



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

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Rating Chart

- ♦ – Poor
- ♦♦ – Useful
- ♦♦♦ – Good
- ♦♦♦♦ – Excellent



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Reviewed this Month

*Grandmaster Repertoire 6:
The Sicilian Defence*
by Lubomir Ftacnik

Play the Najdorf Sicilian
by James Rizzitano

*Opening for White according to Anand
1.e4, Vol.13*
by Alexander Khalifman

The Cutting Edge: The Open Sicilian 1
by Milos Pavlovic

The King of Chess Openings

The cover of *Play the Najdorf Sicilian* proclaims it to be the king of chess openings. When this honor was bestowed is unclear, but the Najdorf has certainly been popular for a long time, and it has been featured in the repertoires of most of today's top players at some time or another. In this column, we will examine no less than three recent books about the Najdorf.

Grandmaster Repertoire 6: The Sicilian Defence by Lubomir Ftacnik, Quality Chess 2010, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 427pp. \$34.95 (ChessCafe.com Price: \$28.95)

Slovakian grandmaster Lubomir Ftacnik deserves special credit for this book, because he is possibly the first author in the last decade to write a book on the Najdorf without mentioning former world champions Fischer or Kasparov in the introduction. They are mentioned in the back cover blurb, but that is written by the publisher, not the author. Here is how Ftacnik describes it in the introduction:

"My own modest expertise lies in the domains of the Najdorf and Scheveningen systems, which I have been playing and studying over the past two decades. The Scheveningen system represents a kind of fundamental core, from which virtually all knowledge about thematic Sicilian structures and plans can be traced. Although the official subject of this book is the Najdorf, the two systems share many common themes and can often transpose to one another. In certain places, such as Chapters 12 and 13 (which deal with the variations 6.f4 and 6.Be2 respectively), the decision to recommend the response 6...e6, instead of the equally valid alternatives such as 6...e5, was influenced by my fondness for the Scheveningen set-up. I make no apologies for this, as I believe that an author can make the most useful contribution when writing about his own areas of expertise."



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by Jan Gustafsson



Play the Scandinavian
by Christian Bauer

In his repertoire choice, Ftacnik has made decisions to follow a repertoire that was also largely the one proposed by Grandmaster Emms in [Play the Najdorf: Scheveningen Style](#) (Everyman Chess 2003), which is also listed in the bibliography. That said, it is hardly Emms's invention to play the Najdorf in



that way. Kasparov often did exactly that in his games, while occasionally going in other directions; for example, when facing the 6 Be3 line. Though in contrast with Kasparov's use of 6...Ng4, Ftacnik devotes thirty-eight pages to 6...e5.

The material is divided as follows:

- Series Foreword (1 page)
- Key to symbols used and Bibliography (1 page)
- From ~~Russia~~ Sicily with Love - Introduction (2 pages)
- Minor Systems (3 chapters – 58 pages)
- Closed Systems (2 chapters – 34 pages)
- Anti-Open Systems (3 chapters – 48 pages)
- Minor Open Lines (6 chapters – 136 pages)
- English Attack (3 chapters – 94 pages)
- Classical Main Line (2 chapters – 41 pages)
- Variation Index (8 pages)

I could raise many objections in regards to the allocation of the material, so I will move on to take a look at the coverage. As with the other books in this series, the material is thoroughly researched and analyzed, the author has put a great deal of thought into which lines to include in the repertoire. It is always interesting to see what is recommended against the Anti-Sicilians, because they tend to kill Black's fun. A couple of Ftacnik's recommendations are somewhat surprising, such as his endorsement of 2...d6 against 2 c3, in addition to 2...d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 g6, as both lines are a far cry from the type of positions that a Scheveningen-style Najdorf player would adopt, because they lead to positions that are different in style and structure to the lines covered under the Open Sicilian. Both lines, however, are perfectly good and interesting.

