

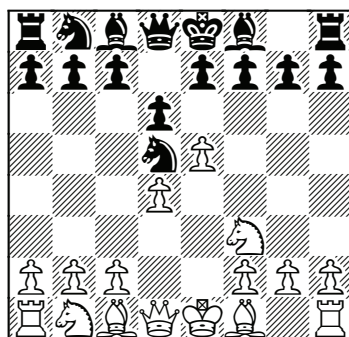
Introduction

Do you want to counter-attack on move one? If your answer is “Yes”, then *Alekhine Alert* is for you – but the book you hold in your hands is quite different from previous works on this opening.

Over the years I have accumulated no less than five books on Alekhine’s Defence – in publication order, these are *Alekhine’s Defence* by R.G.Eales and A.H.Williams (1973); *Alekhine Defense* by Norman Weinstein (no apostrophe this time, but ‘s’ instead of ‘c’ – 1977); *The Complete Alekhine* by Graham Burgess (1992); *Alekhine’s Defence* by Nigel Davies (2001); and finally, *Starting Out: Alekhine’s Defence* by John Cox (2004).

All of these are worthy books, but I have no interest in repeating or, at best, slightly updating their labours. My approach will be entirely different.

The above quintet try to cover all lines of Alekhine’s Defence, and all of them give quite a bit of space to “well-known theoretical lines” that I consider outmoded and simply not worth the time it would take to study them. For example, after 1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 (the dangerous Modern Line)



all of the above books give considerable coverage to 4...♙g4 – but I won’t.

Here's what I think of 4...♙g4: Black must learn a great deal of theory in order to survive to a rather poor position. Why then should one study it? The book you hold in your hands is the first *repertoire book* on the Alekhine. If you want a general book, you can pick any of the fine books listed above – but this one is personal and specific.

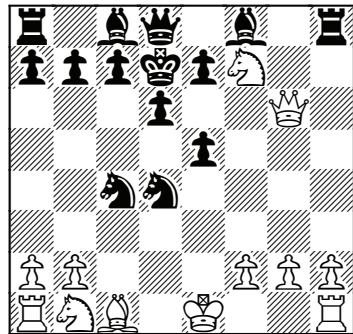
I am going to recommend only lines that I personally like and play myself. I am not going to recommend any lines where you have to know theory to move 20 just to survive. For example, in the Modern Line mentioned above, I advocate the Larsen/Miles/Carlsen continuation 4...dxe5, and then after 5 ♖xe5 I will cover in depth what I think are Black's two best continuations: 5...g6 (Kengis) and 5...c6 (Carlsen). I will not give more than a nod to 5...♘d7, because one could spend the whole book analyzing the sacrifice 6 ♘xf7 – and then what? You could probably play 5...♘d7 ten times without ever facing the sacrifice, as most of your cautious opponents will simply answer 6 ♘f3, when the game will likely transpose to Kengis lines, which you could have reached directly – but then, your eleventh opponent will come wired to the gills and play 6 ♘xf7 – you will have forgotten all the variations that you studied a year ago – and he will crush you with the latest *Fritz* continuation on move 23!

This is not the fate I want for any of my readers!

Therefore I have steered clear of recommending any particularly computeresque variations, such as 1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 ♘c6!? 5 c4 ♘b6 6 e6!? fxe6 or 1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 f4 dxe5 6 fxe5 c5 7 d5 e6. Both of these variations include queen sacrifices as theory! You think I'm joking? In Davies' book he gives the following game:

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correspondence 1997**

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 ♘c6 5 c4 ♘b6 6 e6 fxe6 7 ♘g5 e5 8 ♙d3 ♘xd4 9 ♚h5+ g6 10 ♙xg6+ hxg6 11 ♚xg6+ ♙d7 12 ♘f7 ♘xc4!?

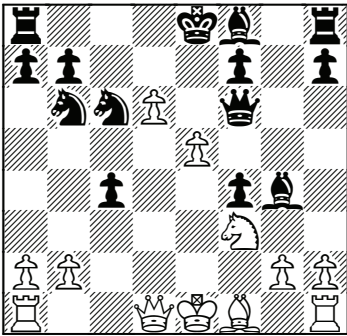


(yes, Black is giving up a queen for two pieces!) 13 ♘xd8 ♙xd8 14 b3 ♙f5 15 ♚f7 ♘b6 16 ♙e3 ♚h7 17 ♚g8 ♘c2+ 18 ♙e2 ♙d7 19 ♙xb6 axb6 20 ♘c3 ♚g7 21 ♚c4 ♚g4 22 ♚f7 ♙g6 23 ♚d5 ♘d4+ 24 ♙d1 c6 25 ♚c4 b5 26 ♘xb5 ♙c2+ 27 ♙e1 cxb5 0-1

Or this one, from *Starting Out: Alekhine's Defence* – I like a queen sacrifice with breakfast myself!

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Bled Olympiad 2002**

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 f4 dxe5 6 fxe5 c5 7 d5 e6 8 ♗c3 exd5 9 cxd5 c4 10 d6 ♗c6 11 ♘f3 ♕g4 12 ♖f4 g5 13 ♗e4 gxf4 14 ♗f6+ ♚xf6!?



