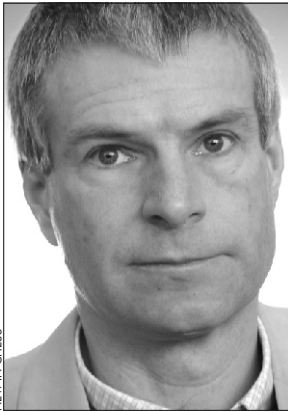


Beating the Sicilian according to Jesus

by **Glenn Flear**



NEW IN CHESS

The crunch question for 1.e4 players is *what to do against the Sicilian?* An enigma for many and one that has kept the ink flowing over the years.

The so-called ‘anti-Sicilians’ (where White employs an off-beat line to try and surprise, or at least frustrate, his opponent) have limited mileage, and well-prepared Sicilian players can usually get close to equality (or better!) without much effort.

So that brings us to the question of the ‘Open Sicilian’, i.e. where d2-d4 is played on move three, which is generally acknowledged as the principled way to combat 1...c5. So let’s face it, despite allowing Black to obtain his favourite set-up, White should really, with due preparation, challenge the Sicilian head-on.

No doubt, what puts many off is the need to learn a series of critical variations and, furthermore, the perception that one slip can mean disaster doesn’t help matters either! However if the motivation is there, and with the right guiding hand in the eternal quest for inspiration, many would be more willing to embark on the Open-Sicilian adventure.

A quarter of a century ago John Nunn gave the chess world a magic key in the form of his *Beating the Sicilian* (Batsford 1984), enabling a whole generation to open the door to a treasure-trove of golden words of wisdom. Nunn’s formula struck a chord with the public and his work (plus various updates and revisions) became a bible for white-

side players of the Sicilian. Needless to say, time has moved on and inevitably theory has evolved, and of course radically so in the sharper lines such as the Najdorf.

So naturally many authors have added their know-how and perception in the light of recent developments. Here we have a couple that are hot off the press: Chess Stars presents the fifth (out of six) volume in which Khalifman sets out his Anand-inspired repertoire for White versus the various forms of the Sicilian Defence, and then there is Jesus de la Villa’s ambitiously titled *Dismantling the Sicilian*.

Jesus de la Villa

Dismantling the Sicilian

New in Chess 2009, 336 pages

The author is from my generation and someone who I have seen in tournaments for many years. I think of him as introverted, studious, almost professor-like, but in contrast, at the board a colourful tactician who happily employs daring, and sometimes rather provocative, opening ideas.

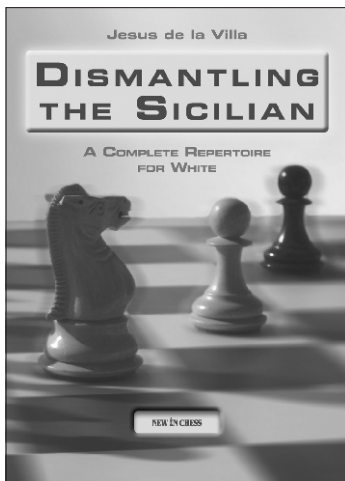
The book reflects both aspects of his personality: a well-researched series of systems with some flamboyance. He comes up with a quotable explanation of his general advice to pupils: ‘against main lines, play main lines; against secondary lines, play secondary lines; against unsound lines, play the refutation.’ Nice! Makes sense to me!

The proposed core set-up is the attractive-looking development in-

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volving the bishop on e3, the queen on d2, f2-f3 and 0-0-0, a concept known by various names such as the Yugoslav Attack against the Dragon, or the English Attack versus the Najdorf. As this doesn't work against the Classical, he proposes the Richter-Rauzer, see below in the following review. He had already developed his main ideas in an earlier Spanish book, *Desmontando la Siciliana* (2003), but most material of the present tome is brand new.

A one-volume antidote of any potency against the most-popular black defence feels like an implausible project, so De la Villa has



preferred clarity and instruction rather than completeness. The theory is embedded within instructive games, some of these being from 2008, where the notes essentially cover the opening and early middlegame (but next to nothing on the endgames), as one would expect.

