

Sicilian Defense

The Chelyabinsk Variation

Its Past, Present & Future

by
Gennadi Timoshchenko

Foreword by Garry Kasparov



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Russell Enterprises, Inc.
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Sicilian Defense: The Chelyabinsk Variation
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Foreword

Gennadi Timoshchenko's book on the Chelyabinsk Variation is both very interesting and necessary. Behind it lies an enormous amount of work, as will become evident as you read and especially play through the author's analysis.

In my book *Revolution in the 70s*, I have already written about a surprising metamorphosis of this once rejected and considered "anti-positional," variation. From Timoshchenko's fundamental work, readers will be able to get a definitive insight into the genesis of the Chelyabinsk Variation.

The form of the book is unusual for a monograph on an opening, but then it is not quite an opening manual. In the first, historical, part, the author tells of the initial stage of development of the variation and supplements it with his 41 games dating from 1965 to 1979. Those little-known games are annotated; some of them are of theoretical interest even today.

Along the way, Timoshchenko tells us a little about himself, and this is also quite interesting. The author carefully examines Sveshnikov's fundamental (!) book on the Chelyabinsk Variation, *The Sicilian Defense: The 5...e7-e5 Variation* published as far back as 1988, and finds hundreds of errors in it, some of them blunders. The author's criticism of Sveshnikov's book is perhaps too strict, but it is candid (and only rarely looks like nitpicking), and his version of the reasons for such a great amount of errors has its place.

Of course, the main part of the book is the third, analytical one. In its 200 chapters, more or less every important branch of the Chelyabinsk Variation is examined. It is also unusual as it contains a huge amount of novelties at various levels of importance. This became possible because of Timoshchenko's active employment of modern computers during his work.

It is necessary to mention a certain peculiarity of the author. It is quite common for Timoshchenko to use the word "novelty" [also indicated by "N" immediately after a move] in a context that may appear unusual to his readers. *For him, a novelty is any new move at any stage of any game that has been published by him (and sometimes after the game has been finished!), and, what is more, not only in the score of a game itself, but also in other analysts' comments.* However, the author's Herculean efforts on improvement/refutation of all kinds of analyses also deserve recognition.

The author examines many well-known games that have become seminal for the development of a particular variation, and his evaluation is often different and leads to a reassessment of the variation itself. The examples are, for instance, Tal-Tseshkovsky, Riga 1979 (chapter 28, variation 7.♠d5) or Shirov-Topalov, Leon 2001 (chapter 64, variation 11.♠xb5).

In chapter 163, the author analyzes the game Kasparov-Kramnik (Novgorod 1994) and points out that White's advantage in a variation formerly recommended by me is extremely negligible after 24...e3, and, in the next chapter, considers an important improvement, 16.♠e3!, that casts doubt on the whole 13...♠e7 branch. However, for some readers, this is not news as I have also managed to find the same improvement while working on volume 3 of *Garry Kasparov on Garry Kasparov* published in 2014.

Often, the author seems to make two steps forward at once in comparison with the modern theoretical state of the Chelyabinsk Variation; first, he points out that the generally accepted way is not quite the best one or it is even downright erroneous, and then shows how it is necessary to play. For example, in today's most popular defensive reaction to 9.♠d5 – ...♠xf6 – (chapters 195-196, the 9...♠e7 10.♠xf6 11.c3 0-0 12.♠c2 ♠g5 13.a4 bxa4 14.♠xa4 a5 15.♠c4 ♠b8 16. b3 ♣h8 17.♠ce3 g6 18.h4! ♠xh4 19.g3 ♠g5 20.f4 exf4 21.gxf4 ♠h4 variation), Timoshchenko first shows that the move 22.♣d2, employed most of the time, leads only to a slight advantage for White, while the rare move 22.♣f1! is able to create many more problems for Black; what is more, the usual reply, 22...f5, leads to a significant advantage for White, and the correct reply is 22...g5! (a novelty).

In chapters 135-142, the move 11.c4 is analyzed. It is very popular now and brings practical success to White; however, the author shows that by playing correctly, Black achieves equality, which is certain to greatly lift the mood of the Chelyabinsk Variation's advocates greatly. One can also note that the variation 9.♠d5 ♣a5 is exhaustively covered in a new light (chapters 123-126).

The author managed to discover many novelties in positions that are rather well-known. Here are examples that caught my eye: 16...♔d8! (chapter 52), 13...♙h6! (chapter 60), 19...a5! (chapter 84), 17...h5! (chapter 99), 15...♗g8! (chapter 148).

