
ENTER THE KETTLEBELL!

Strength
Secret of
The Soviet
Supermen



WITH
PAVEL



ENTER THE KETTLEBELL!

**Strength Secret
of The Soviet
Supermen**



**BY
KAVEL**

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Published in the United States by:
Dragon Door Publications, Inc
P.O. Box 4381, St. Paul, MN 55104
Tel: (651) 487-2180 • Fax: (651) 487-3954
Credit card orders: 1-800-899-5111
Email: dragondoor@aol.com • Website: www.dragondoor.com

ISBN: 978-0-938045-69-4 0-938045-69-5

This edition first published in April 2006

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Printed in the United States of America

Book design, Illustrations, logos, photo manipulation and cover by Derek Brigham
Website <http://www.dbrigham.com> • Tel/Fax: (763) 208-3069 • Email: dbrigham@visi.com
Photographs by Don Pitlik: (612) 252-6797

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FOREWORD BY DAN JOHN

“DO THIS!”

Within minutes of meeting Pavel Tsatsouline for the first time, I was being split fore and aft and being told to tighten my hip as Pavel slapped it. I was stiff in the hip flexors and, well, Pavel was going to do his best to fix it. All I know is that I came away from our first meeting with flexible hips, a plan for lifting for the next year, and, most important, a great respect for Pavel Tsatsouline. Since meeting Pavel, I have seen literally hundreds of his posts on the Internet, read all of his books (although, to the teacher in me, "textbooks" seems more correct), and watched his library of DVDs. Whenever I review his work, one concept comes into my head: Do This!

The greatest challenge in fitness, health, life performance, and sports is walking the narrow balance beam between too much variety and no variety. You know, I love Thanksgiving dinner, but not every day. One day, someone might find the perfect diet with one superfood, but I doubt many people—short of living on a desert island—would follow this diet for very long. Pavel Tsatsouline hit the mark perfectly in his book *Power to the People!*

Power to the People! had all the earmarks of a perfect program: Do This. And, "this" was deadlifts and side presses. He offered suggestions for further variation, but, honestly, one could have a successful career with just those two lifts. I have it on good authority—several drinks at a bar with these throwers—that many world-ranked track and field throwers are currently doing JUST that workout.

So, you may well ask, why do we need another kettlebell book? Where are the mad throngs of crazed health enthusiasts demanding *Enter the Kettlebell!*? You know what? They are everywhere! Early in *Enter the Kettlebell!* Pavel quotes J.M. Martin, who writes, "I was fine doing a *Power to the People!* workout because I knew exactly what to do. The book broke it down idiot proof for me and it worked. I made enormous gains. Well, now I have a kettlebell and I want to make a set-in-stone path to follow." Martin echoes what I have heard from legions of kettlebell enthusiasts: "What do I do? I've got the book/video/DVD/workshop/seminar/article . . . now how do I do 'what' when?"

Enter the Kettlebell!

Personally, the RKC Program Minimum was enough for me. "Here you go . . . DO THIS!" could be the subtitle for the first few chapters. Two exercises. Each exercise twice a week. A push and a pull (holy Power to the People!, Batman). For the majority of kettlebell users, here you go . . . a plan to follow.

Pavel, however, delivers more. The chapter on the "Rite of Passage" gives us a step-by-step approach to literally climbing the ladder of kettlebell exercises. Moreover, the section "The Hazards of Variety and How to Dodge Them" is a century of knowledge compressed into a few pages. If you liked the "old school" approach, open your eyes and see the classic training methods from a kettlebell perspective.

Clearly, this book is not the end point. Pavel notes, "I never stop polishing my training system, which is why you will find some inconsistencies between *The Russian Kettlebell Challenge* and *Enter the Kettlebell!* The latter book takes precedence. At the RKC, we never rest."

I have some simple advice for you:

Do this.



Dan John is your typical coach. A Fulbright Scholar to Egypt, Dan has advanced degrees in history and religious education. He has traveled the world dealing with parasites, customs officials and a terrible accent in every language he has learned...so much so, that both Turkish and Hebrew speakers have asked him to stop speaking their language.

When not working as a professor of religious studies, Dan is a full-time strength coach and Head Track and Field coach at Juan Diego Catholic High School in Draper, Utah. Dan has multiple national and state championships in the discus, Olympic lifting, Highland Games and the Weight Pentathlon.

