

History

A.P. Kazantsev (1906-2002)

ALAIN PALLIER

Among the great names of Russian (or Soviet) chess composition, Aleksandr Petrovich Kazantsev is in a class of his own. To be convinced about this, read again his obituary written by John Roycroft in EG147 (i2003). Today, a lot is known about Kazantsev's life, because he was a semi-public and popular personality of Soviet literature. Our Russian speaking readers will read with interest his numerous interviews (see <http://akazantsev.ru>: no less than 25 from 1981 till 2002).

A.P. Kazantsev was born on 9ii1906 in Siberia, in Akmolinsk (later Tselinograd, today Astana, Kazakhstan). He received a technical education and first was a stenographer. In 1930, he graduated from the Tomsk Technological Institute as a mechanical engineer. Then he was appointed head engineer at the Beloretsky Metallurgical Plant in the Ural, before moving and being promoted to Moscow in a Soviet Research Institute for electromechanics.

In 1939, he stayed for some weeks in the USA. He led the Soviet delegation that had to set up the Soviet pavilion in the New York World's Fair. He came back to the USSR just before the outbreak of WWII. In 1941, when Hitler declared war on the USSR, he was a simple soldier but his imaginative brain made him a careful man and he rejoined a defence complex becoming chief engineer.

Ten years before, his idea of an electric gun that could allow intercontinental firing had been supported by two influential Bolsheviks,

G. Ordzhonikidze and M. Tukhachevsky⁽¹⁾. With Andronik Iosifyan, called the father of satellites and missiles in the USSR, he invented small electric self propelled wire-controlled tanks ('tankettes-torpedos') supposed to jump out from the front gates of buildings and blow up German tanks. Kazantsev left the army in 1945 holding the rank of colonel and, from then, gave all his energies to his new career as a writer. At the same time, he settled in Peredelkino, 20 km south-west of Moscow, a dacha complex, sometimes called a 'colony' (other have said 'ghetto') for writers protected by the Soviet regime. Today, more bankers than writers live there ...

Kazantsev came to literature by the end of the thirties when he won a contest for the best screenplay with *Arenida*, written with Iosif Shapiro, the director of the Leningrad House of Scientists. The movie was never shot but the script was reworked as a novel and became his first book, *Burning Island* (*Пылающий остров*). It was published in 1939-1940 in the periodical *Pionerskaya Pravda*. After WWII, his short story *Взрыв*, (1946; in English: *The Blast*), brought him fame in the USSR and also abroad. As a Siberian, since his childhood, Kazantsev has been familiar with the mystery of the Tunguska explosion that occurred on 30vi1908. In an isolated region of Siberia (Krasnoiarsk krai), a powerful explosion devastated a large forest area: 60 million trees burnt. It is estimated that the blast was 1,000 times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Ka-

(1) Ordzhonikidze, who allegedly died from a heart attack in February 1937, was commissar of Soviet heavy industry; Tukhachevsky, Marshal of the Soviet Union from 1935, was one of the most prominent victims of the great purge and was executed vi1937.

zantsev was unsatisfied with the classical explanations that were given (meteoroid, comet) and, after seeing the effect of the first atomic explosions in Japan, he imagined that a nuclear-powered Martian spaceship trying to land on the earth in order to steal water from Lake Baikal had blown up in mid-air. That fiction by Kazantsev was sometimes taken seriously. In 1963 he developed his idea into a book, a work of non-fiction. This theory has received dozens, if not hundreds of treatments over the last sixty years⁽¹⁾. For that, Kazantsev is considered the father of Russian ufology. He considered that mythologies recounted in a distorted form the visits on earth of extra-terrestrials beings. That controversial theory of *paleocontacts* was popularized in the 50's and in the 60's in the West, Kazantsev was no less than one of its pioneers. With *The Blast*, Kazantsev had made his mark.

During the sixties, he – and other writers of the same generation – became a little bit old-fashioned and overshadowed by new rising talents like the Strugatsky brothers, but the Brehznev years brought him his popularity back. Kazantsev wrote at least 25 novels, many short stories but, as for his study output, it is sometimes difficult to count them. Some of his books cannot be easily classified, since they sometimes mix fiction with a scientific approach (Kazantsev's credo was: «No science without fiction»). The writer never was far from the engineer: in one of his novels, Kazantsev is said to have anticipated the *Lunokhod moonwalker*, the first remote-controlled robot to land on the moon in 1970. In the last twenty years of his life, he also wrote historical novels.

