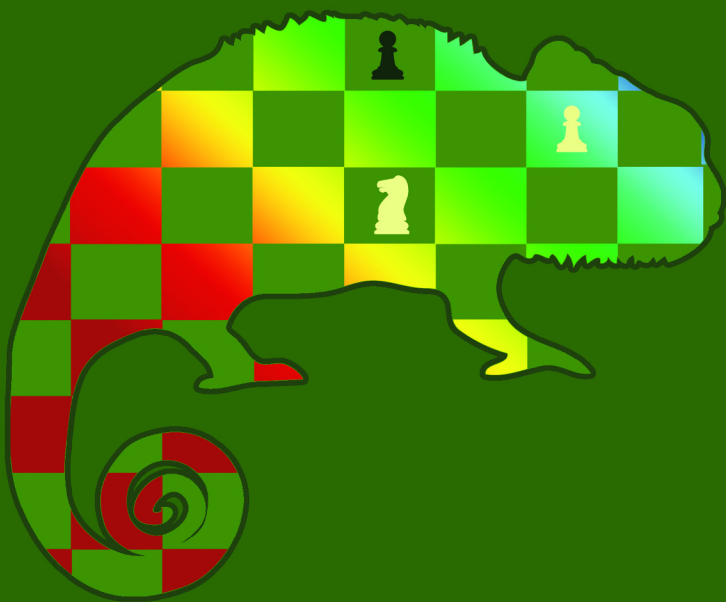


The

CHAMELEON VARIATION

Confronting the Sicilian on Your Own Terms



CARSTEN HANSEN

Foreword by Andy Soltis

**The
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Foreword

In 1982, the late Ken Smith's publishing house Chess Digest published the first edition of my small monograph *Beating the Sicilian, The Chameleon Variation*. It was well received and a second edition came out in 1990. It proposed a very flexible way for White to handle the Sicilian Defense using the move order 1.e4, 2.♖c3 and 3.♗ge2. It kept most of White's options open and allowed White the possibility of luring Black into unfamiliar territory.

I was certainly not the first person to play 3.♗ge2 in the Sicilian, and I did not play it to create opening theory. I did it to *avoid* theory. I had found it increasingly difficult to keep up to date with the latest nuances and changes in the main Sicilian lines, such as the Najdorf, Taimanov, Kan and Dragon, or even the rarer lines like the Kalashnikov. When I first analyzed 3.♗ge2, I was concerned about Black's attempts at refutation, such as 2...♟f6 3.♗ge2 ♟f6 4.g3 d5 5.e×d5 ♞d4. But, not to worry.

With a 3.♗ge2 move order, I could get to a perfectly playable middlegame in which I could expect to know as much about it as my opponent. Of course, there were some Sicilian main lines that I was happy to visit. So, for example, after 1.e4 c5 2.♖c3 ♟c6 3.♗ge2 ♟f6, I would reply 4.d4 c×d4 5.♗×d4 and get to play a Sozin (5...d6).

When Bobby Fischer adopted the Chameleon, he took the same approach. On 3...e6, he would transpose into a main line with 4.d4. Curiously, Bobby played 2.♖c3 e6 3.♗ge2 d6 4.h3 in one of his last tournaments. Fischer also used the 2.♗e2 ♟f6 3.♗bc3 move order in his 1992 rematch with Boris Spassky – himself an occasional Chameleonist – to play an Open Sicilian.

So, I initially looked upon 3.♗ge2 as a kind of ruse. But I also began to appreciate it as a trap. It got my opponents thinking at move three, no small trick in the over-analyzed, over-memorized Sicilian. After I had been playing it for a few years, I was surprised by how many players, even some masters, didn't understand White's third move. They saw 2.♖c3 and thought "Closed Sicilian." They mentally ruled out an Open Sicilian. So I won quick games that went 1.e4 c5 2.♖c3 ♟c6 3.♗ge2 e6 4.g3 g6? 5.d4! c×d4 6.♗×d4 ♟g7? 7.♗db5.

Back in the 1970s, we believed that 2...d6 and 3...e5 (or 2...♟c6 and 3...e5) had to favor White after 4.♗d5 and 5.♗ec3 and ♟c4. After all, one central square was superior to the others and White owned it. But one square isn't all that important. Fischer used the Chameleon in his rematch with Spassky, but avoided ♟c4 in favor of g2-g3 and ♟g2.

