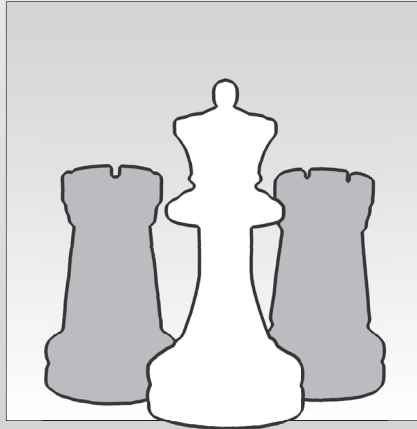




**Chess  
University - 12**

**Maxim CHETVERIK  
Nikolay KALINICHENKO**

**Alekhine  
Defense  
A Complete Guide**



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Edited by Sergey Sudakov and Kiril Kuznetsov  
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# Introduction

‘Just like King Midas, who was endowed with the power to turn everything he touched to gold, Alekhine, the Russian maestro, has the same magical touch in the opening—his audacious and incredible knight move pursues a particular aim—breaking down White’s pawn chain, which pays off in the endgame.

The Alekhine Defense is a peculiar mix of open and semi-open systems. Initially, Black obliges by letting his knight get kicked around by e5, d4, c4, and f4, responding with ♖g8-f6-d5-b6. White gets comfortable in the center, but then Black starts chipping away at White’s pawn chain (with d7-d6, ♗c6, etc.) and eventually, the tables are turned. **Now White has to fight tool and nail to maintain his initiative.**’

Savielly Tartakower began his magnificent work entitled *The Hypermodern Chess Game* with those two eloquently written paragraphs, thereby signifying that the author attached a particular importance to the Alekhine Defense. We recommend you take a look at Tartakower’s analysis of 1.e4 Nf6, viewing our historical background section and his comments as two entries on early chess theory and history. Now we have to move onto some more dry material.

Like the authors’ previous book, *An Encyclopedia on the Dutch Defense*, this volume includes a theoretical section with illustrative games (exactly 100 of them). The book’s 87 chapters have been broken down into 16 separate parts. Not every chapter contains commented games; however, those chapters covering the hottest lines may have two or three, each of them providing extensive analysis and numerous lines from other games. The move order has been modified in certain cases to present the material in a more coherent manner; luckily, one can dissect the Alekhine Defense’s constituent parts without sacrificing continuity, as it is such a flexible and ingenuous opening system.

# Historical Background

The Alekhine Defense is a strange progeny of 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to the Megabase, Black only attacked White's king pawn with his knight (1... Nf6) two times during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first encounter of its kind is rather comical — Madame de Remusat — Napoleon Bonaparte, Paris 1802. Madame shied away from the principled 2.e5 in favor of 2.d3. The French emperor lured the white king into the center of the board by sacrificing two pieces and he mated the poor monarch on move 13. The title of Chase's detective novel, *Believe This — You'll Believe Anything*, probably most aptly describes Napoleon's triumph.

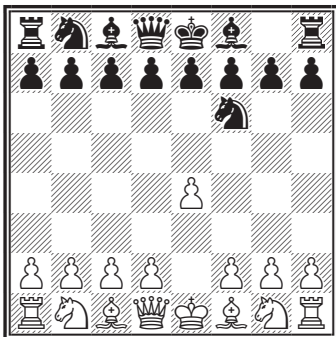
Johann Allgaier mentions 1...Nf6 in his 1811 textbook on chess. No practical games were referenced, though. It is known that in 1860 the Edinburgh Chess Club employed this odd opening against the Berwick Chess Club in a correspondence game. Only was it in 1893 that two American masters, Hanham and Delmar, played something vaguely resembling a modern opening system: 2.Nc3 d5 3.e5 d4 4.ef dc 5.fe cd+ 6.♙xd2 ♖xe7+ 7.♗e2 ♕e6, etc. Aron Nimzowitsch won a funny little game against Adolf Albin twelve years later. Let us take this opportunity to consider this sideline in the Alekhine Defense (and never return to it again for serious analysis). De-facto, this line is not a part of the real Alekhine Defense.

## Game 1

### A.Nimzowitsch – A.Albin

Vienna 1905

1. e2-e4 ♘g8-f6



'A theoretically innocent attempt, not the Klyatskin variation' (Nimzowitsch). One should note that in 1905 Mikhail Klyatskin, a chess player from Moscow, was only eight years old, and he introduced 1...♘f6 into his repertoire slightly earlier than Alekhine himself. Luckily enough, Klyatskin's legacy did not fade into oblivion, but 'the Alekhine Defense' is a fairer name than 'the Klyatskin Defense'.

2. e4-e5 ♘f6-g8?!

