

Evgeny Sveshnikov

The Grand Prix Attack

Fighting the Sicilian with an early f4

New In Chess 2013

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Introduction – The Correct Sicilian

With this book, I continue my discussions of the Sicilian Defence. Some while ago, I wrote a monograph on the system 2.c3, and almost a quarter of a century ago, I wrote about the so-called Cheliabinsk Variation 1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4



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4.♞xd4 ♟f6 5.♞c3 e5, or, as it is known in the West, the Sveshnikov Sicilian.

Including in this new work the present chapter The Correct Sicilian, I will try to show that the move 1...c5! is the best answer to 1.e4. The reader will get to know my system of opening principles, of which there are eight in all, four each for White and Black; I call this the Sveshnikov System. What is new in this system? Most of all, the opening principles are set out in order of their significance, and separated between White and Black, each of which are formulated slightly differently. This is because each side must fulfil his own slightly different task in the opening.

Later, I plan to write books on the following topics:

1) White's ways of avoiding the La Bourdonnais System, 1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 e5! – which today, I consider Black's best. In this work, I will consider the following lines:

- 1a) 1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.b4?
- 1b) 1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.♞c3?! e5!
- 1c) 1.e4 c5 2.g3? d5!
- 1d) 1.e4 c5 2.♞c3 ♘c6 3.♞ge2
- 1e) 1.e4 c5 2.♞c3 ♘c6 3.g3
- 2) The La Bourdonnais and Cheliabinsk Variations
- 3) The Rossolimo System 1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.♞b5!

In general, it is interesting to ask when and where the Sicilian came into existence, and how it acquired its name. I fear that we will not be able to obtain exact answers to these questions. Thus, it is well-known that the Spanish Opening was invented by the Spaniard Ruy Lopez (in English-language literature, it is known under his name – the Ruy Lopez). But the Sicilian? On the island of Sicily, which these days is

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part of Italy, there was an independent state even before the days of the Roman Empire. It turns out that chess reached Sicily significantly earlier than Italy or Spain, but sadly, almost nothing has been preserved of the efforts of the early Sicilian chess players.

In recent years, I have visited Sicily several times, read lectures to local players, and have been surprised that they do not run tournaments in honour of the Sicilian Defence. (As is well known, the most famous Sicilian Defence tournament, in which the players were obliged to play the opening in every game, was dedicated to the 60th birthday of Lev Polugaevsky. So here is a paradox: nowadays, chess is a small thing in Sicily, but the Sicilian is the most popular opening in the world!

Earlier, it used to be said that without understanding the Spanish, one could not become World Champion. This is an absolutely correct thought, because the Spanish is the best opening for White. In the same way, the Sicilian is the best opening for Black. Therefore, I should like to offer this theory: nowadays, it is impossible to become World Champion without understanding both the Spanish and the Sicilian!

But now let us formulate the principles which, in my view, one should follow, in searching for the best moves in the opening.

When playing **White**:

- 1) seize the centre,
- 2) develop the pieces,
- 3) safety,
- 4) attack weaknesses.

For Black the principles are almost the same, but are formulated slightly differently, and are placed in a different order of importance:

- 1) fight for the centre,
- 2) safety,
- 3) develop the pieces,
- 4) defend and do not create weaknesses.

Note that White, in the opening, tries to seize the centre, whilst Black fights for it, so as to prevent the opponent from carrying out his plans. White should attack weaknesses, whilst Black should defend them and try not to create any more.

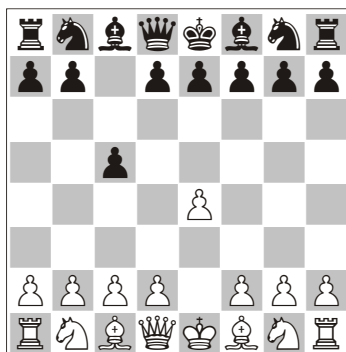
In accordance with the opening principles outlined above (and this is also confirmed by centuries of experience), after 1.e4, there are only two moves that can claim to be the best reply: 1...e5 and 1...c5. I consider 1...c5 to be the strongest, and in order to show why, I will compare it with 1...e5 'point by point'.

