

Daniel King

King's Kalashnikov Sicilian

A Dynamic Black Repertoire for Club Players

New In Chess 2022

Contents

Explanation of symbols.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Part I	
Model Games	11
Part II	
The Kalashnikov Repertoire	54
Chapter 1 A misplaced knight: 5.♭b3.....	55
Chapter 2 The unassuming 5.♭f3.....	66
Chapter 3 The ugly 5.♭xc6.....	74
Chapter 4 Menacing...? 5.♭f5.....	84
Chapter 5 Too sophisticated: 5.♭e2.....	88
Chapter 6 The pragmatic 5.♭b5 d6 6.a4.....	94
Chapter 7 A bad Sveshnikov: 5.♭b5 d6 6.♙e3.....	102
Chapter 8 A traffic jam: 5.♭b5 d6 6.♙c4.....	109
Chapter 9 A mini traffic jam: 5.♭b5 d6 6.♭5c3.....	112
Chapter 10 The gentle 5.♭b5 d6 6.g3.....	116
Chapter 11 The modest 5.♭b5 d6 6.♙e2.....	123
Chapter 12 The terrible 5.♭b5 d6 6.♙g5.....	127
Chapter 13 Sound development: 5.♭b5 d6 6.♭1c3.....	130
Chapter 14 A careless fianchetto: 8.g3.....	141
Chapter 15 A move with potential: 8.♙e3.....	144
Chapter 16 Main line 8.♭c4: minor 10th moves.....	147
Chapter 17 Main line with 10.g3 h5.....	154
Chapter 18 Main line with 10.g3 0-0.....	163
Chapter 19 6.c4: main line with 7.♭1c3.....	172
Chapter 20 6.c4: main line with 7.♙d3.....	185
Index of variations.....	191
Index of names.....	192

Introduction

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 e5 was one of the first serious openings that I played with Black, under the tutelage of my coach at the time, International Master Nigel Povah. I must have been about 12 years old, and it was an exciting initiation into the mysteries of the Sicilian Defence. I didn't realise it, but this was a great place to start as the variations, at least for a couple of moves, are forcing, and decent options for White are surprisingly limited. After 4...e5 White has the choice of six moves with the knight, and five of them give Black an easy game. The odds were already in my favour!



The best move is **5.♗b5** and at that time the only acceptable way for Black to play the opening was **5...a6 6.♗d6+ ♕xd6 7.♖xd6 ♗f6**. This is the so-called Löwenthal Variation, named after Johann Jacob Löwenthal, one of the strongest players of the mid-19th century. Since that time it has had little bursts of popularity – until players of the white pieces remember what to do and it shuffles off again to the dusty pages of an old text book.

In the late 1980s, the reputation of the opening changed when Evgeny Sveshnikov – he of the Sveshnikov Variation – started experimenting with **5.♗b5 d6**. In the past this was always frowned upon as it was thought that **6.c4** gave White a significant grip on the position. As we will see, Black has often been able to prove that this is a dangerous over-extension...

It is extraordinary that when Sveshnikov began playing 5...d6, it had never been taken too seriously. A few notable players had tried it – I might mention Sultan Khan in 1930, Larry Evans in 1955 and Bent Larsen in 1960 – but according to my database they didn't explore the system too much in subsequent games. The Austrian International Master Franz Hölzl was an exponent of the system in the late 1970s and 1980s, creating a little trend along with compatriots Walter Wittmann and Alexander Fauland. But it was when Evgeny Sveshnikov came on board that it became a serious weapon. As with so many openings, he was a formidable creator and flag bearer.

Following him, there were players like Smbat Lputian, John van der Wiel and Ketevan Arakhamia who incorporated the opening into their repertoire. Latterly, it has achieved a high mark of respectability as Magnus Carlsen has employed it with some success, if only in rapid and blitz games. Perhaps the strongest adherents of the opening these days are Teimour Radjabov and the Iranian Parham Maghsoodloo; but as you will see from the games in the book, there is a stellar line-up of players who on occasion like to load up the Kalashnikov.

Why should you play the Kalashnikov? See my first paragraph! At club level, in my experience as a teenager, many players already got it wrong on the fifth move and failed to play 5.♘b5. This is borne out by the games of my current students: somehow players at a certain level are unsure when it comes to moving the knight out towards the edge of the board.

Actually, it is very understandable that the thought of 5.♘b5 causes nervousness. After **5...d6**



it will take some time before the knight re-routes to a better location, and this forms the basis of a lot of the subsequent play. Black has a lead in development and White has two main tasks to handle: bringing the knight back into play as well as completing development, not to mention looking up occasionally to see what Black is doing.

I recommend the Kalashnikov to my students for practical reasons. In most of the variations after 5.♘b5 d6, the pawn structure is fixed. Pawn structure determines strategy, and if one can rely on the structure as a constant, then it is easier to get a handle on middlegame strategy.

In the Kalashnikov there are fewer sharp lines than in many other openings. In the Najdorf or the Dragon, for example, a good recollection of precise move orders and tricky moves is sometimes required to avoid immediate opening disaster. That is rarely the case with the Kalashnikov. A general understanding of pawn structures, piece placement and strategic ideas will often be sufficient to carry you through the opening – which is why I lay so much emphasis on the Model Games section where the strategy is explained.

This book is based on the online Kalashnikov course that I produced for Chessable. What are the differences? First and foremost, the medium. There is certainly something appealing about the ‘gamification’ of learning an opening that the Chessable format offers. But for an overview, I find it easier to consider a subject in book form, where with a quick flick of the page one can appreciate how the material is laid out and how much attention is devoted to different sections.

I have simplified some sections, improved some variations based on feedback (and my revisions), included a few theoretically significant games that have appeared since the course appeared online, and added a few more model games in the first section.