With the passing of time, what is his exact place in Soviet science fiction? For Jacques Bergier, who introduced him in France, he was the 'Russian Van Vogt'. Other have a more severe opinion on his work: Pierre Versins, the author of a monumental *Encyclopédie de l'utopie, des voyages extraordinaires et de la science-fiction*, wrote that 'Kazantsev, like A. E. Van Vogt, has a so muddled spirit that one has difficulty making sense of what he writes ...' The same confesses that 'some amateurs find this awkwardness genial'.

When preparing this article, I have read one of Kazantsev's novels translated in French (his books were widely disseminated since they were translated in no less than 25 languages, although only a few of these novels, three or four, have been translated). This novel is *Phaéna, l'effondrement d'un monde*⁽²⁾. Of course, it is difficult to judge the qualities of an author from a single book, moreover poorly translated, but I have not found the inventiveness I was expecting from him. On the contrary, I found stereotyped situations and characters without profundity. The plot was easily foreseeable⁽³⁾ and the style was rather flat. Of course, the pacifist message of the book cannot be contested but that is not sufficient for a good book. A French critic once said that this book was 'teenage literature' and I am afraid that I have to agree with him. At the same time, I read another Russian novel, *Roadside Picnic* (*Пикник на обочине*, 1971) by the Strugatsky brothers and there I found many other qualities. The problem is that APK himself declared that his trilogy was his favourite among his works ... It would be inter-

(1) On Wikipedia, a notice about a Tunguska event in popular culture (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunguska_event_in_popular_culture) lists the many occurrences of the event in literature, movies, cartoons etc. At the beginning of XXIst century the Tunguska event remains a source of inspiration: see Vladimir Sorokin's *Trilogy* (2002-2005): *Ice*, *Bro's Way* and *23000*, three fascinating novels by a great Russian author.

(2) In English: *The Destruction of Phaena*. The English translation can be found on http://lib.ru/RUFANT/KAZANCEW/kazantsev_faety-engl.txt. It is part of a trilogy (in Russian, *Фаеты*, *The Faetians*, 1972-74).

(3) Wikipedia presents this book as follows: «*Phaetae* is based on the popular hypothesis of Phaeton, a planet that some believe has existed on the site of modern asteroid belt. According to the novel, Phaeton was inhabited by the developed civilisation of the *phaetae* race, who survived the destruction of their planet and brought some of their culture to the prehistorical people of Earth ».

esting to know the opinion of Russian readers who are familiar with his novels in Russian.

It seems that he had no problems with the Soviet regime: his writings were in accordance with the Soviet line. He was a member of the *Molodaya Gvardia* school, the publishing house that belonged to the Central Committee of the Soviet Young Communist League, the Komsomol. Until the end of his life he was a fervent communist. In a 2000 interview, his comments about Gorbachev left little doubts about his politic opinions. The critic Roman Arbitman, in an article about Soviet science fiction written for the *Ural Pathfinder* magazine, wrote that Kazantsev took an active part in the campaign against Boris Pasternak, his Peredelkino neighbour.



Anyway, Kazantsev was a popular writer and in 1981 he was awarded the first *Aelita Prize*, for ‘life achievement’ (he shared it with the Strugatsky brothers, who got it for a novel). What can be drawn from his interviews is

that he had a long and rich life: he had been married three times and had five children. In 1979-80 he wrote a first autobiography (*the Dotted Line of Memories*, in Russian: *Пунктур воспоминаний*) that was published in 1981 and twenty years later a biographical novel (*Фантасм*, *Phantast*), with his son Nikita. In the first one (the second one I have not seen) curiously only a little space has been devoted to chess composition. Kazantsev mentions his chess activity in chapter 9: there are only two paragraphs about this topic, that follow a paragraph devoted to another facet of this multi-talented man (Kazantsev was also a composer of music, he wrote libretti for operas and composed ballades and a piano concerto that were performed by the Bolshoi orchestra).

The only problem is that Kazantsev, one of the most admired study composers, is also one of the most demolished composers. No less than two thirds of his studies are incorrect; even worse, in some cases there are several flaws – a dual, a cook and a bust in a single composition, as already shown by Stephen Rothwell (*EBUR* ix2006).