I found the general presentation to be simpler for the reader than in other New in Chess opening works. This perhaps reflects that the author and publisher have been sensitive to the fact that the targeted readership needs to feel comfortable navigating such a complex subject. The sections, chapter divisions, and indices are

well thought out, thus helping in this process. In chunkier notes the use of a doughnut symbol(!) to distinguish between lines works well to divide the information into more readily-digestible mouthfuls. Another aspect that strikes one as being quite innovative is the detail in his summaries, where it's almost as if the professor has kindly written concise notes for his students. Each variation and sub-variation receives its own mini-assessment, thus enabling the reader to have a convenient aide-mémoire to hand. The overall effect is impressive and highly recommended to those who need help choosing their lines, and I will certainly use it for training purposes. It may be however that higher-ranking players will feel that there aren't enough game references and be disappointed not to find more of these from 2009.

There is also the point about following the advice of a 'lowly' 2500-strength GM on such an important subject, but have faith! In my opinion if you are looking for some good ideas against the Sicilian it's better to have Jesus on your side!

Alexander Khalifman

Opening for White According to Anand - 1.e4 (Volume 12)
Chess Stars 2009, 284 pages

Opening books from Chess Stars based in Bulgaria have become the benchmark for high-quality analysis from the strongest grandmasters. Here Alexander Khalifman turns his attention to the Classical Sicilian against which he recommends 6.♗g5, the Richter-Rauzer.

Thirteen volumes will be required in this series to lay out a complete white repertoire (based loosely on Anand's choices) with 1.e4. That means something in the region of 4000 pages in which Alexander Khalifman presents his case, so it's no surprise that he goes deeper into many lines than others! To give a

comparison, in Volume 12 there are 284 pages, whereas De la Villa handles this subject-matter in a modest 33.

Naturally strong theoretical players should obtain those volumes that cover their repertoire. I even know one GM who had given up buying opening books altogether but started again with this series as he felt that they are just too important to ignore. However, for many lower-ranking players there is far too much material for them to assimilate and for them the practical choice may be to settle for a lighter alternative. I would suggest that players less than 1900 would come into this category.

The English text is perfectly adequate for chess players but there are always a few minor errors in these works. However, the quintessential is the chess analysis, Khalifman's interpretations backed up by up-to-date game references.

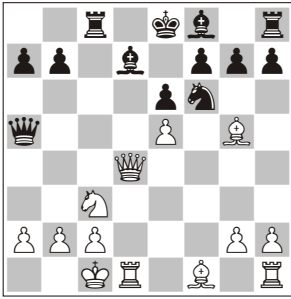
Here are three comparisons between this book (AK) and De la Villa's (DIV) above.

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 ♖c6 3.d4 cd4 4.♗d4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 d6 6.♗g5 ♗d7 7.♗d2 ♝c8 8.f4

Both opt for this rather than the more popular 8.0-0-0.

8...♗d4 9.♗d4 ♗a5 10.e5 de5 11.fe5 e6 12.0-0-0



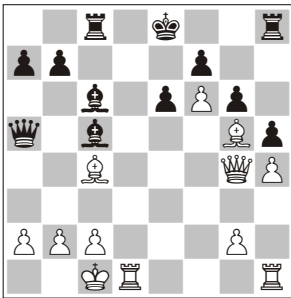


12...♙c6

Both authors note the refutation of 12...♞c3, i.e. 13.♙d2 ♞a2 14.♙c3 g6 15.b4! ♘d5 16.♙c4 ♙h6 17.♞d2! ♞a3 18.♙b2 ♞b4 19.♙d5+.

13.♘b5 ♙b5 14.ef6 ♙c6

Following 14...♙a4 15.h4 g6 (15...gf6?! 16.♞f6 ♞g8 17.♙d3 is bad for Black) 16.♙d3 ♙c5, AK prefers 17.♞f4!, which he analyses as advantageous, whereas the known 17.♞g4 h5 18.♞e2 is less clear after his suggested 18...0-0!. **15.h4 g6 16.♙c4 ♙c5 17.♞g4 h5**



Only here is there a divergence. AK prefers...