Dan John is the author of two instructional DVDs, *Carried Away*, on carrying, dragging and pulling objects for strength and conditioning, and *From the Ground Up*, that teaches weightlifting fundamentals quickly and correctly, the old-school way. Both DVDs are available at www.crossfitnorcal.com/catalog/index.php. Dan also maintains the "world's largest" free website dedicated to lifting and throwing stuff at www.danjohn.org/coach.

PREFACE

A Step to the Left and I Shoot

Remember Robin Williams' Soviet defector character in *Moscow on the Hudson*? The recovering Commie just wanted to buy some coffee. In the USSR he had had two choices: 'We have coffee' or, more likely, "We are out of coffee." When he saw the variety of products in the coffee aisle of a New York City supermarket, he nearly had a nervous breakdown.

The mind-boggling diversity of kettlebell exercises and applications can make the aspiring kettlebeller feel like the Russkie defector. The freestyle training program in my book *The Russian Kettlebell Challenge* kicked off a tyranny of kettlebell choices that has continued with the smorgasbord of exercises on my DVDs and those made by my senior instructors.

"Maybe someone can help," asked Comrade J.M. Martin in a thread titled "Kettlebell Confused" on our forum. "I have read all I can find on kettlebells and have to say I am at loss as to making a program. I was fine doing a *Power to the People!* workout because I knew exactly what to do. The book broke it down idiot proof for me and it worked. I made enormous gains. Well now I have a kettlebell and I want to make a set in stone path to follow. . . ."



Enter the Kettlebell! is your "set in stone path," the ruthlessly efficient *Power to the People!* for kettlebells. A step to the left and I shoot.

Russian kettlebell power to you!

Pavel



INTRODUCTION

When We Say “Strength,” We Mean “Kettlebell.” When We Say “Kettlebell,” We Mean “Strength.”



If Charles Atlas were Russian, he could have told a different story . . .

Sergey Mishin was a heavy, slow, decidedly nonathletic kid. He picked up his first kettlebell, a 53-pounder, at 17 and was dismayed when he could not lift it with either arm. Undeterred by his weakness, Mishin found a plumbing pipe, hammered its middle flat so it would hold the kettlebell handle in place, and started jerking the kettlebell with two hands, like a barbell. The year was 1975. Two years later, Mishin could press a 70-pounder, which he had found abandoned in a park after a festival held on Railroad Worker Day, 30 times with each arm.

Mishin kept kettlebelling in the army, and when he was discharged he bragged to a friend that he would make a Master of Sports national ranking in the first kettlebell lifting competition he entered. And he did!



The cover of a 1915 issue of *Hercules*, Tsarist Russia's strength magazine.

Sergey lost more than 100 pounds; became fast, wiry. And went on to become the number-one kettlebell lifter in the world—170 jerks with a pair of 70-pound kettlebells in 10 minutes!—and Russia's sport legend. The president of Russia awarded Mishin a medal "For Accomplishments for the Benefit of the Motherland." (II degree).

In Russia kettlebells are a matter of national pride and a symbol of strength. In the olden days, any strongman or weightlifter was referred to as a *girevik*, or "kettlebell man." Steeled by their kettlebells, generation after generation of Russian boys has turned to men. A century before Mishin, another young boy, Pyotr Kryloff, found kettlebells at a butcher's shop. It was love at first sight. Pyotr never parted with his kettlebells, and when he became a merchant marine he took them with him around the world. Eventually the kettlebell fanatic became a circus strongman and performed until he was 60. The public called him the "King of Kettlebells." Kryloff could cross himself in the Russian Orthodox manner with

a 70-pound kettlebell, military pressed the same kettlebell with one arm 88 times, and juggled *three* of them at once! Pyotr applied his kettlebell power to all sorts of feats. He broke stones with his fist, bent coins, made "ties" and "bracelets" out of strips of iron, broke horseshoes, jerked a "barbell" with two beefy soldiers sitting inside two hollow spheres, and set a few world weightlifting records.

Pyotr Kryloff, "the King of Kettlebells," could cross himself in the Russian Orthodox manner with a 70-pound kettlebell, military pressed the same kettlebell with one arm 88 times, and juggled three of them at once!



Enter “Heavy Athletics”

“It can be said with a good deal of certainty that Russian weightlifting was born and grew thanks to the devotees of the kettlebell sport,” stated Weightlifting Masters World Champion Prof. L. Dvorkin. Indeed, it was the father of kettlebells, Dr. Vladislav Krayevskiy, who coined the term “heavy athletics” (*tyazholaya atletika*), the name for the sport of Olympic weightlifting in today’s Russia.