I took a look at Ftacnik's recommendation against 6 Bc4, which has been a choice of both Fischer and Kasparov against their pet variation, an indication that it may present some problems for Black. I found Ftacnik's analysis fascinating and loaded with new ideas and original analysis, though there is still room for independent analysis and further improvements. [My analysis is usually preceded with CH and typically offered in brackets.]

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.Bc4 e6 7.Bb3 b5 8.Bg5 Be7 9.Qf3 Qc7 10.e5 Bb7 11.exd6 Bxd6 12.Qe3 Nc6



[FEN "r3k2r/1bq2ppp/p1nbpn2/1p4B1/3N4/1BN1Q3/PPP2PPP/R3K2R w KQkq - 0 13"]

This is the starting point of line "C222." which is offered as an alternative to 12...Bc5, the main line in this variation of the book; the lines after 12...Bc5 are exceedingly complicated and decidedly not to everyone's taste.

13.Nf5 0-0-0 14.Nxd6+

Ftacnik here writes: "Obviously we should also pay attention to:

14.Nxg7

After this move White wins material, but pays the price by handing the initiative to his opponent.

14...Be5!N

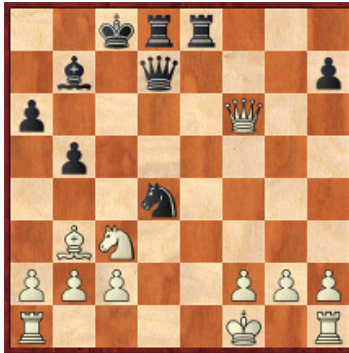
In Darvall-Jovanovic, Canberra 2001, Black preferred 14...Be7. The two moves can lead to the same positions in certain variations, but the main line reduces White's options slightly.

15.Nxe6!?

Quieter continuations are not very attractive as the knight on g7 is virtually trapped. One plausible continuation is 15.O-O Ng4 (The calm 15...Kb8!? also deserves attention [CH: No kidding, after something like 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Nh5 Be5, Black has the better chances. Therefore, this is a good alternative to the more complicated 15...Ng4]) 16.Qh3 h5! 17.Bxe6+ fxe6 18.Nxe6 Qb6 19.Nxd8 Nxd8 20.Rad1 [CH: 20.Rae1 Bxh2+ 21.Kh1 Ne6 is similarly good for Black] 20...Ne6 21.Be3 Qc6=+ Despite his material disadvantage, Black's tremendously active pieces are the dominant feature of the position.

15...fxe6 16.Bxf6 Bxf6 17.Qxe6+ Qd7 18.Qxf6 Rhe8+ 19.Kf1 Nd4

White has three extra pawns, but the question is whether he will survive long enough to use them. It would be reasonable to finish analyzing here, but I decided it would be interesting to explore the position a bit more deeply:



[FEN "2krr3/1b1q3p/p4Q2/1p6/3n4/1BN5/PPP2PPP/R4K1R w - - 0 20"]

20.h4!

White badly needs to get more pieces into play, and I believe this to be the best chances of doing so.

20.Rd1? is a nice way to set up a mating pattern exercise: 20...Bxg2+! 21.Kxg2 Qg4+ 22.Kf1 Qh3+ 23.Kg1 Ne2+ 24.Nxe2 Rxd1#

20.Qg5 is somewhat more resilient, although Black should still prevail as follows: 20...Nxb3 21.axb3 b4! 22.Qc5+ Bc6 23.Qc4 (23.Qxb4 is refuted by 23...Bxg2+ 24.Kxg2 Qc6+ 25.f3 Rd2+ -+; 23.f3 bxc3 24.bxc3 Qe6+ The first player has all the pawns but Black is dominating the board.) 23...bxc3 24.Qxa6+ Qb7 25.Qxb7+ Kxb7 26.bxc3 Rd2+ White may temporarily have five pawns for a bishop, but his pieces are just pathetic.