18.♞g3

DIV opts for 18.♞e2 0-0 19.♞hf1, when his idea is to meet 19...♙b4 by 20.a3!; and 19...♙b6 with 20.♙b1! e.g. 20...♙g2 21.♙e6 ♙f1 22.♞e4 with some advantage. AK continues with...

18...0-0

Or after 18...♙e4 he deeply analyzes 19.♞he1 ♙f5 20.♞d5.

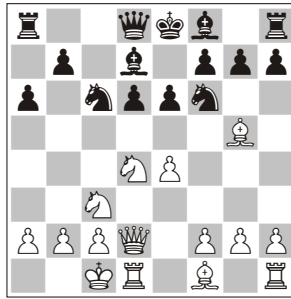
19.♙d2 ♞b6 20.♙e6

...as on pages 81-84.

I have to admit I was impressed by both authors who have suggested their very own convincing improvements.

In the alternative line

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cd4
4.♘d4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♙g5 e6
7.♞d2 a6 8.0-0-0 ♙d7**



DIV prefers 9.f3. This (intending g2-g4 etc.) sticks closer to his overall system and scores a higher percentage in practice. AK instead covers the main line with 9.f4.

Finally after...

**1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cd4
4.♘d4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♙g5 e6
7.♞d2 ♞b6**

...DIV opts for...

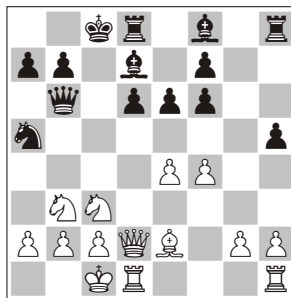
8.♙f6

AK instead recommends the immediate 8.♘b3 and investigates the ins-and-outs of this in a 20-page chapter.

8...gf6 9.♘b3

DIV restricts himself to just half-a-page of comments. Against this Khalifman suggests...

**9...♙d7 10.0-0-0 0-0-0 11.f4
♘a5 12.♙e2 h5**



...pointing out that Black hasn't lost time with either of ...a6 or ...h6 and 'so he can obtain good counterplay'.

However, Black may not be out of the woods yet, as after...

**13.♙b1 ♙b8 14.♞hf1 ♘b3
15.ab3 ♙c6**
...White played the strong thrust...
16.f5!

...in Przybylski-Shishkin, Poznan 2006, and successfully pressurized Black's centre.

These three examples show that the authors don't always propose the same antidote for White, but offer their own ideas and analyses. Clearly Khalifman goes into greater detail and, for the very strongest players, offers that little bit extra, but De la Villa's work would be adequate for most and has the advantage of being succinct.

Sergey Shipov

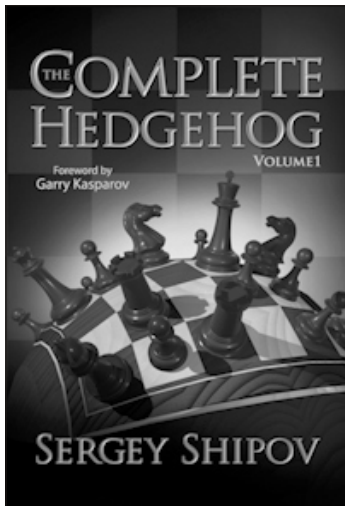
The Complete Hedgehog (Volume 1)

Mongoose Press 2009, 532 pages

Sergey Shipov is a name many will know, largely due to his published analyses. A certain Garry Kasparov, who contributed the preface, mentions that the author was working with him in the late 90's and describes him as 'not just a strong practical player, but someone who likes to study and pursue the truth'. Not many chess writers receive such praise from the highest level!

I had already noted his ability as a commentator, for example when reading through his annotated games for ChessBase or during Khanty-Mansiysk, but I didn't realize how impressive a *writer* he is. Here he exploits the opportunity to allow his imagination to develop to its fullest as he covers a great deal more than an opening system. Apart from numerous metaphors involving the nature and character of 'little spiny beasties' he even brings into question the evaluation of chess positions, which in the case of the Hedgehog is particularly difficult and perhaps even meaningless at times, or as Shipov states, 'the absolute assessment of the positions which arise takes a back seat'.

