

New York 1924

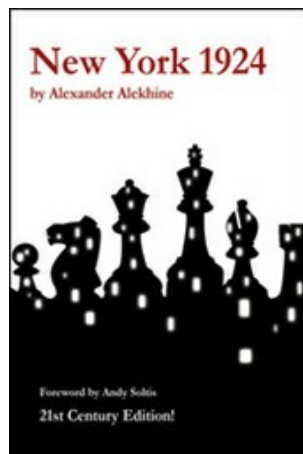
by Alexander Alekhine

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A Truly Extraordinary Tournament

One of the most remarkable and famous chess tournaments ever took place in New York City in March and April 1924. It had a narrative that is still striking today: Three world champions – undisputed world champions, mind you – fulfilling their destiny. The stunning performance of the 55-year-old former world champion Emanuel Lasker. The seemingly invincible reigning world champion José Capablanca suffering his first loss in eight years. And all 110 tournament games deeply annotated by future world champion Alexander Alekhine.

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“Modern readers, who habitually eschew anything old fashioned (regardless of content and value) will have no problems being inspired to study the fabulous games.” – From the review at MarshTowers.com.

New York 1924

by

Alexander Alekhine

Foreword by
Andy Soltis

21st Century Edition!



2016
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
Milford, CT USA

The Book of the New York International Chess Tournament 1924

by Alexander Alekhine
Edited by Hermann Helms
Foreword by Andy Soltis

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Foreword

We use “super-tournament” so much today that, as with “super-model,” “super-computer” and the like, its meaning has become, well, less than super. But New York 1924 was a super-tournament that was truly extraordinary.

This is not merely a question of strength. In today’s age of inflated ratings, there are events with a much higher category attached to their name. But they pass quickly out of our consciousness, and next year we’ll have a hard time remembering whether Bilbao 2008 was as strong as Dortmund 2008 or Sochi 2008 – or anything else about them.

New York 1924 was different. It had a narrative that is still striking today: Three world champions – undisputed world champions, mind you – fulfilling their destiny. Richard Réti unleashing his devastating “Opening of the Future,” 1 ♘f3!. The invincible José Capablanca suffering his first loss in eight years. The remarkable comeback of 46-year-old Frank Marshall and even more stunning performance of 55-year-old Emanuel Lasker.

This was a particularly fertile time of innovation, in chess and elsewhere. A month before the first round, George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* premiered, also in New York. During the course of the tournament, the first successful round-the-world air flights began, George Bernard Shaw’s *Saint Joan* debuted – and the first crossword puzzle book was published.

The chess of 1924 differs in many ways from that of today and the comparisons aren’t necessarily favorable to the present. Nowadays elite GMs compete with the help of computers, analytic entourages, managers, and lawyers. They are more leaders of a team than individuals. At New York 1924 the players didn’t even have seconds.

Nor did they have databases. They had to do their own research, with very few tools. Fifty years after the tournament Edward Lasker recalled how before each round he and Emanuel Lasker took a stroll through Central Park, a few blocks from the tournament site. The younger Lasker was stunned to learn that Emanuel had no knowledge of the Marshall Gambit in the Ruy Lopez. Marshall had sprung it on Capablanca *six years before*. But, Edward explained, that was “during the war, when of course no chess news crossed the Atlantic.”

Today we are struggling with the plague of “grandmaster draws.” Young GMs complain they have to make short draws because they can’t exert themselves every day in an exhausting twelve-round tournament. New York 1924 was twenty rounds and yet somehow these old-timers – their average age was 42 – managed to get by with few quick handshakes.

Today's GMs also complain that faster time controls don't leave them enough time to think. But they don't have to think – at least not until move fifteen or twenty or later – because Fritz prepares them for their next opponent the night before. At New York 1924 the players were on their own. They didn't even know what color they would have each day or who their opponent would be until a drawing was held fifteen minutes before their clocks were started. (This helps explain Réti's collapse in the tournament's second half. Due to luck of the drawing he had five Blacks in a row.)

