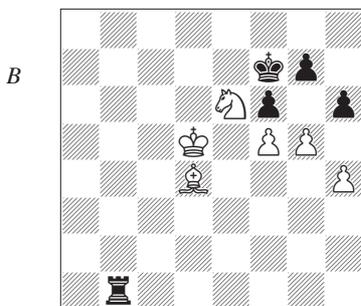


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75...♔g8 76 ♖e6 ♜d1!

With White down to his last pawn, the king and pawn ending arising after 77 ♗xg7 ♜xd4+ 78 ♔xd4 ♔xg7 is an easy draw.

77 ♔e4 ♔f7 78 ♗g5+

If 78 ♔xg7, then 78...♜e1+ 79 ♔d5 ♜f1 80 ♔e5 ♜e1+, etc. The momentary dislocation of White's minor pieces is enough to allow Black a perpetual attack by the rook.

Capablanca tried to squeeze a little bit more, but with no success.

78...♔g8 79 ♔e5 ♜e1+ 80 ♔f4 ♜f1+ 81 ♔g4 ♜d1 82 ♗f3 ♜f1 83 ♔e5 ♔f7 84 ♔f4 ♔g8 85 ♔e4 ♜d1 86 ♗g5 ♜e1+ 87 ♔d5 ♜d1+ 88 ♔e6 ♜e1 89 ♗h3 ♜b1 90 ♗f4 ♜b6+ 91 ♔e7 ♜b5 92 ♗g6 ♜b6 93 ♔d6 ♜a6 94 ♔e6 ♜b6 95 ♗e7+ ♔h7 96 ♗c8 ♜a6 97 ♗e7 ♜b6 98 ♗d5 ♜a6 99 ♗c3 ♔g8 100 ♗e4 ♜b6 1/2-1/2

## Game L8

### Alekhine – Lasker

*New York 1924*

Queen's Gambit, Exchange Variation

Capablanca's reputation for invincibility was at its peak in the early 1920s. He had lost only eight serious games in his rise to the World Championship – a remarkable statistic which Botvinnik later acknowledged as a major inspiration to him. Capa, at the beginning of the great New York tournament in 1924, had not lost a game since 1916, and had played an entire World Championship match with Lasker without losing a single game, and without ever looking like losing one. When he lost a game at New York, to Réti, it was sensational news, and not just in the chess press either.

It was not Capablanca who won the New York tournament though, nor

even his successor as World Champion, Alekhine, nor Marshall, Réti, Maroczy or Bogoljubow. Rather, it was Lasker, generally regarded as a fading force, who scored a stunning 16/20 in a strong double-round tournament, ahead of Capablanca (14½), Alekhine (12), etc. This was the sort of dominance that Lasker was achieving in the late 1890s, with the big difference that Capablanca and Alekhine were a whole generation more advanced in knowledge and technique than even the best players of the 1890s. Also, from the sporting point of view, we must remember that Lasker was no longer in his late twenties, but rather in his mid-fifties! As the

standard of play around him improved, Lasker's play improved too. The gains made by the use of intelligent observation at least matched the concessions due to advancing years.

Lasker being Lasker, there was inevitably a certain amount of mischief-making from poor positions at New York, but we shall not dwell on this aspect. Rather, we look at a superlative piece of chess judo against Alekhine, where Lasker uses the momentum of his opponent's attack to bring about its downfall. Lasker advances his bishop, then on the next move retreats it to its original square; Alekhine meanwhile has been induced to advance a pawn which may never retreat again. The punishment is swift.

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♗f3 ♗bd7**

Probably played with the intention of entering the Cambridge Springs Variation if White played 5 ♗g5; Lasker's game as Black with his namesake Edward Lasker continued 5...c6 6 e3 ♗a5! (more aggressive than the standard 6...♗e7) 7 ♗d2 ♗b4 8 ♗c2 ♗e4 9 ♗dx4 dx4 10 ♗f4 0-0 11 ♗e2 e5 12 dx5 ♗xe5 13 0-0 ♗xc3 14 ♗xc3 ♗xc3 15 bxc3 ♗e8 and Emanuel later won the endgame.