A lively style throughout, plus anecdotes, wit, and even life-changing wisdom make this an all-round fulfilling read. Shipov seems to be something of a philosopher, for example explaining how a Hedgehog player ‘...operates in guerrilla style: avoiding direct contact, he hides in bushes, observes his foe, waits, and then attacks at the most unexpected moment’. More surprisingly he writes ‘For me, the Hedgehog is a brother in arms, at



whose side I fear nothing’, or ‘the actions on the board ... illustrating Einstein’s special theory of relativity’ or the Zen-like ‘internal harmony must be maintained at all costs!’ and ‘Perpetual check. Peace and friendship!’.

He brings to light some practical paradoxes: ‘attackers, by means of a conscious worsening of their position, achieve an improvement in their results’ or, further on, ‘delicate masters of a position deliberately dry up the game ... worsen their position, but in this manner increase the likelihood of a positive result’. You will have to read the book to find and appreciate more of Shipov’s thinking but it’s certainly a worthwhile experience. Despite the literary value we shouldn’t get distracted from his primary aim which is to inform us

about this opening set-up. This he does with the benefit of great experience and understanding. When forcing variations arise he is ready and willing to give us the low-down, but most of the time rich explanations are the order of the day. The chess ‘theory’ comes in the form of illustrated games which are analysed with great care and attention, but even here there are far more textual comments than elsewhere.

If I had to split hairs, perhaps the only negative thing about the book is that it reads like a novel! In other words one needs to read each chapter from left to right as everything flows from the previous page. So just opening a page and delving into it isn’t such a fruitful activity. A pity as this makes life harder for the reviewer!

Mongoose Press seems to be US-based but there is a Bulgarian connection with the cover design and with Semko Semkov involved. The printing-style reminds one of Chess Stars except that here the translation into English and the typesetting are first class. The title is slightly odd perhaps – *The Complete Hedgehog, Volume One* reads as a contradiction in terms – but although the intention was probably to keep it to one work, I suppose that once Shipov had passed the 500th page and kept going somebody cried ‘Enough for now, put the rest in another volume!’.

There is no doubt in my mind that the book is something rather special, not just due to the quality but the obvious originality of Shipov’s prose. Never a dull moment. So treat yourself and buy it even if the Hedgehog isn’t your favourite animal!

The English Opening, Volume One
Mihail Marin
Quality Chess, 477 pages

If you are aware of Marin’s twin volumes on his Spanish/Open Games repertoire you will know his writing style already. He has a

positionally-minded approach and likes to think things through logically before getting down to pure analysis. I think this makes him easier to follow than more emotive authors and furthermore the strategic English Opening is perfect material for him to get his teeth into. So throughout the work his clearly written text is paramount, and so-much-so that game segments only take on a supporting role by illustrating his thinking. He is not one to be swayed by others it seems, as he has a critical approach to previous analyses, even by illustrious commentators.

There are no ECO-style tables this time (which had their supporters and detractors in his earlier Quality works), but his unhurried and generous explanatory writing is there to be appreciated by all. With Marin, even when reading about lines that I know fairly well, he inevitably surprises me with his insight and I often end up thinking ‘Oh yes, I never thought of it that



way before!’.

Here the book actually uses a printing style akin to that already employed by Quality Chess in Avrukh’s *1.d4 Grandmaster Repertoire*. Marin also highlights novelties and original thinking and is thus seeking to attract the top end of the market by laying-out a criti-

cal and combative repertoire, as well as including many recent references.

In general I like the way that Quality present their products so much that I feel a need to mention this again. Here there are 30-odd manageable chapters, each receiving a brief index of variations and relevant conclusions. The typesetting and printing are second to none and, if this isn't enough, a detailed index of variations at the end should enable everyone to find their way around.

There are in total 454 large pages, but this covers only half the repertoire (that is 1.c4 e5), with the promise of the rest to follow in Volume Two. It seems a trend to produce weighty tomes allied with the threat of more in store later!

