Contents

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3.b4 cxb4 4.axb4 ♘xb4 5.d4 d5 6.c3 ♘c6 7.exd5 ♕xd5 8.♘a3
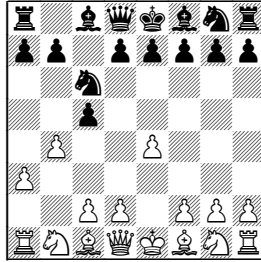
3.b4 cxb4 4.axb4 ♘xb4 5.d4 e6 6.c3 ♘c6

2...♘c6 3.b4

Part 2.   1.e4 c5 2.a3 e6
3.b4 cxb4 4.axb4 ♗xb4

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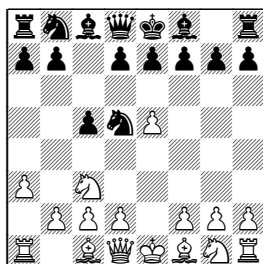
Part 7.   1.e4 c5 2.a3 Miscellaneous

1.e4 c5 2.a3 – Ten years later

White plans to continue on the next move with 3.b2-b4, having played 2.a3, offering an exchange of his flank pawn for the enemy central pawn.

As it is well known, we can divide almost all the fans of the Sicilian Defence into four large groups: these who play 2...♘c6, 2...e6, 2...d6 or 2...g6. It looks like two of these moves do not allow White to play b2-b4. This is not true however. On the contrary – he will sacrifice a pawn with great pleasure. What is very attractive about this gambit is that these principled responses for Black enable White either to obtain a great advantage, or to organise a powerful attack. See, for example, how the game may develop after the move **2...♘c6**.
3.b4!
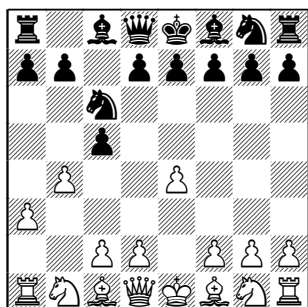
3...cxb4! (There is an old rule, which still works, concerning the fight against the gambits. If the opponent gives – take!) **4.axb4 ♘xb4 5.d4 d5** (Black should not allow his opponent to occupy space for free.) **6.c3 ♘c6 7.exd5 ♕xd5 8.♘a3!**
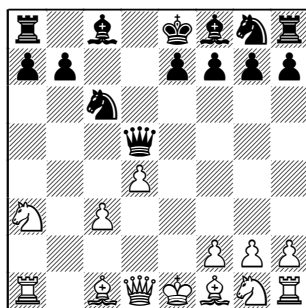
What can we say about this position? If Black does not know well its theory, he will lose very quickly, or if he knows it, then – he will avoid it! It happens very often that the game ends in only five moves. **8...♘f6** (Black must develop his pieces, after all...) **9.♘b5 ♕d8 10.d5 ♘e5** (or 10...♘xd5? 11.♕xd5! ♕xd5 12.♘xc7 and Black ends up a piece down) **11.♗f4 ♘fd7 12.♘f3 f6 13.♘fd4** – He has made his five moves and his position is already hopeless.
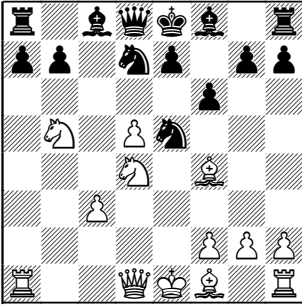
For example: **13...♘b6** (White was threatening 14.♘e6.) **14.♗xe5 fxe5 15.♕h5 g6 16.♕xe5 ♖g8 17.♘c7+ ♔f7 18.♘de6!**
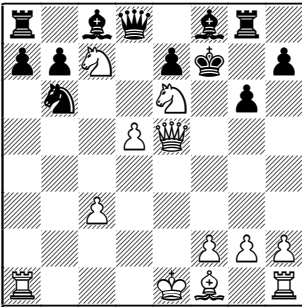
18...♗g7 (18...♗xe6 19.dxe6#; 18...♘xd5 19.♘g5#) **19.♘g5 ♔f8 20.♘xh7+ ♔f7**
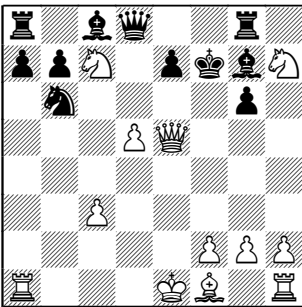
21.♕e6+ ♗xe6 22.dxe6#