20...b4 21.Rh3!?

(This looks like a better try than 21.Na4 Qg4 22.f3 Nxf3 23.gxf3 Bxf3 24.Qg5 Qxg5 25.hxg5 Bxh1 with a clear advantage for Black.)

21...Rf8 22.Qe5

[CH: 22.Qg5 Rf5 is also pleasant for Black]

22...Rf5 23.Qh2 bxc3 24.Rxc3+ Bc6=+ White has a slight material advantage, but he will have a hard time dealing with his opponent's initiative."

14...Qxd6



[FEN "2kr3r/1b3ppp/p1nqpn2/1p4B1/8/1BN1Q3/PPP2PPP/R3K2R w KQ - 0 15"]

15.f3 Nd4 16.Ne4

[CH: Only this move is mentioned by Ftacnik, but my computer has other suggestions that offer even chances: 16.Ne2 h6 17.Bf4 Nf5 18.Qc3+ Qc6 19. Qxc6+ Bxc6 or 16.0-0 Qc5 17.Rae1 (17.Kh1 Nxb3 (17...h6 18.Bf4 Nh5 is possibly the better option) 18.axb3 Qxe3 19.Bxe3, and White has at best some initiative) 17...Nxb3 18.cxb3 Qxe3+ 19.Bxe3 Nd5 with a pleasant game for Black]

16...Nxe4!N

This is an improvement over 16... Bxe4, which according to Ftacnik lead to a better game for White in Naiditsch-Feller, Germany 2008.

17.Bxd8 Nf5

[CH: Black has an interesting alternative in 17...Qc5!?, which is not mentioned by Ftacnik. White is okay after 18.0-0-0 Nxb3+ 19.Qxb3 Nf2 20. Ba5 Nxb3 21.Bd2 (not, however, the immediate 21.Rxb3 due to 21...Qg5+) 21...Bd5 22.Qe3 Qxe3 23.Bxe3, and the chances are even although my computer very slightly prefers Black's position.]

18.Qd3 Rxd8 19.fxe4 Qf4

"This secures a draw, although there is a valid alternative in 19...Qe5!? 20.Qc3 + Qxc3+ 21.bxc3 Bxe4 22.0-0 Rd2 23.Rf2 Rxf2 24.Kxf2 Nd6 Black should be fine in this ending, bearing in mind that the white bishop is quite severely restricted." [CH: I find this unnecessarily risky as after 25.a4 Kb7 26.axb5 axb5 27.g4, only White has any winning chances. Instead Black should look at move 17 if he wants to avoid the forced draw.]

20.g3 Rxd3 21.gxf4 Re3+ 22.Kd2 Rxe4 23.Rhf1 Rd4+ 24.Ke2 Re4+ "The move repetition results in equality."

All the volumes in the *GM Repertoire* series have proved to be exceptional. Here, Ftacnik writes with confidence, intensity, and authority, all of which makes you want to take up the repertoire and make use of the powerful new ideas he introduces. The authors in this series continue to deliver manuscripts that are jam-packed with novelties and true improvements over existing theory. Let's hope they are well-paid, because they have been delivering the goods so far.

My assessment of this book: ♦♦♦♦

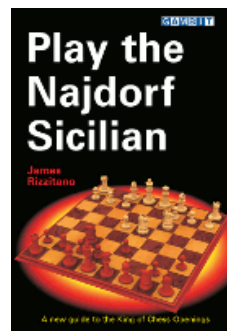
Order [Grandmaster Repertoire 6: The Sicilian Defence](#)

by Lubomir Ftacnik

Play the Najdorf Sicilian by James Rizzitano, Gambit Publication 2010, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 143pp. \$22.95 (ChessCafe.com Price: \$18.95)

Play the Najdorf Sicilian, by American international master James Rizzitano, begins with the following tale:

