

Sergey Shipov



The Complete Hedgehog

Volume I



BOSTON

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Foreword

The Hedgehog came into prominence in the 1970's, around the same time I also made my entry into the world of what we call "big chess" in Russian. I learned it from my Baku peer Elmar Magerramov as a youth and eventually added it to my repertoire. Thanks to the early black successes of Ljubojevic and Andersson, the Hedgehog was also adopted and promoted by other members of the new wave, such as Psakhis and Ftacnik. Black takes a lot of strategic risks, but the many possibilities of the Hedgehog well represented the coming era of flexibility.

It's notable that my teacher, former world champion Mikhail Botvinnik, never weighed in on this new-fangled system. As someone who often went against the current of the day's opening trends when he was in his prime, he likely recognized the Hedgehog's value despite the unattractive and cramped character that appalled many veterans. And of course, the Patriarch knew practical results counted for something!

In 1981 a pair of wins and a near miss showed me that not only could the Hedgehog be played against anything – e4, d4, or c4 – but it could also be played successfully against anyone. In the same Soviet team event in April I scored a 27-move win against Smyslov and was tantalizingly close to victory against my future world champion rival Karpov. Later that year in Tilburg I beat Robert Huebner employing the classic Hedgehog breaks b6-b5 and d6-d5 on consecutive moves. (And the trajectory of his queen's bishop, ♖b2-♗c1-♗g5-♗c1-♗b2, was extravagant even against the Hedgehog!)

From the beginning, the Hedgehog has been about concepts and plans, not concrete variations and memorized lines. Sergey Shipov's profound interest in these underlying ideas are what make his approach, and this book, so valuable. We had countless "discussions" over the board in blitz in this opening while Sergey was working with me in the late 90's and 2000. He's not just a strong practical player, but someone who likes to study and to pursue the truth.

I highly recommend this book because it investigates strategic concepts instead of being limited to mere reactions. Knowing what to do and when to do it might allow for a degree of success. But to achieve mastery of anything, you must also understand WHY. With Grandmaster Shipov's expert guidance, the reader has every opportunity to do exactly that.

Garry Kasparov
Moscow, June 2009

Introduction

Hedgehog – a haircut where the hair accumulates dry leaves, apples, and darkness.

What is a hedgehog? A woodland creature, of course, spiny all over, with a sharp, funny little face.

When threatened, it rolls itself into a little spiny loaf, which larger beasts are unable to get through. It rolls off in a rough little ball, and gets away unimpeded.

The hedgehog may be small, but it's quite ill-tempered. Despite the common misconception, it's a carnivore that will eat anything it can. Now, of course, it can't chow down a big animal. But a snake, ordinarily a dangerous predator itself, may fall victim to the hedgehog – and other small animals would be even more toothsome. This awkward and clumsy-looking little creature also can, in extreme circumstances, demonstrate fantastic speed and alertness. Let's recall the short but pithy lines of the classicist:



“The Brave Hedgehog”

There was a box lying out-of-doors.

Wild beasts came up to the box, looked it over, sniffed it, and licked it.

And then the box went one, two, three – and it opened.

Out of the box – one, two, three – came a snake.

The beasts were scared, and ran away.

Only the hedgehog was not afraid. He bent down to the snake and one, two, three – ate it all up. And then he sat on the box, and cried out, “Cu-curu-curu!”

No, that's not it – the hedgehog cried out, “Honk! Honk! Honk!”

No, that's not it either! The hedgehog cried out, “Meow! Meow! Meow!”

No, that's not it either! I don't know what a hedgehog sounds like.

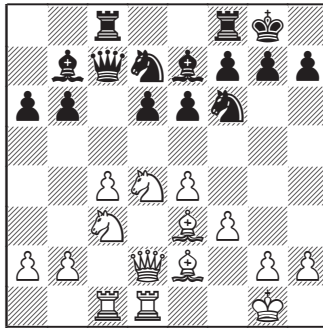
Who knows what a hedgehog says?”