After 8.♘a3, Black might lose in only three moves: **8...e5?! 9.♘b5 ♕d8 10.d5 ♘b8 11.d6+−**

It would take a bit more time for this to happen following **8...e6?! 9.♘b5 ♕d8 10.♗f4 e5 11.dxe5 ♕xd1? 12.♖xd1 ♖b8 13.♘c7 ♔e7**
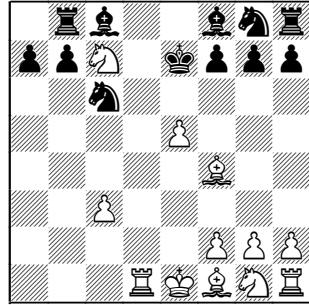
14.♗c1! Nikita Vitiugov wrote about an analogous move in his book about the French Defence "This is a very powerful retreat!".

Among the attractive possibilities for White, we must also mention that **the position after 8.♘a3** will be **encountered by you more often** than 2.a3 e6, 2.a3 d6, 2.a3 g6, i.e. you are going to score frequently a full point without too much of an effort, just repeating the moves in this book.

There are some other considerations as well.

What may come to the mind of the player with Black when he sees you after 1.e4 c5 to make the move 2.a3?
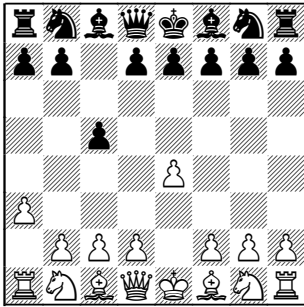
"White wishes to avoid the theoretical variations, so I will choose a scheme in which the move 2.a3 will turn out to be just a loss of time. Still, if I play something which is not a part of my repertoire (for example after 2...g6, I may end up in some line resembling Dragon, instead of my favourite Najdorf variation...), then it may all be not so good. So, I will play as usually – 2...♞c6 (or 2...e6, or 2...d6)".

The point is however, that Black will fail to obtain his well-familiar positions, because after each of these moves White will play **3.b4!**

Before we decide whether to study 2.a3 or not, every sound reasoning chess player would necessarily like to have the answer to another quite correct question – "If we wish to play b4, sacrificing a pawn in the process, then is it not possible to improve this scheme and play immediately b2-b4, without the preliminary move a3, as it was played by Greco back in the 16th century?"

Unfortunately for all the fans of sharp games, this gambit does not promise anything good to White. The precise reaction against it was found at the beginning of the 20th century and after **1.e4 c5 2.b4 cxb4 3.a3**

The move **3...d5** solves completely all the opening problems for Black.

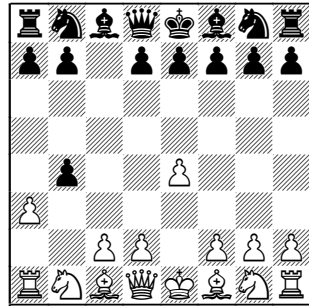On the other hand, how Black should react to 1.e4 c5 2.a3 ♞c6 3.b4, or to 1.e4 c5 2.a3 e6 3.b4, or to 1.e4 c5 2.a3 d6 3.b4 – "is still an enigma for the chess theory".

We are sure that you know who Viswanathan Anand is – a contemporary chess classic, World Champion... Let us compare a position from his game against Van Wely with a position from part 7 of this book.

