

Evgeny Sveshnikov

The Complete c3 Sicilian

The Alapin Variation by its Greatest Expert

New In Chess 2010

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Introduction



In early 1967, as a sixteen-year-old junior, I took part in the USSR championship for schoolboys. Before my 'white' game with Misha Shereshevsky from Minsk (who later became an international master and a good trainer) I was scratching my head: what to play? My opponent usually played the Najdorf Sicilian and I did not know of any way to gain the advantage against this variation. Serious thought was needed. I set up the pieces on a board and played the moves 1.e4 (I have always played this move automatically, without any hesitation, realizing that it is the strongest) and 1...c5. Then I asked myself: what does Black want? He has impeded the move d2-d4. But what if White renews the threat with 2.c3!? No Najdorf, Paulsen or

Dragon then! Looking back on it, this solution turned out to be a brilliant one from a practical standpoint. Since then, according to my database, I have played the 'c3 Sicilian' about 600 times, with a score of over 70%, including dozens of wins against well-known grandmasters. I can confidently say that the move 2.c3 has fed me and my family for almost forty years!

I recall a conversation I had in the mid-1970s with Anatoly Avraamovich Bikhovsky, the chief trainer of the USSR junior team. He asked me: 'Zhenya, why do you play the c3 Sicilian? You are really limiting yourself!' I can't say that I was deeply troubled by this remark, but I did think about what he said. Now, decades later, I can safely say that I do not agree with that evaluation of 2.c3. Yes, objectively the plan with 2.♘f3 and 3.d4 is stronger, but for the study of chess the c3 Sicilian (also known as the Alapin Variation) is no less important, and in respect of the provision of instructional material it presents even greater interest, since there is a wider variety of plans.

Recently I wrote a book about the French Defence with 3.e5. There the structure in the centre is immediately determined, with white pawns on d4 and e5 confronting black pawns on d5 and e6. But in the c3 Sicilian a very wide range of position types is possible: positions with an Isolated Queen's Pawn (moreover in one variation there is a white IQP on d4 whilst in another it is Black who has an IQP on d5), open centre positions, pawns on e5 and c3 versus a pawn on e6, pawns on e4 and d4 versus pawns on e6 and d6, King's Indian structures and even Ruy Lopez set-ups! Incidentally, the line 1.e4 c5 2.c3 e6 3.d4 d5 4.e5! leads us to the Advance

The Complete c3 Sicilian

Variation of the French Defence, which could well be regarded as a branch of the c3 Sicilian!

In one variation of the system 1.e4 c5 2.c3 you might just have to play one move at a time; in another variation it might be that what you need first and foremost are knowledge of standard middlegame plans and skill in playing typical endgame positions. The drawback of forcing variations (of which there are rather a lot) is that the opening can soon fizzle out, quickly reaching a concrete result, or some typical endgame. In contrast to playing a line of the Ruy Lopez, for instance, which involves protracted manoeuvring and requires great experience, in the c3 Sicilian already after just two or three moves a player's concrete knowledge begins to be tested, which favours young chess players with good memories. They need to learn tactics and calculation of variations above all. It is not without reason that young players are advised to study gambits early on, in which the forcing play is something that is far easier for them to grasp.

In the c3 Sicilian, play very often goes straight from the opening into an ending, bypassing the middlegame, and thus young players can get practice in playing endgames. The exchange of queens is not something that should be feared: with the departure of the strongest piece, the advantage need not evaporate and can even increase, as occurs for instance in the variation 1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5 3.exd5 ♖xd5 4.d4 cxd4 5.cxd4 e5 6.♘f3 exd4 7.♗xd4 ♗xd4 8.♙xd4 a6 9.♙c3. The absence of the queens does not, by any means, signify equality!

So, here is everything that a young chessplayer needs, and anyone who quickly wants to adopt a reliable scheme for combating Black's most dangerous response to 1.e4. The only drawback to the 2.c3 system is that with correct play Black can draw the game. But this matter is mainly of theoretical importance, and in practice the c3 Sicilian gives good results.

