



## COLUMNISTS

### From the Archives

Hosted by  
Mark Donlan



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### From the Archives...

Since it came online many years ago, [ChessCafe.com](#) has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the [ChessCafe.com](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

### Hoisting the Hippopotamus by Lev Alburt & Al Lawrence

Master-Chef Hors d'oeuvres from Your Own Toaster Oven  
Or, How to Study the Openings, Part II

Dick Katahn, author of the very famous “no-fat” dieting approach, is a student of Lev’s. Taking a page from Katahn, one of our major themes this month is learning to trim the fat from your opening preparation and learning to cook on your own rather than always ordering from the same expensive restaurant menu as everyone else.

Whatever your playing strength, nothing will improve your opening results more than home preparation; your own work in your own home over your own board. For the serious who have the opportunity, trainers can be a tremendous advantage, of course. But it depends on the trainer, and on your goals.

#### The truth shall make you unemployed

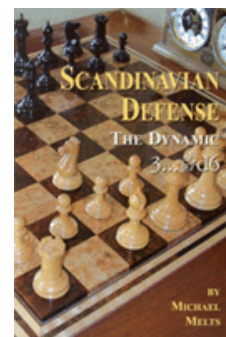
There’s a story about Alexey Suetin boning up for one of his first strong Soviet invitationals. As was the custom then, he was provided a coach, who was an old master from Belorussia up on opening theory. Before the first game, the two met.

“Who’s your first opponent?” asked the old master.

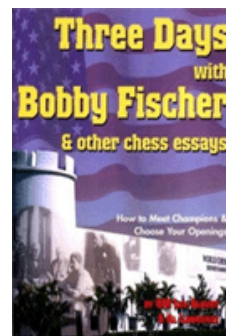
“I have black against Furman,” responded the young Suetin, later himself to become a top-performing GM and an important opening theoretician.

“Well, then there’s no need to prepare. Furman will play 1.d4, gain an advantage and keep pressuring your position. If you do manage to reach time control in a position that isn’t completely hopeless, then we’ll analyze the adjourned position.”

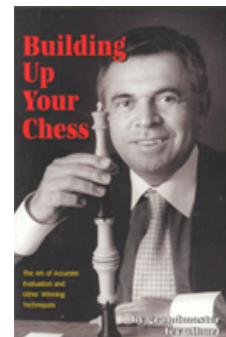
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[Three Days with  
Bobby Fischer](#)  
by Lev Alburt  
& Al Lawrence



[Building Up Your Chess](#)  
by Lev Alburt

Suetin was surprised at such a reaction, of course. He went to the game, and Furman played 1.d4, got an advantage, pressured Black, and forced Suetin to resign before adjournment. Alexey went back to the old master.

“Who’s your next opponent?” the trainer asked.

“Rashid Nezhmetdinov, but I have white.”

“Well, color won’t matter. Nezhmetdinov can play any opening. Somewhere he will sacrifice a pawn for the initiative. Then he will sacrifice another. Then he will sacrifice a piece for an attack. Then he’ll probably sacrifice another piece to drive your king in the center. Then he will checkmate you.”

Suetin was upset. What kind of help was this? Alexey went to his game, and the old trainer’s prediction again came true. (We should note on behalf of verisimilitude if one knows Nezhmetdinov’s games, such a prognostication is hardly difficult. Nezhmetdinov [NEGZ-met-di-nov] polished off many strong opponents in this same sequence.)

Now Suetin was very upset. He called the Belorussian chess ministry, telling them that they must recall this fatalistic fellow immediately. The shocked trainer was sent back to Minsk, where he walked around the chess club complaining of his unfair treatment.

“I don’t understand why this young Alexey is so upset with me,” the trainer would say. “Everything I told him turned out to be exactly right!”

Sometimes it’s smarter to be helpful than right. So we’ll frame a few questions from your point of view.

### **How much of my time should I spend on the openings?**

Our Suetin story is a parable of perspectives, to be sure, but certainly even today’s teachers and trainers risk, if not their livelihood, at least their student’s total confidence, by telling their charges the truth – opening study just doesn’t deserve to be so all-consuming, for two basic reasons:

- There are lots of other areas to study in chess that will make a more dramatic difference in your results; just one compelling example is the study of tactics.
- There have been many grandmasters who became prominent, even world-class players using an opening system roundly condemned as at least slightly inferior. (Last month we discussed the crucial psychological aspects of choosing an opening you like to play, one that’s really a sort of teammate or even “foxhole buddy” you’re willing to depend on and defend from the malevolent designs of opponents.)