"'Why do you play the Najdorf?'" a 12-year-old boy asked me during the spring of 1980 (I was a know-it-all 19-year-old). 'The Najdorf is the only theoretical equalizer – it has the highest ECO code B99 of all King Pawn openings and the last line has an evaluation of unclear,' I replied with a straight face. Of course, according to this logic I should have been playing the Chigorin Variation of the Ruy Lopez (ECO code C99). The explanation must have been convincing because at a tournament several weeks later the 12-year-old asked: 'The thing about the highest ECO code – is that why you play the King's Indian too?' The ruse could not be maintained forever, and for many years every time a Najdorf appeared in one of my games, the future U.S. Champion Patrick Wolff would be quick to remind me that the Najdorf is 'the only theoretical equalizer!'"



Rizzitano's other four books for Gambit were all well-received. They were well-written and he presented the material in an easy-to-read fashion. Of course, the Najdorf is an incredibly complex opening and squeezing a playable repertoire for black into a mere 143 pages is difficult, especially when you consider that Ftacnik spends 427 pages on Black's repertoire and Khalifman uses 380 pages to cover the same opening. However, Rizzitano has different goals. Whereas Khalifman and Ftacnik present their repertoire proposal with grandmaster depth, Rizzitano delivers an overview of each line of the Najdorf, but this book is much more than just a summary.

The material is presented in conjunction with relatively recently played main games that feature both theory and explanatory prose, though the former decidedly outweighs the latter. While the objective to deliver a balanced book is desirable, it is very difficult to do so because of the sheer volume of material. The difficulty of the author's task is unenviable.

The material is divided as follows:

- Symbols, Dedication, Acknowledgements (1 page)
- Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (3 Page)
- Typical Najdorf Themes (5 pages)
- Fischer Attack: 6 Bc4 (10 pages)
- 6 f3 Qb6 and 6 Be3 Ng4 (13 pages)
- 6 Be3 e5 and the English Attack (18 pages)
- Fianchetto Variation: 6 g3 (8 pages)
- Classical Najdorf: 6 Be2 e5 (10 pages)
- The Aggressive: 6 f4 (9 pages)
- Gelfand Variation: 6 Bg5 e6 7 f4 Nbd7 (9 pages)
- Kasparov Variation: 6 Bg5 e6 7 f4 Qc7 (7 pages)
- Poisoned Pawn and Polugaevsky Variations (18 pages)
- Main Line: 6 Bg5 e6 7 f4 Be7 (15 pages)
- White's Sixth Move Alternatives (11 pages)
- Index of Variations (2 pages)

It is hard to fault the allocation of pages to the individual chapters, because the presentation gives a very balanced impression. My fear was that with so much material to cover in such a slim volume much of the originality typical of Rizzitano's books would be lost. However, Rizzitano still managed to include original analysis, improvements over existing theory, and to develop further on other people's ideas. The final outcome is admirable.

This is a great effort. Rizzitano presents a very thorough overview of each line in the Najdorf. Many lines have been cut to the bone in order to make it all fit, but I never felt that lines had been unduly ignored or dismissed. If you are considering taking up the Najdorf as black, then this book is the perfect place to start. It will give you a good look at each line, the current theoretical standing, along with pointers to future developments. It isn't as advanced as

some other works on this opening, but it reaches a wider audience. Players rated above 1900 will benefit from studying the material in this book.

My assessment of this book: ♦♦♦♦

Order [Play the Najdorf Sicilian](#)
by James Rizzitano

Opening for White according to Anand 1.e4, Vol.13 by Alexander Khalifman,
Chess Stars 2010, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 380pp. \$29.95
(ChessCafe.com Price: \$25.95)

I doubt anyone, including the author, expected Anand's opening repertoire as white with 1 e4 to cover this many volumes. I believe there is one more volume on the way and that should be it. I wish those who adopt this repertoire good luck, because it would take thousands of hours to work your way through all the material, let alone try to memorize the most critical lines. For instance, this volume covers the English Attack against the Scheveningen and Najdorf, variations in which the theory is ever-expanding. Unless you are a chess professional or someone with an inordinate amount of spare time, it is impossible to keep up with the latest developments.