Yet the tournament revolutionized opening theory, which had been more or less in stasis since World War I began ten years before. New York 1924 also rewrote endgame theory. When you see for the first time the 103-move battle between the two Laskers, when a king and knight survived against king, rook and pawn, it seems like magic. When you play over Capablanca vs. Tartakower, you quickly understand why it's the most famous rook endgame ever played. It's been reprinted so often that it seems like nothing new could be said about it. But in the 1990s the Russian magazine *64* began to look at it again and triggered a debate over when Black was lost. The debate is still going on.

The book that Alekhine produced was an instant hit and remained a hit. Even after it went out of print, only to resurface in the Dover paperback edition, it remained clearly the best tournament book in English for half a century, until challenged by the translation of David Bronstein's masterpiece in the mid-1970s.

If you've seen the original edition of New York 1924, with its clumsy note format, you can appreciate how much this edition improves on it. But you may not appreciate how the quality of Alekhine's notes stood out in the 1920s.

Some masters of that day annotated games with comments no more illuminating than "Also possible is 33 ♖e3." Alekhine provides real analysis, and with words, not just moves. He imbues the book with personality in contrast with the antiseptic notes of most tournament books written by world-class players, even the great Keres-Botvinnik book on the 1948 world championship.

On the one hand, Alekhine is ruthlessly objective, even with his own mistakes. On the other, he exudes some of Siegbert Tarrasch's poisonous sarcasm, such as when he shows how Réti, as white, finds himself on the defensive by the twelfth move of his game with Emanuel Lasker. "Rather a dubious outcome for the 'opening of the future!'" Alekhine writes. That was just a warm-up to his excellent treatment of one the greatest games ever played.

New York 1924 was indeed a super-tournament. And this is a book that should never have gone out of print.

Andy Soltis
New York
October 2008

Tenth Round

Losing a rook, but the position, of course, has long been hopeless. A game played by Réti without energy.

28 ♖xc6 ♜xc6

Also after 28...♖xc6, would follow 29 ♜d8.

29 ♜d8 ♜cc8 30 ♜g7+ ♜xg7 31 f×g7+ ♜g8 32 ♖e7+ 1-0

(47) *Marshall, F – Capablanca, J*
Queen's Pawn Opening [A48]

1 d4 ♖f6 2 ♖f3 g6 3 e3

This voluntary locking up of the queen's bishop is the source of all subsequent difficulties. Better here would be 3 ♖f4 or 3 c4, of course, with an entirely different plan of development.

3...♖g7 4 ♖bd2 b6 5 ♖c4

Merely giving the opponent a tempo in connection with the subsequent ...d5. Better, therefore, would have been 5 ♖d3.

5...0-0 6 ♜e2 c5

By means of this move Black gains the balance in the center, a feature characteristic of Réti's system.

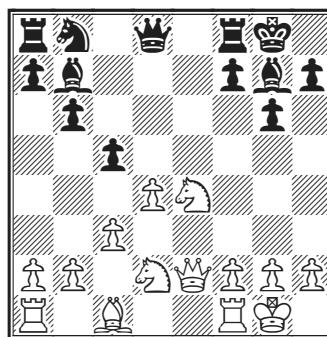
7 c3 ♖b7 8 0-0 d5

The same procedure (with the colors reversed and minus the tempo) was adopted successfully by Réti against Bogoljubow in a later round (see Game 58). Black obtains thereby a clear advantage.

9 ♖d3 ♖e4 10 ♖xex4

White (after so few moves!) has hardly any choice in his cramped position. Were Black to remain passive, the continuation for him would be ...♖d7, followed by ...e5.

10...d×e4 11 ♖g5 e5 12 ♖g×e4 exd4 13 exd4



13...♖a6

A somewhat artificial idea which deprives Black of the most of his superiority in position. Likewise 13...♜e8 would have yielded little after 14 ♜f3; but with the simple 13...cxd4 (whereupon 14 cxd4 was not feasible, on account of 14...♖a6 and ...♜d5), Black could have maintained a clear advantage in position. After the text move, this is changed into a small endgame superiority, which eventually turns out to be insufficient.