Anand – Van Wely, Monaco 2003: **1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.♞c3** (It is quite possible that Vishy wanted to avoid the Chelyabinsk variation and this is why he did not play as usually – 3.d2-

d4.) **3...e5 4.♗c4 ♗e7 5.d3 d6 6.0–0 ♘f6 7.♘g5 0–0 8.f4 ♗g4 9.♘f3 exf4 10.♗xf4**
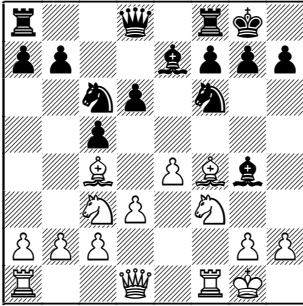
Now, see our variation: **1.e4 c5 2.a3** (We wish to to avoid the Chelyabinsk variation as well...) **2...e5 3.♘c3 ♘c6 4.♗c4 d6 5. d3 ♗e7 6.f4 exf4 7.♗xf4 ♘f6 8. ♘f3 0–0 9.0–0 ♗g4**

The two positions differ only because in our case we have an extra tempo (it is White to move) and we have a pawn on a3, which is also in favour of him, because in some variations White's light-squared bishop has the possibility to retreat to the a2-square (for example after a7-a6 and b7-b5).

If Vishy Anand is willing to play "our" positions (even without a tempo!) then this scheme might not be so bad after all...?

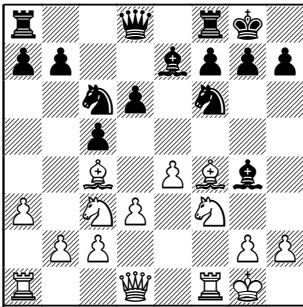I would like to mention another point here. The opening 2.a3 is very good due the fact that if Black makes logical and correct moves, from the point of view of the chess science, then he often ends up in bad positions. I will give you some typical examples after his most popular responses: 2...e6, 2...d6, 2...♘f6, 2...d5, 2...g6 (about 2...♘c6, I have already mentioned at the very beginning).

2...e6 3.b4!? cxb4 4.axb4 ♗xb4 5.♗b2 ♘f6 6.e5 ♘d5 7.c4
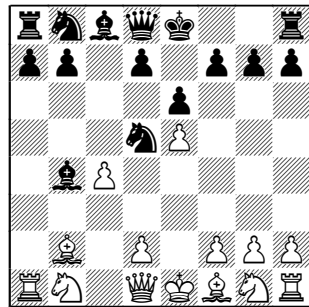
In this variation, Black must choose between four different ways.

7...♘b6

His other three possibilities are: 7...♘f4, 7...♘b6, 7...♘e7. Strangely enough, his best retreat is – 7...♘e7 and after 8.♕g4 –

8...0–0, castling right in front of the enemy attack, but this is not going to be to everybody's liking and requires bravery!

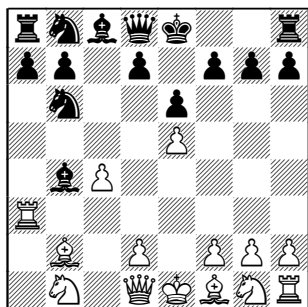Meanwhile, after another popular retreat – 7...♞c7, White follows in the same fashion – 8.♖a3!

8.♖a3!

This brilliant idea belongs to David Bronstein! White's rook is planning to attack the enemy g-pawn or the h-pawn (♖g3 or ♖h3). Black must accept the exchange-sacrifice.

8...♗xa3 9.♗xa3

So, White is an exchange and a pawn down, but Black's dark squares are a sorry sight...

9...♞c6

Following 9...d5 10.♞c3!? ♞c6 11.♕g4 g6 12.♞b5, the penetration of White's knight to the d6-out-post seems to be very unpleasant for Black.

