



COLUMNISTS

Checkpoint

Carsten Hansen

*Rating Chart*

– A poor book.



– Not very good.



– A useful book.



– A good book.

Reviewed this month:*The Sharpest Sicilian*

by Kiril Georgiev & Atanas Kolev

Chess Explained: The c3 Sicilian

by Sam Collins

*The Sveshnikov Variation
of the Sicilian (DVD)*

by Loek van Wely

Classical Sicilian 2nd edition (CD)

by Anthony Kosten

En Passant*Starting Out: Sicilian Najdorf (CD)*

by Richard Palliser

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian (CD)

by Richard Palliser

Starting Out: The Sicilian Dragon (CD)

by Andrew Martin

Seven Sicilians

It is rather amazing that of the seven new releases featuring the Sicilian Defense that are under scrutiny, only two of them cover the same variation; namely, the very popular Najdorf variation. Otherwise we have a CD from Tony Kosten presenting a black repertoire, two main line offerings with the Dragon and Sveshnikov, and two sidelines featuring the Closed and c3-Sicilian. In the *En Passant* section, I will look at three of the recently released Everyman Chess CDs. As promised in last month's [column](#), we will examine them with regards to the functionality of using a CD instead of the book.

The Sharpest Sicilian by Kiril Georgiev & Atanas Kolev, Chess Stars 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 272pp., \$31.95

It is always refreshing when you have a top player





– An excellent book.

willing to discuss his favorite opening in detail. In case you're not familiar with their names, Kiril Georgiev is a Bulgarian grandmaster who has been rated between 2650 and 2700 for many years and is a renowned specialist in the Najdorf variation as black, while Atanas Kolev is a solid Bulgarian grandmaster, who also specializes in the Najdorf. In the "Foreword from the Publisher," we learn some interesting details:



"All top players employ the Poisoned Pawn Variation and Kiril has been using it with big success for twenty years already. The Sozin was also in perfect theoretical health although Nisipeanu occasionally has been trying to shake this opinion. As a publisher I saw a problem with the treatment of the English Attack. Georgiev plays it in the Scheveningen style with ...e6, but it not approve of it against 6 Be2. This structure is very flexible. It leads to extremely complex positions which need a whole book to delve in them. At the same time 6 Be2 e5 is much easier to play and perhaps even objectively best.

"Unfortunately there is no way to build a repertoire based on 6 Be2 e5 and 6 Be3 e6. By changing the move order with 6 Be3 e6 7 Be2, White could easily outmanoeuvre us to unfamiliar ground.

"Finally we decided to advocate 6...e5 to both bishop developments on move 6. That called for a co-author and the other coach of Bulgarian teams grandmaster Atanas Kolev (current Elo 2538) turned to be the best choice. He plays these positions with both colours and lately has spent a lot of time analysing them. In fact he has been intrigued by the 'Najdorf project' ever since its start and ardently emphasized the merits of the 6...e5 approach. As an editor I endeavoured to prune down the flood of variations which he summoned to prove his assessments and novelties.

"The result of 14 month's work is an ambitious book, which aims to arm you with a complete repertoire against 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3. All topical variations are covered in depth. You'll find a lot of original analysis on the most critical positions of the Najdorf.

"The material is up-to-date to February 10 2007. Parts 3, 4 and 5 are written by Atanas Kolev, all the rest is from Kiril Georgiev."

The contents are divided as follows:

- Foreword from the Publisher (2 pages)
- About the Structure of This Book (1 page)
- Introduction (1 page)
- Part 1 The Poisoned Pawn 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Bg5 (60 pages)
- Part 2 The Sozin 6 Bc4 (22 pages)
- Part 3 The Classical 6 Be2 (22 pages)
- Part 4 The English Attack 6 Be3 (61 pages)
- Part 5 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 a4 (8 pages)
- Part 6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 f4 (15 pages)
- Part 7 The Fianchetto 6 g3 (23 pages)
- Part 8 The Moscow Variation 3 Bb5+ (25 pages)

- Part 9 Rare Lines (14 pages)
- Part 10 Alternatives on Move 3 (10 pages)
- Index of Variations (3 pages)

