

Contents

Bibliography	5
Introduction	7
1 The Classical Variation: The Boleslavsky Wall	15
2 The Najdorf Variation	41
3 The Dragon Variation	90
4 The Scheveningen Variation	141
5 The Taimanov/Kan Complex	171
6 No Sveshnikov Allowed	227
7 Unusual Second Moves for Black	255
A Final Wrap-Up	274
Index of Variations	275
Index of Complete Games	285

Introduction

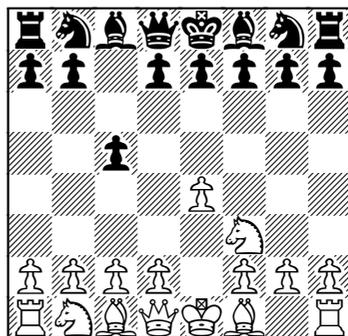
This book came about completely by accident. I had been commissioned by Everyman Chess to write a book on the King's Gambit, which was right up my alley: having written the book *Pawn Sacrifice!*, I loved the idea of starting off with a strong gambit, and moreover a gambit renowned for the attacking chances that could ensue. I had played the King's Gambit off and on throughout my career, with excellent results—but I generally played 1 e4 only when I expected the reply 1...e5. I had very rarely played 1 e4 against “the general public” so to speak.

In any case, I was eager to begin work and, as all my readers know, I won't recommend what I don't play—so the next tournament I went to I played 1 e4 for the first time in many years—and got the answer, 1...c5! What's this? Next White I play 1 e4: answer, 1...c5! Third time... Sicilian again!

“Help!” I cried to my editor, the unflappable GM John Emms. “I must learn the Sicilian before I can even begin to find someone who will answer 1 e4 with 1...e5.”

My editor and publisher were happy to defer the King's Gambit and agreed to a first book on the Sicilian—but what repertoire would I recommend? What would I, myself, like to play?

In those three games mentioned above I tried an assortment of Anti-Sicilians—and got absolutely nothing out of the opening. I used to play the Sicilian Defence myself and I tended to agree with GM Rogozenko who wrote in his book, *Anti-Sicilians: A Guide for Black*, that after 1 e4 c5 the “most ambitious” plan for White is 2 ♖f3 followed, usually on the next move, by d2-d4.



Rogozenko implies, and I will come right out and say it, that Black is by no

Slay the Sicilian

means certain of equalizing after this bold strategy. Consider the popular position 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4—White absolutely owns the centre, and while diverse counter plans are possible for Black, it's clear that at least for the moment he is fighting for equality.

Rogozenko goes on with a corollary, that he puts in bold print: “Anti-Sicilians do not bring an opening advantage for White.”

This one I have a slight reservation about, for if Black is bent on the Sveshnikov, he can bend himself right out of positional shape, and there (and only there) I think White can go for the advantage with a specific Anti-Sicilian—see my list of chapter themes below and Chapter Six for specifics.

But if one believes that an Open Sicilian repertoire is objectively strongest, one must wrestle with the myriad possibilities *after* 3 d4.

The basic questions arise again: What can I recommend? What can I *play*? Many of my opponents have probably played the Sicilian all their life, and I have to hit the ground running! Certainly I'm not going to advocate memorizing 30 book moves of the Yugoslav Attack against the Dragon, or 30 moves of the English Attack against the Najdorf. That's a waste of brain cells, takes the fun out of chess, and ultimately becomes a question of “Is my computer better than your computer?”

No, we're not going there!

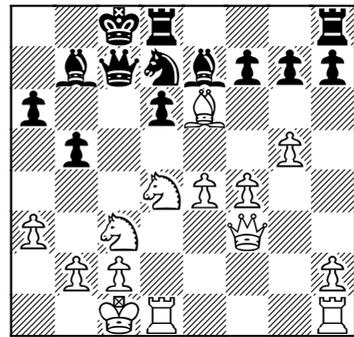
A glimmer of hope was provided by Tal, who throughout his career remarked how he “very much enjoyed” playing against the Sicilian.

On the other hand, he also sometimes played lines like this:

M.Tal-S.Gligoric

Alekhine Memorial,
Moscow 1963

1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗f6 5 ♗c3 a6 6 ♖g5 e6 7 f4 ♙e7 8 ♗f3 ♗c7 9 0-0-0 ♗bd7 10 g4 b5 11 ♙xf6 ♗xf6 12 g5 (I love you Misha, but this razor sharp and incalculable position has over 2,000 games in the database—on move 12!!) 12...♗d7 13 a3 ♙b7 14 ♙h3 0-0-0 15 ♙xe6