10.♕g4 g6 11.♗d6
    (diagram)

There are plenty of pieces on the board, but Black is practically stalemated. **11...♞e7 12.♞c3 0–0 13.♗d3 ♖e8 14.♞e4 ♞f5**
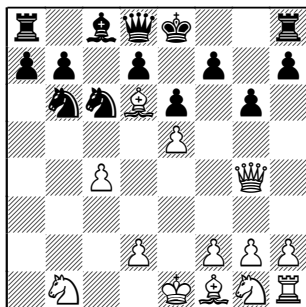
15.♞f6+ ♚g7 16.♗xf5 exf5 17.♕h4 ♖h8

White wins with the beautiful variation **18.♞xh5+ gxh5** (18...♚h6 19.♗e7+–) **19.♕g3+ ♚h6 20.e6!**

2...d6 3.b4!?

In general, chess theory has studied the variations in which White attacks the enemy c5-pawn with the move d2-d4. The solution for Black is easy in this case. It is strategically correct to exchange a flank pawn for the enemy central pawn – c5xd4. What is the right decision here?

3...b6

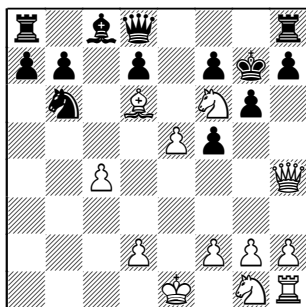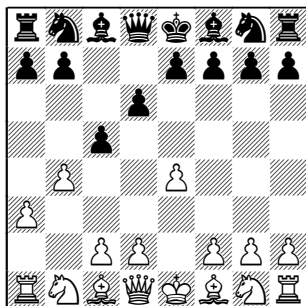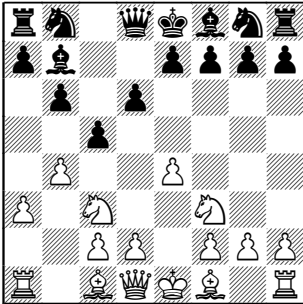Black can exchange the pawns: 3...cxb4 4.axb4, but what should he do later? Maybe to fianchetto the bishop? 4...g6 5.d4 (after the trade 3...cxb4 4.axb4, White has the possibility to occupy the centre) 5...♗g7 6.♘f3 ♘f6 7.♗d3 0−0 8.0−0 with a comfortable advantage for White.

4.♘c3 ♗b7 5.♘f3

5...♘f6

What can be more natural for Black than this move? He develops his knight and attacks White's e4-pawn in the process... This move is imprecise, however...

6.bxc5! dxc5

Black can already lose the game: 6...♘xe4? 7.♗b5+, but this is a trick which is too easy to see.

7.♗b5+
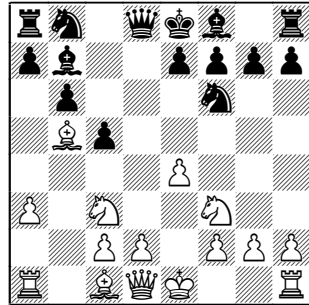
7...♘bd7

Following 7...♗c6, White might try 8.e5 ♘d5 9.e6.

8.e5!

8...♘d5?

This move loses, but may be not every grandmaster will manage to see how. Just show this position to a grandmaster you know and ask him to find the solution. Naturally, without moving the pieces...

Black loses too following 8...♘g4 9.h3 ♘h6 10.e6 fxe6 11.♘e5 ♗c8 12.♕f3 and he will not avoid the huge material losses in order

not to be checkmated on the f7-square.

9.e6 fxe6

10.♘xd5

This exchange is not so easy to evaluate in advance.
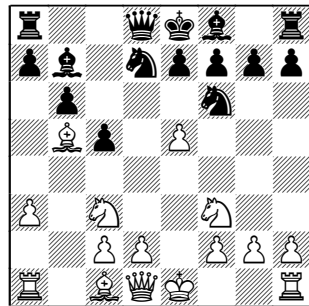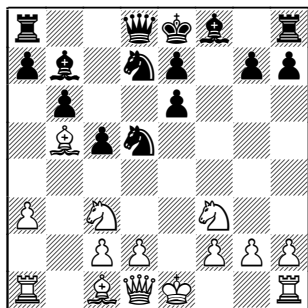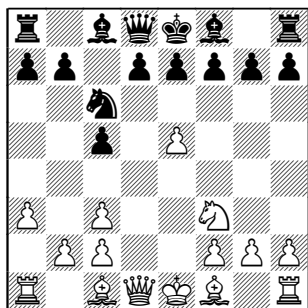
10...exd5 11.♘e5 ♗c8 12. ♕f3 and White wins the queen after **12...♕c7 13.♕f7+ ♔d8 14. ♘c6+.**