I get the impression that Khalifman is a bit annoyed that the variation is named the English Attack. In the preface, he tells us that it was first developed in 1984 by a group of young Leningrad masters that included Aseev, Yudashin, and Khalifman himself. But because the players were relatively unknown and quite underrated, their ideas didn't catch on until they were adopted by the English players Short, Nunn, and Chandler.

The material is divided as follows:


- Preface (3 pages)
- **Part 1: Scheveningen Variation**
 - 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6 6 Be3 (1 page)
 - Various; 6...Be7 7 f3 various; 7...Nc6 8 Qd2 without 8...0-0 and 8...a6 (10 pages)
 - 6...Be7 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 0-0 (11 pages)
- **Part 2: English Attack without b7-b5**
 - 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Be3 (1 page)
 - Without 6...e5, 6...Ng4 and 6...e6 (26 pages)
 - 6...e6 7 f3 without 7...b5 and 7...Nc6 (28 pages)
 - 6...e6 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 without 8...Be7 (24 pages)
 - 6...e6 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 Be7 9 0-0-0 without 9...0-0 (23 pages)
 - 6...e6 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 Be7 9 0-0-0 0-0 10 g4 without 10...Nxd4 (24 pages)
 - 6...e6 7 f3 Nc6 8 Qd2 Be7 9 0-0-0 0-0 10 g4 Nxd4 (49 pages)
- **Part 3: English Attack with b7-b5**
 - 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Be3 e6 7 f3 b5 8 Qd2 (1 page)
 - Without 8...Bb7 and 8...Nbd7 (26 pages)
 - 8...Bb7 (40 pages)
 - 8...Nbd7 9 g4 without 9...h6 (17 pages)
 - 8...Nbd7 9 g4 h6 10 0-0-0 without 10...Bb7 (22 pages)
 - 8...Nbd7 9 g4 h6 10 0-0-0 Bb7 11 h4 without 11...b4 (22 pages)
 - 8...Nbd7 9 g4 h6 10 0-0-0 Bb7 11 h4 b4 12 Na4 d5; 12...Qa5 13 b3 without 13...Nc5 (19 pages)
 - 8...Nbd7 9 g4 h6 10 0-0-0 Bb7 11 h4 b4 12 Na4 Qa5 13 b3 Nc5 (23 pages)
- Index of Variations (5 pages)

Needless to say, the book is incredibly detailed and the analysis is both

impressive and overwhelming. However, if you play this opening with either color or are thinking about adding it to your repertoire, you should definitely invest in this book. It is very interesting to see Khalifman's recommendations for white and which improvements he has to offer.

The book proposes a repertoire from White's perspective. This means that there is often only one option presented, with an occasional alternative covered in the notes. This leaves White somewhat exposed if the evaluation of a line comes into question or if Black discovers a way to steer the game into an equal position without winning chances for either side. In that case, potential white players will have plenty of work finding an alternative that meshes with the remainder of the proposed repertoire. On the other hand, if White is armed with the information and knowledge presented in this book, Black will really need to know his stuff to not get blasted off the board.

Khalifman has done a decent job of interjecting some prose into the analysis, mostly concerning the evaluation of the lines and occasionally explaining typical ideas and patterns. If he hadn't, the book would have been impossible to read. However, in some passages it is obvious that neither the author nor the translator, Evgeny Ermenkov, have English as their native language, though their meaning is usually quite clear. As it is, the book is high-level theory-heavy tough sloggng, geared towards those rated above 2200.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [Opening for White according to Anand, Vol. 13](#)