(a wonderful Tal sac—but all this is “theory” now!) 15...fxe6 16 ♗xe6 ♗c4 17 ♗d5 ♙xd5 18 exd5 ♗b7 19 b3 ♗c8 20 ♗d3 ♗b6 21 ♗c3 ♗d7 22 ♗c7+ ♗xc7 23 ♗xc7 ♗xc7 24 ♗c3+ ♗b8 25 ♗xg7 ♗c8 26 ♗e1 ♗dg8 27 ♗d4 ♙d8 28 ♗e6 ♗f8 29 h4 h6 30 g6 ♗hg8 31 h5 ♗f5 32

♔e4 ♖xh5 33 ♜e8 ♜xe8 34 ♔xe8 ♙f6
 35 c4 bxc4 36 bxc4 ♜h3 37 ♘d2 ♙c3+
 38 ♘c2 ♙d4 39 f5 ♜xa3 40 c5 dxc5 41
 d6 ♜a2+ 42 ♘d3 ♜a3+ 43 ♘c4 1-0

While Tal also played some “human” lines (and some of his games will be found in this book), much of his stuff requires either his wizardry (and sometimes even more than that—see the introduction to Chapter Two) or a multi-processor computer! I only wish I had the former, and I don’t have the latter, so I was still stuck.

And then I was rescued by a very unexpected benefactor.

I was idly looking at World Champion Anatoly Karpov’s book, *My Best Games*—and I came across a line that absolutely stunned me, that I quote in full below:

“I have always felt it completely unnecessary for White to rush headlong into a maelstrom of forced variations with his first moves in the Sicilian. His superiority in the centre gives him the possibility of resolving any problem by solid positional play.”

While I have always admired Karpov’s positional play and his relentless technique, I’ve never been a fan in the way I am a fan of the wizard of Riga.

But after being rescued from a desperate situation, I not only became a big fan, I have made Karpov (like Keres in *Slay the Spanish*) the hero of this entire book!

I found Karpov’s repertoire to be

amazingly human and easy to learn—and absolutely deadly over the board. It seems that no one really plays this way anymore—instead everyone is out there with their laptops rushing headlong into that “maelstrom of forced variations”. Thus virtually none of the opponents I encountered were prepared for what I would describe as *solid positional play with a drop of poison*. However (I couldn’t help myself!), against the Dragon I also offer an alternative, non-Karpovian method, the Alekhine Attack, which so suited my style I barely had to study it!

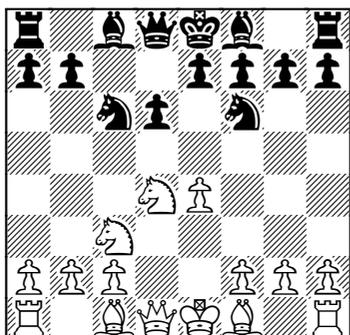
In any case, each chapter starts with a Karpov game, and then continues with relevant games from renowned GMs and World Champions, as well as a number of my own efforts from the trenches.

Let’s take a look at this repertoire, which I stress is easy to learn and very very effective. The Sicilian naturally divides into six types of opening, according to pawn structure, represented by the first six chapters of this book, with a seventh “catch all” chapter devoted to unusual odds and ends.

Here’s a look at what’s in store for White:

Chapter One

I start with one of the oldest lines in the Sicilian, played by Paulsen in the 19th century, the Classical Variation: 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6.



Here I recommend 6 ♖e2, and the Boleslavsky Wall structure is covered in this chapter, where Black answers 6...e5. Although it's unfashionable to say so, I think White maintains a pull in this variation, as it is not at all easy for Black to rid himself of the weakness at d5 without making some concessions. Watch Karpov take down Jan Timman with only the most minute edge—which he carries from opening through middlegame to ending and a full point.

Chapter Two

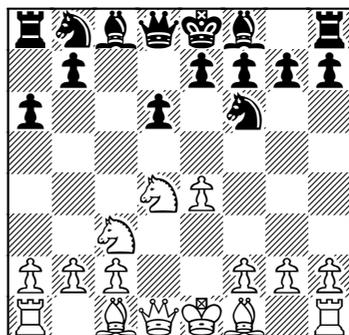
What World Champion doesn't love the Najdorf Variation that arrives after the inexplicable series of non-developing moves 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗f6 5 ♗c3 a6 - ?

(see following diagram)

Think Fischer, Kasparov, Anand!

Karpov loved the Najdorf too—playing against it that is! Naturally I recommend 6 ♖e2 again, and after the pure Najdorf move 6...e5 (continuing

our exploration of the Boleslavsky Wall structure), one notices that Karpov *never lost this position*. With 22 games in the database, the box score is 14 wins for Karpov and 8 draws for his foes. And Karpov beat people like Kasparov, Bronstein, Polugaevsky—Fish!



White has many good follow-ups after the natural 7 ♗b3, and my opinion is that once again the hole at d5 is more costly than most Sicilian books will admit.