The Red Army and the kettlebell are inseparable. Every Russian military unit has a gym called “the courage corner.” Every courage corner is equipped with kettlebells. While other countries waste time testing their troopers with push-ups, Russia tests repetition kettlebell snatches with a 53-pound kettlebell. “The rank and file of the Red Army was magnificent from a physical point of view,” marveled Lt. Gen. Giffard Martel, chief of the British military mission to the USSR during World War II. “Much of the equipment we carry on vehicles accompanying the infantry is carried on the man’s back in Russia. The Russians seem capable of carrying these great loads. They are exceptionally tough.”

Law enforcement tactical teams—even the Russian federal tax police, who are handier with firearms than with calculators—also make kettlebells their strength training tool of choice. In the last days of the Soviet empire, the prison system was plagued with riots and hostage situations. Interior ministry troops were called in to suppress the riots. They did the job, but finesse was sure lacking. For instance, in 1986 they stormed a prison camp and burned it to the ground in the process of ruthlessly suppressing the riot.

In 1991 the interior ministry formed special tactical teams for every administrative prison district. Their mission: hostage rescue, riot suppression, search and arrest of escaped criminals. Since that memorable year when the USSR fell apart, these TAC teams have earned their keep on many occasions, in harsh Russian prisons and in Chechnya.

Russian federal prison SWAT teams are manned with former military special operators, paras, and vets of other elite services; each one had to compete against nine or more rival applicants to make the team. The selection process is similar to that of the army Spetsnaz. Here is what the trooper has to do back-to-back: a 10K forced march in full kit, an obstacle course and rappelling, plus another 10K run. A cherry on the top when you are beyond smoked is a 12-minute full-contact sparring session—with fresh opponents rotating in every three minutes. Once on the team, operators aggressively compete against their colleagues in the frequently held law enforcement sports events. Their specialties: hand-to-hand combat and the kettlebell sport. A matter of specificity and pride.

It is hard to understand the logic of governments—both Russian and American—that encourage inmates to strength train, but Russian prisoners lift kettlebells as well. You may have seen the black-and-white archive footage in a History Channel documentary about Russian organized crime—a wiry prisoner doing kettlebell swings, flips, and side presses. Some Russian prisons even host kettlebell competitions for the inmates! Go figure. Perhaps the law enforcement likes a challenge.



**Dr. Krayevskiy, the
father of kettlebells.**



In the 20th century, Soviet science validated what Russian hard men had known for centuries: kettlebell lifting is one of the best tools for all-around physical development.

Voropayev (1983) observed two groups of college students over a period of a few years. To gauge their performance, he used a standard battery of the armed forces physical training (PT) tests: pull-ups, a standing broad jump, a 100-meter sprint, and a 1K run. The control group followed the typical university PT program, which was military oriented and emphasized the above exercises. The experimental group just lifted kettlebells. In spite of the lack of practice on the tested drills, the kettlebell group showed better scores in every one of them!

Vinogradov and Lukyanov (1986) found a very high correlation between the results posted in a kettlebell lifting competition and in a great range of dissimilar tests: strength, measured with the three powerlifts and grip strength; strength endurance, measured with pull-ups and parallel bar dips; general endurance, determined by a 1K run; and work capacity and balance, measured with special tests.

Lopatin (2000) found a positive correlation between soldiers' kettlebell sport ranking and their obstacle course performance.

Kettlebells improve coordination and agility (Luchkin, 1947; Laputin, 1973).

Kettlebells develop professional applied qualities and general physical preparedness (Zikov, 1986; Griban, 1990).

Kettlebells are highly effective for building strength.

The official Soviet armed forces strength training manual approved by the ministry of defense (Burkov & Nikityuk, 1985) declared kettlebell training to be "one of the most effective means of strength development," representing "a new era in the development of human strength-potential."

Kettlebell lifting is great for your heart.

Siberian scientist Shevtsova (1993) verified what is obvious to any girevik. She studied 75 gireviks with three to five years of experience and recorded a long-term decrease in the heart rate and the blood pressure. The kettlebellers had what Russians call “a cosmonaut’s blood pressure”: 110/70 in the summer and 114/74 in the winter. They clocked an average resting heart rate of 56 beats per minute. The heart rate took a dive not just at rest, but also during and after exercise. And the time it took the heart to slow down back to normal, after exercise, also decreased. Besides, the experienced gireviks’ systems had also adapted to be better “primed” and ready for upcoming action.

