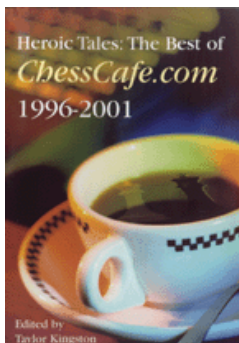




BOOK REVIEWS



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The Suttles System

Steve Goldberg

Chess on the Edge, Volumes 1-3: The Collected Games of Canadian Grandmaster Duncan Suttles, by Bruce Harper and Yasser Seirawan, 2008 Chess'n Math Association, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Vol. 1, 314pp., \$39.95, Vol. 2, 330pp., \$39.95, Vol. 3, 346pp., \$39.95

“Knights on the rim are dim!” Says who?

“Castle early!” Why?

“Don’t make too many pawn moves in the opening.” Why not?

If it’s a chess principle, chances are grandmaster Duncan Suttles has broken it. Time and time again.

Chess on the Edge, a three-volume compilation of the games of Canadian GM Duncan Suttles, is intended by the authors and publisher to be used as a complete set (the page numbers for volumes 2 and 3 pick up where the previous volume left off), although each volume can stand on its own as well.

The Prologue from Vol. 1 explains the format:

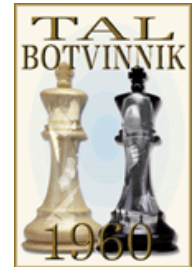
“The three volumes contain all of Suttles’ tournament games which could be found. The first volume consists of 100 games, ordered by theme. Our intention is to help the reader explore various positional ideas and strategies, or particularly good or bad results, in a single place. The main goal of the first volume is to help the reader understand Suttles’ unique style, but there may be instructional or inspirational value in this volume as well.

“The second and third volumes consist of 513 full Suttles games, ordered by opening, plus 7 supplemental games...Here the idea is to let the reader see how Suttles handled different openings and the positions arising out of them. Some of the games in the second and third volumes are annotated briefly, but many have very detailed notes.”

The Table of Contents for Volume 1 is quite lengthy, but gives the reader a clear indication of what to expect:

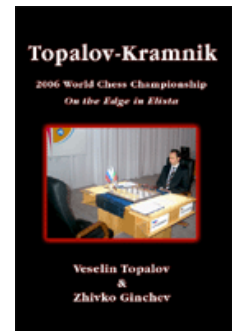
- Dedications
- Acknowledgements
- Interview with Duncan Suttles
- Prologue
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- Foreword – by Lawrence Day
- Preface – by Yasser Seirawan
- Preface – by Bruce Harper
- Chapter 1 – The “Suttles Style”
- Chapter 2 – Pawns
- Chapter 3 – Positional Play
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- Chapter 6 – Positional Sacrifices
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- Chapter 9 – Bishops
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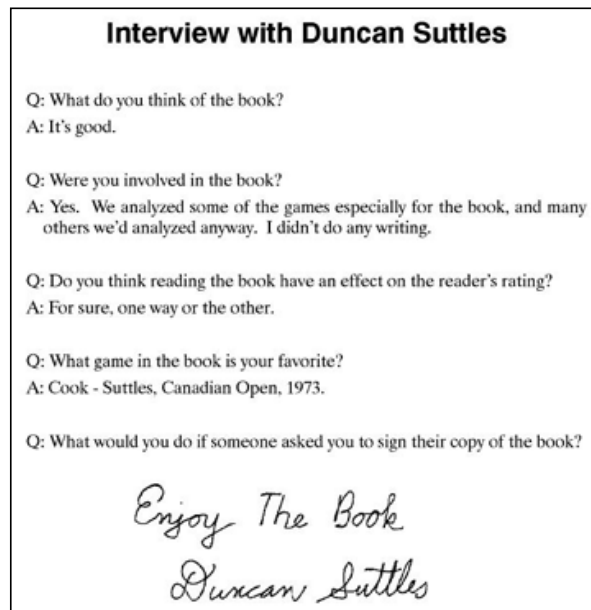
by Victor Bolgan

Read an excerpt [here](#).

