the time White expended in the opening to get the bishop to that square. However, the threat of 25 ... Ng6, removing White's steed on f4, was too serious to ignore.

**25 ... Qxe5 26 Nf3 Qg7**



Now ... e6-e5 is coming.

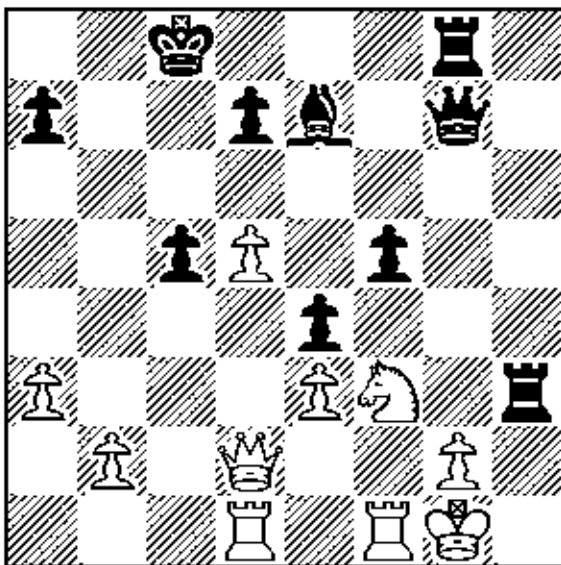
### 27 Rad1

There is no defence. Alekhine also analyses 27 Kh1 (at least unpinning the g-pawn) 27 ... Bd6 28 Qf2, and then gives the spectacular 28 ... Qg4 29 Kg1 Rxf3 30 Nxf3 Qxf3, which is indeed winning for Black, though the computer's more prosaic 28 ... Qh8, threatening both ... Bxf4 and ... e6-e5, is even more decisive.

### 27 ... e5 28 Nd5 Rxf3

Once the defences are breached, the rest is a rout.

### 29 Qd2 Bxd5 30 cxd5 e4





**31 d6**

The knight is lost, in view of 31 Nh2 Qg3 or 31 Ne1 Qh6 etc.

**31 ... exf3 32 Rxf3 Rxf3 33 dxe7 Qxe7 0-1**

A really crushing game by Alekhine. Okay, his opponent was significantly weaker, but I think it is another very instructive example of how to deal with such players, when they set out to play a rock-solid system like the Colle.

## Game 19

# Alekhine-Weenink, Prague Olympiad 1931

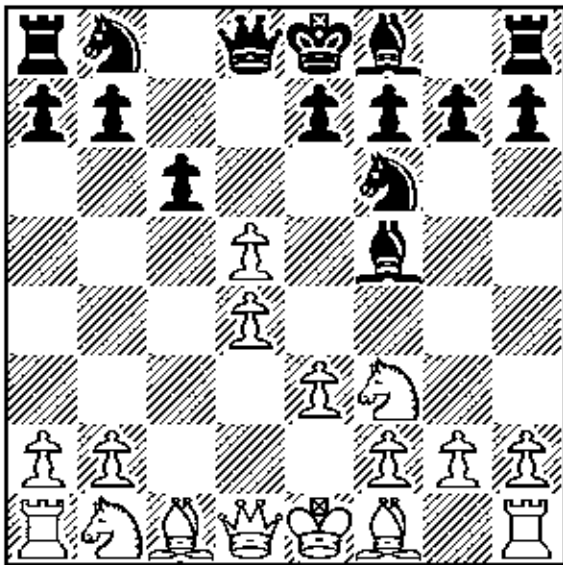
Game 19

A.Alekhine-H.Weenink

Prague Olympiad 1931

Slav Defence

1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 Bf5 5 cxd5



5 ... Bxb1?

This is just a bad move, which needlessly surrenders the bishop pair.

**Question:** Hang on, though. Isn't this the same position as in the note to Game 9, where you said Black had problems anyway?

**Answer:** No, in that game White played 3 Nc3, rather than 3 Nf3. Here there is no objection at all to simply 5 ... cxd5, since if 6 Qb3, Black has the perfectly adequate defence 6 ... Qc7 (whereas with the knight on c3, rather than f3, the d5-pawn would now be hanging).

6 Rxb1 Qxd5

This was Black's idea, but even without Nc3 to worry about, the queen's position in

the centre is not very stable, and White is better.

**7 a3**

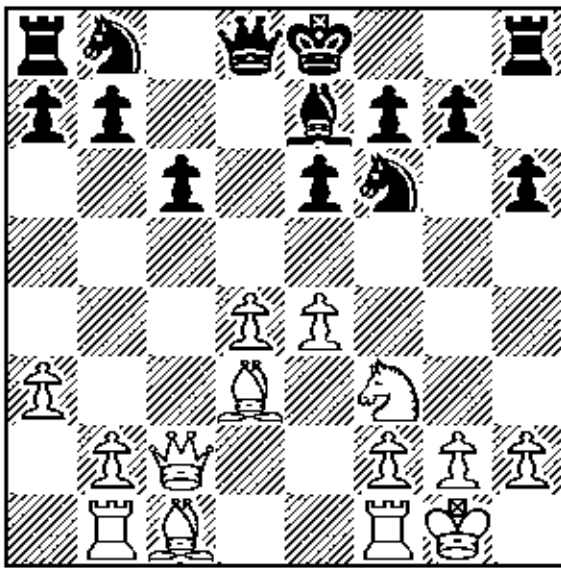
The text is good enough to ensure a safe plus; even so, it is surprising that such a dynamic player as Alekhine did not go in for the pawn sacrifice 7 Qc2, which he mentions as “tempting” in his notes. *Fritz 12* actually thinks it is the strongest move, giving White a serious advantage; e.g. 7 ... Qxa2 8 Bd2 (Alekhine’s 8 Bc4 Qa5+ 9 Bd2 Qc7 10 e4 is also promising) 8 ... Qe6 9 Bc4 Qc8 10 0-0 with more than enough compensation for the pawn.

**7 ... e6 8 Qc2 Be7 9 Bd3 h6**

**Question:** Why weaken the kingside like this? Can’t he just castle?

**Answer:** Unfortunately not; 9 ... 0-0? drops a pawn after 10 e4 Qd8 (10 ... Qh5 11 h3 leaves the queen in trouble) 11 e5 and 12 Bxh7+.

**10 e4 Qd8 11 0-0**



**Question:** The opening has not gone well for Black, it seems?

**Answer:** No indeed. White has a beautiful position – a strong pawn centre, two bishops and a lead in development.

**11 ... Nbd7 12 b4**

This advance restrains the freeing break ... c6-c5, as well as preparing a rook lift along the third rank.

**Question:** You mean Alekhine has his eye on the black king already?

**Answer:** He certainly does! It is the natural consequence of his positional advantage – a later e4-e5 will drive the defending knight from f6, and the pawn move ... h7-h6 has already created a weakness in the enemy kingside.

**12 ... 0-0 13 Qe2**

Setting up the threat of e4-e5, followed by Qe4; hence Black's next.

**13 ... Re8 14 Rb3!**

Now 14 e5 Nd5 15 Qe4 can be met by 15 ... Nf8, so Alekhine instead brings up further reserves. As usual in such positions, White's central grip makes it hard for Black to reroute additional defensive resources to the kingside.

**14 ... Qc7 15 Bb1!?**

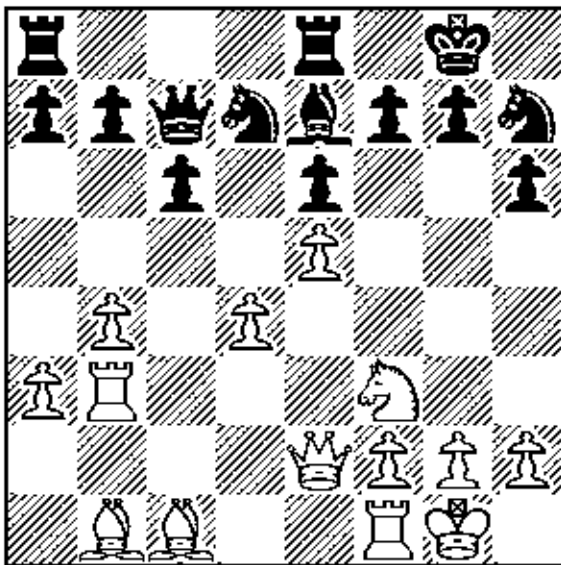
**Question:** Isn't this a logical continuation of the plan?

**Answer:** Yes it is. White makes room for the rook to swing over. But the more energetic continuation of the attack with 15 e5 Nd5 16 Qe4 Nf8 17 Qg4 Kh8 18 Qh5 also leaves Black with serious problems.

**15 ... Nh7?!**

Here 15 ... a5 is an attempt to drum up some counterplay, but then Alekhine's intended 16 Qc2! is very strong. After 16 ... Nf8 17 b5, White's advantage remains undisturbed, while the computer's desperation piece sacrifice 16 ... axb4 17 e5 bxa3 18 exf6 Nxf6 is obviously quite inadequate.

**16 e5**



**16 ... f5?!**

**Question:** That looks incredibly risky.

**Answer:** It does, but Black is already desperate. Passive play such as 16 ... Nhf8, would have been met, according to Alekhine, with the hyper-aggressive thrust 17 g4 with a strong attack (and preventing ... f7-f5, as Alekhine points out; e.g. 17 ... a5 18 g5 hxc5 (18 ... h5 may be fractionally more tenacious, but 19 Nd2 g6 20 Ne4 is still extremely unpleasant for Black) 19 Nxc5 axb4 20 axb4 g6 21 Qg4 and the storm clouds are gathering over the black king.

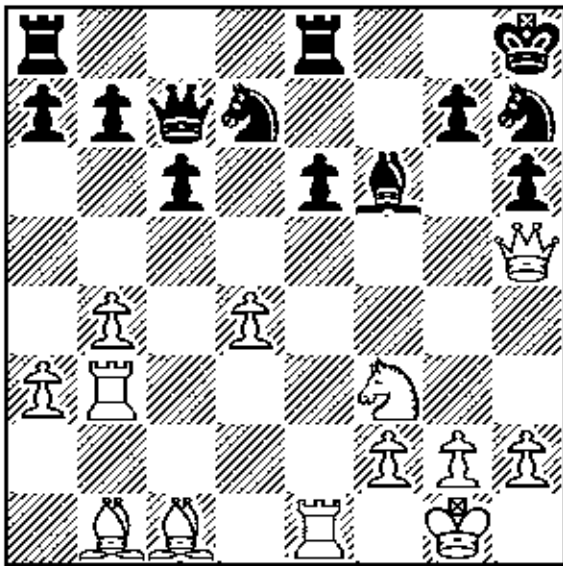
**17 exf6 Bxf6 18 Qe4 Nhf8 19 Qg4 Kh8**

As Alekhine points out, the white queen has been brought into an extremely aggressive position, with no loss of tempo.

**20 Qh5 Nh7**

The threat was 21 Bxh6 gxh6 22 Qxh6+ Kg8 23 Ng5 “with a speedy win” (Alekhine), when 23 ... Bxg5 24 Qxg5+ is mate in a few moves. Black can put up more resistance with 23 ... Re7! 24 Rg3 Bg7, but White should still be winning after 25 Bh7+ Kh8 26 Qh4. In any case, after a random Black 20th move, White does not even need to sacrifice on h6, and could just continue to build up with a move such as 21 Re1, since Black has no counterplay.

**21 Re1**



**21 ... Rad8**

**Question:** On the principle of trying to answer a flank attack with a blow in the centre, is 21 ... e5 possible here?

**Answer:** One of the subtle points of White's last move, as well as adding another

piece to the attack, was to be able to meet this central thrust with 22 Bf4!.

**22 g4!**

Alekhine was rather proud of this move, which devastates the final remains of Black's kingside defences. To be fair, we should point out that it is not the only way to win. *Fritz* shows as one alternative simply 22 Bxh7 Kxh7 23 Ng5+ Bxg5 24 Bxg5 Rc8 25 Rg3 Nf8 26 Re4, bringing the final white piece into the attack with decisive threats, such as 27 Bxh6! gxh6 28 Qxh6+! Kxh6 29 Rh4 mate.

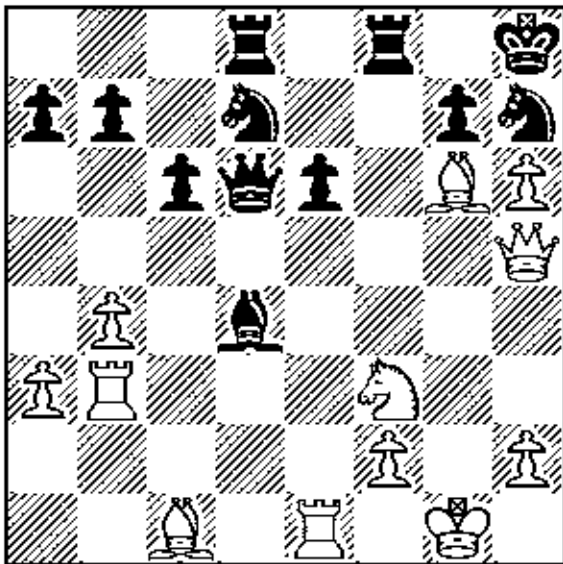
**22 ... Qd6 23 Bg6!**

Black's idea was to answer 23 g5 with 23 ... Qd5.

**23 ... Rf8 24 g5 Bxd4**

Now 24 ... Qd5 loses in several ways; e.g. 25 gxf6 Qxb3 26 fxg7+ with a rapid mate, or most crushingly of all, 25 Be4! Qxb3 26 Qg6.

**25 gxh6**



**25 ... Ndf6**

25 ... Rg8 26 Ng5 is equally hopeless.

**26 hxg7+ Kxg7 27 Qh6+ Kh8 28 Nxd4 Qxd4 29 Bb2 1-0**

Another devastating display by Alekhine, albeit against an opponent of much inferior class. Even so, the manner in which he exploited his opening advantage and transformed it into a crushing kingside attack is highly instructive.

# Game 20

## Stoltz-Alekhine, Bled 1931

*Game 20*

**G.Stoltz-A.Alekhine**

Bled 1931

*Ruy Lopez*

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 d6**

The characteristic move of the Deferred Steinitz Defence, which was a long-time favourite of Alekhine, as well as Paul Keres, a noted Spanish expert.

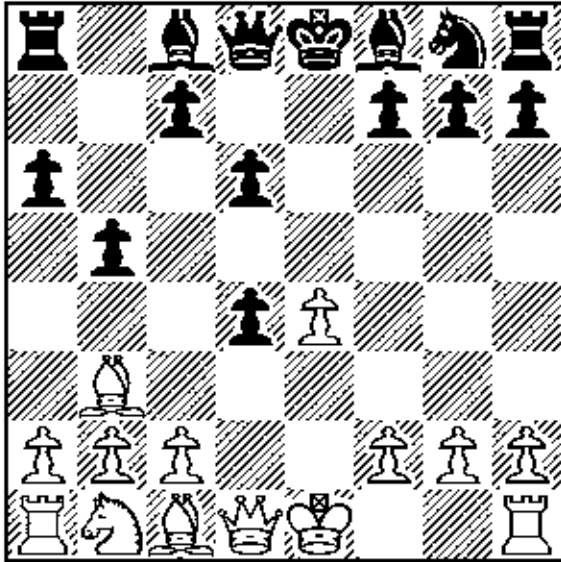
***Question:*** It doesn't have much of a reputation nowadays, does it?

***Answer:*** No, it has gone largely out of fashion. Not so much because it is objectively inferior, as because it is slightly passive; while other lines, such as the Berlin Wall and the Marshall, have proved so solid and responsive to heavyweight computer analysis.

**5 d4!?**

This is not actually bad, but it is one of the weakest ways of playing for an advantage. Both 5 c3 and 5 0-0 pose Black more problems.

**5 ... b5 6 Bb3 Nxd4 7 Nxd4 exd4**



**8 Bd5**

Avoiding the infamous Noah's Ark trap, which occurs after 8 Qxd4?? c5 9 Qd5 Be6 10 Qc6+ Bd7 11 Qd5 c4.

***Question:*** Didn't Alekhine once overlook that trap in a game annotation?

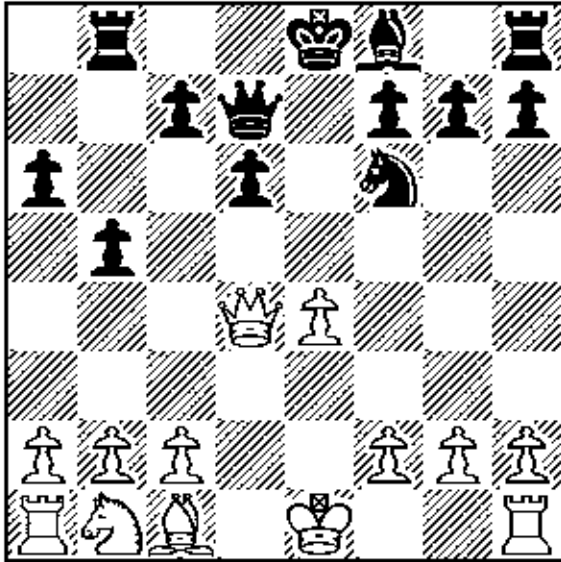
***Answer:*** Bizarrely, he did, yes. Annotating his own game as Black against Yates in his book on the 1924 New York tournament, Alekhine gave this line as a draw (after 11 ... Be6), missing Black's winning move.

***Question:*** What happened?

***Answer:*** Nobody knows, but I guess it is a sign that he sometimes wrote his annotations blindfold and rather hurriedly!

**8 ... Rb8 9 Bc6+ Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Qxd7 11 Qxd4 Nf6**





**Question:** So what is going on here?

**Answer:** Basically, the position is just equal. Both sides will complete their development and have no weaknesses.

**Question:** So a draw is likely?

**Answer:** Oh no, there is plenty of difference between an equal position and a drawn one. Many pieces remain on the board, and the position is not symmetrical, so there is no reason why either player should not be able to create chances, if he so wishes.

**12 Nc3 Be7 13 0-0 0-0 14 Bd2**

It is interesting to note that, in his fine book *The Unknown Capablanca*, the late David Hooper quotes an example where Capablanca reached the black side of this same position, against the strong US amateur and chess organizer, Walter Penn Shipley. As Hooper points out, comparing Capablanca's game with the present one provides an interesting exercise in the differing styles of the two great champions and rivals. Whilst Alekhine works up a winning kingside attack in the main game, Capablanca beat Shipley by reaching a winning endgame within ten or so moves: 14 Re1 Rfe8 15 f3 b4 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 Qxd5 Bf6 18 Qd3 Qb5 19 Qxb5 Rxb5 20 a3 b3 21 Re2 d5 22 c3 dxe4 23 fxe4 Rbe5, when White was already losing a pawn and duly succumbed.

As a further example of how easy it is for White to go wrong here, Alekhine quotes a training game he played in 1933 against the strong, but by then very ring-rusty, Dr. Ossip Bernstein. This saw the latter blunder with 14 Bg5? b4 15 Nd5?? Nxd5 16 Qxd5 Rb5, whereupon he had to resign!

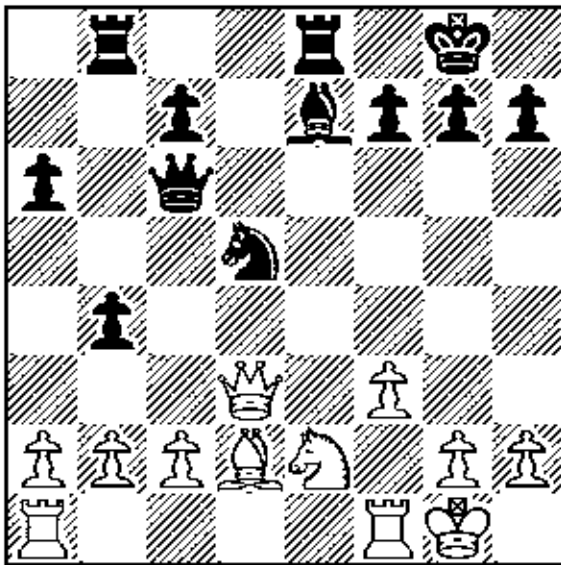
**14 ... Rfe8 15 Qd3 b4 16 Ne2?!**

As Alekhine says, White's play hitherto has suggested that he was following a policy of exchanges with a view to making a draw, in which case it is hard to understand why he did not continue in the same style with 16 Nd5. The text is rather cumbersome.

**16 ... Qc6 17 f3 d5!**

Black has seized the initiative and White needs to be careful; for instance, 18 e5? would lose the pawn for nothing after 18 ... Bc5+.

**18 exd5 Nxd5**



**Question:** Things seems to have gone a bit wrong for White!

**Answer:** Yes, his position has become very uncomfortable very quickly. All Black's pieces are more active than their opposite numbers, and he has pressure against c2, down the e-file, along the a1-h8 diagonal after ... Bf6, etc.

**19 Rae1 Bf6 20 c4**

Alekhine mentions 20 c3 as slightly preferable, and then claims an advantage for Black after 20 ... Qc5+ 21 Nd4 Red8; whereas *Fritz's* 20 ... Red8 looks more convincing to me, when White still has plenty of problems.

**20 ... Qc5+ 21 Rf2**

21 Kh1 Ne3 is also nasty for White.

**21 ... Ne3**

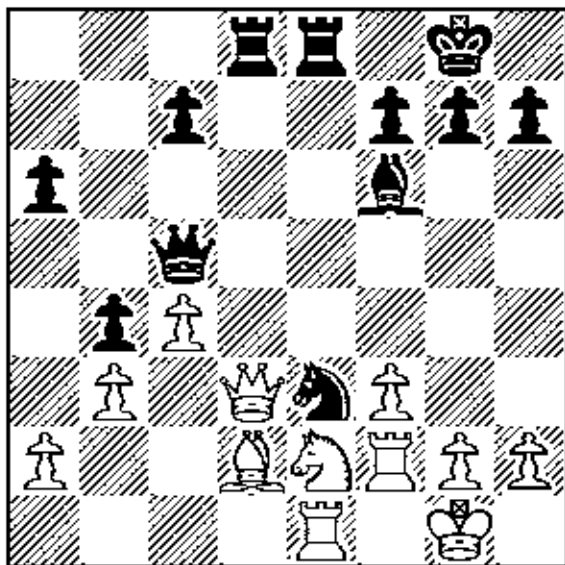
Here 21 ... Nb6 22 b3 Rbd8 looks even better.

**22 b3?**

The computer shows that 22 Ng3 puts up more resistance, the point being that 22 ...

Nxc4 23 Ne4 is a bit awkward. 22 ... Bd4! is stronger, when 23 Ne4 is met by the temporary exchange sacrifice 23 ... Rxe4 24 Qxe4 Nxc4 and White is still suffering, though he has better defensive chances than in the game.

**22 ... Rbd8**



Now Black's initiative is overpowering. One only has to look at his wonderfully active pieces, compared with their miserably passive and huddled white counterparts, to see how great an advantage he has obtained from such a seemingly harmless position.

**23 Bxe3**

Clearly forced, else he loses the bishop.

**23 ... Rxe3 24 Qc2 Bh4**

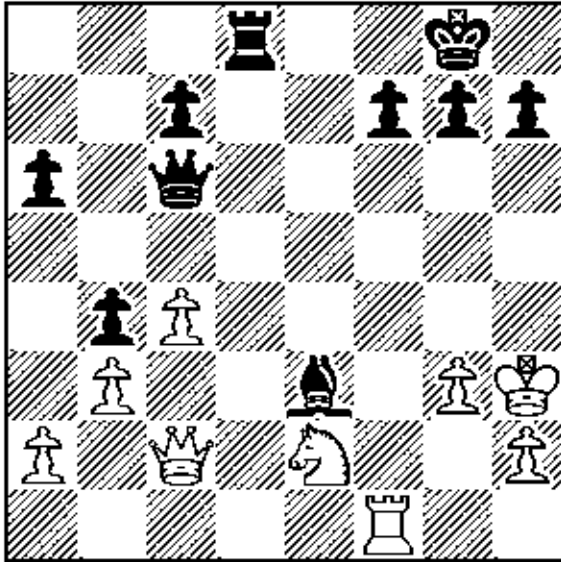
**Question:** I am surprised at that. The pin after 24 ... Rde8 looks crushing.

**Answer:** I agree. Alekhine wanted to provoke a further weakness in the white king position, which the text achieves, and he even awarded his move an exclamation mark, but your move is simpler and just crushing.

**25 g3 Rxf3 26 Ref1 Bg5**

Having said that, Alekhine's line has yielded a crushing advantage too. As well as the massively more active black pieces and insecure white king, Black has an extra pawn.

**27 Kg2 Rxf2+ 28 Rxf2 Qc6+ 29 Kh3 Be3 30 Rf1**



**30 ... Rd5!?**

**Question:** That is just showing off! What is wrong with the simple 30 ... Rd6 - ?

**Answer:** Alekhine argues that this is not so decisive because of 31 Qf5 “with counter-attack”, though the computer shows that this is just a chimera: after 31 ... Rh6+ 32 Kg4 Qe8! Black is winning anyway. Nonetheless, from a human standpoint, Alekhine’s move is logical enough – there is no reason to permit Qf5 if he does not have to.

**31 Nf4 Qd7+**

Here 31 ... Qh6+! 32 Kg4 Rg5+ 33 Kf3 Bxf4 is slightly more accurate, 34 gxf4 Qh3+ 35 Ke4 Qf5+ being the point, though Alekhine’s move is more than adequate.

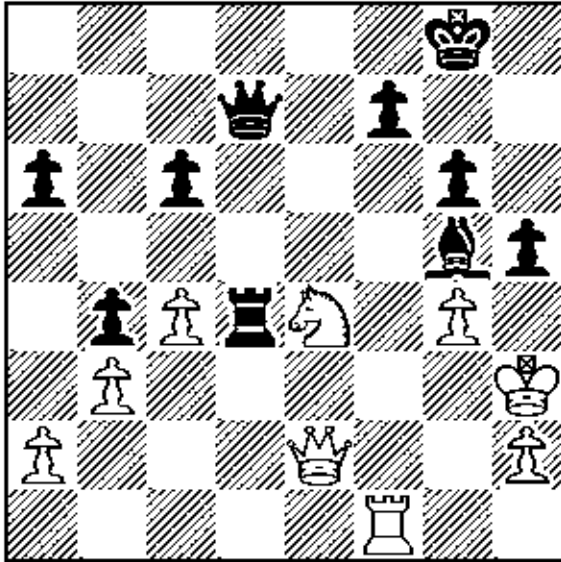
**32 g4 Rd4**

The direct 32 ... h5 is also winning.

**33 Qg2 c6 34 Nh5 Bg5**

Now Black just intends ... g7-g6.

**35 Qe2 g6 36 Ng3 h5 37 Ne4**



**37 ... Qxg4+!**

This final combination wins a whole rook.

**38 Qxg4 hxg4+ 39 Kxg4 Rxe4+ 40 Kxg5 Kg7! 0-1**

The sting in the tail. There is no defence to 41 ... f6+ 42 Rxf6 Re5+, winning the rook.

Another great example of Alekhine's ability to work up a decisive initiative from seemingly unpromising beginnings.

## Game 21

### Nimzowitsch-Alekhine, Bled 1931

*Game 21*

**A.Nimzowitsch-A.Alekhine**

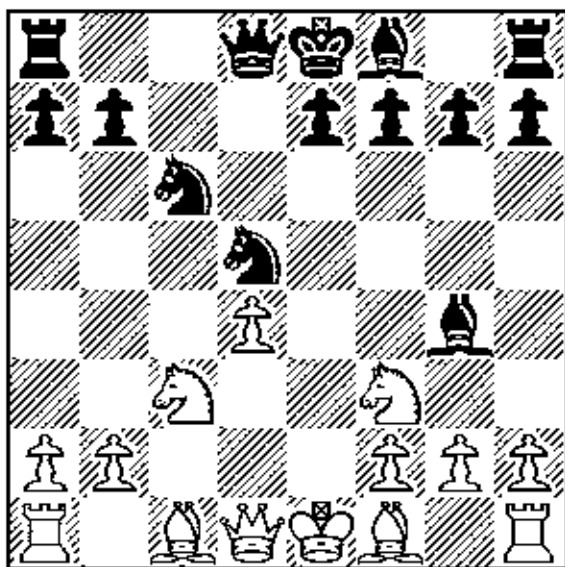
Bled 1931

*Caro-Kann Defence*

**1 c4 c6 2 e4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 d4**

We have transposed into the Panov-Botvinnik Attack, which was little-developed at the time, but which Alekhine also played as White. The game initially follows what is nowadays regarded as probably Black's best line.

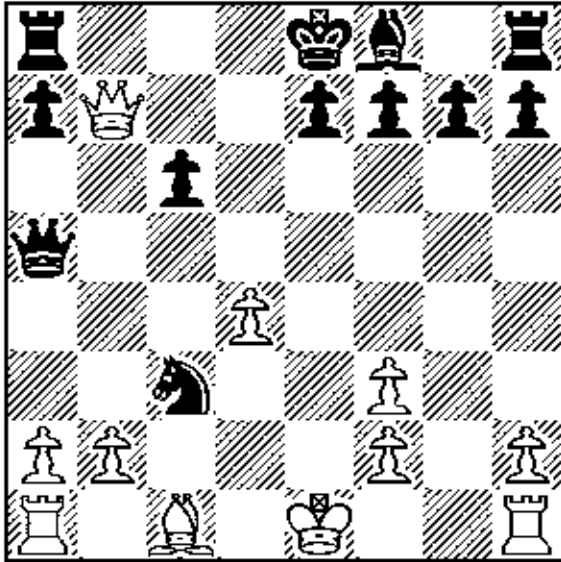
**4 ... Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4 7 cxd5 Nxd5**



**8 Bb5**

Partly because of this game, the text is no longer played in this position. Instead, the main line is 8 Qb3, usually going into a queenless middlegame after the forcing sequence 8 ... Bxf3 9 gxf3 e6 10 Qxb7 Nxd4 11 Bb5+ Nxb5 12 Qc6+ Ke7 13 Qxb5 Qd7 14 Nxd5+ Qxd5 15 Qxd5 exd5, when chances are equal.

**8 ... Qa5 9 Qb3 Bxf3 10 gxf3 Nxc3 11 Bxc6+ bxc6 12 Qb7?**



**Question:** What is wrong with this? It looks good.

**Answer:** Unfortunately, Nimzowitsch had simply miscalculated and failed to see that his queen gets trapped on a8.

**12 ... Nd5+ 13 Bd2 Qb6! 14 Qxa8+ Kd7**

**Question:** Messy!

**Answer:** Well, not really. White is simply losing his queen after 15 ... Nc7.

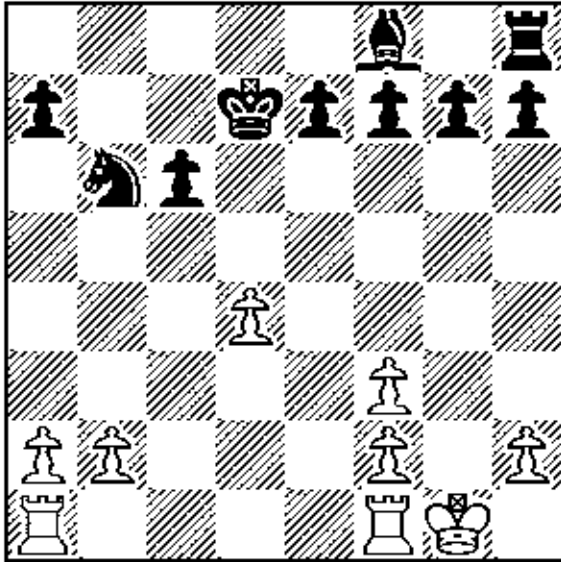
**Question:** Hmmm. So why pick this game for the book? Isn't it just a game of one move?

**Answer:** In one sense, yes, but I included it because it is a nice illustration of a material imbalance with which many club players struggle, in my experience.

**15 0-0 Nc7 16 Ba5**

The only way to avoid simply losing the queen for nothing. White manages to bale out with rook for two minor pieces.

**16 ... Nxa8 17 Bxb6 Nxb6**



**Question:** So how bad is this for White? Rook vs. bishop and knight, equal pawns. Surely Black does not have much here?

**Answer:** In fact, White is objectively lost!

**Question:** But why?

**Answer:** Firstly, his pawns are weak. Secondly, and more importantly, two minor pieces are simply better than a rook, *ceteris paribus*. If the rooks have a lot of open lines and weaknesses to attack, then they can be effective, but that is not the case here. There are no open files, and Black's only weaknesses on a7 and c6 are hard to target effectively. Furthermore, the black knight has a great central outpost at d5, and the two pieces will be able to attack the weak white pawns. Maróczy, writing in the tournament book, simply describes the rest as "a matter of technique " and gives no commentary at all. But we will examine the position more closely, as such material imbalances are frequently poorly understood by the average player.

**18 Rfc1 e6 19 Rc2 Be7 20 Rac1 Bg5!**

Rather than defending c6 passively with the rook, Black uses his bishop to harass the white rooks and stop them attacking the pawn.

**21 Rd1 Rb8 22 Rc5 Nd5 23 Ra5 Rb7**

White has managed to attack a7 and force the black rook to defend. Now he tries to bring his other rook over, but Black soon untangles.

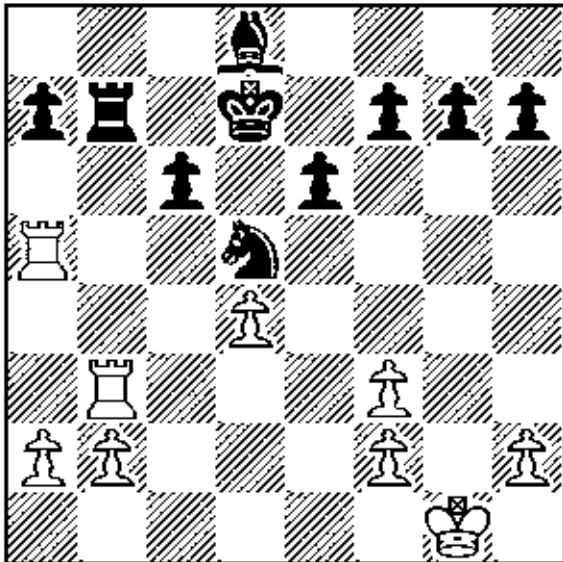
**24 Rd3 Bd8**

Ending any hope of attacking a7 successfully, since the bishop will come to b6,



defending the pawn while also attacking the white weakness on d4.

**25 Rb3**



**Question:** What's this?

**Answer:** Nimzowitsch exploits a tactical chance to disrupt Black's plan and even win a pawn, but it does not ease his position.

**25 ... Rxb3!**

Sacrificing a7 in order to remove a pair of rooks and activate his pieces.

**26 Rxa7+ Nc7 27 axb3 Bf6**

**Question:** Now what is happening?

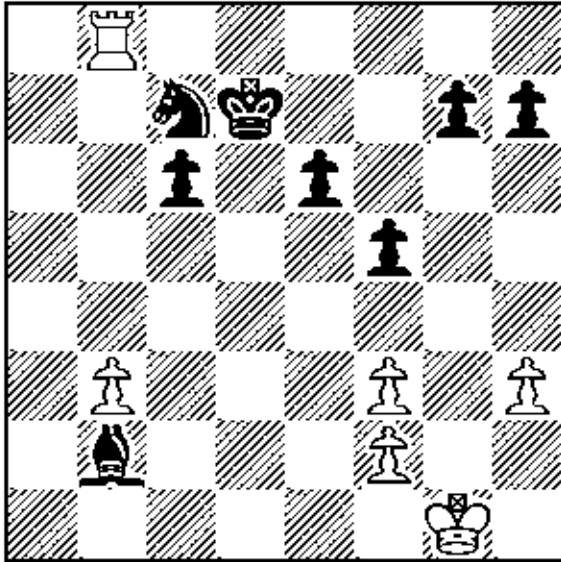
**Answer:** White has won a pawn, but his gain is purely temporary, since d4 is dropping off. Meanwhile, Black will start to coordinate his pieces and attack the other white weaknesses.

**28 Rb7 Bxd4**

Already, the pawn has been regained and b2 is falling as well.

**29 Rb8 Bxb2 30 h3 f5**

Simple stuff. Black starts advancing his central pawn mass. White has no counterplay, as his king is passive and his rook has nothing to attack.



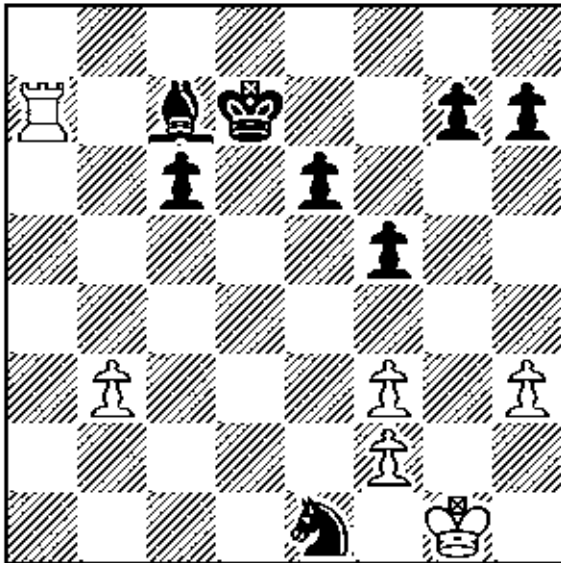
**31 Kf1**

Trying to activate the king, which Black nips in the bud immediately.

**31 ... Nd5**

Now ... Nf4 is a threat, picking off the h3-pawn, so the white king is forced to abandon its dreams of activity and retire to the defence of his kingside.

**32 Kg2 Be5 33 Ra8 Nf4+ 34 Kh2 Nd3+ 35 Kg1 Ne1 36 Ra7+ Bc7 0-1**



White's resignation may seem premature, but he is quite helpless. The f3-pawn drops next, with no improvement in the white position.

Although this game is in a sense just a one-move opening disaster, followed by what to

a master is elementary technique by Black, I included it because many club players, as I said before, have difficulty understanding positions with two pieces against a rook. I hope this example will therefore prove instructive.

## Game 22

### Alekhine-Tartakower, London 1932

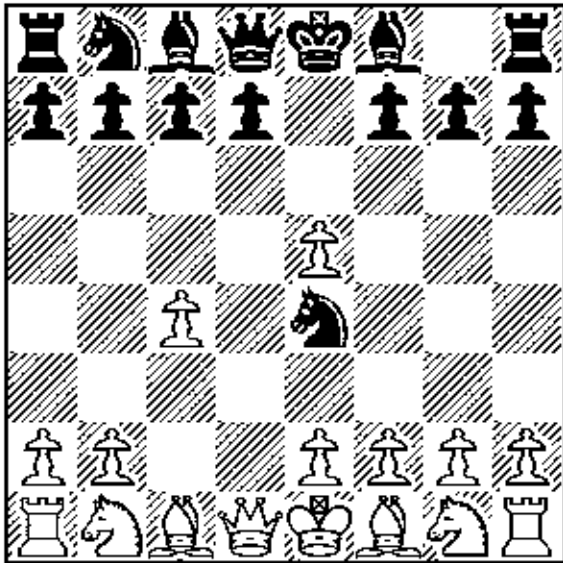
Game 22

**A.Alekhine-S.Tartakower**

London 1932

*Fajarowicz Gambit*

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e5 3 dxe5 Ne4**



The characteristic move of the so-called Fajarowicz Variation, which has always been less popular than the Budapest Gambit with 3 ... Ng4. Against the latter, Alekhine was fond of the aggressive set-up 4 e4 Nxe5 5 f4 with which he won several striking games. Rather than aiming to regain the e5-pawn, the Fajarowicz instead hopes to stir up trouble for White on the a5-e1 diagonal. It is a trappy variation, where the unprepared White player can come unstuck, but objectively Black should not equalize in this line.

**4 Nd2**

Given the importance of the a5-e1 diagonal, the prophylactic move 4 a3 is one of the main lines here. The text has the advantage of developing a piece, as well as challenging the centralized black knight.

**4 ... Nc5**

As Alekhine points out, 4 ... Bb4 5 Nf3, followed by a2-a3, will secure White the bishop pair.