Properly used, kettlebells are surprisingly safe.

Only 8.8 percent of top Russian gireviks, members of the Russian National Team and regional teams, reported injuries in training or competition (Voropayev, 1997). A remarkably low number, especially if you consider that these are elite athletes who push their bodies over the edge.

Kettlebell training improves body composition.

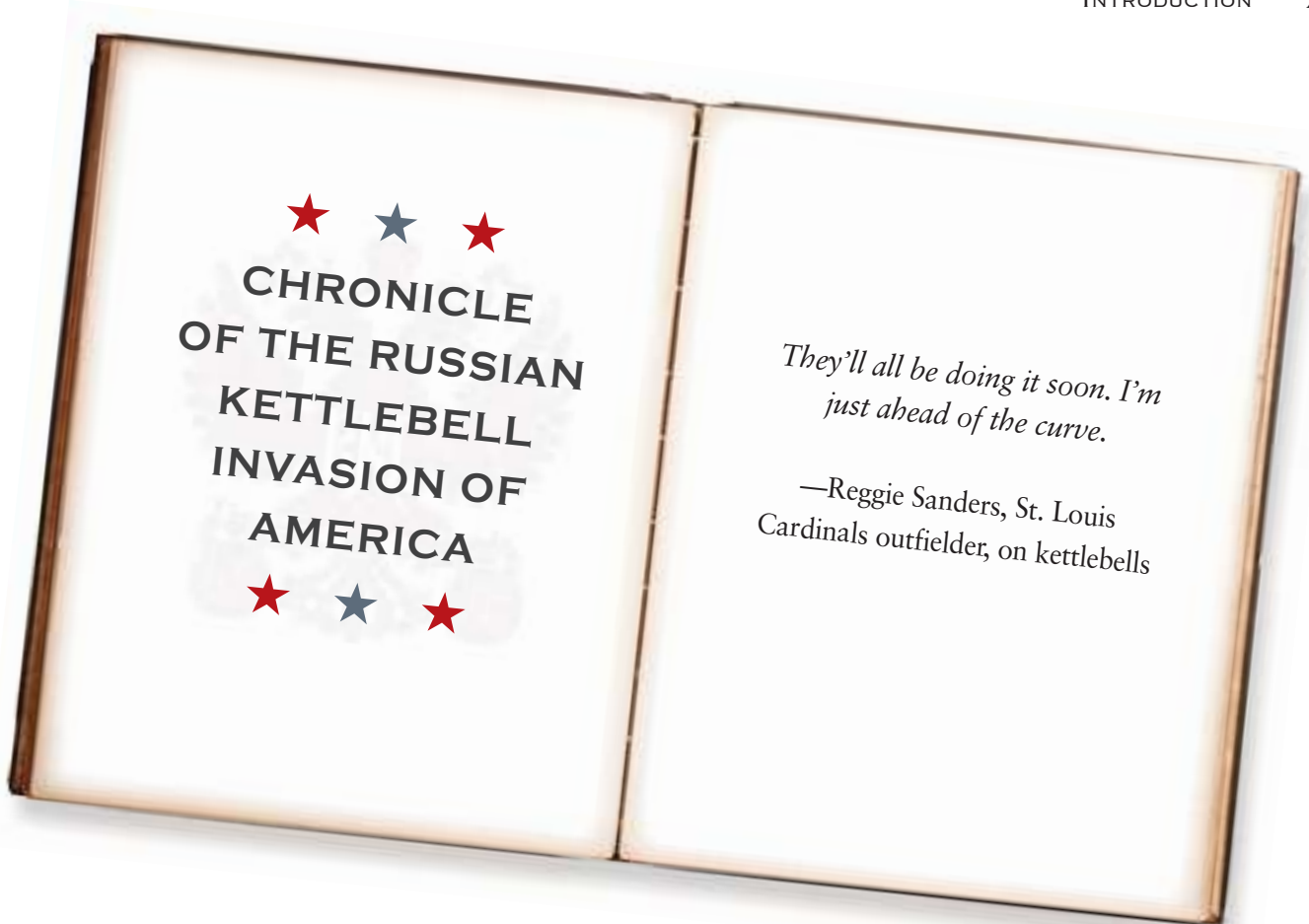
According to Voropayev (1997), who studied top Russian kettlebell lifters, 21.2 percent increased their bodyweight since taking up kettlebelling, and 21.2 percent (the exact same percentage, not a typo), mostly heavyweights, decreased it. Another study of elite gireviks revealed a consistently low body fat (Gomonov, 1998).