I have structured the book according to how I learn an opening. First of all, there is the Model games section where I explain opening and middlegame strategy. Only by examining complete games can we get an idea of what an opening is really about. The second section comprises my detailed repertoire for Black, and there you can fill in the gaps of your knowledge. A good way of

learning an opening is to play it first, and to look it up afterwards. This section can be used as a reference manual to do exactly that. I should emphasise that I have not attempted to write a comprehensive survey of the Kalashnikov. In the digital age, we are bombarded by masses of information, and selecting what is relevant becomes increasingly difficult. I have simplified matters by providing clear recommendations of practical variations. For example, the main line of the Kalashnikov used to be 1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 e5 5.♟b5 d6 6.♟lc3 a6 7.♟a3 b5, but instead I have gone with 7...♙e7 which was originally the choice of the formidable Ukrainians Pavel Eljanov and Alexander Moiseenko, and has also been given the seal of approval by Magnus Carlsen.

Occasionally, I have offered a choice of variations, notably in the main line where the path splits between the more orthodox 10...0-0 and the enterprising 10...h5.

And finally, why is the opening named after the most notorious automatic rifle in the world? It is certainly fitting that Kalashnikov rhymes with 'Sveshnikov' as the two systems are closely related and Evgeny Sveshnikov developed many of the key ideas. But who actually coined the name? All can be revealed.

John van der Wiel, a Dutch Grandmaster who was one of the earliest adopters of the opening in the 1980s boom, introduced the name in the magazine *New In Chess* – yes, the publisher of this book. As he explained to me:

'It was an inside joke amongst some players from my region in the Netherlands back then. Something like "a primitive weapon, but it never jams". To my great surprise, others embraced this name and now it is the "official" name.'

There you have it – from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

The humour of the name 'The Kalashnikov' is dark and for some does not read well in the context of our troubled times. I considered unilaterally renaming the opening and retitling this book, but that would just be a euphemism. In the chess community, 'The Kalashnikov Variation of the Sicilian' is the name that has stuck over decades and that won't change for a long while. Thankfully, the struggle on the chessboard is unrelated to the painful reality of actual conflicts around the world.

Daniel King, London, April 2022

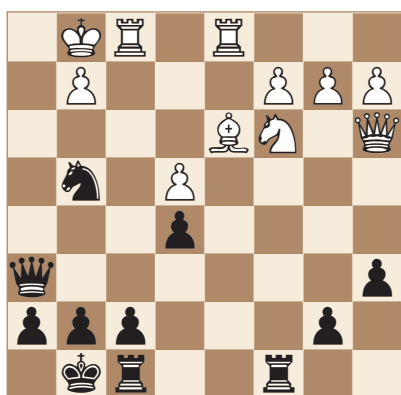
21.♔g2 ♖g4 22.♖h1 ♜f6 23.♖d2
 ♘e3+ 24.fxe3 ♜f3+ 25.♔g1 ♜xg3+
 26.♔f1 ♜f3+ 27.♔g1 ♖c6 28.♖hh2
 ♜xe3+ 29.♖df2 ♖g6+ 30.♔h1 ♘f3.

Notice how in these lines White's queen is stranded in Siberia, unable to take part in the defence. That is so often a consequence of capturing the pawn on d6.

20.h3 ♘f3+ 21.♔h1

Instead, 21.gxf3 ♜xh3 22.fxg4
 ♜xg4+ 23.♔h2 ♖c6 is similar to variations above.

21...♗g5 22.f3 ♘xh3 23.fxg4 ♘f2+
 24.♔g1 ♘xg4



25.♖f5

25.♖f2 ♜h2+ 26.♔f1 ♜h4 27
 ♖dd2 gives better chances of a defence according to my machine, but in practice such positions are virtually impossible to handle.

25...♜h2+ 26.♔f1 ♜h1+ 27.♔e2
 ♜xg2+ 28.♔e1 ♜g3+ 29.♔e2 g6
 30.♖df1

Instead, 30.♖ff1 ♜e3 checkmate is White's problem.

30...gxf5 31.♗d5 fxe4 32.♗e7+
 ♔h8 33.♗xe4 ♜xa3 34.bxa3 ♖c7
 35.♗d5 ♖c4 36.♗f5 ♖d8 0-1

There are many positions in the opening where White is able to capture the pawn on d6: it is rarely a good idea. In most cases Black is able to generate a quick attack. It is worth remembering that in many lines White makes multiple knight moves in the Kalashnikov, and is already behind in development. Therefore, capturing a pawn, liberating Black's pieces, is often a perilous exercise.

Game 12

Fidel Corrales Jimenez 2502
Johan Alvarez Marquez 2413

Havana 2008 (3)

Here is another game where White foolishly captures the pawn on d6 in the opening. The consequences are catastrophic.

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4
 4.♘xd4 e5 5.♗b5 d6 6.♗1c3 a6
 7.♗a3 ♗e7 8.♗d5 ♘f6



In the Kalashnikov, the struggle often revolves around the d5-square. Decades ago, in similar positions from the Najdorf, Boleslavsky and Sveshnikov variations of the Sicilian, it used to be thought that the simple occupation of the square conferred an advantage on White, but methods have been found to challenge the knight, or simply to play around it. Just going on general principles, I find it hard to believe that Black can be worse in this position: White has already made four moves with the king's knight, and now makes a second move with the queen's knight – which is about to be exchanged off. The upshot is that Black already has a lead in development. In general, this is why I believe that the Kalashnikov is fully playable: White must spend time recycling the knight on a3 to a better position and that gives Black time to develop and fight for those central squares. Playing the knight to f6 prepares castling, but also attacks the e-pawn, so practically guarantees that the knight on d5 will be exchanged.