14 c4 ♜x×d4 15 ♜b1 ♖c6 16 b3 ♜ad8 17 ♖b2 ♜d3 18 ♜x×d3 ♜x×d3 19 ♖f3 ♖x×b2 20 ♜x×b2 f5 21 ♖eg5 ♜e8

Black has reached the goal for which he strove with his thirteenth move; he

occupies the open files and the prospects for action on the part of the white knights are very slight. Marshall, however, defends himself very cleverly from now on.

22 ♖h3

22...h6, followed by ...g5, was threatening.

22...♗b7 23 ♖f4 ♖d6 24 ♖d5 ♖e7

To be considered also was 24...♖e5 25 ♖xe5 ♗xd5, leaving White merely a choice between two unfavorable rook endings: 26 ♖xg6 ♗xc4 27 bxc4 h×g6; or 26 ♖f3 ♗xf3 27 gxf3 ♖d3 28 ♖g2 f4, followed by 29...g5. But the text move also leads to a serious deterioration of White's pawn position.

25 ♖c7

The best at his disposal.

25...♖ed8 26 ♖e2 ♖6d7 27 ♖e6 ♗xf3 28 gxf3 ♖d2 29 ♖fe1 ♖xe2 30 ♖xe2 ♖d7

Now Black threatens to reinforce his position by means of ...♖c6, which White prevents in surprising fashion. The subsequent ending is very instructive.

31 ♖d8 ♖f8 32 ♖e6+ ♖f7 33 ♖g5+ ♖g7 34 ♖e6+ ♖f6 35 ♖g2 h6

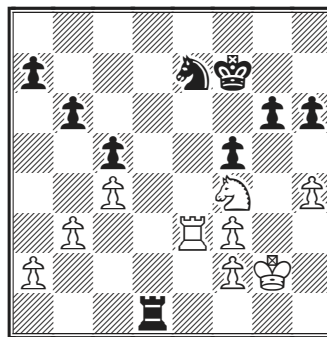
Now the effectiveness of Black's move, ...♖c6, is somewhat diminished, because the white knight, after ♖f4, would threaten to occupy d5 with the gain of a

tempo. Evidently this was the idea underlying the move of 31 ♖d8.

36 h4

In order to rid himself of the annoying doubled pawns after 36...g5 37 h×g5+ h×g5 38 f4 g4 39 ♖g5, followed by f3.

36...♖f7 37 ♖f4 ♖d1 38 ♖e3



White is practically forced to make this pawn sacrifice, which offers some counterplay, on account of the threatened entrance of the black knight. If for instance, 38 ♖g3, then 38...♖c6 39 ♖e6 ♖d4 40 ♖xg6 ♖e2+ and wins.

38...♖d4 39 ♖d3

Not 39 ♖g3, on account of 39...g5.

39...♖xh4 40 ♖e5+ ♖f8

In consequence of the transfer of the king to the queenside, which he now contemplates, Capablanca deprives himself of his last opportunity to win. If victory were attainable at all, it would have been possible only through 40...♖g7 and, if 41 ♖d3 (41 ♖d7 ♖g8, followed by ...♖d4) then 41...♖f6 42 f4 g5. After the removal of the king, the white rook finds a bit of welcome booty on the king's wing.

Tenth Round

41 ♖d7+ ♜e8 42 ♜e5 ♜d8 43 ♜f7+ ♜d7 44 ♜e5+ ♜c7 45 ♜f7 ♜c6

There was still time, by means of ...♜d7-d8-e8-f8-f7-g7, to continue along the line indicated above.

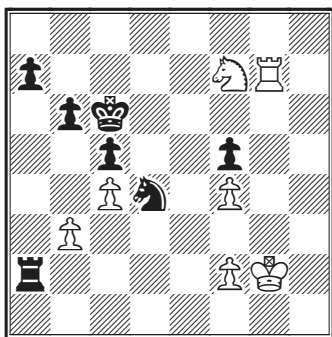
46 ♜e6

By this means the balance of material is restored.

