

The Bishop

Danger on the Diagonal



Power of the Pieces Series

Sergey Kasparov

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The Bishop: Danger on the Diagonal
Power of the Pieces Series
by Sergey Kasparov

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Introduction

Welcome, dear readers!

More than likely, we have already gotten acquainted from my previous books; or else we met at a tournament: Sergey Kasparov, Grandmaster (GM) from Byelorussia, at your service (Byelorussia being a Eastern European country between Poland and Russia.)

As usual, the technical work on this book is done by my wife Tatiana, a Woman International Master (WIM). You probably already know of her as well.

There are a few chess pieces, of different kinds; this book is devoted to one of them.

It is called by different names, in different languages; but the name it is usually called – and the one most people are familiar with – is “Bishop.” In Russian, it is “Слон” or “Elephant,” which refers to one of the most powerful creatures on the planet:



The Bishop

On the chessboard, it looks like this:



This is the description given by Wikipedia:

“The Bishop can move any number of squares along the diagonal, provided there are no pieces in its path. Each bishop may move only along the white squares, or along black; therefore, bishops are called ‘white-square’ or ‘black-square,’ respectively, according to the color of the square they are placed on originally.”

We will consider the drawbacks and the advantages of this piece in various phases of the game, with various piece configurations, etc. I shall make it a point to have a comparatively large number of diagrams, in order that the lazier ones among my readership will not have to set up their own chessboards. This is a book you may read on the metro, on a train, or lying on your couch. Very rarely, in between the strictly chess problems, I will make “lyrical digressions” to give my readers a chance to take it easy.

Notice! The author does not pretend to be absolutely right; or to cover all the possible situations involving the bishop. The size of this book does not allow me to do exhaustive analysis; and besides, I do not want to overload your memory. If any questions for your author should happen to arise, or requests, or argumentative criticism, do not worry – you may write to tkasparova@rambler.ru.

I wish you a happy and useful way to pass the time.

Sergey Kasparov
April 2018

Chapter 8

The French Bishop

The bishop has an unusual destiny in the French Defense. In a number of lines, it runs smack into the e6-pawn, which went there on the very first move. Usually, I have had to work with this position as White, but lately, I have had to protect the interests of the bishop itself as well. Now, a series of examples, where Black really suffers on account of our chief hero.

First, there will be simple game fragments, where the bishop is not completely blocked – it can move, but White blithely “ignores” the French bishop.

(87) S.Kasparov – Juettner
Schwaebisch Gmund 2005
French Defense [C06]

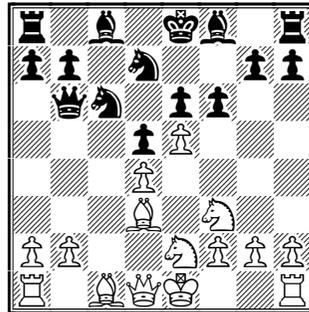
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2

I usually employ this flexible development system.

3...♗f6 4.e5 ♗fd7 5.♕d3 c5 6.c3

It is desirable to shore up the center pawn and to maintain the central pawn chain.

**6...♗c6 7.♗e2 ♖b6 8.♗f3 c×d4
9.c×d4 f6**



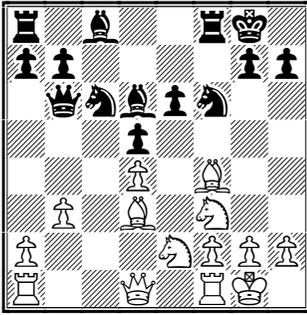
And thus, White has chosen a clever way to develop his knights: one jumped ♗b1-d2-f3, while the other one crept modestly to e2. The main point was to maintain control over the key squares d4 and e5. In his turn, Black undermines the opposing bastions in the center.

10.e×f6 ♗×f6 11.0-0 ♕d6 12.b3

I want to bring my bishop out to f4, and do it without leaving the b2-pawn hanging.

12...0-0 13.♕f4

The Bishop

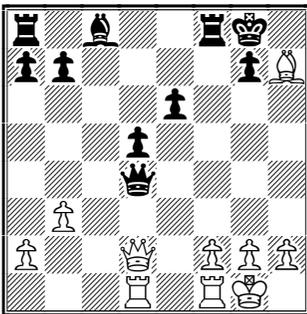


When the center pawns are set up like this, it usually favors White to play exactly this way – trading off the dark-square bishops. I hope that you understand why? Right: partly because some weakness in my opponent’s dark squares (e5, d6...) arises.

13... ♖xf4 14. ♜xf4 ♚e4 15. ♜e2 ♜d6

Periodically, in this opening, Black will land the blow 15... ♖xf3, but in this instance gluttony goes unrewarded: 16.gxf3±

16. ♚d2 ♜f5 17. ♖ad1 ♜d7 17... ♜fxd4?? 18. ♜exd4 ♜xd4 19. ♜xd4 ♚xd4 20. ♜xh7+±

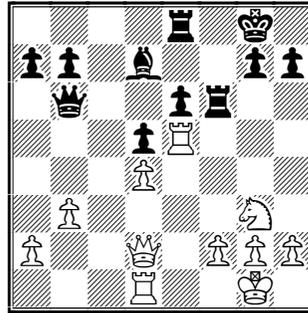


The d4-pawn may be snatched, but only if the variation does *not* conclude by moving the bishop away *with check*.