**5 Ngf3 Nc6 6 g3 Qe7**

**Question:** That looks ugly!

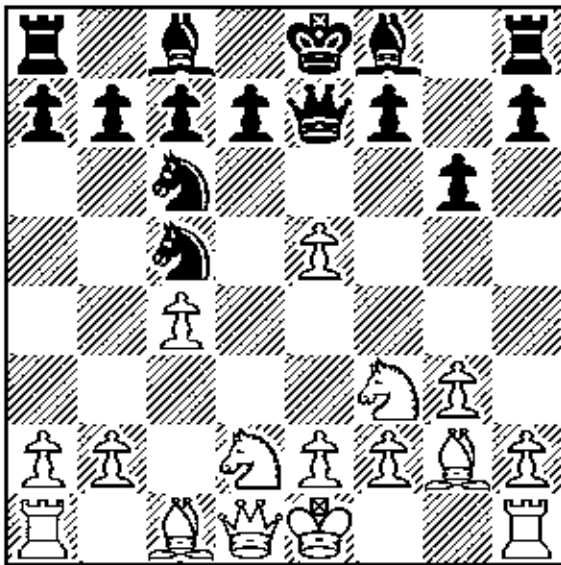
**Answer:** Indeed, it does not contribute much to the cause of harmonious development within Black's camp, but he wants to be able to regain the e5-pawn.

**7 Bg2 g6**

A logical consequence of his last move; Black wants to develop his bishop and castle, albeit while postponing recapturing on e5.

**Question:** Is it bad?

**Answer:** Against standard development by White, it would probably have worked out well, but Alekhine was exceptionally good at finding unexpected and very concrete responses to such dubious play. He does so again here.



**8 Nb1!**

**Question:** Crikey! That is certainly unexpected!

**Answer:** Yes, one does not often see a player deliberately undevelop a developed piece. Though this be madness, yet there is method in't. With the black queen on e7, the d5-square is an even more alluring outpost for the white knight than is usually the case in the Budapest, so Alekhine immediately directs his knight towards that square. Black

cannot do much to stop it landing there.

**8 ... Nxe5 9 0-0**

Another accurate move: Alekhine gets his king out of the centre, in order to enable the recapture on the following move.

**9 ... Nxf3+ 10 exf3!**

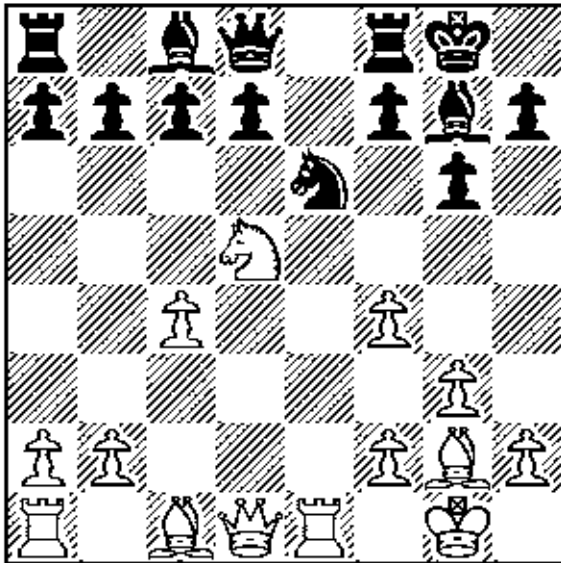
*Question:* Doubling his pawns?

*Answer:* Again, this is very concrete. Although White's pawn structure is compromised, he opens the e-file for his rook, and the black queen is now embarrassed.

**10 ... Bg7 11 Re1 Ne6 12 Nc3 0-0**

Black cannot really stop the white knight getting to d5, as after 12 ... c6, the reply 13 Bf4 is extremely unpleasant.

**13 Nd5 Qd8 14 f4**



*Question:* So I guess the assessment is that Black's opening has been a real failure?

*Answer:* Unquestionably. He has been comprehensively outplayed. White has a large space advantage and a substantial lead in development.

**14 ... c6**

Driving the knight away, which could not really be tolerated on d5, but now Black has a permanent weakness on d6.

**15 Nc3 d6 16 Be3**

White's play is very simple: he intends Qd2 and Rd1.

**16 ... Qc7 17 Rc1**

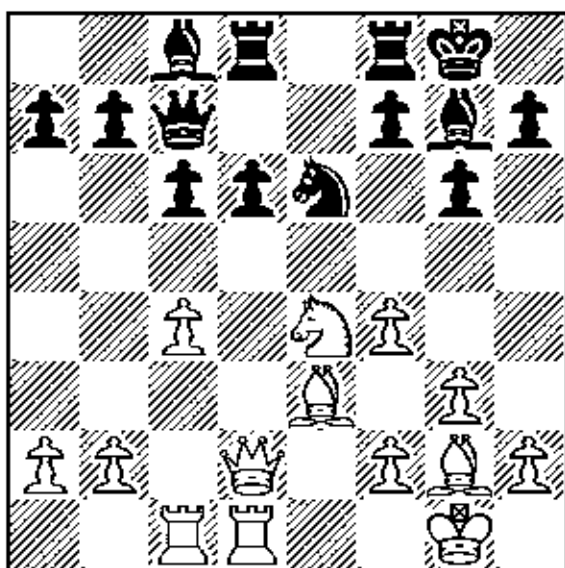
**Question:** I assumed this rook would come to d1.

**Answer:** It is the most obvious choice, but now the black queen has gone to c7, the rook is able to set up an unpleasant vis-à-vis on the c-file, while the other rook can reposition itself from e1 to d1.

**17 ... Bd7 18 Qd2?!**

Natural, though perhaps not the most accurate. White does better to play 18 Ne4 Rad8 19 Re2!, followed by Rd2, with heavy pressure. (19 Qxd6 Qa5 20 Qa3 Qxa3 21 bxa3 is less clear.)

**18 ... Rad8 19 Red1 Bc8 20 Ne4**



**20 ... Nc5?**

Black's position is unpleasant, but this move falls victim to a nice combination, while the obvious 20 ... d5? allows White to demonstrate why he put his queen's rook on c1: 21 cxd5 Rxd5 22 Nf6+! Bxf6 23 Bxd5 exploits the pin to win the exchange.

**Question:** So what should Black play?

**Answer:** Alekhine recommended 20 ... b6!, when 21 Nxd6?! c5 leaves White struggling to break the pin on the d-file; other 21st moves (Alekhine gives 21 b4, for example) maintain some pressure but nothing huge for White.

**21 Nxd6!**

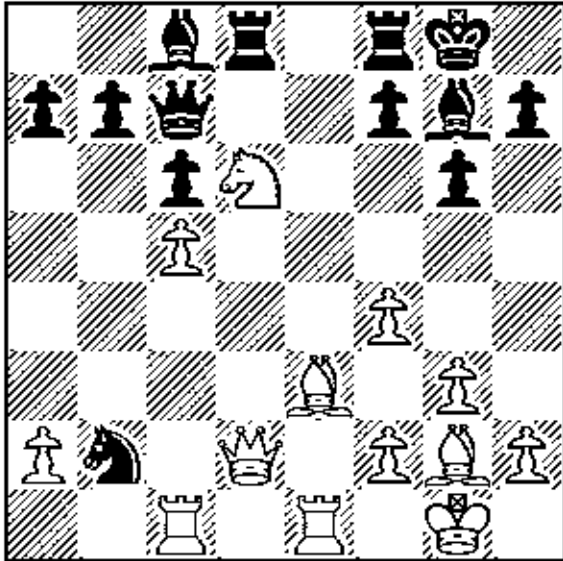
The start of a deeply-calculated sequence.

**21 ... Na4 22 c5?!**

Alekhine does not comment on this, but it is an inaccuracy which should have cost

White part of his advantage. The computer points out the much stronger 22 Qb4!, when 22 ... Nxb2? 23 Rd2 is winning for White, and even the relatively best continuation 22 ... a5 23 Qxa4 Rxd6 just leaves White a pawn up.

**22 ... Nxb2 23 Re1**



**23 ... b5?**

Overlooking the reply.

**Question:** So what should he play instead?

**Answer:** Alekhine actually mentions the best move 23 ... Bf5, claiming that 24 g4 Bxg4 25 Bd4 gives White a decisive advantage, but things are not so clear. The computer refutes this with 25 ... Rxd6! 26 cxd6 Qxd6, when it is Black who stands better; e.g. 27 Qxb2 (27 Bc3 Qxd2 28 Bxd2 Nd3 wins for Black) 27 ... Bxd4 and Black has two pawns for the exchange, with two very strong bishops and the white pawns weak. Black's advantage looks pretty decisive here.

Instead, White should answer 23 ... Bf5 with 24 Bf1, covering d3 and retaining the advantage, although he has less here than after 22 Qb4.

**24 cxb6!**

The idea Black had missed. The next few moves are forced.

**24 ... Qxd6**

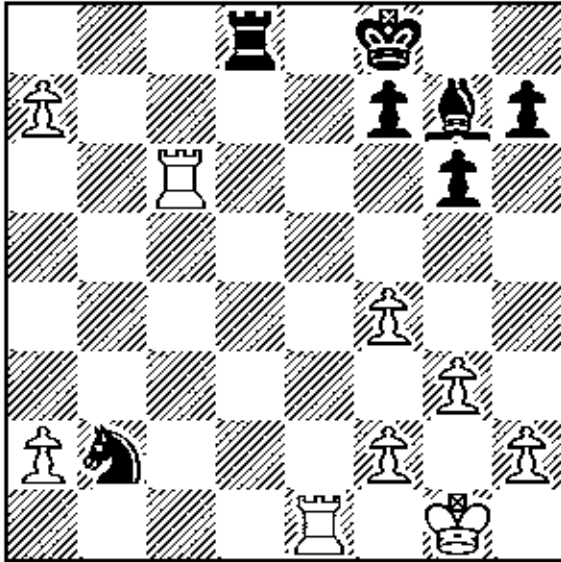
24 ... axb6 25 Rxc6 is hopeless.

**25 Qxd6 Rxd6 26 bxa7 Bb7 27 Bc5**

The final sting in the tale. White regains an exchange.

**27 ... Rdd8 28 Bxf8 Kxf8 29 Bxc6 Bxc6 30 Rxc6**





**Question:** So what has happened?

**Answer:** White's combination has yielded him rook and three pawns against two minor pieces, with one of the pawns sitting on a7. He has a winning advantage. Tartakower prefers to end the game quickly.

**30 ... Ra8 31 Rb6 Rxa7 32 Rb8 mate**

## Game 23

### Alekhine-Rosselli del Turco, Zürich 1934

*Game 23*

**A.Alekhine-S.Rosselli del Turco**

Zürich 1934

*Colle System*

**1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 e3**

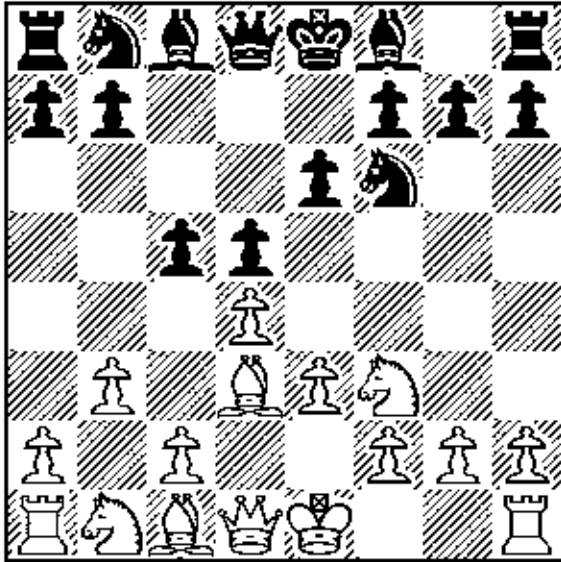
**Question:** The Colle System does not strike one as Alekhine's sort of opening at all!

**Answer:** Maybe not, and it is true that he won some nice games on the Black side, but this game is a very good illustration of the merits of the system (more particularly, Zukertort's interpretation) against slightly inaccurate defence. Indeed, one reason for including it in the present book is that it is a highly instructive example of a line which is a favourite of many club players.

**3 ... e6**

There is nothing objectively wrong with this, except that both 3 ... Bf5 and 3 ... g6 are very solid equalizers here.

**4 Bd3 c5 5 b3**



This is the the key move of the Zukertort System; the pure Colle instead involves 5 c3. The Zukertort is not so popular at GM level any more, but it does occasionally get an outing. I recall the very strong Cuban GM, Lazaro Bruzon Batista, using it to win a crushing game against Anand a few years ago; and Artur Yusupov is another who has used the line quite often.

**5 ... cxd4?!**

**Question:** Is this really a mistake? It seems very natural.

**Answer:** Yes, but it is definitely a small inaccuracy. The premature opening of the e-file makes White's play easier, by giving him a ready-made plan of developing, planting a knight on e5, and playing on the kingside. In addition, as this game shows, White gets a potential queenside pawn majority, which can also be a significant factor. Strangely enough, Anand committed the same basic strategic error (albeit a few moves later) in the aforementioned game against Bruzon, a clear sign that soon-to-be World Champions nowadays spend little time studying the classics!

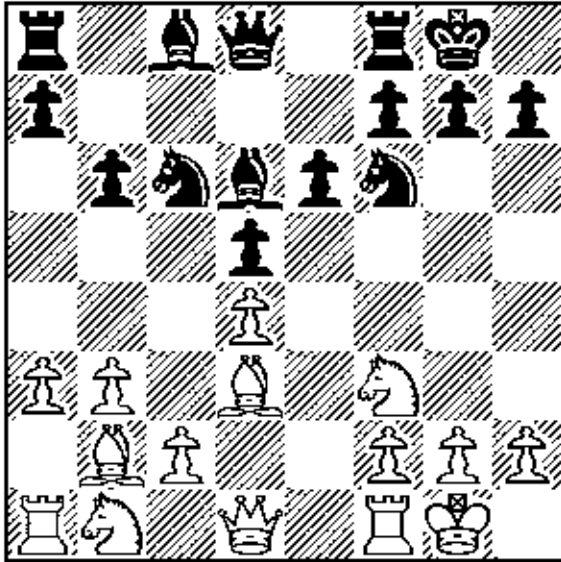
**6 exd4 Bd6 7 0-0 0-0 8 Bb2**

One of the attractions of these lines for White is that his development plan is simple and harmonious. The so-called "Horwitz bishops" on d3 and b2 can be a potent threat against the black king in the middlegame.

**8 ... Nc6 9 a3**

Protecting against the knight raid ... Nb4.

**9 ... b6**



**Question:** So you like White here?

**Answer:** He is definitely slightly for preference. His game is freer, he has the chance to build a kingside attack, based around equine occupation of e5, and he also has the queenside pawns. Black's position is solid, but a little passive. I think there can be no doubt that the Colle-Zukertort would be much more popular, even at GM level, if White could always guarantee to reach this position.

**10 Nbd2 Bb7 11 Qe2 Qc7 12 Ne5 Ne7 13 f4**

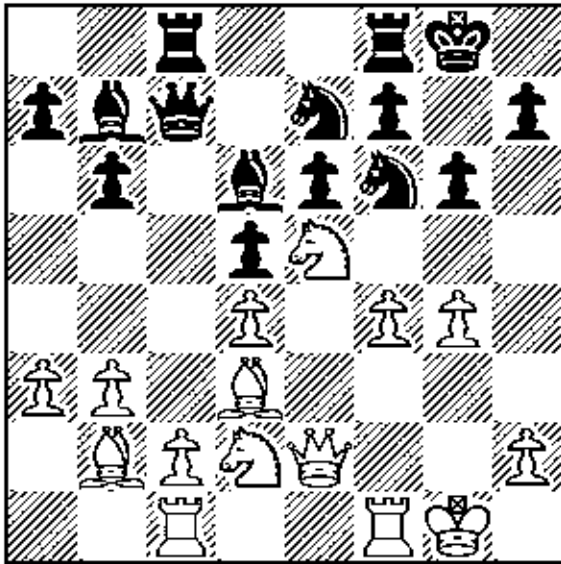
White's play is a model of logic – he completes his development and now sets about starting his kingside initiative, with chances to follow up with Rf3-g3/h3, for example. Black needs to be very careful.

**13 ... Rac8 14 Rac1**

**Question:** That looks a little inconsistent with the idea of a kingside attack.

**Answer:** Well, as we have already remarked, White also has a queenside pawn majority, and Alekhine's last move shows that he is thinking of using that as well, should the occasion arise. In his notes to the game, he comments that White could just ignore this possibility and concentrate on the attack, and he quotes another of his games (against Asgeirsson at the 1933 Folkestone Olympiad) where he did exactly that, simply crushing Black on the kingside. But it seems logical enough at least to introduce the possibility of utilizing the queenside majority, as such a double threat can only complicate the defender's task.

**14 ... g6 15 g4**



**Question:** That looks very committal. Can it be right to advance the pawns in front of the white king?

**Answer:** It is all based on the fact that the centre is stable. If Black could break in the centre in some way, and open lines, then White might well regret this advance of the g-pawn; but Black is never likely to be in a position to break with ... e6-e5 here, and he has no other central pawn levers. If I were White, the main thing I would be worried about is not allowing Black a promising pawn sacrifice with ... Ne4 at some stage – that is the only way he is likely to be able to open the game against the white king.

**15 ... h5?**

But this is really rather a disgusting move to modern eyes. I can only assume Rosselli had delusions of grandeur, and could see himself playing ... Kg7, ... Rh8 and mating the world champion on h1 after a glorious counter-attack, but it is about as realistic as a FIDE business plan. Instead, he should just play something calm, such as 15 ... Nc6. The phlegmatic computer thinks the position is completely equal after that, which strikes me as too optimistic for Black but, certainly, the whole game would remain ahead.

**16 h3 Kg7**

Continuing his suicidal idea of bringing a rook to the h-file. Had he followed Jonathan Rowson's advice and "talked to his pieces", I can't help feeling that the black monarch would have expressed some fears about its vis-à-vis with the enemy bishop on b2.

**Question:** But the long dark diagonal is

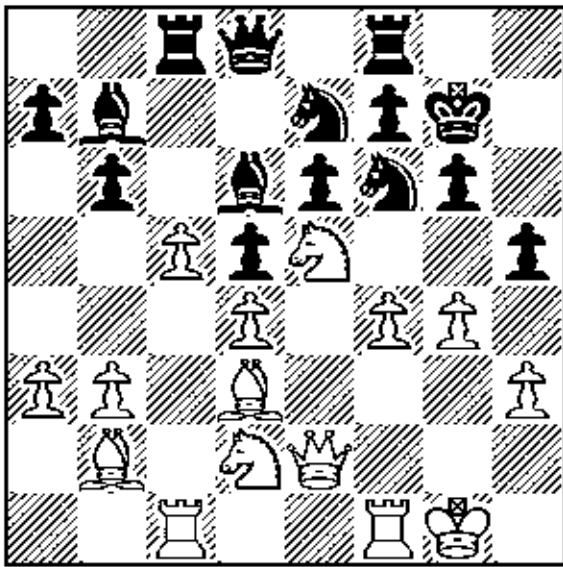
blocked and White can't really open it, can he?

**Answer:** That is doubtless what Rosselli thought. Nonetheless, White can exploit the diagonal, as we will see.

**17 c4 Qd8**

This is terribly passive and walks into White's next move, but Black was understandably terrified of 17 ... dxc4 18 Bxc4, followed by d4-d5, when the long diagonal opens and the so-called "dead bishop" on b2 is suddenly a monster.

**18 c5!**



Once again exploiting the fact that Black dare not open the long diagonal by capturing on c5. As a result, White obtains a powerful bind on the queenside as well, with his advancing pawn majority.

**18 ... Bxe5**

Naturally, 18 ... bxc5 19 g5 Ne4 (or 19 ... Nd7 20 Nxd7) 20 dxc5 is too awful to contemplate; while the passive 18 ... Bb8 gives White a delightful choice between strengthening the bind with 19 b4, and pressing on with the kingside attack after 19 f5, which the computer thinks is even stronger; e.g. 19 ... exf5 20 gxf5 and the attack is just crushing.

**19 fxe5**

Now, in addition to Black's other troubles, the dark squares around his king have lost their chief defender.

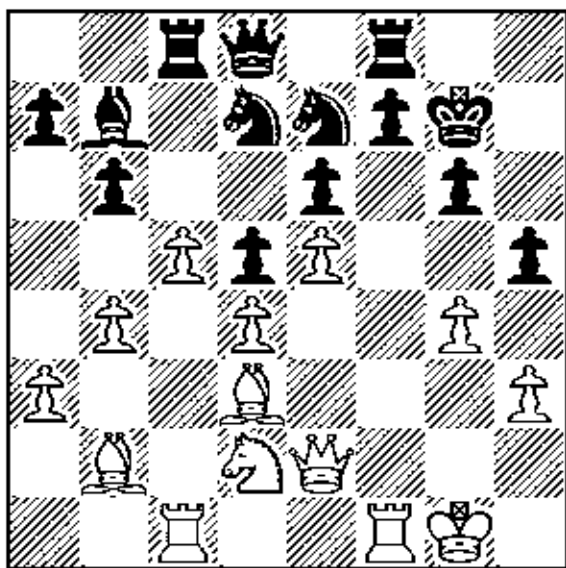
**19 ... Nd7?!**

Once again, Rosselli comes rather quietly.

**Question:** So what should Black do?

**Answer:** This was probably the time for the aforementioned pawn sacrifice, 19 ... Ne4 – not so much with dreams of a glorious counter-attack against the enemy king as of establishing some sort of light square blockade after something like 20 Nxe4 dxe4 21 Bxe4 Bxe4 22 Qxe4 Nd5. White would remain clearly better, but Black would at least have a chance of putting up some resistance.

**20 b4**



Now it is all one-way traffic. White has a decisive positional advantage on both sides of the board.

**20 ... hxg4 21 hxg4 Rh8 22 Nf3 bxc5 23 bxc5**

**Question:** Could 23 dxc5 have been played?

The queenside pawn majority looks crushing then.

**Answer:** Yes, and had Alekhine's kingside pawns been intact on h2 and g2, I am sure that is what he would have played. Given that his king a bit draughty, he prefers to rule out any chance of the long light diagonal opening with ... d5-d4, and a possible counter-attack. Objectively, as the computer confirms, 23 dxc5 is still very strong, but Alekhine's choice is much more pragmatic.

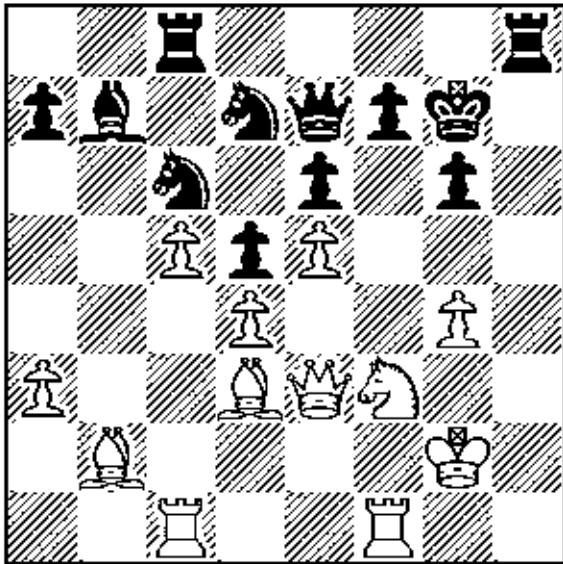
**23 ... Nc6 24 Qe3!**

Starting an assault on the kingside dark squares. 25 Ng5 is a threat, and a later Bc1 is in the air as well.

**24 ... Qe7 25 Kg2**

Now the idea is Rh1, challenging the h-file. This is the ultimate punishment for Black's grossly over-optimistic 15th move – instead of using the h-file himself, Black

finds it being used to attack his own king.



25 ... f5?

**Question:** What is this? Desperation?

**Answer:** Absolutely. Rosselli can see that sitting tight offers no hope at all, so he lashes out in an attempt to change the course of events. As usually happens in such cases, this only hastens the end, although the old saying naturally applies: “better an end with horror than a horror without end”.

Objectively, 25 ... Na5 offers better chances, hoping to cause some disruption by bringing the knight to c4.

**26 exf6+ Nxf6 27 Qg5 Rh6 28 Rh1 Rch8 29 Rxh6 Rxh6 30 Re1!**

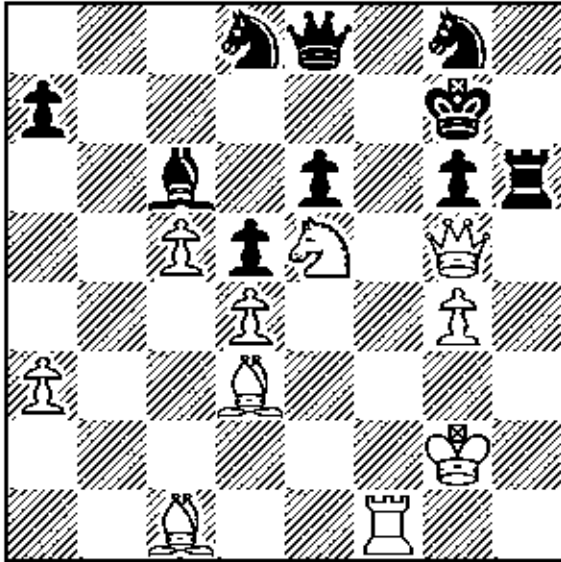
As Alekhine notes, 30 Rh1 “would win only a pawn” and the text is stronger still. Bc1 is coming.

**30 ... Nd8 31 Ne5 Ng8 32 Bc1**

Rather cruel. Black cannot even exchange queens, because h6 and d8 would both be hanging.

**32 ... Qe8 33 Rf1 Bc6**





**34 Rf6!**

Finally applying the wellie boot. This has been a crushing display by Alekhine.

**34 ... Nxf6 35 Qxh6+ Kg8 36 Bg5 1-0**

A fine example of an opening set-up which is a club player favourite.

## Game 24

### Alekhine-Em.Lasker, Zürich 1934

Game 24

A.Alekhine-Em.Lasker

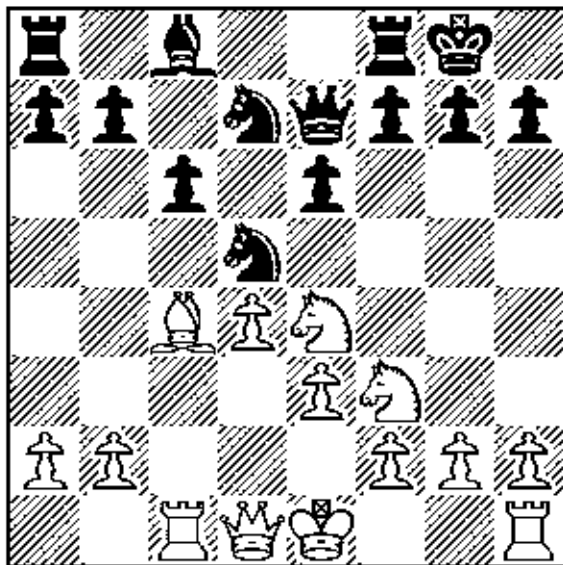
Zürich 1934

*Queen's Gambit Declined*

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 Bg5 Nbd7 6 e3 0-0 7 Rc1 c6 8 Bd3

Rather than engaging in tempo-fighting moves, Alekhine this time settles for the main line.

8 ... dxc4 9 Bxc4 Nd5 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 11 Ne4



And this move was very much his patented favourite method. Instead of the standard 11 0-0 Nxc3 12 Rxc3 e5, Alekhine's move seeks to avoid exchanges and aims for a more dynamic game, which certainly suited his style, even if objectively it is only good enough for equality.

11 ... N5f6

**Question:** That is a bit of a surprise. I would have thought 11 ... N7f6 was more natural.

**Answer:** Actually, that would be inaccurate. Black's key task in this whole variation is to solve the problem of freeing his game and developing his queen's bishop. To that end, he needs to be able to break with ... e6-e5 or ... c6-c5. On d7, his queen's knight supports both of these, whereas after your suggested move, White would reply 12 Ng3 and Black is not in a position to achieve either of the essential freeing breaks. Lasker's move is therefore the best, using his d5-knight to challenge the white knight on e4, while leaving Black's other knight on d7.

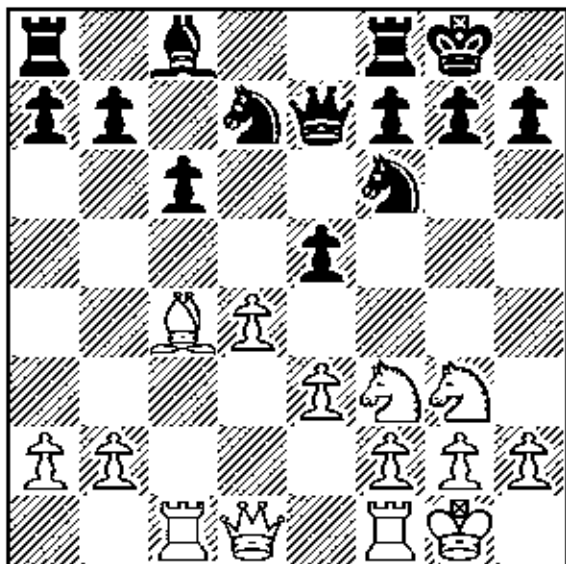
**12 Ng3 e5!?**

Lasker consistently follows the plan of freeing his game with ... e6-e5, but, as we will see, this does not entirely solve all Black's problems. The main line is 12 ... Qb4+ 13 Qd2 Qxd2+ 14 Kxd2, which was extensively tested in the Alekhine-Capablanca match of 1927.

**Question:** But isn't this just better for White?  
He has more space and better development.

**Answer:** I agree that it is quite attractive. The numerous games in the 1927 match showed that Black is okay if he defends very accurately (and Capablanca made seven draws out of seven), though the position does not look terribly attractive for him from a practical viewpoint. I can see Ulfie's eyes lighting up at the prospect of playing White here, and I note as well that the computer strongly prefers White. Objectively, I think the silicon beast is being a touch optimistic, but I would certainly be happy to play this as White over the board.

**13 0-0**



**13 ... exd4?!**

**Question:** You don't like this?

**Answer:** No. Interestingly, Alekhine does not comment on the move, instead implying that the whole plan starting with 12 ... e5 is dubious, but I think Black is okay after 13 ... e4; for example, 14 Nd2 Nb6 15 Bb3 Be6 and I don't see that Black has any serious problems.

**Question:** What is wrong with Lasker's move?

**Answer:** The problem is that he opens the position, which is in White's favour, because he is ahead in development. The black queen also finds herself uncomfortably placed on the open e-file.

**14 Nf5!**

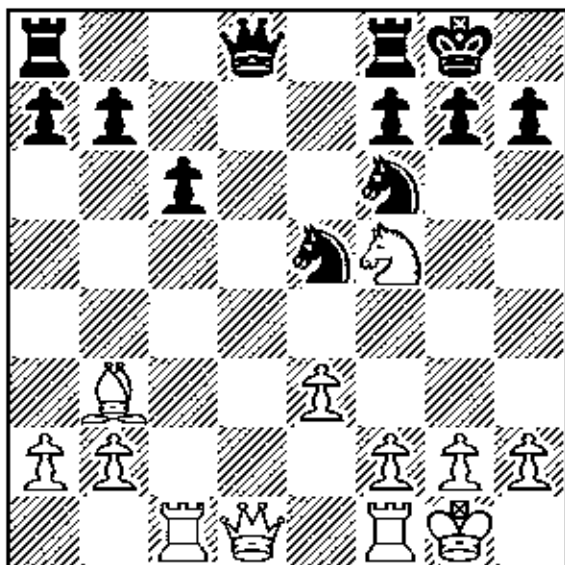
Alekhine himself comments that "this sharp-looking move is in reality less aggressive than the straightforward 14 exd4", but *Fritz* disagrees, and I am inclined to think that Alekhine in fact made the best choice. After the simple recapture, he continues the line with 14 ... Nb6 15 Re1 Qd6 16 Bb3 Bg4 17 h3 Bxf3 18 Qxf3, correctly claiming that taking the d-pawn would yield White a strong attack. However, after simply 18 ... Qd7, White does not seem to have too much, and two move earlier the computer's suggestion of 16 ... a5 17 Qd2 a4 18 Bc2 Be6 looks very solid.

**14 ... Qd8 15 N3xd4**

**Question:** Isn't the queen recapture more aggressive?

**Answer:** Not really, Alekhine rejected it because of 15 Qxd4 Nb6, forcing exchanges; indeed, after the further moves 16 Nd6 Nxc4 17 Rxc4 Be6, White has nothing at all.

**15 ... Ne5 16 Bb3 Bxf5 17 Nxf5**



### 17 ... Qb6?

Up to here, Lasker has defended well and is close to equalizing, but the text is a serious mistake. Alekhine recommended 17 ... g6, when he says 18 Nd6 Qe7 and 18 Qd6 Re8 would both be fine for Black. The computer fully confirms this.

**Question:** What is wrong with Lasker's move? It looks fine too – he will follow up with ... Rad8, won't he?

**Answer:** The trouble is that he will not get the time. Alekhine's reply initiates a sweeping attack.

### 18 Qd6! Ned7

It seems the knight must move, since 18 ... Rfe8 runs into 19 Ne7+ Kh8 20 Qxe5. Strangely, the computer actually thinks this is relatively the best defence for Black, since he can regain the piece with 20 ... Ng8.

**Question:** So are you saying Black is okay here?

**Answer:** No, he is still much worse. White plays 21 Nd5!, when the forced sequence 21 ... Rxe5 22 Nxb6 axb6 23 Bxf7 leaves him a solid pawn up in the endgame. 18 ... Ng6 is an alternative retreat, but then White has 19 Nh6+ gxh6 20 Qxf6 Qd8 21 Qc3 (Alekhine) and Black is still in a bad way.

### 19 Rfd1 Rad8 20 Qg3

Although this is strong, and soon produces the desired result, the computer shows that there was an even more powerful way to conduct the attack: 20 Qf4! g6 21 Nd6 (21 Qg5 transposes to the game), when all of the white pieces are superbly placed, and

there is great pressure against f7 in particular. Meanwhile, the black queen is cut off on the queenside and cannot get back to help its beleaguered monarch.

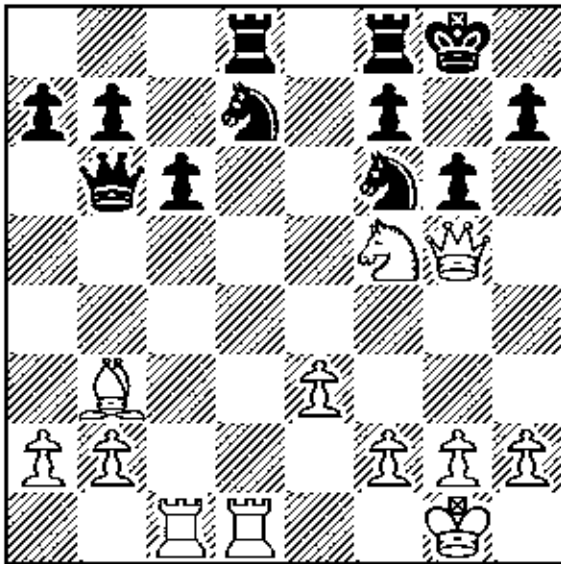
**20 ... g6**

Forced. 20 ... Ne8 loses simply to 21 Nh6+ Kh8 22 Nxf7+, while 20 ... Nh5 21 Qg5 g6 22 Rd6 is also crushing.

**21 Qg5**

**Question:** What is the threat?

**Answer:** There are actually two: 22 Rd6 and 22 Nd6. Black is helpless.



**21 ... Kh8**

*Fritz* gives 21 ... Qb5 as relatively best, but then 22 Bxf7+! Rxf7 (not 22 ... Kxf7? 23 Nd6+) 23 Nh6+ Kg7 24 Qxb5 cxb5 25 Nxf7 Kxf7 26 Rc7 brings about an endgame where White will have rook and two pawns for two knights, and the strength of his initiative is such that Black is unlikely to be able to hold.

The other main defensive try is 21 ... Ne4, when White must find 22 Qe7!. Now the threat of a check on h6 forces 22 ... gxf5, after which 23 Rxd7 Rxd7 24 Qxd7 is again clearly much better for White, although Black is still on the board. Lasker's move loses more easily.

**22 Nd6 Kg7 23 e4**

A nice finish. The pawn not only joins in the attack itself, it also opens the third rank for the white rooks.

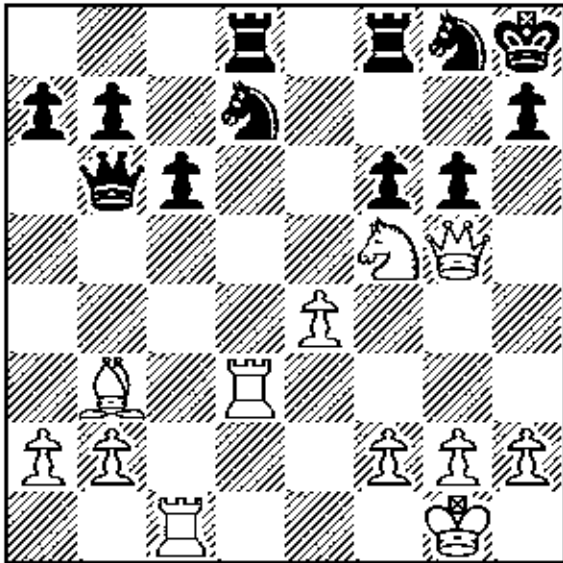
**23 ... Ng8 24 Rd3 f6**

This loses very attractively, but there is no defence anyway.

**Question:** What about 24 ... h6 instead?

**Answer:** As Alekhine points out, that loses in a very similar fashion to the game: 25 Nf5+ Kh7 26 Nxe6 f6 27 Nf5! fxe5 28 Rh3+ and mates – a very nice “pendant-variation”, as he calls it.

**25 Nf5+ Kh8**



**26 Qxg6! 1-0**

**Question:** It is amazing how quickly Black’s game collapsed. Up to move 17, he seemed to be very solid, yet just nine moves later, it is all over.

**Answer:** Yes, it is another example of Alekhine’s blistering handling of the initiative. He really was lethal when given a chance.

## Game 25

### Winter-Alekhine, Nottingham 1936

Game 25

**W. Winter-A. Alekhine**

Nottingham 1936

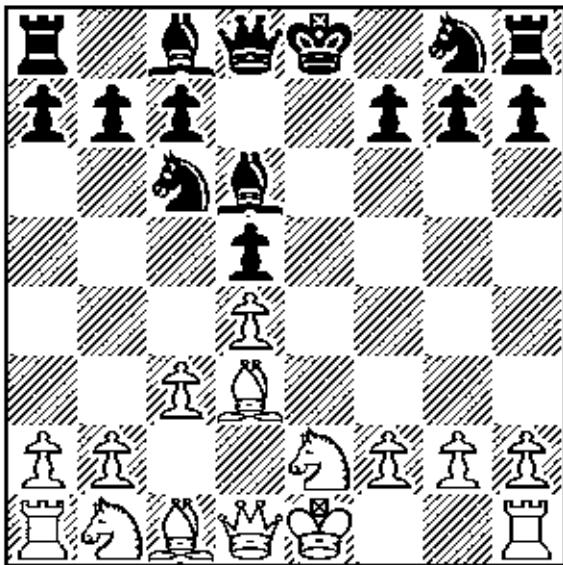
*French Defence*

**1 d4 e6 2 e4 d5 3 exd5**

**Question:** Oh dear, I bet Alekhine was unhappy to see that!

**Answer:** Not if he is to be believed. His comment was that “Black will at least have not fewer opportunities for complicating, if he wants to, than in most of the other variations of the French.” Indeed, this is one reason to include the game in this book. Just as with Games 13 and 18, here too Alekhine gives an object lesson is how to play against an opponent who is unambitious with the white pieces.

**3 ... exd5 4 Bd3 Nc6 5 Ne2 Bd6 6 c3**



**6 ... Qh4!**

**Question:** That looks like a wild lunge. Why do you give it an exclamation mark?



**Answer:** Contrary to first appearances, there is good sense behind the move. By defending d4, White's last move threatened to simplify further by 7 Bf4, which Alekhine's move prevents. He also prepares queenside castling.

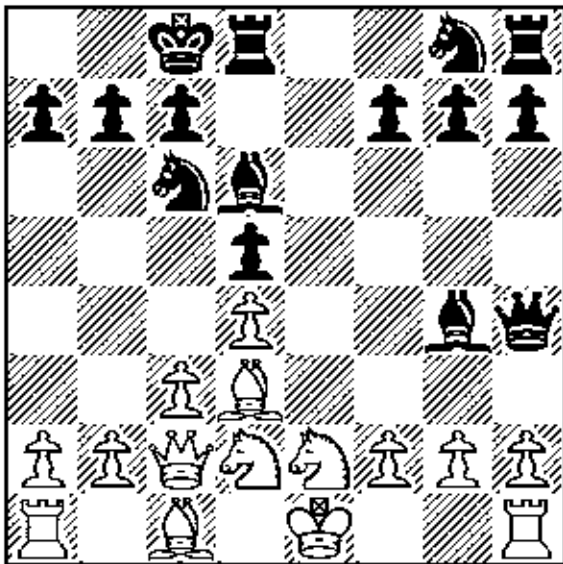
**7 Nd2 Bg4!**

Another accurate and problem-setting move. This stops the white knight coming to f3, as well as clearing away the last obstacle to long castling. On the other hand, it also entails a pawn sacrifice ...