Daniil Kharms, 1935

Indeed, a most serious question; I don't know the answer to it, either. No doubt, the hedgehog howls silently....

For a human, as may be understood from the difference in size, it's not dangerous. On the other hand, I have it from people who keep hedgehogs as household pets that it has a foul temperament, and never misses a chance to bite whomever is closest with its small, sharp teeth.

In chess, the word "hedgehog" refers to a pawn structure with the black pawns arranged on the 6th rank, or the white pawns on the third rank (which, understandably, occurs far less frequently). Here's a typical "hedgehog" position:



Observe: four of Black's pawns have lined up along the sixth rank (sometimes they are joined by the g- and h-pawns), and with their short, strong spines (thus "hedgehog," and not "porcupine"!), they control the fifth rank in front of them. The hostile armies complete their reorganizations inside the space set aside for them. White has four ranks, Black three. The appearance of a pawn or a piece on the fifth rank usually signals the start of sharp conflict, in which the winner will be the one who is better prepared.

Besides the outward resemblance, these kinds of setups also resemble the woodland creature in the way they deal with an enemy who is superior to them in spatial measurement: Black spends a great deal of time in strictly defensive maneuvers, under cover of his pawn-spines, in order to find the right moment to leap out suddenly and bite White.

In this book, I shall be using the words "hedgehog," "hedgehog-like," "quill," "spiny," etc., so often that I'm going to stop using quotation marks around them for simplicity's sake. The reader should understand these words in the chess sense, and not the zoological. Meanwhile, out of deference both to the system and to the critter, I will write the main word with a starting capital letter, and without quotes, as follows: Hedgehog.

The possible permutations of the Hedgehog position are huge, many of them without any real theoretical significance. Thus, for example, I remember that in my school days, when facing weak opposition, I used to play the weirdest Hedgehog positions in blitz games. For instance, I might open a game as White with 1. a3, followed by 2. b3, 3. c3, 4. d3, 5. e3, 6. f3, 7. g3, 8. ♔g2, 9. ♖a2, etc., regardless of what Black played, reaching a very strange and non-viable version

of the Hedgehog. As the years passed, the beasts on my half of the board grew ever stouter and more dangerous for my opponents.

In this book, we shall be examining the generally used setups in which the white d-pawn is exchanged for the black c-pawn, and in which White's pawn is on c4, facing the Hedgehog shield of pawns at e6, d6, and b6. Black's e-pawn must be on e6, and not on e7! Frequently, with White's pawn at c4 after the aforementioned exchange, Black will develop the king's bishop at g7, move the d-pawn to d6 (and sometimes, the queenside pawns will come to the sixth rank), but leave its neighboring pawn at e7. Without this spiny element, Black's pawn structure looks like a dragon – which is a completely different animal. On the other hand, if this pawn eventually does arrive on e6, warding off the white pieces from the last available fifth-rank square, then the Dragon turns into a Hedgehog (note to zoologists – of the same size!), and falls by transposition within our zone of attention.

How should White array his pieces against the Hedgehog? We already have the pawn at c4, nailing down potential Black weaknesses at b6 and d6. The white light-squared bishop could go to g2, to counter the black bishop on b7; in this case, White's e-pawn could be at either e2 or e4. Such a Hedgehog would be labeled “English,” since it arises most often out of the English Opening.

Other types of Hedgehog come about when White's e-pawn goes immediately to e4 and his bishop to e2 (in this case, the e4-pawn is supported by its neighbor on f3 or by the queen from c2), or d3 or c2. Such Hedgehogs are hard to give a name to, arising as they do from many different openings. Sometimes, as we shall see illustrated later on, completely identical positions can arise from fundamentally different means, plus or minus a few tempi – even though, from the initial moves, one might never expect it.

The Hedgehog is a garden of branching paths that suddenly can come back together as one. The problem of transposing or combining variations prevents us from describing these Hedgehog setups in encyclopedic fashion – that is, move after move. So the logical approach is to divide them up, not according to openings, but by the pawn structure that exists after the development of the pieces is completed.