(another queen sacrificed for two pieces!) 15 exf6 0-0-0 16 ♚c1 ♜e8+ 17 ♜f2 ♙xd6 18 ♙xc4 ♙c5+ 19 ♜f1 ♙e3 20 ♚c3 ♘xc4 21 ♚xc4 ♜d8 22 ♜e1 ♙xf3 23 gxf3 ♜d2 24 ♜e2 ♜d1+ 25 ♜e1 ♜d2 26 ♜e2 ♜d1+ 27 ♜e1 ♜d2 28 ♜e2 1/2-1/2

You might enjoy studying these at home, for fun, if you have time, and you might surprise someone with a “my computer is better than your computer” line, but this book has a different aim.

So what is the goal of *Alekhine Alert*?

Just this: I will give the prospective Alekhine player a sound but not too theoretical repertoire against everything White can throw at this defence – but I warn you in advance, White will throw a lot of *junk*!

And one has to take this junk seriously, for one will face it much more often than the critical lines. Almost a hundred years of experience have made it clear that the strongest test of Alekhine’s bold counter-attack is this aforementioned Modern Line – here are the moves again: 1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♗f3. World Champion Anand plays this exclusively, with great results (out of eleven games in the database he has scored nine wins, two draws, and not a single loss!). One would think you would face this line all the time – but not so at all.

Anand clearly takes the Alekhine seriously, and always seems well prepared when he faces it – but most people tend to view the cheeky knight counter as some kind of nonsense that can be met with any junk lying about – as though champions of the defence like Alekhine himself, Vassily Smyslov and Bobby Fischer were just crazed amateurs having a fling!

Consider the Sousse Interzonal of 1967, for example: the best players in the world are vying for the world title, and some of these “weak” players (Larsen! Korchnoi! Mecking! Hort!) play Alekhine’s Defence. Among them they play 1 e4 ♘f6 five times (Larsen played

Alekhine Alert!

it twice). Did any of their esteemed opponents play the strong and critical Modern Line? Not a chance! Two of the five white players tried the largely inoffensive Exchange Variation (2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♗b6 5 exd6) where White hopes for a slight edge at best, but hardly challenges the Alekhine. Two more white players tried the completely inoffensive 2 e5 ♖d5 3 ♖c3 which has never given White more than equality since Alekhine cleanly equalized against Sämisch (see Game 65) in 1921! Finally, one World Championship contender wouldn't even push the centre pawn past the meridian and defended with 2 ♖c3.

What were the results? *Black won all five games.*

Nothing much has changed today. Unless you face Anand, your opponents will probably throw everything at you *except* the Modern Line! My experience is quite typical. In recent years I have played the Alekhine eleven times and have faced the following variations: The most common line was the Exchange Variation (three games) but this is no way for White to get an advantage – if in fact he wants one. Many players play this way out of trendy pacifism: that is, they aim for a draw with White. Two opponents played what is probably the worst playable answer to 1...♗f6, namely the pitifully passive 2 d3. This was played just as often as the two opponents who actually went for the strong Modern Line.

That accounts for seven games: in the other four I faced Sämisch's inoffensive 3 ♖c3, the even more inoffensive 2 ♖c3, the no-name 2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♗b6 5 ♗f3!?, and finally the optically impressive Four Pawns Attack just once.

To sum up, I faced the dangerous Modern Line just 18% of the time, and the absurdly retrograde 2 d3 just as often! I learned how to fight against White's drawish Exchange Variation 27% of the time, more than any other line; and another 27% of the time I faced an assortment of harmless variations.

I faced the sharp Four Pawns Attack (2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♗b6 5 f4) only once, or just 9%.

And I scored, with Black, four wins, three losses and four draws, for a healthy plus score of almost 55% (one recalls that normally White scores this kind of percentage) and it's worth noting that I was playing substantially higher rated opponents in three of these games.

These statistics do give a very good reason to play the Alekhine's Defence: most of the time you will face not very good lines that you should be able to equalize cleanly against, or even get the advantage right out of the opening! You must, of course, be prepared for the dangerous Modern Line, but I will give two good, related variations here, so even if you face it you can react with confidence.

As for the “inoffensive” moves, I am going (for the first time in an Alekhine book) to give what I think is *best* rather than what is strictly Alekhine’s Defence. In other words, if the best line is to transpose to the French, then transpose to the French! (Game 61). If the best move is to transpose to the Four Knight’s Game (Game 70) then bring on more horsepower! If the best calls for moving your king on move three, then call your king Steinitz and move him on out! (Game 74).

In every case my repertoire lines are based not on long memorized variations but rather on solid positional concepts.

In Chapter One I will show how World Champions have upheld the honour of Alekhine’s Defence; and after that, I will take on *all* of White’s tries, starting with the dangerous Modern

Line (Chapters Two, Three and Four) and then work my way down to the “savage” 2 d3 and 2 f3 of Chapter Ten. Most of the chapters will start with a game featuring “Lines I Don’t Like” – usually theory-heavy, overrated variations – and then will proceed to my recommendations. Also, each chapter will feature a hero such as Larsen or Korchnoi who has championed my proposed repertoire – all GMs except for one lowly IM (you can guess who that is!) spotlighted in Chapter Ten.

If you work all the way through this book, I promise you that you will come away with a sound and playable repertoire to battle 1 e4 with 1...♘f6!.

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Los Angeles
January 2010