Why the name? Chess Digest had issued my previous pamphlets with titles like *1.b4*. He wanted something memorable. For subsequent pamphlets I suggested names like *Nimzo-Larsen Attack* (for 1.b3) and *Baltic Defense* (for 1.d4 d5 2.c4 ♗f5). How the name stuck and won acceptance – and how 2.♗c3/3.♗ge2 grew into a worthwhile chapter of opening theory – continues to surprise me.

And now, the journey of the Chameleon continues in this thorough, comprehensive update by well-known author Carsten Hansen.

Andy Soltis
New York City
September 2017

Chapter 9

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 e6 3.♗ge2 d5

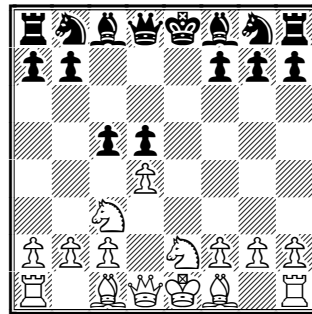
1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 e6 3.♗ge2 d5
4.exd5 exd5 5.d4

We have already looked at other lines that involved Black playing ...e7-e6 followed by ...d7-d5. This chapter will cover the lines where Black doesn't play ...♘c6 immediately.

The absence of the knight on c6 means that Black can develop other pieces first and only later decide whether the knight should be placed on c6. The downside for Black is that White has not yet committed to g2-g3 which, technically speaking, weakens the light squares on the kingside. White still has the option of going in that direction if he so chooses, but can also attempt to exploit Black's loose pawn center through pressure against the center and rapid piece development, exactly what Black attempts to do as well.

5...♗f6

(a) 5...cxd4 is not an outright mistake, but Black is risking becoming seriously behind in development: 6.♗xd4 ♗f6 7.♗b5+ (or 7.♗g5 ♗e7 8.♗b5+ ♗d7 9.♖d3 ♗c6 10.0-0-0 0-0 11.♗f5 ♗xf5 12.♖xf5 ♖a5? 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♗d3,



and Black resigned, 1-0, Herman-Feher, Hungary 2000) 7...♗d7 8.♗xd7+ ♖xd7 9.0-0 ♗e7?! (9...♗c6 is better, but White has an advantage anyway) 10.♖d3 0-0 11.♗f5 ♗b4? 12.♗h6! (now it goes downhill rather rapidly for Black) 12...♗xc3 13.bxc3 ♗e8 14.♖ae1 ♗c6 15.♖e3 gxh6 16.♖xe8 f6 17.♖g3+ ♗f7 18.♖xa8 ♖xa8 19.♖g7+ ♗e6 20.♖e1+ ♗e5 21.♗d4+ ♗d6 22.♖xf6+, and Black resigned, 1-0, Skovgaard-Avdeeva, Serpukhov 2004.

(b) 5...♗e6 6.g3 (6.♗f4 ♗f6 7.♗b5+ ♗c6 8.0-0 a6 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 10.♖e2 ♖c8 11.♗a4 ♖a7 12.dxc5 ♖e7 13.♗e3 and it is pretty clear that Black's opening play has been a failure, Maki-Keskinen, Jyvaskyla 1996) 6...♗c6 7.♗g2 cxd4 8.♗xd4 ♗b4 9.0-0 ♗xd4 10.♖xd4 ♗xc3 11.♖xc3 ♗f6 12.♗g5

1.e4 c5 2.♗c3 e6 3.♗g2 d5

♞c8 13.♗xf6 ♖xf6 14.♖xf6 gxf6 15.c3 when Black's messed-up pawn structure provides White a clear positional advantage, Sirias Martinez-Theerapappisit, Mallorca 2004.