The point of this book is not just to describe the opening phase of the Hedgehog, but also to make a detailed study of the ideas for both sides in the middlegame, using the examples of selected best games.

To show a separate opening stage of a game, and at the end of a variation to trot out some useless assessment, such as “with chances for both sides,” or “with some advantage to White,” is to stop halfway down the road. (And to dismember our Hedgehog!) Here, of course, one is tempted to make the grisly analogy about separating the head from the body.... But look at the photo of our woodland beastie! He's so compact; it's hard to tell where the head ends and the rest of his body begins. The analogy is quite accurate: in the Hedgehog that lives on the chess board, the line between the opening and the middlegame is very fine; and learning the right moves to play in the opening variations doesn't mean that you've learned to play the Hedgehog. What are you going to do in the

middlegame? What sort of plans will you execute? What are you going to aim for – and what are you going to avoid? This is very important, because the Hedgehog is a very specific kind of battle and requires specific habits.

Besides, the process of studying many variations of the opening has, in our day, stretched out right to a spot deep in the endgame. The Hedgehog has not escaped this, either: many of its lines have been analyzed all the way to the end.

So I shall be annotating many of these games right to the finish, also.

I must warn you right off that not all of the examples in this book will be of top-grandmaster quality. And for the beginning stages of your acquaintance with the Hedgehog, this is even a good thing. It is precisely against weaker players that the key strategic and tactical ideas are executed quickly and easily. It follows, then, that such “one-sided” games are the most valuable flash material for study. On the other hand, this book you hold in your hand certainly is not one of those cheap commercial volumes with a title like, “Play the Hedgehog and Win!” Here you will find the key ideas for both sides; that means not just the plus sides, but the minus sides of the system as well.

The book is written for both amateurs and skilled players who want to expand their opening and playing repertoire. I, grandmaster Sergey Shipov, will attempt – based on the study of thousands of games by other players and of hundreds of my own, in addition to analyses I myself have done – to offer as objective a study of the Hedgehog as I can muster.

The Hedgehog

Its Birth and Development

There's a little story, which has Capablanca stealthily letting a hedgehog out of his sleeve onto the chess table; the creature then tells Alekhine, in perfect Russian, "Have atcha!" – and the outcome of the battle was never in doubt.

In both content and philosophy, the Hedgehog is a child of Chess Hypermodernism, which rose to the level of a conscious strategy at the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, just as in both the Reti Opening (from the first strong hypermodernist) and the Gruenfeld Defense (from another of the First Pleiad), in the Hedgehog one side gives up the center to his opponent in the opening, with the intention of utilizing the middlegame to attack it. Before the arrival of Richard Reti and his followers on the chess stage, the role of the center and an advantage in space had been overstated somewhat by the representatives of the orthodox school of positional play.

The Hypermodernists, who clearly did not suffer from claustrophobia, demonstrated by their analyses, but chiefly by their tournament successes, that a lack of space could be compensated for by harmonious piece placement and clever exploitation of weaknesses in the enemy camp – and most of all, in the center.

The first Hedgehog games appeared in the Twenties. Of course, from a modern academic standpoint, their quality was far from finished; but some talented forerunners by then had discovered intuitively promising piece placements and methods of counterplay. Here's the clearest example from those days. Notice what Black does here. This was a breakthrough – a step into the future.

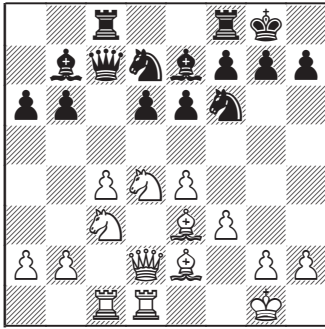
K. Opocensky – F. Saemisch

Bad Pistyan 1922

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♗xd4 a6 5. c4 ♖c7 6. ♗c3 ♗f6 7. ♙e2 b6

We won't let ourselves be distracted by examining the subtleties of the opening; all we care about is the outcome.