**8 Qc2**

... which Winter wisely declines. After 8 Qb3 0-0-0 9 Qxd5 Nf6, Black's lead in development would have been very serious. We have already seen many examples in this book of the danger of granting Alekhine such advantages.

**8 ... 0-0-0**



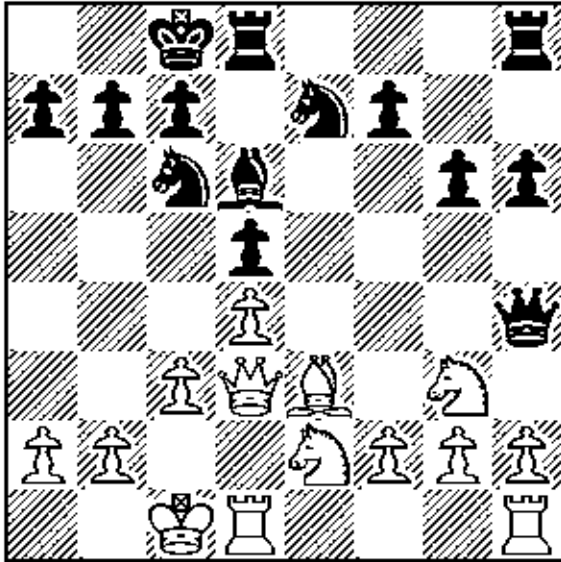
**Question:** Black looks to have a good game already.

**Answer:** He is already somewhat better, yes. White will need to put his own king on the queenside as well, which will take some time.

**9 Nf1 g6**

This sets up the positional idea of a later ... Bf5, exchanging off the light-squared bishops. With the central pawn structure being as it is, with White's pawns fixed on dark squares, the exchange of the d3-bishop will leave him weak on the light squares.

**10 Be3 Nge7 11 0-0-0 Bf5 12 Nfg3 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 h6**



**Question:** What is that for?

**Answer:** Black anticipates a possible Qd2, when Bg5 might be a nuisance.

**Question:** It is interesting that, despite wanting to beat a weaker opponent with Black, Alekhine does not go hell for leather.

**Answer:** No, and that is well worth noting. Even the choice of the French Defence, not fearing the Exchange Variation, was a sign that Alekhine was not going to go mad. Instead, he puts his trust in playing accurate, slightly unbalancing moves, hoping gradually to outplay his less experienced opponent. Instead, playing hyper-aggressively would only be liable to rebound. As we noted in Game 18, Black cannot hope simply to get an advantage by force against such a solid line as White has chosen; rather, he needs to avoid total symmetry and/or heavy exchanges, but at the same time play soundly and show some patience.

**14 f4?**

This really is rather a repulsive move, weakening the e3- and e4-squares and hampering White's bishop. A quiet move such as 14 Kb1 or 14 Qd2 would still have left the game very equal.

**14 ... Qg4**

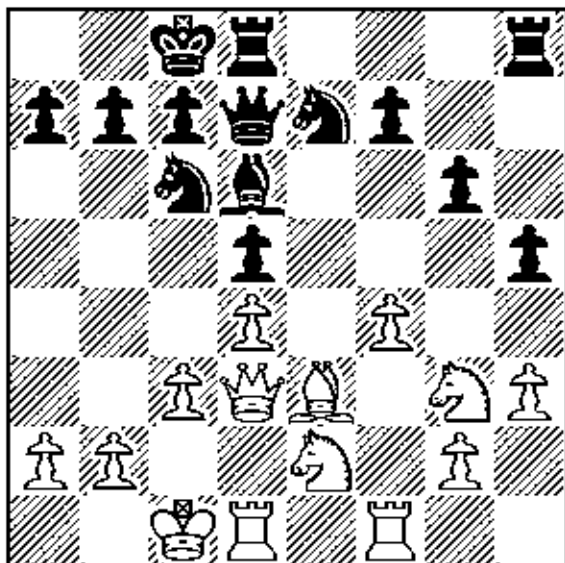
Stopping the further advance of the white f-pawn. As Alekhine notes, Maintaining a blockade over f5, Nimzowitsch-style, is very important.

**15 h3 Qd7 16 Rhf1?!**

Trying to prepare f4-f5 again, but after Alekhine's reply, White never does succeed

in getting the move in. He could, and probably should, have tried it immediately: 16 f5 Nxf5 17 Nxf5 Qxf5 18 Qxf5+ gxf5 19 Rhf1 Rde8 20 Kd2 and although Black can defend the pawn with 20 ... Ne7, White has some compensation. Declining the pawn with 16 ... h5 may be the best reply, but then at least White gets rid of the pesky pawn on f4, which shuts in his bishop.

**16 ... h5!**



**17 Ng1**

Now 17 f5 is met by 17 ... h4 and after 18 f6 Ng8 19 Nh1 Re8, the f6-pawn will be rounded up. Note that 20 Bg5 does not help due to 20 ... Rh5 21 Qd2 Rxe2!, winning material.

**17 ... h4 18 N3e2?!**

Given White's troubles with this knight obstructing the e-file, 18 Nh1 was probably somewhat better.

**18 ... Nf5**

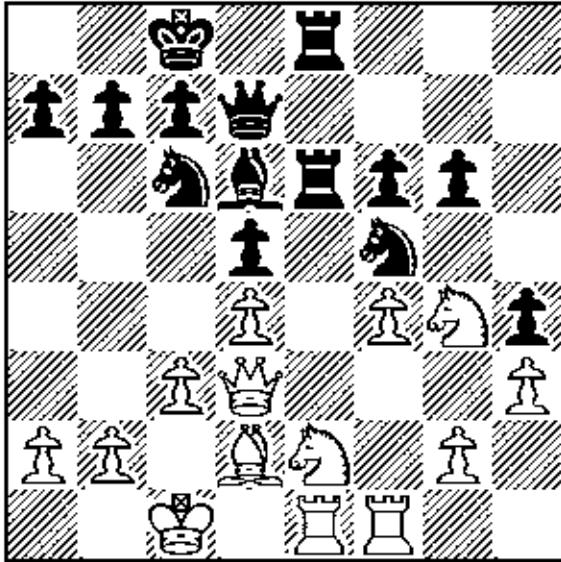
**Question:** Things are starting to look really serious for White, aren't they?

**Answer:** Yes, his position has deteriorated markedly over the last few moves. He lacks any real counterplay, and can only watch as Black methodically tightens his grip.

**19 Nf3 f6**

Keeping the white knight out of e5.

**20 Nh2 Rde8 21 Bd2 Re6 22 Ng4 Rhe8 23 Rde1**



**23 ... R8e7!**

An excellent move, the idea of which we have already seen in Game 17.

**Question:** You mean “Alekhine’s Gun”?

**Answer:** Exactly. The queen will be tucked in behind the rooks, creating an awesomely powerful battery down the e-file.

**24 Kd1**

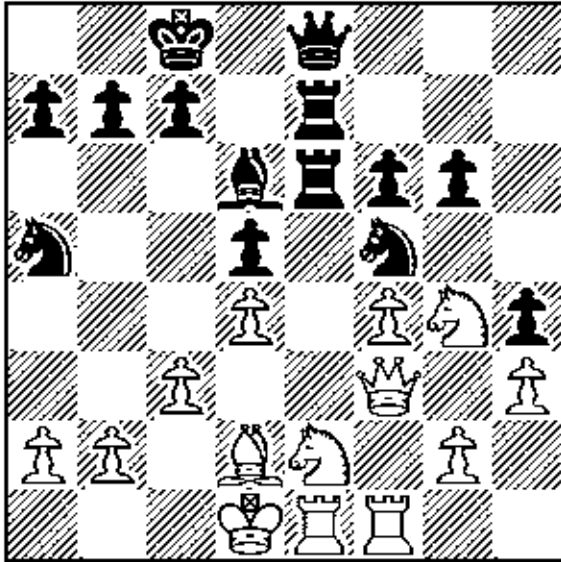
White ties himself in knots, in anticipation of the pin coming down the e-file. The alternatives are also terrible; 24 Ng1 was relatively best, but then if nothing else Black can simply take a pawn: 24 ... Rxe1+ 25 Rxe1 Rxe1+ 26 Bxe1 Bxf4+.

**24 ... Qe8 25 Qf3**

By defending f4, White prepares to move his stricken knight from e2 without the pawn hanging at the end of the exchanges, as was the case in the previous note. But now Alekhine strikes from the queenside.

**25 ... Na5!**

A nice move. The prospect of the knight landing on c4 is horrible for White, so he feels obliged to stop it.



**26 b3?**

Unfortunately, this does not actually stop the threat.

The tactical justification of Black's last move is that 26 Qxd5 can be met by 26 ... Rxe2. Now Alekhine only considers 27 Rxe2 Rxe2 28 Qxa5 Ng3 29 Rf3 Qe4, winning at once, whereas *Fritz* points out that the immediate capture on a5 is slightly better. Even so, after 27 Qxa5 Ng3, there is no adequate defence to the threat of 28 ... Rxd2+ 29 Kxd2 Re2+ 30 Kd1 Qe4. White can set a trap with 28 Qxa7 Rxd2+ (28 ... Qb5! is the simplest win) 29 Kxd2, when 29 ... Re2+? (29 ... Nxf1+ 30 Rxf1 Qb5 still wins) 30 Kd1 Qe4?? would lose to 31 Qa8+ Kd7 32 Nxf6+, but I am sure Alekhine would not have fallen for this!

Instead, 26 Nc1 was relatively best, though things are still very unpleasant for White after 26 ... Nc4.

**26 ... Nc4!**

**Question:** That must have been a rude shock!

**Answer:** No doubt. It turns out that 27 bxc4 loses to 27 ... Qa4+ with mate in five: 28 Kc1 Ba3+ 29 Kb1 Rb6+ 30 Ka1 Qc2 etc.

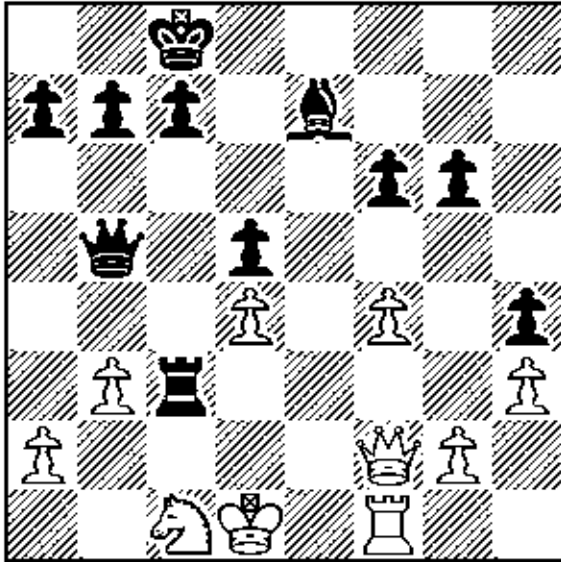
**27 Bc1 Nce3+**

27 ... Qb5 is also winning, but the text is more than adequate.

**28 Bxe3 Nxe3+ 29 Nxe3 Rxe3 30 Qf2 Qb5**

As in so many other variations, this queen infiltration finishes the job, although other moves also win; e.g. the computer's 30 ... Rd3+ 31 Kc2 Ree3, followed by ... Qe4.

**31 Nc1 Rxc3 32 Rxe7 Bxe7**



Black has an extra pawn *and* the compensation. The rest is easy.

**33 Qe1 Kd7 34 f5 Re3!**

Disposing by tactical means of the threat of Qe6+.

**35 Qf2 g5 36 Re1 Re4 37 Rxe4 dxe4 38 Kd2 Bd6 39 Kc2 Bf4 0-1**

A splendid example of defeating an unambitious weaker opponent with the black pieces.

# Game 26

## Alekhine-Fine, Hastings 1936/37

Game 26

**A.Alekhine-R.Fine**

Hastings 1936/37

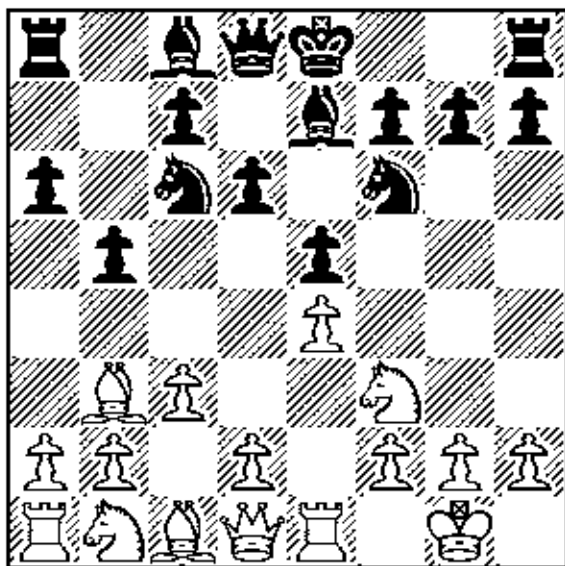
*Ruy Lopez*

**1 e4**

**Question:** Alekhine was mainly a 1 d4 player, wasn't he?

**Answer:** Yes, predominantly, although he never played that move to such a degree of exclusivity that opponents could discount 1 e4. In the present game, the tournament situation should be borne in mind. This game was played in round eight of a nine-round all-play-all. Fine had thus far scored 7/7 and Alekhine had half a point less. Given the short and weak nature of the event, a draw in this game would practically guarantee Fine first place, so Alekhine had to play for a win.

**1 ... e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3**



**8 ... Na5?!**

This old-fashioned move order has now been completely supplanted by 8 ... 0-0 9

h3 and only then 9 ... Na5.

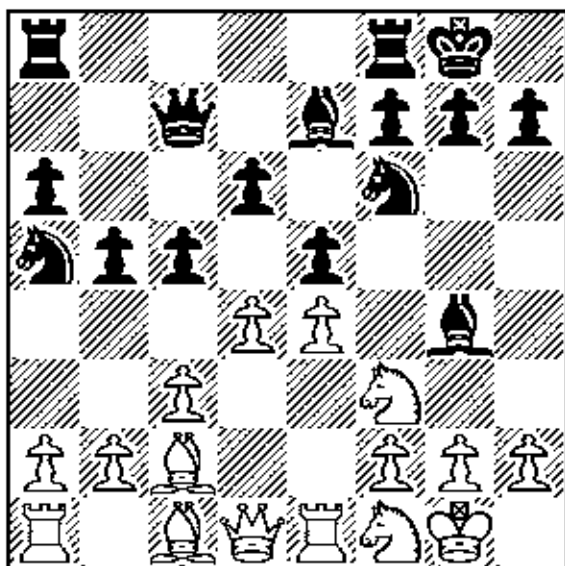
**Question:** Does it make any real difference?

**Answer:** Yes, albeit only a small one. In the game variation, White is generally able to dispense with the prophylactic h2-h3, and instead play something more aggressive, such as a2-a4 at a crucial moment. It does not give him any huge advantage, but there is no real reason to allow White this extra option, especially as Black gets no particular benefit from his choice of move order.

**9 Bc2 c5 10 d4 Qc7 11 Nbd2 0-0 12 Nf1**

Objectively, 12 a4! is the best attempt to try to exploit Black's move order, though the text also attempts to manage without h2-h3.

**12 ... Bg4**



**Question:** This seems to force clarification in the centre, doesn't it?

**Answer:** It seems to, yes; but Alekhine has a dynamic pawn sacrifice in mind.

**13 Ne3!?**

A highly interesting idea. At the cost of a pawn, White gains the bishop pair and brings his knight to the classic attacking f5-square, typical for these Spanish positions. The pawn sacrifice is speculative, but it enables White to seize the initiative and forces Black to defend carefully – exactly what Alekhine must have been striving for, given the tournament situation.

Interestingly, David Bronstein once used a similar pawn sacrifice in a must-win game against Paul Keres, in the final round of the 1950 Candidates tournament. That



game went 8 ... 0-0 9 d4 Bg4 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Qxf3 exd4 12 Qd1 dxc3 13 Nxc3 and although White's initiative does not even look as impressive as Alekhine's (no knight on f5!), Bronstein still went on to win this vital game, which brought him victory in the tournament. Admittedly, it is hard to draw too many objective conclusions about the Bronstein-Keres game, in view of subsequent allegations that Keres had been leaned on by the Soviet chess authorities and ordered to lose. All the same, I think it does at least show that White's initiative in such positions can be more dangerous than it perhaps appears at first sight.

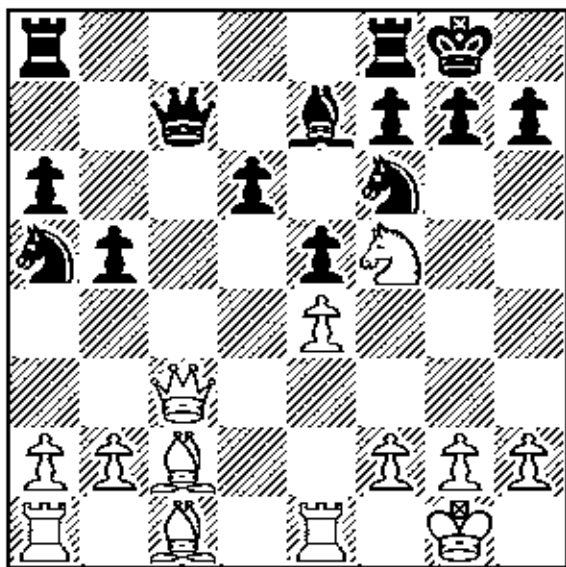
**13 ... Bxf3 14 Qxf3 cxd4 15 Nf5?!**

**Question:** Isn't this his whole idea?

**Answer:** Maybe, but Alekhine himself later analysed the position accurately and admitted that 15 cxd4 is stronger. The main line runs 15 ... exd4 16 Nf5 Qxc2 17 Nxe7+ Kh8 18 Nf5 (with the threat of 19 Nxc7 Kxc7 20 Bh6+, forcing mate). Alekhine stopped his analysis here, claiming a decisive advantage, which may be something of an exaggeration. Even so, after 18 ... d3 (the best chance) 19 Nxc7 Nd7 20 Bf4, White has a clear advantage, since if 20 ... Kxc7?, he regains the piece with 21 Qg4+ and 22 Qxd7.

Possibly Black's best response to 15 cxd4, and the move Alekhine expected, is 15 ... Nc6, when he analysed 16 d5 Nd4 17 Qd1 Nxc2 18 Nxc2 a5 19 Bd2 as slightly better for White, though I am not sure it really amounts to anything significant.

**15 ... dxc3 16 Qxc3**



**Question:** So what is going on here? What does White have for his pawn?

**Answer:** He has the initiative and some attacking chances on the kingside, based primarily around the knight at f5.

**Question:** It does not sound like a lot!

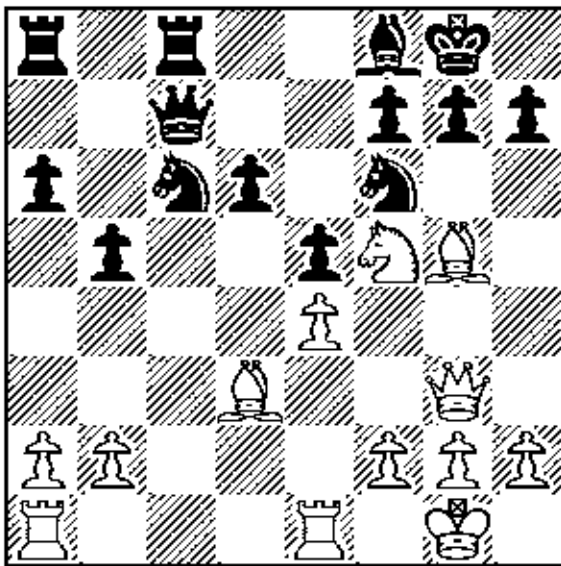
**Answer:** Maybe not, but this book has already shown that one should never underestimate the value of the initiative in Alekhine's hands.

**16 ... Rfc8**

**Question:** Why that rook?

**Answer:** The point is to threaten to exchange queens, since now after 17 ... Qxc3 18 Nxe7+, Black has 18 ... Kf8, regaining the piece.

**17 Qg3 Bf8 18 Bd3 Nc6 19 Bg5**



**19 ... Ne8!?**

Neither of the two players (both of whom published annotations to this game) commented on this move, which is perhaps a trifle passive. *Fritz* prefers 19 ... Nh5 20 Qg4 g6 with equal chances, although the fact that the computer does not think Black is better here, with his extra pawn, is itself interesting.

**20 Rac1?!**

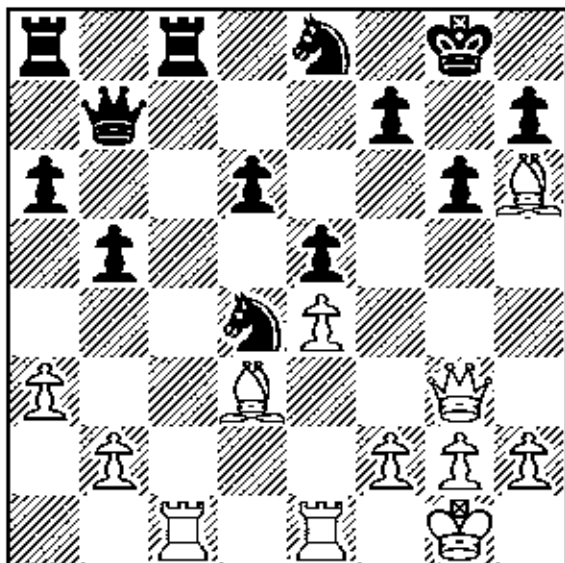
Alekhine criticized this, since an exchange of rooks on the c-file is only to Black's advantage. He recommended instead 20 Rad1, which may well have gained a tempo over the game; and 20 h4 is another possibility.

**20 ... Qb7 21 a3**

**Question:** That seems rather a feeble attacking move!

**Answer:** Actually, it is more insidious than it looks. As well as stopping ... Nb4, the move also envisages the manoeuvre Bb1-a2-d5.

**21 ... g6 22 Nh6+ Bxh6 23 Bxh6 Nd4**



**Question:** So who has benefited from the exchange on h6?

**Answer:** I would say there is not much in it. White has eliminated the enemy bishop and so left the kingside dark squares weak around the black king; on the other hand, White's strong attacking knight on f5 has also bitten the dust. The computer actually prefers Black now, which I instinctively disagree with, though in view of the note to move 25, the silicon beast may in fact be right.

**24 Rcd1 b4 25 f4**

White has to do something active on the kingside; otherwise he will simply be a pawn down for nothing.

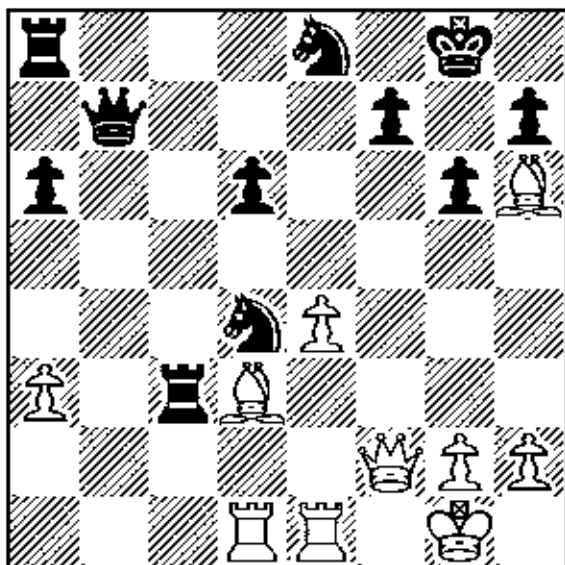
**25 ... exf4?!**

Fine awarded this move an exclamation mark, and Alekhine also implies that it is best; whereas the computer strongly prefers 25 ... bxa3 26 bxa3 Rc3 27 fxe5 Qb3, assessing this as in Black's favour. It is clear that White's lost tempo with his rook at move 20 has significantly weakened his initiative.

**26 Qxf4 bxa3 27 bxa3 Rc3 28 Qf2**

Alekhine gives an interesting variation here, which he claims was the point of Black's play. After 28 e5, Black intended 28 ... Rxd3 29 Rxd3 Ne2+ 30 Rxe2 Qb1+ 31

Kf2 Qxd3 32 e6 Qf5! 33 Qxf5 gxf5 34 e7 f6 35 Ke3 and White's active king should ensure the draw, but certainly no more than that. Naturally, this was not attractive to Alekhine, given the tournament situation, so he seeks another path.



### 28 ... Ne6?!

Both players considered this to be the turning point of the game, though Black still seems to be okay. Both recommended the natural 28 ... Nc6, directing the knight towards e5. After either 29 Bc1 Ne5 30 Bf1 (Alekhine) or 29 Bb1 Ne5 30 Ba2 Rac8, White is struggling to justify his material deficit.

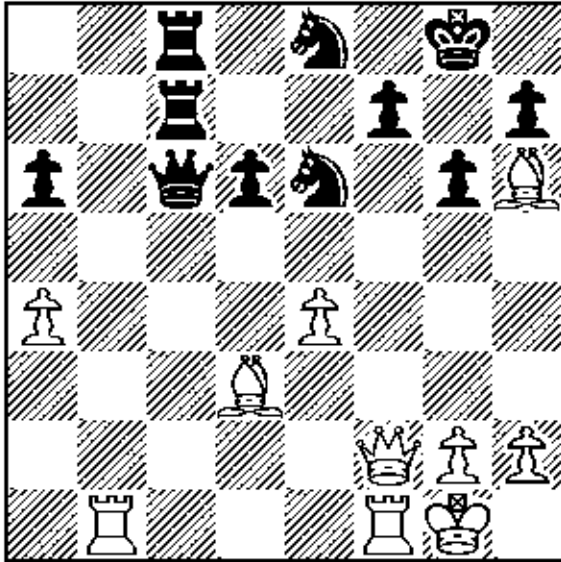
### 29 a4 Rac8

Black later regrets undefending his a-pawn like this. *Fritz* prefers 29 ... Qe7, which brings the queen towards the vulnerable dark squares on the kingside. The position would remain unclear.

### 30 Rf1 R3c7?!

The threat was 31 Bxa6! and wins, but 30 ... Nc5 looks a better defence. Fine dismisses this with 31 Bb1 Nxa4 32 Ba2 R3c7 33 Rb1 Qa7 34 Bxf7+! Rxf7 35 Qxa7, winning. Instead of the act of larceny on a4, 31 ... Rb8 appears stronger at first, but after some thought the computer finds the nice idea 32 Ba2 Nb3 33 Rd2!, followed by Rb2 and Rfb1, when Black still looks to be in serious trouble. Ironically, the best move in this variation may be 31 ... Nb3, although it is understandable that Fine was reluctant to move his knight so far from the kingside.

### 31 Rb1 Qc6



### 32 a5!

After a series of mini-inaccuracies by Fine, White has worked up a serious initiative for the first time in the game. Objectively, the position is still defensible for Black, but he now has to be very careful.

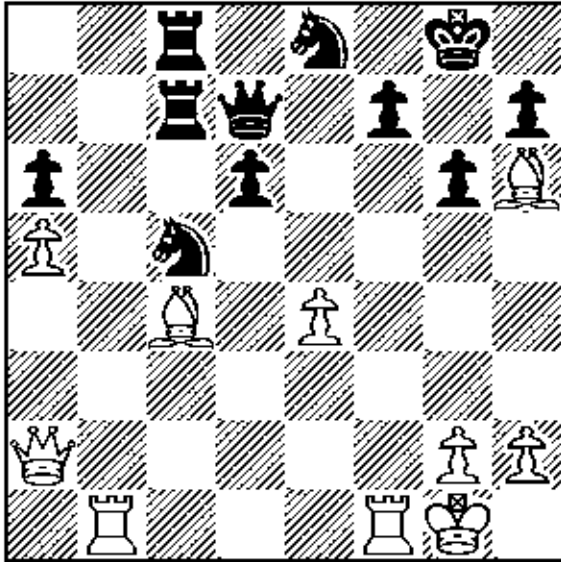
### 32 ... Nc5?

And this final error proves fatal. *Fritz* agrees with Alekhine in suggesting 32 ... Ra8 as relatively best, when 33 Rbc1 and Bc4 gives White a strong initiative, but not necessarily a decisive one.

### 33 Bc4

Taking aim at the key f7-square. Now 33 ... Nxe4? fails to 34 Bxf7+ Kh8 35 Qd4+ etc.

### 33 ... Qd7 34 Qa2



**34 ... Nxe4**

Suddenly, there is no way to defend the f7-square: 34 ... Ne6 leads to mate on f8 after 35 Bxe6 Qxe6 36 Qxe6 fxe6 37 Rf8 mate; while 34 ... d5 can be met by 35 Rxf7! Kxf7 36 Rf1+ Nf6 (or 36 ... Ke7 37 Bg5+) 37 Bxd5+ Ke7 (or 37 ... Ne6 38 Bg5) 38 Rxf6! Nxe4 (38 ... Kxf6 39 Qb2+ is mate in four) 39 Rf7+ Ke8 40 h3! and White wins.

**35 Rxf7 Qxf7 36 Bxf7+ Rxf7 37 Qe6 1-0**

**Question:** Black seemed to collapse over the last ten moves or so.

**Answer:** Yes, he did; though I think one must credit Alekhine for having created so many problems and kept Fine under pressure throughout. This is what often happens in such cases. Objectively, the white pawn sacrifice was at best speculative, and at one point he was struggling not to be significantly worse, but eventually, the difficulty of defending such a position told on Black. One must always remember that players are not computers!

## Game 27

### Alekhine-Reshevsky, Kemerì 1937

Game 27

**A.Alekhine-S.Reshevsky**

Kemerì 1937

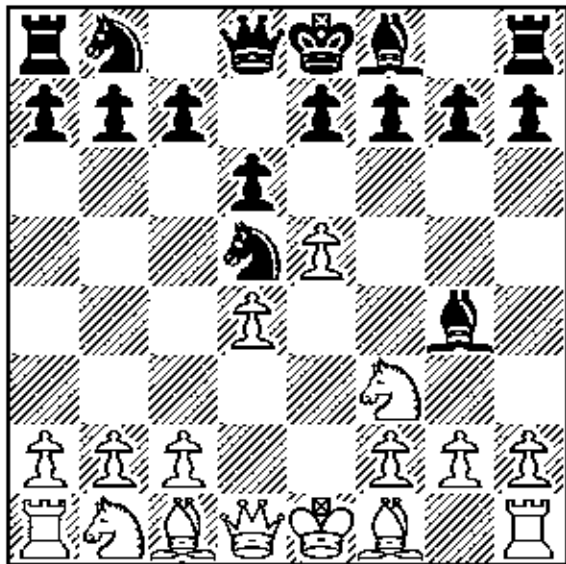
*Alekhine's Defence*

**1 e4 Nf6**

**Question:** Huh! Was the opening choice a deliberate joke?

**Answer:** Not that I know of, although it raises a smile to see Alekhine faced with his own eponymous defence.

**2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 Nf3 Bg4**



**5 c4?!**

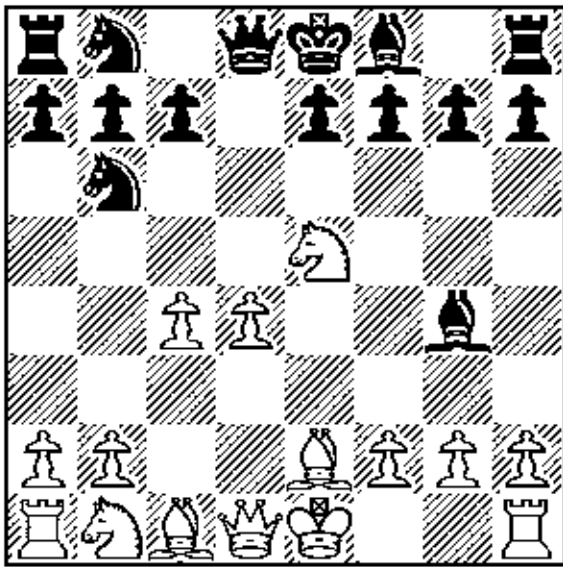
Alekhine himself acknowledged that this is not the most accurate. The immediate 5 Be2 is better, since then White can safely answer 5 ... dxe5 (not the best move) with 6 Nxe5, without having to go in for the somewhat speculative pawn sacrifice seen in the game. The move c2-c4 can always be played later.

**5 ... Nb6 6 Be2**

Here 6 exd6 is probably objectively best, though it confers no advantage.

**6 ... dxe5 7 Nxe5!?**

There is a theoretical subtext to the opening in this game. Alekhine had in fact reached this position previously, in the 29th game of his match against Euwe in 1935. Then he had played 7 c5 and secured an edge after 7 ... e4 8 cxb6 exf3 9 Bxf3 Bxf3 10 Qxf3 axb6 11 Qxb7. However, 10 ... Nc6! improves for Black and gives him a good game. We may reasonably surmise that this was what Reshevsky intended when he chose this opening line as Black. Instead, Alekhine surprises him with one of his speculative pawn sacrifices.



**7 ... Bxe2**

**Question:** Does Black have to accept?

**Answer:** I think it is clear that he should; otherwise White will have achieved an obvious positional advantage at no cost.

**8 Qxe2 Qxd4**

**Question:** So what does White have for the pawn?

**Answer:** It is typical of other examples we have seen in this book. Basically, a small lead in development is the main point. Black's pieces remain at home, and his queen will lose further tempi. Black has no real weaknesses, but we have seen already that Alekhine was extremely adept at exploiting such development advantages.

**9 0-0**

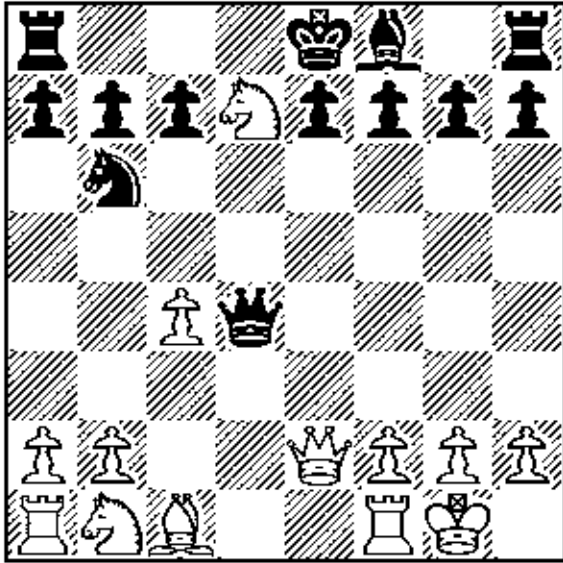
Alekhine later suggested he should not allow his centralized knight to be exchanged,



preferring 9 Na3 N8d7 10 Nf3, although it is not clear this is so much better than the game continuation.

**9 ... N8d7 10 Nxd7**

Now 10 Nf3? would just lose the c-pawn.



**10 ... Nxd7?!**

**Question:** I thought he would have taken the chance to get his queen back to a safer position with 10 ... Qxd7.

**Answer:** That is exactly what Alekhine recommended, and it does look a better choice. He then gives as his intended line 11 a4 Qc6 12 Na3 e6 13 a5 Nd7 14 Nb5 with compensation for the pawn. Nevertheless, this would be better for Black than the game continuation.

**11 Nc3 c6**

This does not contribute to Black's lagging development, but the threat of 12 Nb5 was very unpleasant, so Reshevsky felt he had to meet it.

**12 Be3 Qe5 13 Rad1 e6 14 Qf3**

Now Black has definite problems. Regular development by 14 ... Bd6 15 g3 leaves him facing a serious threat of 16 Bf4, while 14 ... Be7 can be met by *Fritz's* 15 Nb5!, since 15 ... cxb5? 16 Rxd7! gives White a winning attack; e.g. 16 ... Kxd7 17 Qxb7+ Qc7 18 Rd1+ Bd6 19 Rxd6+! Kxd6 20 Bf4+ e5 21 Bxe5+ etc. (Alekhine's 15 Rxd7 Kxd7 16 Qxf7 is less convincing after 16 ... Qf6.)

*Fritz* suggests 14 ... Qf5 as best, but then both 15 Qg3 and 15 Qxf5 exf5 16 Rfe1 give White enough for the pawn. Instead, Reshevsky elects to return the extra pawn, in order to get his king out of the centre.

**14 ... 0-0-0 15 Bxa7**

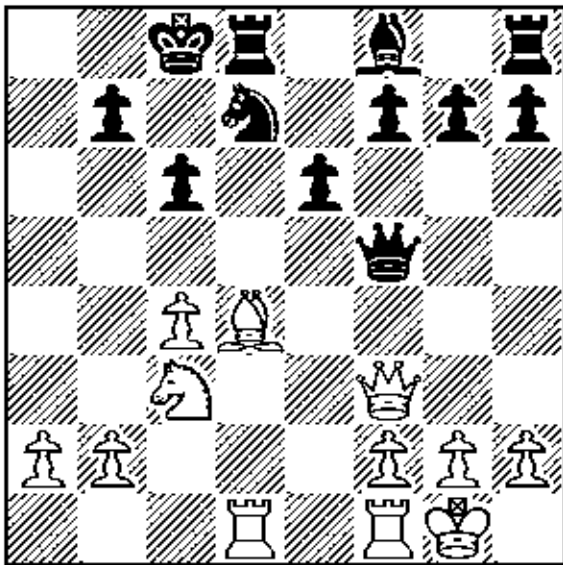
**Question:** So White has regained his pawn. Is he better here?

**Answer:** Somewhat better, yes. The black king is by no means safe in this position.

**15 ... Qa5**

*Fritz's* slight preference is 15 ... Bd6 16 g3 Nf6, but it does not change the essentials of the position.

**16 Bd4 Qf5**



**17 Qg3?!**

Alekhine was very critical of this decision, describing it as “an ex-world champion’s decision”! He advocated simply 17 Qxf5 exf5, which yields White an effective extra pawn on the queenside and a safe, risk-free advantage.

**Question:** Do you agree?

**Answer:** I am in general a great fan of such “play for two results”, but in this position I am not convinced it makes the most of White’s advantage. *Fritz* suggests 17 Qe2 as stronger, which does look very good; e.g. 17 ... e5 18 Ba7, followed by a4-a5, softening up the already vulnerable black king. White just appears to be seriously better here.

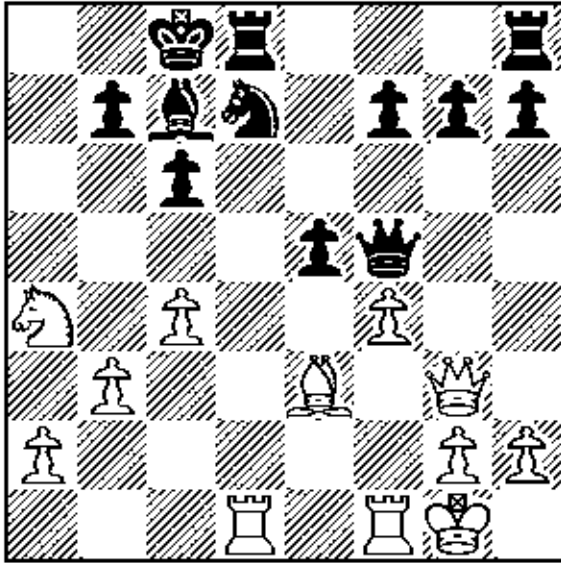
**17 ... e5 18 Be3 Bb4 19 Na4 Ba5 20 f4**

Black was intending ... Bc7 and ... e5-e4, when he would stand well, so Alekhine felt this energetic move was essential, though it is not clear it should yield any advantage.

### 20 ... Bc7

Alekhine does not mention 20 ... e4, which the computer likes and which seems to give Black perfectly reasonable chances. This supports the argument in favour of 17 Qe2.

### 21 b3



As Alekhine explains, the text is essential to prevent Black from playing Qc2 with tempo; i.e. 21 fxe5 Qc2.

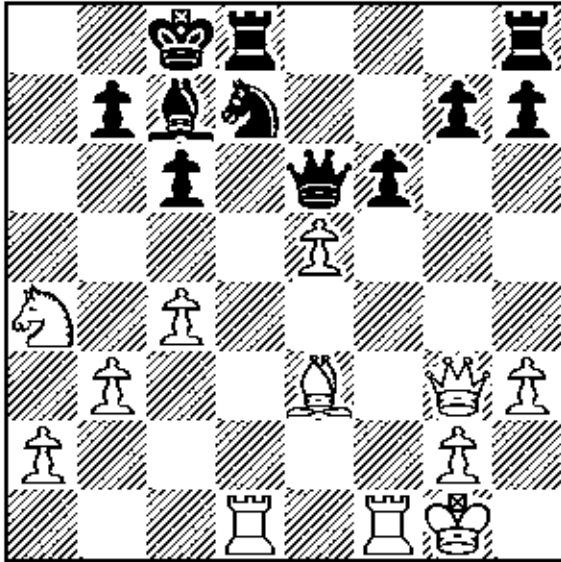
### 21 ... f6?

