Part 1. 1.e4 c5 2.a3 Nc6
3.b4 cxb4 4.axb4 Nxb4 5.d4 d5 6.c3 O c6 7.exd5 Oxd5 8.Qa3

1 8...O f6 9.Qb5 ................................................................. 29
2 8...e5 9.Qb5 ................................................................. 34
3 8...e6 9.Qb5 ................................................................. 47
4 8...W e4+ 9.Q e2 ............................................................. 56
5 8...Q f5 9.Q c4 ................................................................. 64
6 8...a6 9.Q c4 ................................................................. 83
7 8...W e6+; 8...Q e6; 8...g6; 8...W d8; 8...W a5; 8...Q d7 ........... 107

3.b4 cxb4 4.axb4 Oxb4 5.d4 e6 6.c3 O c6

8 7.d5 O b8 8.d6; 7...Q ce7 8.d6; 7...Q e5 8.f4 Q g6 9.d6 ........ 122
9 7.d5 exd5 8.exd5 O b8 9.d6; 8...W e7+ 9.Q e2 ....................... 135
10 7.d5 exd5 8.exd5 O e5 9.f4 Q g6 10.W e2+ W e7 11.O a3 ........ 142
11 7.Q d3 ................................................................. 159
2...Nc6 3.b4

Part 2.  1.e4 c5 2.a3 e6

3.b4 cxb4 4.axb4 Nxb4

12  3...cxb4 4.axb4 Nxb4 5.d4 d5; 5...c6; 5...g6; 5...d6 ........ 171
13  3...cxb4 4.axb4 e5 5.b5 ................................. 187
14  3...cxb4 4.axb4 a6; 4...d5; 4...d6; 4...e6  ....................... 196
15  3...b6; 3...e5; 3...f6; 3...d6  ...................... 212

17  5.Bb2 c6 6.e5 d5 7.c4 b6 8.a3 w/o 8...Bxa3 .................. 259
18  5.Bb2 c6 6.e5 d5 7.c4 c7 8.a3 Bxa3 9.a3 ..................... 275
19  5.Bb2 c6 6.e5 d5 7.c4 c7 8.a3 w/o 8...Bxa3 .................. 289
20  5.Bb2 c6 6.e5 d5 7.c4 f4 8.h4 .............................. 297
21  5.Bb2 c6 6.e5 d5 7.c4 e7 8.a3 .................. 310
22  5.Bb2 f8; 5...f8; 5...f6  ............................. 328
23  5.c3 e7 6.d4 ................................. 343
2...e6 3.b4

Part 3. 1.e4 c5 2.a3 d6 3.b4

Part 4. 1.e4 c5 2.a3 g6 3.b4
32 3...cxb4; 3...b6; 3...g7 4.c3 w/o 4..d6 ................. 419
33 3...g7 4.c3 d6 5.g3 with cxb4 on moves 5-7 ...... 429
34 3...g7 4.c3 d6 5.g3 c6 6.b1 e6 7.g2 g7 8.ge2 ........ 439
35 3...g7 4.c3 d6 5.g3 f6 6.g2 0-0 7.ge2 c6 8.b1 ...... 446

Part 5.  1.e4 c5 2.a3 d5 3.exd5

36 3...f6 4.b5+ bd7 5.c4; 4...d7 5.xd7 xd7 6.c4 ...... 452
37 3...xd5 4.c3 e6+; 4...e5+; 4...d6 ......................... 461
38 3...xd5 4.c3 d8 5.f3 a6; 5...g6; 5...e6 .................. 469
39 3...xd5 4.c3 d8 5.f3 c6 6.b4 ......................... 476
40 3...xd5 4.c3 d8 5.f3 f6 6.d4 ......................... 490

Part 6.  1.e4 c5 2.a3 f6 3.e5 d5 4.c3

41 4...b6 5.f3; 4...e6 5.xd5 exd5 6.f3 ..................... 501
42 4...xc3 5.dxc3 e6; 5...c7; 5...d6 ..................... 511
43 4...xc3 5.dxc3 c6 6.f3 g6 7.f4 ....................... 517
44 4...xc3 5.dxc3 c6 6.f3 d5 7.exd6 ..................... 522
45 4...xc3 5.dxc3 c6 6.f3 c7 7.f4; 6...e6 7.f4 .............. 528

Part 7.  1.e4 c5 2.a3 Miscellaneous
46 2...a5; 2...a5; 2...a6; 2...e5 ......................... 534
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: those who play 2...Nc6, 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...Nc6.