1) Visually, the move 1...e5 is a greater battle for the centre. But in reality, Black's potential prospects after 1...c5 are greater, because he retains the possibility of including two pawns in the battle for the centre - the d- and e-pawns.

2 and 4) Safety is also greater for Black after $1...c5$, because he does not create a weakness in the form of the pawn on e5. Obviously, it is much harder to attack the c5-pawn than the one on e5, which can be attacked immediately with $2.\text{♟}f3$.

3) Developing the pieces is definitely easier after $1...e5$, because the diagonal of the f8-bishop is immediately opened. But we have already stated that safety (principle 2) is more important for Black than development (principle 3)!

If you look at the games of the strongest players in recent years, you will see that the move $1...c5$ predominates, and Black's results are very good. [Translator's note: But since Kasparov's retirement, the move $1...e5$ may have surpassed $1...c5$ in popularity.]



Let us take a step further. What plans after $1.e4 c5$ does White have? Following our principles above, it is clear $2.\text{♟}f3$ is the strongest move here. However, we will also look at other possibilities. The main ones, and the most popular, are $2.f4$ and $2.c3$.

A) The move **2.f4** was played successfully a number of times by Alexander McDonnell, England's strongest player in the first third of the 19th century, in his first match against the great French player, Louis-Charles Mahé de la Bourdonnais (London 1834). Traditionally, many English players play $2.f4$, and the whole variation is sometimes known as the Grand Prix Attack, because it was widely used on the English weekend tournament Grand Prix circuit. But why did McDonnell refrain from $2.\text{♟}f3$? Because De la Bourdonnais several times replied $2...♞c6$ $3.d4 cxd4$ $4.\text{♟}xd4 e5!$ $5.\text{♞}xc6 bxc6$, and the Englishman struggled to equalise in the opening, with white! So McDonnell played $2.f4$ not out of choice, so much, but as the result of what we might now call a process of elimination!

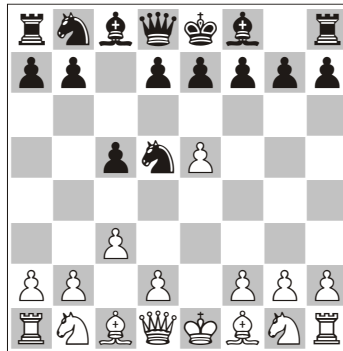
The move $2.f4$ is quite logical; in my opinion, it is the second or third strongest move behind $2.\text{♟}f3$. In this introductory chapter, I will not go into details about the move, since the whole of the book you are holding in your hands is devoted to it!

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B) 2.c3. I recently wrote a substantial book on this subject. In Russian and Italian, it appeared as two volumes, in English as one, but very large volume. Here I will be very brief – Black has two reliable paths to equality: 2...d5 and 2...f6.

After 2...d5 3.exd5 ♖xd5 the queen comes under attack, and White retains some initiative, neutralising which requires some effort. The second move, in my view, is stronger, because in this case, Black does not exchange off the weak pawn on e4, but forces it to advance to e5, after which it will be attacked with tempo, while Black continues to develop his pieces.

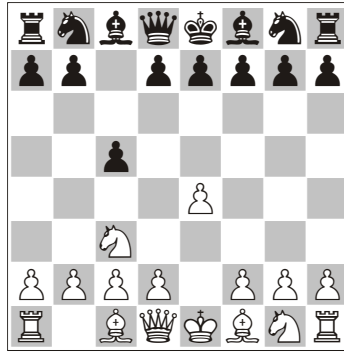
Here are the main lines of this system: 2.c3 ♜f6! 3.e5 ♞d5



B1) 4.♞f3 ♞c6 5.♙c4 ♞b6 6.♙b3 (6.♙b5 a6! 7.♙e2 d6 8.exd6 e5 or 6.♙e2 d6 7.exd6 e5 – with mutual chances in both cases) 6...c4 (6...d5 7.exd6 ♖xd6 is also not bad) 7.♙c2 ♖c7 8.0-0 (8.♙e2 g5 9.h3 ♙g7 10.0-0 ♞xe5 11.♞xg5 d5 with good counterplay for Black) 8...♞xe5 9.♞xe5 ♖xe5 10.♙e1 ♖c7 11.♞a3 e6 12.♞b5 ♖c5 13.a4 a6 14.♞d4 ♙e7 15.a5 ♞d5 16.b3 cxb3 17.♙xb3 ♞f4 18.♖f3 ♖c7 – with mutual chances.