It should not come as a surprise that novelties for Black prevail in the book. The fact of the matter is that novelties for White are sought and found by “everybody and his uncle,” while the advocates of the variation are much less in number, so it is more difficult for them.

I believe that Timoshchenko’s book, refining theory as it does in the Chelyabinsk Variation, should provide a boost to the variation’s popularity.

Garry Kasparov

Acknowledgement

My special thanks to former world champion Garry Kimovich Kasparov, whom I had the pleasure to help during several important years of his chess career and who had the kindness to agree to write a small foreword for this book.



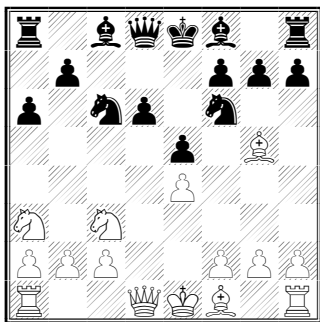
The author with Garry Kasparov in Bratislava, 2011

**Section 4. 7. ♖g5 a6 8. ♗a3 without 8...b5 9. ♕×f6 g×f6
10. ♗a3 f5 or 9. ♗d5**

Chapter 39

8. ♗a3 ♕e6 9. ♗c4 without 9...♖c8 or 8...b5

1.e4 c5 2. ♗f3 ♗c6 3. d4 c×d4 4. ♗×d4 ♗f6
5. ♗c3 e5 6. ♗db5 d6 7. ♖g5 a6 8. ♗a3!



This is certainly better than taking on f6 because it deprives Black of good counterplay in the variations with 9...f5, discussed in the previous section.

8... ♕e6

Sveshnikov pays an enormous amount of attention – 23 pages! – to this move. Taking into account the fact that the theoretical part in his book is 206 pages, this represents more than 10 per cent and roughly corresponds to 20 chapters of my book.

In my opinion, the move 8... ♕e6 clearly does not deserve this kind of attention. This is a second-rate continuation which used to be employed at the dawn of the development of the 5...e5 variation when people were still ignorant of the merits of the move 8...b5!. It has occurred in many games, but there is absolutely no need to enumerate them all, much less to re-copy them.

They occasionally play in this fashion even now, but only to confuse the opponent in the course of his preparation of main systems. I suppose that three chapters would be enough to discourage you from making this move.

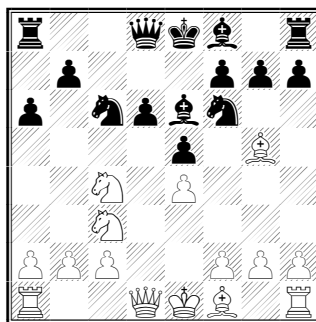
The sharp 8...d5?! fails to equalize because of 9. ♗×d5 ♖a5+ (the usual continuation 9... ♗×a3?! 10. b×a3 ♖a5+ 11. ♖d2 ♖×d2+ 12. ♗×d2 ♗×d5 13. e×d5 ♗d4 14. 0-0-0 ♗f5 15. c3 is worse. White has a serious advantage, Sax-Velimirovic, Rio de Janeiro 1979) 10. ♖d2 ♖×d2 11. ♗×d2 ♗×d5 12. e×d5 ♗b4 13. 0-0-0N ♗×a2+ 14. ♖b1 ♗b4 15. ♗c4 with an advantage for White.

The variation 8... ♕e7 9. ♗c4! ♗d4 10. ♗×f6 ♗×f6 11. ♗d5 ♕e6 12. ♗×f6+ ♖×f6 13. c3 ♗×c4 14. ♗×c4 ♗c6 also leads to a clear white advantage. And the main move 8...b5! is going to be analyzed beginning with chapter 42 to the very end of the theoretical part.

9. ♗c4!

9. ♗d5?! ♗×d5 10. ♗×f6 throws away the advantage because of 10... ♖a5!+ 11. c3 ♕e6! with equal play. 11... ♗×e4?! is weaker in view of 12. ♗c4 ♖c7 13. ♗×g7!, and now Black should play 13... ♗d4!N, with a small advantage for White. 13... ♗×g7? 14. ♗×d6+ ♖e7 15. ♗×e4, suggested by Sveshnikov, is a blunder. He believes that the game is even, while in fact White's position is won. 9. ♗×f6 ♖×f6 10. ♗d5 ♖d8! is not so good, as White has only a slight advantage here.

Let us return to 9. ♗c4!.