3.b4! (There is an old rule, which still works, concerning the fight against the gambits. If the opponent gives – take!) 4.axb4 Nxb4 5.d4 d5 (Black should not allow his opponent to occupy space for free.) 6.c3 Nc6 7.exd5 exd5 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.Bb5 d8 10.d5 e5 (or 10...xd5? 11.exd5! exd5 12.xc7 and Black ends up a piece down) 11.f4 f7 12.f3 f6 13.fd4 – He has made his five moves and his position is already hopeless.
For example: 13...\(\text{d}b6\) (White was threatening 14.\(\text{d}e6\).) 14.\(\text{d}xe5\) fxe5 15.\(\text{w}h5\) g6 16.\(\text{w}xe5\) \(\text{g}8\) 17.\(\text{c}7+\) \(\text{f}7\) 18.\(\text{d}e6!\)

18...\(\text{g}7\) (18...\(\text{xe6}\) 19.\(\text{dxe6}\)#; 18...\(\text{xd5}\) 19.\(\text{g5}\)#) 19.\(\text{g5}\) \(\text{f}8\) 20.\(\text{xh7+}\) \(\text{f}7\)

21.\(\text{we6+}\) \(\text{xe6}\) 22.\(\text{dxe6}\)#

After 8.\(\text{d}a3\), Black might lose in only three moves: 8...e5?! 9.\(\text{b5}\) \(\text{d}8\) 10.\(\text{d}5\) \(\text{b}8\) 11.\(\text{d}6+\)--

It would take a bit more time for this to happen following 8...e6?! 9.\(\text{b5}\) \(\text{d}8\) 10.\(\text{f}4\) e5 11.\(\text{dxe5}\) \(\text{xd1}\) 12.\(\text{xd1}\) \(\text{b}8\) 13.\(\text{c}7\) \(\text{e}7\)

14.\(\text{c}1!\) 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.\(\text{a3}\) 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...Nc6 (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 Nc6 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.d3 d6 3.d3 (It is quite possible that Vishy wanted to avoid the Che-lyabinsk variation and this is why he did not play as usually – 3.d2-
d4.) 3...e5 4.Nc4 e7 5.d3 d6 6.0–0 d5 7.d5 0–0 8.f4 g4 9.xf3 exf4 10.xf4

Now, see our variation: 1.e4 c5 2.a3 (We wish to avoid the Chelyabinsk variation as well...) 2...e5 3.b3 b6 4.c4 d6 5.d3 e7 6.f4 exf4 7.xf4 f6 8. d3 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...\( \text{Nc7} \), White follows in the same fashion – 8.\( \text{xa3} \)!

This brilliant idea belongs to David Bronstein! White’s rook is planning to attack the enemy g-pawn or the h-pawn (\( \text{Eg3} \) or \( \text{Eh3} \)). Black must accept the exchange-sacrifice.

8...\( \text{Bxa3} \) 9.\( \text{Bxa3} \)

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

9...\( \text{xc6} \)

Following 9...d5 10.\( \text{c3} \)!? \( \text{c6} \) 11.\( \text{g4} \) g6 12.\( \text{b5} \), the penetration of White’s knight to the d6-outpost seems to be very unpleasant for Black.

10.\( \text{g4} \) g6 11.\( \text{d6} \)

(diagram)

There are plenty of pieces on the board, but Black is practically stalemated. 11...\( \text{e7} \) 12.\( \text{c3} \) 0–0 13.\( \text{d3} \) \( \text{Ee8} \) 14.\( \text{e4} \) \( \text{f5} \)

White wins with the beautiful variation 18.\( \text{xh5} \+ \text{g7} \) 16.\( \text{xf5} \) exf5 17.\( \text{h4} \) \( \text{h8} \)

2...\( \text{d6} \) 3.\( \text{b4} \)!

15.\( \text{f6} \+ \text{g7} \) 16.\( \text{xf5} \) exf5
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.\( f3 \) \( \mathbf{f6} \) 7.\( d3 \) 0–0 8.0–0 with a comfortable advantage for White.