2...♘f6 3.e5 ♘d5 4.♘c3!? ♘xc3 5.dxc3 ♘c6 6.♘f3

In this position, one of the possible and most logical plans for Black is to fianchetto his bishop and to castle kingside. **6...g6**

7.♗f4 ♗g7 8.♕d2 0–0 9. 0–0–0 a6 10.♗h6. White's attack is developing much faster. **10...♕c7 11.♖e1 b5 12.h4**
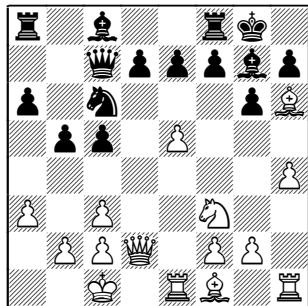
12...f6 (This is the only way for Black not to lose quickly.) **13.h5 g5 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.h6+ ♔h8 16.♗d3**
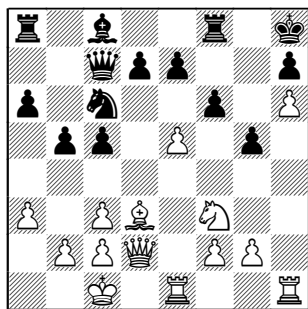
16...d6 (The contemporary magician of chess analysis – the computer programme "Houdini" takes a long time to believe that after 16...c4, the fastest way for White to win is 17.♗xh7! ♔xh7 18.♘xg5! fxg5 19.♕xg5, for example: 19...♖f7 20.♕h5 ♖f8 21.♖h3 and his rook joins in the battery on the g-file.) **17.e6 ♘e5**
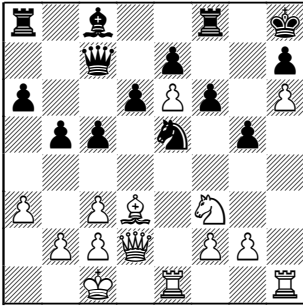
18.♖xe5! dxe5 19.♘xg5 fxg5 20.♕xg5 ♖g8 21.♕f5 ♖g6 (Black's rook cannot hold simultaneously the two squares: g7 and h7.) **22.♕f8+ ♖g8 23.♕f7+−**

2...d5 3.exd5

3...♕xd5 (Following 3...♘f6 4.♗b5 ♗d7 5.♗xd7 ♕xd7 6.c4, Black must still prove that he has some compensation for the sacrificed pawn.) **4.♘c3 ♕d8 5.♘f3** (diagram)

This is the basic position of the "Scandinavian" variation.

5...♘c6

If Black is reluctant to play a position with an extra pawn but under attack, he has a sim-
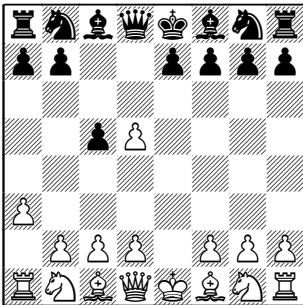
pler solution − 5...♘f6 6.d4 cxd4 7.♕xd4!? ♕xd4 8.♘xd4 with only a slight but stable edge for White.
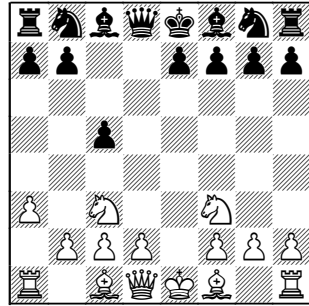
6.b4!?

This is another version of the pawn-sacrifice on b4...

