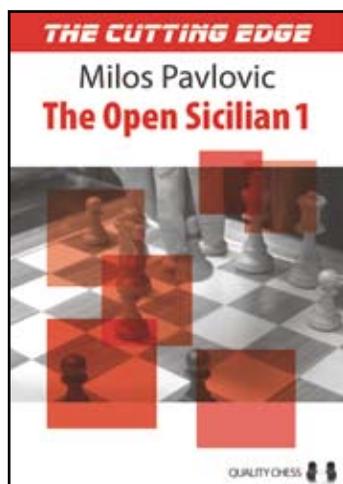


The Cutting Edge

The Open Sicilian 1

By

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Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

***The Cutting Edge*: Series Introduction**

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 Cutting Edge* concept**

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 opponents. 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.

***Cutting Edge* preparation**

When building and maintaining an opening repertoire, one must pay attention both to inferior and/or unusual responses, and to the more critical main lines. Preparing for sidelines is generally not too difficult. Rare moves are normally rare for a reason, and in most cases you can easily check a database and/or a good book to find a convincing response. Of course we have all, at one time or another, succumbed after being surprised in the opening, but we should not worry about it unduly.

Preparing for main lines is a completely different kettle of fish. The theory of these lines is constantly evolving, as certain critical positions are tested over and over by top players armed with increasingly powerful analysis engines. Simply put, it can be a daunting prospect even for a seasoned grandmaster.

***Cutting Edge* value**

The purpose of our *Cutting Edge* series is to give the reader the best possible headstart in preparing for the most challenging opening variations, irrespective of the side of the board on which he will be sitting. The material is as up-to-date as it can be, and includes a plethora of original analysis from the author. Furthermore, the fact that we cover several different variations within each volume enables the reader to adopt a flexible approach, varying his choices while keeping a number of aces up his sleeve.

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. We are excited about this series, and hope the readers will share our enthusiasm.

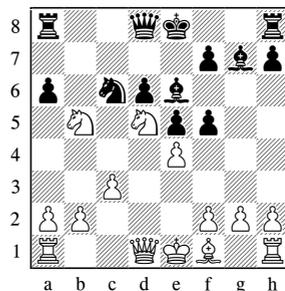
Andrew Greet
Series Editor

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Chapter 1

Sveshnikov



13. ♖xb5 piece sac

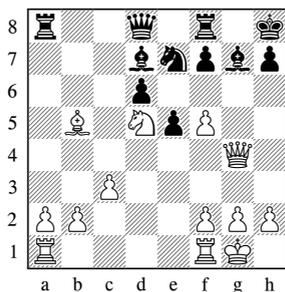
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1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e5 6.♘db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6
8.♘a3 b5 9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♘d5 f5 11.♙d3 ♙e6 12.c3 ♙g7

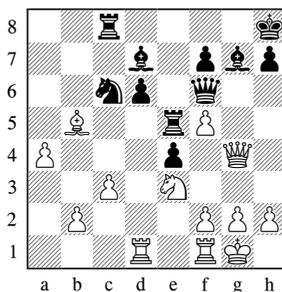
13.♘xb5! axb5 14.♙xb5

A) 14...♙d7 15.exf5	9
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A11) 16...♙b8	11
A12) 16...♙e8 17.a4 e4 18.♙g4 ♖h8	13
A121) 19.♙ad1	13
A122) 19.♙fd1!?	15
A2) 15...♘b8	18
A21) 16.a4	18
A211) 16...♙xb5	18
A212) 16...0-0!?	20
A22) 16.♙g4	21
B) 14...♙c8	23

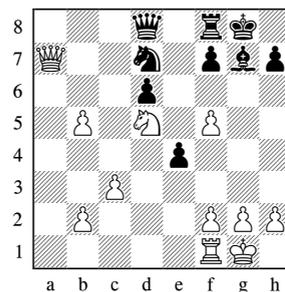
A1) note with 16...♖h8!?



A121) after 21... ♙f6



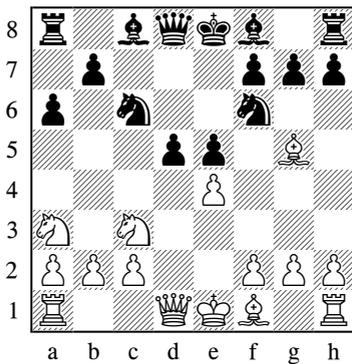
A211) after 20...e4



The Sveshnikov, also known as the Lasker or Pelikan variation of the Sicilian, is an immensely popular line. The great Emanuel Lasker played it first, but the Argentinean master Jorge Pelikan and later on the famous Russian grandmaster Evgeny Sveshnikov both made valuable contributions, popularizing this highly complex line. The whole system is based on the misplaced knight on a3 in addition to the bishop pair and strong centre in many lines.