- Chapter 12 – Weird Maneuvers
- Chapter 13 – Psychology
- Chapter 14 – Just Plain Funny
- Chapter 15 – Blow Outs
- Chapter 16 – Tricks
- Chapter 17 – Normal Openings
- Chapter 18 – Opening Disasters
- Chapter 19 – Crash and Burn
- Chapter 20 – Fischer and Spassky
- Chapter 21 – Masterpiece
- Appendix I – The Rat
- Appendix II – The Suttles System

Each of the main chapters contains between three and nine annotated games. The biography, the foreword by Lawrence Day and the prefaces by Yasser Seirawan and Bruce Harper do a wonderful job of introducing the reader to the unique nature of GM Duncan Suttles.

The “Interview with Duncan Suttles” isn’t terribly revealing, consisting entirely of the following:



Yet it is indicative of Suttles’ wit that when asked to identify his favorite game from this collection, he responds, “Cook-Suttles, Canadian Open, 1973.” The reader will search in vain for a Duncan Suttles game against Cook; however, in Volume 3 there is a game by Mrs. D. Suttles, her only victory of that tournament. More chess players should have Suttles’ sense of humor.

Suttles began playing at the relatively late age of fifteen, but quickly rose to master (and later grandmaster) strength. And he quickly developed his own style. As Day says, “Suttles was the iconoclastic maverick who challenged much of the classical orthodoxy that had been received wisdom for previous generations. Alexander Alekhine dismissed the defence 1.e4 g6 as “a joke” in his theoretical review of the New York 1924 tournament...After several generations, this ridicule had cemented itself into players’ praxis as axiomatic, but in the 1960s Duncan turned this on its head. Duncan always played 1...g6.”

Grandmaster Yasser Seirawan is a big fan of Suttles and says, “Duncan was very much a folk-hero in the whole Pacific Northwest. His original style of play thrilled and delighted us all. It seemed as if he would deliberately defy all the ‘rules’ of chess strategy by refusing to occupy the center, instead building up first on the flanks, developing his knights and rooks to obscure squares and all the while baiting his opponent into a premature attack.”

Seirawan adds, “Duncan’s style involves flinging down a gauntlet and proudly exclaiming, ‘Refute this – if you can!’ In many of his games, his opponents are drawn out of their comfort zones as early as the first few moves. Unable to rely on memorized openings and familiar patterns, stresses and tensions begin early and often last through the whole game.”

Now White's f2-g3 goes for a run and perishes in a mate similar to that in Mihajlovic-Suttles, Chicago, 1973 (Game 5).
34...fxg3? 35.gxe3 ♖h6? 36.gd3 ♕e1? 37.gxe4 ♖xe4? mate 0:1

Pawn Chains

We have termed a pawn attack against the enemy king a pawn storm, but strategically the real object of the attack is the base of the enemy pawn chain. In a King's Indian pawn structure, the base of White's d5-e4 pawn chain is originally e4, then f3, and occasionally g2, as Black's pawns push forward. This is just one example of attacking the base of the enemy pawn chain.

This idea is such a common theme in Suttles' games that it is hard to find games in which it does not occur. In the next game, the enemy pawn chain is demolished in graphic fashion.

Game 8

Rat B06/6

Bárczay, L. - Suttles

Sousse, Interzonal, 1967

1.e4 g6 2.d4 Bg7 3.Nf3 d6 4.♗c4 c6

A natural reaction. If Black can simply play ...d6-d5, White's development of his bishop to c4 will have accomplished little.

5.♕c3 b5!?

A bold attempt to gain space on the queenside. The tactical justification for 5...b5!? is interesting. Black's idea is to answer 6.♗xb5 with 6...d5 (6...cxb5? 7.♗d5). After 7.♗b3! dxe4 8.♗g5! (8.♗e5? cxb5 9.♗e7 ♖d4 10.♗c3 ♖xb1? 11.♗d1 ♕c6 12.♗xb8 e6 12.♗xg6 hxg6 13.c3

is more or less equal) 8...♗h6?! (8...cxb5? 9.♗x7 transposes into the previous line) 9.♗c3 ♖ud4, White was slightly better in Bohatrchuk-Witt, Montreal, 1965.

6.♗b3 b4 7.♕e2 a5

Black is playing with the innocence of youth. Children of all ages like to chase their opponent's pieces with pawns (and sometimes they catch them, too!).

8.c3

8.a3 or 8.a4 might be preferable.