9...d4

This is an old move. One can say that the development of the variation 9.d4 started with this. Now it occurs only rarely. At first I intended to discuss it very briefly in the comments to the main line, but then I decided to devote a separate chapter to this move. I had two reasons to do that: the first one was that I had a great amount of material on the move 9...c8, and the second and principal one was that Sveshnikov's chapters devoted to 9...d4 contain a lot of errors which need correcting. The move 9...c8 will be discussed in the next two chapters.

It is interesting that in my database I found about a dozen recent correspondence games in which players with ratings higher than 2300 played Black and in which a new move, 9...e7!, occurs. Black is willing to sacrifice a pawn after 10.f6 f6!. Then it is possible to continue 11.d6+ (or 11.d6 e7 12.d8+ d8, and White has only a slight advantage) 11...f8 12.d4 d4! 13.e3 g5 (or 13...h4), and White does have an advantage, but it is no greater than in the main line with 9...c8. It is quite possible that in the future the theory of the move 8...e6 will develop in this direction.

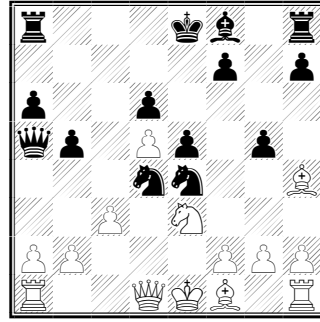
10.d5

This move can lead to interesting complications which are admittedly favorable for White. Positional players may prefer the calm 10.f6? f6 11.b6 b8 12.cd5, and although the move 12...d8 cited by Sveshnikov is not the best, White retains an undeniable advantage after other moves as well.

10...d5 11.exd5 b5?

Sveshnikov puts an exclamation mark on this move that leads to sharp positions, but objectively it is bad. The move 11...e7!, which Sveshnikov brands with a question mark, retains chances for a successful defense for Black, although after 12.c3 b5, White's advantage is obvious.

12.e3 a5+ 13.c3 d4! 14.h4 g5



15.g5!N

Sveshnikov examines only 15.g3 d3 16.d2 b4. He awards Black's moves 11, 13 and 15 with exclamation marks. Judging by the number of those, you might think that Black has almost won the game, but actually he faces very serious problems.

The variation continues 17.d4? d5 18.bxc3 bxc3 19.cxc3. Now all Sveshnikov's moves (19...g7, 19...f5 and 19...c5) lose, pure and simple. The best that he has here is 19...c8!N, on which possible is 20.d3 c3 21.d5 c5 22.b4! a5 23.d3 c2 24.f3!, etc., with a great advantage for White. Indeed, instead of 17...d5, a more precise novelty, 17...a4!, can be employed, but White possesses a solid edge even then.

15...g8!?

In the variation 15...d5 16.a4! b4! 17.cxd4 b3+ 18.e2!, White has a great advantage.

16.f4! h6!

16...xc3?! 17.bxc3 cxc3+ 18.f2 is weaker, for example, 18...f6 19.h5!+ g6 20.f5 d2+ 21.e2 dxe2 22.hd1! b2 23.f1, and Black is on the brink of defeat. Try to find an improvement in this interesting variation for yourself.

17.h4 dxc3 18.d2! d3 19.cxc3 cxc3+ 20.bxc3 dxa1 21.d2!

In this position White has a large advantage.

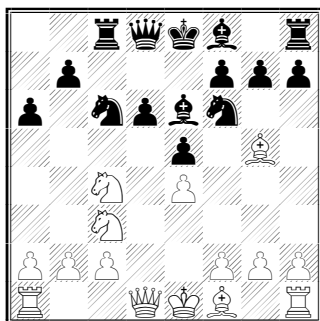
Chapter 40

8.d3 e6 9.d4 c8 without 10.f6

1.e4 c5 2.d3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.dxd4 df6 5.d3 e5 6.d5 d6 7.g5 a6 8.d3 e6 9.d4 c8 (D)

This rook move occurs in the overwhelming majority of games.

Sicilian Defense: The Chelyabinsk Variation



10. ♖d5!?

And this move, about three times as rare as 10. ♖xf6 and half again as rare as 10. ♖e3?!, nevertheless deserves serious attention because it forces Black to part with his light-square bishop.

A probable reason for such an underestimation of 10. ♖d5 in tournament practice is the strange order of presenting material in Sveshnikov's book. He explores the move order with 10. ♖d5 in a separate chapter, but only in connection with the weak 11. exd5?! (after 10... ♖xd5) instead of the correct one 11. ♖xf6!. As for the position after 11... gxf6, it is investigated in another chapter and with another, secondary move order (with 9. ♖xf6). More than that, the analysis itself contains serious errors which we are going to correct currently.