Kazantsev’s fame comes from the extraordinary climax of some of his masterpieces, picture mates with a single white man (bishop, pawn) mating a black king as a victim of self-blocks, incredible stalemate pictures with immured and pinned men, or for his ability in using knights, often promoted ones. O. Pervakov and N. Kralin explain in their tribute to Kazantsev (*ZyE* v2003) that the composer had only a little time to devote to chess composition because of his professional work to which he was devoting all his energy. Some figures help to understand what is unique with Kazantsev: two thirds of his output is made up of versions and/or corrections. One quickly gets lost in the maze of these compositions and I am not sure that Kazantsev himself could find his way in it! If we except one or two masterpieces whose initial version was the right one, all the others proved incorrect and had to be reworked, sometimes 5 or 6 times, even 8 or 10 times. Take his more famous masterpieces

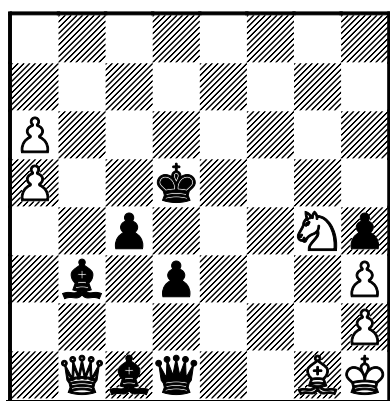
and you will count a total of 67 versions/corrections.

The story that follows is symptomatic. Since years, I was puzzled by two studies reproduced in EG90, p 302. We read that a Kazantsev study that was ‘top ranked’ (1/2nd prize shared) in the provisional award of the Zolotoie Runo (Golden Fleece) 1986 tourney had been disqualified ‘because of publication elsewhere during the judging period’.

I asked AJR if could give me more details: he answered that an article in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* xii1986 written by Yuri Averbakh had reproduced no. 6602a, without mentioning the source. Apparently the Georgian judges discovered that 6602 was a version of 6602a and therefore could not be considered as an original entry. No. 6602a was in fact a well-known ... 1954 study! And the comment that follows the solution in EG90 (“The composer had worked on this for over a quarter of century”) was more or less the same as the comment that followed the 1954 study the Soviet anthology (*Sovietsky shakhmatny etyud*), published in 1955 and, for the chapter about Kazantsev, written by the composer himself!

Let’s begin with about no. 6602a :

P.1. A.P. Kazantsev
4th prize *SVTVS* 1954



h1d5 4071.43 8/7 Draw

1.Kg2 (1.Se3+? Bxe3 2.Qxd1 Bxd1 3.Bxe3 Bf3+ 4.Kg1 c3 5.a7 Kc4 6.Kf2 d2 7.Bxd2 cxd2 8.a8Q Bxa8 9.Ke2 Ke3 wins) **1...Qd2+** **2.Bf2 Kc6** **3.a7 Kb7** **4.a6+ Ka8** **5.Qa1 Bb2** **6.Qh1 Qd1** **7.Bg1 Qe2+** **8.Sf2** draw (e.g. 8...d2 stalemate) – White doesn’t fear 8...Qe1 since if 9.Kf3 d2 10.Kf4+ and White wins.

Of course, a fantastic study with an original stalemate picture that cannot be forgotten but such studies are especially difficult to compose and several cooks have been reported:

1...Kc6! wins for Black. But after **2.Se5+ Kc7**, White has **3.a7!** (and not, as given, **3.Sxc4 Qe2+** **4.Bf2 Qe4+** **5.Kg1 Qxc4** and Black wins) **3...Kb7** **4.Bf2 Bg5** **5.Qxd1 Bxd1** **6.Sxc4 d2** **7.Sxd2 Bxd2** **8.Bxh4** draws, or **4...Qc2** **5.Qa1 Be3** **6.Sg4 Bxf2** **7.Qg7+ Ka8** **8.Sxf2 Ba4!** (8...d2?? **9.a6** wins) **9.Qc7!** and White draws.