8...♕f6



9.e5

White doesn't feel he can settle for 9.♗c2, when the position begins to resemble a mutated Ruy López. The more natural 9.♗g3 is met by 9...♗a6, and if 10.c4 a4. Black's position is sound enough to handle White's early attack in the center.

9...dxe5 10.♗xe5 0-0 11.0-0 ♕fd7!?

Immediately putting the question to White's e5-f4. White's reply has been unfairly criticized. After 12.f4 ♗a6 (12...c5 13.♗xf7? is interesting). Black is doing well.

12.♗g4! a4! 13.♗e2

Let's take a look at Game 8 of Volume 1, in which Suttles uses his reliable 1...g6, known as the Modern Defense, or more affectionately, as the Rat Opening:

Game 8

Rat B06/6

Bárczay, L. - Suttles

Sousse, Interzonal Sousse, 1967

1.e4 g6 2.d4 Bg7 3.Nf3 d6 4.Bc4 c6

A natural reaction. If Black can simply play ...d6-d5, White's development of his bishop to c4 will have accomplished little.

5.Nc3 b5!?

A bold attempt to gain space on the queenside. The tactical justification for 5...b5!? is interesting. Black's idea is to answer 6.Nxb5 with 6...d5 (6...cxb5? 7.Bd5). After 7.Bb3! dxe4 8.Ng5! (8.Ne5! cxb5 9.Nxf7 Qxd4 10.Be3 Qxd1+ 11.Rxd1 Nc6 12.Nxh8 e6 13.Nxg6 hxg6 14.c3 is more or less equal) 8...Nh6?! (8...cxb5! 9.Nxf7 transposes into the previous line) 9.Nc3 Qxd4. White was slightly better in Bohatrchuk-Witt, Montreal, 1965.

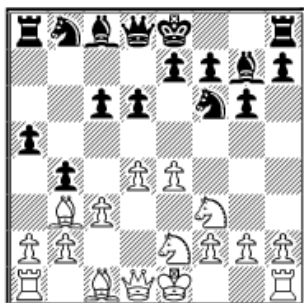
6.Bb3 b4 7.Ne2 a5

Black is playing with the innocence of youth. Children of all ages like to chase their opponent's pieces with pawns (and sometimes they catch them, too!).

8.c3

8.a3 or 8.a4 might be preferable.

8...Nf6



9.e5

White doesn't feel he can settle for 9.Bc2, when the position begins to resemble a mutated Ruy Lopez. The more natural 9.Ng3 is met by 9...Ba6, and if 10.c4 a4. Black's position is sound enough to handle White's early attack in the center.

9...dxe5 10.Nxe5 0-0 11.0-0 Nfd7!?

Immediately putting the question to White's e5-knight. White's reply has been unfairly criticized. After 12.f4 Ba6 (12...c5 13.Nxf7!? is interesting), Black is doing well.

12.Ng4!? a4!? 13.Bc2

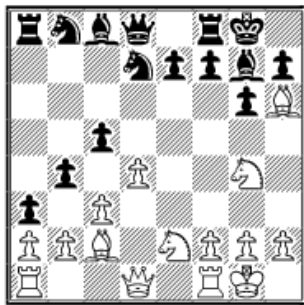
13.Bxa4 Nb6, attacking White's g4-knight, is approximately equal after 14.Nh6 + Bxh6 15.Bxh6 Rxa4 16.Bxf8.

13...c5 14.Bh6?!

Here is where White starts to go wrong. After 14.Nh6+! Kh8 15.dxc5!, Black's d7-knight is pinned to his d8-queen (15...Nxc5? 16.Qxd8 Rxd8 17.Nxf7+ Kg8 18.Nxd8), and 15...bxc3 16.Nxc3 gives Black no time for 16...a3? Because of 17.Qd5!.

White's basic opening plan to develop rapidly and rely on active piece play to counter Black's hyperaggressive queenside pawn attack was therefore sound, but his execution was flawed.

14...a3!



This move deserves an exclamation mark, if only because it creates a position which deserves a diagram! Regardless of its actual effectiveness, such an attack on White's central pawn chain is every Rat player's dream. White hopes that he will have enough tactical chances on the kingside to offset the demolition of his queenside.

