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Open Sicilian Systems

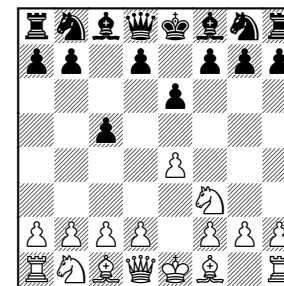
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Foreword

Could the Sicilian be a safe opening? Is there a miraculous system which guarantees Black a calm life after 1.e4 c5 2.♗f3? Of course not! After all we love the Sicilian because it offers tangled play with much greater chances to score than the Ruy Lopez or the Russian Game. Yet the variations I analyse in the present book were in the repertoire of the world champions Petrosian, Karpov and Anand. They are famous for their sound strategy and practical approach to chess.

The key moment is the second move of Black 2...e6!



It leads to a vast variety of sys-

tems that are known under the name “the Taimanov variation”. I should note that the modern treatment has left little of the original design of the prominent Russian grandmaster. He was linking 2...e6 with the manoeuvre ♗g8-e7 and early queenside activity by b7-b5.

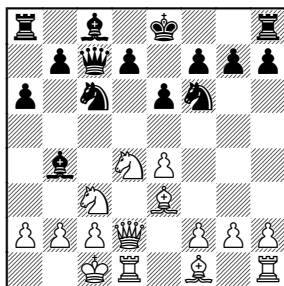
The spirit of this book is different.

I prefer more aggressive development based on active piece play. The king’s knight usually goes to f6 while the dark-squared bishop is useful on b4, c5 or d6. The impact of Black’s pieces on the centre leaves the opponent much less choice than popular variations like the Najdorf. I cannot think of a single main line in this book where material does not count and piece sacrifices on b5 or e6 or d5 are a matter of everyday life. That explains the title “The Safest Sicilian”. In fact most chapters of the book deal with positions where both sides castle on the same flank

and often it is Black who is attacking the enemy king.

The only exception is the original version of the English attack which arises after the moves

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cd4 4.♗d4
♘c6 5.♗c3 ♖c7 6.♗e3 a6 7.♗d2
♗f6 8.0-0-0 ♗b4



The bishop on b4 is a weighty factor which restricts White's attacking possibilities. As a matter of fact, White often aims to swap queens from b6 or g3, hoping for a small endgame edge. In a good half of my games, especially in the fashionable line 9.♗b3 ♗e5 10.♖e1 ♗e7! I managed to counter-attack with the f-pawn achieving an advantage on the kingside! This variation seems to become a Bulgarian patent now that besides me several other Bulgarians defend Black. It is true that Topalov and his second Cheparinov keep strictly to the other side, but they are still young and could be converted!

Once you master some typical ideas, you'll be able to play successfully the Sicilian for many

years, without having to update your opening knowledge every two weeks! The worst that could happen to you is to get somewhat cramped, but very solid position, in which the better player still has plenty of chances to outplay his opponent.

This book is based on my own repertoire.

As a professional player I participate in many opens. I need at least 7.5/9 for the first place so I have little margin for mistakes. And mistake means less than a full point! As Black, it is extremely difficult to get a playable position without accepting extreme risks. Top rated players solve this dilemma by choosing the Berlin Wall or the Russian Game against their equals and employing the Sicilian against less qualified or tactically diffident rivals. I suppose that you still have some way to go before reaching the Top Ten and you need a reliable opening for all circumstances.

Let's consider the options:

Thanks to Topalov, currently the Najdorf is at its peak of popularity. Yet the same Topalov in the first round at San Luis was lost against Leko before move twenty in a very sharp main line of the English attack. The only other bad position he got in the tourna-

ment was in the Scheveningen. It suffices to mention the 6.♗g5-attack with forced variations all the way up to move thirty or more, to understand my reluctance to use the Najdorf. Every school boy or girl could learn by heart the theory and hold me to a draw. And imagine if Fritz 9/10/12... found a whole on move 31... Obviously, at least from the practical point of view, this system cannot suit me.

The Dragon is even more unfit for a main repertoire. The same long narrow forced variations, many dead drawn endgames in some lines without h4, and on top of all – the unbearable sight of the d5-square, where one White piece replaces another. On the safety side – I think that Fisher said that it is all very simple in the Dragon – White opens up the h-file, sacrifices the exchange, check, check and mate!

As for the Classical system, it has been sliding downhill for years. Now every one knows that White should choose the Rauzer attack 6.♗g5, castle queenside and enjoy the better position.

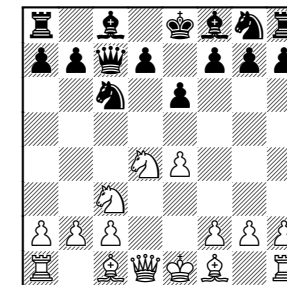
We come to the other topical variation lately – the Sveshnikov. Why do you think so many strong players adopted it? Because Black actively counter-attacks in the centre thus avoiding crushing attacks. However that is achieved at a high price. The permanent hole

on d5 makes the centre static and dooms the Sveshnikov to be poor on strategical ideas. It is boring to play one and the same position for years, especially when more and more often lately Black seems to struggling in passive positions. Here the main lines are longer than ever and every game introduces a novelty you must know.

The Scheveningen is hardly an independent system because of the English attack, the Keres attack etc. Even when Black cleverly chooses my favourite move order 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6! 3.d4 cd4 4.♗d4 ♗c6! to enter it, I have some doubts about facing 5.♗c3 with 5...d6. I like very much to be on the White side of the Scheveningen with ♗e2, a4, ♖h1 and to push g4-g5. GM Grischuk and many top players also think that the fame of the Scheveningen of the times of K-K matches has faded.