B2) 4.d4 cxd4 5.cxd4 (it was known long ago that 5.♖xd4 e6 6.♞f3 ♞c6 7.♖e4 f5 is harmless for Black) 5...d6 (the pawn should be attacked at once; White is better after 5...♞c6?! 6.♞c3 ♞xc3 7.bxc3 d6 8.f4) 6.♞f3 (Black is also fine after 6.exd6 ♖xd6 7.♞c3 ♞c6 8.♞f3 ♙e6!?) 6...♞c6 7.♙c4 (the endgame after 7.♞c3 dxe5 8.dxe5 ♞xc3 9.♖xd8+ ♞xd8 10.bxc3 ♙d7 is harmless for Black; incidentally, he can also avoid the queen exchange with 8...♙e6!?) 7...♞b6 8.♙b5 (a sharp position, in which Black's chances are not worse, arises after 8.♙b3 dxe5 9.d5 ♞a5) 8...dxe5 9.♞xe5 ♙d7 10.♞xd7 (little is promised by both 10.♞c3 ♞xe5 11.dxe5 ♙xb5 12.♞xb5 ♖xd1+ 13.♙xd1 ♞d5=, and 10.♙xc6 ♙xc6 11.♞xc6 bxc6 12.0-0 g6 13.♙e1 ♙g7 14.♙g5 0-0!, and it is already White who must think about maintaining equality: 15.♙xe7 ♖xd4 16.♖xd4 ♙xd4 17.♞d2!)=) 10...♖xd7 11.♞c3 e6 12.♖g4 – and dynamic equality reigns on the board.

C) 2.♞c3. In recent times, this move has become very popular. Its basic idea is to avoid precise theoretical lines.



From the point of view of our basic opening principles, this move is fundamentally wrong, because we are fighting for the centre in the wrong way: we are not seizing the squares d4 and e5, but are defending e4 and d5, which we already control. Now after the logical reply $2... \text{♞c6}$ White has lost the square d4. In my view, the moves $2.c3$ and $2.f4$ are significantly more logical than $2. \text{♞c3}$, as they retain for White the possibility of seizing the centre. In reply to the fashionable variation $2. \text{♞c3} \text{ ♞c6} 3. \text{♙b5}$ the best reply (at least, the simplest one) is $3... \text{♞d4}$! (of course, $3...e5$ is also good) $4. \text{♙c4} e6$ followed by $... \text{♞a5}$ and $...b7-b5$ or $...a7-a6$ and $...b7-b5$. The resulting position is complicated, but White has no advantage. I repeat, this variation is now fairly popular, I think because it has been studied less than many others.



Boris Spassky

Instead of $3. \text{♙b5}$ there is $3.g3$ – this is the pure Closed Variation, much loved by World Champions Vasily Smyslov and Boris Spassky. The Candidates' quarterfinal match Spassky-Geller (Sukhumi 1968) was very instructive for this line. Efim Petrovich adopted the plan with $...d7-d6$, $...g7-g6$, $...♙g7$, $... \text{♞f6}$ and obtained excellent positions. Then he put the pawn on e5, and again equalised. Yet another good set-up is $...g7-g6$, $...♙g7$, $...d7-d6$, $...e7-e6$, ♞ge7 . In general, this was Geller's plan, and he regularly obtained the advantage. However, in the end, Spassky won anyway, because Geller could not withstand the attack on his king.

Another good reply to $3.g3$ is $3...e6$ $4. \text{♙g2} \text{ ♞f6} 5. \text{♞ge2} d5 6. \text{exd5} \text{ exd5} 7. d4 \text{ cxd4} 8. \text{♞xd4} \text{ ♙g4} 9. \text{♞d3}$ ($9.f3 \text{ ♙e6}$) $9... \text{♙e7} 10.0-0 0-0$ – White has a small plus,

but nothing real. However, I believe the plan with $...g7-g6$ is stronger, underlining the weakness of the square d4.