It is interesting that when in the mid-1990s Bikhovsky started helping the young Alexander Grischuk, he began teaching his protégé the Alapin (2.c3) system, with the transposition to the Advance French! I remember that Anatoly Avraamovich said to me: 'Maybe the move 2.c3 is not so bad, since it rules out a whole load of variations which young players find very hard to grasp immediately!'

This system also has an advantage for the professional player: he has to study fewer set-ups since, to a great extent, Black has only two good replies – 2...d5 and 2...♘f6. Furthermore, White is very solid, and his play is very simple and logical. It is not easy for Black to stir up complications by diverging from theory; deviating from the main line by just a single move can land Black in a bad position! This system can be learnt quickly and it will raise your standard of play to a higher level. In order to play for a win, Black has to take big risks. The majority of players do not like it when weaker (or less experienced) opponents entice them into forcing lines in the opening. But chess is inevitably becoming more like an exact mathematical problem, right from the very opening!

Since there is no single characteristic pawn structure, it is logical to present the material variation by variation. Part I of this book deals with all Black's replies apart

from 2...♟f6. The author will attempt to cover all the forcing lines and give precise assessments of them or, in the last resort, select key endgame positions resulting from them and show that White still has an advantage. Let us consider, for instance, the variation involving the immediate attack on the d4 pawn: 1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5 3.exd5 ♖xd5 4.d4 cxd4 5.cxd4 ♟c6 6.♟f3 ♙g4 7.♟c3 ♙xf3 8.gxf3 ♖xd4 9.♖xd4 ♟xd4 10.♟b5, or 7.♙e2. The assessment of the move 7.♟c3 depends on several critical endgame positions, but even after the simple 7.♙e2 White gets a slight advantage, and again it is a matter of reducing it to three or four endgame positions that are better for White. The appearance of strong computer programs has brought about a re-appraisal of many lines and I have tried to reflect this in the book. Similarly, in the variation 1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5 3.exd5 ♖xd5 4.d4 cxd4 5.cxd4 ♟c6 6.♟f3 e5 7.♟c3 ♙b4 some quite critical positions which have an endgame character occur, where White's advantage is not in any doubt but where, for the present, a forced win has not been found, i.e. Black has drawing chances.

At the time of writing the book I came to the conclusion that for explaining many of the variations my own games would be sufficient. The games of elite players in the majority of cases serve only to confirm my own conclusions, building on the discoveries of earlier authors and the ideas of other theoreticians. So I have generally cited the games of elite players with only brief comments, just for information. Quite another matter is the creative work of Sermek, Pavasovic, Rozentalis, Vorotnikov and a few other players – their work brings something new, so of course I have made use of it here.

In the latest ChessBase Megabase there are about 60,000 games played with the c3 Sicilian (ECO code B22), and the database continues to grow at a fast rate. I hope that by offering this two-part monograph for your consideration I will help you find the correct route in this sea of information.

My experience as a trainer has shown me that most amateur players assimilate new opening variations best by studying games that have thorough and clear annotations. That is exactly the basis of this book, which includes a selection of theoretically important games. The main game chosen to illustrate each variation of the opening is analysed in detail, whilst the supplementary games, included to help complete the picture, are given with briefer annotations.

* * *

The author wishes to express his sincere thanks to International Master Vladimir Barsky for his assistance in the preparation of this book.

Evgeny Sveshnikov
July 2010

Chapter 4 – Important Games by Variation

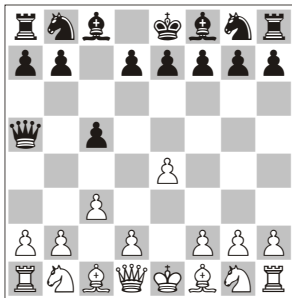
We now continue with a more detailed consideration of the plans for each side, as well as the typical strategic and tactical methods in this system.

For this it will be helpful to choose annotated games that are most important from a theoretical standpoint. My own experience in grandmaster practice and as a trainer has convinced me that this is the most effective way to study a new opening scheme.