Alekhine does not comment on this, but it is a major mistake. His assumption was that 22 fxe5 was a threat, whereas *Fritz* shows that 21 ... Nf6 is completely satisfactory for Black, the point being that 22 fxe5 can be met by 22 ... Rxd1! 23 Rxd1 Re8 and Black is fine. Other moves yield nothing for White either; e.g. 22 Qxg7 (or 22 Rxd8+ Rxd8 23 Qxg7? exf4) 22 ... Rhg8 23 Rxd8+ Bxd8 24 Qxf7 Qh3 25 g3 Rxd3+ 26 hxd3 Qxg3+ with at least a draw, and probably a good deal more for Black; e.g. 27 Kh1 Qh3+ 28 Kg1 Qxe3+ 29 Kg2 exf4 30 Qg7 b5!.

### 22 fxe5 Qe6

Not 22 ... Qxe5? 23 Bf4.

### 23 h3!?



**Question:** Another sub-optimal move?

**Answer:** Apparently so. This is the sort of position where the computer can make anyone look bad, and it seems that both sides missed some chances here. Alekhine was very proud of his move, which even envisaged his queen retreat at move 33, but *Fritz* prefers simply to grab the g-pawn: 23 Qxg7.

**Question:** Doesn't Alekhine consider this?

**Answer:** Not in his notes, no; and I suspect it would not have entered his head to take such a pawn. But the cold silicon analysis suggests that the apparent danger down the g-file is a chimera; e.g. 23 ... Rhg8 24 Qh6 Nxe5 25 Rxd8+ Bxd8 26 Qf4 and White just has a solid extra pawn.

**Question:** Can't Black improve by playing the other rook to g8, avoiding an exchange on d8 later?

**Answer:** I am sure that was what Alekhine feared, but then *Fritz* shows that the exchange sacrifice 23 ... Rdg8 24 Qxd7+! Qxd7 25 Rxd7 Kxd7 26 exf6 yields a winning endgame, with three extra pawns for the exchange.

**23 ... Rhg8?!**

For Black, 23 ... g5 24 Bd4 Rhe8 is a better try, keeping White's advantage to a minimum.

**24 Bd4 Nxe5?!**

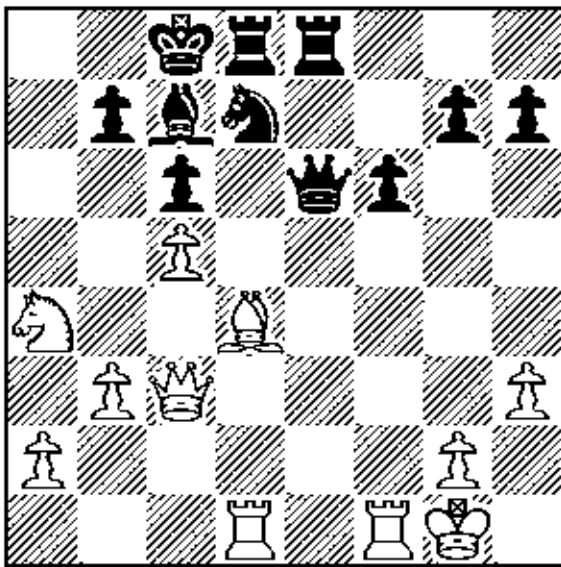
Here Alekhine was quite right in saying that 24 ... fxe5 was stronger. He then gives 25 Qe3 e4 26 c5 Rde8 as best, which still looks unpleasant for Black after 27 Nb6+, but 25 ... Rgf8 seems fine for him.

**25 Qc3!**

**Question:** Why is that good?

**Answer:** Reshevsky had been counting on 25 Nc5 Qe7 or 25 Nb6+ Kb8 26 Qc3 c5, either of which is okay for Black. The text is stronger, as now both knight moves are threatened; hence Black's next.

**25 ... Nd7 26 c5 Rge8**



**27 b4?!**

Alekhine awarded this an exclamation mark, on the assumption that the pawn on a2 cannot be taken, but it seems he was wrong. On the other hand, if that is so, he has no advantage anyway; *Fritz* actually recommends the feeble 27 a3 as best.

**27 ... Nb8?**

The computer suggests Black can gain the advantage himself by grabbing the a-pawn. Alekhine gave the line 27 ... Qxa2 28 Ra1 Qd5 29 Rfd1 “etc”, but *Fritz* shows that the apparent threat of a discovery on the black queen is not real: after 29 ... Re2 30 Bf2 Qf5, Black just seems to be better.

**28 Nb6+**

Now the following forced exchange leaves the black king in great trouble, and the white bishop much the stronger minor piece.

**28 ... Bxb6 29 cxb6 Qxa2?!**

Black is in real difficulties and decides to have something for which to suffer.

However, it seems amazingly dangerous to open the a-file now, when White is so easily able to exploit it. 29 ... Rd5 looks a better chance.

**30 Qg3 Rd7**

After 30 ... Qf7, Alekhine gives 31 Ra1!, with the point that 31 ... Rxd4? 32 Ra8 Re5 33 Qxe5! wins.

**31 Bc5!?**

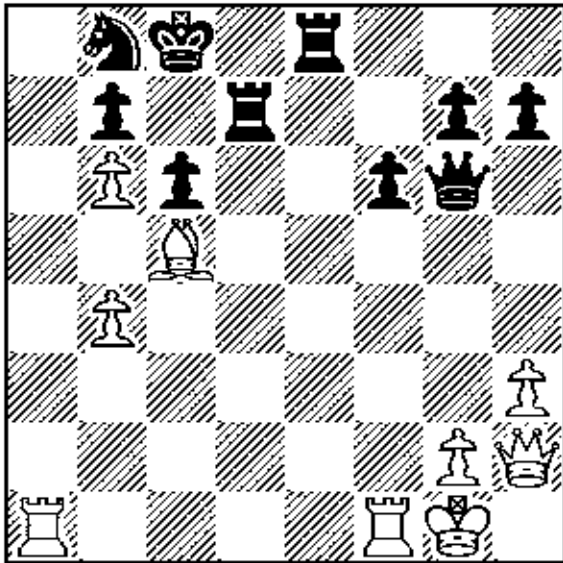
This is good enough, but later, Alekhine saw what the computer spots straight away (of course!): 31 Bxf6! and if 31 ... gxf6 then 32 Rxd7 Kxd7 33 Qc7+ Ke6 34 Re1+ wins.

**31 ... Qf7 32 Ra1?**

*Question:* Another change of fortune!

*Answer:* Yes, and in his commentary this went unnoticed by Alekhine, who assumed he was winning thanks to his next move, which is not so, as we will see. Stronger was 32 b5, when Black's king position is fatally broken up; e.g. 32 ... Re5 (or 32 ... cxb5 33 Bd6) 33 bxc6 bxc6 34 Bd6 and wins.

**32 ... Qg6 33 Qh2**



This was the move Alekhine had foreseen when playing 23 h3. He was understandably proud of the idea, which seems to threaten the deadly 34 Bf2, but the computer finds an amazing defence.

**33 ... Re5**

Alekhine correctly shows that 33 ... Qg5 fails to 34 Ra8 Qe5 35 Bf2! Qxh2+ 36 Kxh2, when there is no defence to 37 Bg3.

However, 33 ... Na6! holds for Black. Alekhine then gave 34 b5 Qg5 35 Rfc1 as the

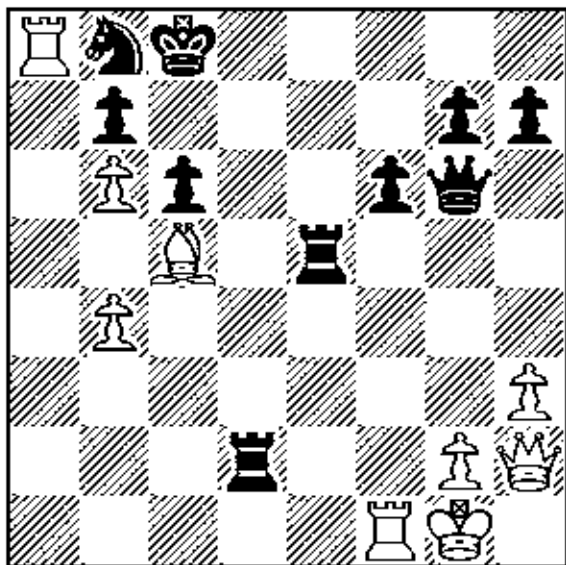
refutation, but he does not mention 34 ... cxb5!.

**Question:** Why not?

**Answer:** Presumably he assumed it also loses to 35 Rfc1, with a deadly-looking discovered check on the c-file, but *Fritz* points out the resource 35 ... Re2! with the idea of interposing on c2. Remarkably, after 36 Bf2+ Rc2, Black seems to be hanging on by his fingertips; e.g. 37 Qg3 Kd8! 38 Qb3 Rxc1+ 39 Rxc1 Qf7.

### 34 Ra8 Rd2?

Finally blundering the game away. Alekhine gives 34 ... Qe8 35 Qg3, followed by Qa3, which wins anyway. Instead, 34 ... Qd3 is a much tougher defence, denying the white queen access to g3. Although White is probably still winning after 35 Qf4, thanks to the danger facing the black king, the variations are somewhat opaque; for example, 35 ... h5 36 b5 Qe4 (not 36 ... Qxb5? 37 Rxb8+! Kxb8 38 Qxe5+) 37 Qg3 Qd3 and now either 38 Bf2 or 38 Rf3 (*Fritz 12*) looks very good for White, but clearly he has some work to do yet.



### 35 Rxb8+! Kxb8 36 Qxe5+ 1-0

A dramatic game, far from error-free on both sides, but full of interesting play. Once again, Alekhine managed to create enough threats and complications to force a decisive error eventually from the defender.

## Game 28

# Alekhine-Euwe, World Championship (Game 2) 1937

*Game 28*

**A.Alekhine-M.Euwe**

World Championship (2nd matchgame), Netherlands 1937

*Slav Defence*

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Nc3 dxc4 5 a4 Bf5 6 Ne5 e6 7 Bg5**

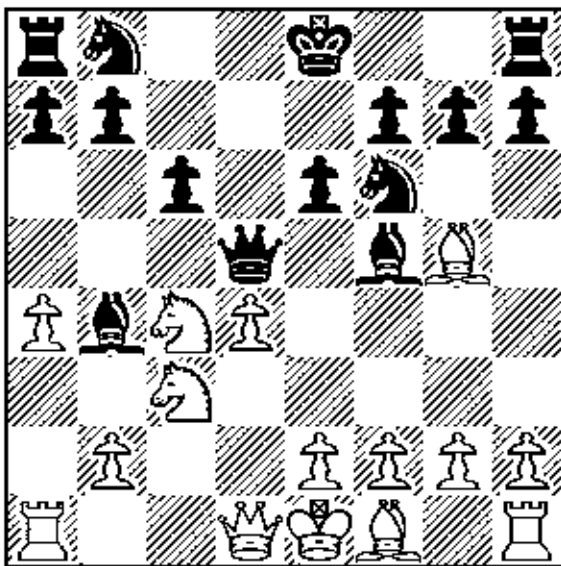
We saw this move in Game 16, where Bogoljubow failed to solve his opening problems and ended up with his queen's bishop buried on h7 for the entire game. Euwe does a better job of handling the black side.

**7 ... Bb4!**

Stronger than the passive 7 ... Be7, which was Bogoljubow's choice.

**8 Nxc4 Qd5**

Alekhine gives 8 ... h6 9 Bh4 g5 10 Bg3 Ne4 11 Rc1 c5 as fine for Black, but agrees that the text is good too. Black attacks c4 and also threatens ... Ne4.



**9 Bxf6**



**Question:** Is 9 Ne3 a move here?

**Answer:** Yes, but Alekhine describes that as “even less promising” after 9 ... Qa5 10 Nxf5 Qxf5.

**9 ... Qxc4**

Now 9 ... gxf6 10 Ne3 or 10 Qb3 is a little better for White.

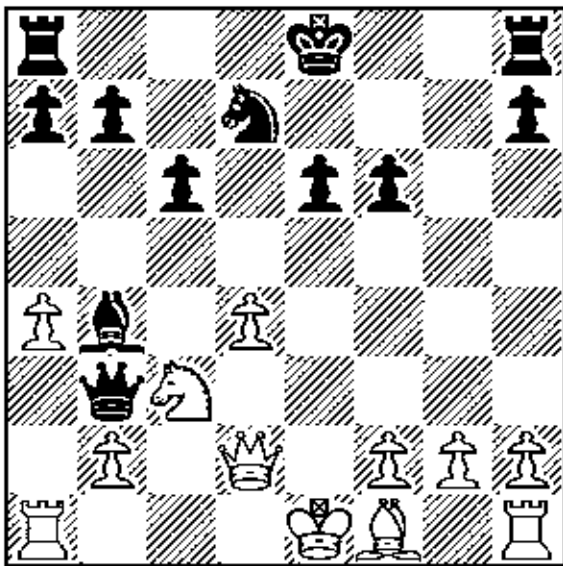
**Question:** It looks as if White has to be careful after the text!

**Answer:** Yes, there is forcing play around this point, which both sides had to calculate accurately.

**10 Qd2!**

Alekhine points out that this is forced, since 10 Rc1? gxf6 11 e4 Qa2! favours Black; e.g. 12 exf5 Qxb2 13 Qd2 Qxd2+ 14 Kxd2 Nd7 with a sound extra pawn.

**10 ... gxf6 11 e4 Qb3 12 exf5 Nd7 13 fxe6 fxe6**



**Question:** So what is going on here?

**Answer:** The forcing line has led to a very balanced position. Material is equal, and we have opposite-coloured bishops.

**14 Be2 0-0-0 15 0-0 e5**

It seems the text was criticized by various commentators, but Alekhine defends the move, which does indeed seem perfectly good. Instead, Alekhine suggests that 15 ... Nb6 16 a5 Na4 (16 ... Nc4 is a possible improvement) 17 Qe3 Nxb2 18 Rfc1 “would expose Black to dangerous threats”, and indeed his king looks somewhat vulnerable

here.

**16 dxe5 Nxe5 17 Qc1 Bxc3!?**

**Question:** Is this good?

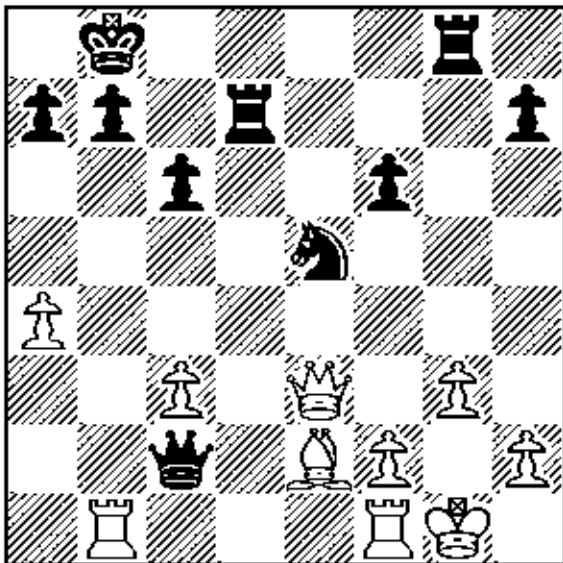
**Answer:** I think it is objectively okay, but it is certainly not forced, and probably not best. Alekhine recommended 17 ... Rhg8, giving the variation 18 Ne4 Nf3+ 19 Bxf3 Qxf3 20 Ng3 Qg4 with equality. But this line is not convincing in various ways, most notably because Black has 18 ... Rd4! and if 19 Nxf6 then 19 ... Rg6 with a strong initiative. In view of this, White should probably prefer something like 18 a5 a6 19 Rd1 with equality.

Black has other options too: both 17 ... Rd4 and 17 ... Nd3 are quite reasonable moves.

**18 bxc3 Rhg8 19 Qe3 Kb8**

Again, this is perfectly satisfactory, as was the alternative 19 ... Qd5. Alekhine assesses White's chances as superior after 20 g3 Qd2 21 Qxd2 Rxd2 22 Rfe1, but this seems a tad optimistic, given the activity of Black's pieces.

**20 g3 Rd7 21 Rab1 Qc2**



**22 Rfe1**

Alekhine was proud of this move, which he described as “the most subtle move of the game”.

**Question:** What is the point?

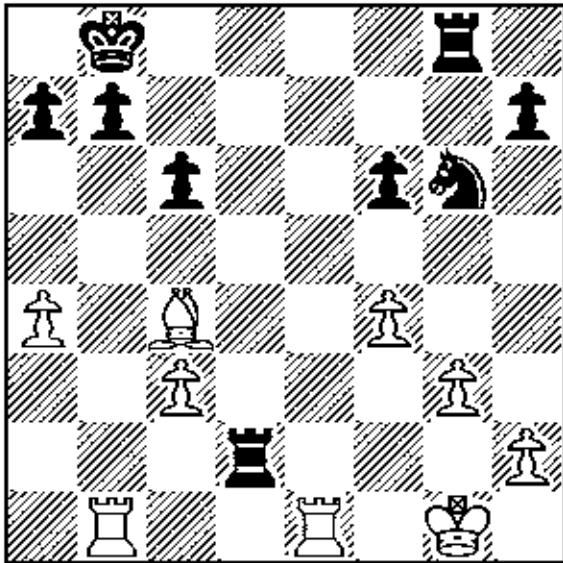
**Answer:** He wants to advance f2-f4, which, if played immediately, could be met by

22 ... Rd2 23 Rfe1 Nd3.

**Question:** So are we saying White is getting on top?

**Answer:** No, I don't think so. Black is still absolutely fine.

22 ... Qd2 23 Qxd2 Rxd2 24 f4 Ng6 25 Bc4



**Question:** So this is still just equal?

**Answer:** Alekhine claimed an advantage for White and goes on to win in instructive style, as we will see.

**Question:** Why should White be better?

**Answer:** The basic point is that rook and bishop generally co-operate better together in such positions than do rook and knight. With pawns on both sides of the board, and an asymmetrical pawn structure, the bishop tends to be stronger than the knight, thanks to its long-range qualities.

**Question:** So you agree that White has the advantage?

**Answer:** Actually, I am not sure I do! The trouble in this example is that Black is very active. Exchange the d2-rook for one of the white rooks, and I would start to agree that White is better, but with the active black rook on the board, I am inclined to think he is holding the balance satisfactorily.

### 25 ... Rgd8

In view of White's next move, Black should seriously consider 25 ... Rg7, leaving the rook on the g-file.

**Question:** With what idea?

**Answer:** So that 26 Re6 can be met by 26 ... Nxf4 27 Rxc6 Nh3+ 28 Kh1 Nf2+ 29 Kg1 Nh3+ with a draw.

Alekhine indicated instead 26 Re8+ Kc7 27 Kh1! "with advantage to White", but this is not very convincing either after, for example, 27 ... Rc2.

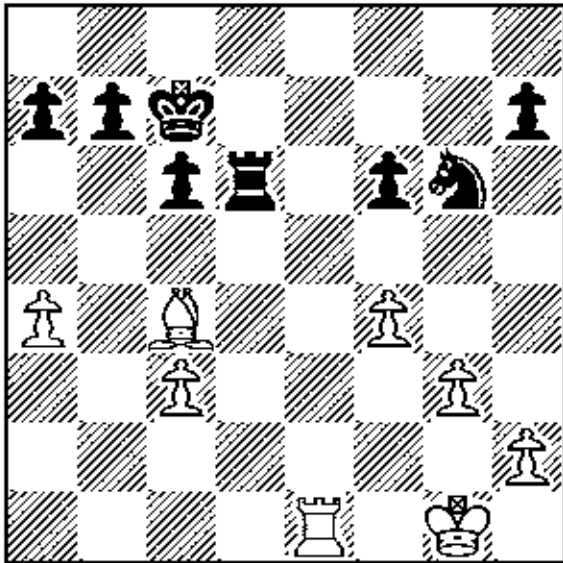
### 26 Re6!

A nice move, which has as its aim the exchange of a pair of rooks – the very thing I said in the note to 25 Bc4 would confer an advantage on White.

### 26 ... R8d6

This is not what Black wishes to play, but the tactical point of Alekhine's last move is that 26 ... Rc2 allows 27 Ba6! b6 28 Rxc6, when the black rook on d8 is tied to the back rank, because of the mate threat at c8. White would have a sizeable advantage.

### 27 Rbe1 Kc7 28 Rxd6 Rxd6



**Question:** So White has managed to get the rooks off!

**Answer:** Yes, and as a result his advantage starts to look more convincing. In fact, this position has been quoted in a number of textbooks as a classic example of the R+B vs. R+N endgame.

**Question:** Surely White can't be winning, can he?

**Answer:** That is perhaps going too far, but his advantage is greater than the computer thinks, for example. These endings with R+B vs. R+N were a favourite of Bobby Fischer, who won a whole raft of fine examples, so much so that Mihai Marin, in his classic book *Learn from the Legends*, referred to this as “the Fischer Endgame”.

**29 h4!**

Step one is to activate the white king, by preparing Kf2, when the check on d2 would no longer be a problem. The text also sets White's kingside pawn majority in motion and threatens to drive Black's knight back from g6. The knight's lack of a secure central outpost is a key factor in White's advantage, as is the asymmetrical pawn structure.

**Question:** The former I can understand, but why is the latter important?

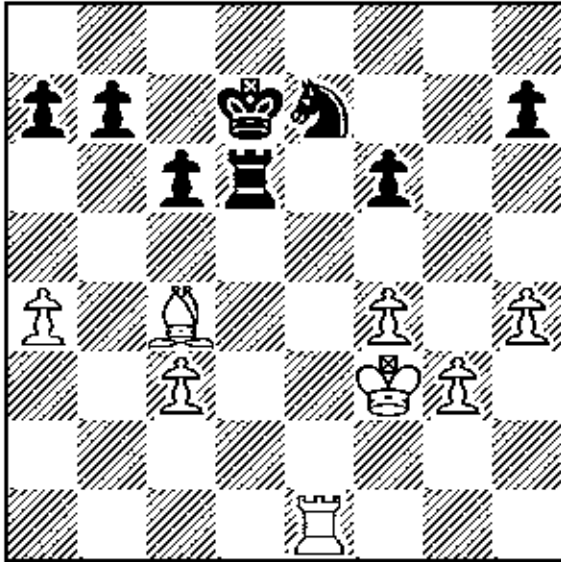
**Answer:** Because an asymmetrical structure means that passed pawns can be created, White on the kingside and Black on the queenside. In such a battle, the bishop will usually be stronger than the knight, since it can potentially support its own passed pawn, while simultaneously assisting in the fight against the enemy passed pawn on the other wing. The knight, by contrast, cannot influence two such widely-separated battlefields at once.

**29 ... Kd7 30 Kf2 Ne7**

**Question:** What if the rook returns to its active post on d2?

**Answer:** Now it brings nothing. After 30 ... Rd2+ 31 Kf3 Rc2, White just plays 32 Re3, when everything is defended, and he threatens to bring his king in via g4-f5 or even g4-h5-h6. Black would be in some trouble.

**31 Kf3**



**31 ... Nd5?**

Strangely enough, putting his knight on a decent-looking central outpost turns out to be the decisive mistake.

**Question:** How come?

**Answer:** Because it ignores the threat by the white king to penetrate on the kingside.

**Question:** So what should he do?

**Answer:** The move recommended by Alekhine was 31 ... f5!, preventing the white king entering via g4, although he was sceptical that this would save the game after 32 h5!, intending g3-g4 (not the immediate 32 g4?! fxc4+ 33 Kxc4 Rg6+, which gets nowhere).

**Question:** And do you agree?

**Answer:** No! It seems Alekhine was far too optimistic about this position. Botvinnik, who wrote a little-known book on the match, continued the analysis with 32 ... h6 33 Re5 b6 34 g4 fxc4+ 35 Kxc4 Rf6. His assessment was that “although White has undoubted winning chances, one should not give a categorical assessment of the resulting position” and I agree with this. Moreover, at the very end of this variation, Fritz’s 35 ... Nd5 looks an even more convincing defence. I see no winning chances at all for White after 36 Bxd5 cxd5 37 Kf5 a5. The only conceivable winning plan is to activate the rook with Re2-g2-g6, but after 38 Re2 d4 39 cxd4 Rxd4 40 Rg2 Rxa4 41

Rg6 Rb4 42 Rxh6 Ke7, Black's united passed pawns are just as strong as White's split pawns on the kingside. This position should be a draw.

**32 Bd3!**

**Question:** What is so strong about this?

**Answer:** It is a very instructive move, typical of such endings. White provokes the black h-pawn to move, thereby weakening the g6-square. Then the white king can enter via g4-f5.

**32 ... h6**

**Question:** What about 32 ... h5, trying to keep the white king out?

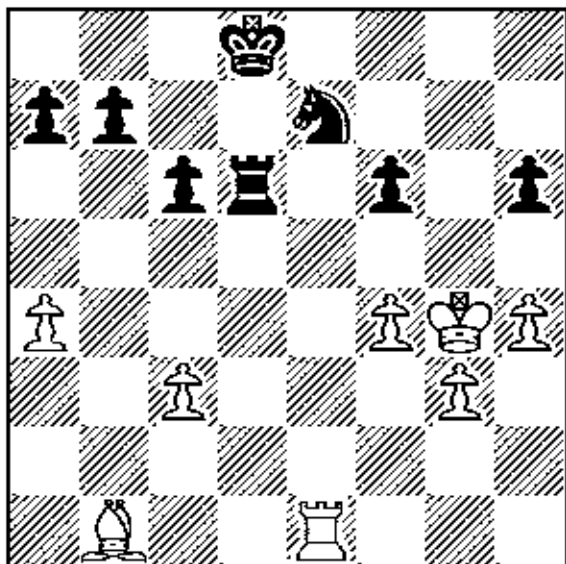
**Answer:** It is a thought, more so given that trying to win the pawn at once is not so clear (i.e. after 33 Bg6 Nxc3). But simply 33 Bf5+! Kd8 34 g4 forces an immediate passed pawn, which will advance too fast for Black to deal with it adequately.

**33 Bf5+ Kd8 34 Kg4 Ne7**

**Question:** Why not take on c3?

**Answer:** After 34 ... Nxc3 35 Kh5, the h6-pawn drops and the passed white h-pawn would again be too strong. Note that the computer is initially quite optimistic that Black is holding here, but if you leave it to run for a minute or two, it soon changes its mind!

**35 Bb1**



**35 ... Ke8**

Here 35 ... Rd5 is another attempt to keep the white king out, when Botvinnik analyses 36 f5 Kd7 37 Rf1. This is another example where the computer's "horizon effect" leads it to underestimate the danger for Black. At first, it thinks this is just equal, whereas after the further moves 37 ... Rc5 38 Kh5 Rxc3 39 Rg1 (if 39 g4?! at once, then 39 ... Rg3! is annoying) 39 ... Ke8 (or 39 ... Rc4 40 g4 Rxa4 41 Kxh6 etc) 40 Kxh6 Kf7 41 g4 Ra3 42 g5 fxg5 43 Kxg5 Rxa4 44 h5 Nd5 45 f6 Ra5 46 Bg6+ Kf8 47 h6 Ne7+ 48 Kh4 Ra4+ 49 Kh5 Ng8 50 Bf5! (all of which the computer approves of as best for Black), it realizes that the pawns are unstoppable.

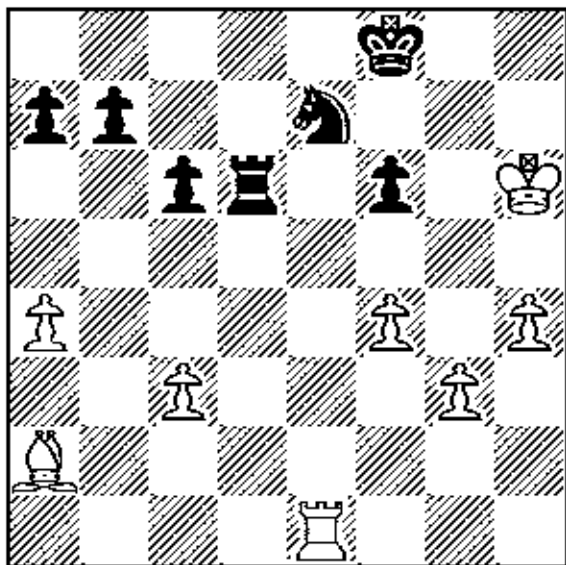
**Question:** So computers are still no good at endgames?

**Answer:** Well, I would not go that far, but they certainly have their limitations. If left to run for long enough, they will usually get it right, but one must give them time to think. In the time it has taken me to type this note, for example, my *Fritz 12* has amended its assessment of this position from an initial +0.02 to +3.92 for White!

**36 Kh5 Kf7**

36 ... f5 was the only way to defend h6 directly, but then 37 Bxf5 Rd5 38 g4 Kf7 39 c4!! Rc5 40 Re5 (Botvinnik, quoting Riumin) forces the rooks off; or if Black keeps them on with 39 ... Ra5 40 Re5 Rxa4, the kingside pawns decide things easily enough after 41 Kxh6.

**37 Ba2+ Kf8 38 Kxh6**



**38 ... Rd2**

Or 38 ... Nf5+ 39 Kg6 Nxg3 40 f5 (Alekhine) and the h-pawn again decides.

**39 Be6 Rd3 40 g4 Rxc3 41 g5 1-0**

The kingside pawns sweep away all in their path.



An instructive example of how R+B can be superior to R+N on an open board, with play on both flanks.

## Game 29

# Alekhine-Euwe, World Championship (Game 6) 1937

Game 29

**A.Alekhine-M.Euwe**

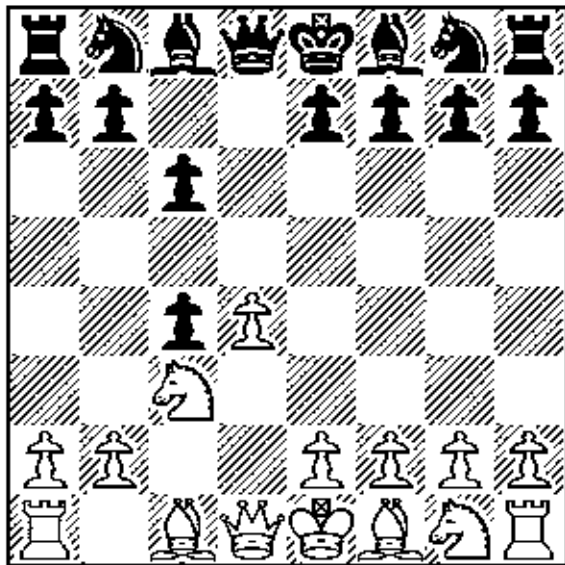
World Championship (6th matchgame), Netherlands 1937

*Slav Defence*

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 Nc3**

We discussed this move order in Game 9. White tries to make it difficult for Black to develop his queen's bishop.

**3 ... dxc4**



Clearly a critical response, and nowadays regarded as possibly best. Note that 4 a4 is well met by 4 ... e5.

**4 e4 e5**

**Question:** Can't Black try to hang onto the pawn with 4 ... b5 here?

**Answer:** Indeed – and with the knight already on c3, White finds it more difficult to

regain the pawn favourably than would be the case with 3 Nf3 played, instead of 3 Nc3. Nevertheless, after 5 a4 b4 6 Na2 Nf6 7 e5 Nd5 8 Bxc4 we reach an unclear position; and 6 Nce2 is also a respectable option, again leading to a balanced, unclear position. Euwe's move is a logical enough attempt to counter in the centre, but modern theory considers it less accurate than 4 ... b5.

### **5 Bxc4?**

The prelude to an astonishing idea, but objectively this move has to be regarded as bad.

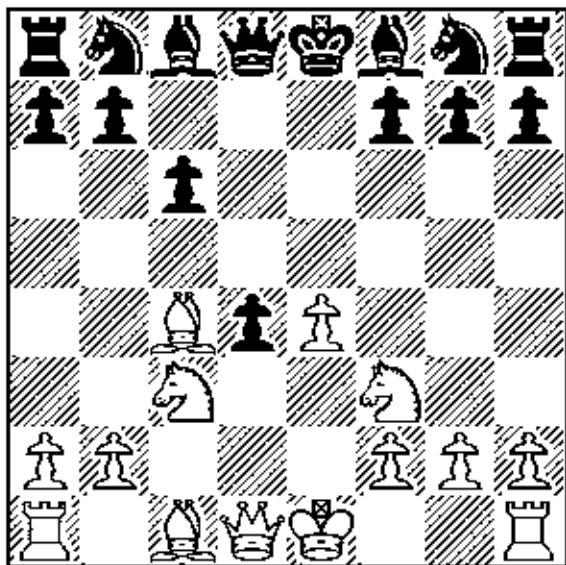
**Question:** So what should White do?

**Answer:** The computer quite likes 5 dxe5?! Qxd1+ 6 Kxd1, but after 6 ... Be6 it is generally considered that White has no advantage. The strongest reply is 5 Nf3 exd4 6 Qxd4 Qxd4 7 Nxd4, when we reach a queenless middlegame where White stands better.

**Question:** But is he getting his pawn back?

**Answer:** Yes, he is. After 7 ... b5 8 a4 b4 9 Nd1 Ba6 10 Be3 Nf6 11 f3 and then Rc1, White will regain the c4-pawn, as shown by Alekhine himself.

**5 ... exd4 6 Nf3?!**

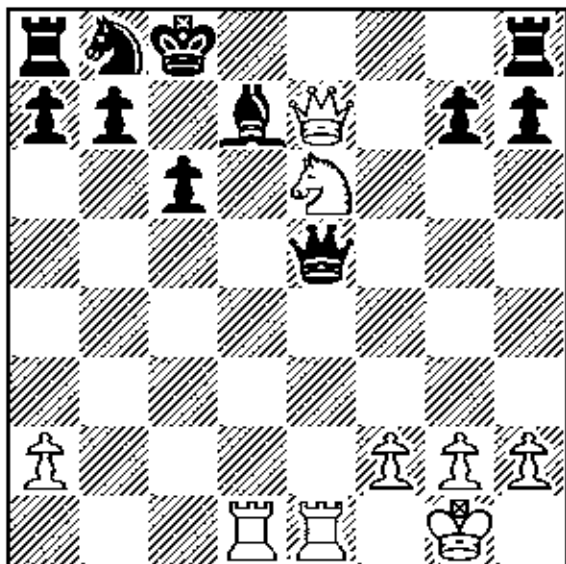


**Question:** Good God! “You cannot be serious!”, as a certain tennis player once said.

**Answer:** Oh, it is serious all right – this is the championship of the world! Alekhine had clearly prepared this remarkable idea, and like many such sharp pieces of preparation it bears fruit, although later analysis has shown it to be faulty. As usual with Alekhine, it is all about development.

**6 ... b5?**

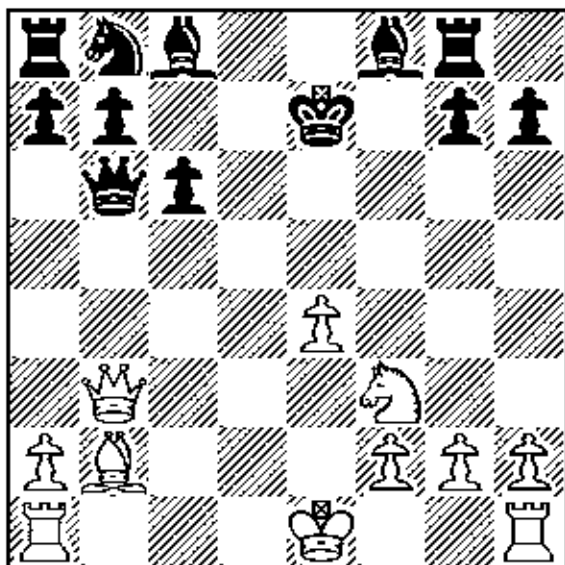
Doubtless shocked by his opponent's sacrifice, Euwe commits an elementary oversight, after which he is in deep trouble. The critical line of course begins with 6 ... dxc3!. Alekhine gives a splendid demonstration of the depth of his preparation, citing the following lengthy variation as his main line: 7 Bxf7+ Ke7 8 Qb3 Nf6 9 e5 Ne4 10 0-0 Qb6 11 Qc4! cxb2 12 Bxb2 Qxb2 13 Qxe4 Kxf7 (White is now two pieces down, but he has all his units developed, while Black has only his queen in play) 14 Ng5+ Ke8 15 Qc4 Be7 16 Qf7+ Kd8 17 Rad1+ Bd7 18 Ne6+ Kc8 19 Qxe7 Qxe5 20 Rfe1



Thus far, Alekhine's analysis has been faultless, even when checked with a modern-day engine. However, he now gives only 20 ... Qf6? (my punctuation) 21 Rxd7 Qxe7 (or 21 ... Nxd7 22 Qd6) 22 Rxe7 with a decisive advantage; whereas the computer points out that after 20 ... Qh5 21 Qd6 Qa5 or 20 ... Qa5 21 Nc5 Rd8, Black is still holding.

**Question:** So Alekhine's sacrifice was enough for at least a draw, was it?

**Answer:** Alas, no. Back at move eight, Black has the stronger defence 8 ... cxb2! 9 Bxb2 Qb6 10 Bxg8 Rxd8.



Now there are two options. Firstly, 11 Qxg8 Qb4+! 12 Nd2 Qxb2 and Black has the advantage.

**Question:** Why?

**Answer:** He has two minor pieces against the rook, which is a significant plus in a middlegame such as this. Admittedly, his king is exposed, but he has weathered the worst of the attack and will take over the initiative, once he gets his pieces developed.

The other option is 11 Ba3+ c5 12 Qxg8, though this does not really help, as after 12 ... Qa5+ 13 Nd2 Qxa3 14 0-0 Nc6 15 Qxh7 Be6, we have the same scenario as the previous variation – Black is organizing his forces and his two pieces (currently two bishops!) are stronger than the rook in this middlegame. Bizarrely, the computer, while agreeing that Black has a large advantage in the previous variation, assesses this position as only equal. Kasparov, on the other hand, thinks Black has a large advantage, and I know whose judgment I trust!

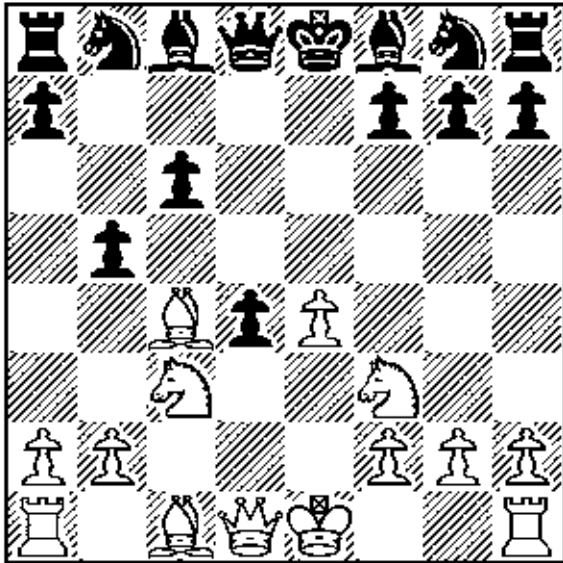
**Question:** So the overall conclusion is that the sacrifice is unsound?

**Answer:** Yes. By 6 ... dxc3 and 8 ... cxb2, Black could have got the advantage, although it goes without saying that solving such a complicated task over the board is immensely difficult.

The final thing which should be mentioned is that the credit for finding this correct line of defence goes to a man called Goncharov, who published the analysis in the Soviet journal 64 in 1938.

**Question:** Who was Goncharov?

**Answer:** A good question! Nothing is known about him, as far as I am aware. He was another of the seemingly endless series of unknown Soviet amateurs, who used to while away the cold winter nights huddled in a corner of their communal flat, awaiting the inevitable midnight knock on the door from the NKVD, and in the meantime analysing complicated chess positions with a depth and accuracy that the rest of us could only dream of in the pre-computer era.



**7 Nxb5!**

A complete refutation of Euwe's last move, in view of 7 ... cxb5 8 Bd5. Astonishingly, the Dutch world champion admitted that he had completely overlooked this simple reply.

**7 ... Ba6 8 Qb3!**

This solves all White's remaining problems with his precariously-placed pieces. He defends the c4-bishop, covers the b4-square against a black bishop check, and attacks f7 as well. Black is just losing now.