It is hard to believe that the potentially vulnerable far-advanced

e-pawn adequately compensates for this tempo loss. Retreating to the back rank never gained popularity, remaining an opening experiment. Centralizing the knight by playing 2...♞e4?! is risky relative to 2.♞c3 d5 3.e5 ♞e4. For instance, after 3.d4 f6 4.♙d3 d5 5.f3 ♞g5 6.♞e2 it is unclear how Black will develop his pieces, while White can meet 3...e6 with the promising 4.♞h3!.

3.d3, as well as 3.d4, gives White an advantage. It is hard not to shed a tear looking at Black's position after 3...♞c5 4.d4 ♞ca6 5.♞f3 d6 6.♙c4 e6 7.0-0 de 8.♞xe5 ♙d6 9.♙g4 ♙xe5?! 10.de ♙f8 11.♙g5 ♙e8 12.♞c3 Bakhmatov – Heinrichs, Nettetel 2010. After 4...♞e6 5.d5 ♞c5 6.b4 ♞ca6 the overworked horse also finds itself on the brim, but the position is not so clear because Black can undermine White's center with 7.a3 d6 8.♙e3 c6. 5.f4!? g6 6.d5 ♞c5 7.♙e3 d6 8.♙d4 f6 (Moroz – Vavra, Pardubice 1998) 9.e6 c6 10.c4 is worth considering.

John Watson and Eric Schiller have dubbed the 2...♞e4 continuation the Mokele Mbembe variation. One can only wonder how these two American chess theorists drew a parallel between Nessi's relative in Africa and an opening variation.

**3. d2-d4 d7-d5**

The 3...d5 and 3...d6 sidelines run together if an exchange on d6 occurs. After 4.ed ♙xd6 5.♞c3 we

arrive at a transposed Scandinavian Defense (1.e4 d5 2.ed ♙xd5 3.♞c3 ♙d6 4.d4). 5.♞f3, looking to redirect the queen's knight to c4, is more flexible.

Perhaps, 3...d6 is best for Black, all things considered. If 4.♞f3 de 5.♞xe5 ♞d7 (if 2...♞d5 3.d4 d6 4.♞f3 de 5.♞xe5 ♞d7 White would sacrifice on f7...) 6.♙d3 (or 6.♙f3 ♞xe5 7.de c6 8.♞c3 ♙a5 9.♙f4 g5!? 10.♙xg5 ♙xe5+ 11.♙e3 ♙g7 with a manageable position for Black) 6...♞gf6 7.♞d2 c5 8.♞df3 cd 9.♙e2 ♞xe5 10.♞xe5 a6 11.♙g5 h6 12.♙h4 ♙a5+ 13.c3 e6 14.0-0, and the sacrificed material is roughly worth the initiative, Grandelius – Fries Nielsen, Lund 2011. 10.♙xe5, followed by winning back the pawn, guarantees White a small yet stable advantage.

Magnus Carlsen, seemingly recalling his younger days, returned his knight to the back rank, instead of centralizing it, in his blitz game against Fressinet (Dubai 2014). After 4.♞f3 c6 5.h3 ♙f5 6.♙d3 ♙xd3 7.♙xd3 de 8.♞xe5 ♞d7 9.♙f4 ♞gf6 10.♞c3 ♞xe5 11.♙xe5 e6 12.0-0-0 ♙e7 13.♙b1 0-0 14.♙g3 ♞h5 15.♙f3 ♞f6 the French GM shied away from repeating moves. Instead, he charged on (16.h4!?!), and eventually lost. Overall, Black does not have any weaknesses or chances at usurping the initiative.

**4. ♙f1-d3 ...**

4.c4!? is more decisive. By opting against undermining the d4+e5

pawn duo Black may find himself in a critical position. For instance, 4... c6 5.♘c3 ♙e6 6.♗ge2 dc4 7.♗f4 ♚c8 8.♙e3 ♙f5?! (Black should have redirected his knight to this square via h6) 9.♙xc4 e6 10.g4 ♙g6 11.h4 ♙b4 12.f3 b5 13.♙b3 Ponizil – Krajina, Ostrava 2010.

4. ... e7-e6

It is unwise of Albin to neglect putting some pressure on d4. An interesting continuation could follow: 4...c5 5.c3 ♗c6 6.♗e2 ♙g4 7.f3 (7.♙e3!?) 7...♙d7 8.♙e3 ♚b6 9.dc ♚xb2 10.e6!?! fe 11.♗d2 ♚a3 12.♚b1 ♚b8 13.0-0.

5. ♗g1-e2 ...

Nimzowitsch aims to activate his queen as he does in his variation of the French Defense (1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.♚g4). This would be an improvement on his usual developing maneuver. 5.♚g4 b6 6.♗f3 ♙a6 7.♙xa6 ♗xa6 8.0-0, noted by Nimzowitsch, actually does favor White; however, if 5... c5!? 6.♗f3 cd 7.♚xd4 ♗c6 8.♚f4 ♗ge7 he still must fight for an advantage.

5. ... ♗b8-c6

Black cannot stir up any substantial counterplay without c7-c5. Nevertheless, his fortress is still rather durable.