I have often observed that demonstrating a single game in which one side won by using a typical scheme (even very convincingly) makes an impression, of course, but no more than that. But if you see several games all following the same scenario then it becomes quite clear that, in chess in general and in the opening stage in particular, there exist certain strict and indisputable laws.

It is especially important for young chess players to understand this.

1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♖a5?



Game 4.1

Evgeny Sveshnikov

Viktor Kupreichik

Kiev 1984

1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♖a5?!

Black avoids a theoretical duel and as early as the second move he tries to set White new problems. However, this move did not take me by surprise even twenty years ago (it was first played by Tarrasch against Alapin in the Vienna of 1898) and it had already been tried many times against me in blitz. In general this queen sortie goes against the principles of the opening and its only virtue is its surprise element.

3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.a3!?

With his last move White makes it clear that he is trying to gain an advantage. The simple 4.♙c4!? also seems quite good, followed by developing the pieces. In this case the position of the queen on a5 is completely absurd.

4...e6

On 4...d6 comes the unpleasant 5.b4 cxb4 6.cxb4 ♘xb4 7.axb4 ♖xa1 8.♙b5+ with a strong attack.

5.d4 ♘xd4

After 5...cxd4 6.b4 followed by 7.cxd4 White's advantage is not in doubt.

6.♘xd4 cxd4 7.b4 ♖c7

Dangerous, but nevertheless more consistent was 7...♖e5!?. Since 8.♖xd4 ♖xd4 9.cxd4 d5 is obviously inadequate to play for a win, White should sacrifice a pawn with 8.cxd4! ♖xe4+ 9.♙e3. In that case Black can try to construct a defence with 9...♖c6!. I intended to play 10.d5!? (otherwise Black

plays ...d5 himself) 10...♖xd5
 11.♗xd5 exd5 12.♘c3 ♘f6 13.♙b5,
 winning back one pawn and retaining
 an enduring initiative.

Probably stronger was 10...exd5 or
 10...♗c7, although after 11.♙a2 White
 has a promising position.

8.cxd4 ♘f6

It is doubtful whether 8...a5 is any
 good, since after 9.bxa5 the weakness
 of the squares b5 and b6, together with
 his undeveloped kingside, should be
 Black's undoing.

9.♙d3 d5 10.e5 ♘d7

Here 10...♘e4 is impossible, owing to
 11.f3 ♘c3 12.♗c2, winning a piece.

11.♙a2 ♘b6 12.♗c2 ♗d8

Slightly better was 12...♘c4 13.♘d2 b5,
 but even then after 14.♙b3 White has a
 lead in development and more space.

13.♗g4

It is possible to assess the results of the
 opening: White outstrips his opponent
 in development, controls the open
 c-file, and can also create an attack on
 the kingside if the black king manages
 to castle on that side.

13...g6 14.♙g5

Hindering Black from castling.

14...♙e7 15.♙h6 ♙d7 16.0-0 ♙a4

The bishop is awkwardly placed on a4,
 so 16...♗c8 or 16...a6 was better.

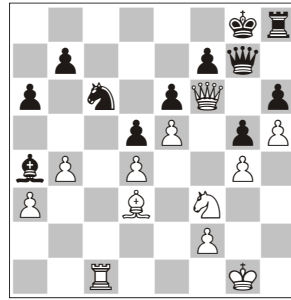
**17.♗c3 a6 18.♗fc1 ♗c8 19.♗xc8
 ♘xc8 20.♘d2**

The final piece comes into play. White's
 plan is 21.♘f3, 22.♗f4, 23.♘g5.

**20...♙f8 21.♗f4 ♘a7 22.♘f3
 ♘c6 23.♙xf8 ♙xf8**

If 23...♗xf8 24.♗h6 White wins the h7
 pawn. Nevertheless, this was the best
 chance, since 24...a5 would give Black a
 bit of counterplay.