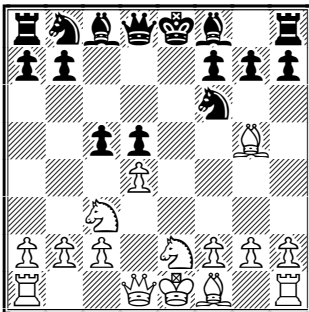
(c) 5...c4 6.g3 ♗b4 (or 6... ♗f6 7.♗g2 ♗c6 8.♗g5 ♗b4 9.0-0 ♗xc3 10.♗xc3 and White is already much better, Gu-Zhang, Hefei 2010) 7.♗g2 ♗e7 (7...♗g4 8.0-0 ♗xc3 9.bxc3 ♗e7 10.♞b1 ♖d7 11.♗a3 ♗bc6 12.♞e1 0-0-0 13.♗d2 h5 14.♗f4 and Black's position is a few small steps away from completely falling apart, Baumhus-Denk, Vienna 1991) 8.0-0 0-0 9.♗f4 (or 9.♗g5 ♗bc6 10.♗xd5 ♖a5 11.♗xb4 ♖xg5 12.♗xc6 ♗xc6 13.c3 when Black is clearly in trouble, Ertl-Camerini, ICCF email 2004, but 9...f6 improves for Black, although 10.♗e3 ♗bc6 11.♞e1 ♗g4 12.♖d2 is still somewhat better for White) 9...♗xc3 10.bxc3 ♖a5 11.a4 ♗bc6 12.♗a3 ♗f5 13.♞e1 ♞fe8 14.♞e3 with a large advantage for White, Al Qudaimi-Darini, Muscat 2015.

(d) 5...♗c6 transposes to chapter 13.

6.g3

White has tried a few other ideas as well:

(a) 6.♗g5, and now:



(a1) 6...♗c6 7.♗xf6 gxf6 8.dxc5 d4 9.♗e4 f5 10.♗d6+ ♗xd6 11.cxd6 ♖xd6 12.♖d2 ♗e6 13.♗f4 0-0-0 14.♗e2 d3 15.♗xd3 ♖e5+ 16.♖e3 ♖xb2 17.0-0 with better chances for White, Pancevski-Dinev, Skopje 2007.

(a2) 6...♗e7 7.dxc5 (or 7.♗xf6 ♗xf6 8.dxc5 0-0 9.♖xd5 ♖a5 10.0-0-0 ♗c6 11.♖c4 ♗e6 12.♖b5 ♖c7 13.♗e4 with a better game for White, Antoniewski-Torotto, Tatranske Zruby 2008) 7...0-0 8.♖d2 ♗e6 9.0-0-0 ♗c6 10.♗f4 d4 11.♗xe6 fxe6 12.♖e1 e5 13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♗c4+ ♖h8 15.♗e4 and White is completely in control, Rogovski-Zhornik, Simferopol 2003.

(a3) 6...♗e6 7.♗f4 cxd4 (or 7...♗c6 8.♗b5 a6 9.♗xc6+ bxc6 10.0-0 h6 11.♗xe6 fxe6 12.♗e3 ♗e7 13.dxc5 when Black does not have sufficient compensation for the pawn, Isaev-Polonsky, Moscow 2008) 8.♖xd4 ♗c6 9.♗xf6 (9.♗b5 ♗e7 10.♗xc6+ bxc6 11.0-0-0 0-0 12.♗xe6 fxe6 13.♞he1 ♖d7 14.f3 ♗d6 15.♗xf6 c5 16.♖g4 ♞xf6 was played in Gavrilov-Plich, Koszalin 1996, and now 17.♗xd5! ♞g6 18.♖e4 would be clearly better for White) 9...♖xf6 10.♖xf6 gxf6 11.♗xc5 ♗d5 12.♗xd5 0-0-0 13.0-0-0 and Black has lost a pawn without adequate compensation, Kron-Ginzburg, Itkutsk 2016.

(b) 6.♗e3 cxd4 7.♗xd4 ♗e7 8.g3 0-0 9.♗g2 ♗c6 10.0-0 ♗g4 11.h3 ♗xd4 12.♖xd4 ♗xe2 13.♗xe2 ♞c8 14.♗c3 (or 14.c3 ♗c5 15.♖d3 ♖b6, Hou Yifan-A.Muzychuk, Beijing 2014, and now 16.b4 ♗d6 17.♗xd5 ♞fd8 18.♗g2 ♗xb4 19.♖c2 ♗a5 20.♞ab1 ♖c5 21.♞xb7 is somewhat better for White) 14...♗c5 15.♖d3 d4 16.♗e2 ♖b6 17.a3 ♞fd8 18.♞fd1 with a small plus for White, Spassky-Borik, Germany 1982.