**8 ... Qe7**

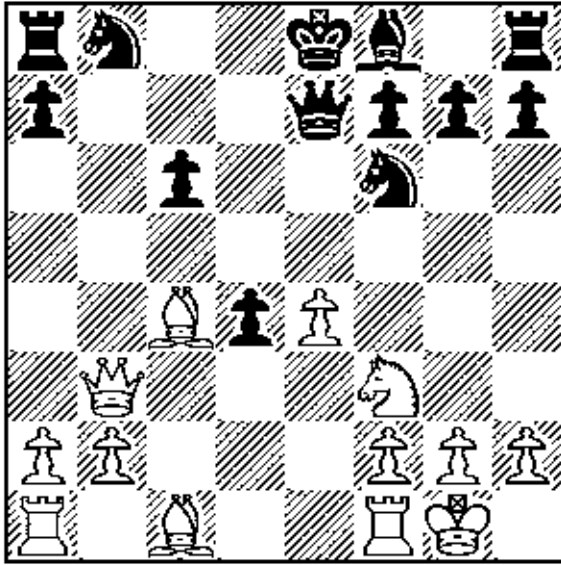
**Question:** Can he take on b5?

**Answer:** That would at least set a trap: 8 ... Bxb5 9 Bxf7+ Kd7 10 Bxg8 Rxb8 11 Qxg8?? Bb4+ and Black wins; but Alekhine gives 10 Nxd4! with a crushing attack, as the computer confirms.

**9 0-0 Bxb5 10 Bxb5 Nf6**

10 ... cxb5 11 Qd5 still wins a rook, so Black is just busted.

## 11 Bc4



The upshot of the complications is that material is equal, but White has a decisive lead in development.

**11 ... Nbd7 12 Nxd4**

Alekhine gives as an equally good alternative 12 e5 Nxe5 13 Nxe5 Qxe5 14 Qb7 Rb8 15 Qxf7+ Kd8 16 Qxa7 Bd6, when White is winning easily enough, even if the game continues. The text is simpler and just as strong.

**12 ... Rb8 13 Qc2 Qc5 14 Nf5**

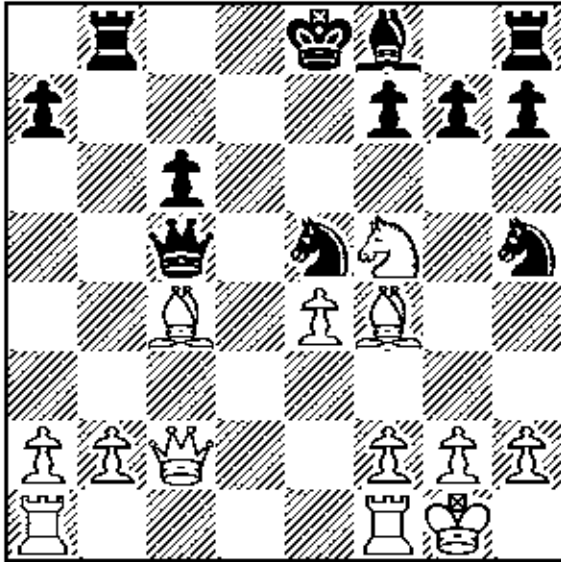
14 Nxc6? Rc8 is another trap to be avoided.

**14 ... Ne5 15 Bf4**

Once again, Alekhine declines to fall into Euwe's trap: 15 Nxc6+ Kd8! (not 15 ... Bxc6?? 16 Bxf7+) 16 Rd1+ Kc7, when two white pieces are hanging. Admittedly, White is still winning after 17 Nf5 Qxc4 18 Qxc4 Nxc4 19 Bf4+ Kb7 20 Rac1, but there is no need for such complications.

**15 ... Nh5?**

Instead, 15 ... Nfd7 would put up greater resistance, but it is all hopeless in the long run.



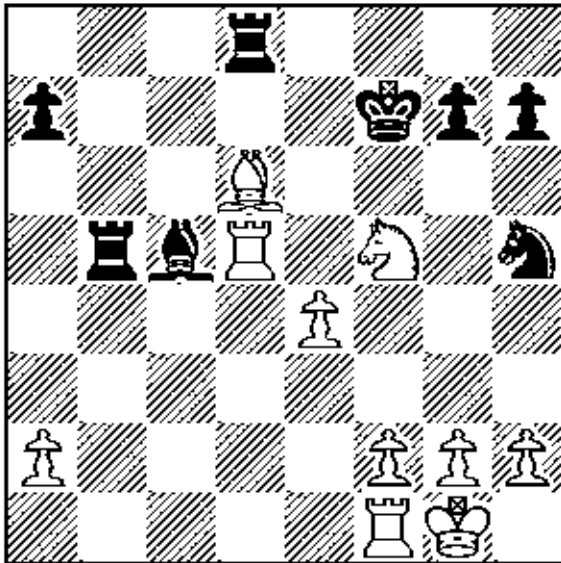
**16 Bxf7+!**

A final combinative simplification. The computer's more prosaic 16 Bxe5 Qxe5 17 Qa4 also wins easily enough.

**16 ... Kxf7 17 Qxc5 Bxc5 18 Bxe5**

With two extra pawns, the rest is just a case of mopping up.

**18 ... Rb5 19 Bd6 Bb6 20 b4 Rd8 21 Rad1 c5 22 bxc5 Bxc5 23 Rd5 1-0**



More material is lost, so Black resigned.

**Question:** A bit of a one-move game, in a way?



***Answer:*** Yes, Euwe's blunder at move six spoiled things a bit, but the game is still noteworthy for Alekhine's remarkably imaginative piece sacrifice idea in the opening.

## Game 30

# Alekhine-Euwe, World Championship (Game 24) 1937

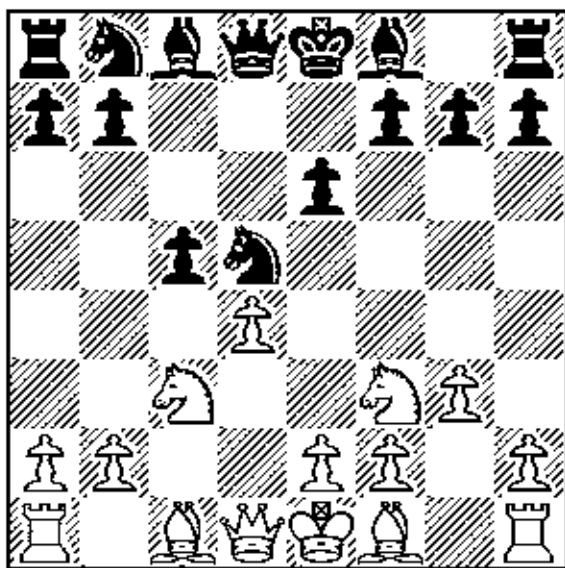
Game 30

A.Alekhine-M.Euwe

World Championship (24th matchgame), Netherlands 1937

*Semi-Tarrasch Defence*

1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 d4 Nf6 4 Nc3 c5 5 cxd5 Nxd5 6 g3!?



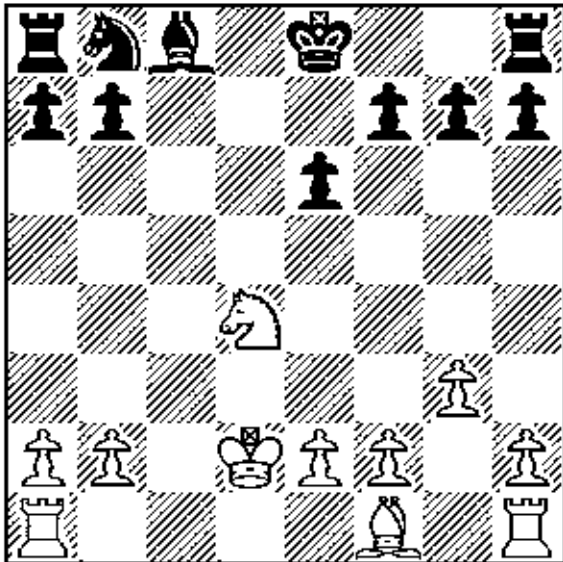
**Question:** We have transposed into a Queen's Gambit Declined, Semi-Tarrasch Defence. The usual moves here are 6 e4 and 6 e3, but the text is playable too, if rather unambitious.

**6 ... cxd4**

There is nothing wrong with the text, though Alekhine also gives 6 ... Nc6 7 Bg2 Nxd4 8 Nxd4 Nxc3 9 bxc3 cxd4 10 Qxd4 Qxd4 11 cxd4 Bd6 12 a4 Ke7 with easy equality, as Euwe played in one of the two exhibition games which were held immediately after the match itself. In both cases, we see the problem with the move 6

g3 – it allows Black to simplify too much.

7 Nxd5 Qxd5 8 Qxd4 Qxd4 9 Nxd4 Bb4+ 10 Bd2 Bxd2+ 11 Kxd2



**Question:** It looks like a very boring game is about to unfold!

**Answer:** On the contrary, such so-called “simple” positions often contain great subtlety and can be fascinating to the connoisseur. Ulf Andersson made a healthy living in the 1980s and 90s, by winning such harmless-looking positions against GMs.

**Question:** Black can’t really have any serious problems here, can he?

**Answer:** Objectively no, but he needs to be a little careful. He is slightly behind in development, and the key issue is dealing with the white bishop, which is coming to g2. As in many similar Catalan positions, Black must ensure he develops his queenside accurately, otherwise he can find himself being raked by the fianchettoed bishop. That is in fact what happens in the game.

**11 ... Ke7?!**

Alekhine castigates this move as the cause of all Black’s later troubles.

**Question:** Why is it wrong? Doesn’t it make sense to keep the king centralized in such a simplified position?

**Answer:** Yes, it does, but Black must attend to the development of his queenside before it gets paralysed by the enemy bishop, operating down the long diagonal from g2.

**Question:** So what should Black play?

**Answer:** Alekhine gives 11 ... Bd7! 12 Bg2 Nc6 13 Nxc6 Bxc6 14 Bxc6+ bxc6 15 Rac1 0-0-0+ 16 Ke3 Kc7 “with an easily defensible rook endgame”.

**Question:** Is that really so? Surely Black does not want to weaken his queenside pawns in this way?

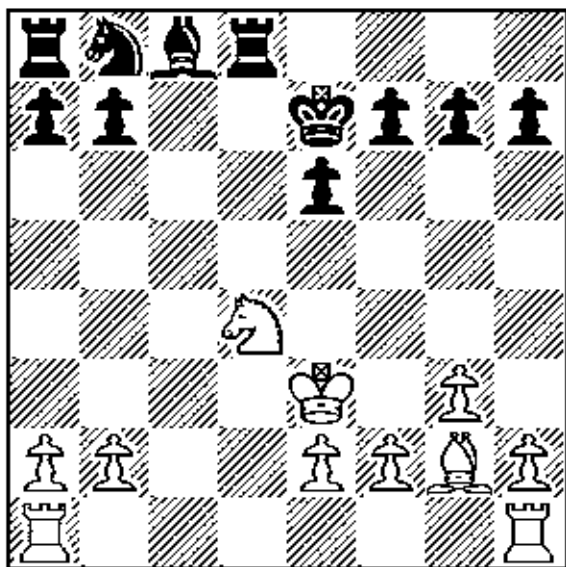
**Answer:** Well, I am sure you are right, in that this is the reason Euwe was put off this continuation, but it soon becomes clear that it is much the lesser evil. The pawns on a7 and c6 are actually not difficult to defend, and White will not succeed in creating any serious difficulties for Black.

**12 Bg2 Rd8**

**Question:** What about 12 ... e5 here?

**Answer:** That is *Fritz*’s preference, but 13 Nb3 Nc6 14 Rhc1 retains a small edge for White, and 14 Bxc6 bxc6 15 Rac1 is worth considering too.

**13 Ke3**



**13 ... Na6**

Suddenly Black has some trouble developing his queenside. After 13 ... Nd7 14 Rhc1, White threatens a potential penetration to c7, and Nb5 is also in the air. Black will clearly find it very difficult ever to get his queen’s bishop developed.

**Question:** It seems incredible that, in just a couple of moves, Black should be suffering in such a simple-looking symmetrical structure.

**Answer:** That is often the nature of such positions. One should not be deceived by the apparent simplicity or symmetry into believing the position is dead drawn. Far from it.

**14 Rac1 Rb8 15 a3!**

**Question:** That is a pretty modest-looking move to deserve an exclamation mark!

**Answer:** Maybe, but it is typical of how to handle such positions. White just takes b4 away from the enemy knight, leaving it without a single square to move to. Alekhine points out that the immediate raid on the a7-pawn by 15 Nb5? would be premature. Black can reply 15 ... Bd7, with the point that 16 Nxa7?? Ra8 traps the knight.

**15 ... Bd7**

Black has finally managed to get his bishop away from c8. He has still not solved all his problems, but threatens to do so with 16 ... e5, so Alekhine now prevents that move.

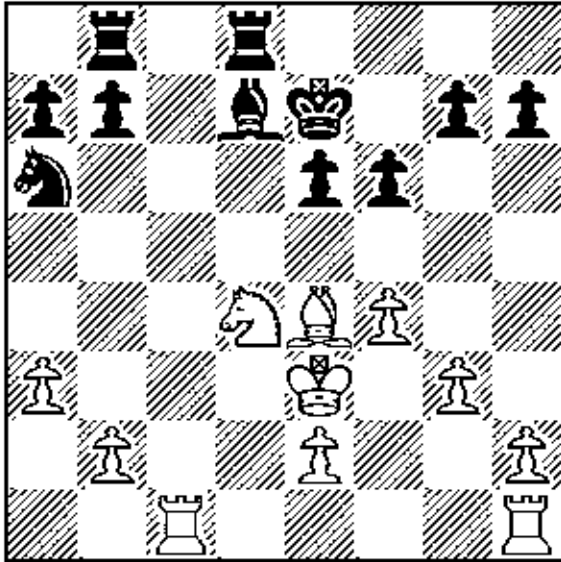
Actually, Black could have played 15 ... e5 at once. He presumably did not want the white knight to come to b5, but this is not so terrible; e.g. 16 Nb5 Bd7 17 Nc7 (as noted above, the a7-pawn is poisoned, since the knight would be trapped) 17 ... Nxc7 18 Rxc7 Rdc8 19 Rhc1 and if White retains a small advantage, it is probably no greater than in the game.

**16 f4! f6**

**Question:** That looks weakening.

**Answer:** Yes, it is, but Euwe wants to renew the possible threat of ... e6-e5, driving away the centralized enemy knight. It is true that this will now involve accepting an isolated e-pawn, which is not especially desirable, but he is short of other decent moves. Alekhine quotes the line 16 ... Be8 17 b4 (threatening to win the knight with 18 b5) 17 ... Rd7 18 Nb5 (18 Rc4 may be stronger still) 18 ... Ra8 (18 ... Rdd8 is a little more tenacious, again exploiting the possibility of trapping the knight on a7, but even then 19 Nc7 Nxc7 20 Rxc7+ Rd7 21 Rhc1 leaves White better) 19 Rc3 and White will double rooks on the c-file with a very powerful bind.

**17 Be4!**



A really nice and instructive move.

**Question:** What is so good about it?

**Answer:** It has many ideas. Firstly, it simply attacks h7, and so will force some sort of weakness in the black position. Secondly, the bishop may now be able to transfer to d3 at some stage, attacking the a6-knight. Thirdly, the immediate advance of the black e-pawn is prevented tactically: 17 ... e5? now loses a pawn after 18 fxe5 fxe5 19 Nf3, when e5 and h7 are both hanging.

**17 ... Be8 18 b4**

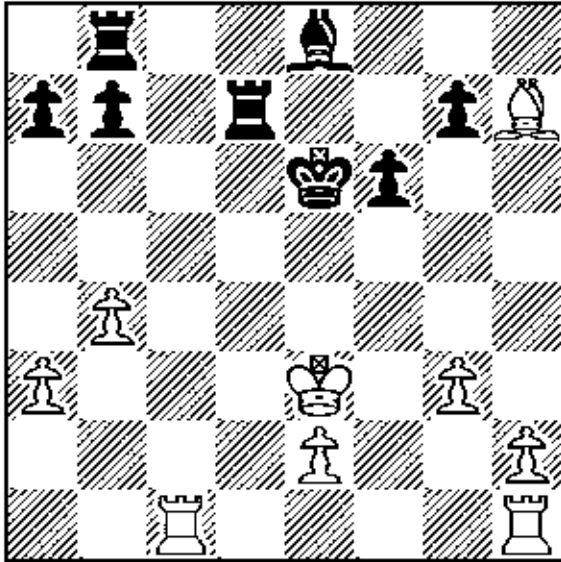
Both players assumed the h-pawn was immune because of 18 Bxh7!? g6, intending ... Bf7 and ... Rh8, whereas the computer shows that this is not entirely clear after 19 g4 Bf7 (or 19 ... f5 20 gxf5 exf5 21 Bg8) 20 f5. Nonetheless, White has no need to fish in such murky waters, as he can maintain a strong bind without any adventures. The text again threatens to trap the knight on a6 by 19 b5.

**18 ... Rd7 19 f5! Nc7**

**Question:** I thought White wanted to hinder the advance ... e6-e5 and keep his knight on d4?

**Answer:** He did, but one must always be flexible and adapt one's plans to suit the needs of the position. Alekhine seizes the chance to break up Black's central pawns, since both 19 ... e5 20 Ne6 and 19 ... exf5 20 Bxf5, winning the h7-pawn, are very bad for Black.

**20 fxe6 Nxe6 21 Nxe6 Kxe6 22 Bxh7**



White has won a pawn after all but, as Alekhine points out, his positional advantage has vanished, and Black now starts getting some counterplay.

**Question:** So was White wrong to go in for the pawn win?

**Answer:** No, I don't think so, because there was no obvious way to go on strengthening his position. This is a very typical situation: there always comes a point when one must decide whether to "cash in one's chips", as it were; i.e. convert a positional grip into concrete material gains. Against half-decent defence, it is rarely possible to do this without relaxing one's grip and allowing the defender some activity. The art of good technique in realizing advantages is judging exactly the right moment to cash in – while one wants to strengthen the position as much as possible, at the same time it is important to recognize when there is no longer any effective way to do so further, and it is time to pick some of the fruit.

**22 ... f5 23 Rc5!**

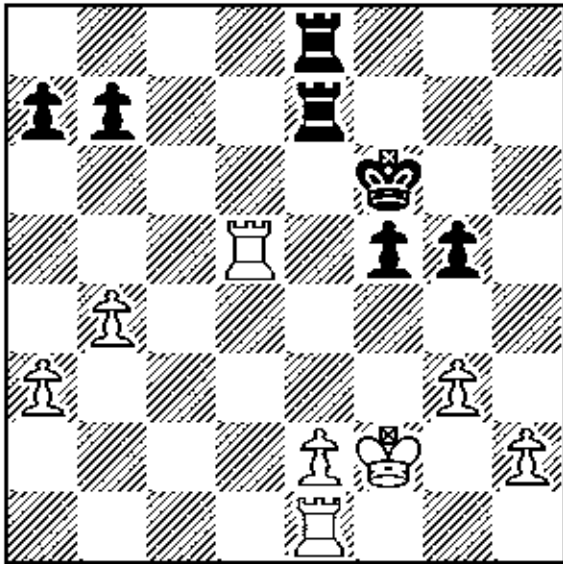
**Question:** What the exclamation mark?

**Answer:** Alekhine has a deep idea in mind. He foresees that the black bishop will emerge on c6, where it will be very strong, so he creates the ability to exchange bishops on d5.

**23 ... g6 24 Bg8+ Kf6 25 Rhc1 Re7+ 26 Kf2 Bc6 27 Bd5!**

As discussed above.

**27 ... Rbe8 28 Re1 Bxd5 29 Rxd5 g5**



**Question:** Is White still winning this? He looks a bit passive.

**Answer:** I am not sure about “winning”. It is always dangerous to use such terms, except in the most overwhelming of positions, when there really is no doubt; once you tell yourself during a game that you are “winning”, you put yourself under extra psychological pressure. I would be more inclined to say that White has good winning chances – a solid extra pawn and a potential outside passed pawn on the h-file.

**30 Rd6+ Ke5?!**

This pseudo-active move was strongly criticized by Alekhine, who instead recommended 30 ... Kf7 31 h4 gxh4 32 gxh4 Rh8 33 Rd4, concluding that “White would still have some technical difficulties in order to force the win.” I think this assessment is perfectly correct.

**31 Red1 g4?!**

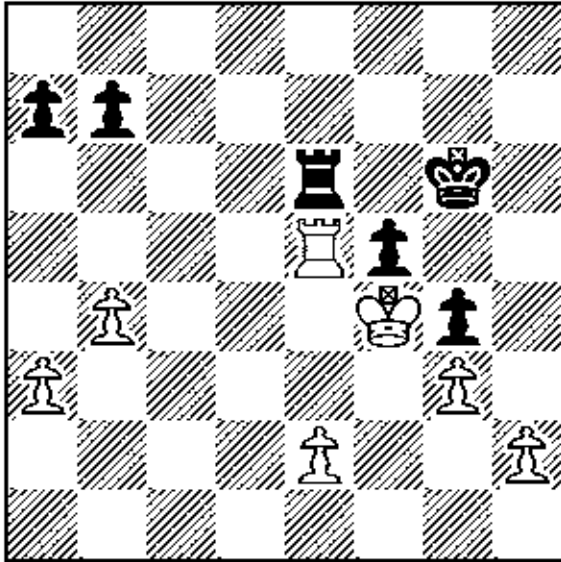
Alekhine does not say so, but this move makes the win simpler for White. Black should have opted for Alekhine’s alternative line 31 ... Re6 32 Rd7 R8e7 33 h4, when White would retain good winning chances, but it is not completely hopeless for Black.

**32 R1d5+ Ke4 33 Rd4+ Ke5 34 Ke3**

Suddenly, Black’s king is in a mating net, so he has to allow himself to be pushed back.

**34 ... Re6 35 R4d5+ Kf6+ 36 Kf4 Kg6 37 Rxe6+ Rxe6 38 Re5**





**38 ... Ra6**

Euwe goes for activity, but it proves futile.

**Question:** What if he defends the f-pawn?

**Answer:** After 38 ... Rf6, Alekhine gives 39 e4 fxe4+ 40 Kxg4 Rf2 41 h4 “winning rapidly”, and 40 ... Ra6 41 Rxe4 Rxa3 42 h4 is little better. Nevertheless, I prefer the computer’s more technical approach of squeezing Black slowly: 39 b5 b6 40 e3 and it is zugzwang. After 40 ... Rf7 41 Re6+ Kh5 (or 41 ... Kg7 42 Kg5) 42 a4, Black is again in zugzwang and must either abandon the f5-pawn or allow the white rook onto the seventh.

**39 Rxf5 Rxa3 40 Rb5 b6 41 Kxg4 1-0**

A very fine technical display by Alekhine, who nursed his small opening plus and converted it with great accuracy. His handling of the whole game is very instructive.

# Game 31

## Alekhine-Böök, Margate 1938

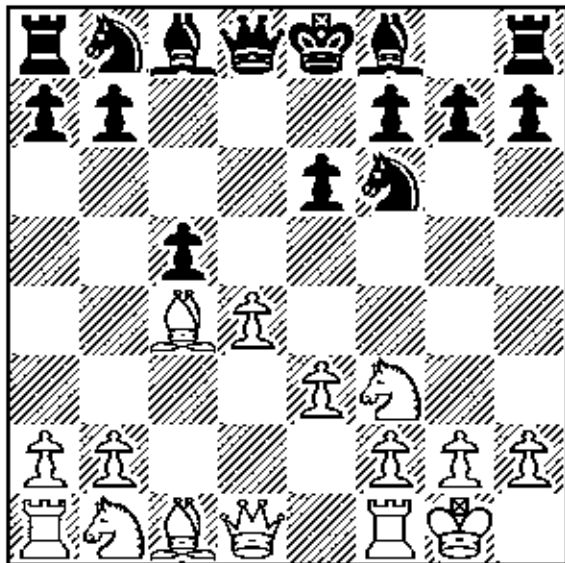
Game 31

A.Alekhine-E.Böök

Margate 1938

Queen's Gambit Accepted

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e3 e6 5 Bxc4 c5 6 0-0



6 ... Nc6?!

Nowadays, theory prefers 6 ... a6 which prepares queenside expansion and reserves the option of developing the queen's knight either to c6 or d7.

7 Qe2 a6?!

**Question:** Is this bad? It looks standard.

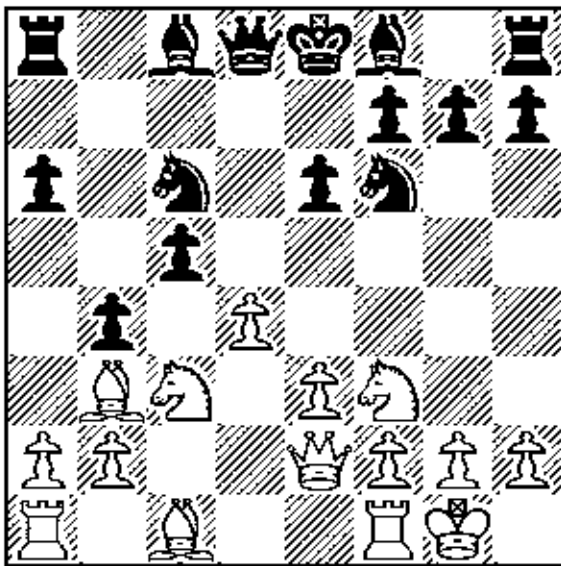
**Answer:** Black is mixing systems. As we said above, 6 ... a6 is the main line, whereas combining it with an early ... Nc6 creates a few problems for him. Not least, Black is falling behind in development, which is always a potentially dangerous thing, especially when Alekhine is sitting on the other side of the board!

8 Nc3 b5 9 Bb3 b4?

This is the move which brings the roof down on Black's head, although things are already not that easy for him. The natural developing move 9 ... Bb7 had been tried by Böök in a previous game, without success: 10 Rd1 Qb6 (*Fritz* advocates 10 ... c4 as equal, but such an advance is generally strategically suspicious in such positions, as it gives White too much of a free hand in the centre) 11 d5! exd5 12 Bxd5 with a dangerous initiative, G.Stahlberg-E.Böök, Kemerí 1937 (and 12 e4! was even stronger).

**Question:** Maybe Black should develop his kingside first, and thus get his king out of the centre as soon as possible?

**Answer:** That is a worthy thought. The problem is that 9 ... Be7 runs into the typical response 10 dxc5 Bxc5 (or similarly 10 ... 0-0 11 e4) 11 e4 Nd7 12 e5 with a clear advantage. Such positions are well known in the QGA. White has a dangerous kingside initiative, based on the strength of the e5-pawn.



The text looks reasonable enough, as it seems that White must retreat his queen's knight to an ineffective square; but Alekhine finds a much more dynamic solution, based on the uncastled black king.

**10 d5! Na5**

**Question:** Is this best?

**Answer:** Relatively so, yes. The alternatives are both worse. Firstly, 10 ... exd5 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Rd1 Qc7 13 Bxd5 leaves Black in serious trouble, as he cannot complete his development satisfactorily.

**Question:** Really? It doesn't look so bad. What about simply 13 ... Be7 - ?

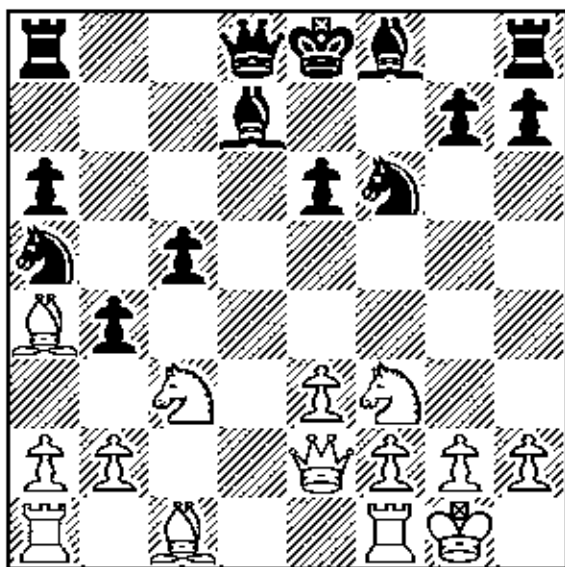
**Answer:** Then White has the hammerblow 14 Ne5!, attacking both c6 and f7, and winning the exchange.

**Question:** Ah, I see. In that case, I play 13 ... Bb7 first.

**Answer:** But then I have 14 Qc4 or 14 Ng5, in either case with an attack on f7, which cannot be parried satisfactorily.

**Question:** And if I take on c3 instead, at move 10?

**Answer:** After 10 ... bxc3 11 dxc6, White again has a near-decisive initiative; e.g. 11 ... Qc7 (11 ... cxb2 12 Bxb2 gives White an even bigger lead in development) 12 bxc3 Be7 13 e4 Qxc6 14 Ne5 Qc7 15 Bf4 Bd6 16 Ba4+ and Black is getting battered.  
**11 Ba4+ Bd7 12 dxe6 fxe6**



**13 Rd1!?**

**Question:** A piece sacrifice?

**Answer:** Indeed. This was the real point of Alekhine's idea.

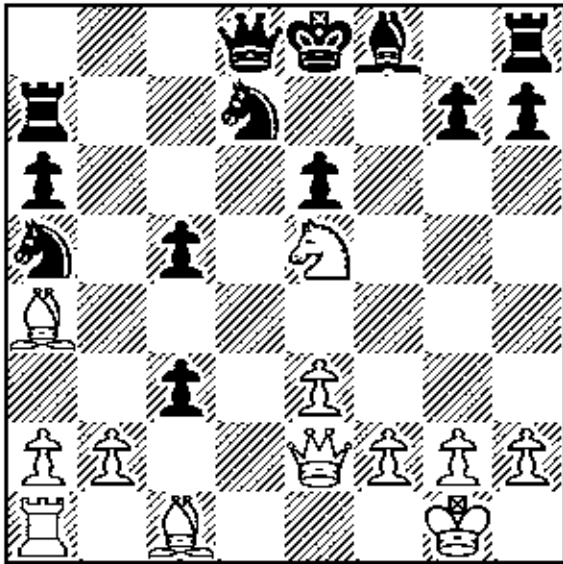
**Question:** Is it sound?

**Answer:** Well, as we will see, there has been a great deal of analytical midnight oil spent on this game. *Fritz* is certainly not impressed at this stage, instead considering that White should settle for the toothless 13 Bxd7+ Qxd7 14 Rd1 Qc6 15 Nb1 with bare equality. Alekhine would rather have cut off his hand than play like that!

**13 ... bxc3**

Clearly forced, as otherwise White has a huge attack at no material cost.

**14 Rxd7! Nxd7 15 Ne5 Ra7**



**16 bxc3!?**

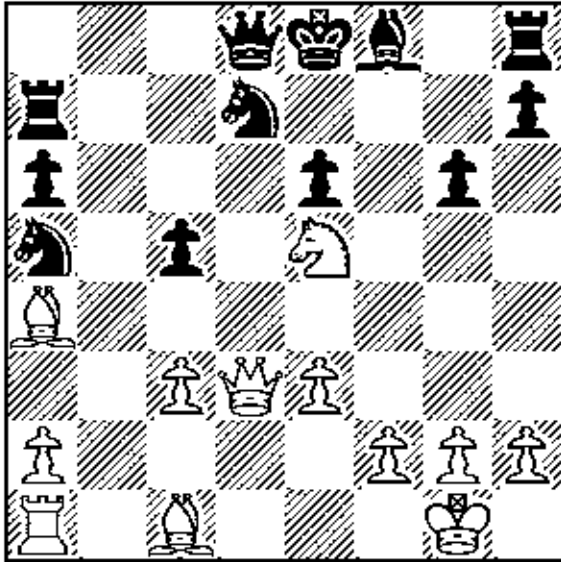
**Question:** Wow! That looks astonishing. A piece down, and in the middle of a raging attack, he just recaptures an insignificant-looking pawn! What is going on?

**Answer:** It is a remarkable move. 16 Qh5+ was the obvious continuation. Hugh Alexander condemned this on the basis of the variation 16 ... g6 17 Nxc6 hxc6 18 Qxh8 Kf7, when Black is clearly better, but *Fritz* points out that White can obtain a draw by repetition with 18 Qxc6+ Ke7 19 e4 Bh6! (the only satisfactory defence to the threat of Bg5+) 20 Bxh6 Qg8 21 Bg5+ Kf8 22 Bh6+ Ke7 (if instead 22 ... Rxh6 23 Qxh6+ Qg7 24 Qf4+ Kg8 25 bxc3, White has bishop and three pawns against two knights; with an exposed king as well, Black is unlikely ever to be better) 23 Bg5+ Kf8 etc. Black must acquiesce here, since 23 ... Kd6?? loses at once to 24 Rd1+ Kc7 25 Rxd7+.

**16 ... Ke7?**

This is the most critical point of the game. Böök's move, trying to escape the pin on the d7-knight, is definitely bad and should lose. He has at least three major alternatives.

The obvious and natural move is 16 ... g6, after which Alexander quotes Böök's analysis to show it as inadequate: 17 Qd3!

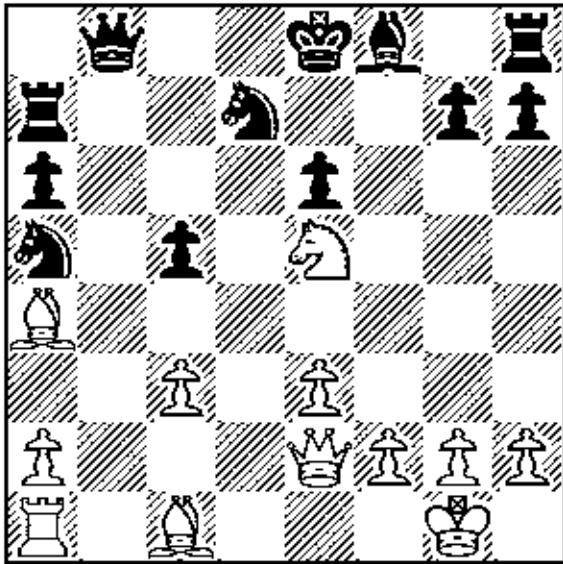


17 ... Ke7? 18 e4! Nf6 (not 18 ... Nxe5?? 19 Bg5+) 19 Qf3 Bg7 20 Bg5 Rf8 21 Rd1 Qc7 22 Nd7! Qxd7 23 Rxd7+ Rxd7 24 Bxd7 Kxd7 25 Qd3+ Kc8 26 Qxa6+ Nb7 27 Qc6+ Kb8 28 Bf4+ Ka7 29 Bc7 and wins.

However, the computer suggests several improvements on this analysis. Firstly, back at move seventeen, 17 ... Qe7 is much stronger; e.g. 18 Ba3 Qd6 19 Qe4 Qd5 20 Qf4 Bd6 21 Qf7+ Kd8 22 Nxd7 Rf8! 23 Qxh7 Qc4 and Black is, if anything, somewhat better. 17 ... Bg7 is also good enough to hold the balance: 18 Nxd7 Rxd7 19 Ba3 Qc7 20 Bxc5 Nb7 21 Ba3 Kd8 22 Bxd7 Qxd7 23 Qxa6, when White's three pawns compensate for the piece, but no more than that.

White, in his turn, probably does better by meeting 16 ... g6 with 17 Qf3, although he has no more than a draw; e.g. 17 ... Qh4 18 Qf7+ Kd8 19 Bxd7 Qe7 20 Qf3 Rxd7 21 Qa8+ Kc7 22 Qa7+ Kc8 23 Qa8+ etc (*Fritz 12*).

In addition to 16 ... g6, both Alexander and the German master Alfred Brinckmann (the latter in his 1967 book *Streifzüge und Irrtümer auf 64 Feldern*) indicate 16 ... Qb8 as Black's best defence.



This seems sufficient for equality too; e.g. 17 Nxd7 Rxd7 18 e4 (Alexander analyses 18 Qxa6?! but now instead of his 18 ... Qc7?, needlessly giving up the e6-pawn, Black can improve with 18 ... Qd6, when he is at least okay) 18 ... Qb6 19 Qg4 and despite White still being a rook down, *Fritz* suggests that his ongoing attack is good enough for a draw. One line is 19 ... Nc4 20 Rb1! Qxb1 21 Qxe6+ Be7 22 Qxd7+ Kf7 23 Qd5+ Kf8 24 Qa8+ with perpetual check.

Finally, 16 ... Be7! is yet another defence adequate for equality. Alexander then analysed 17 Qh5+ g6 18 Nxg6 hxg6 19 Qxh8+ Bf8, concluding that “I can find nothing decisive for White” – although he added that “with two pawns for the piece and a pair of bishops, and with Black still tied up, I think, however, that even in this variation White’s practical chances are very good.” The computer has nothing significant to add to this.

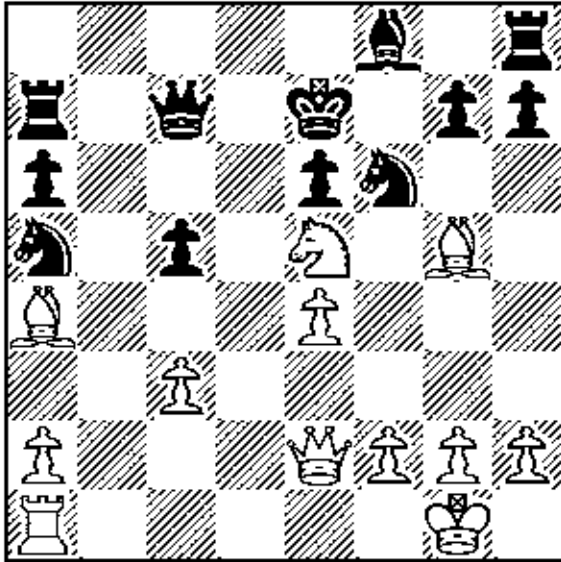
**Question:** So at the end of all that, the conclusion is that Alekhine’s attack was not fully sound?

**Answer:** No, I would not go that far. The conclusion is that the attack may only suffice for a draw against best defence, with Black, in this crucial position after White’s 16th, apparently having at least three adequate moves. But all of these variations are extremely complicated, and to handle such a position over the board is immensely difficult. I agree with Alexander’s conclusion that, from a practical viewpoint, White’s chances are very good.

**17 e4!**

Threatening 18 Bxd7 Rxd7 19 Bg5+.

**17 ... Nf6 18 Bg5 Qc7**



**19 Bf4?!**

**Question:** A mistake by Alekhine?

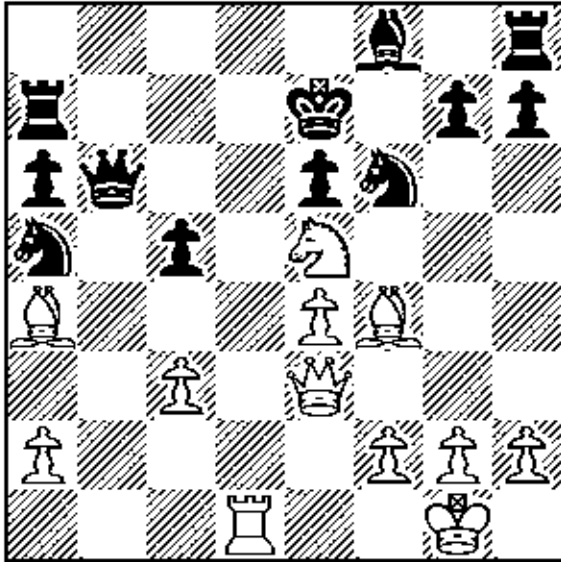
**Answer:** Yes, his one lapse in this game, although he is winning anyway, as we will see. But Brinckmann pointed out years ago that 19 Qh5! is crushing here, and the computer agrees. Taking the knight with 19 ... Qxe5? allows forced mate with 20 Qe8+ Kd6 21 Rd1+ Kc7 (or 21 ... Nd5 22 Qd8+) 22 Qd8+ Kb7 23 Rb1+ etc, while 19 ... g6 (the only way to keep the white queen out of e8 and/or f7) is met by 20 Nxc6+ hxc6 21 Qxh8 and Black loses either the f6-knight or, after 21 ... Qe5 22 Qh7+, the a7-rook. In both cases, White is winning easily.

**19 ... Qb6**

After the slightly stronger 19 ... Qb7, Alexander analysed 20 Qe3! Kd8 (or 20 ... Nxe4 21 Bg5+ Nxc5 22 Qxc5+ Kd6 23 Rd1+ Kc7 24 Qd8 mate) 21 Qd3+ Kc8 22 Rb1 Qxe4 23 Nf7+ and mate on b8.

In this variation 20 ... Qb6 is a slightly tougher defence, but 21 Rd1 still leaves White with a crushing attack.