I'm actually stunned to see the Poisoned Pawn variation being recommended in a repertoire book for black, as no one else has done so, and because it is such an unlikely choice. However, as mentioned above, all the top players employ the Poisoned Pawn, accepting that White can force a draw if he really wants one. It is because of this, along with the prospect of endless hours of memorization, that I have never taken up this line or even allowed it as white. However, Georgiev takes time to dispel such fears:

“There is a common myth that the Poisoned Pawn (PP) variation requires from the players to memorise reams of theory to stay on their feet. **In my opinion, compared to the trendy 7...Nbd7 or 7...Qc7, it is much easier to learn.** The reason for that is simple. Computer analyses and decades of practical tests at top level extremely narrowed the safe path for both sides in the PP. The risk of facing a novelty is quite minimal while 7...Nbd7 is still in development and every new game introduces new problems to worry about. In the diagram position [CH: after Black's 7...Qb6!?] if White refrains from sacking the b2-pawn and retreats with 8 Nb3, he gets worse versions of the other 7th move Black alternatives because the knight is passive on b3 and there nothing to sacrifice on b5 or e6. Grandmaster Tony Kosten writes about 8 Nb3 (in Chesspublishing.com) ‘I feel that if everyone played this as White then everyone would play 7...Qb6 as Black!’...”

Then Georgiev presents the game Vallejo Pons-Kasparov, Moscow 2004, which ends with a draw by perpetual check after twenty-five moves. He explains that if White deviates from this main line, it is usually to his own detriment, and he reveals that as black, he has “scored 65% against an opposition of 2570 average rating and 75% against grandmasters above 2600 ELO.” This is an amazing score for Black in any opening, and along with the other excellent points he makes, it is good reason to consider this opening.

Each chapter is divided into two sections. The first is called “Quick Repertoire,” and it demonstrates the basics of the opening to get you started. The second part, “Step by Step,” delves into the analysis in greater detail. However, I found the quick repertoire segments are essentially a waste of time and space, no matter how well-meaning they are, because the coverage barely scratches the surface of theory, and it is insufficient for the stronger players that are likely to use this book. Even with 262 pages, it seems unlikely that you can actually provide a full repertoire for Black in the Najdorf without sidestepping main lines and taking some serious shortcuts. Entire books have been written on the English Attack alone which are longer than the present title. This volume condenses the English Attack to sixty-one pages, thirteen of which are devoted to the quick repertoire. The eleven pages devoted to the complete games only marginally adds to the theory, but it does help to illustrate several high-class encounters with rather thorough and instructive annotations that cross reference the previous two sections.

Embracing the task of playing such an opening demands an enormous commitment on the part of the reader to keep abreast with the theoretical developments. Kolev notes that the starting point of this variation begins at move thirteen and that “novelties appear on move 30 or more and a significant number of games are won during home preparation. The opposite kingside attacks leave little room for strategy and any move could be decisive.” Such work can undoubtedly be rewarding, both for your chess understanding and your results; however, I seriously doubt the practical value for the average player. For those rated less than 1900, it is

a poor investment of time. Still, the book is well-researched and stronger players will find it enlightening.

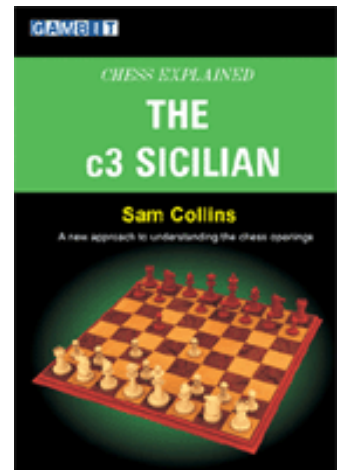
My assessment of this book: 

Order *The Sharpest Sicilian*

by Kiril Georgiev & Atanas Kolev

Chess Explained: The c3 Sicilian by Sam Collins, Gambit Publications 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, Paperback, 112pp., \$19.95

The idea behind this series of books is to present twenty-five recent and highly instructive games, which are annotated in detail to help the reader gain a thorough understanding of the opening and ensuing middlegame structures. The focus is on verbal explanations of ideas, plans and maneuvers rather than memorizing variations. Yet stronger players will be able to benefit from these books as well, because the authors often tend to offer quite a few new ideas to the openings. This is one of the benefits of having a specialist discuss a favorite topic.