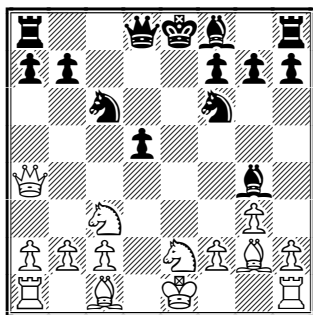
The Chameleon Sicilian

6...♠g4

6...cxd4 7.♠xd4 ♠b4 (7...♠e7 8.♠g2 0-0 9.0-0 ♠c6 10.♠e3 ♠g4 11.♠xd5 ♠xe3 12.fxe3 ♠c5 13.c3 ♠e5 14.♣h5 with better chances for White, Comas Fabrego-Berkovich, La Massana 2012) 8.♠g2 ♣e7+ 9.♠e3 ♠xc3+ 10.bxc3 ♠g4 11.♣d3 ♠bd7 12.0-0-0 13.♠fe1 ♠fe8 14.h3 ♠c5 15.♣f1 when White has some initiative, Moskalenko-Sveshnikov, Alushta 1994, now both 16...♠d7 and 16...♠e6 should be met with 17.c4! with a pleasant game for White.

7.♠g2 ♠c6

A reasonable alternative for Black is 7...cxd4 8.♣xd4 ♠c6 9.♣a4, and now:



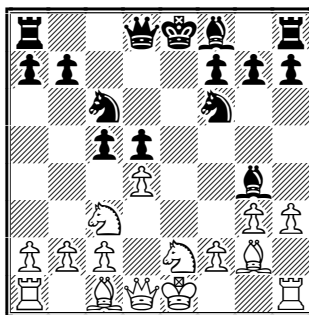
(a) 9...♠c5 10.♠xd5 ♠xe2 (10...0-0?) 11.♠xf6+ ♣xf6 and now instead of 12.♣e4+? ♣f8 13.♣xe2 ♠e8 14.♠e3 ♠xe3 15.fxe3 ♠d4 16.♣c4 ♠xe3+ and White is completely busted, Tseshkovsky-Gorelov, Aktjubinsk 1985, White should have played 12.♠xc6+ bxc6 13.♣e4+ ♣d7 14.♣xe2 ♠he8 15.♠e3 with a clear advantage.

(b) 9...♣d7 10.♠g5 ♠b4? (10...♠e7 is better although 11.0-0-0 is still problematic for Black) 11.♠xf6 ♠xe2 12.♣xe2 ♣xf6 13.♠hd1 0-0-0 14.♣f1

♠xc3 15.bxc3 ♣f5 16.♠ab1 and Black is, in fact, losing; the threat is c3-c4, Lobron-Hector, Reykjavik 1984.

(c) 9...♠b4 10.0-0 0-0 (10...♣a5 11.♣xa5 ♠xa5 12.h3 ♠f5 13.♠g5 ♠e4 14.♠xe4 ♠xe4 15.c3 0-0 16.♠e3 ♠fd8 17.♠ad1 ♠e5 18.♠d4 ♠c4 19.♠c1 ♠b6 20.♠fe1 with a small plus for White, Novitzkij-Balashov, St. Petersburg 2000) 11.♠g5 (or 11.♠f4 ♠xc3 12.bxc3 ♠e5 13.f3 ♠d7 14.♣d4 ♠e8 15.♠e3 ♠b5 16.♠fe1 ♠c4 17.a4 ♣a5 18.♣d2 ♠c6 and Black clearly does not have any problems, Bryzgalin-Lugovoi, Moscow 1998) 11...d4 12.♠xf6 ♣xf6 13.♠d5 ♣d6 14.♠xd4 ♠xd4 15.♣xb4 ♣xb4 16.♠xb4 a5 17.♠d5 ♠xc2 18.♠ac1 ♠b4 was played in Novitzkij-Kupreichik, Minsk 2003, and now White's best continuation would have been 19.♠e7+ ♣h8 20.a3 ♠d3 21.♠c7 ♠xb2 22.♠b1 ♠d3 23.♠xb7 ♠ad8 24.♠c6 with a small plus on account of his active and better-placed pieces.

8.h3



8.♠e3 c4 (8...cxd4 9.♠xd4 ♠xd4?! 10.♣xd4 ♠c8?! 11.♠xd5 ♣a5+ 12.c3 ♠xe2 13.♣e5+ ♣d8 14.♣xe2 ♠xd5 15.0-0-0 and White is completely winning, Iskov-Grooten, Amsterdam 1982, but Black can easily improve with

1.e4 c5 2.♟c3 e6 3.♞g2 d5

9...♞d6) 9.h3 ♞h5 10.0-0 ♞b4 11.♞g5 ♟e7 12.♞xf6 gxf6 13.♖d2 ♖d6 14.♟f4 ♞g6 15.♟b5 ♞xd2 16.♟xd6+ ♖d7 17.♟xg6 hxg6 18.♟xb7 ♖ab8 19.♟c5+ and White is clearly better, Savage-Sprenkle, Chicago 1984.