Chapter 1

A Short Historical Survey

The move 2.f4 in reply to the Sicilian Defence has been known for a long time. I think it is one of the oldest replies to 1...c5. It was seen, for example, in two games by Gioacchino Greco, dated 1620: in one the Calabresian played White, in the other Black.

François André Danican Philidor twice had to play against 2.f4. Although it would be more correct to say 'at least twice', because only 78 of the great Frenchman's games have been preserved, and only 14 of those were played on even terms, whereas in the rest he gave odds – of a pawn, piece or even a rook. So two out of 14 is not such a small number! Both times, Philidor played successfully against the Englishman Atwood.



François André Danican Philidor

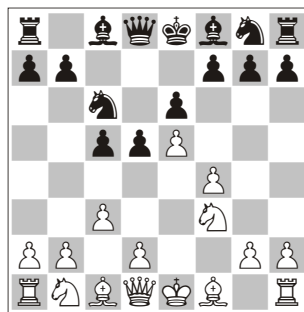
Game 1.1

Atwood, George
Philidor, François

London 1794

1.e4 c5 2.f4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.c3
d5 5.e5?!

Equality is maintained by 5.d3.



5...f5?!

A strange move. More natural and simpler is 5...♘h6, after which the initiative passes to Black.

6.d4 ♘h6 7.a3 ♘f7 8.♙e3 ♖b6
9.♗d2

Also good is 9.b4 c4!? 10.a4 – the space advantage helps White to develop the initiative on the kingside.

9...♙d7 10.♗f2?!

White has thought up an interesting, but not fully correct combination. It was simpler to continue development: 10.♙e2 ♖c8 11.b4 cxd4 (11...c4!?) 12.♘xd4 with rough equality (only not 12.cxd4? because of the standard blow 12...♘xb4!, and Black wins at least a pawn).

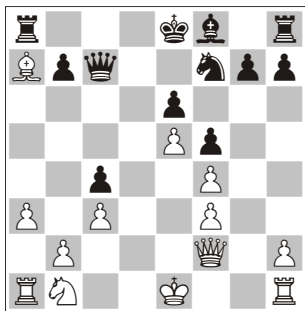
10...c4 11.♙xc4!?

Otherwise it is hard for White to complete his development, as the b2-pawn will be hanging the whole time.

11...dxc4 12.d5 ♖c7

A simple and strong positional continuation. Philidor is not seduced by the interesting complications after 12...♗cxe5!?, and correctly so; the sample variation 13.fxex5 ♖b5 14.dxe6 ♗xe6 15.0-0 g6 16.♗d4 ♖d5 17.♗d2 ♖d7 Black has a serious advantage.

13.dxc6 ♗xc6 14.♗xa7 ♗xf3 15.gxf3



15...g5!

There can be no doubt that this move encapsulates Black's main idea. In general, in our day, this has become a typical device in French Defence positions: with the help of the flank blow ...g7-g5 Black fights against the advanced pawn on e5.

16.♗e3?

White should have retained the e5-pawn, and to do so, he needs to drive the enemy queen from c7: 16.♗b6. After 16...♖c6 17.♗d2 gxf4 18.♗d4 ♖g8 Black is only slightly better. True, now after 19.0-0-0 there is the tempting blow 19...♖xa3!?, but after 20.bxa3 ♗xa3+ 21.♖b1 ♖b5+ 22.♗b3 cxb3 23.♖d2 the white position is fully defensible.

16...gxf4 17.♗xf4 ♗xe5 18.♗xe5?!

This further mistake puts White on the edge of defeat. The bishop had to be retained, although after 18.♖f1 0-0-0 (also promising is 18...♖a5!?) 19.♖e2 ♖d5 20.♖g1 ♗c5 21.♖g3 ♖hd8 22.♗d2 ♖d7 Black has a serious advantage.

18...♖xe5+ 19.♖e2 ♖xe2+ 20.♖xe2 h5?

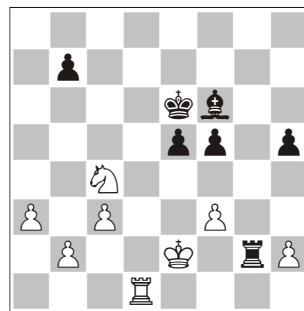
It is not clear why he did not play 20...♖g8 with a large, perhaps decisive advantage.