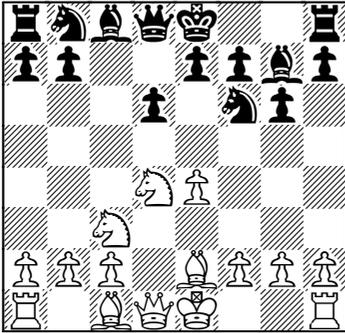
Chapter Three

The Dragon is so much fun to play... against! By moving his pawn to g6 early, Black offers you a choice of f4-f5 or h4-h5 levers (and sometimes both—see Game 30, Taylor-Casella). I also offer the reader a choice: A Karpov specialty was 1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♗xd4 ♗f6 5 ♗c3 g6 6 ♖e2 ♖g7

(see following diagram)

7 0-0 0-0 followed by the key move of 8 ♖g5! with positional pressure, and

a mating attack often coming into the picture around move 35.



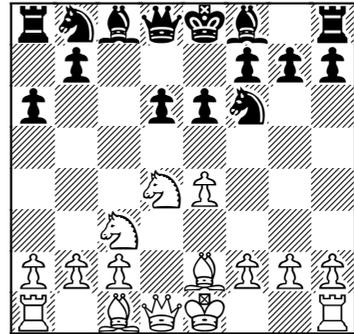
Rather more ferocious is my second recommendation, the Alekhine Attack, which continues like this: 7 ♖e3 ♘c6 8 ♘b3 ♖e6 9 f4 0-0 10 g4!. OK, not too Karpovian, but very little explored in the computer age, and suitable for quick wins (and one quick loss!)

One good point about both my recommendations is that they work against the regular Dragon as well as the Accelerated (with a few slight modifications), as will be pointed out in the text. Furthermore I took the opportunity to box the Dragodorf on its ear a couple of times, when Black attempts to confuse his opponent by playing two systems at once—but more often just confuses himself in the process!

Chapter Four

Black might set up a “little centre” of pawns on e6 and d6 and wait to see what White does—this is the Scheveningen system, most often

reached these days after the sequence 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♖e2 e6.

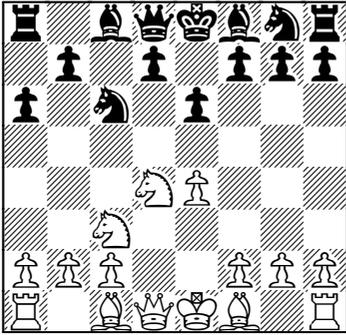


I advocate the solid Karpovian (and Birdian, if that’s a word!) method of creating a big centre with pawns at e4 and f4, and then using that centre as the basis of an eventual kingside attack, usually helped out by the manoeuvre ♖e1-g3. White’s free hand in the centre makes this line easy to play, though one must watch out for counter punchers!

Chapter Five

If Black plays an early ...e7-e6 but holds off on ...d7-d6, he is playing either a Taimanov or a Kan (or possibly a couple of wacky sidelines!). I thought of breaking up the chapter into various parts, but since all the lines can transpose into each other, I have put all the variations usually reached after 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 e6 in one umbrella chapter. I will cover the pure Taimanov, which comes about after 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘c6 5 ♘c3 a6,

Slay the Sicilian



where I recommend, as usual, 6 ♖e2—and make sure you check out Karpov's stunning victory over Taimanov himself in this line, where our hero sacs two pawns—for a positional advantage!

As usual I don't think it's at all easy for Black to equalize against White's solid but strong play.

Against the pure Kan (3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 a6 5 ♖c3 ♔c7 I also recommend our ubiquitous 6 ♖e2 (though in the fashionable sideline 5...b5 I suggest the precise 6 ♖d3!—see the explanation in the main text). Once again White's central control and solid positional play give him every chance of an edge.

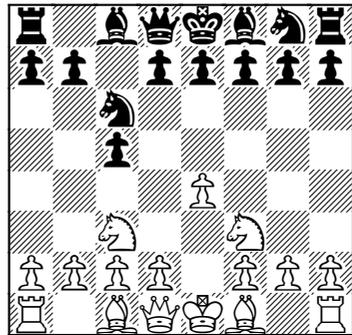
I also offer recipes against the peculiar Pin (4...♖f6 5 ♖c3 ♖b4), the Four Knights (4...♖f6 5 ♖c3 ♖c6), and the downright odd Gå På (4...♖f6 5 ♖c3 ♔b6), as well as the early 4...♗c5—none of which should trouble White... if he knows what to do!

Chapter Six

Black might go for the bizarre Svesh-

nikov which is reached after 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4 ♖f6 5 ♖c3 e5 6 ♖b5 d6 7 ♖g5 a6 8 ♖a3, when I have to borrow a Larsen quote and say: "Both sides stand badly!" Black has a gaping hole at d5, but White has spent four moves to manoeuvre his king's knight to the worst possible square imaginable—a3! Ever helpful, my friend Joe Cepiel said, "The game usually starts around move 17, as all lines are heavily booked up to that point!" Joe also claimed all the moves were logical, but friendship only goes so far—these moves look utterly insane to me!