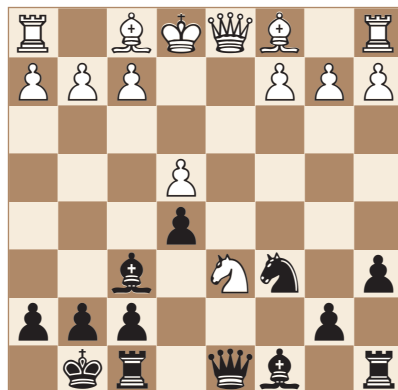
9. ♖xf6+ ♗xf6 10. ♘c4 0-0

Black could defend the d-pawn with 10... ♗e7, but there is no need.

11. ♘xd6

A reckless decision considering that the knight is White's only

piece in play and he has yet to castle. Perhaps it was the lack of a forcing reply that persuaded White that he could get away with it. 11.c3 would have been more prudent.



11... ♗e6

Black doesn't need to go crazy: it is enough to bring some pieces into play.

12. c3 ♖c7

Threatening a pin with a rook.

13. ♘f5 ♗fd8

In the repertoire I recommend 13... ♖ad8, but the game continuation is also dangerous.

14. ♗f3 ♖a5

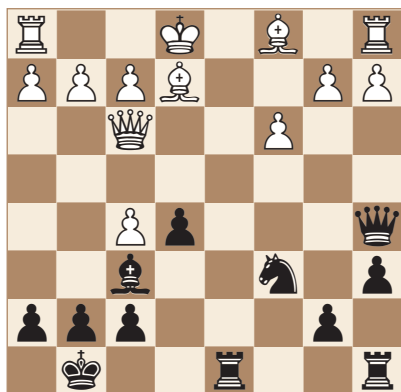
Excellent move. Black uses the pin to play the knight into the middle. White's lack of development is shocking.

15. ♗e2 ♗xf5

There was another strong continuation: 15... ♘d4 16. ♘xd4 exd4 17. 0-0 dxc3 18. bxc3 ♗xc3 19. ♖b1 b5 20. a3 ♗a2 21. ♗b2 ♖ac8 22. ♖a1 ♗e6 23. ♗xc3 ♖xc3 24. ♗f4 ♖xa3, winning a pawn.

16.exf5

Instead, 16. ♖xf5 ♜d4 hits the queen and threatens a winning check.



16...e4

The bishop is unleashed.

17. ♖h5

Alternatively, 17. ♖xe4 ♜e8 (17... ♙xc3+ 18. ♖f1 ♜e8 19. ♖c2 ♙f6 20. ♙e3 ♜ac8 also gives Black a wonderful initiative) 18. ♖b1 ♜d4 19. ♙e3 ♜xe2 20. ♖xe2 ♖b5+ leaves the king stranded in the middle of the board and the attack rages on.

17... ♙xc3+ 18. ♖f1 ♙d2

After the exchange of bishops, Black's rook is able to access the second rank.

19.g3 g6 20.fxg6 ♖xh5 21. ♙xh5 hxg6 22. ♙d1 ♙xc1 23. ♜xc1 ♜d2

Material is even, but the rook on the second cuts through White's position and the attack persists.

24. ♙c2 e3 25.fxe3 ♜e5 26. ♙e4 ♜ad8 27.h3 ♜xb2 28. ♜g1 ♜c4

White resigned.

The knight cannot be taken because of ...♜d1 mate, and there

are threats to take on e3 and check on d2.

White's king never escaped from the middle which meant he could never bring the king's rook into play – justice after the injudicious pawn grab. For the most part, Black did not need to play any extraordinary moves to exploit his lead in development, although I would mention one that was clever: 14... ♖a5, preparing 15... ♜d4.

Game 13

Maria Schöne 2163
Ekaterina Kovalevskaya 2403

Germany Frauenbundesliga 2018/19 (1)

In many variations of the Sicilian, it is common for White to attack by advancing the f-pawn – see Game 2 Surujhlah–Belous. There are pros and cons in doing so. If the pawn advances all the way to f6, it can be a dangerous spearhead for an attack; or it might be that the f-file becomes an attacking avenue for the rook. On the other hand, advancing the f-pawn can weaken White's king along the a7-g1 and a8-h1 diagonals; and don't forget that the second rank is also more exposed, if Black ever breaks through. The e4-pawn is also in danger of becoming weak as it can no longer be protected by a pawn. All this is very theoretical. Let's

see how this plays out in an actual game.

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4
4.♗xd4 e5 5.♘b5 d6 6.♗1c3 a6
7.♗a3 ♕e7 8.♗c4 b5 9.♗e3 ♗f6**

The main line of my repertoire. Here, 10.g3, 10.♕d3 and 10.♗ed5 are the most popular choices, but the game continuation is a solid alternative.

10.a3

By preventing Black from expanding with ...b5-b4, White attempts to keep control of the position.

10...0-0 11.g3 ♕e6 12.♕g2 ♗d7

In my repertoire, I recommend 12...♗c8, but this is also very sensible, claiming control over an important diagonal and connecting the rooks.

13.0-0 ♗ac8

By the way, instead of this, **the Bad-Bishop Bounce** comes into consideration here – 13...♕d8.

The bishop will find a good spot on b6.

14.f4



Good morning, **Freddie** . Just because the f-pawn's advance is common doesn't mean it is good. Black's kingside position is strong, there are simply no weaknesses, whereas it is White who is actually running a risk because pawns are disappearing from in front of the king. In short, when playing with Black, hold on to what is good about your position (safe king, well-coordinated pieces, strong pawn structure) and look forward to a stinging counter-attack.

14...exf4

White had a semi-threat of playing the pawn to f5, creating a pawn wedge on the kingside while also closing the centre. The exchange avoids that and looks forward to when White's centre will be vulnerable.

15.gxf4 ♕h3

Black had two good alternatives:

A) 15...♕d8 – once more the bishop finds its way to b6, taking aim at the kingside, an after 16.f5 ♕c4 the knight finds a great square on e5;

B) 15...♗fe8 is also sensible. The bishop can choose whether it dips back to d8 or f8.