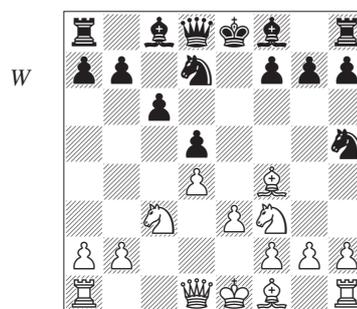
Nowadays, the Semi-Slav with 4...c6 is a popular option, and if 5 ♗g5, then 5...dxc4!? 6 e4 b5 7 e5 h6 8 ♗h4 g5 9 ♗xg5 hxg5 10 ♗xg5, the wildly complicated Botvinnik Variation. The closest approach at New York was Janowski-Tartakower, which continued 5...h6 6 ♗h4 (6 ♗xf6 is normal) 6...dxc4 7 e3?! (too slow; 7 e4 is unclear) 7...b5 8 ♗e2 ♗bd7 9 a4 ♗b6 10

0-0 ♗b4 and Black had gained a solid extra pawn.

**5 cxd5 exd5 6 ♗f4**

In *The Queen's Gambit Declined: 5 ♗f4!*, I briefly discussed this move-order, and suggested 6 ♗c2 c6 7 g3!?. The problem with an early ♗f4 here is that Black has not yet committed his king's bishop, and might well be able to find it a more aggressive square than e7.

**6...c6 7 e3 ♗h5! (D)**



Excellent timing by Lasker. Forcing this exchange is nothing special if Black has already played ...♗e7, but the fact that Black will still have the option of playing ...♗d6 without loss of tempo makes a difference.

**8 ♗d3?!**

In the tournament book, Alekhine recommended 8 ♗e5, with the idea of provoking 8...f6?!. The simple 8...♗xe5 9 dx5 g6 is satisfactory for Black however.

8 ♗g3 is the natural and obvious move, and after, for example, 8...g6 9 ♗d3 ♗xg3 10 hxg3 ♗g7 Black has a reasonable enough game. *ECO* then suggests that White can aim for a minority attack on the queenside with 11

b4. Whether or not one agrees with *ECO* that White is slightly better, it is indisputable that the minority attack has better chances of success when the d-pawn is securely protected than when the e3-pawn has veered off to f4.

**8...♞xf4 9 exf4 ♙d6**

Black must react vigorously in this type of position, since, as Rubinstein showed, White can gain considerable pressure if allowed to consolidate. Thus 9...♙e7?! 10 0-0 should favour White; the grip the pawns provide on the central dark squares fully compensate for the surrender of the dark-squared bishop, and the plan would be to extend the grip on the dark squares with ♞e5, g3, h4, ♞e1, etc. Once the 'Rubinstein bind' has been achieved, Black has problems.

9...♞e7+ 10 ♔f1! leaves Black in a tangle on the e-file. 10...♞f6 11 ♞e2+ ♙e7 12 ♞e1 ♞b6 13 h3 ♙d7 14 g4 ♞c8 15 f5 will force Black to play accurately to survive. The defence is not a prospectless chore, however, as Black has assets for the long term if he can hold his game together for a few moves. Not many players would want to take the task on.

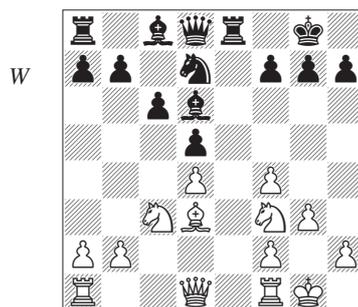
**10 g3?!**

This allows Black to complete his development in safety. Alekhine suggested 10 ♞e5, giving 10...♞h4 11 g3 ♞h3 12 ♞c2 in the tournament book. The queen manoeuvre looks suspiciously decentralizing however, and White will be happy enough castling queenside now that Black has spent a lot of time preventing him from castling kingside.