**Question:** What exactly is the threat? Black still has an extra rook, after all.

**Answer:** Yes, but what is it doing? It is sitting on h8, contributing nothing. Likewise, the a5-knight is stuck on the edge of the board and cannot move; in fact, Black can hardly move a single piece without dropping something.

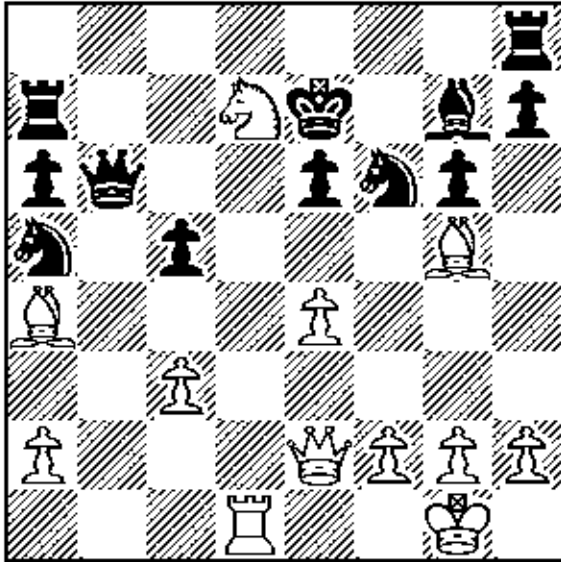
**Question:** Okay, but I still don't see what White's threat is.

**Answer:** Well, there is nothing immediate, so let's just try some moves. Assume Black plays 21 ... Rb7, say. Then play might continue 22 Qf3 c4 23 Bg5 Qc5 and now 24 Qh5! g6 25 Nxg6+ hxg6 26 Qxg6!, when both the f6-knight and mate on e8 are threatened (e.g. 26 ... Qe5 27 Qe8 mate).

**20 Rd1 g6**

This stops a subsequent Qh5 and also attempts to develop the kingside, but now the weakness of the f6-knight is fatal.

**21 Bg5 Bg7 22 Nd7!**



**22 ... Rxd7**

Or 22 ... Qc7 23 e5, winning easily.

**23 Rxd7+ Kf8 24 Bxf6 Bxf6 25 e5 1-0**

If the bishop moves, there is a deadly check on f3.

A classic example of one of Alekhine's blistering attacks on an uncastled king.

## Game 32

### Alekhine-Kieninger, Krakow/Warsaw 1941

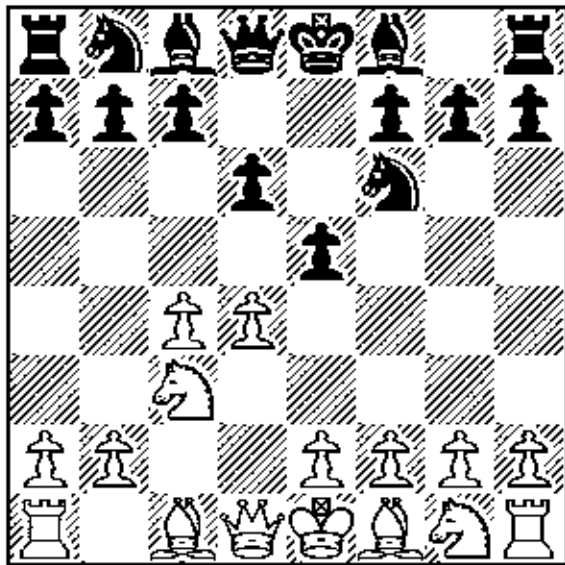
Game 32

A.Alekhine-G.Kieninger

Krakow/Warsaw 1941

Old Indian Defence

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nc3 e5



The Old Indian is a relatively rare guest at GM level nowadays.

**Question:** Why is that? Is it bad?

**Answer:** Not necessarily bad *per se*, but it is a trifle passive, and Black players tend to prefer the King's Indian Defence if they are looking for a dark square based set-up.

4 Nf3

**Question:** Isn't 4 dxe5 dxe5 5 Qxd8+ Kxd8 good for White?

**Answer:** Not really. Black's lost castling rights are less serious in the absence of

queens, and he can organize himself with ... c7-c6, ... Kc7, etc. Practice has shown that White has very little here.

**4 ... Nc6?**

But this is not a very good move at all. The knight just gets hit, and White gains central space with tempo. Black should play 4 ... Nbd7 instead.

**5 d5 Nb8**

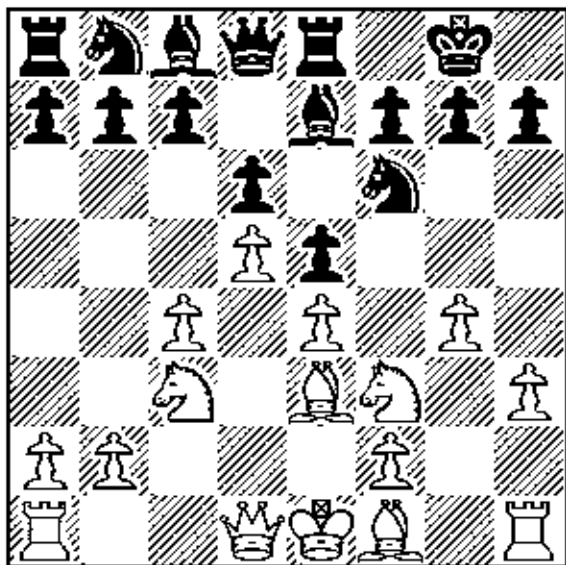
**Question:** This all looks very retrograde.

**Answer:** Yes. Black has delusions of rerouting his knight to c5, secured by the move ... a7-a5, but it is much too slow, and he will never get the chance.

**6 e4 Be7 7 h3**

Immediately revealing aggressive intentions. Alekhine plans to castle long and play g2-g4, initiating a strong kingside attack. Nowadays, such set-ups are known to be very dangerous against a passive black formation, such as the Old Indian or Czech Benoni.

**7 ... 0-0 8 Be3 Re8 9 g4**



**9 ... c5?**

**Question:** Why don't you like this?

**Answer:** Again, it is just too passive. Black transposes into a Czech Benoni, an opening which has rather a dubious reputation anyway – and here he is a couple of tempi down, having played ... Nc6-b8.

**Question:** So what should Black do?

**Answer:** Well, I am not very enamoured of his position in any case, but I think he should try 9 ... c6, keeping the possibility of opening some lines on the queenside, where the white monarch is destined to take up residence. I repeat, Black's position already stinks, but at least that would give him slightly more chances of counterplay.

**10 Rg1 a6 11 g5 Nfd7 12 h4**

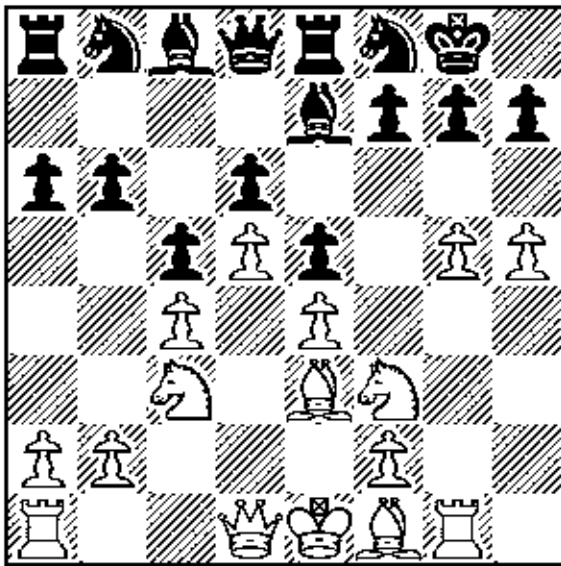
**Question:** Isn't White also guilty of attacking while still undeveloped?

After all, he has not yet castled, yet he is throwing his kingside pawns forward.

**Answer:** True, but the key point is that the centre is blocked. If Black were in a position to open lines in the centre, even by a sacrifice, then White might indeed regret these early aggressive pawn advances on the wing, but clearly that is not the case here. Black has no counterplay, so White can just prepare to take aim and land a knockout blow against the black king.

**12 ... Nf8 13 h5 b6?**

Once again, absurdly passive. Black stands terribly, but the modern player would at least try 13 ... b5, in an (albeit fruitless) attempt to create some semblance of counterplay.



**14 Nh4**

The main value of this game for me is the instructive way Alekhine carries out the kingside attack, which is a model for such positions. Although Black is playing very passively, he has no real weaknesses, so it is interesting to see how Alekhine breaks him down. The text intends to bring the knight to f5.

**14 ... g6**

**Question:** So Black stops it ...

**Answer:** Well, yes and no! As we will see, the presence of a black pawn on g6 does not actually stop the knight coming to f5 in due course.

**15 Qf3 Ra7**

This was evidently the idea behind Black's 13th move, but the rook is not really able to contribute much to the defence of the king, because Black is too cramped and cannot clear the second rank.

**16 0-0-0 Qc7 17 Bd3**

White has all his pieces out and is soon going to land a huge punch on the kingside.

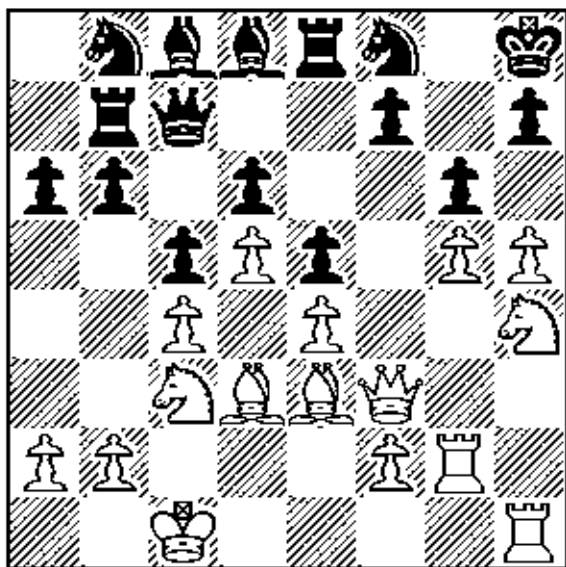
**17 ... Bd8 18 Rg2 Kh8**

Black anticipates the Nf5 sacrifice and tries to lessen its effectiveness by getting his king off the g-file, but White's next move shows that the king is no safer on h8.

**Question:** What should Black do?

**Answer:** Frankly, I have nothing at all to suggest! He is just far too cramped and passive; his position is quite beyond salvation.

**19 Rh1 Rb7**



**20 Nf5! gxf5**

**Question:** Does he have to take the knight?

**Answer:** Well, strictly speaking, no; but if he does not, White will transfer the

knight via h6-g4 to f6. Besides, what other moves does Black have?

**Question:** Well, let's try 20 ... b5.

**Answer:** Yes, okay, I could take it, but let's just assume I ignore you and play 21 Nh6 bxc4 22 Bc2. Now Black is in a truly comical state of helplessness and can hardly move a piece. He cannot play a knight or bishop to d7, because f7 will hang; he cannot play the rook to e7 because of Qf6 mate (!); and the queen cannot go to b6 because, once again, f7 will hang with check. He is virtually move-bound.

**21 exf5**

Now White intends simply Ne4, followed by g5-g6. Black decides to get one decent outpost for his pieces by returning a pawn.

**21 ... e4 22 Nxe4 Nbd7**

Now at least he has the e5-square, but White responds by exploiting the opening of the a1-h8 diagonal.

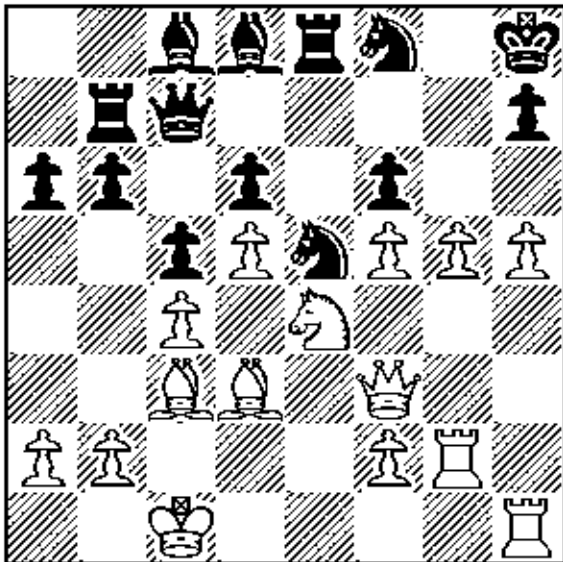
**23 Bd2!**

Very nasty indeed – the bishop heads to c3. Admittedly, 23 Bf4 was another option, intending 23 ... Ne5 24 Bxe5 Rxe5 25 g6 and so on, but I very much like the text.

**23 ... f6**

23 ... Ne5 24 Bc3 renews the threat of g5-g6.

**24 Bc3 Ne5**



**25 gxf6!**

Now the g-file is opened, and Black is defenceless against the white heavy pieces doubling (or even tripling) on it.

**25 ... Qf7**

The first point is 25 ... Nxf3 26 f7+ and mate next move. The text blockades the f6-pawn, and so threatens to take the queen.

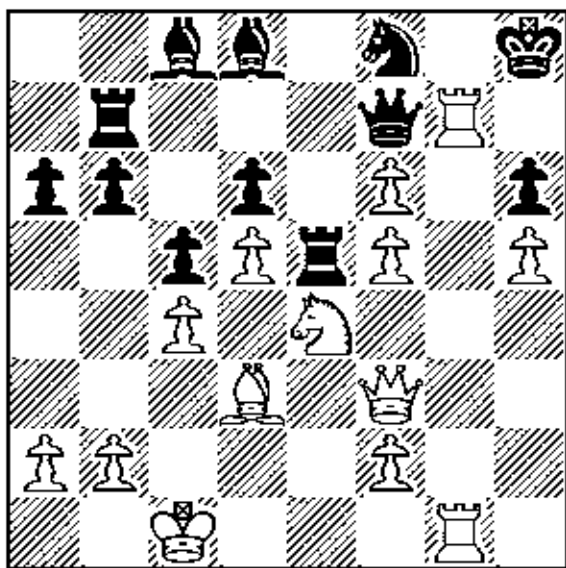
**26 Rhg1!**

Again ignoring the apparent danger to his queen.

**26 ... h6**

Now 26 ... Nxf3 is met by 27 Rg8+! Qxg8 28 f7+ and mate next move.

**27 Bxe5 Rxe5 28 Rg7**



**28 ... Qxg7**

Or 28 ... Qe8 29 Qg3 and mates again.

**29 fxg7+ Rxg7 30 Rxg7 Kxg7 31 f6+ 1-0**

An extremely one-sided massacre, but instructive for the way Alekhine broke down the black defences. The knight sacrifice on f5 is very thematic for King's Indian and similar positions.



# Game 33

## Alekhine-Keres, Salzburg 1942

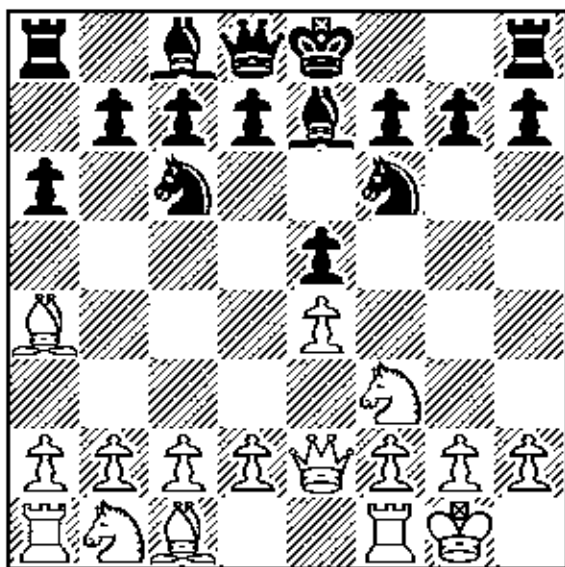
Game 33

A.Alekhine-P.Keres

Salzburg 1942

Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Qe2



**Question:** Unusual!

**Answer:** A little, yes; but it was something of a favourite of Alekhine, and later of Keres (who possibly learned something from the present game!). Nowadays, Sergei Tiviakov is the main exponent of this move.

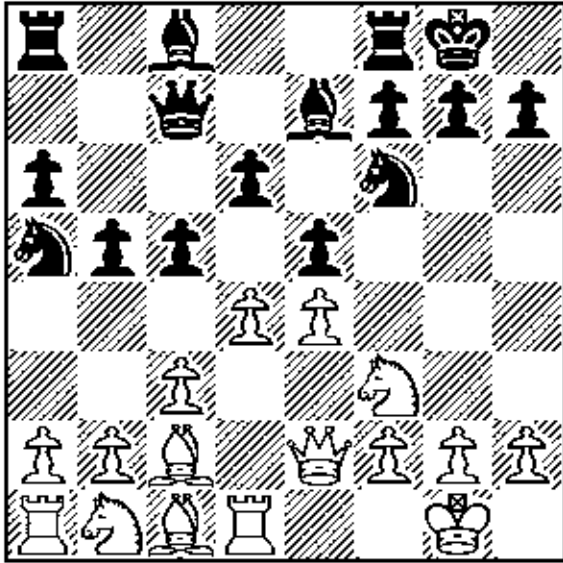
**Question:** What is the point?

**Answer:** The main point is to keep the option of bringing the king's rook to d1, rather than e1, from where it sets up a vis-à-vis with the black queen. It also leads to slightly less-explored positions than the standard 6 Re1.

**6 ... b5 7 Bb3 d6**

The alternative is the pseudo-Marshall treatment 7 ... 0-0 8 c3 d5, when White does best to hold the tension with 9 d3, since 9 exd5?! e4! is rather dangerous.

**8 c3 0-0 9 Rd1 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 Qc7**



We have reached a typical Chigorin system set-up, with the minor difference that White has his rook on d1, rather than e1, and his queen on e2, rather than d1. He has also dispensed with the move h2-h3, which usually features in the main lines.

**12 Bg5!?**

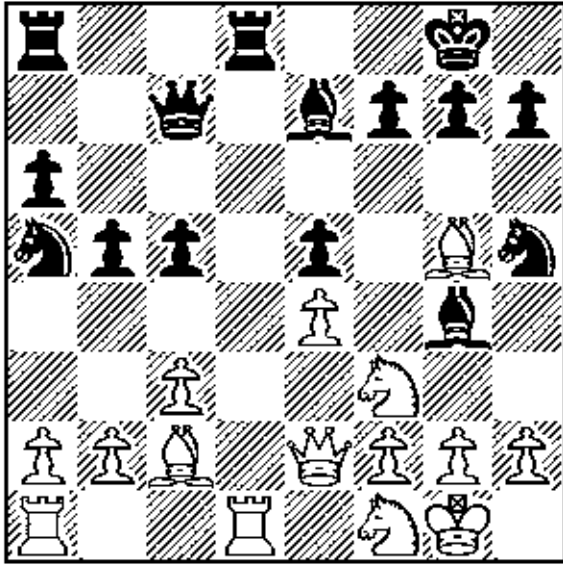
**Question:** That looks a bit unusual in Spanish positions, doesn't it?

**Answer:** Yes, it is somewhat. As Alexander notes, White generally leaves his bishop at home and first brings his queen's knight round to the kingside with Nbd2-f1. But Alekhine's move has some sense: he intends to adopt Rauzer's plan of exchanging pawns on e5 and trying to exploit the hole on d5. To this end, Bg5 threatens to take on f6, removing a key defender of the d5-square. The most straightforward way to implement this plan is 12 dxe5 dxe5 13 Nbd2 etc; but not 12 Nbd2? due to 12 ... cxd4, which exposes the downside of having the white queen on e2 – the c2-bishop is undefended.

**12 ... Bg4 13 dxe5 dxe5 14 Nbd2**

The Rauzer plan is not seen much these days, the alternative of closing the centre with d4-d5 and looking to exploit the space advantage having been popularized hugely by Karpov in the 1980s. But it is worth remembering that Bobby Fischer, one of the other all-time great Spanish players, always preferred the Rauzer scheme. White hopes to land his knight on d5 later in the game.

**14 ... Rfd8 15 Nf1 Nh5!**



A good reply. Keres understands that, in this structure, his knight is rather more useful than his dark-squared bishop, not least because the knight can defend the d5-square. Black is very comfortable here.

**16 h3 Be6 17 Ne3 f6**

More ambitious than 17 ... Bxg5 18 Nxg5 Nf4, which is also fine for Black.

**18 Nh2**

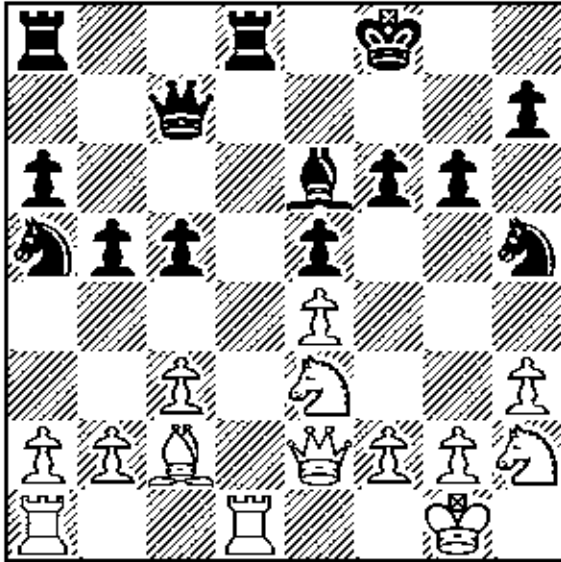
Now 18 Bh4 Nf4 leaves Black with the initiative, so Alekhine has to fight back, utilizing the undefended h5-knight.

**18 ... g6**

The computer is initially enthusiastic about 18 ... Bf7, until it finds the neat variation 19 Nd5! Rxd5 20 exd5 fxg5 21 d6 Bxd6 22 Qd3, when White is better.

**19 Bh6 Bf8 20 Bxf8 Kxf8!?**

Alexander prefers 20 ... Nf4 21 Qf3 Rxf8, though this is no more than equal either.



**Question:** So what is happening here?

**Answer:** I think it is just equal. Alekhine's timely 18th move has avoided slipping into an uncomfortable position, and he has slightly weakened the black king. On the other hand, Black has more space on the queenside, and has exchanged off his relatively bad dark-squared bishop, while his king's knight is ready to occupy a good square on f4.

**Question:** The dreaded Spanish bishop on c2 looks rather a miserable piece!

**Answer:** That is true, but this often happens in such lines. White hopes to bring it to life with an effective Nd5 at some point, when an exchange on d5 will open the bishop's diagonal after the recapture e4xd5.

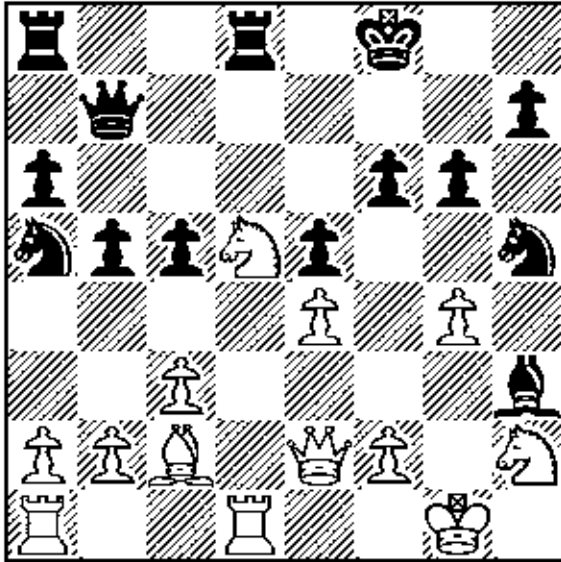
**21 g3!?**

A critical moment. Alexander gives Alekhine's move an exclamation mark, claiming an advantage for White, but it seems he was wrong.

**21 ... Rxd1+?!**

**Question:** Why isn't the pawn on h3 dropping?

**Answer:** That is indeed the critical line. Alexander (and presumably both of the players) assumed that 21 ... Bxh3 was not possible, because of 22 Nd5 Qb7 23 g4



23 ... Nf4 24 Nxf4 exf4 25 Qf3 and the bishop is trapped.

However, the computer points out that, in this line, Black has the powerful exchange sacrifice 23 ... Rxd5! 24 exd5 Nf4, when it assesses the position in Black's favour. For example, 25 Qe3 (or 25 Qf3 Nc4) 25 ... Qc8 26 f3 Nc4 27 Qf2 Nxb2 and Black has two pawns for the exchange, while the white position is riddled with weaknesses.

**22 Bxd1**

Now 22 ... Bxh3? 23 Nd5 is definitely bad for Black.

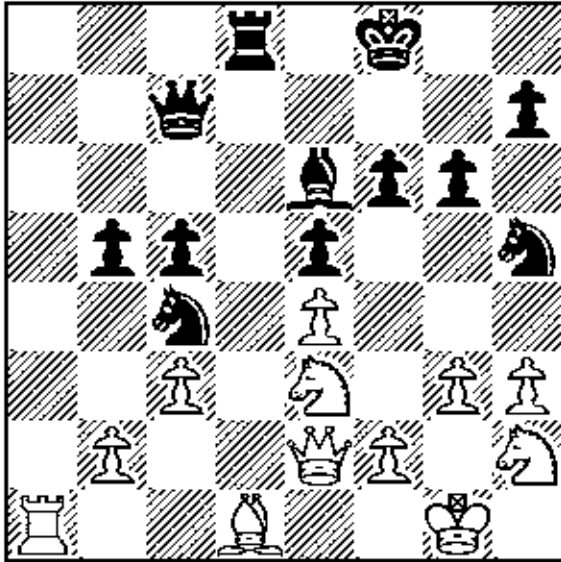
**22 ... Rd8**

After the brief flurry of excitement at move 21, events have resumed their normal course. Black is still fine.

**23 a4**

Always a thematic plan for White in such positions. He opens the a-file for his rook and sets up pressure against Black's advanced queenside pawns.

**23 ... Nc4 24 axb5 axb5**



### 25 Nd5!

Another critical moment. Alekhine's move is a typical and thematic blow in such positions, aiming to open lines and expose the weakened black king, as well as bringing the Spanish bishop into the game. Instead, the sterile 25 Nxc4 would just be rather equal.

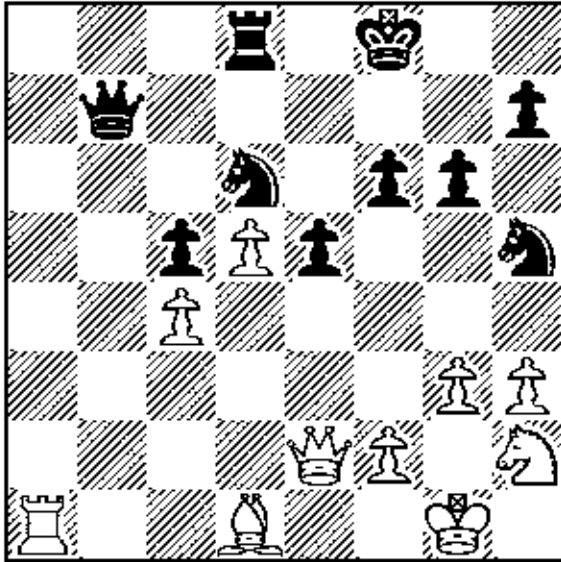
### 25 ... Qb7!?

**Question:** Why can't he take the pawn?

**Answer:** Once again, that is the critical response. After 25 ... Bxd5 26 exd5 Rxd5, Alexander gives the follow-up 27 Qe4! Rd8 28 Bxh5 gxh5 29 Qf3 Qf7 30 Qc6 Nxb2 31 Qxc5+ Kg8 32 Qxb5 "with much the better game". However, it is not clear how much White really has after just 32 ... Nc4 or 32 ... Rd1+ 33 Rxd1 Nxd1. He is better with the outside passed pawn, but the black pieces are active, so whether White has serious winning chances is less certain.

Keres' move is sensible enough, and may even be best. Black avoids opening up the position to the benefit of the white pieces, and maintains a solid defence; while the white knight has reached its dream outpost, it remains unstable there, and Black may soon threaten to take on d5 in more effective circumstances, so Alekhine immediately takes steps to secure it.

**26 b3 Nd6 27 c4 bxc4 28 bxc4 Bxd5 29 exd5**



**Question:** The structure has changed – now White has a passed pawn. Is he better?

**Answer:** Slightly, but still not by a huge amount. The passed pawn is very securely blockaded by the knight on d6. Nevertheless, Black does have some problems with his weakened kingside and the possibility of the white rook penetrating down the a-file.

**29 ... Ng7 30 Ng4 Qe7 31 Bc2 Nge8**

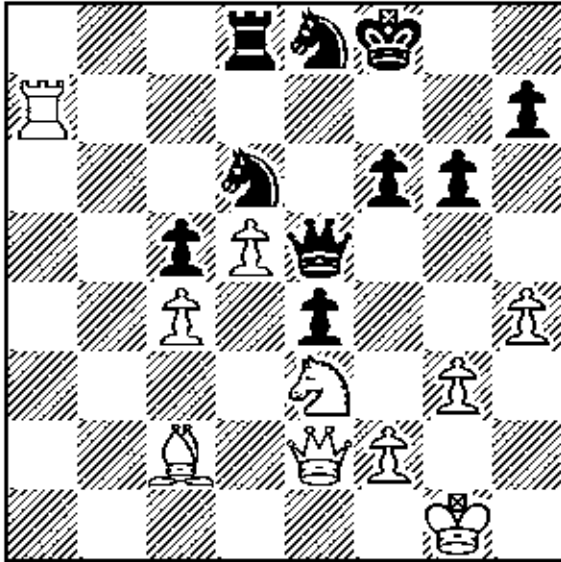
Alexander suggests 31 ... Nf7, intending ... f6-f5, but after 32 Ra6 f5 33 Ne3 e4 34 Bd1, with the idea of Qb2, White has a sizeable advantage.

Fritz's suggestion of 31 ... e4 looks like a better try. After 32 Ne3 Re8 33 Ra6 Ngf5, Black defends by keeping his pawn on f6, covering the central dark squares; although White still has the initiative, it is not easy to make real progress.

**32 h4 e4 33 Ne3 Qe5?!**

Black cracks under the pressure and heads into a combination. 33 ... Rb8 is a better defence.

**34 Ra7**



**34 ... Kg8?!**

Another mistake.

**Question:** So what should he do instead?

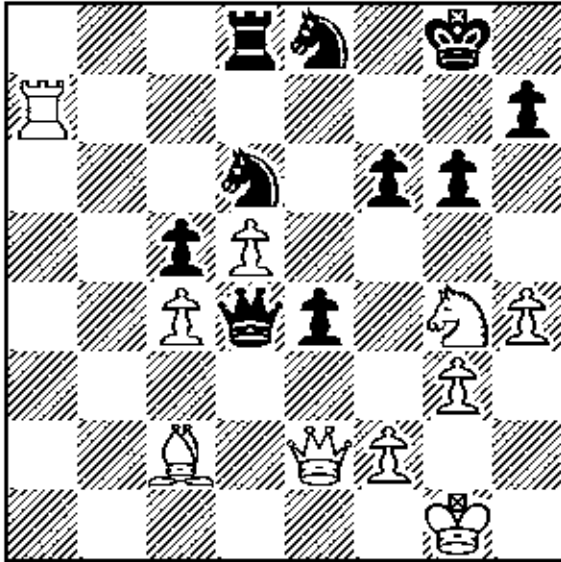
**Answer:** Once again, Alexander's suggestion 34 ... Ng7 is not much better, in view of the subtle reply 35 Qd2!. Now the threat is Ng4, followed by Qh6, while after the virtually forced 35 ... f5, the white queen switches direction with 36 Qa5 Rc8 37 Qa6 and the black defences are creaking (Rd7 is a major concern).

Probably 34 ... f5 was the only hope, but again, transferring the white queen to the queenside with 35 Qe1, followed by Qa5, is very unpleasant for Black.

**35 Ng4 Qd4?**

A third error in three moves. Black's last chance to put up any resistance was 35 ... Qb2, pinning the bishop. Then the computer likes the quiet 36 Kg2!, stepping out of possible checks; for example, 36 Kg2! Rb8 (or 36 ... f5 37 Nh6+ Kh8 38 Qd2, coming round on the dark squares) 37 Nh6+ Kh8 (or 37 ... Kf8 38 Qxe4! Nxe4? 39 Rf7 mate) 38 Nf7+ Kg8 39 Nxd6 Nxd6 40 Qe3! Qxc2 41 Qh6 Nb7 42 Qf4 Re8 43 Rxb7 e3 44 Qxf6 Qxf2+ 45 Qxf2 exf2 46 Rc7 with a winning rook endgame.





### **36 Bxe4!**

The tactical trick Black had missed.

### **36 ... f5**

Now 36 ... Nxe4 37 Nh6+ Kh8 (or 37 ... Kf8 38 Rf7 mate) 38 Nf7+ wins a rook, and 36 ... Qxe4 37 Qxe4 Nxe4 38 Nh6+ is the same. Black therefore loses a pawn for nothing.

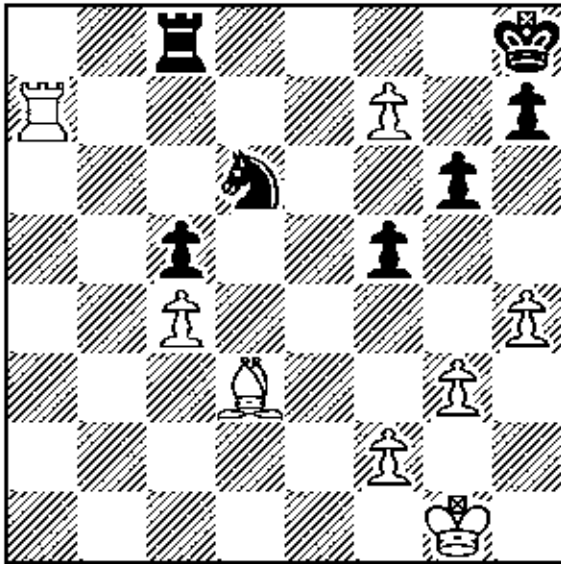
### **37 Nh6+**

This wins for White, but in fact the bishop could have taken another pawn: 37 Bxf5! with the decisive threats of Qe6+ or Qe7; while simply 37 Bc2 at once was very strong too.

### **37 ... Kh8 38 Bc2 Qf6 39 Qe6 Qxe6 40 dxe6**

White has won material and still has a crushing position. The rest is just a mopping-up exercise.

### **40 ... Rc8 41 Nf7+ Nxf7 42 exf7 Nd6 43 Bd3**



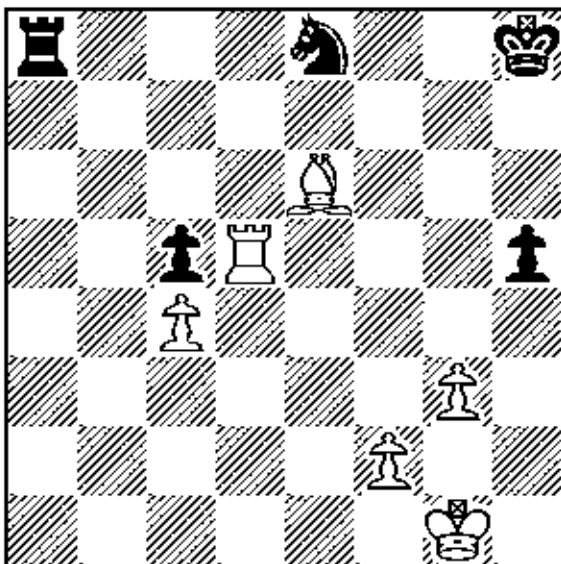
**43 ... Kg7**

The threat was 44 Rd7 Ne4 45 Rc7, but the text allows a further simplification.

**44 f8Q+ Kxf8 45 Rxh7 Kg8 46 Rd7 Ne8 47 h5!**

Finally undermining what remains of Black's kingside pawns.

**47 ... gxh5 48 Bxf5 Ra8 49 Be6+ Kh8 50 Rd5**



Winning a second pawn, after which Black could resign with a clear conscience.

**50 ... Nf6 51 Rxc5 Kg7 52 Kg2 Ra2 53 Bf5 Ra3 54 Rc7+ Kh6 55 Rf7 Ra6 56 f4 h4 57 g4 1-0**

A fascinating battle between two great players, in which Black was holding his own for

a long time, but eventually succumbed to the pressure.

# Game 34

## Alekhine-Junge, Prague 1942

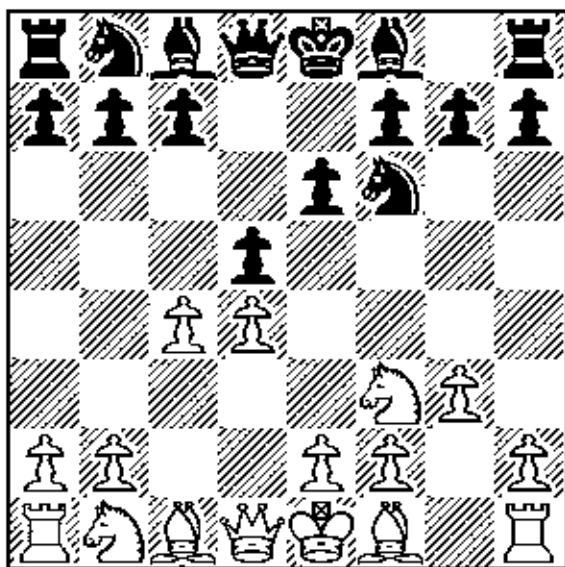
Game 34

A.Alekhine-K.Junge

Prague 1942

Catalan Opening

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 g3



The Catalan was a relatively unusual opening in those days, only gaining its current great popularity in the hands of various Soviet GMs, such as Smyslov, Geller and Korchnoi, from the 1950s onwards. White's basic strategy, as in the English Opening, is to exert pressure on the central light squares, aided by his fianchettoed king's bishop.

4 ... dxc4

**Question:** Is this quite logical? I should have thought Black would keep the pawn on d5, to shut out the white bishop?

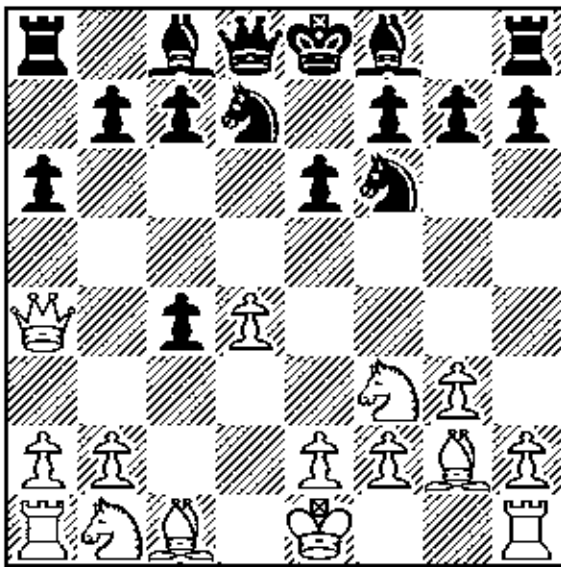
**Answer:** That is another perfectly valid set-up. Basically, Black has two broad philosophical approaches to the defence of the Catalan. One is to hold the centre, defending the d5-pawn like grim death, in the hope of leaving the Catalan bishop biting

on granite. The other, adopted here by Junge, is to clear the diagonal at once, leaving the bishop gazing into thin air, while hoping to get ... b7-b5 and ... Bb7 in to neutralize the bishop later. Both are equally valid, if carried out precisely.

**5 Qa4+**

This is a somewhat old-fashioned approach, which objectively offers fewer chances of an advantage than the modern gambit method with 5 Bg2. Nevertheless, the text should not be underestimated, as Black needs only to commit a single inaccuracy to find himself under heavy pressure on the queenside. Ulf Andersson was one who furnished his house several times over in the 1980s, on the proceeds of such apparently harmless, quiet positions.

**5 ... Nbd7 6 Bg2 a6!**



Black adopts an accurate move order, which should allow him to equalize. The threat of ... b7-b5 forces White to regain his pawn at once.

**7 Qxc4 b5 8 Qc6!?**

**Question:** This looks rather odd!

**Answer:** It is an attempt to sow a little disruption in Black's position. The simple retreat 8 Qc2 Bb7, followed by preparing the ... c7-c5 break, gives Black a comfortable game. The text aims to spend a tempo forcing the black rook to a slightly inferior square.