15.Bxg7 axb2 16.Rb1

16.Bxf8 bxa1Q 17.Qxa1 Nxf8 18.Ne3 (better than 18.Nh6+?!, as given by Wade in the tournament book and later by Keene) 18...cxd4 19.Rd1 results in a mass liquidation of the queenside pawns.

16...Kxg7 17.cxb4 Nb6!?

Black continues to try to complicate the position by taking advantage of the exposed position of White's g4-knight. 17...cxb4 was safer.

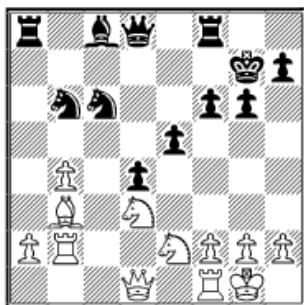
18.Ne5?

After 18.dxc5? Bxg4, White is in trouble, but 18.bxc5!? Bxg4 19.cxb6 Rxa2 was about equal.

18...cxd4 19.Bb3

Keene's suggestion of 19.Qxd4?! Qxd4 20.Nxd4 f6 gives Black the advantage.

19...f6 20.Nd3 e5 21.Rxb2 Nc6



White's active pieces make it difficult for Black to make full use of his impressive pawn center. Despite all the excitement, the position is still balanced.

22.a4

22.Qd2 was more prudent.

22...Qd6 23.Qc2?

In *Chess Chat*, Colin Aykroyd calls this "the losing move."

Keene, in his classic *The Modern Defence*, is more effusive. His comment here is "White's pieces now get into a tangle and he loses a pawn, but after 23.b5 Na5 White's majority would be hopelessly blocked while Black's central

hordes would have nothing to impede their murderous advance.”

To quote Elwood Blues, this is strong stuff. But prose, even (perhaps especially) well written and effusive prose, can be misleading. Black is better after 23.b5? Na5, although he will be in no hurry to allow White counterplay by advancing his central pawns. More importantly, 23.a5! Nd5 24.Bxd5 Qxd5 25.Qd2 is still approximately equal.

After 23.Qc2?, White loses his b4-pawn and his position disintegrates.

23...Bf5 24.Ng3 Bxd3 25.Qxd3 Nxb4 26.Qb5 Rfb8 27.Ne4 Qe7 28.a5 Nd7 29.Qc4 f5

Here they come. When Black reaches a position like this from a Rat, something has gone terribly wrong.

30.Ng5 Qxg5 31.Qf7+ Kh6

Suttles has never hesitated to send his king for a walk (more on that in Chapter 11).

32.Qxd7 Nd3 33.Rbb1 Nc5 34.Qd5 Rxa5

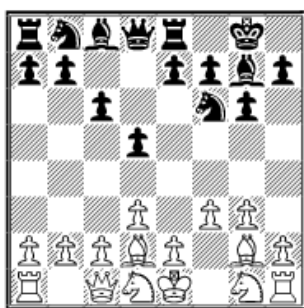
35.Qxe5 loses to 35...Rxb3. The rest is easy.

35.Bc4 Rxb1 36.Rxb1 Qe7 37.Bf1 Ra7 38.Re1 Rd7 39.Qg8 e4 40.Bc4 0-1

The annotations for this specific game contain quite a few alternative variations, but many of the game comments in this volume are more descriptive and explanatory in nature, especially suited to the intermediate player.

Chess on the Edge is well named. Suttles repeatedly demonstrates a desire to play from the flank, and his opening selections, both as white and black, could certainly be termed *edgy*.

On more than one occasion, Suttles demonstrates a humorous side to his sometimes bewildering play. For example, in Game 2 of Volume 1, we reach the following position after Suttles has played 8.f3!?, blocking his light-squared bishop:



The authors comment, “Readers trying to predict White’s moves in this game can give up with a clear conscience. With Black’s d5-pawn defended three times, White completely abandons any effort to attack it, concentrating instead on building his own center.

About this position, Suttles himself wrote, “d5 is overprotected so White will *underattack* it [emphasis mine – S.G.], producing an element of confusion.”

Somehow Yogi Berra comes to mind here.

The authors continue, “Black should probably accept the challenge implicit in 8.f3!? and play 8...d4. Instead he decides to stay in his half of the board and try to play normally, even if his opponent won’t.”