6...Qc1! found by Zoilo Caputto, but this line had already been analyzed in the 1955 Soviet anthology (*Sovietsky shakhmatny etyud*), with the answer **7.Be1!** (and not Caputto’s move **7.Bg1**) with a draw: **7...Kxa7** **8.Kf1 Qf4+** **9.Bf2+ Kxa6** **10.Qc6+ Ka5** **11.Se3!** **c3** **12.Qc5+ Ka4** **13.Qa7+ Kb5** **14.Qb7+ Ka5** **15.Qa7+ Kb4** **16.Qe7+** or **11...Qxh2** **12.Sxc4+ Bxc4** **13.Qc5+**.

A third cook (64 v1998) had been proposed by Kazantsev himself: **7...Qe1!** **8.Kf3 Bc1** **9.Sf2 Bd1+** **10.Kg2 c3!** winning (there is even a quicker win : **10...Be2!** followed by mate) but here **9.Se3!** clearly a better move that saves White. What is the difference? After **9...Kxa7** (**9...Bd1+?** is no longer effective: **10.Kf4+** and White mates) **10.Kg4!** (**10.Ke4?** or **10.Kf4?** **Kxa6** wins) **10...Kxa6** (**Qe2+**; **Kxh4**) **11.Qa8+ Kb5** **12.Qe8+** drawing by perpetual check because here, with **wSe3** instead of **wSf2**, **12...Kb4??**, losing the queen, is not possible.

So, did the 1954 study eventually become correct? Alas not, since the indefatigable cook-hunter Mario García has recently found an organic **dual**: **5.Se3!** **Qa5** **6.Qxc1 d2** **7.Qb1 Qg5+** **8.Kf1 Qxe3** **9.Bxe3 d1Q** **10.Qd1 Bxd1** stalemate.

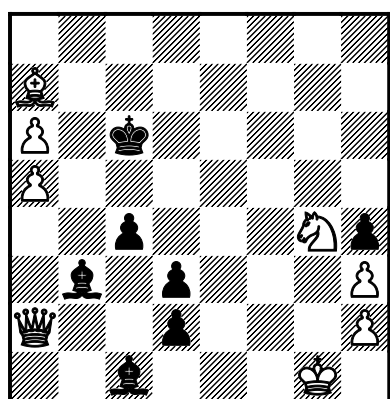
But that is not all: in *Československý Šach* i1955 the study was shown to be incorrect, even for a semi-false reason: **3.Se5+!** **Kc7** **4.a7 Qg5+** **5.Kf1 d2** **6.Qh7+ Kd6** **7.Sf7+**. **4...Qg5+?** is a weak move (White even wins after that blunder) but after the better **4...Kb7** White draws: **5.Sxc4 Qc2** **6.a6+ Ka8** **7.Sb6+ Kxa7** **8.Sc4+**. It is a second **dual**. The study,

with two other works (by Mugnos and Bondarenko & Kakovin) was eliminated from the final award. Nevertheless, it was selected for instance in Kasparian's anthology, *Zamechatelniye Etyudy* (Erevan, 1982) where it is no. 636, as it was reproduced in ... Kazantsev's book *Dar Kaissa* (1st edition, 1975), and, as we have seen it, in *Shakhmaty v SSSR* xii1986.

In 1998, the 1954 study was quoted in 64 with a different solution (it is diagram n° 2 in a short story written by Kazantsev): 1...Kc6 was chosen as the main line (no more mention of 1...Qd2+): 2.a7 Kb7 3.a6+ Ka8 4.Qa1 Qd2+ 5.Bf2 Bb2 6.Qh1 Qd1 7.Bg1 Qe2+ 8.Sf2 and, miraculously, thanks to a different order of moves by Black, the 1954 study has been saved ... Really? Alas not, after 1.Kg2 Kc6, White has the following **second solution**: 2.Se5+ Kc7 3.Bb6+! (and again not 3.Sxc4? Qe2+ 4.Bf2 Qe4+ 5.Kg1 Qxc4 wins) 3...Kc8 4.a7 Kb7 5.Bf2 Qc2! 6.Qa1! Be3 (6...c3? 7.a6+ Ka8 8.Qa5! Be3 9.Qd8+ Kxa7 10.Sc6+ Kxa6 11.Sb4+ and 12.Sxc2 wins) 7.Sg4 Bxf2 8.Qg7+ Ka8 9.Sxf2 and White draws.