21.♗d2 ♖c8 ♖ 22.♖hg1 ♖f7 23.♖g2 ♗e7 24.♖ag1 ♗f6 25.♗f1 e5 26.♗e3 ♖e6 27.♖d1?

White's main trump was control of the open g-file, and now he voluntarily gives that up. A game with mutual chances would have resulted from 27.♖g6.

27...♖hg8 28.♖xg8 ♖xg8 29.♗xc4 ♖g2+

Stronger is 29...b5 30.♗e3 f4 31.♗d5 ♖g2+ 32.♖f1 ♖xb2 with advantage.



30.♖d3?

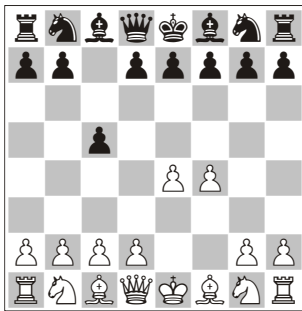
After 30.♖f1! ♖xh2 31.♖d6+ ♖e7 32.♖b6 Black would have to show ingenuity, in order not to lose. But he can still make a draw: 32...♗h4! 33.♗xe5 ♗g3 34.f4 ♖f2+ 35.♖g1 h4 36.♖xb7+ ♖f6 with equality.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Overview

Now let us examine the variation not from a historical, but from a theoretical point of view.

Playing 1.e4 c5, Black clearly does not rush with the development of his pieces, so it is quite safe for White to play 2.f4, so as to seize space on the kingside and later to try to develop the initiative there.



The move 1...c5 has a defensive character. After 2.f4 White in most cases refrains from opening the centre with d2-d4, because he considers that the black king is likely to go kingside, and he hopes to attack him there. And certainly, Black only in very rare cases puts his king on the queenside – preparing queenside castling takes time and, the main thing, the king will not feel terribly comfortable there, because the pawn on c5 allows White to open the b-file rapidly.

In addition, the move 2.f4 allows White to continue the fight for the centre: he will bring the knight to f3 and will

fight for the important squares d4 and e5. The move 1...c5 is quite slow, so after 2.f4 the white king does not face any particular danger; for example, after 2...e5 there follows the simple reply 3.♘f3 and White reaches a very favourable version of the King's Gambit.

One must also note a purely practical characteristic of the move 2.f4, namely that (like 2.c3) it sharply reduces Black's options. In the so-called Open Sicilian, after 2.♘f3 and 3.d4, White must be prepared for the most varied, extremely dissimilar systems, such as the Najdorf, Cheliabinsk, Scheveningen, Dragon, Rauzer, Paulsen, etc. But after 2.f4 Black has a much narrower choice, and in practice, he will usually choose one of the following replies:

- 1) 2...♘c6
- 2) 2...g6
- 3) 2...e6
- 4) 2...♘f6
- 5) 2...d5

But these moves (with the exception of 2...d5) do not by themselves yet determine the scheme Black will adopt. The main question consists of whether he needs to play ...d7-d5, freeing his game, or should he concentrate on the battle for the square d4? If he adopts the second plan, then the most logical thing is to adopt the set-up ♘c6 + g6. However, if we are talking in terms of immediate counterplay, then this means the

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moves 2...♘f6, 2...e6 with the idea of ...d7-d5 and, without doubt the strongest continuation, 2...d5!

Let us ask ourselves what minuses the move 2.f4 could have. It turns out that its main drawback is the same as that of 2.c3 – the weakening of the e4-pawn. The best answer to 2.c3 is rightly considered to be 2...♘f6, immediately attacking the central pawn. In the case of 2.f4, bringing out the knight to f6 is less desirable, since after 3.e5 the central pawn will be defended and it is already not so easy to attack it (although notwithstanding this, the variation 2.f4 ♘f6! is still quite interesting). In addition, White can defend the pawn with 3.♘c3, creating the threat of e4-e5, and in reply, Black is practically forced to play 3...d5. After 4.e5 d4 (4...♘e4) 5.exf6 dxc3 6.fxg7 cxd2+ 7.♖xd2 (7.♙xd2) 7...♗xd2+ 8.♙xd2 ♙xg7 we reach a complicated endgame, which requires further study.