16.♗f2

White would have done better to play 16.♗f3 ♕xg2 17.♗xg2 to bring the queen to the kingside. From g2 it also protects the e4-pawn. However, Black's position is still playable after 17...♗fe8.

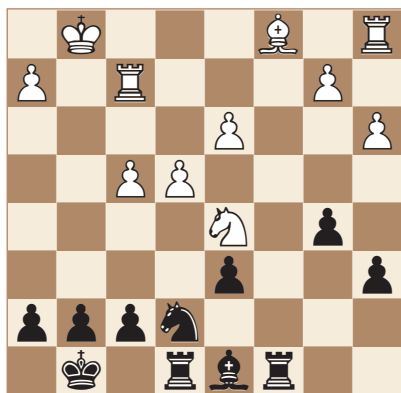
16...♖fe8 17.♘xh3 ♚xh3

The queen is a thorn in White's side. The best White can do is go for an exchange – but that leaves the e4- and c2-pawns as targets.

18.♚d3 ♘d8 19.♗ed5

19.♗f5 is better.

19...♚xd3 20.cxd3 ♗xd5 21.♗xd5 ♗e7



Exchanging off the knight emphasises Black's lead in development: White's queenside pieces are still on their starting squares.

22.♗xe7+ ♜xe7 23.♖g2

If 23.♘e3, 23...f5 counter-attacks.

23...♘b6 24.♞e2 ♞ec7

Taking control over the only open file: Black is better.

25.♘e3 ♘xe3 26.♞xe3 ♞c2+

27.♖g3 ♞xb2 28.d4 ♖f8 29.♞d1

♞cc2 30.h3 ♞g2+ 31.♖h4 ♞bf2

0-1

White's pawn weaknesses came home to roost. This final position illustrates one of the problems with moving the f-pawn: there

is nothing to block the second rank.

If White advances the f-pawn, the stakes are raised, but have faith. Keep the kingside firm and trust in counter-attacking moves rather than defence. A mistake by White can have fatal consequences.

Game 14

Ian Nepomniachtchi

2773

Magnus Carlsen

2861

Abidjan rapid 2019 (2)

This is a wonderful example of **the Steamroller**. In the Kalashnikov, White very often plays a knight to d5, it gets exchanged and a pawn takes its place. The resulting pawn structure gives White a queenside pawn majority and Black a kingside pawn majority. That's where the fun starts.

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4

4.♗xd4 e5 5.♗b5 d6 6.♗1c3 a6

7.♗a3 ♘e7 8.g3

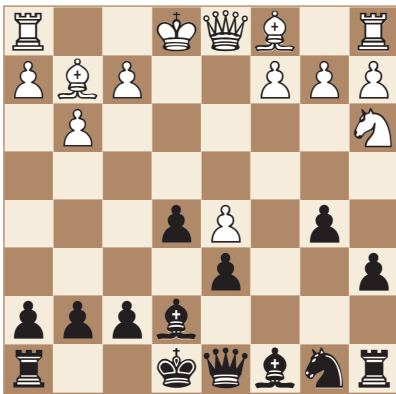


White has spent so much time moving the knights that to make a pawn move, which isn't strictly necessary, feels like too much of a luxury.

8...♟f6 9.♞g2 b5

A decent move, but it was possible to play **the Poke**: 9...♞g4 – however White responds to the blunt attack on the queen, it involves a compromise. Please see the variations in the repertoire.

10.♞d5 ♟xd5 11.exd5 ♟b8



Here is the reason I wanted to show this game: after the exchange on d5 we have arrived at a position with a very common pawn structure. Instead of a piece, White has a pawn on d5, which changes the nature of the position. This is a very common scenario, as you will see through the repertoire.

12.0-0 ♟d7 13.c4

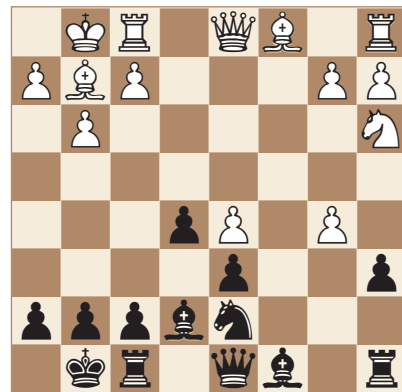
Pawn structure determines strategy. White has a four versus three majority on the queenside and, typically, that is where

White will want to generate play, using the space advantage that the pawn on d5 confers. Black, on the other hand, will want to generate play on the kingside with the four versus three pawn majority. As you can imagine, in such positions, time is of the essence: who will power through first?

13...0-0

Carlsen already recognises the urgency of the situation and prefers to complete his development rather than engage with White's play. Instead, 13...bxc4 14.♟xc4 a5 (to stop b2-b4 and ♟c4-a5-c6) 15.♞d2 0-0 16.♞c1 feels as though White is developing well on the queenside.

14.cxb5



14...axb5

By the way, Black could also embark on kingside play immediately with 14...f5. If 15.bxa6 ♞xa6 and it will take some time before White is able to get play going on the queenside.

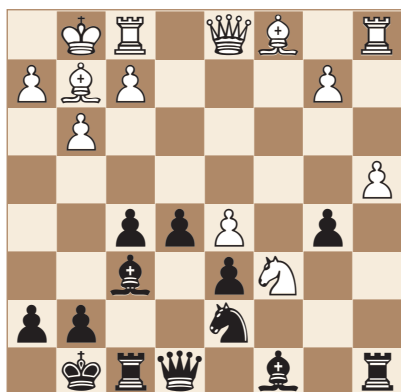
15. ♖c2

15. ♖xb5 would be met by
15... ♗a6, winning material.

15... f5

The Steamroller begins. These
pawns have a bright future.