18. ♖fe1 ♖ae8 19. ♜xf5

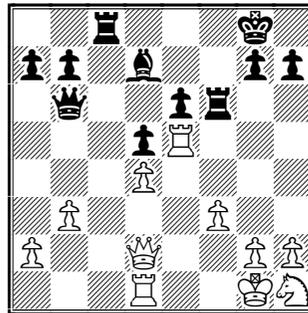
Why am I giving up my bishop for the knight? We already know that, usually, the bishop is a bit stronger. For now, I will let you think about it.

19... ♖xf5 20. ♜g3 ♖f6 21. ♜e5 ♜xe5 22. ♖xe5



We can already draw a few conclusions. Of all the minor pieces, there remain only the “bad” bishop (blocked by its own pawns) and the knight. It is precisely for this reason that White stands better. Ideally, I need to bring my knight to e5.

22... ♖ef8 23.f3 ♖c8 24. ♜h1

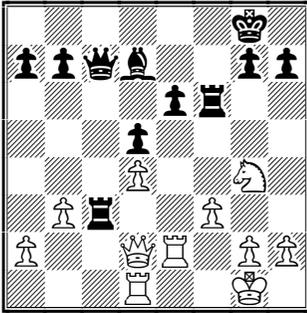


The knight is trying to advance via steps that the bishop cannot reach; for, if a trade occurs, then the situation will be equalized. A single weakness – the

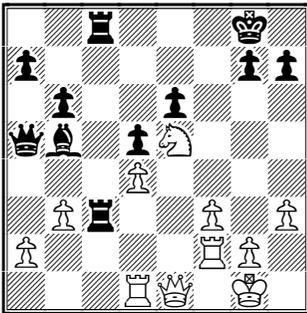
The French Bishop

pawn at e6 – is usually insufficient for victory.

24...♞c6 25.♟f2 ♜c7 26.♞e2 ♞c3
27.♟g4



27...♞f8 28.♟e5 ♟b5 29.♞f2 ♜a5
30.h3 ♞fc8?! 30...♜b4; 30...b6
31.♜e1 b6??



A serious error; however, Black's position was not very enjoyable, even without this. Notice how his bishop fires away into nothingness; while my pieces are doing their best to ignore it.

32.♟c4+-

Problems with the e6-pawn, and the c3-rook.

32...♜a6 33.♜x e6+ ♜h8 34.♟d6
1-0

Along with everything else, White threatens a smothered mate by ♟d6-f7-h6, ♜g8 and ♟f7.

The next game, played in a village in the Apennines, was even quicker and more violent. The bishop was a "stranger at this celebration of life."

(88) S.Kasparov – Astengo

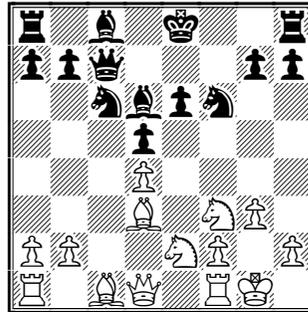
Soazza 2009

French Defense [C06]

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♟d2 ♟f6 4.e5
♟fd7 5.♟d3 c5 6.c3 ♟c6 7.♟e2
cxd4 8.cxd4 f6 9.exf6 ♟xf6 10.0-0
♟d6 11.♟f3 ♜c7

Preventing the developing move ♟c1-f4.

12.g3



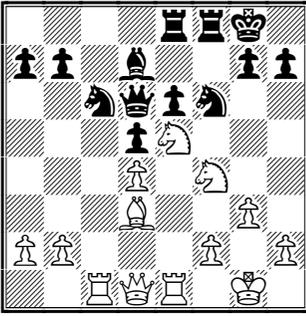
I have to weaken my king's protection.

12...0-0 13.♟f4 ♟d7 14.♞c1 ♟xf4
15.♟xf4 ♜d6 15...♜b6!?± 16.♞e1

In similar structures, the whole game revolves around the key square e5. Black would like to play e6-e5, contesting the center and opening up the bishop's space. Naturally, White prevents this.

16...♞ae8 17.♟e5±

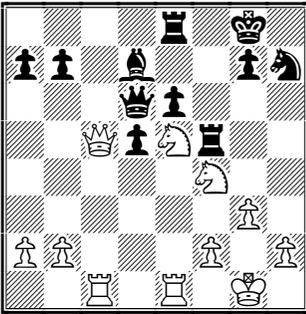
The Bishop



17...dxd4?!

A strategic error. It does not lead to material losses; however, what does happen is a knight-for-bishop exchange; and in this case, that is not so good.