While Karpov did enter this morass at times, he once again rescued me with a logical and strong positional alternative: after 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♖c6 White simply plays 3 ♖c3!



Now the Sveshnikov adherent is thrown completely out of his game, as his opening is no longer playable (and his thirty memorized moves are meaningless!). If he plays 3...e5, White gets an edge with the simple 4 ♖c4 target-

ing the weak d5-square (Rogozenko claims this is OK for Black, indeed even the “principled” answer—but my feeling is that Black is giving up too much too soon here, as Games 63-65 will show.

Black might also try to transpose to the Svesh by playing 3...♗f6, but then as Karpov—as well as Tal and Adams—has shown, White has excellent chances for an advantage with 4 ♖b5. The first player then reaches a Rosolimo Variation where Black, due to the provocative placement of his king’s knight, must constantly watch out for White’s e4-e5 thrust.

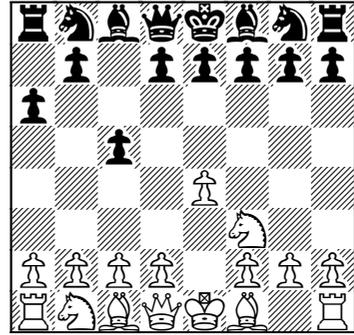
In practice (after 3 ♘c3) my opponents always played 3...g6, when the Open Sicilian appeared again after 4 d4, with Dragon slaying on the menu.

Chapter Seven

The first six chapters have offered a repertoire solution to all the main lines that can be reached after the big three of second moves: 2...d6, 2...♘c6 or 2...e6. However, these are not the only continuations, just the most popular ones.

White must also be ready for 2...a6, 2...g6 (mostly this will transpose to regular Dragon lines, but not always), 2...b6 and 2...♗f6. Of these, by far the most important is the O’Kelly Variation, 2...a6—not having outlined the last chapter yet, I was surprised by this and lost!—which has been touted in Everyman’s *Dangerous Weapons* books

and is a great surprise weapon!



On the other hand, it’s really nothing special if you are armed in advance. While Karpov played the approved 3 c3, I also offer the simple yet very strong 3 ♘c3, when if Black wants to stay in a pure O’Kelly he must take probably unsustainable risks—or else he must make the psychologically difficult decision to return to main lines.

Against the other unusual moves I offer simple and strong play where, in general, Black faces the same dilemma as he does in the O’Kelly—return to the main lines where our repertoire gives comfortable play for White, or take extreme risks that can likely be punished right in the opening—see especially Bobby Fischer’s demolition of 2...♗f6 in the last game of this book, Game 70.

The reader might wonder, how did I do with this repertoire? It’s true I had to learn it fast (and in one case, the O’Kelly, had not learned it yet). I was also playing (while researching and writing this book) in a series of strong

Slay the Sicilian

Metropolitan Club International events—round robins with an array of titled players, many of whom were higher rated than myself. I also kept busy with a number of Swiss system open events—and I faced a ton of Sicilians (well, 28 to be exact). Every one of these games was an Open Sicilian (as mentioned above, when I offered an Anti-Sicilian—after 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3—I always ended up with the Dragon).

The statistics are quite interesting: first of all, I faced twelve titled players: one GM, ten IMs (I am counting in this group two “IM-elect”s who have made all their norms for the title, and probably will have it by the time this book comes out) and one WGM. I must admit that all twelve of these titled players were higher rated than myself.

My score against this group with my Open Sicilian repertoire was six wins, five draws and only one loss, for a fairly awesome 8½/12 or 71% against higher-rated opposition.

Against non-titled players (usually in the master class, ranging from 1950 to 2350), or in other words against players roughly at my rating level or below, I scored 12 wins and 4 losses for an expected percentage increase to 75%.

Karpov rules!

However, the statistics also have one very strange anomaly—or possibly it’s a result of the chosen repertoire. What was the most popular Sicilian

variation chosen by my opponents? Go ahead, guess the Najdorf—and you’ll be wrong! I did score 4½/5 out of my five games against the Najdorf—but that opening line was dwarfed in popularity by the Dragon Variation!

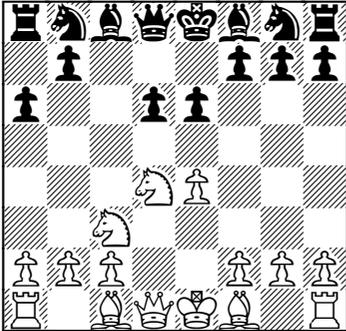
Out of these twenty-eight recent games, more than half—*seventeen*—featured the Dragon. I found I loved playing against this and scored 13/17 or 76% (and would have scored higher had my technique been better!). In every game but one I got the advantage right out of the opening, playing both Karpov’s positional ♗g5 and Alekhine’s wild attack with g2-g4.