46...♜d4 47 ♜xg6 ♜d2 48 f4

Marshall actually appears willing to play for a win; otherwise he might have achieved an easy draw through the simple 48 ♜xh6, for instance: 48...♜d4 (or 48...♜xg6 49 ♜xf5 ♜d4 50 ♜xd4 cxd4 51 ♜g5 and ♜d5) 49 ♜g7+ ♜b8 50 ♜f7 ♜xa2 51 ♜d6 ♜xb3 52 ♜b7+ ♜a8 53 ♜g7 a5 54 ♜g8+ ♜a7 55 ♜g7+ ♜a6 56 ♜g8.

48...♜xa2 49 ♜g7 ♜d4 50 ♜xh6+ ♜c6 51 ♜f7



51...♜d7

Neat would have been 51...♜e6 52 ♜e5+ ♜d6 53 ♜d7#. If 51...♜xb3, then White forces a draw immediately by means of 52 ♜d8+ ♜d6 53 ♜f7

(threatening perpetual check), for, after 53...b5 54 ♜b7+ ♜c6 55 ♜d8+ ♜b6 (?), the black rook would be won after 56 ♜b7+ ♜a6 57 cxb5+.

52 ♜e5+ ♜e6 53 ♜g6+ ♜e7 54 ♜g7+ ♜f8 55 ♜b7 ♜xb3

Clearly there is no other way in which to strengthen his position. Now, however, White's f-pawn takes an important part in the discussion, thereby bringing to naught the adversary's chances on the opposite wing.

56 ♜f7+ ♜e8 57 ♜xf5 ♜d2

Likewise, if 57...a5 58 ♜h5, threatening f5-f6.

58 ♜h5 ♜c2 59 ♜h8+

Still better would have been 59 f5 at once.

59...♜e7 60 f5

This, too, accomplishes it, for, if now 60...♜xc4 61 ♜g4 ♜d6 62 ♜h7+ ♜f8 (or 62...♜e8 63 ♜f6+, etc.) 63 ♜h6!, followed by f6, with a sure draw.

60...♜e4 61 ♜f3 ♜d6 62 ♜h7+ ♜f6 63 ♜g4+ ♜xf5 64 ♜e3+ ♜g6 65 ♜xa7 ♜c3 66 ♜a6 ½-½

The simplest, for, if 66...♜xc4 67 ♜e2, and Black cannot save his b-pawn.

(48) *Lasker, Ed. – Alekhine, A*
Ruy Lopez [C78]

1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♜b5 a6 4 ♜a4 ♜f6 5 0-0 ♜c5

This defense, which was recommended by Danish master J. Möller at the beginning of the century, has been closely examined during the last few years by the player of the black pieces and repeatedly made use of, not without success.

6 d3

This tame reply cannot be regarded either as a refutation of 5...♘c5 or even as an attempt at it. The following lines of play, which lead to a game difficult to handle on both sides, deserve a further practical examination: (I) 6 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 7 d4 ♖xe4 8 ♕e2 (or 8 ♖e1) 8...♙e7 9 ♗xe4 ♖g6, followed by ...0-0; (II) 6 c3 ♙a7! 7 d4 ♖xe4 8 ♕e2 f5 9 dxe5 0-0.

6...♗e7

As a matter of course the only correct continuation here is 6...b5 7 ♘b3 d6, which promises Black fair equalization. The move of the queen really should not have been considered at all, because of the possibility of the development of the white queen's knight. Now White obtains a superior game for some time to come.

7 ♖c3

Threatening 8 ♙g5 as well as 8 ♖d5 ♖xd5 9 exd5. Black's answer, therefore, is almost forced.

7...♖d4 8 ♖xd4 ♙xd4 9 ♖e2

This maneuver with the knight, which forces a considerable weakening of the black kingside, looks very promising and in fact retains the advantage. But

even the simpler 9 ♖h1 b5 10 ♘b3 d6 11 f4 would have been unpleasant enough for Black.

9...♙a7 10 ♖g3 g6

At any rate more passable than 10...b5 11 ♖f5 ♗f8 12 ♘b3 d6 13 ♗f3.