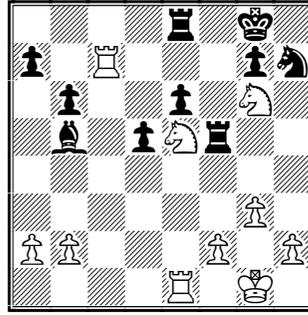
18. Qxh7+ Nhx7 19. Qxd4 Rf5
20. Qc5



I am too lazy to calculate variations, so I decided to just trade off queens, since the endgame, with his “bad” bishop, was going to be quite joyless for Black. (20.g4+-)

20...Qxc5 21. Rxc5 b6 21...Ng5
22. Qg2± 22. Rxc7 Qb5 23. Qfg6! (D)

Once again, it all happens so that the bishop cannot take part in the struggle. The sufferer on b5 is totally useless for the kingside battle.



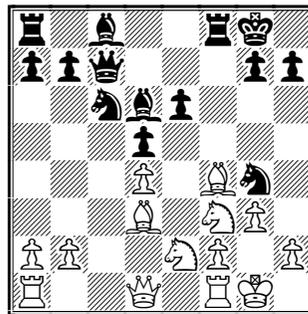
23...Ng5 23...Rf6 24. Rxa7+- 24.f4
1-0

The threat is Ng6-e7+; therefore, the Italian laid down his arms.

And now we have the same line, but with a more competent performance by Black. Let's see how it goes when he manages to open up the center, and his bishop breaks out into the open. With adequate counter-action from White, there are bound to be problems.

(89) S.Kasparov – Polivanov
Donetsk 2011
French Defense [C06]

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3. Nd2 Nf6 4.e5
Nfd7 5. Qd3 c5 6.c3 Nc6 7. Qe2
cxd4 8.cxd4 f6 9.exf6 Qxf6
10. Qf3 Qc7 11.0-0 Qd6 12.g3 0-0
13. Qf4 Ng4



This variation is pretty current. Black

The French Bishop

establishes total control over the e5-square and inevitably gets in ...e6-e5.

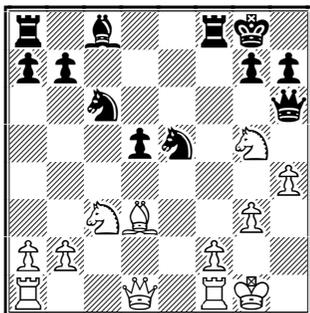
14. ♖×d6 ♗×d6 15. ♘c3

Lacking the resources to avoid the central breakthrough, White takes all possible precautionary measures against the consequences.

15...e5 16.d×e5 ♗h6 17.h4

This could also be called theory. I could not see any other way of defending the h2-pawn.

17... ♖g×e5 18. ♖g5



18...d4 19. ♖×h7+

This has all been seen before, although not very often. 19. ♖d5 gives us an unclear position, Vachier-Lagrave-E. Berg, 2008.

19... ♗h8 20.f4!

The only move that gives White the advantage; other moves are weaker.

20... ♖g4 21. ♗b3?

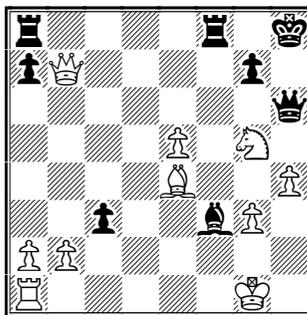
The best line here was 21. ♗c2! d×c3 22.f×e5 ♖d4 23. ♗e4 c×b2 24. ♖ab1 ♖f3+ 25. ♖×f3 (The queen protects the bishop, and controls the e3-square)

25... ♖×f3 26. ♖×f3 ♖×f3 27. ♗×f3 ♗×h7 28. ♗c3±, Huschenbeth-Kurmann, Merlimont 2011.

21...d×c3 22.f×e5 ♖d4 23. ♗×b7 23. ♗b4 ♖f3+ 24. ♖×f3 ♖×f3 25.b×c3=

23... ♖f3+ 24. ♖×f3 24. ♖×f3?! ♗e3+ 25. ♗g2 ♖ab8 (25... ♗e2+? 26. ♖f2 c×b2 27. ♖b1 ♖×f3+ 28. ♗×f3+-) 26. ♖g5 ♗e2+ 27. ♗g1 ♖×f1+ 28. ♖×f1 ♗×f1+ 29. ♗×f1 ♖×b7 30.b×c3 ♖b2 with the initiative.

24... ♖×f3 25. ♖e4



The only move: the others are all unsatisfactory.

25... ♖×e4 26. ♗×e4 c×b2 27. ♖b1 = ♖ab8?

This logical move is the reason that he loses: he had to get the queen to the queenside. 27... ♗b6+ would have maintained dynamic equality. Here are a few illustrative variations: 28. ♗h1 g6 29.e6 ♖ab8 (or 29... ♖ac8 30.e7, which will probably lead to a draw by perpetual check). 30. ♗×g6 ♗b7+

(a) 31. ♗g1 ♗b6+ 32. ♗h1= (31... ♗g7 32. ♖f7+ ♖×f7 33. ♗h5+ ♗g8 (33... ♗h7? 34. ♗e5+-) 34.e×f7+ ♗×f7=); or

(b) 31. ♗h2 ♖f2+ 32. ♗h3 ♖bf8