In the present book I recommend the move order:

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cd4 4.♗d4
♗c6 5.♗c3 ♖c7



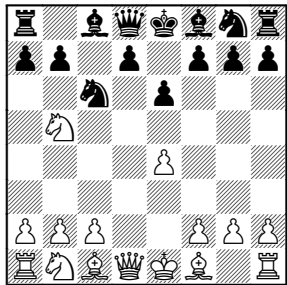
Do not think that I like to save a6 in order to sweep away the opponent in some rare lines with b6 or similar! I do not believe in them and firmly suggest that you put in a6 on the next move. I only want to sidestep the variation 5... a6 6. ♖c6 bc6 7.e5.

In the diagram position White's main answers are 6. ♕e3 a6 7. ♗d2; 6. ♕e2; 6. ♕e3 a6 7. ♕d3; 6.f4 and 6.g3. They are considered in Parts 3 to 7.

Every opening move order has its fine points.

Twenty years ago Karpov was implacably crushing his opponents with the most consistent response to Black's second move:

3.d4 cd4 4. ♖d4 ♖c6 5. ♖b5



Black answers 5...d6 and Karpov played 6.c4. His positional superiority over his opponents was so big that he was easily outplaying them in the hedgehog structure. Kasparov also fell victim of his grip and had to invent a dubious gambit in order to put his ri-

val off. At that time 5. ♖b5 had the reputation of a calm, but slightly better for White, variation. Black has no backup lines in this case. If he builds his repertoire on 2...e6, then Karpov's pet line is the first thing with which he should learn to cope. That explains my choice for the first chapter (I call it Part 1). Let me reassure you right away – Black has full equality and I point out a clear way to it.

Part 2 deals with 5. ♖b5 d6 6. ♕f4 which also has lost most of its venom lately.

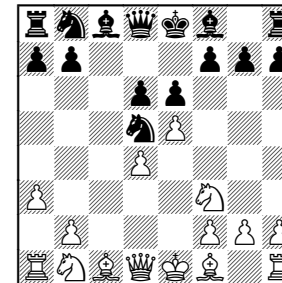
At the club level and on the Internet a lot of players avoid the main lines of the Open Sicilian. They play 2.c3, closed lines and all kinds of side lines in order to throw you out of the theory you might know.

When they see 2...e6 they are genuinely happy.

Their reasoning is simple: ...e6 is not the main line against 2.c3, so let punish the opponent for his tricky move order! The same applies to the fans of the KID reversed: "Oops, he/she chose the "bad" system against the KID reversed, now I'll teach him a lesson!" And there follows... 3.d3?! To me the idea itself that White could aspire to an edge with moves like 3.d3 seems very funny. Every devoted Sicilian player will tell you that ANY reasonable OPEN system against 1...c5 is more dan-

gerous than the so-called Anti-Sicilian lines. Black has plenty of good plans against them and I offer you my personal choice which has been tested throughout the years.

I should admit that 3.c3 has more sound reasoning: White is occupying the centre! But the pawn deprives the knight on b1 of its natural square. In the old books the variation 3.c3 ♖f6 4.e5 ♖d5 5.d4 cd4 6.cd4 d6 7.a3



was assessed in White's fa-

avour, but if you check up your database, you'll see that Black is scoring...59% with 7... ♕d7. Times change and evaluations are revised.

I wrote this book in first person, but it is a collaborative work.

Every line has been checked and discussed by both authors. IM Semko Semkov has long years of practice with the Sicilian 2... e6 and certainly more experience than me in writing. He also made some valuable fixes and patches in problem variations. Together we tried to answer for you all the questions that we thought important.

Good luck with the Taimanov!

GM Alexander Delchev
January 2006

About the structure of this book

From my conversations with readers of Chess Stars publications I understood that what you want from an opening book is:

1. To contain detailed information about every known option against the proposed repertoire.
2. To have fewer variations and more explanation.
3. To present the material clearly, move by move.
4. To contain annotated complete games.
5. To be up-to-date, possibly even anticipating theoretical developments by years.
6. To convey the author's personal opinion on the subject.
7. To be objective.

Obviously within the usual structure of an opening book it would be impossible to accomplish more than half of this list. So I decided to experiment with a **new form of presentation.**

Every system is examined in a separate part which contains

three chapters: "Quick Repertoire"; "Step by Step"; "Complete Games".

You start with the "Quick Repertoire". You'll find there all the vital information that you need to start playing the variation. In three-four pages you get explanation of

typical ideas, crucial positions and topical lines.

Most club players do not need anything more. I suppose that 90 percent of games feature lines that are covered in these chapters.

"**Step by Step**" chapters follow the usual layout of Chess Stars books with main lines that branch to sub-lines. Here we try to analyse as many of White's options as possible. You could use these chapters as a reference book or in case you would like to learn more.

Both chapters complement one another. In the "Quick Repertoire" you'll find explanations of the general ideas which are omitted in the reference chapter. You start with the basic information

and practice will show where you need additional knowledge.

Finally, every part ends with "**Complete Games**".

We tried to avoid repeating famous games which you have probably seen already. We chose mostly recent games and especially games of Delchev whenever possible.

I should add that the Bulgarian

grandmaster Alexander Delchev is one of the world's leading experts on the Taimanov system. His current rating is 2661. He played in many olympiads with the Bulgarian national team and is the winner of more than thirty tournaments. He is especially proud with the European Grand Prix trophy which he won in 2004.

*Semko Semkov
Chess Stars Publishing*