To begin our investigation I will present a position that has been regarded as suspicious by modern theory but was briefly popular in the 1970s and '80s:

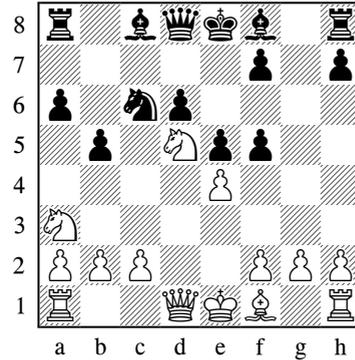
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 d5!?



This pawn sacrifice never achieved great popularity, but at least it gave a hint about Black's active possibilities. Pelikan published analysis on this so his contribution to the system is by no means small.

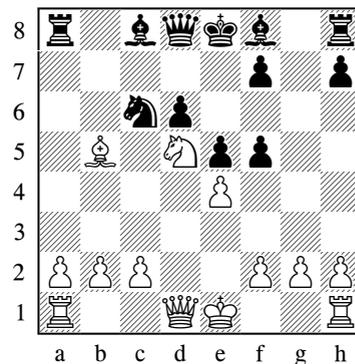
On the other hand Sveshnikov realized the strength of a bishop pair and potentially strong pawn centre despite White's strong outpost on the d5-square. The Russian pioneered the following system:

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6
5.♗c3 e5 6.♗db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♗a3 b5
9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♗d5 f5



In the early 1970s these ideas were revolutionary and did not catch on right away. When other strong grandmasters such as John Nunn and Andras Adorjan began to take an interest in Black's system it became more widely accepted. Nowadays it has become one of the most challenging obstacles against White's aspirations for an opening advantage. The names of Kasparov, Kramnik, Radjabov, Topalov and Leko are just a few of those I could mention amongst top players who have used it with success.

In this chapter I will focus on one of the most direct attempts to refute Black's play, by sacrificing the knight on a3. One way of doing it, from the above diagram position, is with:
11.♗xb5!? axb5 12.♙xb5

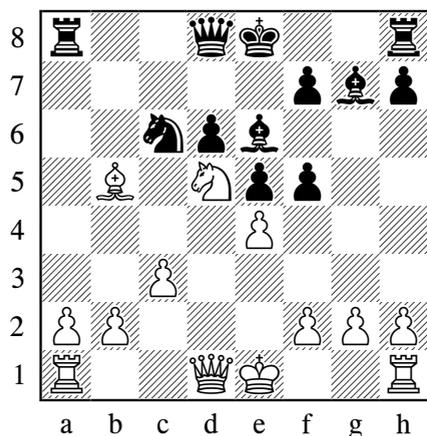


The sacrifice on b5, by either the bishop or knight, is nowadays considered to be one of the most direct challenges to the entire variation. The diagram position first occurred to my

knowledge in a game of Murey, but became better known and more widely accepted after David Bronstein won a nice game against Vukic at a tournament in Vrsac in 1979. The line was subsequently adopted by many other players, but antidotes have been found. Until the early 2000s the line disappeared, until White players unearthed a more accurate move order to sidestep certain problems that occurred in the original sacrifice.

The present chapter will focus on the modern incarnation of the knight sacrifice:

1.e4 c5 2.♖f3 ♖c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♖xd4 ♖f6
5.♖c3 e5 6.♖db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♖a3 b5
9.♙xf6 gxf6 10.♖d5 f5 11.♙d3 ♙e6 12.c3
♙g7 13.♖xb5!? axb5 14.♙xb5