How does one explain the huge popularity of this variation? Could Los Angeles be a hotbed of Dragon fiends? Yes, some opponents played directly for the Dragon—but the repertoire has something to do with it. When I played 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 I got 3...g6 (always), and after my recommended 1 e4 c5 2 ♖f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♖f6 5 ♘c3 ♘c6 6 ♗e2 I also (usually) got 6...g6. Apparently there are some “recipes” floating around the internet that advise Black to transpose into the Dragon in such situations—but I say the fire has gone out, and the Dragon can slink back to his cave like Puff after Jackie Paper took away the sealing wax! In any case, if these stats mean anything, the reader would do well to study Chapter Three intensively!

Now let’s examine in detail how to *Slay the Sicilian*.

Game 40
V.Anand-I.Sokolov
 Brussels (rapid) 1992

1 e4 c5 2 ♗f3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 a6 5
 ♗c3 d6



An ever more popular transposition from the Kan to the Scheveningen.

6 a4

Not to knock the World Champion, but I would prefer to wait on this move until I saw where Black's queen's knight was going—after ...♘bd7 this is a good move; whereas it is not so good, in my opinion, if Black develops to the knight to c6, observing b4. Therefore 6 ♖e2 ♗f6 7 0-0 ♘bd7 8 a4 would be my preferred move order.

6...♗f6 7 ♖e2 ♘bd7

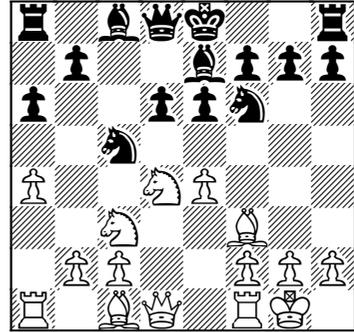
Black should play ...♖e7!...0-0!...♙c7! ...♘c6 with a reasonable game, à la Kasparov.

8 0-0 ♗c5

Instead of Matikozian's 8...b6, Black buys time to castle with this attack on the e4-pawn—but this problem knight

is still not well placed, and Sokolov succeeds only in lengthening the game by one move!

9 ♖f3 ♖e7



10 g3

Other GMs have exploited the b6-square and won slowly, but the World Champion doesn't want to wait that long!

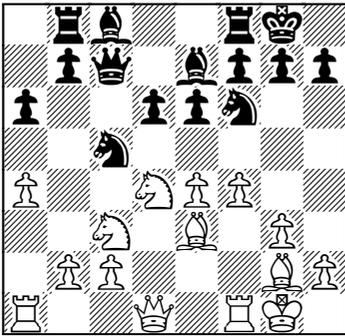
K.Asrian-H.Odeev, Dubai 2001, saw 10 ♖e3 0-0 11 a5 (the b6-square is weak and White goes to work: Asrian's positional style is well suited to this kind of grind—recall the note to move 12 in the previous game, when he ground down Matikozian—and once again he makes slow but steady progress) 11...♙c7 12 ♖e1 ♗b8 13 ♘b3 e5 14 ♘c1 b5 15 axb6 ♗xb6 16 ♘d3 (White's pressure through to b6 leads to the creation of two isolated black pawns) 16...♗b8 17 ♘xc5 dxc5 18 ♙c1 ♗b4 19 ♖e2 c4 20 ♗a2 h6 21 f3 ♖c5 22 ♘d1 ♗d8 23 ♖xc5 ♙xc5+ 24 ♙e3 ♙c7 25 ♘c3 ♙b8 26 ♗d1 ♖e6 27 ♗xd8+ ♙xd8 28 ♖f2 ♙b6 29 ♘d1 ♙b7 30 ♙c3 ♘d7 31 ♘e3 a5 32 ♖xc4 (one of which

Slay the Sicilian

now falls, which is the end of the game when playing Asrian) 32...♙xc4 33 ♘xc4 a4 34 ♗e3 ♗f6 35 ♚xe5 ♚b6 36 ♙e2 ♚a6+ 37 ♙d2 ♚b6 38 ♜a3 ♜xb2 39 ♜xa4 ♙h7 40 ♚d4 ♚b8 41 e5 1-0.

Also possible is 10 a5 with an immediate queenside bind, and after 10...0-0 11 b4 ♗cd7 12 ♗a4 ♗e5 13 ♗b6 White just took over the square and ground to victory in M.Panchanathan-V.Belov, Mumbai 2009.

10...0-0 11 ♙g2 ♚c7 12 ♙e3 ♜b8 13 f4!



Anand zeroes in on Black's central weak point: the e5-square that the early ...♗c5 neglected; while if Black retreats with 13...♗cd7, he gets another cramped undeveloped position that invites g3-g4-g5.

13...♜e8?!

Underestimating the following attack. As noted above, 13...♗cd7 is weak due to 14 g4, which means that 13...e5 is relatively best. This pawn block stops the immediate attack and will so prolong the game, though Black's positional problems remain after the evident 14 ♗f5.

14 e5!