16. ♖b4 ♗f6 17. ♖c6 ♔e8 18. a4



The position is brewing nicely.
Both sides have developed their
own play: White can be happy
with the knight on c6 and is
now opening the queenside;
Black tip-toes around the knight
and has strong centre pawns.
Game on!

18... ♖c5

A natural move, but the
computer recommends 18... bxa4
19. ♖xa4 ♗a6 20. ♖e1 ♖c5 21. ♖a5
e4, followed by establishing a
piece on d3. All Black's minor
pieces stand well. Remember,
this was a rapid-play game.

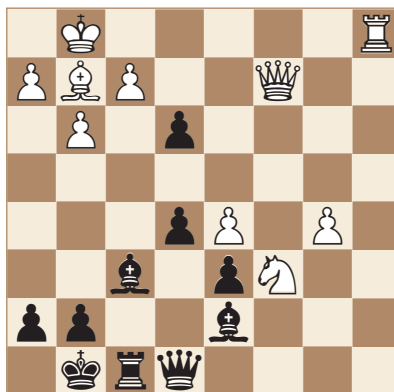
19. ♗e3 ♖xa4 20. ♔c2 ♗d7 21. b3
f4!

21... ♖c5 22. ♖xa8 ♔xa8 23. ♗xc5
dxc5 24. ♔xc5 would have swung
the game in White's favour.

22. bxa4

This is met by an unexpected
and spectacular refutation.
22. ♗d2! is better, when all bets
are off.

22... fxe3 23. axb5 ♖xa1 24. ♖xa1



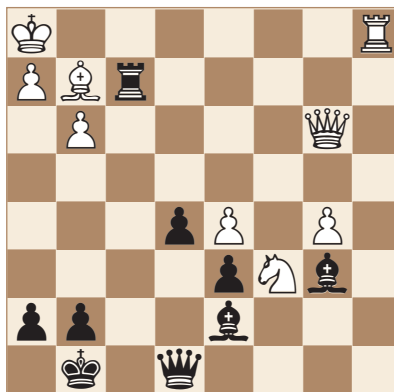
24... ♗g5!

Threatening to take on f2.

25. b6

Nepo goes all in, backing the
b-pawn to run, but allowing
Black in on the kingside, to
some extent.

If instead, 25. fxe3 ♗xe3+ 26. ♖h1
♖f2 27. ♔b3 ♗b6.

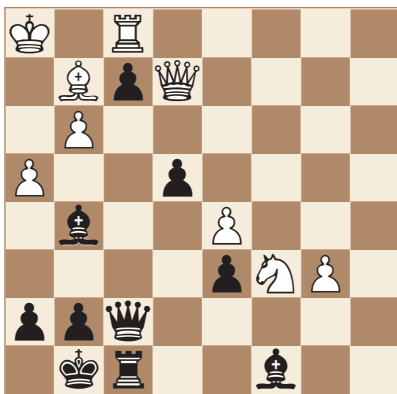


analysis diagram

The rook is great on f2 and the dark-squared bishop – apparently the ‘bad’ bishop – once more proves what a superb piece it can be, controlling an important diagonal, attacking and defending simultaneously. This is a great example of **the Bad-Bishop Bounce**, but instead of manoeuvring via d8, the bishop got to b6 via g5 and e3!

25...exf2+ 26.♔h1 ♕c8 27.♖f1 ♗f7 28.♗e2 e4 29.h4

If 29.♕xe4, 29...♕h3 30.♕g2 ♕xg2+ 31.♔xg2 ♗xd5+ wins. White’s best is 29.♗xe4 ♕a6 30.♗e6 ♕xf1 31.♕xf1 ♔h8 and apparently with precise play White can hold, but this is somewhat academic given the rough and tumble nature of a rapid game (and indeed this kind of position).



29...e3!!

An extraordinary move. Carlsen has judged that his pawns will be worth a piece.

29...♕h6? 30.♕xe4 ♕h3 31.♗e7+! ♔h8 (31...♗xe7 32.♕xh7+) 32.♕g2 ♕xg2+ 33.♔xg2. In this case the knight on e7 defends the d5-pawn.

30.hxg5 ♖e8

Holding the pawn and preparing to take on g5 with the queen followed by a deadly check on h6.

31.♔h2 ♕g4 32.♗xg4 e2 33.b7 ♗xb7 34.♖xf2 e1♗

Magnus has won the race, but is it a Pyrrhic victory? He still needs to quell White’s pieces on the kingside.

35.♗f5 ♗e3 36.♖f3 ♗e2 37.♗d4 ♗e5 38.♗g4 ♗bxd5 39.♗f5 ♗de6 40.♗h5 ♗g6 41.♗g4 h5 42.♗c4+ d5 43.♗b5 ♗xg5 44.♗d7 h4 45.♖f1 hxg3+ 46.♔g1 g6 47.♕xd5+ ♔h8

The fun is over and White resigned.

This is an excellent example of strategy with such a pawn structure. Both sides were intent on pursuing their own plans and neither blinked. Carlsen strove with all his might to push forward his kingside pawn majority, although sometimes it can be worth pausing and seeing what is happening on the other side of the board (see move 18). It took precise calculation to execute the kingside attack, but in general it is important to recognise the broad thrust of strategy and

PART II

The Kalashnikov Repertoire

In this section you can find a ready-made template of Kalashnikov variations to follow, saving you the laborious task of researching the raw games and deciding what is good and bad. I point out what is rare, what is common, what one might reasonably expect to face with Black, and at the end of each chapter there is a short evaluation of the merits of the variation in question. That will help you decide which lines to devote most study time to. Naturally, these are my personal recommendations and if something isn't to your taste and style, then that is quite normal. In fact, it would be odd if everything were to your taste: as you will discover, very often I mention alternative lines and you will have to make your own decision as to which way to go. I am hoping that this book will provoke you into your own way of thinking about the opening.