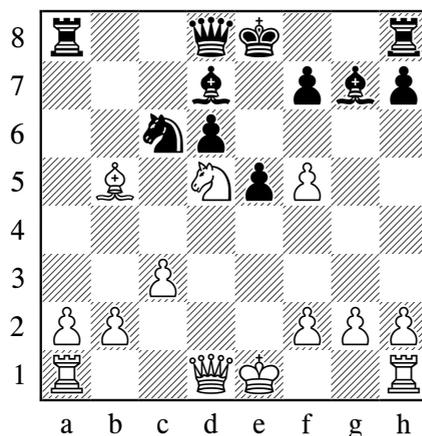
In comparison with the bishop sacrifice on b5 (an aggressive line that will not be considered in the present book), here White's strategy is more positional. He will obtain three pawns for a piece while retaining the strong outpost on d5. After Black defends the knight on c6 White will capture on f5, winning a third pawn and securing some space on the kingside. In some positions the prospect of f5-f6 can be troublesome for the second player. The queenside pawns are another key element in the position, and White will usually start pushing his a- and b-pawns as soon as

he gets the chance. Black on the other hand is a piece up, but passive at the moment, so activating pieces is his main priority. All in all, a fascinating and complex struggle lies ahead of us.

In the present position Black has two ideas, of which the first is critical: **A) 14...♙d7** and **B) 14...♙c8**.

A) 14...♙d7 15.exf5

We have reached another important branching point. White has three pawns for a piece, a great knight on d5 and a strong pawn chain on the queenside, while Black is after all a piece up. That was a basic explanation, but later we will see that many more ideas and evaluations will come to the surface.



Here we will consider the following moves in detail: **A1) 15...0-0** and **A2) 15...♖b8**.

Also 15...e4!? is possible. It is an interesting move order from Kotronias, intending to rule out White's possible idea of coming quickly with the queen to e4. White has two main options:

a) The attempt to attack the e4-pawn leads nowhere:

16.♙g4 ♖f8 17.♙xe4

17.♙f4 ♖e5 18.♙e2 ♙c6 is good for Black.

17...♖a5!

Threatening ...♞e8.

18.0-0 ♖xb5 19.f6 ♕h6 20.a4 ♗b3 21.♗h4

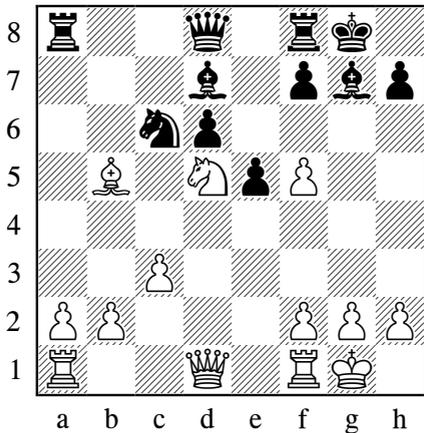
After a forced sequence of moves White did not achieve any advantage, for instance:

21...♗xd5 22.♗xh6† ♕e8 23.♗g7 ♞f8 24.♞fe1†

Now both 24...♕e6 and 24...♖e5 give Black at least adequate play.

b) However, White can and should prefer the simple 16.0-0. After 16...0-0 17.a4 ♞e8 18.♗g4 ♕h8 the game will transpose to line A12) below.

A1) 15...0-0 16.0-0



With apologies for the further division, there are two main lines to consider here: **A11) 16...♞b8** and **A12) 16...♞e8**.

In Almasi – Shirov, Bundesliga 2004/05, Black preferred 16...♕h8!?. This move can have independent meaning, but it can also lead to transpositions as we will see. It is worth checking two possible responses:

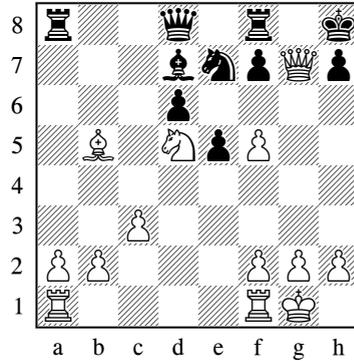
a) 17.♗g4

This sets a nice trap, but is not the most accurate move. It is better to leave the queen at home until Black goes for ...e4 ideas, as we will see later.

17...♞b8

The trick is revealed after: 17...♖e7?

18.♗xg7†!



18...♕xg7 19.f6† ♕h8 20.fxe7 ♗a5 21.exf8=♗† ♞xf8 22.♕xd7 ♗xd5 23.a4

After a practically forced sequence, it is only White who can play for a win in the resulting position, thanks to his dangerous queenside pawns. Both players should be on the lookout for the sacrifice on g7 whenever the white queen comes to g4.