I suppose that no. 6602 was intended as a correction for 6602a:

P.2. A.P. Kazantsev
Zolotoie Runo Ty 1986-87



g1c6 1071.44 8/7 Draw

1.Qa1 d1Q+ 2.Kg2 Qd2+ 3.Bf2 Bb2 4.a7 Kb7 5.a6+ Ka8 6.Qh1 Qd1 7.Bg1 Qe2+ 8.Sf2 and stalemate.

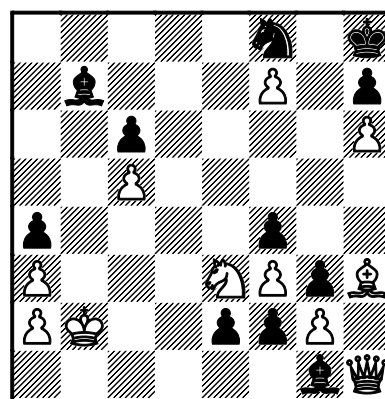
But it is not very difficult to see that, this time, 2...Qe2+! (Mario García) is better: after 3.Bf2 (3.Sf2 Bb2 4.Qf1 and, e.g. 4...Kb5

5.Bc5 Kxc5 6.Qxe2 fxe2 7.a7 e1Q+ or 4...Qxf1+ 5.Kxf1 Kb5 and Black wins) 3...Qe4+! (the difference) 4.Kg1 d2 5.Se3 Qg6+ wins, or 5.Qf6+ Kb5 6.Qg5+ Ka4 7.Se3 c3 wins.

There is also another **cook**: even after 2...Qd2+ 3.Bf2 Black still wins: 3...c3! 4.Se3 (a7 Bd5+;) 4...Ba2 5.a7 Kb7 6.a6+ Ka8 7.Kg1 Ba3 followed by 8...Bc5.

As indicated in the comments of the 1986 study (no. 6602 in EG90), the study was a 'redaksia' (version) of an earlier effort by Kazantsev, but in fact in 1954 it was already a 'redaksia' of Kazantsev's first ambitious study, with the same original stalemate picture that was rewarded by a 5th prize in the 1929-1930 Troitzky JT (the diagram was published in *Zadachy y Etyudy* vii1929 and solution in *Zadachy y Etyudy* viii1930).

P.3. A.P. Kazantsev
5th prize Troitzky JT 1929-30



b2h8 1074.77 11/11 Draw

1.Bf5! Bh2 (1...e1Q 2.Qh4 Qe2+ 3.Bc2 Qb5+ 4.Bb3; 1...f1Q 2.Qh4 Qa1+ 3.Kxa1 e1Q+ 4.Kb2) **2.Qa1 e1Q 3.Bb1 Qd2+ 4.Sc2 f1Q** stalemate.

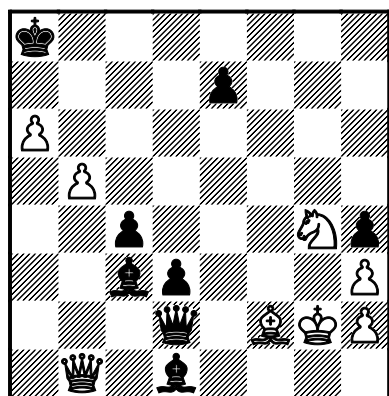
The setting is heavy and can be improved: there is no doubt that that was Kazantsev's intention in 1954. He also wanted to add more play. However nobody seems to have noticed the **second solution** shown by Mario García: the wQ is too strong and White can simply play 2.Qb1! e1Q 3.Qd3! Qxe3 4.Qd6! after which Black must take perpetual, e.g. 4...Qe2+ 5.Kc3 Qe1+ 6.Kc2 Qe2+ 7.Kc3. Mario García also found an easy correction: add a bpc7 and square d6 is no longer availa-

ble for the white Queen. As in the 1954 piece, **P3** was reproduced several times (for instance, in 1994, in the Neishtadt/Sukharev book about chess composition in Siberia or in 2003, in the already mentioned *Zadachy y Etyudy* tribute written by N. Kralin and O. Pervakov).

All three other versions of **P3** published by APK in 64 ii1934 were incorrect (two have a second solution, the third has no solution) as was another one by R. Aleksandrov (*Shakhmaty v SSSR* 1932) ...