### **How do I know if I should learn a completely new system?**

If you have a leaky roof, but one that’s structurally sound, you can put a pan under the hole and hope it doesn’t rain very often. On the other extreme, you could spring for a work crew to clamor over your head for a week to pry up and replace all the old shingles and wood. Or save thousands of dollars by having the roofers come for an afternoon to patch and repair the roof in the right places.

Learning a new opening system from near scratch is the most time-consuming step, much more time-intensive than beefing up the one you already play and know something about. As you read on and consider, you may just decide to keep playing your old tried and mostly true, while doing some “patching” that doesn’t take nearly so much time.

So unless your metaphorical roof is ready to cave in at the next high-wind, or unless you just want different-colored shingles and have the

wherewithal (which, in the case of chess openings is time, memory and patience), the prescription of choice is probably a repair job. After that, routine maintenance keeping track of what the top GMs are playing in your opening and being prepared will occupy only a reasonable amount of the time you have available for chess.

### **Should I learn a second opening as a “surprise weapon” or can I mow the lawn?**

There are enough choices within an opening to allow opportunities to surprise your opponent. The most practical advice is to know one opening very well for each major possibility, and to know a little bit about nearly everything else. To this day, Reuben Fine’s [\*Ideas Behind the Chess Openings\*](#) remains one of the best ways to learn something about practically every game-opener, while learning a lot about underlying ideas that apply to many different openings. It’s an old book and doesn’t have the latest analysis, but that’s not its point anyway. And treat the biases of the book for example, underrating current top-40 releases, such as the Scotch and the Benko as proof that much of opening theory is faddishness. Fine’s classic work is still available only a mouse-click away.

Anyway, most top players are unabashedly specialists in a few openings; normally just enough to cover the opponent’s main possibilities. A few, like Kasparov, seem encyclopedic in their opening choices, but after all, they have teams of researchers and theoreticians.

Actually, the best thing about knowing a second opening well, if you have time, is not that you can use it as a surprise weapon against your opponent, but that you learn the ideas and themes of a different type of position. But once again, from the point of view of real people with jobs to do and lawns to cut, a second opening covering the same ground usually steals time from other important areas of your chess development.

### **Karpov got an edge against one of my lines shall I give it up?**

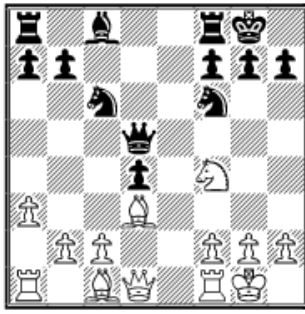
The dark side of our openings being part of our “team” is that we can hold them to too high a standard or even blame them for defeats that take place long after the opening phase. Ridiculous as it sounds, when we scavenge through opening books for the “perfect line,” we often wind up rejecting a possibility because it ends in a loss against a top GM or even a world champion. This is a corollary to the cynical outlook that an opening is evaluated by the results of a few key games, and the games were won by the stronger player.

A true story about GM Lev Alburt. When Lev was an expert, he took up a certain line in the Sicilian. He stuck with the variation as he rose through the ranks. As a master he contributed to the line’s theory. He drew and even defeated famous grandmasters with his variation. So he kept playing it. True, his own analysis unearthed one line that Lev worried about, a series of moves that left White with an edge out of the opening. But no one, not even top GMs, seemed to have discovered the sequence. No one played it against him, or against anyone else.

Then in 1971, in the semifinals for the Soviet championship, he was paired as black against a new twenty-year-old grandmaster named Anatoly Karpov, already coached by renowned opening theoretician Semyon Furman. Karpov opened with 1.e4, and Alburt was soon in the familiar territory of his trusty Sicilian. And then he was in the line he hoped he would never see in a tournament game.

***Karpov – Alburt, 1971***  
Sicilian, Four Knights

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e6 6.Ndb5 Bb4 7.a3 Bxc3+ 8.Nxc3 d5 9.exd5 exd5 10.Bd3 d4 11.Ne2 0-0 12.0-0 Qd5 13.Nf4!**



White drives Black's queen from her dominant central position.

**13...Qd6 14.Nh5!**

Karpov had played the best line for White and gotten a small edge. Alburt defended well, but the game was adjourned with Karpov retaining this edge, not necessarily enough to force a win, but an advantage. Another full, six-

hour session saw the game adjourned a second time, this time in a lost position for Lev. Alburt was disgusted. He felt that everyone would now play the same line against him and he would suffer in this way as long as he played the variation. He gave it up.

He says now that he knows this was a very premature reaction. After all, Karpov went on to dominate top-level chess until Kasparov arrived on the scene. The line Karpov played to get a small edge would not be to everyone's taste, nor within most GMs ability to maintain and convert to a win. It's true that Lev went on to a new, famous "relationship" with Alekhine's defense, but perhaps for the wrong reasons.