There will of course be competition from John Watson's *Mastering the Chess Openings, Volume 3* which came out only a year ago, but for the consumer it's better to have a choice between great publications rather than settling for mediocrity.

So it just has to be recommended, particularly if you are concerned with 1.c4 e5 from White's point of view.

Ivan Sokolov

The Ruy Lopez Revisited

New in Chess 2009, 271 pages

On so many occasions over the years I have looked at slightly daring and possibly underestimated ideas for Black after 1.e4 e5, and I have learnt that you can almost bet your last dollar that Sokolov had got there first! Ivan Sokolov in fact plays all sorts of systems, some of them completely sound and others perhaps less so, but of all active GMs of a certain standing he has perhaps the greatest experience in these marginal lines.

The book actually concentrates on the Spanish without 3...a6, a subject covered in 1986 by Mikhail Yudovich (*Spanish without 3...a6*,

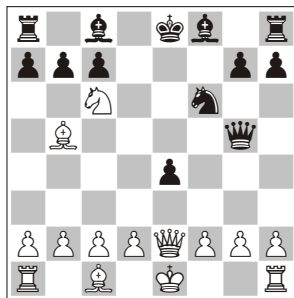
Batsford) and yours truly (*Offbeat Spanish*, Everyman 2000) but these are rather past their shelf-life, especially the former! In addition to what Yudovich and I covered, Sokolov also deals with the delayed Jaenisch (despite it being a bit dodgy) which seems a logical choice as 3...a6 4.♟a4 f5 clearly has similarities with 3...f5. However, he wisely leaves the Berlin (1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.♟b5 ♟f6) alone, which has taken on a life of its own in recent years.

In the more acceptable version of the Jaenisch (3...f5!) Sokolov adds a great deal to known theory and in particular has a very close look at the following:

1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.♟b5 f5 4.♟c3 fe4 5.♟e4 d5

The author describes 5...♟f6 as 'fully playable', so agrees with Brunello (see my review in Yearbook 93).

6.♟e5 de4 7.♟c6 ♔g5 8.♔e2 ♟f6



9.♟a7!?

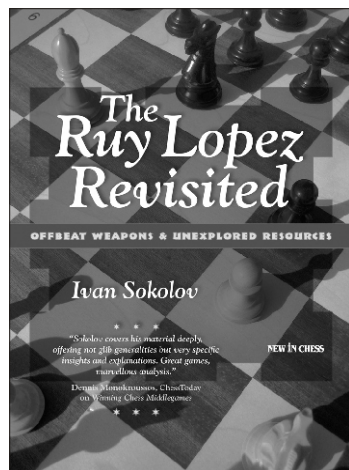
This has been touted in some quarters as a 'refutation' but I suspect that there are many secrets waiting to be uncovered before a final conclusion will be made. Sokolov analyses this in great detail, showing that there is life in the old Jaenisch yet!

Interestingly enough Sokolov doesn't believe that the main line 9.f4 gives any advantage to White.

9...♟d7! 10.♟d7 ♟d7! 11.f4!

See pages 35-42. This is critical and I won't even begin to delve any further, just get the book and you'll see why!

I also liked his coverage of the Classical Variation (1.e4 e5 2.♟f3 ♟c6 3.♟b5 ♟c5) and Sokolov has some interesting things to say about the choice of move order for Black. He clears off the cobwebs on lines that haven't received due attention, and demonstrates that there are many ways for Black to seek winning chances. Even so, I found him to be objective in his assessments and not afraid to point out those spanners that White can throw in the works. It's also clear that he has gone far beyond what previous authors have had to say so often, even white Spanish players would be unwise to ignore this work. Some less-serious readers may find the analysis a little too detailed at times, which leaves one with the impression that chess is a very complicated game. I wonder why? The structure of the book is however user-friendly, with each chapter being allocated a brief but pointed introduction and a firm



conclusion at the end. The index of variations is now a regular feature of the New in Chess opening series, and thankfully so.

There is no doubt that Ivan Sokolov is onto another winner here.

Clearly I am recommending this book to players of all strengths and hope that it may induce some of them to switch from the Petroff!