11 ♙h6

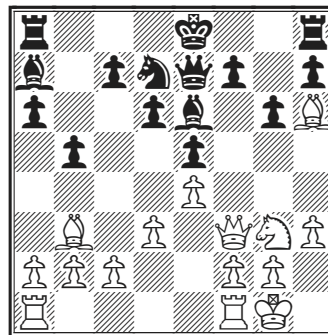
Not only preventing ...0-0, but also ...h6 (or ...h5), and threatening ♗f3, followed by ♙g5 (g7). There is only one defense against it.

11...b5 12 ♘b3 d6 13 h3

Otherwise 13...♖g4.

13...♙e6 14 ♗f3 ♖d7

Just at the right time! It almost seems as though Black had overcome the worst; White's next move, however, revives the attack.



15 ♖f5

This pretty exchange combination, which Black could not very well prevent, should result, if properly continued, in a clear positional advantage for White.

Tenth Round

15...gxf5 16 exf5 d5

The only move which holds the position. Quite without prospect would have been 16...e4 17 ♖xe4 d5 18 ♙xd5 ♜f6 19 ♙c6+ ♜d8 20 ♖f3; and also 16...0-0-0 17 ♖a8+ ♙b8 18 ♖xa6# was hardly worth striving for.

17 fxe6 fxe6 18 ♙e3

Until now White had played quite excellently, but here he lets down noticeably. Correct would have been 18 c4!, for instance: 18...c6 19 cxd5 cxd5 20 ♖ac1 ♖f7 (Black had nothing better: if 20...♖h4, for instance, the sacrifice of the bishop on d5 is too strong) 21 ♖xf7+ ♜xf7 22 ♖c7 ♜e7 23 ♖fc1 (23 ♙g7 ♙b6) 23...♖hg8 24 ♙d2!, and Black could then, to be sure, defend himself with difficulty and stress (24...♙b6), but White's advantage all the same would be evident. After the unnecessary retreat of the bishop, on the other hand, he little by little is placed at a disadvantage.

18...♖f8 19 ♖h5+

White cannot very well avoid the exchange of queens, for otherwise Black, with 19...♖f7, followed by ...♖g8, would obtain good counterplay on the open lines.

19...♖f7 20 ♖xf7+ ♖xf7 21 c3 ♜e7

It would have been a mistake here (and also subsequently) to play 21...c5, inasmuch as White, with 22 c4!, would have blocked the hostile bishop and, after 22...bxc4 23 dxc4 d4 24 ♙d2, followed by ♙c2, would have gained

the advantage through the co-operation of his bishops in spite of Black's passed pawns.

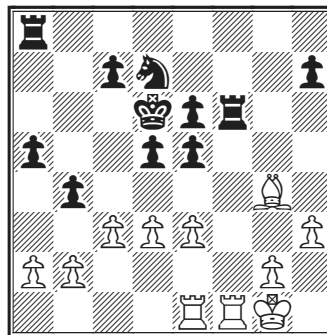
22 ♖ae1 a5 23 ♙d1 ♜d6 24 ♙h5

Likewise 24 ♙g4 at once would have changed the situation but little, for, after 24...♙f6 25 ♙f3 ♙xe3 26 fxe3 c5 (27 g4 ♖g8), Black would have stood very well.

24...♖f6 25 ♙g4 ♙xe3

Now the time has arrived for the exchange, for Black cannot strengthen his position otherwise.

26 fxe3 b4



Herewith is prepared the subsequent complicated pawn sacrifice. Another more promising plan would have been the blocking of the doubled pawn with 26...c5 in order, after 27 e4!, to continue with 27...d4. After 28 cxd4 ♖xf1+ 29 ♖xf1 exd4, Black would have obtained the advantage through possession of the e5-square, and through the penetration of his king after 28 ♖xf6 ♙xf6 29 cxd4 ♙xg4 30 dxc5+ ♜xc5 31 hxg4 ♜d4. Otherwise, however, he would have threatened eventually to establish a passed pawn on the extreme queen's