10. ♖d3?! is weak because of 10... ♖e7, and it is already White who has to worry about equalizing. 10. ♖e3?! throws away the advantage after 10... ♖e7!. It must be noted that 10... ♗b6? is bad even if Sveshnikov believes that this move deserves attention. White obtains a great advantage after 11. ♖xf6!, for example, 11... ♗xb2 12. ♖cd5 ♖xd5 13. ♖xd5 ♖b4 (or 13... gxf6 14. ♖b1) 14. ♖b1! ♖xc2+ 15. ♖d2 ♖d4+ (or 15... ♗xa2 16. ♖c3!) 16. ♖d3 gxf6 (16... ♗xf2+ 17. ♗e2 is even worse) 17. ♗e2!.

The move 10. ♖xf6! will be discussed in the next chapter.

10... ♖xd5 11. ♖xf6!

11. exd5?! is weak: 11... ♖e7 12. ♖xf6 gxf6, and Black has good play.

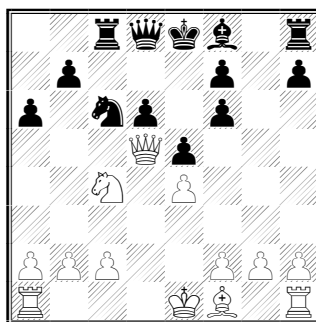
11... gxf6

This is the move for adventurous players. Capturing the bishop with the queen, 11... ♗xf6, is a rare but quite playable move. After 12. ♗xd5 ♖e7 13. c3, Black has the interesting 13... ♖d8!? (the knight intends to move to e6), for example, 14. ♖d1 (there is an interesting novelty 14. ♖e3!?) 14... ♖c6,

and though White has an advantage, Black is prepared for a long siege.

12. ♗xd5

We have already discussed the position after 12. exd5?! ♖e7.



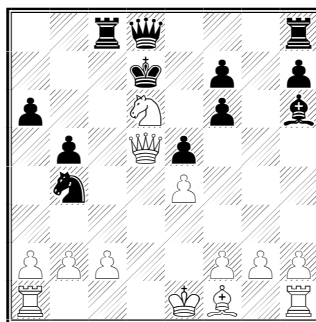
12... ♖d4!?

This is the main move. However, Sveshnikov brands it with a question mark and devotes no more than a couple of lines to it. His key moves are 12... ♖b4 and 12... b5. Well, let us explore them in more detail.

Sveshnikov is right to think that the variation 12... ♖b4 13. ♗d2 d5 14. exd5 ♖xc2+ 15. ♗xc2 ♖b4+ 16. ♖d1 b5 17. ♗e4 bxc4 18. ♖xc4 ♗b6 19. ♖c1! is insufficient for equality. I would make his evaluation more exact: in this position White has a great advantage.

Instead of 14... ♖xc2?!+, it is better to play 14... ♗xd5, but in the ensuing endgame White has a clear advantage. Instead of 16... b5?!, Black has a better move, 16... ♗xd5+, but in the resulting position he does not have full compensation for his piece.

In the end of the chapter about the move 12... b5 in Sveshnikov's book a sharp position arises; however, he commits an awful blunder in the variation that leads to it. After 13. ♖e3 ♖h6 14. ♖f5 ♖b4?? 15. ♖xd6+ ♖d7, White has a choice.



Sveshnikov, who has for the umpteenth time copied somebody else's analysis without checking it (this time the original analyst is Simic), holds that after 16.♘xf7+ ♖c6 17.♘b7+ ♖c5, and so on and so forth for ten lines, "Black beats back the opponent's attack successfully." And yet in the game Schmidt-Hohlbein, 1995, White made a move that had not been included in analysis, 17.♞d1!, and after 17...♟xc2+ 18.♞e2 ♟d4+ 19.♞xd4 exd4 20.♟xc8 d3+ 21.♞f3, Black resigned.

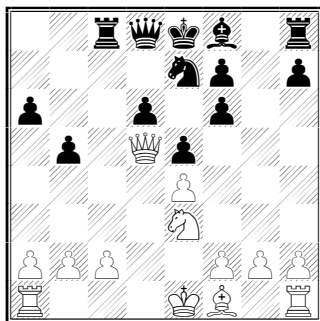
But there was another, even sadder story. In 1991 during the European Club Cup tournament in the game Smagin-Kharlov, Black, with boundless confidence in Sveshnikov's book, "caught" his opponent in a variation that included 17...♞c5. But instead of 18.♘a7 promised by Sveshnikov, White played 18.♞d1!. This move, though weaker than 17.♞d1!, was sufficient for a win.