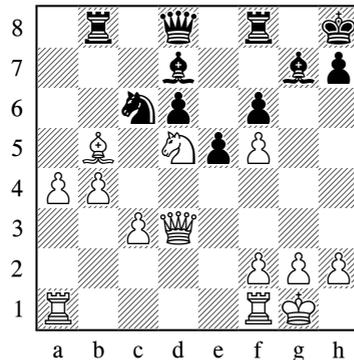
18.a4 f6!

This brings Black an excellent game. Compared with line A11 Black has not wasted a tempo on ...♞e8 and will aim for a quick ...♖e7. Meanwhile the white queen is not so well placed on g4 in this position.

b) 17.a4!

This is the best move.

17...f6 18.b4 ♞b8 19.♗d3



This is a useful move, connecting the rooks and also keeping an eye on the c3-pawn. Furthermore, the queen blocks any ...e4 ideas, while also preparing some pressure on the d-file and defending the bishop in preparation for a4-a5. A truly multifunctional move!

19... ♖e8

Now the game continued 20. ♖fd1 e4 21. ♗e2 ♗c8 at which point Almasi decided to repeat the position with 22. ♕a6 ♗d8 23. ♕b5 ♗c8 24. ♕a6 (Rogozenko mentions the possibility of 24.a5!? intending ♖b6) 24... ♗d8 25. ♕b5 ½-½.

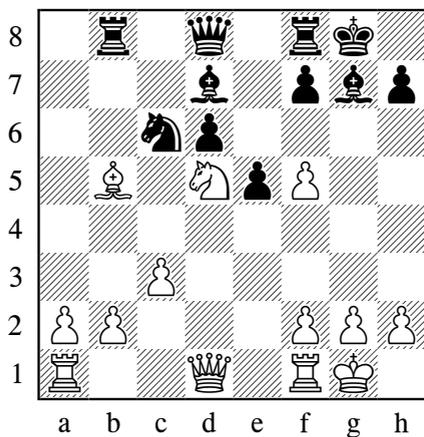
It may have been as well for White to play:

20. ♗e4

Transposing to line A11 below.

A11) 16... ♖b8

Black intends to stabilize his position and to prepare ...♖e7. His main goal is to exchange both sets of minor pieces. The problem with this line is that the move ...f7-f6 will have to be played at some point, which will severely limit the scope of black's remaining bishop – not an ideal scenario when confronted by two speeding pawns on the queenside. Nevertheless the move has been tried many times.



17.a4 ♖e8

This is the usual move here, although Black can also try:

17... ♗g5

Black wants to restrain the enemy queen, and also hopes to exert pressure against the f5-pawn as well as on the kingside generally.

18. ♗f3

This looks to me like the most logical move. I think that as a general rule in this line, White should not move the knight away from d5 unless it is absolutely necessary.

18. ♖e3 could be met by 18... ♖fd8 19. ♗xd6 ♕e8 20. ♗a3 ♖e7 21. ♕xe8 ♖xe8 22.a5 ♖xf5 23. ♖xf5 ♗xf5 24.a6 e4. This position is not clear; the black bishop is not blocked in so it will help to restrict the white pawns on the queenside. At the same time he has the idea of ...♕e5 to attack the opposite flank; quite an attractive plan when you consider that the white queen is far away on a3.

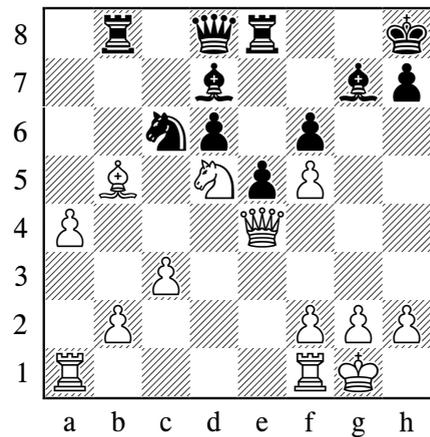
18... ♖h8 19. ♖e3 ♖xb5?!

19... ♖fc8! was surely better. After 20. ♖fd1 ♕f8 21.b4 White has the initiative, but the position remains interesting; Black is certainly not without chances.

20.axb5 ♖e7 21. ♖a8 ♕xb5 22.f6

White won quickly in Parligras – Kapnissis, Kavala 2004.

18. ♗g4 ♖h8 19. ♗e4 f6



Both sides have carried out their objectives to some degree. White has firmly blocked his