4.\( c3 \) \( \mathbf{b7} \) 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.\( xc5! \) \( dx\mathbf{c5} \)

Black can already lose the game: 6...\( xe4? \) 7.\( b5+ \), but this is a trick which is too easy to see.
not to be checkmated on the f7-square.

9.e6 fxe6

10.Nxd5
This exchange is not so easy to evaluate in advance.

10...exd5 11.Qe5 Qc8 12.Qf3 and White wins the queen after 12...Qc7 13.Qf7+ Qd8 14.Qc6+.

12...f6 (This is the only way for Black not to lose quickly.)

12...f6 13.h5 g5 14.Qxg7 Qxg7 15.h6+ Qh8 16.d3

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

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.Qxh7! Qxh7 18.Qxg5! fxg5 19.Qxg5, for example: 19...Qf7 20.Qh5 Qf8 21.Qh3 and his rook joins in the battery on the g-file.) 17.e6 Qe5
1.e4 c5 2.a3 – Ten years later

18.\textit{\textipa{ex}5}! \textit{dx}e5 19.\textit{\textipa{dx}g5} \textit{fx}g5 20.\textit{\textipa{dx}g5} \textit{\textipa{eg}8} 21.\textit{\textipa{df}5} \textit{\textipa{eg}6} (Black’s rook cannot hold simultaneously the two squares: g7 and h7.) 22.\textit{\textipa{df}8}+ \textit{\textipa{eg}8} 23.\textit{\textipa{df}7}–

2...d5 3.\textit{ex}d5

3...\textit{\textipa{wd}5} (Following 3...\textit{\textipa{df}6} 4.\textit{\textipa{db}5} \textit{\textipa{dd}7} 5.\textit{\textipa{xd}d7} \textit{\textipa{wd}7} 6.c4, Black must still prove that he has some compensation for the sacrificed pawn.) 4.\textit{\textipa{dc}3} 5.\textit{\textipa{df}3} (diagram)

This is the basic position of the “Scandinavian” variation.

5...\textit{\textipa{dc}6}

If Black is reluctant to play a position with an extra pawn but under attack, he has a sim-
pler solution – 5...\textit{\textipa{df}6} 6.d4 cxd4 7.\textit{\textipa{xd}d4}!? \textit{\textipa{wd}4} 8.\textit{\textipa{xd}d4} with only a slight but stable edge for White.

6.b4!?

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

6...\textit{\textipa{cx}b}4 7.\textit{\textipa{ax}b}4 \textit{\textipa{xb}4} 8.\textit{\textipa{de}5}!

This is why White has sacrificed a pawn. He is threatening a check from the b5-square.

8...\textit{\textipa{df}6}

This is the best response for Black. It is worse for him to opt for 8...\textit{\textipa{dd}d7} 9.\textit{\textipa{xd}d7} \textit{\textipa{wd}7} 10.d4 e6 11.d5!, as well as 8...\textit{\textipa{dc}6} 9.\textit{\textipa{hh}5} \textit{\textipa{xe}5} 10.\textit{\textipa{xe}5} and White is threatening both \textit{\textipa{b}5} and \textit{\textipa{b}5}.

9.\textit{\textipa{bb}5}
Black must interpose now. What with?

9...\texttt{d}d7!

He would like to preserve his bishop 9...\texttt{d}d7?, but this loses because of 10.\texttt{f}f3 and the f7-square is defenceless.

\texttt{10.Nxd7 Nxd7}

\texttt{11.Ra4!}\?

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

\texttt{11...\texttt{c}c6 12.\texttt{f}f3 \texttt{c}c7 13.d4 e6 14.d5} with a crushing attack.

\texttt{2...g6 3.b4 \texttt{g}g7 4.\texttt{c}c3 exb4 5.axb4 \texttt{c}c6 6.b5 \texttt{d}d4}

7.\texttt{a}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...\texttt{e}6, then after 8.\texttt{b}b2 \texttt{ge}7 9.\texttt{ce}2, White wins a pawn. 9...\texttt{e}5 10.\texttt{xd}xd4 \texttt{exd}4 11.\texttt{xd}4. Naturally, Black is not obliged to lose a pawn and play 8...\texttt{ge}7, 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.

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Saint-Petersburg 2013