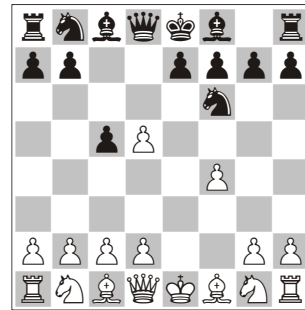
The strongest move is 2...d5!, attacking the pawn with a pawn.



After 3.e5 Black cannot possibly have any problems at all, because he has reached a favourable version of the French Defence, where his bishop on c8 is not blocked in by its own pawns. Therefore, in the diagram position,

White has two choices – exchanging on d5 or 3.♘c3. In reply to the toothless 3.d3 Black can choose between 3...♘f6 and transposition into an endgame (3...dxe4 4.dxe4 ♗xd1+ 5.♙xd1), in which White can hardly have any real advantage.

In the case of 3.exd5 the sole pawn on f4 is not a great achievement for White. But in order to achieve satisfactory play, Black should definitely reply 3...♘f6! (since after 3...♗xd5?! 4.♘c3 White has the advantage; neither 4...♗d6, nor 4...♗d8 give full equality).



Now White has a new choice – 4.c4 or 4.♙b5+; other moves lead to the loss of the extra pawn and complete equality.

A) 4.c4 e6 5.dxe6 ♙xe6, and his control over the point d4 gives Black full compensation for the pawn. Even so, White is not worse – both sides need to play very accurately, so as to maintain the balance.

B) 4.♙b5+. Now Black chooses which piece to interpose – bishop or knight. The move 4...♙d7 leads to relatively simple play and the more reliable equality, whilst after 4...♘bd7 a more complicated position arises. Depending on your opponent's play, the tournament situation and your plan for the concrete game, you can make your choice. I will offer one short variation: 4...♘bd7 5.c4

Chapter 3

Black Fianchettoes His King's Bishop

Game 3.1

Sikora Lerch, Jan

Lanka, Zigurds

Trnava B 1989 (11)

1.e4 c5 2.f4 g6

By preparing the fianchetto of the king's bishop, Black begins the battle for the central square d4. An important question is: which move should he start with: 2...♗c6 or 2...g6?



3.d4!?

Advocates of 2...♗c6 contend that 2...g6 is less accurate, precisely because of this reply. But just how dangerous for Black is the early entry of the white queen to the centre of the board? We will try to establish this.

3...cxd4

Black quite often plays 3...♙g7 here, but after 4.d5 we reach positions characteristic not of the Sicilian, but the Benoni, and so we will not look at these here.

4.♙xd4 ♗f6 5.e5 ♗c6

White has disturbed the enemy knight, and Black the white queen. Both pieces

will have to retreat, and the only question is how quickly and successfully the two sides will manage to regroup their forces.



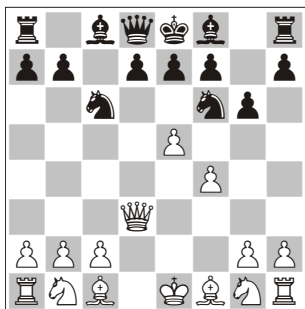
6.♙d3

This move was introduced into tournament practice by the Finnish GM, Heikki Westerinen.

White several times tried retreating the queen to d1, so as to avoid later coming under attack with tempo by moves such as ...♗b4 or ...♙f5, but without any particular success: 6.♙d1 ♗e4 (the simplest: the knight has an excellent square in the centre of the board, and occupies it with pleasure) 7.♗d2 (in reply to 7.♙e3 Black simply defends the knight with 7...d5) 7...♗xd2 8.♙xd2 ♙g7 9.♙c3 d6! (Black eliminates the cramping pawn on e5 and seizes the initiative) 10.♗f3 (10.exd6?! looks dubious because of the pawn sacrifice 10...♙xc3+ 11.bxc3 ♙a5! 12.♙d2 0-0, and the white king is liable to come under attack.) 10...0-0 11.♙b5

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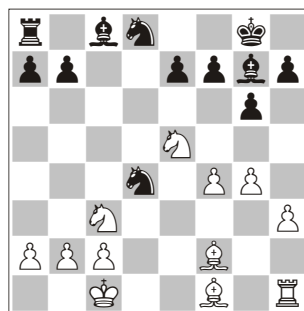
♖b6 12.♚e2 ♘g4 13.♙xc6 bxc6
14.♗f2 ♚a6 with advantage to Black,
Salmensuu-Hillarp Persson, Reykjavik
2000.