6...cxb4 7.axb4 ♘xb4 8.♘e5!
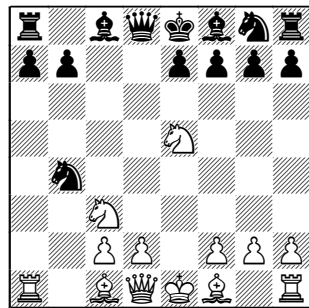
This is why White has sacrificed a pawn. He is threatening a check from the b5-square.

8...♘f6

This is the best response for Black. It is worse for him to opt for 8...♗d7 9.♘xd7 ♕d7 10.d4 e6 11.d5!, as well as 8...♘c6 9.♕h5 ♘xe5 10.♕xe5 and White is threatening both ♘b5 and ♗b5.

9.♗b5

Black must interpose now. What with?

9...♗d7!

He would like to preserve his bishop 9...♘d7?, but this loses because of 10.♕f3 and the f7-square is defenceless.

10.♘xd7 ♘xd7

11.♖a4!?

This is another resource, quite typical for this particular variation. White's rook enters the actions on the semi-open a-file.

11...♘c6 12.♕f3 ♕c7 13.d4 e6 14.d5 with a crushing attack.

2...g6 3.b4 ♗g7 4.♘c3 cxb4 5.axb4 ♘c6 6.b5 ♘d4
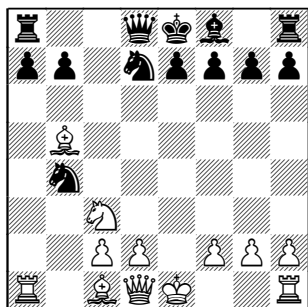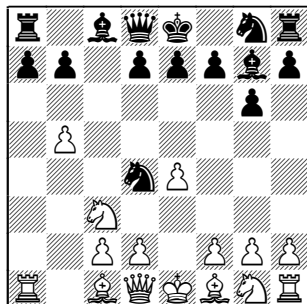

7.♖a4!? Now, it is impossible for Black to deploy his knight to f6 and if he tries to develop it, for example to e7 – **7...e6**, then after **8.♗b2 ♘ge7 9.♘ce2**, White wins a pawn. **9...e5 10.♘xd4 exd4 11.♗xd4**. Naturally, Black is not obliged to lose a pawn and play 8...♘ge7, so I simply wanted to show you once again the idea, quite typical for this opening how White's rook joins in the actions via the a4-square.

I got acquainted for the first time with this opening back in the year 2003 by Alexey Bezgodov. He showed me several attractive examples and told me that he wished to write a book about this scheme. I liked this idea and tried to help him in the work over this book.

The greatest problem at that moment was that the theory ended literally after just a few moves. Is it possible to write a book about an opening based only on the analysis of the authors? So, I began "to pile up" theory by playing on the Internet an endless number of blitz games. Later, I and Alexey began to discuss ideas and so the new theory was being born.

In order to give an official status of this rather non-theoretical Sicilian branch I even organised a thematic tempo-tournament for the participants of the 57th Championship of Russia (Saint-Petersburg 2004). GM Konstantin Landa won it.

At the end of the year 2004, A.Bezgodov's book "*Challenging the Sicilian with 2.a3!?*" was published in Bulgaria. The opening was becoming popular and people started playing it. Besides Bezgodov himself, among the grandmasters V.Dobrov plays is regularly and sometimes Sh.Mamedyarov, T.L.Petrosian, K.Chernyshov as well as the translator of this book – the Bulgarian grandmaster E.Ermenkov.

In principle, the basis, the direction of the analysis in this book were very good. Still, after some time I understood that not everything in Alexey's book was quite correctly written. White can play much stronger at some moments and some of the variations he had recommended can be improved considerably. So, I began a very thorough analysis, checking in the process some of my discoveries from my countless blitz games and tempo-tournaments. Now, I am ready to present the results of my work during many years to your attention and evaluation.

IM Sergei Soloviov
Saint-Petersburg 2013