“A girevik is characterized by a balanced development of all organs and musculature with significant hypertrophy of the muscles of the shoulder girdle.” (Rasskazov, 1993).

“A girevik (legendary strongman Eugene Sandow pictured) is characterized by a balanced development of all organs and musculature with significant hypertrophy of the muscles of the shoulder girdle.”—(Rasskazov, 1993)







American iron men of old knew the value of kettlebells. You can see a pair in the training “dungeon” of one of the greatest deadlifters of all time, Tennessee farmer Bob Peoples, who pulled more than 700 pounds weighing a buck eighty before steroids and supportive gear. Sig Klein was a big proponent of kettlebells. I bought a pair of antique 1917 American kettlebells (they look like miniature Weber grills) from a 70-year-old friend, a “once a lifter, always a lifter” who still does good mornings with 405 pounds.

Then America got prosperous and forgot its rugged frontier past. Kettlebells went the way of the California gold prospectors and the gunslingers of the Old West. The kettlebell would have remained but a chapter in manly American history if not for my friend Marty Gallagher, former Coach, Powerlifting Team USA.

Marty and I were enjoying steaks in his backyard in an undisclosed location on the East Coast. We were trading old war stories over a mouthful of Mennonite-raised beef. Marty told me about Ed Coan, Kirk Karwoski, and other champions he had coached. I told him about kettlebells.

Gallagher thoughtfully finished chewing his steak and suggested, “Why don’t you write an article for *MILO*?” You know, the magazine for crazy guys who bend nails and lift rocks.

I said, “Marty, you don’t get it, this is the most painful workout you could imagine, who would want to do it or even read about it?” Earlier I had made the mistake of explaining a Russian slur, the “collective farmer,” to Marty. He used it on me and told me that I did not understand Americans.

The subversive *Vodka, Pickle Juice, Kettlebell Lifting, and Other Russian Pastimes* was published in 1998. The article was extremely well received by the most ruthless critics in the strength world. I started getting mail from guys with busted noses, cauliflower ears, scars, or at least Hells Angels tattoos. Incredulous, I told my friend and editor John Du Cane about it. He thought for a minute and said: “Let’s do it! I’ll make kettlebells and you teach people how to use them.”

Behind John’s reticent Cambridge demeanor is the heart of an American pioneer. A Brit who grew up in Africa, John drove from England to India—through Pakistan and Afghanistan—and lived for a few years in a Yoga community. He built his publishing company in the U.S. while driving a limousine to make ends meet. Fledgling Dragon Door Publications demanded undivided attention and John could not afford “wasting” his time on sleep. Du Cane took naps in the limo while waiting for his customers and used every spare minute to build his American Dream.

When presented with a new opportunity this rugged, self-reliant individual risked everything he had accomplished in his hard years as an entrepreneur publisher and decided to invest in manufacturing and promoting Russian kettlebells. Hindsight is always 20/20 and today it is obvious to anyone that the kettlebell is a winner. But that was not the case back then. “A cannon ball with a handle? Are you out of your mind?!”

2001 was the year of the kettlebell. Dragon Door published *The Russian Kettlebell Challenge* and forged the first US made Russian style cast iron kettlebell. RKC, the first kettlebell instructor course on American soil, also kicked off in 2001. Given the kettlebell’s harsh reputation, most of my early students looked like they came from the federal witness protection program. People often ask if Steve Maxwell and I are brothers. Steve, I love you, man, but I don’t think it’s a compliment for either of us.



Times change. Hard living Comrades remain the loyal core of ‘the Party’. But now they have to begrudgingly share the Russian kettlebell with Hollywood movie stars and other unlikely kettlebellers. Fed up with the sissified mainstream fitness advice, smart folks go hardcore. In 2002 our Russian kettlebell made it into the *Rolling Stone's* exclusive Hot List as ‘the Hot Weight’. In 2004 Dr. Randall Strossen, one of the most respected names in the strength world, stated, “In our eyes, Pavel Tsatsouline will always reign as the modern king of kettlebells since it was he who popularized them to the point where you could almost find a country filled with his converts...”

CHAPTER I

Enter the Kettlebell!



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