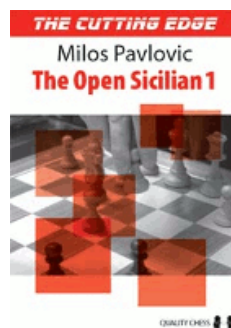
by Alexander Khalifman

The Cutting Edge: The Open Sicilian 1 by Milos Pavlovic, Quality Chess 2010, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 168pp. \$27.95 (ChessCafe.com Price: \$23.95)

The Cutting Edge is a new series from Quality Chess that editor Andrew Greet introduces as follows:

"*The Cutting Edge* is a new type of opening book. The purpose of the series is to investigate a selection of the most critical variations in various openings, providing a state-of-the-art, 'cutting edge' snapshot of the current theoretical picture as well as suggesting numerous improvements and new ideas. ... The idea of this series was in some ways inspired by recent trends amongst our competitors. First there was *New In Chess*, whose successful *S.O.*

S. series continues to cover a variety of unusual opening lines designed to surprise one's opponent. Everyman's *Dangerous Weapons* series did something similar, except that each individual volume is dedicated to one particular opening. Our *Cutting Edge* series is closer to the latter, in the sense that each volume covers a number of variations within one major opening, which we believe to be the most logical and reader-friendly approach. However, there are a couple of major differences. Firstly, *The Cutting Edge* focuses on reputable main lines, most of which have been tested at the very highest levels. Secondly, we are not looking to 'sell' one side of the position over the other. Instead we allow the author to investigate the variations in question with a completely open mind, in an effort to discover the real truth of the position. ... The goal of this series is not to spoon-feed the reader a repertoire, but rather to provide high-quality information that will enable him to develop and refine his knowledge and understanding of the opening in question."




This is indeed a new concept that if executed properly should excite many players who want to know where the theory is heading rather than where it stands. In this first volume in the series, grandmaster Milos Pavlovic covers a number of lines in the Open Sicilian:

- Series Introduction (1 page)
- Bibliography (1 page)
- Keys to symbols used (1 page)
- **The Sveshnikov Variation**
- 13 Nxb5 piece sac (20 pages)
- 18 h4 pawn sac (14 pages)
- The positional approach: 11 c4 (16 pages)
- **The Rauzer Variation**
- Doubled f-pawn variation (18 pages)
- **The Dragon Variation**
- Chinese Dragon (8 pages)
- 12...Re8 variation (10 pages)
- Topalov Variation (8 pages)
- **The Taimanov Variation**
- English Attack main line (14 pages)
- English Attack 8...Be7 (12 pages)
- 5...a6 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 Bd3 (14 pages)
- **The Kan Variation**
- 5 Nc3 Qc7 6 Bd3 Nf6 7 0-0 Bc5 (14 pages)
- 5 Bd3 Bc5 (12 pages)
- Index (2 pages)

As with the *Grandmaster Repertoire* series from the same publisher, the author uses an 'N' to indicate novelties in his recommendations, and based on this criteria alone the level of original material is amazing. I am most impressed by the coverage in the Taimanov, where Pavlovic introduces so many new moves and improvements that it can truly make your head spin. He digs deep and investigates every single line with vigor to get to the truth. He doesn't take anyone's word as gospel. There is room for disagreement with some of his assessments, but you have to respect his commitment to presenting his views on the future development of the lines.

Of course, there are some limitations. The focus can be narrow; thereby, reducing the likelihood of reaching these positions over the board. Still, if your opponents are equally apt to study the latest ideas and most topical lines, then there is a better than average chance that you can employ these lines.

The concept behind this series is laudable and this volume offers plenty of analysis, cutting-edge material, and some explanatory prose, with a good balance of diagrams and text. However, those rated below 2200 should carefully consider whether memorizing such high-level analysis, which may never arise over the board, is truly an effective use of study time that could be used to improve other areas of their game.

My assessment of this book: 

Order [The Cutting Edge 1: The Open Sicilian 1](#)

by Milos Pavlovic

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