The next time you're tempted to switch your opening because the latest [Informator](#) game shows how Kasparov beat NM Rollovervitch in ninety moves in the line, don't. There isn't a line that wouldn't look bad in such a match-up. And when you lose in the city championship to a smartly played mating attack by the ultimate winner, don't rush to blame the opening. The reason for your loss may lie elsewhere.

### **Why is home cooking better than takeout?**

One of the best ways to dish it out is to cook at home. You don't have to be a master chef to prepare *hors d'oeuvres* that are both original and sound. Sometimes what you find may be a tactical trick. Perhaps with best play your find peters out to equality faster than the main line, but an opponent seeing it for the first time will likely slip into a brutal trap, or he may panic in the face of the unknown and try a kamikaze counterattack. Sometimes you'll even find something that becomes a new main line; for example, the Moody-Alburt gambit.

In the early 1980s, Richard Moody answered one of Lev Alburt's advertisements that offered answers to chess questions. At first, Moody's frequent questions were very simple to answer.

"Why can't I take the pawn on b7 here?"

"Because Black mates you in one with 13.Qxh2."

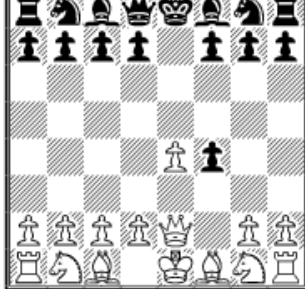
After a while the questions became more difficult. Perhaps the answer would be that Moody's move left him down a tempo compared to the main line, or with a knight on a bit less effective square than in theory. Then the questions grew into gray areas where Lev couldn't pinpoint a drawback to Moody's suggestion. The progression of insight was intriguing to Alburt. Then Moody began to advocate a specific new opening sequence and not one neck-deep in the latest Dragon line, but one that begins on only the third move of the venerable King's Gambit!

Moody wanted to discourage Black from playing d5, a good defense against the King's Gambit. So he came up with:

**1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Qe2!?**



Even though ...d5 turns out to be playable anyway, you can see that



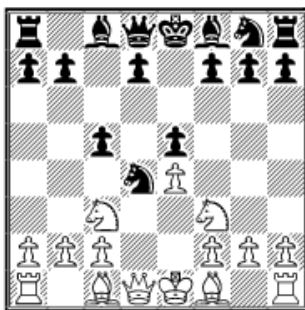
Moody's new move came from an intriguing idea. His variation turns out to be completely playable. He even wrote a book about it. You can imagine the confidence, not to mention the fun, Moody has playing his own opening! Once Lev Alburt was having dinner with World Champion Garry Kasparov and American superstar grandmaster and

opening guru Max Dlugy. Lev showed them Moody's move. Their verdict after a ten-minute-long consultation attempting to refute it? Perfectly playable. (Your opponent's moves will normally not approach the quality and depth of ten minutes concentration on this level!)

So what was this Richard Moody discoverer of new, playable strategies on the third move of the King's Gambit rated? Well, he was unrated for years. Then Lev encouraged him to play in tournaments, explaining that the experience would make him an even better openings researcher. Eventually, Richard played in a few events and is rated about 1700.

Another example proved much more influential even at the highest levels. Evgeny Sveshnikov was a Soviet expert when he began to research and advocate the line in the Sicilian that bears his name today.

**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 exd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5!?**



It was in very large part because of his work and play of this sharp variation that he became a grandmaster. Not as surprising as it sounds he knew the middlegames that grew out of his openings, and even the endgames that resulted from the middlegames. This is ultimately the kind of understanding you'll gain if you work at your opening preparation logically.

Certainly, anyone rated 1800 or above who likes research has a chance to find interesting and meaningful ideas on his own. Even players well below "A" level can try and very likely profit from the effort. Old books and magazines can provide excellent hunting grounds.

In [October](#), we'll wrap up our three-part series on selecting and learning an opening. We'll cover the kind of materials best to use, the fastest and best methods to employ to learn a system, and a bit about statistics. We'll also address trying to match your playing personality with an opening, and using shortcuts to keep your chess life manageable. In addition, we're working on a sort of blueprint that places the major openings in "tiers" according to their ranking by modern theory.

Next [month](#), we'll review the fascinating career of Sidney Samole (sa-MOL-ee), the giant of the commercial chess computer industry who (inspired by an episode of Star Trek) patented the very first micro-processor chess computer. Samole passed away on July 30, leaving behind a unique legacy of innovation, success, and contributions to the chess community, including the new U.S. and World Chess Hall of Fame and Sidney Samole Museum.

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