**24.♗h6+ ♙g8 25.h4! ♗f8 26.♗f4
 h6 27.h5 g5 28.♗f6! ♗g7 29.g4!**



A picturesque position! Black has no
 useful moves at all and a transition to an
 ending is almost forced. If 29...♙f8 a
 possible line is 30.♗xc6 ♙xc6 31.♗d8+
 ♙e8 32.b5 f5 (32...♗h7 33.♗d6+ ♙g8
 34.♗e7 ♙xb5 35.♗d8+ ♗f8
 36.♙xh7+) 33.exf6 ♗d7 34.♗xd7
 (also strong is the simple 34.♗b8!)
 34...♙xd7 35.♘e5 ♙e8 36.♘g6+
 ♙xg6 37.hxg6 ♗g8 38.b6+-.

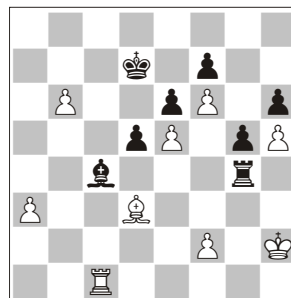
**29...♗xf8 30.exf6 ♙f8 31.♘e5
 ♙e8 32.♙xa6 ♘xe5**

Also hopeless was 32...bxa6 33.♘xc6
 ♙xc6 34.♗xc6 ♙d7 35.♗xa6.

33.dxe5

Unnecessary complications arise after
 33.♗c8+ ♙d7 34.♗xh8 ♘f3+ 35.♙g2
 ♘h4+ 36.♙g3 bxa6 37.f4 (37.♗xh6
 e5!) 37...gxf4+! 38.♙xh4 e5.

**33...♙d7 34.♙xb7 ♗b8 35.♙a6
 ♗a8 36.♙d3 ♙b3 37.b5 ♗a4
 38.b6 ♗xg4+ 39.♙h2 ♙c4**



40.♙g6! ♙e2

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Time pressure is over, and White had to seal a move. Three continuations win easily: 41.♖c7+, 41.f3 and 41.f4.

The game continued with

41.f4 ♖c4

Now there is no perpetual check and Black must watch out for the b-pawn.

42.♙xf7 ♖xf4 43.♖b1 ♔c8

44.♙xe6+ ♖b8 45.♖b4 ♖b7

46.f7

Black resigned.

1.e4 c5 2.c3 b6



Game 4.2

Valery Zhuravliov

Jacob Murey

Soviet Union 1974

1.e4 c5 2.c3 b6?!

This variation became popular in the 1970s thanks to the efforts of the English players Speelman, Stean, and especially Miles.

A great contribution to the development of this variation was made by the Muscovite master (subsequently French grandmaster) and well-known theoretician Jacob Murey.

With this move the grandmasters tried to avoid theory, but nowadays theory is all-embracing.

3.d4 ♙b7 4.♙d3 ♖f6 5.♗d2!

If 5.♖e2 Black can exchange the opposing light-squared bishop and obtain counterplay with 5...cxd4 6.cxd4 ♖c6 7.♗f3 ♖b4 8.♗c3 ♖xd3+ 9.♖xd3 ♖c8! (9...e6 10.♙g5± is weaker.)

5...cxd4 6.cxd4 ♖c6 7.♗e2 g6

Here 7...♖b4 is ineffective: 8.♙b1 e6 9.0-0 ♖c8 10.a3 ♗c6±.

8.0-0

8.e5!?

8...♙g7 9.a3

See the following game for 9.e5 ♗d5 10.♙e4±.

9...0-0 10.f4?!

10.♖e1± or 10.b4± would be better.

Now Black gets counterplay.

10...♖c8⇒ 11.h3

11.b4!?

11...d6 12.♖h1 a6 13.b3 ♗h5

14.♗f3 e5

Black has successfully regrouped his pieces and makes a timely break in the centre.

15.d5 ♗d4?!

This knight move is tempting but in my opinion 15...♗e7⇒ was better, preparing ...f7-f5.

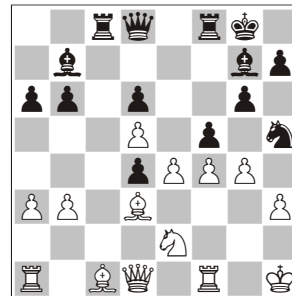
16.♗fxd4 exd4 17.g4

17.♙b2 ♖e8 18.♖h2 ♗f6 19.♗g3 h5

20.♖f3± is better.