If you go through the repertoire page by page, variation by variation, move by move, then in my experience you will be unique. At first, most concentrate on studying a few main variations, put those into practice, then use the book as a reference work, looking up the details of variations after playing. That's the best way: learning by doing.

This repertoire is based on the one that I recommended in my online Chessable course. For those of you that have already been there and are here for this handy physical version, I should mention that minor changes have been made: a few simplifications of variations and a couple of updates, but it is essentially the same.

CHAPTER 12

The terrible 5. ♘b5 d6 6. ♙g5

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 e5 5. ♘b5 d6 6. ♙g5



This looks terrible – and it is terrible. Take it!

6... ♙xg5 7. ♘c7+ ♔d8 8. ♘xa8



For the moment, White is the exchange up, but that knight in the corner is trapped, and if it is taken, the material balance will tip the other way. Besides, Black already has a lead in

development and that isn't easy for White to manage.

8... ♘f6

Black develops with gain of tempo.

9. ♘c3 ♘d4

The knight on a8 cannot run away, but before scooping it up, let's make it as difficult as possible for White to develop. Normally I wouldn't recommend that a piece moves twice in the opening, but in this particular position Black is able to go on the offensive immediately. White must already tread carefully to avoid losing on the spot.

At this point there are three moves to consider:

- A) 10.g3
- B) 10.♖d3
- C) 10.h4

A) 10.g3



White would like to bring out the king's bishop, but this is a terrible mistake.

10...♗g4

Exploiting the weakness of the f3-square. Another **Poke!** This is a very a common idea in the Kalashnikov. At this point 11.♗e2 ♘f3 checkmate is not recommended.

11.♖d3 ♗f3+

Displacing White's king. No more castling for you.

12.♔d1 ♗d4+ 13.♗e2 ♗xe2+

14.♗xe2 ♖g4

Black threatens to exchange off on e2, then play ...♗e7, ...♔d7 and capture the knight in the corner without drama. The endgame with bishop and knight against rook is winning for Black.

15.♞e1 ♗f3

Black has a wonderful attacking position, and the knight in the corner is also waiting to be taken. This is a winning position.

B) 10.♖d3



10...d5

Very bold! White is under massive pressure.

11.exd5

Instead, 11.♗xd5 ♗xd5 12.exd5 ♗f5 and 13...♗xc2+ wins for Black.

11...♗f5

That's the point. Black is breaking through to the king.

12.♖c4 ♗xc2+ 13.♔d1 ♖g4+

Black could play 13...♗d6 (with a winning position), but exchanging queens is a practical choice: less can go wrong.

14.♔d2 ♖xc4 15.♗xc4 ♗xa1

Taking the rook is also a good practical choice...

16.♞xa1 ♗d6

The king will move to e7 and then rook takes knight. Black has an extra piece.

C) 10.h4



A vain attempt to drive away the queen.

10... ♖f4

The queen remains active, attacking the e-pawn.

11. ♞d3 ♞e6

There is no need for Black to rush: simple development will suffice. The threat is to play ...♞e7, ...♟d7 and ... ♖xa8 when Black will have a material advantage – as well as the attack. White cannot do much to cross this.

12.a4

If 12.g3, 12...♞g4 and Black remains in control.

12... ♞e7 13. ♟b5

Conclusion

6.♞g5 is a move suitable for a blitz game when White merely wishes to sow confusion. However, even under those circumstances, this move cannot be recommended as it actually gives Black the initiative.

An attempt to rescue the stranded knight – which fails miserably.

13... ♟xe4

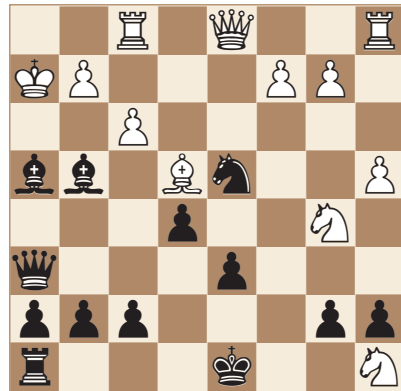
Threatening the pawn on f2.

14.0-0

Out of the frying pan and into the fire. The f2-square has been defended and immediate danger averted, but the king faces a lethal assault in its new location.

14... ♞g4 15.f3 ♖e3+ 16.♟h2

♞xh4 17. ♞xe4 ♖h6



I'll allow you to analyse the details of this position yourself, but suffice to say that Black has a winning attack.

CHAPTER 13

Sound development: 5.♘b5 d6 6.♘1c3

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 e5 5.♗b5 d6 6.♘1c3



Sound development. This is the most popular line at master level – but in my experience it does not occur with the same frequency in club chess. At this point Black can play 6...♗f6 and transpose into a Sveshnikov, but we want to keep the game along pure Kalashnikov lines.

6...a6 7.♗a3

That already looks pleasant from Black's viewpoint. The knight has been sent back to a poor position. Much of the subsequent opening and middlegame struggle will focus on whether that knight should transfer to a better square, and if that consumes too much time.

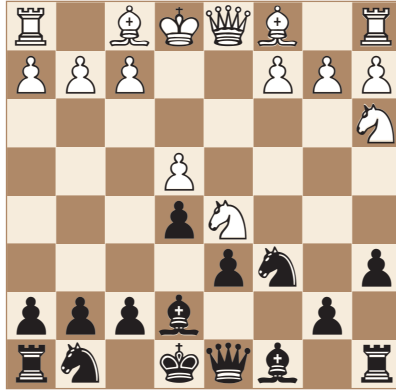
7...♗e7

This simple developing move has been played by Carlsen, Nakamura, Radjabov, Ivanchuk, Shirov and many other luminaries of the chess world. In recent times it has been the move of choice for most strong players, but 7...b5 used to be the most popular continuation. That is certainly worth looking at, but a bit too committal for my taste. I think it is better to hang back with the b-pawn for the moment.