The material is divided as follows:

- Symbols/Bibliography (1 page)
- Introduction (2 pages)
- 1 2...Nf6: Lines with cxd4 (22 pages)
- 2 2...Nf6: Main Line with 6 Bc4 (14 pages)
- 3 2...Nf6: White Avoids an Early d4 (15 pages)
- 4 2...d5: Black Plays ...Nf6 and ...e6 (13 pages)
- 5 2...d5: 4...Nf6 5 Nf3 Bg4 (or 5...Nc6) (12 pages)
- 6 2...d5: Alternatives to 4...Nf6 (9 pages)
- 7 Second-Move Alternatives for Black (18 pages)
- Index of Variations (1 page)
- List of Games (1 page)

Collins begins by arguing his case for playing the c3-Sicilian:

“I’ve never been a fan of negative campaigning, but I’m going to indulge a little here. Some facts about the Open Sicilian:

1) White has never, ever, shown a clear route to an advantage

2) Learning and maintaining a complete repertoire as White in the Open Sicilian requires the single largest time investment of any chess project.”

Further in the introduction, he addresses some of the most common criticism of the topical variation:


“**The c3 Sicilian gives no advantage:** Fine, but nor does the Open Sicilian. Clearly White can’t win the game with best play, but he gets an edge from the opening more often than Black does.

The c3 Sicilian is boring: This one has a little more foundation. Certainly, the positions arising in this book are generally less complicated than in the Najdorf or Sveshnikov. Several of the main lines result in endgames, which are not to everyone’s taste. That said, White has some decent attacking chances in many lines, especially those where he obtains an isolated queen’s pawn (IQP) or related structure.”

Such honesty is wonderfully refreshing, because most opening books are written with some bias, and while Collins may favor White’s chances slightly more than Black’s, he generally “calls ‘em as he sees them.” In addition, I found his game commentary to be very instructive, insightful and even enjoyable.

There is a fair share of variations in the annotations to the main games, but there is far more prose, and you can actually read the book without using a chess board and still learn plenty in the process.

The games are well-chosen and the text is well-written, so it is rather easy to recommend this book to a wide audience, whether you play the c3-Sicilian or not. Of course, those who play this opening as white or face it as black should buy this book without hesitation.

My assessment of this book: 

[Order](#) *Chess Explained: The c3 Sicilian*
by Sam Collins

The Sveshnikov Variation of the Sicilian (DVD) by Loek van Wely, ChessBase GmbH 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$34.95

Dutch grandmaster Loek van Wely has joined ranks with the likes of Shirov and begun annotating some of his best games using the ChessBase Media System. With the exception of one game, all of the games on this DVD feature Van Wely as black.

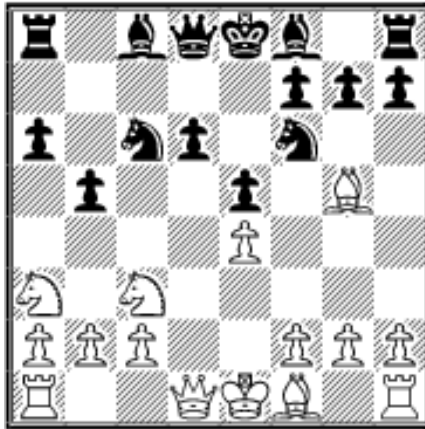
The contents are as follows:

- Intro
- Sulskis-Van Wely, Moscow 2004
- Ehlvest-Van Wely, Moscow 2004
- Amonatov-Van Wely, Moscow 2004
- Anand-Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2006
- Topalov-Van Wely
- Shirov-Van Wely, Monaco 2003
- Kramnik-Van Wely, Monaco 2005
- Shirov-Topalov
- Kramnik-Van Wely, Wijk aan Zee 2005



- Shirov-Van Wely, Monaco 2004
- Anand-Van Wely, Calvia 2004
- Vallejo Pons-Van Wely

The topic of discussion here is the very popular Sveshnikov Variation, which arises after 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6, and now usually 7 Bg5 a6 8 Na3 b5.