17...f5!?

Black carries out this break anyway, not hesitating to sacrifice a piece.

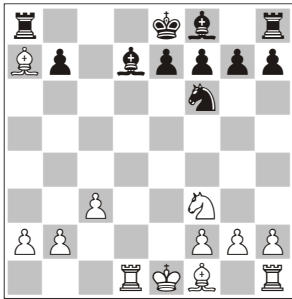


Chapter 5 – Exercises

My wish to devote a separate chapter to this theme did not arise by chance. The reason is that in the c3 Sicilian very lively positions quite often arise, very similar to the positions which you can find in open games and gambits. The main difficulty in compiling the material for this section was selecting the most interesting games from the numerous candidates.

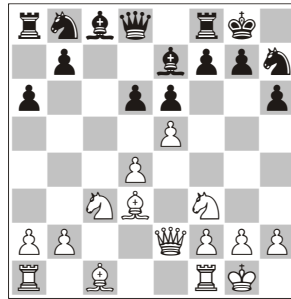
Check the solutions on pages 222-236.

5.1



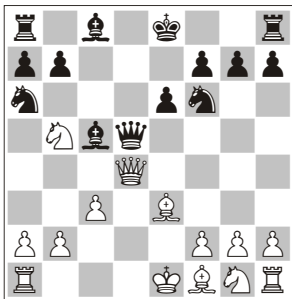
White to move

5.2



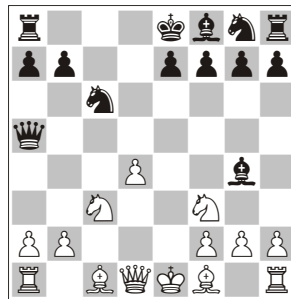
White to move

5.3



White to move

5.4



White to move

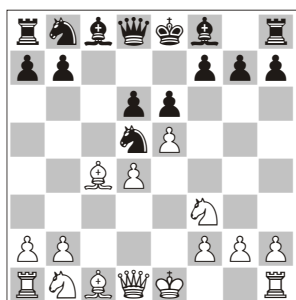
Conclusion

The system with ...e6 and ...b6 leads to very sharp positions, which are quite dangerous for Black.

His king remains in the centre for rather a long time, where at any moment it can come under a crushing attack. In the variation 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.e5 ♘d5 5.d4 cxd4 6.cxd4 b6 7.♘c3 ♘xc3 8.bxc3 ♖c7 9.♙d2 ♙b7 10.♙d3 d6 11.0-0 ♘d7 12.♘g5 dxe5 13.♖h5 g6 14.♖h3 ♙e7! (14...♙g7?! is hardly possible) Black hangs by a thread, but he hangs on nevertheless.

A quieter approach for White is 12.♙e1 dxe5 13.♘xe5 ♘xe5 14.♙xe5 ♙d6 15.♖h5 g6, and now the move deserving the most attention is 16.♙b5+!?

1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♘f6 3.e5 ♘d5 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘f3 e6 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4



Game 9.28

Evgeny Sveshnikov

Mark Taimanov

Salekhard 2001

This rapid game had great sporting significance. It was played in the last round, at the start of which I shared

first place with Taimanov, Vasiukov and Kupreichik.

Having White meant that I had to fight for a win (I have great respect and even veneration for Taimanov; before the event, I had remarked that I took my hat off to Mark Evgenievich for his willingness to battle the younger generation). I succeeded in winning this interesting game, and the 'blame' lies with the c3 Sicilian.

I remember how 30 years ago, Mark Evgenievich came to Cheliabinsk as head of the Leningrad student team. This was shortly after his match with Fischer. Our game was played in a separate hall with spectators, and is especially memorable as it was my first victory over a grandmaster. On that occasion, the game started 1.e4 c5 2.c3 d5.

1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♘f6

Strongest, although statistics show that 2...d5 is more often played.