The e-pawn will be indirectly protected by a potential skewer, so Black's last move can now be seen as a mistake: the f-file opens and f7 is weak.

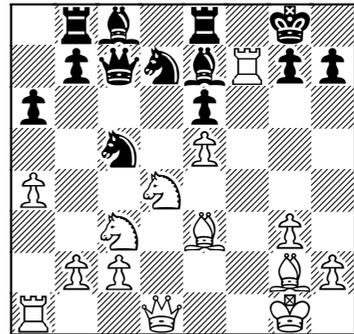
14...dxe5

Virtually forced, as after 14...♗fd7 15 exd6 ♚xd6 (15...♙xd6 16 ♗db5 axb5 17 ♗xb5 ♚b6 18 ♚xd6 is another easy winner) 16 b4 a tangled knight drops—as we see, this is a common theme in the ...♗bd7 variation.

15 fxе5 ♗fd7

Not 15...♚xe5? 16 ♙f4 skewering.

16 ♜xf7!!



16 b4 can be answered by 16...♗b3 and Black survives for the moment—but I bet he didn't see this blow coming!

16...♙xf7 17 ♚h5+

Black's king has no defenders, the miserable rook on e8 prevents the safe retreat to g8, and the white reserves are coming up—in short, the World Champion shows us how it's done: White has a winning attack against a GM after only 17 moves.

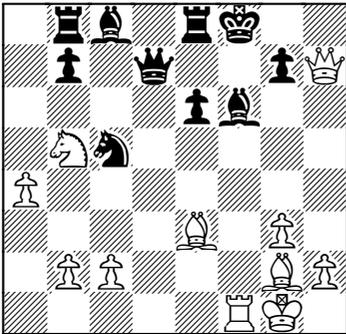
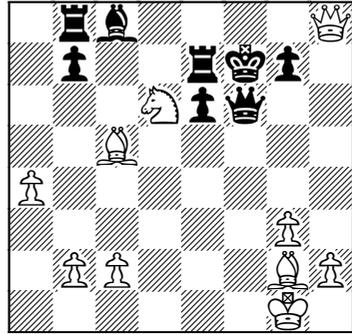
17...♔f8 18 ♖f1+ ♘f6 19 exf6 ♙xf6 20 ♘db5!!

An exchange down at this point, Anand sacs a piece just to gain one tempo!

20...axb5 21 ♘xb5 ♗d7

Not 21...♗e7? 22 ♙xc5, winning the queen.

22 ♗xh7!



Now a full rook down, Anand ignores the black knight that is hanging with check—and snaps off a pawn!

22...♗e7

22...♗e7 23 ♙xc5 b6 24 ♖xf6+ gxf6 25 ♙f3 bxc5 26 ♗h8+ ♔f7 27 ♙h5 is one of many pretty mates hiding in the position.

23 ♖xf6+!

When you're one rook down already, it's easy to give another.

23...♗xf6

The suicidal line is 23...gxf6 24 ♙h6+ ♗g7 25 ♗xg7 mate.

24 ♙xc5+ ♖e7

If 24...♔f7 then 25 ♘d6+ ♔e7 26 ♙e4+ picks off the queen.

25 ♗h8+ ♔f7 26 ♘d6+ 1-0

Black resigns in view of one more pretty mate: 26 ♘d6+ ♔g6 27 ♙e4+ ♔g5 28 ♗h4 mate.

While one would hardly say that the early ...♘d7 loses for Black, it's obvious White gets a positional advantage by combining an a2-a4 clamp with an f2-f4 attack! As White, always watch to see if the black knights (which on f6 and d7 occupy each other's flight squares) may become tangled—you might be able to pick one of them off! Finally, just take a moment to appreciate the World Champion's fabulous attack and multiple sacrifices!

But now things are not going to be so easy: Mr. Kasparov is in the house!

Game 41

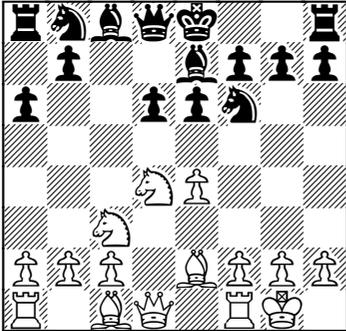
A.Karpov-G.Kasparov
World Championship (24th
matchgame), Moscow 1985

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 ♘f6
5 ♘c3 a6 6 ♙e2 e6

Slay the Sicilian

This move order is the most popular way to reach the Scheveningen now—there are over 10,000 games in the database! After Game 11, Kasparov was not about to play 6...e5 again and enter Karpov's positional realm.

7 0-0 ♖e7!



Kasparov's regular move: Black prepares to castle on the next move, for otherwise, as we have seen, he might not get another chance.

8 f4

Karpov in turn plays his patented attack.