Sveshnikov himself believes that instead of the winning move 16.♘xf7!+ "there is a more vigorous continuation, 16.♟xb5!+ axb5 17.♘xb5+, with a strong attack" (then there follows that neatly copied analysis by Simic). However, this attack is parried after 17...♞e6 18.♞d1 ♟xc2+ 19.♞e2 ♟d4!+ (19...♘xd6?? loses) 20.♞xd4 exd4 21.♘d5+ ♞e7 22.♟f5+ ♞e8 23.♘xd8+ ♞xd8 24.♟xh6 ♞d7!N, with equal play.

There is another line that is even more promising, 17...♞xd6!N. After 18.♞d1+ ♞e6 19.♞xd8 ♟xc2+ 20.♞f1 ♞hxd8 21.g3 ♟d2, 21...♟d4 or even 21...♟e1!?, Black feels quite comfortable.

Thus, we must vigorously award the "vigorous" move 16.♟xb5 with a couple of question marks. Instead of 14...♟b4?!, Black should play 14...♟d4!. The best reply is 15.c3! (15.♟xd6+? is bad: 15...♞e7 16.c3 ♘xd6 17.♘xd6 ♞xd6 18.cxd4 ♞c2, and Black stands better), and then 15...♟xf5 16.exf5 0-0 17.♟e2. Despite White's advantage, the struggle is far from being over.

Sveshnikov thinks that instead of 13...♟h6, "the move 13...♟e7!?" deserves serious investigation."



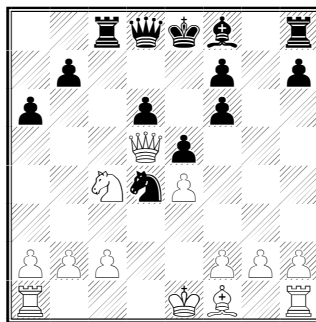
Well, I had undertaken this serious investigation and came to the conclusion that this knight move is highly dubious.

First, after 14.♘b7 ♘a5 +15.c3 ♞c7 16.b4 ♞xb7 17.bxa5, the correct move is 17...♟h6, and White has an advantage in the endgame (Murey-Jamieson, Lucerne 1982).

Second, Sveshnikov's recommendation 17...♞d8? is wrong, as after 18.a4 bxa4, chances are far from being equal. White has a great advantage, for example, 19.♞xa4! (19.♟xa6 ♞a7 20.♟b5 ♞xa5 21.♟xa4 is slightly weaker) 19...♞b1+ 20.♟d1 and ♟d3.

Finally, 14.♘d3! ♟h6 15.♟e2! is even stronger as now White's advantage is obvious.

Let us return to 12...♟d4.



13.♟d3!

In Sveshnikov's opinion (this time he refers to Larsen), White is able to refute 12...♟d4 by 13.0-0-0 ♘c7 14.♞xd4!, so there is no point in discussing 12...♟d4 any longer.

However, after the correct move 13...b5!, White has to think about equalizing, for example, 14.♟e3 ♟h6 15.c3 ♞c5 16.♘b7 ♞c7 17.♘xa6 (17.♘d5 b4) 17...♘b8 18.♞b1 ♞a7 19.♘xa7 ♘xa7 20.cxd4 ♟xe3 21.♟xb5+ ♞e7 22.fxe3. Thus, the question mark should be transferred from 12...♟d4 to 13.0-0.

13...b5!

13...♞e7?! is weaker because of 14.♘a5!. Then in Varavin-Kharlov, Elista 1994, there was 14...♞c5! 15.♘d2 ♘c7 16.c3 ♟e6 17.♟e3 ♟h6 18.0-0 ♘b6 19.g3 ♞c6 20.♞ae1 ♞g8 21.♞h1 ♟xe3 22.♞xe3, and White has a solid advantage.

In Yemelin-Kharlov, St. Petersburg 1998, Black played 14...♞xc4 15.♟xc4 ♟xc2+ 16.♞e2 ♟xa1?N (16...♟d4!+ is much stronger), and after 17.♞c1 ♟h6 18.♟xf7+ ♞xf7 19.♞c7 ♞d8 20.♘d5+ ♞f8 21.♞xe7 ♞xe7 22.♘xb7+ ♞d7 23.♘c8 d5 24.♘g8 ♟f8 25.exd5, White won.