6. c2-c3 ♗g8-e7

7. ♙c1-g5 ♚d8-d7

8. ♗b1-d2 ♗e7-g6

9. 0-0 ...

It is easier to attack by playing 9.♚c2 ♙e7 10.h4 (Nimzowitsch).

Marching the f-pawn is slightly less effective.

9. ... ♙f8-e7

10. f2-f4 ♚d7-d8

11. ♗d2-f3 h7-h6?!

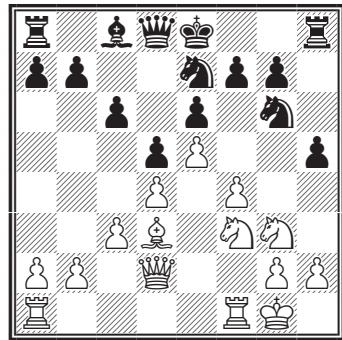
12. ♙g5xe7 ...

12.♙xg6 hg 13.♚d3! ♗f8 (13... fxg6 14.♚xg6+ ♚d7 15.f5) 14.♙h5 ♗h8 (aimed against 15.♚h7) 15.♙xf7+!? (15.♙g4!?) 15...♚xf7 16.fg ♚g8 17.♗f4 ♙d7 18.h4 is more interesting, and Black will struggle to defend his cramped position.

12. ... ♗c6xe7

13. ♚d1-d2 c7-c6

14. ♗e2-g3 h6-h5



15. f4-f5!? ...

Nimzowitsch opts for an immediate sacrifice instead of breaking down Black's blockade on the white squares with 15.♗g5 ♗h4 16.♚e2 g6. He chose not to comment upon Albin's reply, but wrongfully. The endgame resulting after 15...♗xf5 16.♚ae1 (threatening 17.♗xf5 ef 18.e6) 16... ♗ge7 17.♚g5 ♗xg3 18.hg ♗f5

19.♙xf5 ♖xg5 20.Nxg5 ef 21.e6  
♙xe6 22.♖xf5 0-0 looks like drawn.

15. ... e6xf5?

16. ♘f3-g5 ...

Yet another sacrifice aimed at wrenching open some lines is on the agenda. Nevertheless, 16.♖g5 (16... ♖d7 17.Nxf5! Nxf5 18.e6!) looks simpler and stronger.

16. ... f5-f4

17. ♖f1xf4! ♘g6xf4

18. ♖d2xf4 ♙c8-e6

19. ♖a1-f1 ♖d8-b6?!

19...♖d7! is more precise than 19...♖c7?! and the text move, because in the 20.♘xf7 0-0 21.Nh6+ gh 22.♖xh6 line the bishop is protected, and White's attack is not a sure thing. If 20.♖f3, then 20...0-0-0 21.♘xf7 ♙xf7 22.♖xf7 g6, and Black may be able to fend off the attack.

20. ♘g3-f5?! ...

Nimzowitsch's self-proclaimed 'remarkable positional intuition' failed him here. Black could have held on in this seemingly dangerous position by playing 20...♙xf5 21.♙xf5 c5! 22.♙d3 0-0, while the prophylactic 20.b4! would have backed Black up against a wall!

20. ... ♘e7xf5?

21. ♙d3xf5 ♖b6-c7

22. ♙f5xe6 f7xe6

23. ♘g5xe6 ♖c7-e7

24. ♖f4-f5 ♙e8-d7

25. ♘e6-f8++ ♙d7-c7

26. ♘f8-g6 ♖e7-e8

27. ♘g6xh8 ♖e8xh8

28. ♖f5-e6 ...

White has an extra passed pawn and an overwhelming position, so all roads lead to Rome: 28.e6, 28.♖g6, followed by invading the 7<sup>th</sup> rank (♖f1-f7), and the text move are winning.

28. ... ♙c7-b6

29. ♖e6-e7 ♖h8-h6

30. ♖e7-c5+ ♙b6-a6

31. b2-b4 b7-b5

In the 31...b6 32.b5+! cb 33.♖a3+ ♙b7 34.♖f7+ ♙c6 35.h3 h4 36.♙h1 variation Nimzowitsch takes prophylactic measures, but there is no need to because he has 35.c4!

32. h2-h3 ...

Another pointless move. After 32.a4 White wins by wrenching open the a-file.

32. ... h5-h4

33. ♙g1-h1 ♖h6-e6

34. ♖f1-f7 ♖e6-h6

35. a2-a4 ♖h6-e6

36. a4-a5 ♖e6-e8

37. ♖f7xa7+ ♖a8xa7

38. ♖c5-b6#

Alexander Alekhine first employed the defense bearing his name in a game versus Donegan, Muellner, and Zimmerman (August 1921). He implemented 1...Nf6 during a serious tournament game two months later. His games against Friedrich Saemisch and Endre Steiner during the Budapest tournament were not particularly impressive though, but it would be a disservice to Alekhine's