I found the book to be both entertaining and instructive, with little to complain about. It might have been helpful to know if the annotations are coming from Seirawan or Harper, but regardless, the annotations stand on their own.

It would have also been enlightening to have player ratings listed with the games, but as the introductory comments make clear, even locating and verifying some of the game scores was a task in itself. One assumes that player ratings were often simply not recorded at the time the games were played.

The second and third volumes of *Chess on the Edge* differ from Volume 1 on two primary levels:

- The Volume 1 games are sorted by theme, whereas the Volume 2/3 games are sorted by opening. Volume 2 represents all of the available Suttles games that fall within the “A” category of openings, as defined by the *Encyclopedia of Chess Openings*, while Volume 3 represents the “B” through “E” categories of openings.
- Games in Volumes 2 and 3 that appeared in the first volume are not presented in their entirety; rather, only the first ten moves are listed, then a reference is provided to where the game may be found in Volume 1.

All three volumes contain a player index at the end, but the Volume 1 player index refers only to players from games that appear in Volume 1, whereas the player indices in Volumes 2 and 3 reference all the players from all three volumes. In addition, Volume 3 contains an event index, referencing all the tournaments represented in the three volumes, sorted by year and event name.

Volume 2 contains 219 games, and Volume 3 consists of 294 games. All of the “100 Selected Games” in Volume 1 appear somewhere in Volume 2 or 3, albeit in their abbreviated ten-move form. There are also a number of additional non-Suttles games included in each volume, beyond those listed above, that were deemed similar in theme or spirit and appear adjacent to the relevant Suttles games.

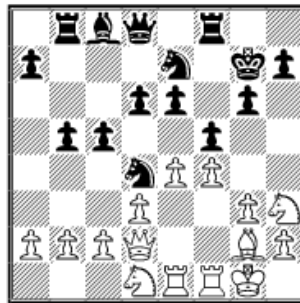
Upon hearing about this three-volume set, my assumption was that, like most large game collections, I would find a few nicely annotated entries, with the large majority of games just appearing as bare game scores.

I was wrong.

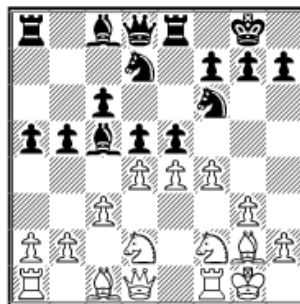
I can’t imagine how much time went into this work – every game I looked at had at least some annotations, and the vast majority contained well-thought-out analysis and insights, similar to what is found in Volume 1.

The authors are pretty clear about Suttles’ games tending to be a bit out of the ordinary. A quick look at some of the positions shown, without even analyzing the games, makes this apparent. Take a look at some of the positions you’ll find here:

Suttles-Padevsky, Lugano, 1968



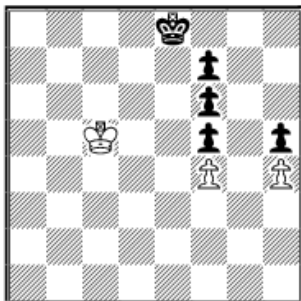
Suttles-Polugaevsky, Belgrade, 1969



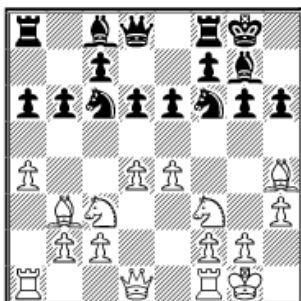
Suttles-Karpov, San Antonio, 1972



Castro-Suttles, Nice, 1974



Suradiradja-Suttles, Indonesia, 1982



These are not your twelve-move grandmaster draws!

In summary, *Chess on the Edge* represents a fun game collection, from a unique grandmaster, with extensive annotations ideally suited for the intermediate player. Chess players are always looking for oddball openings or variations with which to throw off their opponents, and this three-volume set can certainly provide plenty of inspiration.

If you want a quick taste of the “Suttles System,” then Volume 1 alone will suffice. If for some reason you only have the second or third, pick up Volume 1 as well, since this is the only volume where these games appear in their entirety. Certainly if you want to be a part of the chess Rat Pack, you’ll need all three!

[Order](#) *Chess on the Edge - The Collected Games of Canadian Grandmaster Duncan Suttles* (pre-publication sale)