8. ♙e3 ♙b7 9. f3 d6 10. ♖d2 ♗bd7 11. 0-0 ♙e7 12. ♜fd1 0-0 13. ♜ac1 ♜ac8



Recognize this? It's a contemporary Hedgehog position – the same typical position from the previous chapter. Black has set out his pieces accurately, and continues with some very good maneuvers.

14. ♙f1 ♖b8 15. ♖f2 ♗h8

Bravo!

16. ♗c2 ♙d8!

Another notable maneuver, whose full power the Hedgehog experts were to acknowledge only some 60 years later!

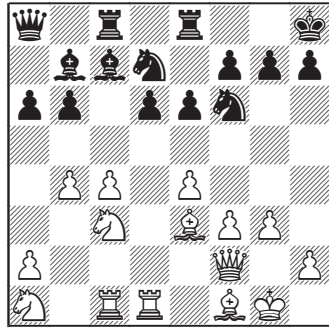
17. ♗a1

Creatively played! Inscrutable are the paths of talented chessplayers' knights.

17...♙c7! 18. g3

Even back then, people understood that the black pawn at d6 was capable of taking a suicidal step forward.

18...♖a8 19. b4 ♜fe8



Too bad it didn't go to g8! On the other hand, just the fact that Friedrich Saemisch put the rook on e8, and not on d8, speaks volumes for his fine positional sense.

20. ♗b3

Karel Opocensky also is on top of things: White's pieces gradually assume ideal positions.

20...♖b8

Black is searching – what to do once all the pieces have been set out? It's a task that every Hedgehog player must resolve...

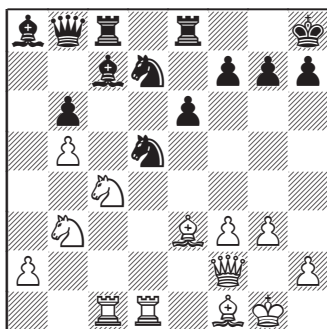
21. ♗a4 ♙c6 22. b5

White is the first to begin active operations, and he does so in the proper direction, and with reasonable means.

22...axb5 23. cxb5 ♗a8 24. ♖b2 d5!

The ...d6-d5 break is the main weapon of the Hedgehog – for all time.

25. exd5 ♜xd5 26. ♜c4



And with this completely modern Hedgehog position, we should end our examination of this first-ever source game, because further on, its creators did not play quite so well. After a tense struggle, the game ended in a draw.

Examples of modern Hedgehog ideas may be found in dozens of our predecessors' games. These were discoveries of genius over the board, moments of inspiration from talented experimenters.

But, despite successes in disparate games, the Hedgehog as a goal of the opening and a style of play remained a rare guest in practice for half a century; consequently, it was not studied by theoreticians. The main reason this happened was because none of the

strongest chessplayers of the world, whom chess fashion always follows, would play the Hedgehog. A second reason was that the usual, classical openings had not been worked out so deeply yet. Those who wished to discover new and fruitful ideas had plenty of unexplored fields to work in already.

The situation only changed in the '70s, when the time was ripe for a new appearance by the Hedgehog: there was a burning need to vary the opening palette with original setups. A whole constellation of notable grandmasters and masters, headed by Ljubomir Ljubojevic, Ulf Andersson, Florin Gheorghiu, Zoltan Ribli, Lajos Portisch, Robert Huebner, Anatoly Karpov (yes indeed, the World Champion!), Lev Polugaevsky, and Mihai Suba, began to make active use of Hedgehog formations against many different openings, and to achieve outstanding results with them. Closer to the '80s, they were joined by a wave of younger experts, such as Lev Psakhis, Andras Adorjan, Lubomir Ftacnik, and, finally, by Garry Kasparov as he ascended to the Champion's rank.

The games grew more numerous, which in conjunction with the analysts' work led to the detailing of fine-tuned opening variations, leading to viable Hedgehogs and also to the examination of middlegame ideas for counterplay, creating a whole unified strategy of Hedgehog setups.

This comprised the second, and essentially the main, birthing of the chess Hedgehog, which this author believes can be expected to live forever – or as long as people continue to play chess.