The story didn't finish in 1986. Twelve years later, Kazantsev wrote a 'novella' (the word is used in Russian but means 'short story' and not 'novella' in its meaning in English), a 3-page text in the spirit of *Dar Kaissi*, with four diagrams. No. 1 is:

P.4. A.P. Kazantsev
64, 1998



g2a8 4071.44 8/8 Draw

1.b6 Bb3 2.Qh1 Qd1 3.Bg1 Qe2+ 4.Sf2 d2 5.b7+ Kb8 6.a7+ Kxb7 7.a8Q+ Kc7 8.Qc6+ Kd8 9.Qd7+ Kxd7 stalemate.

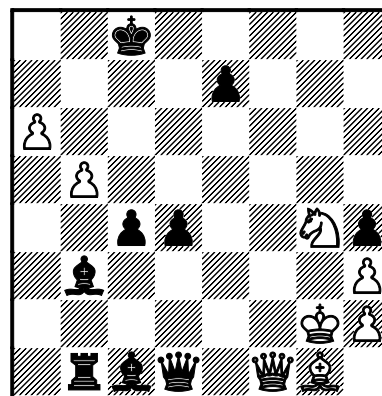
But 1.Se3! or 2.Se3! draw as shown by M. García. And there are also duals after 7...Kc7.

In the same novella, we find another study (P.5.):

1.Qf5+ Kb8 2.Qxb1 d3 3.Qa1 Qe2+ 4.Bf2 Bb2 5.Qh1 Qd1 6.Bg1 Qe2+ 7.Sf2 dxe2 8.a7+ Kc7 9.a8Q d1Q 10.Qc6+ Kd8 11.Qc8+ Kxc8 stalemate.

Again, the same comedy of errors: first 1...Kb8 is not a good move: 2.Qd5! wins, e.g. 2...Kc7 3.a7 Qe2+ 4.Kh1 Ra1 5.Se5. Better

P.5. A.P. Kazantsev



g2c8 4371.44 8/9 Draw?

(the question mark is by Kazantsev)

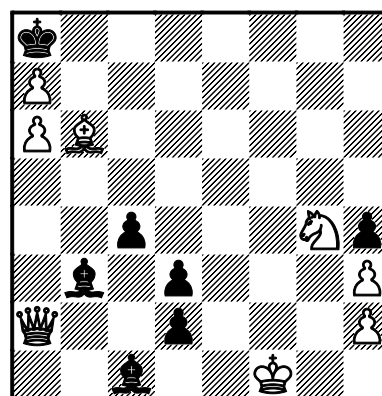
are 1...e6 and 1...Kd8 after which White has just to give checks with a likely draw. Therefore 2.Qxb1? is weak since 2...Bc2! wins for Black. None of these alternative moves have been analyzed in the 64 article.

[HH: the final position is not even a stalemate: wpb6!].

So what? Does it mean that the study was cursed and that no correct version was possible?

Fortunately, not. Kazantsev himself failed to make it correct, but Nikolai Kralin and Oleg Pervakov succeeded:

P.6. A.P. Kazantsev
correction by N. Kralin & O. Pervakov
Zadachy y Etyudy 2003



f1a8 1071.43 8/7 Draw

1.Qa1 d1Q 2.Kg2 Qd2+ 3.Bf2 Bb2 4.Qh1 Qd1 5.Bg1 Qe2+ 6.Sf2 c3 stalemate.

A "true masterpiece" as they wrote ... We all agree, of course. But this leaves a strange impression. Stephen Rothwell, in his *EBUR* article, rightly entitled *Phantast* (a German

word that can be translated by ‘utopian’ or ‘dreamer’) has shown similar unsuccessful efforts for other studies. That doesn’t in any way detract from our admiration for his amazing conceptions *à la* Kazantsev, but it reminds us that, as everybody and maybe more than other great composers, Aleksandr Petrovich Kazantsev was fallible. Quite obviously, he was not the best of analysts. As a writer, Kazantsev could content himself with inventing objects or situations, he did not have to carry them out; as a study composer, he had also to take on their technical realization.

5. References

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Websites:

- <http://akazantsev.ru/main.html> (The website that collects Kazantsev’s novels, short stories, interviews, any photographs also)
- <http://russkayafantastika.hautetfort.com/archive/2010/05/08/alexandre-kazantsev.html> (A website specialized in Russian (Soviet) science fiction literature, in French)

6. Special thanks

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