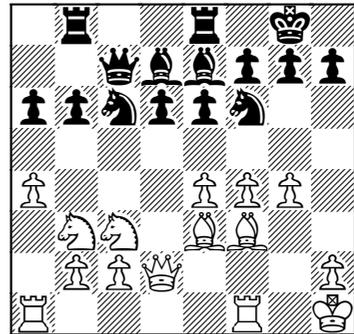
8...0-0 9 ♔h1

We've seen throughout this book that Karpov likes to put his king here whenever he plays f2-f4, so avoiding annoying checks that might come at the wrong time. On the other hand, I have seen many strong players just get on with it by playing 9 ♖e3 ♘c6 10 ♕e1, heading to g3 (we do know where Black's king lives!) with attack. We'll see that basic idea in the final two games of this chapter.

9...♗c7 10 a4

In my opinion this is not best here (though it's very strong vs. ...♘d7), when the black knight can still go to c6. Essentially, this means ...♘b4 is possible, while Black has not had to pay (as in Karpov-Spassky, Game 37) with the weakening ...a7-(a6)-a5. Karpov himself evidently came to this conclusion, and in the next game he played 10 ♕e1; subsequently he allowed ...b7-b5 and then stopped the pawn with the modest but effective a2-a3, so keeping the black knight out of his position.

10...♘c6 11 ♖e3 ♗e8 12 ♖f3 ♗b8 13 ♕d2 ♖d7 14 ♘b3 b6 15 g4!?



Do or die! Karpov was undoubtedly influenced by a previous game in this match where he tried his typical manoeuvring and got absolutely nothing: 15 ♖f2 ♖c8 16 ♖g3 ♘d7 17 ♗ae1 ♖b7 18 e5 ♗bd8 19 ♕f2 ♗f8 20 ♖e4 dxe5 21 fxe5 ♘c5 22 ♘xc5 bxc5 23 ♖f4 1/2-1/2 A.Karpov-G.Kasparov, World Championship (18th matchgame), Moscow 1985.

The match situation was also critical: this was the final game of the

match and Karpov was a point behind, so he absolutely had to win to retain his title.

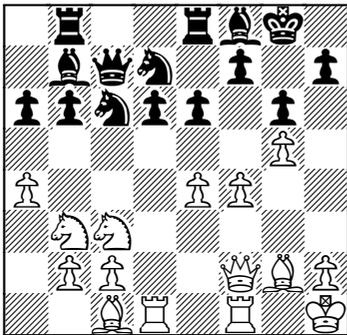
However, I believe Black has sufficient defensive resources, one of which is ...♖b4!. In my opinion, in the present position, White has at least two pieces misplaced: the queen should be on g3, and the king's bishop should be on d3, aiming for the king. So it's hard to believe White has an objective advantage—or that he can win by direct attack here.

But Karpov does go for it! And after a couple of slight errors by Kasparov, he reaches a near-winning position.

15...♙c8 16 g5 ♘d7

It's crucial that Black's knight has this safe retreat square; note that the black knights do not trip over each other.

17 ♖f2 ♙f8 18 ♙g2 ♙b7 19 ♖ad1 g6 20 ♙c1!



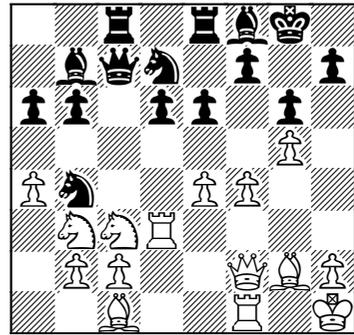
A good move, clearing the third rank for the rook. Kasparov doesn't notice the danger until it's almost too late!

20...♖bc8?!

20...♘c5! (Kasparov) is correct, which forestalls the rook manoeuvre, and if 21 ♖xc5 bxc5 then Black gets the b-file and d4-square for counterplay. Mr. Fritz has it as dead even after this knight move, which shows that White's attack has (until now, anyway) made no impression on Black's solid game.

21 ♖d3 ♘b4

Black does get this knight tempo in, without weakening the b5-square with ...a6-a5.



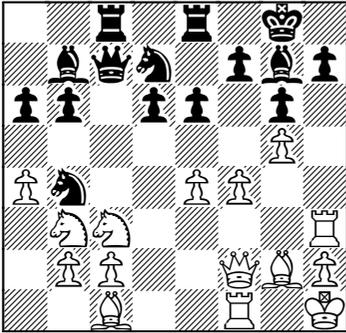
22 ♖h3 ♙g7?!

Careless, as Kasparov himself says. It's time to hit back with 22...f5 23 gxh6 ♘xf6, which appears to lose a piece to 24 ♖d4, forking, but doesn't, due to the following fantastic resource: 24...e5! 25 ♖xb4 d5!, when both small centre pawns move forward with tempo and White has nothing better than to return the piece with 26 ♘b5 axb5, after which Black is slightly better.