6...♞h5!

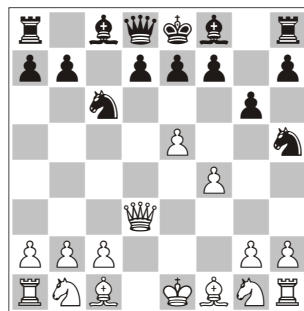
A) 6...♞g4?! is dubious because of 7.h3 ♞h6 8.g4!, and the black knight is stranded on the edge of the board. There could follow: 8...♙g7 9.♞f3 0-0 10.♙g2 ♖b6 11.♞c3 d6 12.♞d5 ♗d8 13.0-0 ♙e6 14.c4 with an obvious advantage to White, Westerinen-Sahl, Esbjerg 1982;

B) 6...♞g8 7.♞c3 ♙g7 8.♙e3 d6 9.0-0-0! (this unexpected pawn sacrifice has not been seen in practice, and is suggested by Houdini; human players have usually played more simple-mindedly: 9.exd6, when after 9...♙f5 or 9...♞f6 Black achieves good play) 9...♞h6 (on closer inspection it transpires that the pawn sacrifice was a deception, as the pawn cannot be taken: 9...dxe5 10.♗xd8+ ♞xd8 11.♙b5+ ♞c6 12.♞d5! ♞f8 13.♞c7, and White wins: 13...♗b8 14.♙xc6 bxc6 15.♗d8#) 10.♞f3 0-0 11.h3 (the start of standard play against the offside knight on h6) 11...♞f5 12.♙f2 dxe5 13.♗xd8 ♗xd8 14.♗xd8+ ♞xd8 15.g4 (after 15.fxe5 ♙h6+, followed by penetrating to e3, Black is fine) 15...♞d4 16.♞xe5±.



White has a pawn majority on the queenside and has gradually pointed his bishops at this side of the board. Black will need to show considerable accuracy, to avoid serious problems.

Returning to the position after 6...♞h5, the final target of this knight journey, just as with the retreat to g8, is the square f5. However, on h5, the knight is more actively placed and in many cases, proves useful on this square itself.



7.♞f3

A fairly toothless move. More principled is 7.♙e2, trying immediately to show up the weakness of the knight on the edge of the board. We will examine this continuation in the next game.

7...d6 8.♞c3 ♙g7

Black has a good alternative in 8...♙h6!?, so as to exploit the upside of the knight's position on h5. This is how play might then develop: 9.g3 0-0 10.♙g2 ♙g7 11.♗e3 ♞b4 12.♗e2

Chapter 6

The Immediate Central Blow 2...d5

Game 6.1

Sveshnikov, Evgeny

Sax, Gyula

Ljubljana 1994 (9)

1.e4 c5 2.f4 d5 3.exd5 ♖xd5

I have already written in the theoretical survey that I do not consider this move good enough for equality. Correct is 3...♘f6!.

4.♘c3

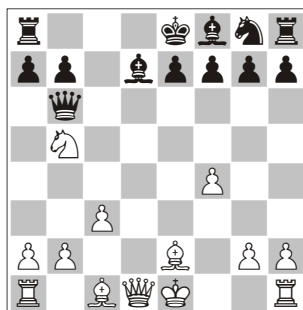


We have before us the basic position of the Scandinavian, or Centre Counter Defence, but with the addition of pawn moves to f4 and c5. I think this inclusion favours White, mainly because the black queen no longer has access to the safe square a5, whilst the move ...c7-c5 itself does not really prevent d2-d4, but significantly weakens the black queenside. The move f2-f4 is useful for White, meanwhile, as he can bring his knight to e5, where it will be defended.

4...♗d6

We will examine the main continuation 4...♗d8 later.