Judging from the introduction, you would think that viewing this DVD would be a torment to watch, as Van Wely struggles his way through the prose, clearly unprepared to speak in English, and not knowing which words to use or even what to say. It is so painful to watch that you actually feel sorry for the guy. Yet, it surprises me that they didn't redo this segment, as neither Van Wely nor the producers could have been satisfied with it.

Van Wely explains that he took up the Sveshnikov because he didn't seem to be capable of protecting his king in the Najdorf against strong opponents. But he fared better after adopting the Sveshnikov, and even used it to nearly win the very strong Aeroflot Open in Moscow in 2004!

Unlike other presenters on these ChessBase DVDs, Van Wely appears a bit sterile and impersonal. For example, Shirov likes to relate the circumstances of the game and other matters that make you feel like it's a personal lesson. In contrast Van Wely is very business-like and concentrates on getting to the first critical position of the game and then begins the narrative, although he does lighten up a bit as the DVD progresses.

The theoretical relevance of the presentation is rather limited and the annotations are at times superficial, even though explanations for the average player become more plentiful towards the end. The benefit of this style of presentation is to have a top player discuss his games as if you were sitting across the board from him in the skittles room. Strong players looking for deep theory should buy a book.

My assessment of this DVD: 

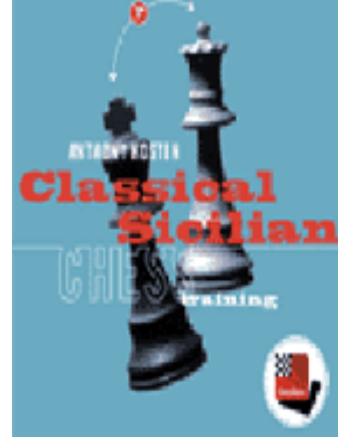
*The Sveshnikov Variation
of the Sicilian (DVD)*
by Loek van Wely

Classical Sicilian 2nd edition (CD) by Anthony Kosten, ChessBase GmbH 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$27.95

In this second edition CD, English grandmaster Anthony Kosten discusses the Classical Sicilian, which arises after 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 (or as Kosten



explains after 2...Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6, depending on which line he prefers against 3 Bb5) 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6. Now White's two primary choices are 6 Bg5, the Richter-Rauzer Attack or 6 Bc4, the Sozin Variation, while lines such as 6 Be2, 6 Be3, 6 f4, and 6 f3 play secondary roles. However, it is important to note that this CD does *not* cover 6 Bg5, but Kosten promises it will be dealt with in a separate volume.



Thus, the contents are divided as follows:

- Introduction
- Sozin 6 Bc4 (7 database texts)
- Boleslavsky 6 Be2 e5 (8 database texts)
- 6 Be3 (6 database texts)
- The Modern 6 f3 (3 database text)
- 6 f4 (1 database text)
- Other sixth moves (1 database text)

Including the introduction, there are a total of twenty-seven database texts, linking in more than nine-hundred games, of which two-hundred are annotated, forty-six of those by Kosten exclusively for this release.

It also noteworthy that against the Sozin, only 6...Qb6 is discussed. While this move is becoming increasingly popular, it is hardly the entire story of the Sozin, so not finding separate database texts on the other lines against 6 Bc4 is somewhat surprising. However, in the first text the alternatives 6...Bd7, 6...e5, 6...g6 and 6...Na5 are all mentioned, while Kosten calls 6...e6 a Scheveningen and thus outside the scope of this CD.

The games are well-chosen and more than adequately annotated. The database texts are also well-written, easy to follow, and allow the reader to gain a good understanding of the opening. Nonetheless, not all of the linked games have annotations. Often there is just a bare game score, where you don't know when the losing mistake was made or what the evaluations were along the way.

If you want to take up this line of the Sicilian, this is definitely a product you'll want to have, even if you have to make a further investment for the Richter-Rauzer.