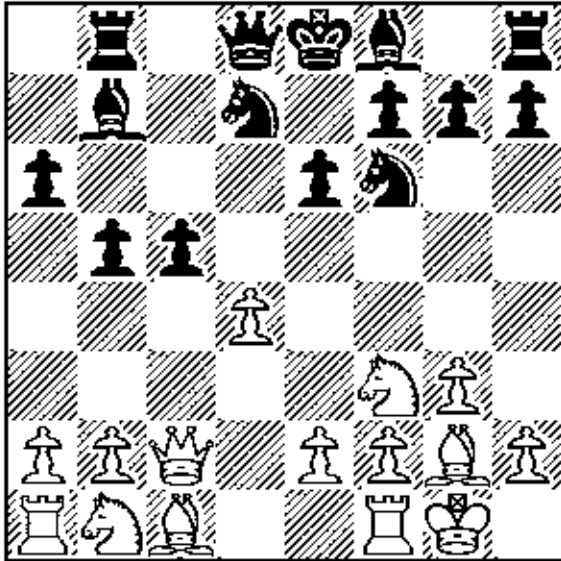
**8 ... Rb8**

Strange as it may seem at first sight, 8 ... Ra7 is slightly better.

**Question:** Really? The rook looks a bit stupid on a7!

**Answer:** Maybe, but in fact Black can usually swing the rook across to c7 or d7 later; whereas, on b8, the rook can sometimes find itself getting hit by Bf4.

**9 0-0 Bb7 10 Qc2 c5**



Even so, Black has a good game. He has solved the most pressing problem he usually faces in the Catalan, which is developing his queen's bishop. He has also rid himself of the potential backward pawn on c7, which, if he gets stuck with it, can be a millstone round his neck.

**Question:** So he has no problems at all?

**Answer:** Objectively, no, providing he carries on playing precisely. But in order to achieve his gains on the queenside, he has been forced to postpone his kingside development, and his king is still a couple of moves away from castling; so White needs to try to stir up some initiative, to distract Black from completing that task.

**11 a4!**

This is the only way. White tries to provoke a weakening of the enemy queenside pawns, in which cause he is willing to sacrifice a pawn.

**11 ... Bxf3**

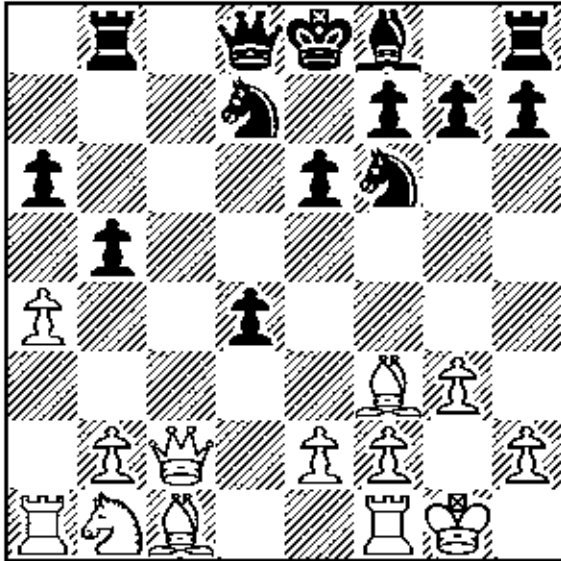
Black takes the bait.

**Question:** Should he do so?

**Answer:** I think he should. *Fritz* also thinks 11 ... b4?! is just equal, but I don't really like this. Black concedes the c4-square to the white queen's knight, and generally

fixes his queenside pawns in a somewhat inferior manner. With highly accurate play, Black is probably still okay, but it feels like a concession. I suspect little Ulfie's eyes would light up at the sight of such a move!

**12 Bxf3 cxd4**



**Question:** So Black has won a solid extra centre pawn. What does White really have?

**Answer:** He has some development and the initiative. True, his bishop being on the long light diagonal, rather than pointing at the black king, makes this a gambit somewhat different from the norm, but as will see, Alekhine could always find a way to get at uncastled enemy kings!

**13 axb5 axb5 14 Rd1 Qb6**

**Question:** Can't he develop and defend the pawn at the same time with 14 ... Bc5 - ?

**Answer:** The trouble is, that leaves his pieces a little vulnerable. Hugh Alexander then analyses 15 Bf4 e5 (or 15 ... Rc8 16 Bb7) 16 Bxe5 Nxe5 17 Qxc5 Nxf3+ 18 exf3 Qe7 19 Qxd4 or 19 Qc6+ with a substantial advantage to White.

The other attempt to defend the d-pawn, 14 ... e5, does not contribute to Black's development; White retains compensation after 15 e3, although this does allow Black to play 15 ... Bc5, with Bf4 now ruled out.

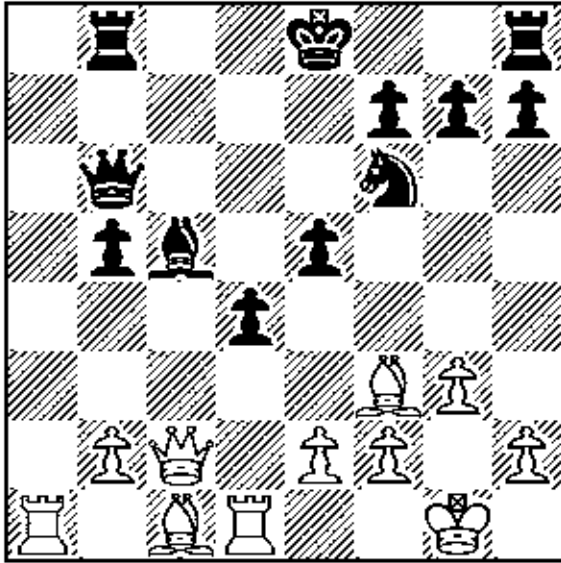
**15 Nd2 e5 16 Nb3 Nc5?**

Almost certainly missing White's 18th move. After 16 ... Be7 17 e3 dxe3 18 Bxe3

Qe6 (Alexander), White would have quite a dangerous initiative. Instead, 16 ... Qe6 is Fritz's suggestion, intending 17 e3 Qc4 with equal chances.

**17 Nxc5 Bxc5**

After 17 ... Qxc5? 18 Bc6+, White has a dangerous attack; e.g. 18 ... Kd8 19 Qf5 or 18 ... Nd7 19 Qe4.



**18 Ra6!?**

*Question:* What??

*Answer:* Another of Alekhine's bolts from the blue! White sacrifices an exchange in order to trap the black king in the centre.

*Question:* Is it good?

*Answer:* As we will see below, the computer suggests that Black could have gained the advantage, had he found the correct continuation at move 22, but he has to defend extremely accurately. In objective terms, White should perhaps have played 18 Bg5 Nd7 19 Qf5, when he has a decent initiative for his pawn.

**18 ... Qxa6 19 Qxc5 Qe6!**

The only good way to defend e5, since 19 ... Nd7? loses after 20 Bc6 f6 21 Qd6.

**20 Bc6+ Nd7**

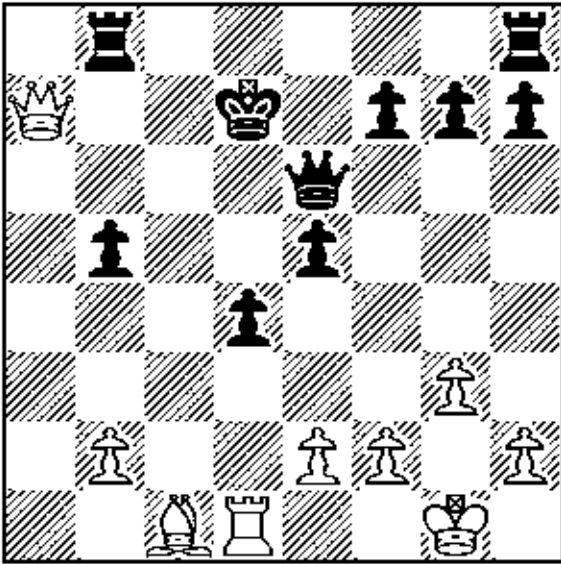
Again best. 20 ... Kd8 21 Bd2 b4 and now 22 Qa5+! gives White a virtually decisive attack. Alexander instead gives 22 Ra1 "and wins", but the computer refutes this with 22 ... Qe7, when White has nothing better than a repetition: 23 Qa5+ Qc7 24 Qc5 Qe7 etc.



### 21 Bxd7+ Kxd7

Not 21 ... Qxd7?? 22 Qxe5+, winning a rook.

### 22 Qa7+



### 22 ... Kc6?

Thus far, Black's defensive moves have been practically forced, but here he has an important choice between the text and 22 ... Kd6!. The computer shows that the latter is in fact stronger.

**Question:** What happens then?

**Answer:** According to Ludek Pachman, who annotated this game in his old book *Pachman's Decisive Games*, Junge rejected the move because of 23 Bf4, which indeed looks dangerous. But Fritz defends calmly with 23 ... Rhd8! (23 ... exf4 24 Rxd4+ Kc6 25 Rd1 Rhc8 26 Rc1+ Kd5 27 Rd1+ Kc6 28 Rc1+ is only good for a draw) 24 Qxd4+ (or 24 Rxd4+? Kc6) 24 ... Ke7 25 Qb4+ Rd6 (not 25 ... Kf6? 26 Rxd8 Rxd8 27 Bg5+! Kxg5 28 Qh4+, which reaches a drawn queen ending) 26 Be3 Kd7 and claims an advantage for Black.

### 23 Bd2 Rhc8 24 e4!

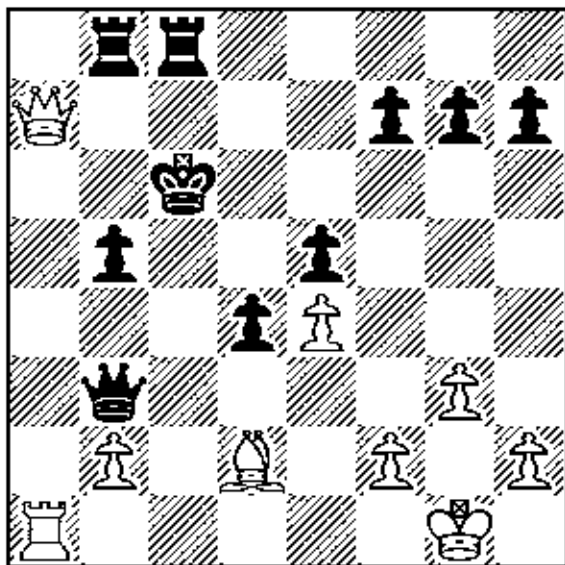
Taking the d5-square away from the black king and threatening 25 Rc1+ Kd6 26 Bb4+.

### 24 ... Qb3??

Junge cracks under the pressure. The only hope was 24 ... b4 25 Ra1 Kb5!, and even here the computer shows that 26 b3! (another subtle pawn move to take a vital flight square from the black king) 26 ... Qb6 (the only way to stop mate on a5) 27 Qa4+ Kc5 28 Qd7 gives White a strong attack. The immediate threat is 29 Rc1, while after 28

... Qd8 29 Qa7+ Kd6 (not 29 ... Qb6? 30 Ra5+ Kc6 31 Ra6) 30 Qxf7 Ra8 31 Qd5+ Kc7 32 Qxe5+, the attack continues, with the black king still wandering around the board, seriously exposed.

**25 Ra1!**



This is now decisive, since the black queen is hopelessly out of play.

**25 ... b4**

Or 25 ... Rb6 26 Rc1+ and wins.

**26 Ra6+ Kb5 27 Ra5+ Kc6 28 Qc5+ Kd7 29 Ra7+ 1-0**

Mate is forced.

A typical Alekhine attack – the enemy king delays castling and is caught in the centre by an unexpected sacrifice, after which he is hunted to extinction. Admittedly, in this instance the computer shows that Black could perhaps have escaped with his booty intact, but as with many of Tal's sacrifices several decades later, defending such positions over the board frequently proves beyond even world-class opponents.

## Game 35

### Alekhine-Bogoljubow, Warsaw 1943

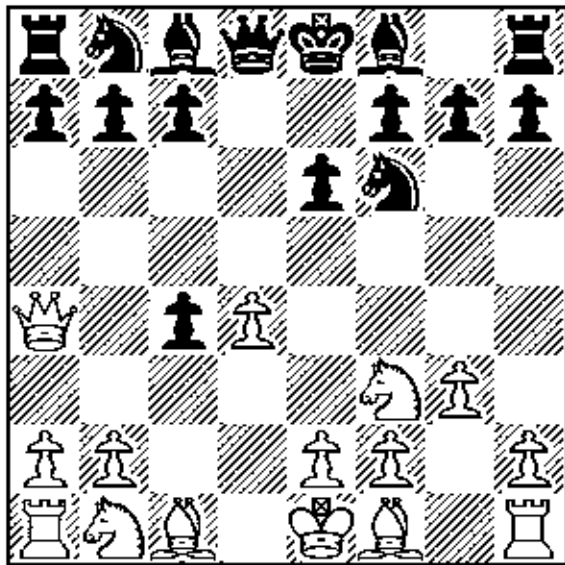
Game 35

**A.Alekhine-E.Bogoljubow**

Warsaw (2nd matchgame) 1943

*Catalan Opening*

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 g3 dxc4 5 Qa4+



**5 ... Qd7?!**

In the previous game, we saw Junge play 5 ... Nbd7, which I think is the best move. 5 ... Bd7 is also possible, intending to bring the bishop to c6 to neutralize White's Catalan bishop, although this does have the drawback of blocking the black c-pawn and making the freeing ... c7-c5 break difficult to achieve.

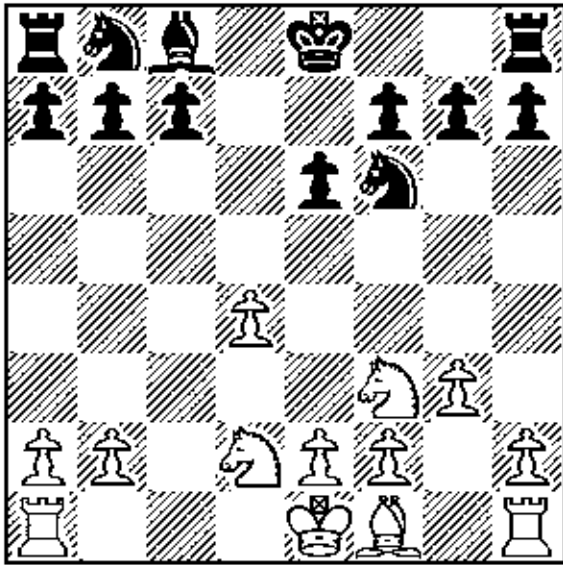
**Question:** What about Bogoljubow's move?

**Answer:** I do not especially like it. The enforced queen exchange may appear to ease Black's game, but it does not really address the problem of developing his queenside.

6 Qxc4 Qc6 7 Nbd2 Qxc4 8 Nxc4 Bb4+

Black continues his policy of swapping pieces, perhaps hoping an early draw would result, but this exchange of bishops does not address Black's real problem either, which is with his queenside development. Indeed, he could easily miss his dark-squared bishop later in the game.

**9 Bd2 Bxd2+ 10 Ncxd2**



**Question:** So I take it you would assess this position in White's favour?

**Answer:** Yes, definitely. It is not a huge advantage, but it is stable and lasting. He will be able to bring his rook to the half-open c-file quickly, and Black will face serious trouble in developing his queen's bishop satisfactorily. It is also a position where "play is for two results", as the saying goes.

**Question:** Meaning what exactly?

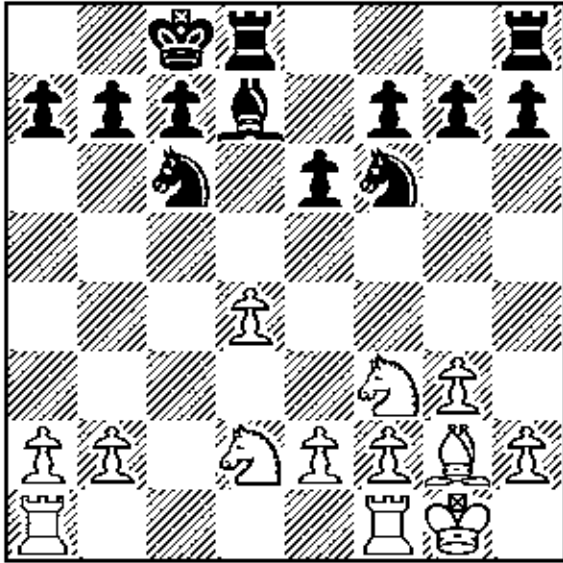
**Answer:** It means that White has some winning chances and almost no losing chances, so it is a question of a win or a draw for him. Obviously, White can lose any position if he blunders or otherwise plays badly enough, but this is a position of a quiet type where Black has no real counterplay, so White would only lose if he does something fairly terrible. With normal play, it is just a question of whether Black can hold the draw or whether he loses.

Alternatively, 10 Nfxd2 is also good, and was preferred in M.Botvinnik-M.Vidmar, Groningen 1946. White went on to win that game convincingly, so I think we can conclude that Black's defensive idea of 5 ... Qd7 and 6 ... Qc6 has not justified itself in practice.

### 10 ... Nc6

Here 10 ... Bd7 looks a better try to me, although after 11 Bg2 Bc6 12 Rc1, White retains the small, steady plus.

### 11 Bg2 Bd7 12 0-0 0-0-0



**Question:** So Black has solved his development problems and uses his king to defend the queenside.

**Answer:** Well, that is one interpretation of events, but it sounds to me like a rather rose-tinted one from Black's perspective. Firstly, I don't think one can really call the d7-bishop "developed" in any meaningful sense – it is still very passive and inactive. Secondly, rather than defending the queenside pawns, one might instead say that the black king has "castled into it". White will be able to exert strong pressure against the king, via the c-file and the long light diagonal.

**Question:** But with queens off, a real attack on the king is unlikely, isn't it?

**Answer:** Not necessarily. As we will see, Alekhine still manages to work up significant threats.

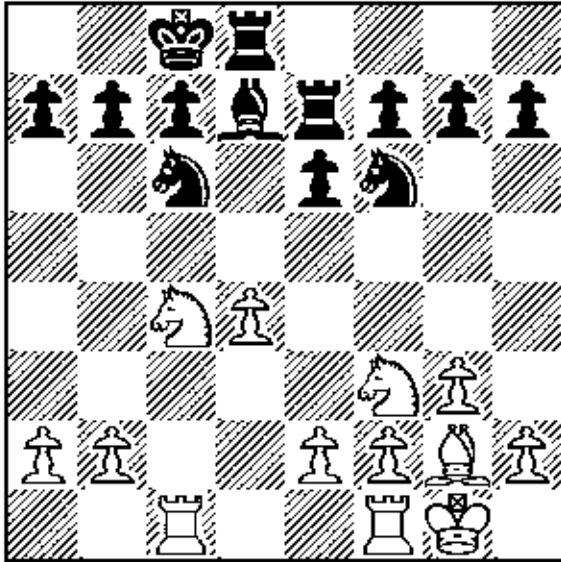
### 13 Rac1 Rhe8

Black wants very much to be able to break with ... e6-e5. Naturally, Alekhine does not co-operate in this regard.

### 14 Nc4!

Slamming the door on the ... e6-e5 break.

### 14 ... Re7



Bogoljubow was probably worried that a subsequent Nfe5 will attack the f7-pawn, so he defends it in advance.

**Question:** At least he has no real weaknesses.

**Answer:** That is true, and is obviously important. Nonetheless, his game remains very passive and unpleasant. Bogoljubow was not noted for his patience or stoicism at the board, so suffering in such a position must have been especially hard for him.

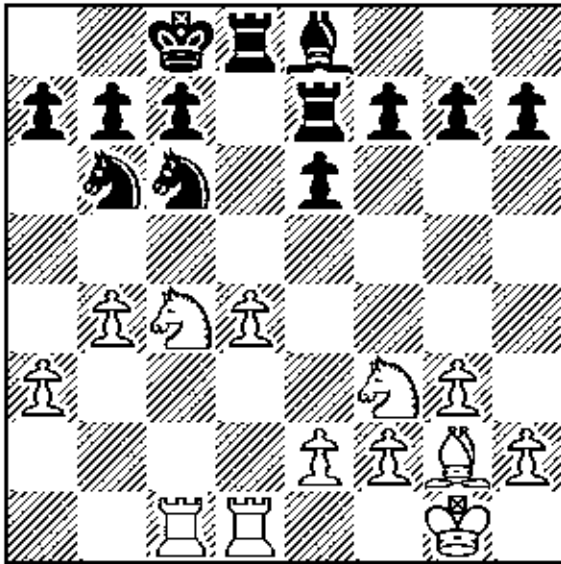
**15 a3!**

A modest-looking, but highly insidious move. White prepares to advance on the queenside, with the aim of driving the enemy knight from c6 and creating threats down the c-file. Black finds this almost impossible to prevent.

**15 ... Be8 16 Rfd1 Nd5 17 b4 Nb6**

**Question:** Why not 17 ... a6, stopping the pawn advancing?

**Answer:** Alexander mentions that move, but as he points out, the problem is the weakening of c5. White will eventually plant a knight there, with great pressure on the black queenside, and the knight will be hard to evict with ... b7-b6, since the a6-pawn is liable to be hanging.



### **18 b5?!**

Consistent, but probably premature. In view of the next note, White should probably settle for a slower build-up with 18 e3 Nxc4 19 Rxc4, when he retains a very pleasant edge.

### **18 ... Nb8?!**

Instead, 18 ... Nxc4 is a critical alternative. Alexander then gives 19 bxc6 Nxa3 20 cxb7+ Kxb7 21 Ne5+ Kc8 22 Nc6 Bxc6 23 Bxc6 Rd6 24 Rd3 with advantage, but in this line 19 ... b5! is much stronger and leaves Black with a reasonable game. As 19 Rxc4 Na5 20 Rb4 c6 is nothing much for White either, this seems to be what Black should have played.

### **19 Nxb6+ axb6 20 a4**

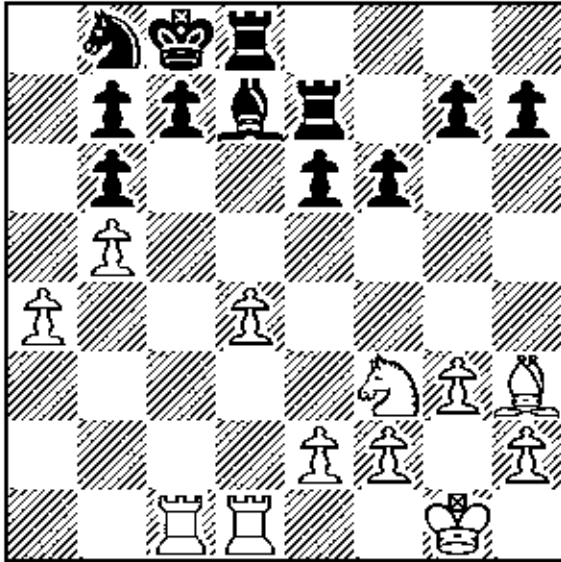
Now White has a clear target on the queenside. It may not look like it, but the pawn on b6 proves very hard to defend.

### **20 ... f6**

*Question:* Is that best?

*Answer:* It is probably as good as anything, even though it weakens e6, which Alekhine immediately exploits. The other way of covering the e5-square, 20 ... Nd7, is still quite unpleasant for Black after 21 Nd2.

### **21 Bh3 Bd7**



## 22 Nd2!

Again, this may look modest, but it is actually very strong and well calculated. Black was ready to free himself with 22 ... e5, so White needs to act quickly.

## 22 ... Rf8

With the idea of ... Kd8, stepping out of the pin on the c-file.

**Question:** I thought Black was preparing ... e6-e5. Why doesn't he play it here?

**Answer:** Unfortunately, 22 ... e5 is refuted by 23 Nc4, threatening mate in one no less, against which Black has no adequate defence! For instance, 23 ... Rf8 24 dxe5! fxe5 25 Nxb6+ wins easily.

## 23 Bg2

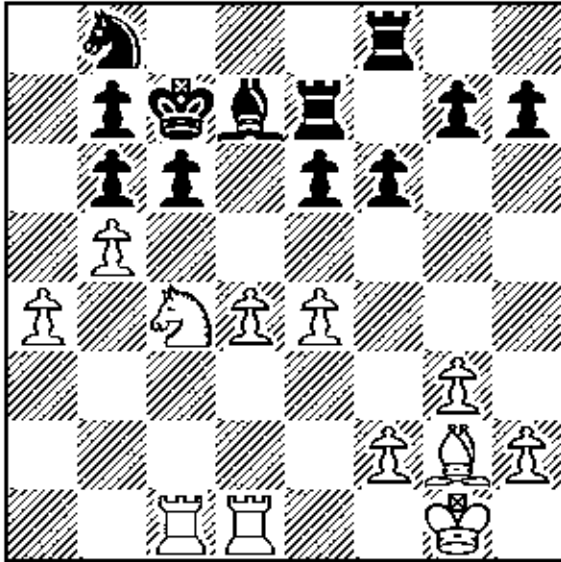
Provoking an additional weakness on d6. 23 Nc4 Kd8 24 Rc3 was also very strong.

## 23 ... c6

Desperately trying to save the b7-pawn, which drops off after 23 ... Be8 24 Nc4 Nd7 (defending b6) 25 Nd6+ etc.

## 24 Nc4 Kc7 25 e4





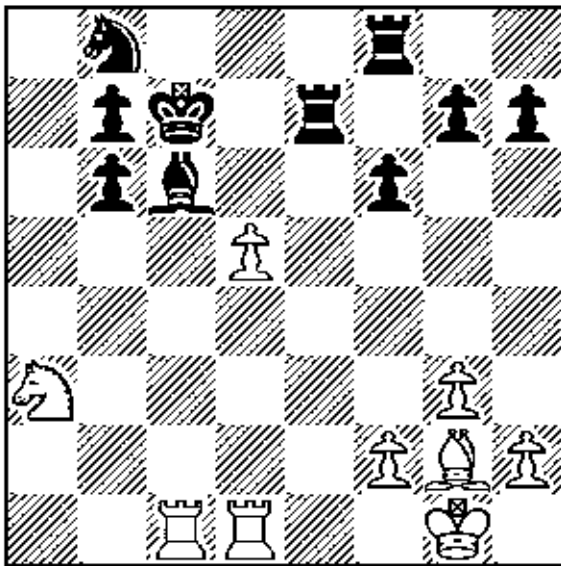
**25 ... cxb5**

Suicide, but Black is helpless anyway. For example, 25 ... Be8 26 d5! demonstrates the main threat now, breaking open central lines against the beleaguered black king.

**26 axb5 Bxb5 27 d5!**

Even more decisive than 27 Na3+ Bc6 28 d5, which should also win easily enough for White.

**27 ... exd5 28 Na3+ Bc6 29 exd5**



The exchange of the two pawns means that the Catalan bishop is now bearing down the diagonal as well with deadly effect.

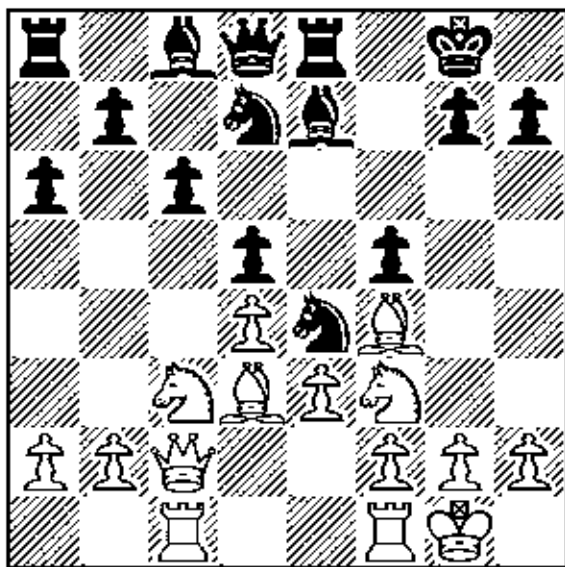
**29 ... Rd7 30 Nb5+ Kd8 31 dxc6 bxc6 32 Nd4 1-0**

A very nice example of a powerful attack on the enemy king, carried out in the absence of queens.

# The Finishing Touch

Alekhine was always known first and foremost for his tactical penetration and combinational brilliance, and it seems only appropriate to finish this book with a small selection of combinations which did not make it into the main games selection. Readers are recommended to try to solve the positions themselves, before looking up the solutions. This will provide some excellent tactical training. Most are not hugely difficult, although #20 is very tough and requires great imagination and deep, accurate calculation.

## #1. Alekhine-Rubinstein, San Remo 1930

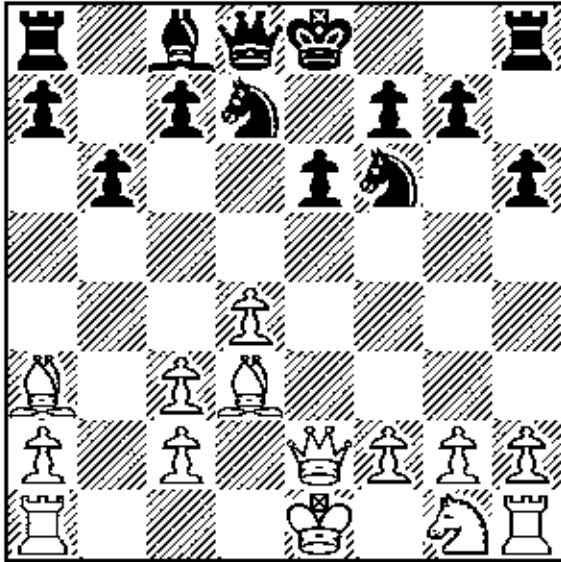


*White to play*

Black has just played 12 ... f5, securing his knight on e4. Why was this a mistake?

## [Solution](#)

## #2. Alekhine-Vasic, Banja Luka (simul) 1931

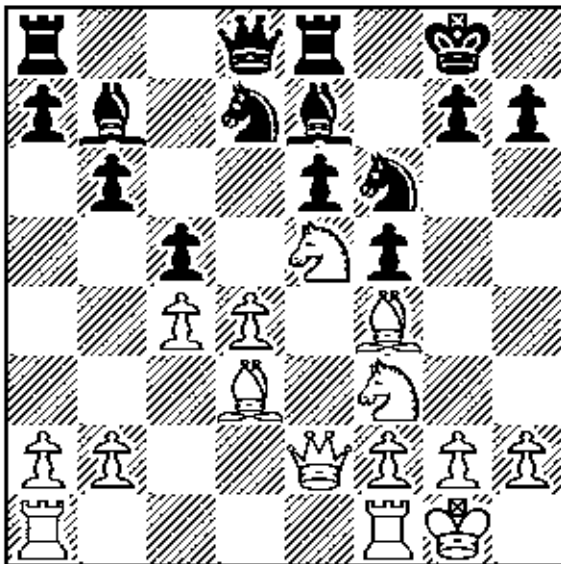


*White to play*

How did Alekhine finish off the game in double-quick time?

[Solution](#)

**#3. Alekhine-Feldt, Odessa (simul) 1916**

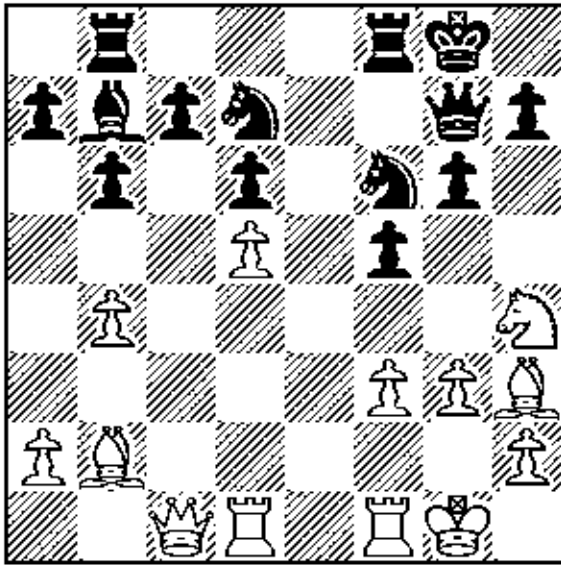


*White to play*

Find Alekhine's bolt from the blue.

[Solution](#)

**#4. Alekhine-Alexander, Nottingham 1936**

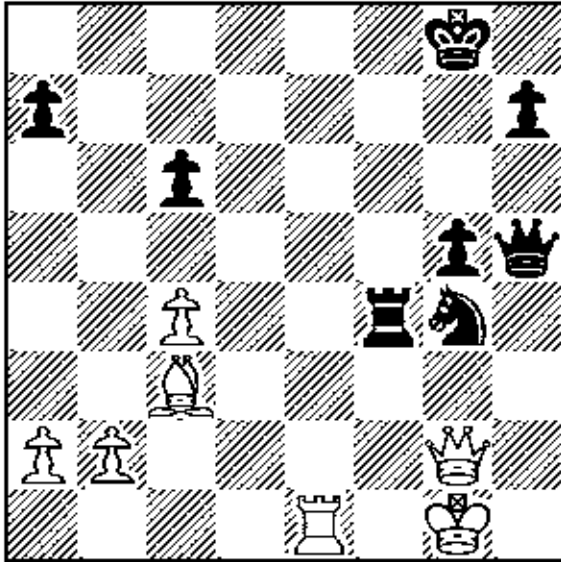


*White to play*

How does White win material and wreck his opponent's kingside into the bargain?

[Solution](#)

**#5. Tartakower-Alekhine, Nottingham 1936**

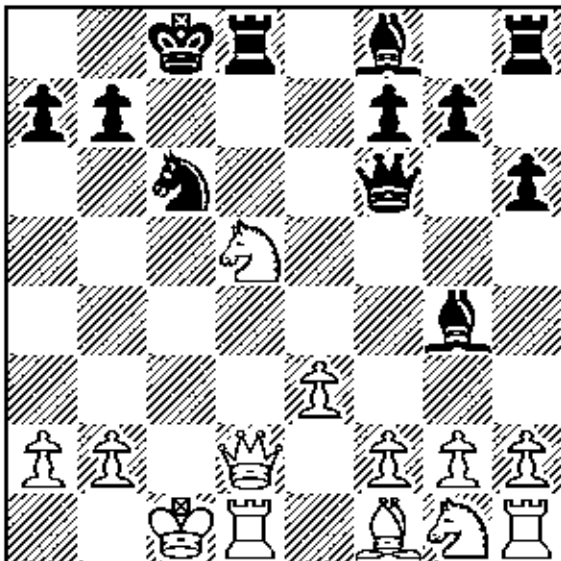


*Black to play*

Although Black has an extra pawn, his own king seems at risk as well. How did Alekhine end the game quickly?

[Solution](#)

**#6. Pirc-Alekhine, Bled 1931**

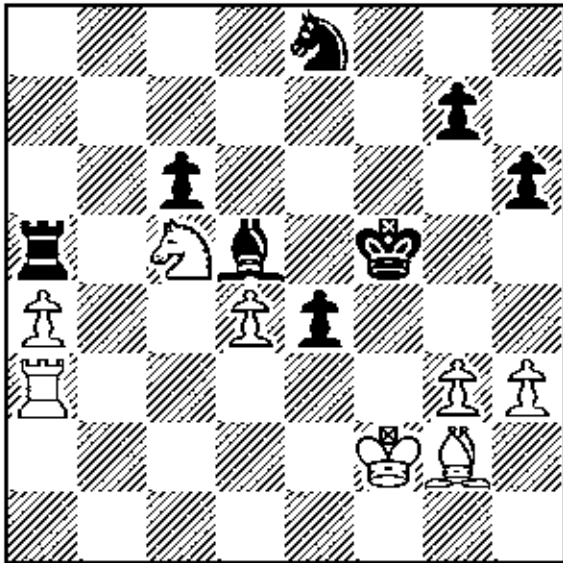


*Black to play*

Find a way to exploit Black's lead in development.

[Solution](#)

**#7. Alekhine-Tartakower**, San Remo 1930

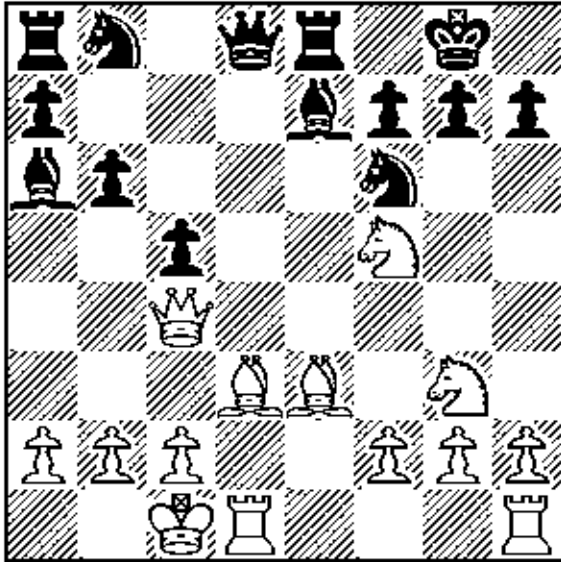


*White to play*

Just when a tense battle seemed ahead in a quiet-looking endgame, Alekhine found an unexpected tactical blow to win material. What was it?

[Solution](#)

**#8. Alekhine-Tartakower**, Kecskemet 1927

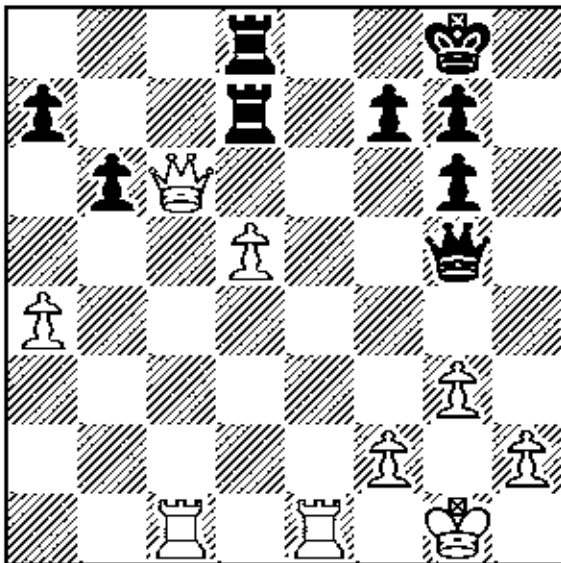


*White to play*

White's pieces are very threateningly placed. How did Alekhine convert this into material gain?

[Solution](#)

**#9. Alekhine-Colle, Paris 1925**



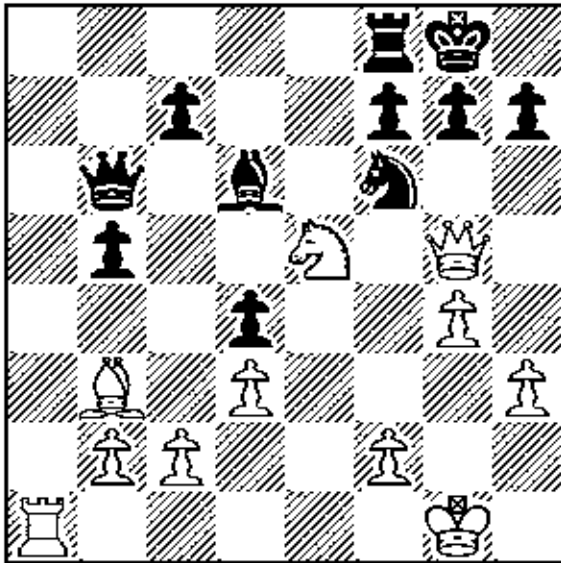
*White to play*



Black has just recaptured with the wrong pawn on g6. Prove it!

[Solution](#)

**#10. Alekhine-Duras, St Petersburg 1914**

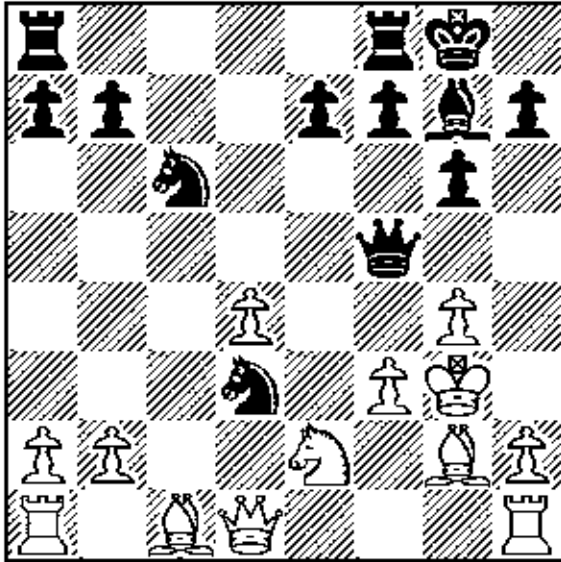


*White to play*

How did Alekhine exploit his aggressively-placed pieces and pressure against f7?