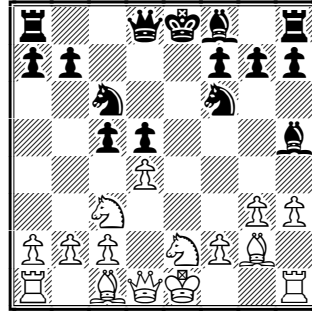
8...♞e6

Black has tried several other things at this juncture:

(a) 8...♞xe2 9.♟xe2 ♞e7 (9...♖b6 10.0-0 cxd4 11.c3 ♟c5 12.cxd4 ♞xd4 13.♟xd4 ♖xd4 14.♖e2+ ♟e4 15.♖d1 with a clear advantage for White, Misailovic-Kontic, Cetinje 1993) 10.0-0 0-0 11.♞e3 c4 12.c3 h6 13.♖c2 b5 14.b3 ♖c8 15.bxc4 bxc4 was played in Reinderman-Yermolinsky, Wijk aan Zee 1999, and now 16.♟f4 would have left White with the better game.

(b) 8...cxd4 9.hxg4 (or 9.♟xd5 ♟xd5 10.hxg4 ♞b4+ 11.♖f1 ♟de7 12.♖d3 h6 13.♟f4 ♞d6 14.♖e1 ♖c7 15.♟c3 ♟xf4 16.♟d5 with clearly better chances for White, Teichmann-Spielmann, Berlin 1914) 9...dxc3 10.♟xc3 d4 (also 10...♞b4 favors White: 11.0-0 ♞xc3 12.bxc3 0-0 13.♖b1 ♖a5 14.♖xb7 ♖xa2 15.♖b3 ♖ad8 16.♞g5 ♖a5 17.♞xf6 gxf6, Lepelletier-Marciano, Toulouse 1995, and now 18.g5 f5 19.♖d3 f4 20.gxf4 would have left White with a large advantage) 11.♖e2+ ♞e7 (11...♖e7 12.♟d5 ♟xd5 13.♞xd5 ♖xe2+ 14.♖xe2 ♟c5 15.♖h5 ♞b6 16.♟f4 g6 17.♖h2 ♖c8 18.♖ah1 is close to winning for White, Sale-Hulak, Pula 1999) 12.g5 ♟d7 13.♟d5 ♖f8 14.♟xe7 ♖xe7 15.♖xe7+ ♖xe7 16.♟f4 with a clear advantage for White, Novitzkij-Litvinov, Minsk 2002.

(c) 8...♞h5, and here:



(c1) 9.♞g5 cxd4 10.♟xd5 ♖a5+ 11.♞d2 ♖d8 12.♟df4 ♞g6 13.♟xg6 hxg6 14.0-0 ♖d7 15.♟f4 with a lead in development and a superior pawn structure for White, Shirazi-Sprenkle, Pasadena 1983.

(c2) 9.g4 ♞g6 10.♞e3 (White can improve with 10.0-0 cxd4 11.♟xd4 ♞e7 12.♞e3 0-0 13.♟de2 when he has positional advantage) 10...cxd4 11.♟xd4 ♞b4 12.0-0 0-0 13.♟ce2 ♖e8 14.♟f4 ♞d6 15.♟xg6 hxg6 16.♖e1 ♞e5 17.c3 ♞xd4 18.cxd4 ♖b6 with equal chances, Smederevac-Velimirovic, Osijek 1978.

(c3) 9.♞e3 cxd4 10.♞xd4 ♞b4 11.0-0 0-0 12.♞xf6 ♖xf6 13.♟xd5 ♖xb2 14.♖b1 ♖a3 15.♖b3 ♖a5 16.g4 ♞g6 17.♟xb4 ♟xb4 18.♖d2 with better chances for White. Botterill-Adorjan, Canterbury 1973.

9.♞e3

White can also play 9.♞g5, e.g., 9...h6 10.♞xf6 ♖xf6 11.♟xd5 ♞xd5 12.♞xd5 0-0-0 13.♞xc6 ♖xc6 14.0-0 and White is somewhat better, Troianescu-Kortschnoj, Bucharest 1954.

9...cxd4 10.♟xd4 ♞b4 11.0-0 0-0 12.♟ce2 ♞e7