My assessment of this CD:



Classical Sicilian 2nd edition (CD)

by Anthony Kosten

Starting Out: Sicilian Najdorf (CD) by Richard Palliser, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$23.95

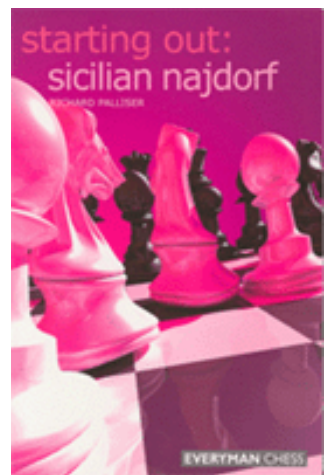
I reviewed the book upon which this CD is based in




[August 2006](#), and since the contents are exactly the same, please refer to the earlier review for more detail.

This excellent introductory work on the Najdorf includes the following chapters:

- Bibliography
- Acknowledgements
- About this publication
- Introduction
- Chapter 1: The Positional 6 Be2
- Chapter 2: The English Attack with 6...e5
- Chapter 3: The English Attack with 6...Ng4
- Chapter 4: Fischer's 6 Bc4
- Chapter 5: 6 Bg5 and Black Prevents e5
- Chapter 6: 6 Bg5 and Black Allows e5
- Chapter 7: The Tricky 6 f4 and 6 g3



In many ways the CD is even better than the book, because the material (in ChessBase format) is extraordinarily accessible, and you have the added benefit of being able to use a chess engine while studying the material. Therefore, one can derive much more information and further their understanding of the opening.

My assessment of this CD: 

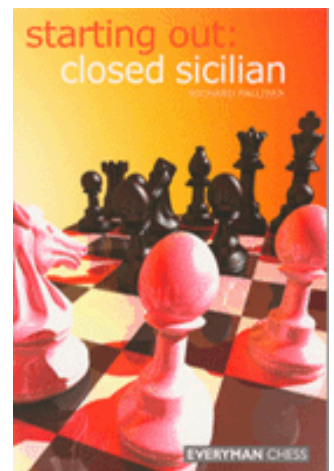
**[Order](#) *Starting Out: Sicilian Najdorf*
(CD)
by Richard Palliser**

Starting Out: Closed Sicilian (CD) by Richard Palliser, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$23.95

This work is easily one of the best ever done on the Closed Sicilian and really allows you to understand the nuances of this important Anti-Sicilian. I reviewed the book upon which this CD is based in [August 2006](#), and since the contents are exactly the same, please refer to the earlier review for more detail.

The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography
- Acknowledgments
- About this Publication
- Introduction
- Chapter One: The Main Line with 6 f4 e6
- Chapter Two: 6 f4 and Black's Other Defences
- Chapter Three: 6 Be3 e6 and 6...e5



- Chapter Four: 6 Be3 and Black's Alternative Set-ups
- Chapter Five: The Tricky 6 Nge2 and 6 Nh3
- Chapter Six: Early Black Deviations
- Chapter Seven: Crafty Move-orders with 2 d3 and 2 g3

Again, in many ways the CD is even better than the book, because the material (in ChessBase format) is extraordinarily accessible, and you have the added benefit of being able to use a chess engine while studying the material. Therefore, one can derive much more information and further their understanding of the opening.

My assessment of this CD: 

**Order *Starting Out: Closed Sicilian*
(CD)**

by Richard Palliser

Starting Out: The Sicilian Dragon (CD) by Andrew Martin, Everyman Chess 2007, Figurine Algebraic Notation, \$23.95


My original [review](#) of the book upon which this CD is based found it wanting in many departments. The author takes far too many shortcuts and does not focus equal attention on all of the important lines.



The material is divided as follows:

- Bibliography
- About this Publication
- Introduction
- Chapter One: The Yugoslav Attack
- Chapter Two: The Yugoslav with 9 0-0-0 & 9 g4
- Chapter Three: The 9 Bc4 Yugoslav
- Chapter Four: The Main Line and Soltis Variation
- Chapter Five: The Classical Variation
- Chapter Six: The Modern 6 Bc4
- Chapter Seven: The Levenfish Attack
- Chapter Eight: Other Tries for White

However, to reiterate, in many ways the CD is even better than the book, because the material (in ChessBase format) is extraordinarily accessible, and you have the added benefit of being able to use a chess engine while studying the material. Therefore, one can derive much more information and further their understanding of the opening.

My assessment of this CD: 

Order *Starting Out: The Sicilian Dragon*

(CD)

by Andrew Martin

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