4...♗e6+ is sometimes played, but on this square, the queen interferes with the normal development of the other pieces, and will sooner or later have to move elsewhere. Play might continue as follows: 5.♙e2 ♘c6 6.♘f3 ♘d4 (otherwise White plays d2-d4, and it will be easier for him to exploit his lead in development in this open position) 7.♘xd4 cxd4 8.♘b5 ♗b6 (the most tenacious seems to be 8...♗d7, preventing the move c2-c3, but here too, after 9.♘a3!? ♗c7 10.0-0 e6 11.c3± White has the advantage; and in the event of 8...♗c6?! White is happy to exchange his wing pawn for the central one: 9.♘xd4 ♗xg2 10.♙f3 ♗h3 11.♗e2 a6 12.b3±) 9.c3! dxc3 10.dxc3 ♙d7 and now:



analysis diagram

11.♗d5!?. (this computer move seems to pose Black the most problems. However, 11.♗d4!?± is also good, inviting Black to enter an unpleasant endgame, and 11.a4 a6 12.♘a3 ♙e6 13.♘c4

Conclusion

The 2.f4 system has several times served me well in important games against strong opponents, when I needed to win at all costs, including games against grandmasters Sax, Tseshkovsky, Dvoirys, Neiksans and others. The fact is that in the Open Sicilian and in the 2.c3 system, they were armed to the teeth, but after 2.f4 my opponents were on their own and already started to think by about moves 5-7, while I was still in my home preparation. It must be said that even now, this system is to a considerable extent 'virgin territory'.

So from a practical point of view, the 2.f4 system is certainly worthwhile. But from a theoretical viewpoint this is also the case – Black has to play quite energetically and accurately, in order not to fall into an inferior position. I consider 2...d5 3.exd5 ♖f6 to be objectively the strongest reply, whilst 2...♗f6 3.♗c3 d5!? also leads to a complicated game with chances for both sides.

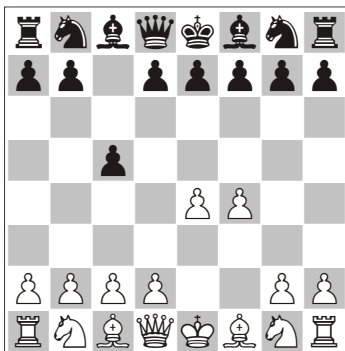
It is important to point out that by no means all masters and grandmasters, to say nothing of amateurs, risk playing 2...d5. And even here, after 3.exd5 almost half reply by taking back with the queen on d5, and then after 4.♗c3 Black has problems. Here White can obtain a stable advantage after just three moves, even against grandmasters, as shown for example by my games against Sax and Dvoirys. Of course, in more recent years, strong opponents have made this mistake more and more rarely, and usually play 3...♗f6, but here too, there is a sea of virtually unexplored positions. Very often, Black refrains from 2...d5, going instead for a set-up with ...♗c6 and ...g7-g6; in reply, I recommend a plan with c2-c3, immediately beginning the battle for the square d4: I think Black has definite problems here.

I think that with suitable preparation, it is easier for White to rack up the points in the 2.f4 system than in the main lines of the Sicilian, on which masters and grandmasters spend the great majority of their time. The resulting non-standard and fresh positions are interesting to play for both colours. However, both White and Black have definite choices. I, for example, have my whole life avoided the early development of the knight to c3, but in the course of preparing this book, I have looked at many games by English grandmasters and have come to understand that this plan is also very attractive. How many striking mates they have managed to give! Even so, against the Grand Prix Attack, it seems to be that Sergey Karjakin demonstrated the correct plan, involving the capture 9...gxf5 (see Game 5.11); in my opinion, Black should not have any problems here.

In general, White at this moment does not have any great advantage in the 2.f4 system, but a mass of fresh positions arises, and this is nowadays very important, as one more and more gets the impression that with the help of the computer, openings are being analysed out to death. In my book, I have offered many interesting, and, I hope, promising new ideas for both colours, and I would like to wish the inventive player success in his creative work. This is where it is all happening!

Index of Variations

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1.e4 c5 2.f4 g6



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1.e4 c5 2.f4 e6

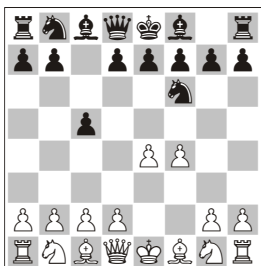


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