

Preface

Dear readers,

You are holding in your hands the fourteenth (and last!) book in the series “Opening For White According To Anand: 1.e4”. This volume is devoted to the variations of the Najdorf Sicilian arising after the moves 6.♗e3 ♖g4 and 6.♗e3 e5. It is possible that nowadays these lines are no longer the main focus of theoretical attention, yet only a few years ago their correct evaluation and treatment were absolutely crucial for opening theory in general. However, as we all know very well, fashion in the theory of the openings is so fickle that critical new evaluations and reassessments of these variations might arise at any moment.

I wrote a lot about the Najdorf, both in general and also quite concretely, in the foreword to the previous volume, so I do not want to repeat it all here. Nevertheless, I should like to share some of my ideas with you. I believe that all true Najdorf fans with Black place the pawn on e6 only if that move is absolutely forced. Thus the players with White who develop their bishop to e3 need to be better prepared for the lines that we shall analyze in this book than for the variations arising after 6.♗e3 e6. Admittedly this is a purely subjective opinion on my part, because it is not always so easy to distinguish the true Najdorf player from a “Scheveningen” adherent in disguise. To cut a long story short, however, I believe that any player who goes in for such complicated variations needs to be completely prepared for everything.

In the first part of this book we have analyzed the variation 6.♗e3 ♖g4. This challenging knight sortie was first introduced into tournament practice during the 1970s by GM Walter Browne, without much success however. Then, for about twenty years or so, the theory of this variation hardly developed at all and its reputation as “original, but

not completely sound...” remained largely unchallenged. Then in 1996 there came a real surge, both in the understanding and the usage of this system, when Kasparov began to play this way regularly as Black. Thus the time came when even the most sceptical theoreticians needed to treat this “dubious” system quite seriously. During the last fifteen years this variation has been regularly played at top level and its theory has been developing rapidly, mostly due to the efforts of Topalov and Grischuk as Black. As for White, almost all the top players have contributed, including Anand, and the entire concept of the variation has changed radically. It has become evident that White’s attempts to refute it can sometimes end up very badly for him, whereas quiet positional play and just “fighting for squares” might promise him some slight but stable advantage in the long run. This is the treatment of the 6...♟g4 variation for White that we have focused on in this book. The play is a bit similar to the Dragon variation, but naturally the placement of Black’s pawns on h6-g5 introduces numerous nuances.

In the second and main part of the book we have analyzed the line 6.♙e3 e5. This is not just a single variation, but rather an entire complex of opening lines, whose theory is now so complicated, involving many different branches, that it resembles a separate opening. It therefore seems to me to be pointless to try to cover separately the history of this variation and the players who have contributed to its development – to do so would require a lot of space. As far back as I can remember, this system has always had the reputation of being one of the most principled, and new ideas and branches have appeared every year (sometimes every month and even every week...). White is faced with an immediate choice: where to retreat his knight. The moves 7.♟f3 and 7.♟de2 are by no means harmless for Black, but nevertheless I would venture to recommend the traditionally main move 7.♟b3, with the already familiar plan of ♖d2+f3+g4+0-0-0; in the first place, because I consider this to be White’s most principled approach, and secondly because the entire plan and all its nuances are already familiar to us from the previous books in this series.

I should like to draw your attention to the fact that although attacking races, involving pawn-storms against the enemy king castled

on the opposite wing, are quite typical of all these positions, in this particular case these are less essential for the general understanding of the strategy underlying the events on the board. I believe that the most important factor in the majority of the positions arising from the variation 6.♗e3 e5 7.♘b3 is the fierce and uncompromising fight for the d5-square. If Black manages to win that fight (by advancing ...d6-d5 at an opportune moment), then his chances are at least equal. But if White succeeds in completely dominating this key outpost, then his position often becomes strategically winning and the pawn-storms tend not to alter this evaluation. However, if both sides play precisely, in the majority of cases a dynamic balance is reached and the most important positions arise when White places his knight on d5 and, after Black captures it with one of his minor pieces, White plays e4xd5. It seems to me that understanding the general principles and strategy of this typical pawn-structure and the correct evaluation of the long-term prospects are just as important as knowledge of the concrete variations here. Nevertheless, as usual in the Sicilian Defence, you will not get very far without some deep memorisation of concrete move-orders. I believe that in this book I have suggested numerous new ideas in many principled variations and that these will be of great help to you.

Since this is the last book in our series, I should like to share with you some comments on the contents of the series as a whole. It has taken more than ten years of hard work. I have to admit that we had no idea how difficult it would be and what an immense amount of material we would need to cover. We were younger, much more energetic and optimistic, and we all had quite different views then. Of course, it is a pity that our first volumes have now become outdated (we had no illusions about this though – this is bound to happen with all kinds of literature about the chess openings...). It is quite possible that not all the volumes and chapters are up to the same high standard. (We tried our best, but the quantity of material was really huge...). The results of our efforts are for you to judge. What else can I say? It was an endeavour...!

Last but not least, I should like to express my enormous and sincere gratitude to all the people who have helped me with this task. Without them, this titanic undertaking would never have come to fruition. I also

thank all of you, the readers, for your critical comments, most of them well-intentioned, which helped me to establish and maintain a level of quality which I believe was, and remains, impressive.

All the hard work involved in the creation of this series has convinced me once again that the game of chess, including that really quite small part of it which comprises the theory of the openings, opens practically unlimited horizons, no matter how quickly technical progress is changing human life. Thus it is certain that the present century will provide us with some new and interesting themes. And so maybe this is not “good bye”...

A.Khalifman
14th World Chess Champion