Instead, White should not go for the piece, but rather play for attack with 24 f5 exf5 25 exf5 ♙g7, reaching "a com-

Slay the Sicilian

plicated and unclear” position – Kasparov.



23 ♖e3?

White could have taken advantage of Black’s two inaccuracies with the resolute 23 f5!, when things are bad for Black: f5-f6 is threatened, the counter-attack ...f7-f5 is prevented and, in general, White has every chance of winning the game—note that *Mr. Fritz* sits at a big +1.2 after the f-pawn advance.

Had Karpov won this game and retained his title, who knows what would have happened to the Kasparov experiment?

But all this is “analysis”—this was Kasparov’s year, and while Karpov missed his big chance, Kasparov did not miss his!

23...♖e7

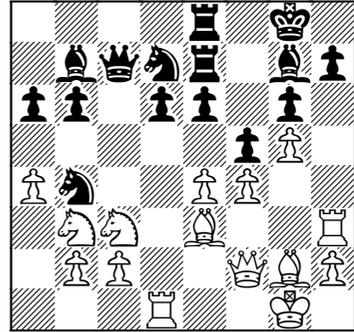
White should probably still play 24 f5 now, though it is nowhere near as strong as before. When he hesitates again, Black prevents the advance.

24 ♖g1 ♖ce8!

An original conception: by doubling rooks on the closed e-file, Black pre-

vents f4-f5, which would now be met decisively by ...e6xf5, opening the e-file for the rooks to attack the e3-bishop.

25 ♖d1 f5!



Given his chance, Black is the one to play the critical f5; at this moment one can see the World Championship shifting owners.

As an aside, when I think of all the colossal drama of the 24-game World Championship matches such as this one, Spassky-Fischer, Petrosian-Spassky, Tal-Botvinnik—and the phenomenal Candidates matches that led up to these (I already mentioned this in the book, but once again: can anyone who lived through those times forget Fischer’s 6-0 crush of Mark Taimanov?), I have to say, the system wasn’t broke—why has it been fixed?

Bringing back the system as it existed in 1972: interzonal, candidate matches, 24-game world championship match would do so much to restore excitement and credibility to chess—every change since has made things worse!

Now back to the game, as Kasparov, with the initiative in hand and favoured this day by fortune, romps home like Zenyatta at Santa Anita.

26 gx6 ♖xf6!

“Black, of course, sacrifices the pawn” – Kasparov. That kind of note is rarely seen today!

27 ♔g3 ♖f7 28 ♕xb6 ♜b8 29 ♕e3

29 ♖d4 ♗c6 30 ♖c4 ♗h5 shows White’s weaknesses across the board.

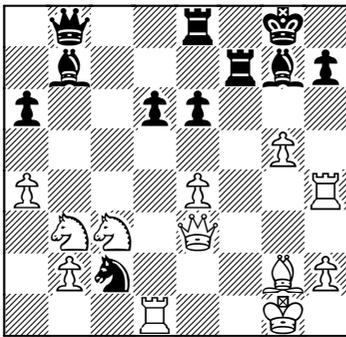
29...♗h5 30 ♖g4 ♗f6 31 ♖h4

Given the match situation, 31 ♖g3 ♗h5 with a draw was no good for Karpov.

31...g5!

Kasparov isn’t counting pawns, but rather counting on the initiative!

32 fxg5 ♗g4 33 ♜d2 ♗xe3 34 ♜xe3 ♗xc2



The black knight, that long ago got the b4-square, suddenly strikes a fierce blow deep in White’s territory.

35 ♜b6 ♕a8 36 ♖xd6?

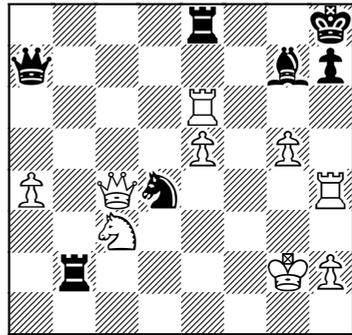
Blundering under pressure. Correct is 36 ♜xb8 ♖xb8 37 ♕h3! with the idea of obtaining rook and pawn vs. two

pieces in the endgame and good chances of drawing—but a draw still lost the match.

36...♖b7

A simple skewer; but in the final moves of the final game of a world championship match, anything is possible. The champion and challenger are human after all.

37 ♜xa6 ♖xb3 38 ♖xe6 ♖xb2 39 ♜c4 ♕h8 40 e5 ♜a7+ 41 ♕h1 ♕xg2+ 42 ♕xg2 ♗d4+ 0-1



Black comes out a full rook and bishop up, and Kasparov became the new World Chess Champion!

Two things must be noted: White got nothing out of the opening (I mainly blame 10 a4)—but even so, White got a close to winning attack after only two slight inaccuracies by Black, which shows how precise the Scheveningen player must be, given that he concedes the first four ranks. Both White and Black must be resolute without blinking. Kasparov’s nerves held up better, and he was willing to give up two pawns to get his play going!