There is no swift path to equality after 10 ♞e5, but Black has reasonable

long-term prospects if he buckles down to defence with 10...0-0 11 0-0 g6 followed by ...♞e8 and ...♞f8. It is a curious paradox that the safest pawn formation in front of the king involves weakening himself on the dark squares, on which White is hoping to create his bind. The point is, however, that White can only *occupy* the dark squares; his *lines of attack* are along the light squares. Landing pawns on the light squares blocks these lines of attack. Black is well advised to build the barrier promptly; if 11...♞e8?!, then 12 ♙xh7+ ♔xh7 13 ♞xf7 ♞f6 14 ♞xd6 ♞xd6 15 ♞h5+, and White wins material.

**10...0-0 11 0-0 ♞e8 (D)**



**12 ♞c2?!**

White's play over the next few moves appears a little disjointed. Black's knight is coming to f8 anyway to protect h7, and *once h7 is adequately protected against attack, there is no point in attacking it.*

Instead of attempting the hopeless task of winning on the light squares, White should be concentrating on gaining ground on the dark squares, a more modest and more achievable

task. 12 ♖b1 comes to mind, using the temporary weakness on h7 to gain a tempo for the preparation of b4. Then 12...♗f8 13 b4 ♕g4, and if 14 ♘e5, not 14...♕h5?! 15 b5 f6 16 bxc6! fxe5 17 cxb7 ♜b8 18 fxe5, when the pawns outweigh Black's extra piece. Instead, 14...♕xe5! 15 dxe5 (15 fxe5 ♖b6 wins the d4-pawn) leaves Black with a protected passed d-pawn, making a mockery of White's attempt to improve his pawn-structure.

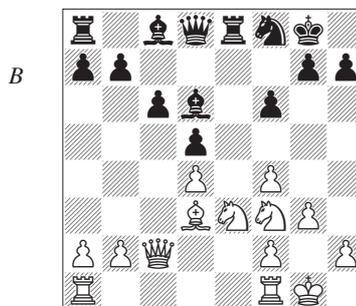
So even 12 ♖b1?! must be abandoned. White has to keep a tight formation, concentrating on central security rather than on any ambitious plan of expansion on the queenside. 12 ♖d2 is a solid option, keeping an eye on both the b- and d-pawns. White then may challenge rooks on the e-file, leaving various possible plans for redeployment of his minor pieces. The option of ♘e5 will best be kept for when Black plays ...♕g4, while ♘h4 could be a useful response to ...f6. White could also think about the re-fianchetto of his bishop. The main battle lies ahead.

#### 12...♗f8 13 ♘d1?!

Alekhine seems determined to play for a kingside attack, come what may. A few moves later, when it becomes clear that this plan will be fruitless, he is equally eager to attack on the queenside. All that results is that his pieces are drawn further out of position. There is, for example, no reason to think the knight will be better placed on e3 than on c3, and there is even less reason to spend a couple of moves getting it there. Challenging on the e-file with 13 ♜fe1 is still sensible.

#### 13...f6 14 ♘e3 (D)

#### 14...♕e6!



Taking the opportunity to bring the bishop round to its ideal defensive square f7. This, strangely, is the first of six consecutive moves by the two black bishops. The other bishop is going round to b6 to add pressure to the d-pawn. What is remarkable in this game is the way in which the defender runs circles round the attacker just by manoeuvring quietly in his own half. Possibly Alekhine did not appreciate the danger to his position until it was too late.

#### 15 ♘h4?!

Another decentralizing move, which is not quite powerful enough to be called an attacking move. Any extra pressure on f5 is counteracted by the weakening of the d-pawn. Alekhine suggests 15 ♜fd1 ♕f7 16 ♘f5. Another approach is to play the knight on f3 to the other side of the board with 15 ♘d2!?, and then possibly ♘b3-c5.

Black's slight weakness on the kingside is not serious enough to be destroyed by direct attack. White should remain content that Black's pieces are tied down by the need to protect h7, and should seek to create and exploit weaknesses elsewhere; the 'principle of two weaknesses'.