3.e5 ♘d5 4.♘f3 e6 5.♙c4 d6

Problems also remain after 5...♘b6.

6.d4 cxd4 7.cxd4 dxe5

More common is 7...♘c6 or 7...♘b6, going into a well-known tabiya.

8.dxe5 ♙b4+?!

This check is not terribly good since the exchange of dark-squared bishops favours White.

He also wins a tempo for the development of his pieces.

9.♙d2 ♙e7

Acknowledging his mistake.

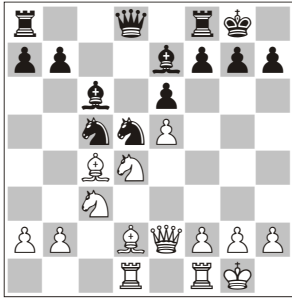
10.0-0 0-0 11.♖e2 ♙d7

Black tries to exploit the fact that the knight is still on b8, and its place on c6 can be taken by the 'bad' bishop. But this involves loss of time.

12.♘c3 ♙c6 13.♙ad1 ♘d7

14.♘d4 ♘c5

Maybe he should play 14...♘7b6.



15. ♖g4?!

The rapid time control has its effect. At this moment Spassky was standing behind me, studying the position and after the game he pointed out the move 15.b4!?.

I had also considered it, but after 15...♗a4 16.♗xc6 ♗dxc3 17.♙xc3 ♗xc3 I stopped my analysis. However, the simple 18.♖f3 wins.

Consequently, Black would have had to settle for 15...♗xb4 exposing himself to a strong attack. Even so, after 16.♙h6 ♖c7 17.♗cb5 ♙xb5 18.♗xb5 ♖b8 19.♙f4 a6 the situation is not so clear.

Perhaps White's best way to go is 15.♖h5!?.

15...♗h8

The only move.

16.♗xc6 bxc6 17.♗e2?!

After 17.♖fe1 White would have a slight advantage.

17...♖b8 18.♗d4 ♖c8 19.f4 ♗e4

19...♖xb2 is dangerous because of 20.f5.

20.♖e2 ♗xd2

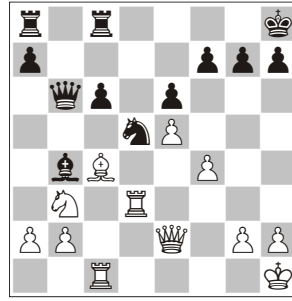
Now the worst is over for Black.

21.♖xd2 ♙c5 22.♗h1 ♖b6

23.♗b3 ♗e3 24.♖c1 ♙b4

25.♖d3 ♗d5

The game is reaching its decisive phase. At this point, White had eleven minutes remaining, against Black ten.



26.♖e4 g6!

Essential prophylaxis against 27.f5.

27.♖f3

Solid, but not active enough. 27.g4!? was worthy of attention.

27...♖d8

The black rook occupies the open file. But now the black queen cannot reach d8, which means that it is difficult to bring her to the kingside, where most of the action is taking place.

28.h4 a5 29.a4

There is no need to allow counterplay.

29...♗e7

I was more afraid of 29...h5, after which White would be forced to adopt extreme measures such as 30.♖g1 and 31.g4.

30.h5 ♗f5

30...gxf5!? is interesting, e.g. 31.♙d3 ♗f5 32.♖xc6 ♖b8 33.♖c4!? (33.♖c4 ♗e7 34.♖c7 ♖a7 35.♖xa7 ♖xa7 36.f5 ♗xf5 37.♙xf5 ♖d1+ 38.♖f1 ♖xf1+ 39.♖xf1 exf5=) 33...♗g7 34.♖e2±.

31.hxg6 hxg6 32.g4± ♗d4

33.♖e3 c5 34.♖h3+ ♗g8□

On 34...♗g7 the reply 35.f5 followed by 36.f6 or 36.♖h6 is unpleasant. The check on c6 delays the threat by one move, but does not prevent it.

35.f5 ♗f8 36.♗xd4 ♖xd4

37.♖f3+-

37.fxg6 was also winning.