[Solution](#)

**#11. Potemkin-Alekhine, St Petersburg 1912**

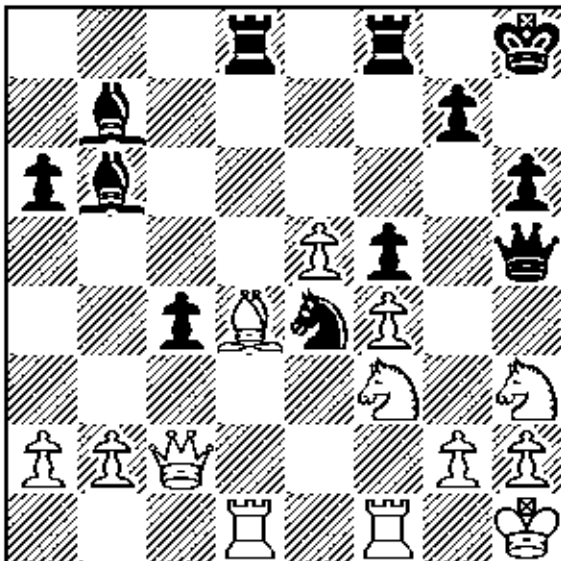


*Black to play*

White's position is obviously a wreck. How did Alekhine bring down the curtain at once?

[Solution](#)

**#12. Torres-Alekhine, Spain (simul) 1922**

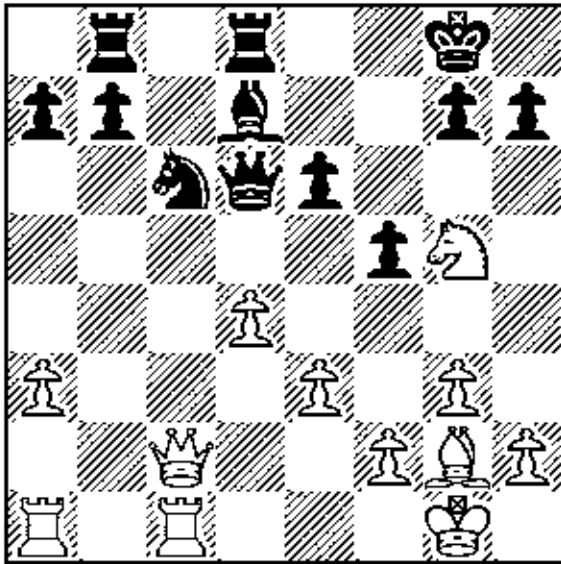


*Black to play*

The black pieces rake the enemy king most threateningly, but how exactly can this be converted into a decisive attack?

[Solution](#)

**#13. Alekhine-Golombek, Margate 1938**

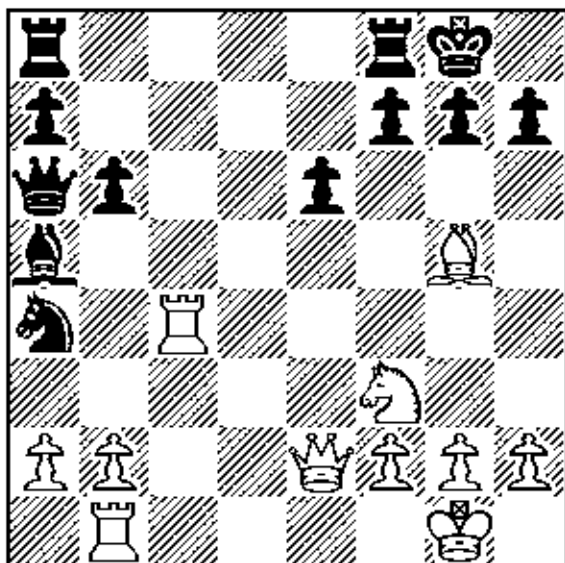


*White to play*

Black's king position is somewhat draughty. How did Alekhine take advantage of this?

[Solution](#)

**#14. Alekhine-Sterk, Budapest 1921**

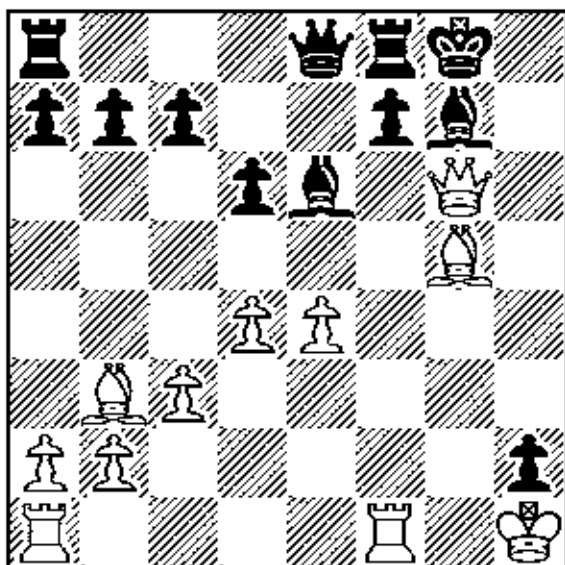


*White to play*

Black's pieces have ended up stranded on the a-file, leaving his king denuded. How did Alekhine exploit this?

[Solution](#)

#15. Alekhine-Mikulka, Olomouc (simul) 1925

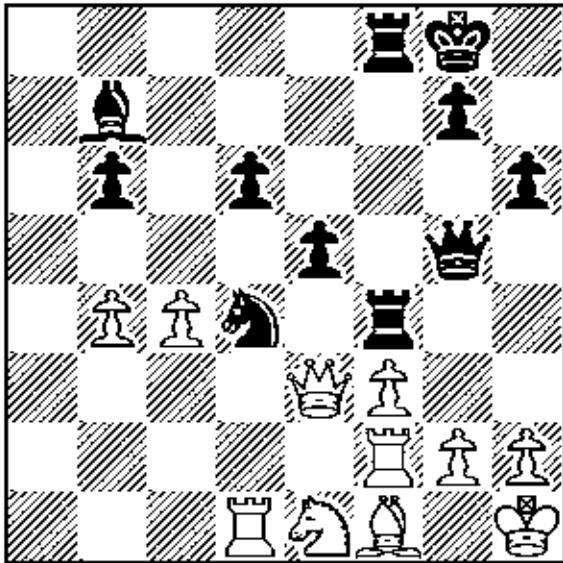


*White to play*

How did Alekhine finish his opponent off?

[Solution](#)

**#16. Stahlberg-Alekhine**, Hamburg Olympiad 1930

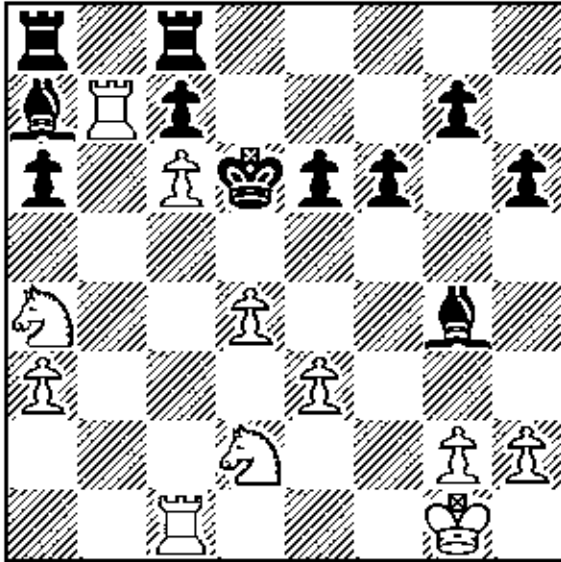


*Black to play*

How did Alekhine end the game quickly?

[Solution](#)

**#17. Alekhine-Kristofil**, Kecskemet (simul) 1936

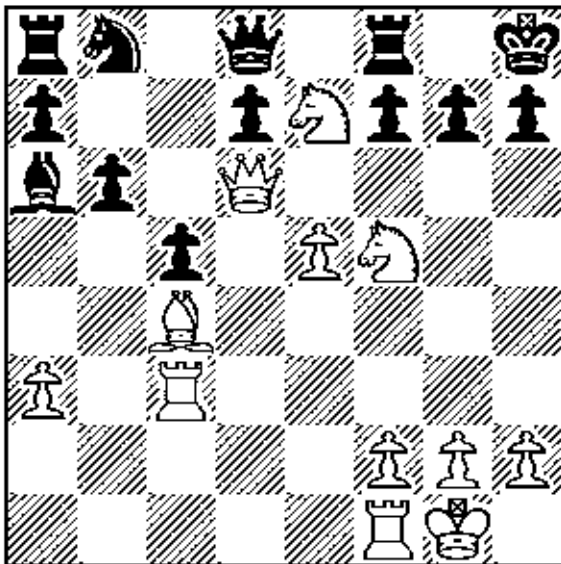


*White to play*

What is the strongest continuation for White?

[Solution](#)

**#18. Alekhine-Supico, Lisbon (simul) 1941**

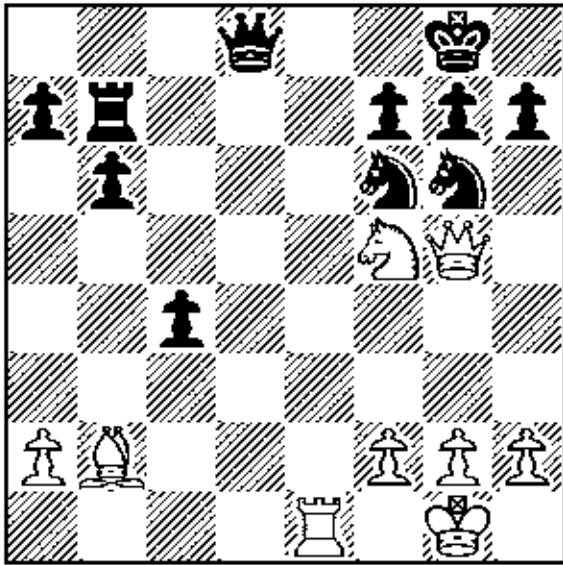


*White to play*

How did White conclude the game most rapidly and elegantly?

[Solution](#)

**#19. Alekhine-Frieman**, New York (simul) 1924



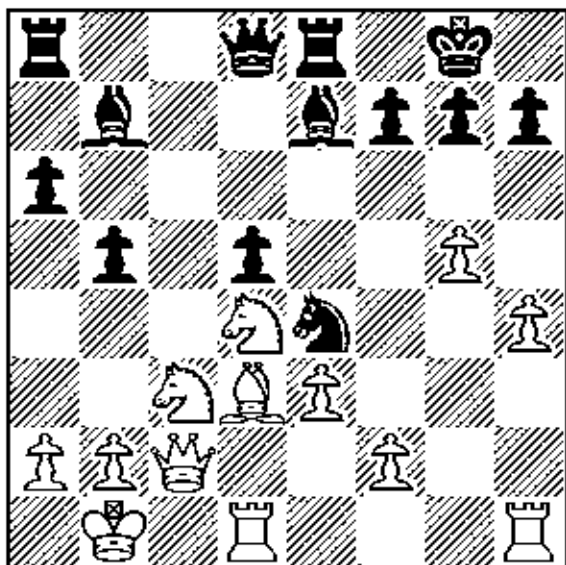
*White to play*

Here the game ended 22 Bxf6 gxf6 23 Qh6 Qf8 24 Re8 1-0. But how would Alekhine have finished things off if Black had recaptured on f6 with the queen?

[Solution](#)

**#20. Alekhine-Yates**, Hamburg 1910





*White to play*

Black has just played 16 ... Ne4. Can White win a pawn by taking repeatedly on e4?

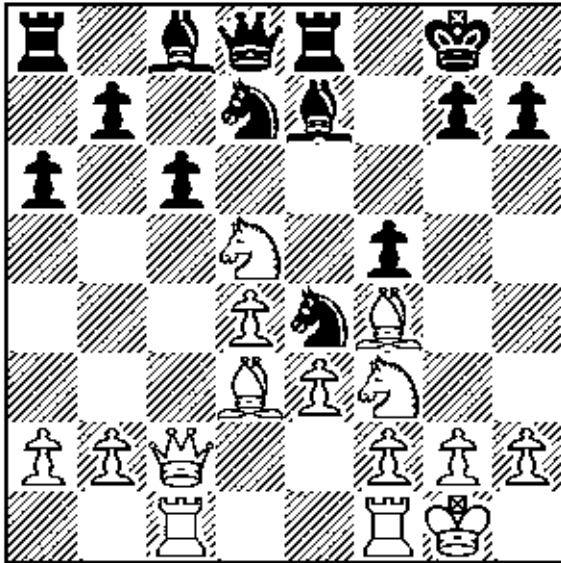
[Solution](#)



# Solutions

#1.

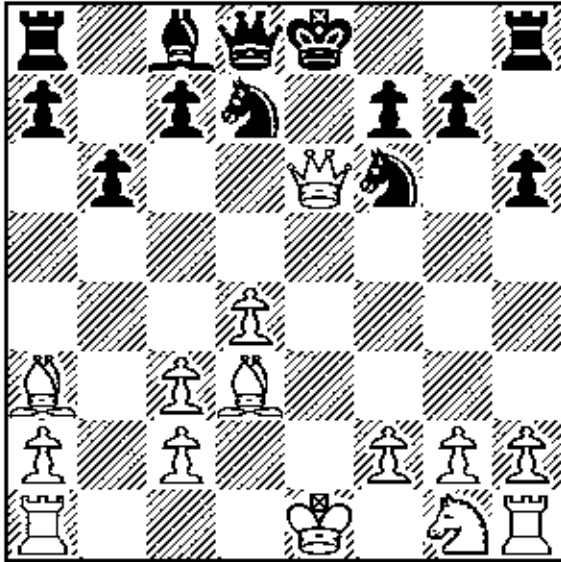
13 Nxd5! wins a pawn,



because 13 ... cxd5? loses the queen after 14 Bc7.

#2.

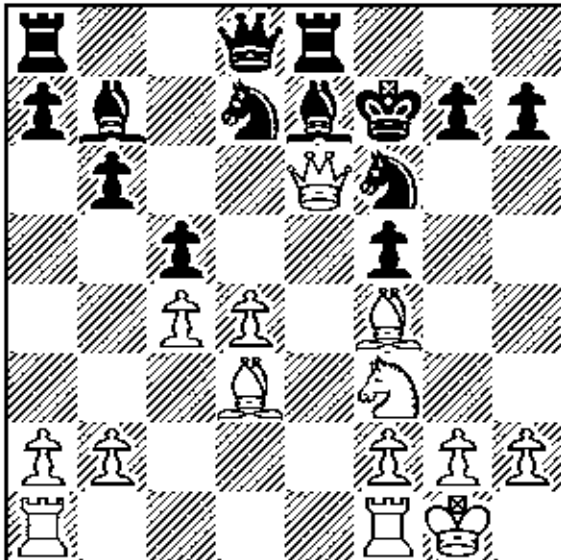
10 Qxe6+!



10 ... fxe6 11 Bg6 mate.

#3.

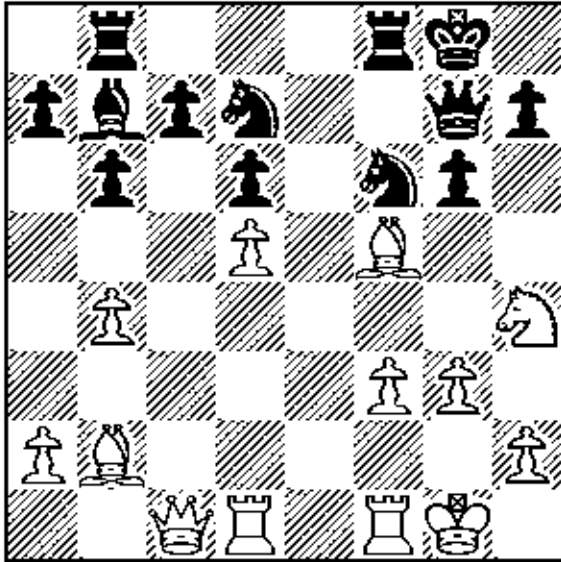
15 Nf7! Kxf7 16 Qxe6+!



16 ... Kg6 (if 16 ... Kxe6 17 Ng5 mate; or 16 ... Kf8 17 Ng5 and wins) 17 g4! Be4 18 Nh4 mate.

#4.

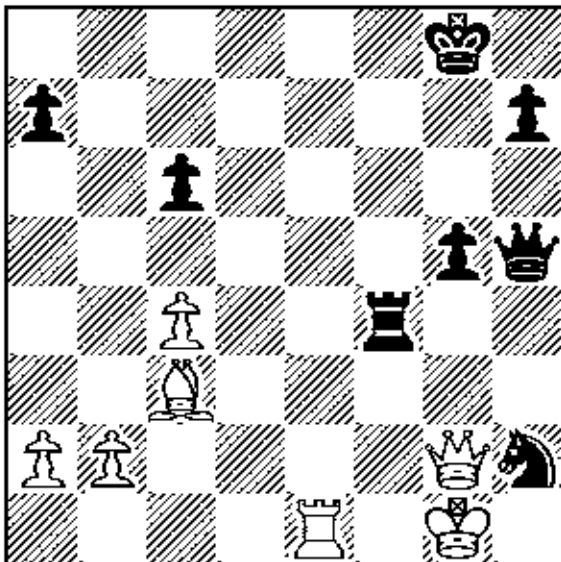
22 Bxf5! wins a pawn,



because 22 ... gxf5 23 Nxf5 Qh8 (23 ... Qg6 24 Ne7+ wins the queen) 24 Nh6+ Kg7 25 Qg5+ mates. Alexander just abandoned the pawn with **22 ... Kh8**, but lost quickly.

#5.

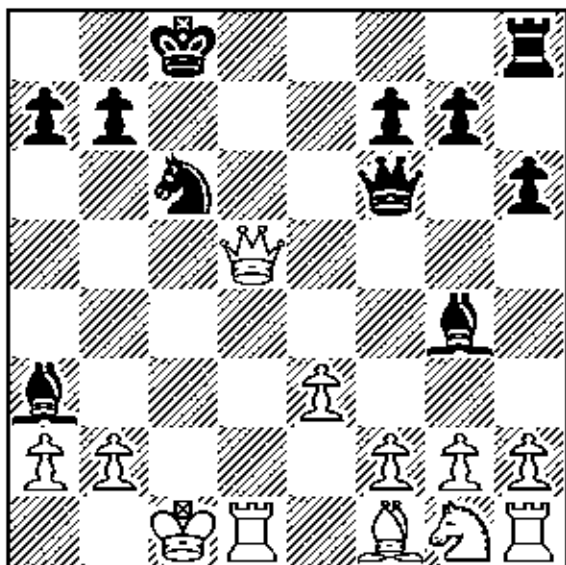
Alekhine played **29 ... Nh2!**



**30 Re3** (if 30 Qxh2 Rg4+ 31 Kh1 Rh4) **30 ... Rf1+ 31 Qxf1 Nxf1 32 Kxf1 Qf7+** and won in a few moves.

#6.

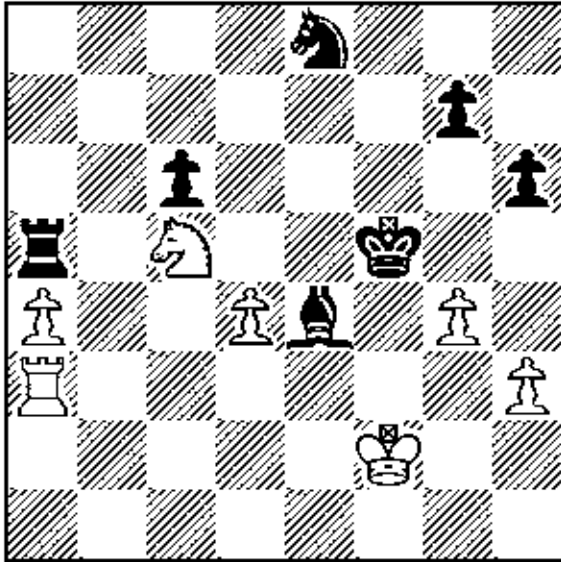
White has fallen dangerously behind in development, and his king is far from safe on the queenside. Alekhine now struck in typical fashion with **13 ... Rxd5! 14 Qxd5 Ba3!.**



After the further moves **15 Qb3 Bxd1 16 Qxa3 Qxf2**, White's position was a wreck and Alekhine finished him off without undue trouble: **17 Qd3 Bg4 18 Nf3 Bxf3 19 Qf5+ Kb8 20 Qxf3 Qe1+ 21 Kc2?** (giving up the e-pawn with 21 Qd1 was forced) **21 ... Rc8 22 Qg3+ Ne5+ 23 Kb3 Qd1+ 24 Ka3 Rc5 0-1.**

#7.

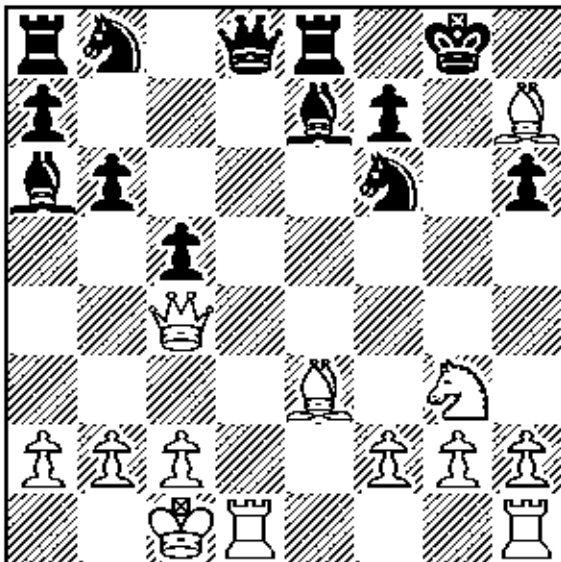
Alekhine won a pawn after **33 Bxe4+! Bxe4 34 g4+**,



the point being that 34 ... Kf4?? walks into 35 Ne6 mate!

#8.

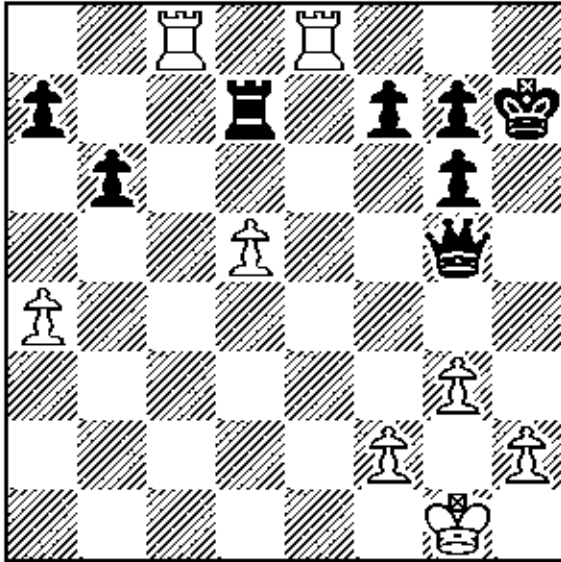
14 Nh6+! gxh6 15 Bxh7+



15 ... Nxe7 (if 15 ... Kh8 16 Qxf7 wins) 16 Qg4+ Kh8 17 Rxd8 Rxd8 (or 17 ... Bxd8 18 Qf3) 18 Qe4 and White won.

#9.

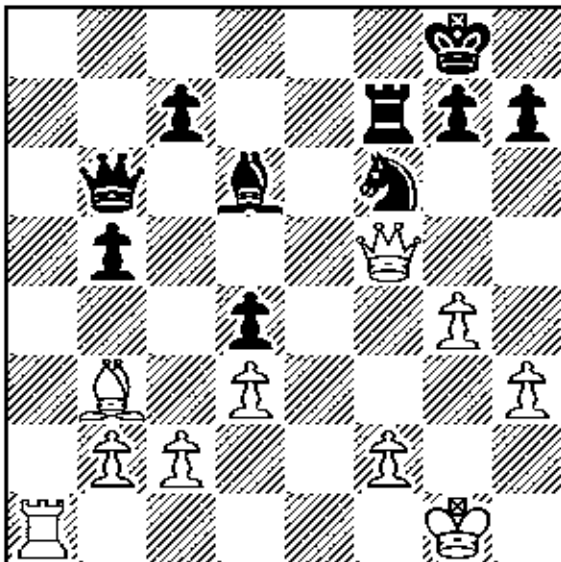
30 Qxd7! Rxd7 31 Re8+ Kh7 32 Rcc8



and mate is inevitable, unless Black gives up his queen for nothing.

#10.

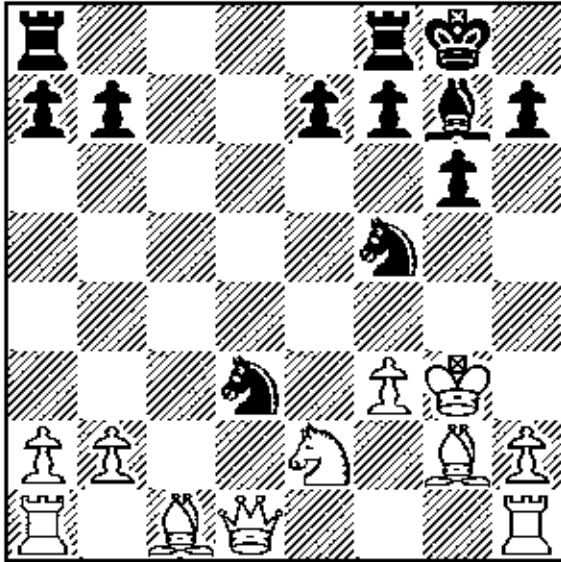
**23 Nxf7! Rxf7 24 Qf5** with the twin threats of **25 g5** and **25 Qe6**.



The game ended **24 ... g6 25 Qe6 Kg7 26 Qxf7+ Kh6 27 Be6 1-0**.

#11.

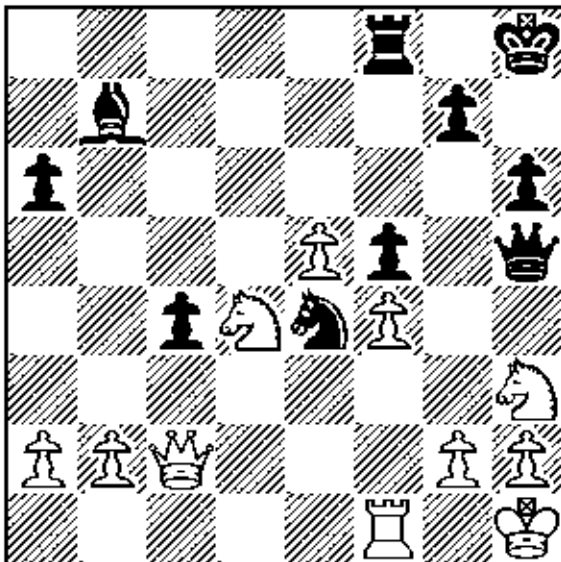
**16 ... Nxd4! 17 gxf5?** (allowing forced mate, but **17 Nxd4 Qe5+ 18 f4 Qxd4** is also winning for Black) **17 ... Nxf5+ 0-1**.



It is mate after 18 Kg4 (or 18 Kh3 Nf2) 18 ... h5+ 19 Kg5 Bf6.

#12.

Alekhine exploited the long light diagonal with the typical combination **26 ... Bxd4**  
**27 Rxd4 Rxd4 28 Nxd4**

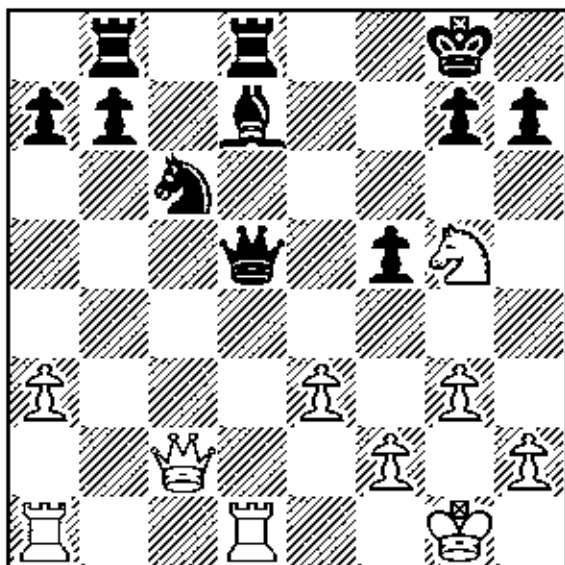


and now **28 ... Qxh3! 29 gxh3 Nf2+ 30 Kg1 Nxh3** mate.

#13.

The key idea is to utilize the a2-g8 diagonal and the position of the white knight on g5

to create threats of smothered mate. Alekhine struck with **19 d5!**, the point being that 19 ... exd5 is met by 20 Bxd5+! Qxd5 21 Rd1 and the black queen cannot stay on the vital diagonal.

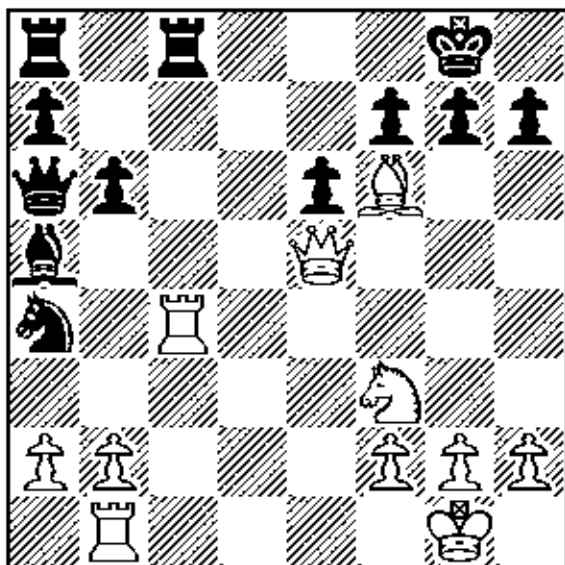


After a retreat to 21 ... Qa5, say, there follows 22 Qc4+ Kh8 23 Nf7+ etc; or if 21 ... Qe5 then 22 Qa2+! Be6 23 Nxe6 Rxd1+ 24 Rxd1 Kh8 25 Rd7 with a winning attack. Golombek tried **19 ... Ne7** instead, but after **20 dxe6 Bxe6 21 Rd1 Qe5 22 Bxb7!**, his back-rank weakness cost him a pawn and White won easily.

#### #14.

With Black's pieces all lined up on the a-file, Alekhine took advantage of the abandoned enemy king in fine style: **23 Bf6! Rfc8** (23 ... gxf6? 24 Rg4+ wins the queen) **24 Qe5!**

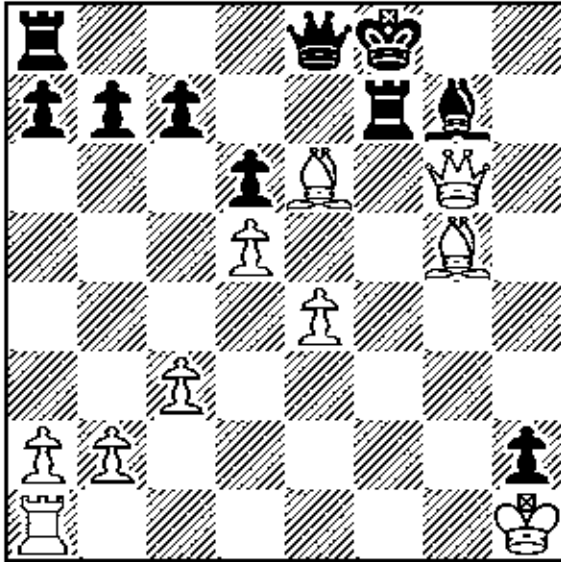




24 ... **Rc5** (24 ... g6 25 Qg5 Kf8 26 Qh6+ Ke8 27 Qxh7 yields a decisive attack) 25 **Qg3 g6 26 Rxa4** and White's clever, tempo-gaining queen manoeuvre has unpinned the c4-rook, allowing him to win a whole piece. The game ended 26 ... **Qd3 27 Rf1 Rac8 28 Rd4 Qf5 29 Qf4 Qc2 30 Qh6 1-0**.

#15.

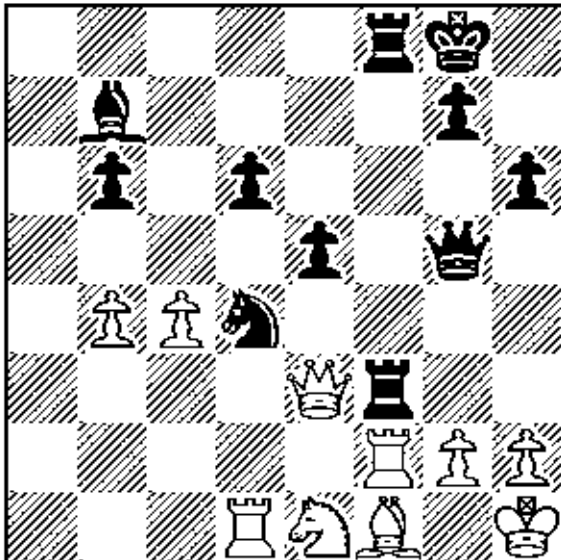
18 **Rxf7! Bxf7?** (losing at once) 19 **Bf6 1-0**. Black had to try 18 ... Rxf7 19 Bxe6 Kf8, when Alekhine might expect to win the ending after 20 Qxf7 Qxf7 21 Bxf7 Kxf7 22 Kxh2, but continuing the attack with 20 d5! is even stronger and leaves Black in a hopeless position.



One threat is 21 Re1 and 22 Bh6 (e.g. 22 ... Bxh6 23 Qxh6+ Ke7 24 Qg5+ Rf6 25 e5! dxe5 26 Qg7+ Rf7 27 Bxf7 Qxf7 28 Rxe5 and wins), while 20 ... Rf6 21 Qh7 Qg6 doesn't help due to 22 Qxg6 Rxg6 23 Rf1+ and White will win this one.

#16.

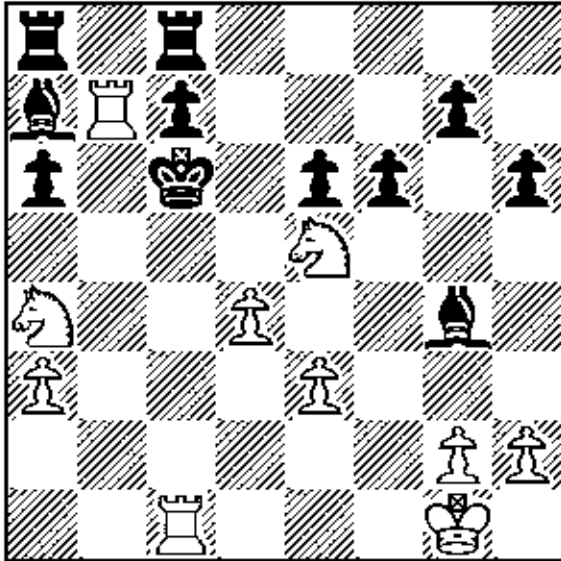
31 ... Rxf3! and 0-1,



since 32 Qxg5 Rxf2 threatens mate on f1 and leaves White no time to save his queen.

#17.

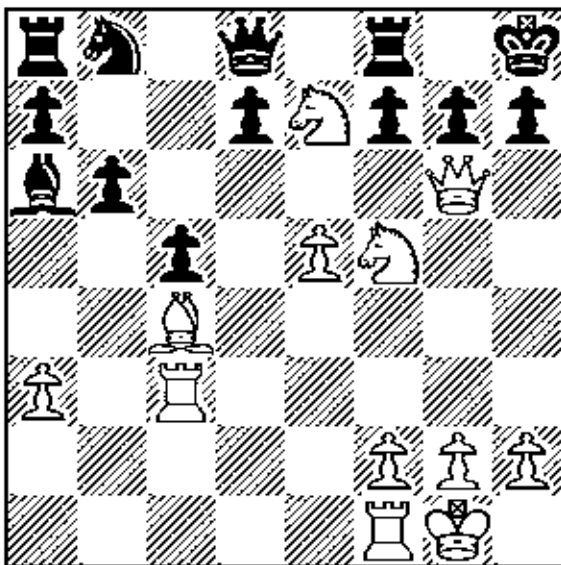
**27 Nc4+ Kxc6** (27 ... Kd5 is a sterner defence, but White should win after 28 Rxa7! Rxa7 29 Ncb6+ cxb6 30 Nxb6+ Ke4 31 Nxc8 Rc7 32 Nb6, since 32 ... Kxe3 fails to 33 d5 etc) **28 Ne5+!**



**28 ... Kxb7** (or 28 ... Kd6 29 Rc6+ Ke7 30 Rexc7+ and wins) **29 Rb1+ Bb6 30 Nc5+ Ka7 31 Nc6** mate.

#18.

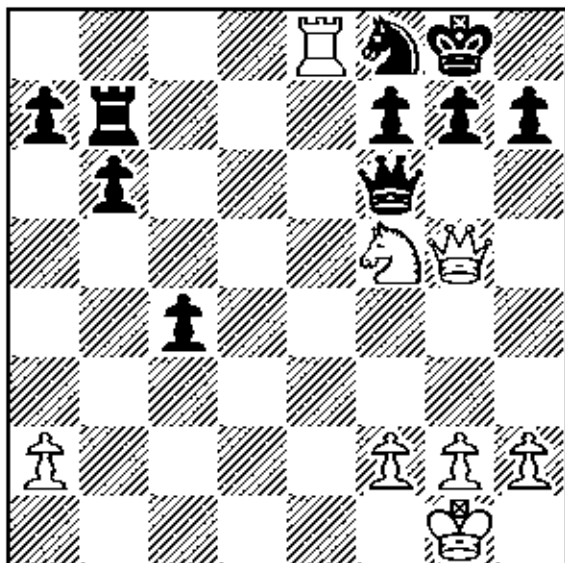
**20 Qg6!! 1-0.**



A lovely echo of the famous Levitzky-Marshall “gold coins” game. All lines lead to mate: 20 ... hxc6 21 Rh3 mate, or 20 ... fxc6 21 Nxc6+ hxc6 22 Rh3+ etc, or 20 ... Rg8 21 Qxh7+ Kxh7 22 Rh3 mate.

**#19.**

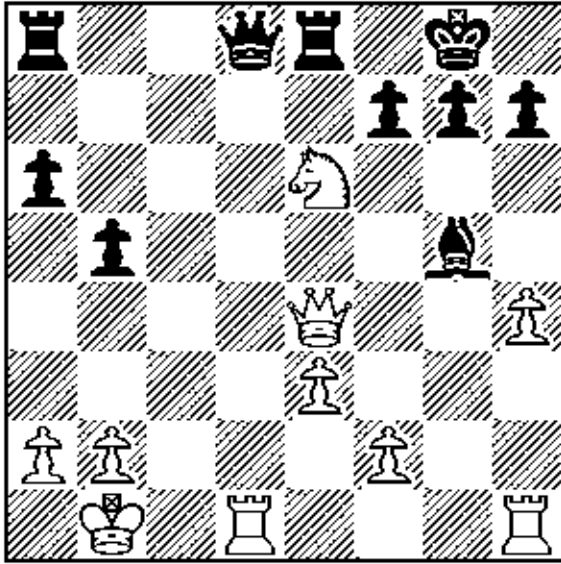
**22 ... Qxf6 23 Re8+ Nf8**



**24 Nh6+! Qxh6 25 Rxf8+ Kxf8 26 Qd8 mate** is the conclusion you will find in Alekhine’s *My Best Games 1924-37*, but contemporary newspaper cuttings show that Black actually recaptured with the pawn on move 22. This is one of those notorious cases of Alekhine substituting a prettier finish than occurred in reality.

**#20.**

Solving this fully requires very deep calculation and great tactical imagination. It seems that after **17 Nxe4 dxe4 18 Bxe4 Bxe4 19 Qxe4**, Black can regain the pawn with **19 ... Bxg5**, but then Alekhine unleashed a stunning “sting in the tail”: **20 Ne6!!**.



The game continued **20 ... Qe7 21 hxc5 h6** (Alekhine points out that 21 ... g6? runs into 22 Rxc7! Qxe6 23 Qh4 Qe4+ 24 Qxe4 Rxe4 25 Rdh1 and wins, while 22 ... Kxh7 23 Rh1+ Kg8 24 Qe5 f6 25 gxf6 Qf7 26 Qh2! leads to mate; and 21 ... Qxe6? 22 Qxh7+ Kf8 23 Qh8+ Ke7 24 Qxg7 also wins easily) **22 gxh6 Qxe6 23 Qd4!**, with the point that 23 ... gxh6 gives White a decisive attack: 24 Rdc1+ Kf8 25 Qg7+ Ke7 26 Rxc6 Qf5+ 27 e4! Qxe4 28 Ka1 and Black has no defence. Yates bailed out into a pawn-down ending after **23 ... Qe4+ 24 Qxe4 Rxe4 25 hxc7 Kxc7**, but still lost eventually.