7...♗e6 is also worth investigating, and finally 7...♗f6 will probably transpose back into a Sveshnikov after 8.♗g5. In fact, that gives us a clue as to why 7...♗e7 is played: White is unable to play 8.♗g5, so Black is hoping to retain more control over d5.

At this point 8.♘c4 is the main line and is dealt with in detail in later chapters. However, at this point there are several valid alternatives that need examining.

8.♘d5



This is the second most popular move (after 8.♘c4) and looks logical: the knight occupies a fine square in the middle of the board. Nevertheless, there is a big drawback to the move.

8...♗f6

This simple developing move demonstrates the problem with White's last move: the knight on d5 is challenged and the e-pawn threatened, inducing a compromise. At this point, White has several continuations:

- A) 9.♘xf6+**
- B) 9.♘xe7**
- C) 9.♙e3**

In my opinion, none of the moves gives an advantage, and in several cases White has to struggle to avoid falling into a poor position. By the way, we can dismiss 9.♙d3 because of 9...♘xd5 10.exd5 ♖a5+ 11.c3 ♖xd5, winning a pawn – thank you.

A) 9.♘xf6+

Although this is probably White's best move, I count this as a success for Black: the knight has already moved twice and there is nothing better than to exchange it off! That means Black has a lead in development which can be put to good use.

9...♙xf6 10.♘c4 0-0

Black could protect the d-pawn, but let's not mess around! We might be able to catch White's king in the centre: there are plenty of opportunities for our opponent to go wrong. I'm going into some detail here. It's fun to analyse when Black has the initiative. There are four moves to consider:

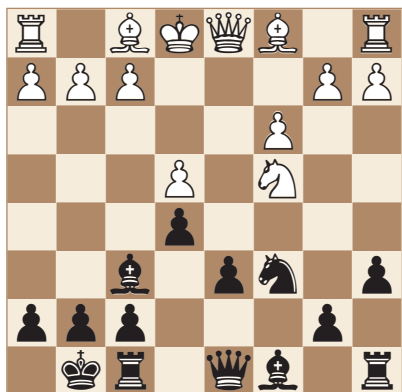
A1) 11.c3

A2) 11.♖xd6

A3) 11.♘xd6

A4) 11.♙e3

A1) 11.c3



This is the best move and it also has the best results in my database (50%). Nevertheless, White has to take care if he is to escape unscathed; after all, the king has yet to castle.

11...b5

Black could simply defend the d-pawn with the bishop, but this bold pawn sacrifice, keeping White busy, is far more attractive.

12.♘xd6 ♙e6

Sound development. White will not be able to maintain the knight on d6. Black wants to move the queen out of the way and put a rook on d8.

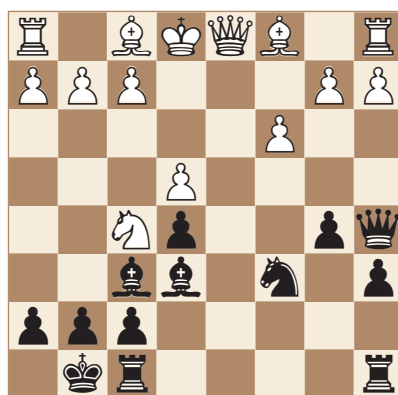
13.♘f5

The best move, although it is still not easy for White.

13.♙e3 is a risky move. White is neglecting kingside develop-

ment: 13...♖c7 14.♘f5 ♗fd8 15.♖c1 (15.♖f3 was played in Milov-Feicht, Heusenstamm 2016, and here Black could have got a bone-crushing attack with 15...b4, for example: 16.♙e2 bxc3 17.bxc3 ♙xf5 18.♖xf5 ♘e7, followed by taking the pawn on c3) 15...♙xf5 16.exf5 and now 16...♖b7 sets up an evil hit: 17.♙e2 (with the idea of castling, but Black gets in there first) 17...♘d4 (BOOM) 18.cxd4 ♖xg2 19.♗f1 exd4 20.♙f4 d3. White's king will not get out alive.

13...♖a5



As well as making way for the rook to come to d8, the pin sets up the tactical possibility of the knight moving into d4. White has to pay attention or there could be massive trouble.

14.♘e3

This is the only move that gives White a route to safety.

The standard developing move 14.♙e2 is a mistake. Black starts the middlegame while White

is still in the opening: 14... ♖fd8
 15. ♖c2 (if 15. ♗d2, 15... ♗xf5 16.exf5
 ♗g5 wins material) 15... ♗d4
 (a huge hit!) 16. ♗xd4 exd4
 17. ♗d2 dxc3. With the following
 exchanges Black succeeds in
 isolating White's queenside
 pawns: 18. ♗xc3 ♗xc3+ 19.bxc3
 ♖ac8 20 0-0 (White has to
 simply abandon the c3-pawn
 as 20. ♖c1 b4 makes things even
 worse) 20... ♖xc3 21. ♖b2 ♖a3
 wins a pawn with a winning
 endgame. The a- and b-pawns
 should decide.

14... ♖fd8 15. ♗d5

This is the most prudent choice,
 returning the pawn in order to
 bring the king to safety.
 Self-pinning with 15. ♗d2 is risky.
 Black has good compensation
 for the pawn after any of these
 moves: 15... ♖d6, 15... ♗g5, or
 15... ♖c7.

15. ♖c2 is asking for trouble.
 The best reply is 15... ♖ac8 and
 something nasty is about to
 happen involving ... ♗d4 or
 ...b5-b4, depending on White's
 response.

15... ♗xd5

With this Black regains the
 pawn.

16.exd5 ♗e7 17. ♖c2

The queen steps out of the way
 of the rook.

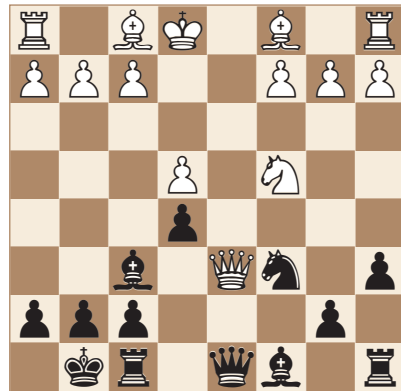
17... ♗xd5 18. ♗d3 g6

Blocking out the bishop. If one
 wanted to be adventurous (and
 also take a risk) then 18...b4 is
 possible.

19.0-0 ♖ac8

The position is roughly level.
 Black will probably play for ...b5-
 b4 to force c3-c4 so that the
 d4-square can be occupied by
 the knight spinning round via e7
 and c6.

A2) 11. ♖xd6



Taking the pawn is risky. Black
 has some hits while White's king
 is still loitering in the middle of
 the board.

11... ♖xd6 12. ♗xd6 ♗b4

Hitting White where it hurts.

13. ♗d3 ♖d8 14. ♗c4

With this accurate move, White
 can still maintain the balance.
 14. ♗xc8 ♖axc8 is worse, when
 Black will recover the pawn with
 wonderful activity for the rooks.

14...b5

Alternatively, 14... ♗xd3+ 15.cxd3
 ♖xd3 16. ♖e2 ♖d4 17. ♗b6 ♖b8
 18. ♖f3 ♗e6 19. ♗e3 ♖d6 20. ♖hc1
 is roughly level. White's well-
 placed minor pieces balance
 Black's two bishops. I would love

to be able to claim that Black can get the advantage in one of these endgames, but the truth is that White can still hold the balance. Still, this is quite a good theoretical outcome from the opening when playing with the black pieces!

15. ♖b6 ♜b8 16. ♕e3

16. ♖xc8 ♜bxc8 would give Black an excellent endgame.

16... ♕e6 17. 0-0-0 ♜d6

This forces the knight back and Black regains the pawn

18. ♖d5 ♖xd5 19. exd5 ♕xd5

The endgame is roughly level if White starts exchanging pieces with 20. ♕e4.

A3) 11. ♖xd6



Risky, considering that White is so far behind in development.

11... ♕e6

The position is tricky for White. Black just wants to move the queen and put a rook on d8.

12.c3

Watch out for the traps:

12. ♖xb7? ♜e7 traps the knight;

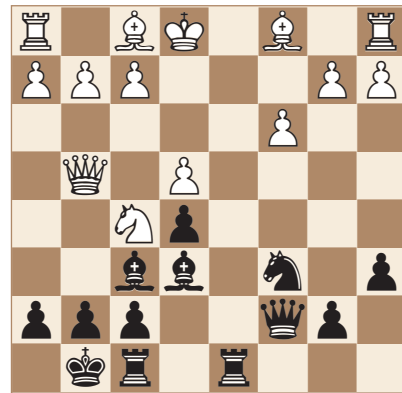
12. ♕e2? ♜e7 followed by ... ♜fd8 leaves White's queen in trouble.

12... ♜c7

Instead, 12...b5 would transpose to the main line and is quite playable, but moving the queen away directly is even more dangerous. White has to tread carefully.

13. ♖c4

Instead, 13. ♖f5 ♜ad8 14. ♜g4.



analysis diagram

Black has so many pieces in play, it must be possible to cause White some trouble: 14... ♜a5 (we see this idea in several different positions in this line; Black wants to use the pin to create trouble for the king) 15. ♕e2 (White has to hurry to bring his king to safety; everything else is just BAD) 15... ♖d4 16. ♕d1 ♖xf5 17. exf5. Black has the choice of two testing continuations at this point. I like the exchange sacrifice, but if that isn't your cup of tea, then 17... ♜d4 is worth investigating: 17... ♜xd1+ 18. ♜xd1

(18. ♖xd1? h5 19. ♖xh5 ♗c4 is even worse) 18... ♗c4. Black has excellent compensation for the exchange. How does the white king escape from the middle?

13... ♖fd8 14. ♖c2 b5 15. ♗e3 ♖ac8

Over the last few moves Black has brought his pieces into play and at the same time attacked White's pieces. He has a significant lead in development.

16. ♗e2 ♖a5 17. ♗d2

White would like to castle 17.0-0, but that leads to disaster: 17... ♗d4 18. ♖d1 ♗f3+ wins the queen.

17... ♗g5

Often the right square for the bishop in the Kalashnikov. The pressure increases.

18.0-0 b4

Black has a strong initiative, though White can hold the position with accurate play.

A4) 11. ♗e3



At this point, 11... ♗d4 is the most popular move, but I prefer to develop another piece:

11... ♗e6

Simple and strong. The bishop comes into the game onto its usual excellent square and White is under pressure: he is behind in development and the best continuation is far from obvious. There are four moves to consider:

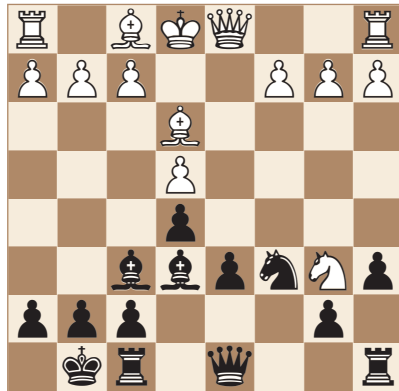
A41) 12. ♗b6

A42) 12. ♖xd6

A43) 12. ♗b6

A44) 12. ♗xd6

A41) 12. ♗b6



12... ♖b8 13. ♗d5

Normally I would exchange off the dark-squared bishop with 13... ♗g5 – which is also fine for Black – but there is a chance to seize the initiative:

13... ♗xd5 14. ♖xd5

14.exd5 ♗e7 gives Black the better pawn structure and there is a threat to play 15... ♖a5+, winning the d-pawn.

14... ♗g5

Exchanging the dark-squared bishops allows Black's queen to