

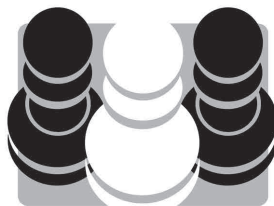
Playing 1.e4

Sicilian Main Lines

– a grandmaster guide

By

John Shaw



Quality Chess
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Preface

The purpose of *Playing 1.e4* is to supply a top-class repertoire for White. The first volume covered the Caro-Kann, 1...e5 and minor lines. The second volume covered the French Defence and some Sicilian sidelines. The repertoire is completed by the present volume on the Sicilian Main Lines. My original intention was to create a two-volume complete repertoire, with the French and Sicilian in just one volume, but the material grew to such an extent that a split was essential.

Our idea in creating this 1.e4 repertoire was to choose serious lines for White, but ideally not to the same level of theoretical depth as a Grandmaster Repertoire book. But the main lines of the Sicilian challenge that approach – we had to make a choice between a repertoire that is promising but complicated, or easy-to-learn but unthreatening to Black. We chose the former.

I recommend the Open Sicilian, as I feel the anti-Sicilians are not aggressive enough to form an ambitious repertoire. And some of the major Open Sicilian lines, particularly the Sveshnikov and Najdorf, must be met by heavy-duty lines if White is to threaten them. So a significant effort will be required from the reader in some places, but that is the nature of being an ambitious 1.e4 player. Given the amount of original analysis and new ideas in this book, I am confident that the reader's efforts will be well rewarded over the board.

Arguably the four biggest defences met in this volume are the Najdorf, Sveshnikov, Dragon and Taimanov. We target the Najdorf with the English Attack, when Black must thread his way through a narrow path to avoid disaster, and even then we have many dangerous innovations. Against the Sveshnikov our positional main line with 9.♘d5 gives nagging pressure. We meet the Dragon with the modern main line 9.0–0–0, while against the Taimanov we are also on-trend, with dangerous 7.♞f3 ideas.

As with my previous books for Quality Chess, my name is on the cover, but creating the book was a team effort. I had the final say on words and analysis, but I was aided by GM Jacob Aagaard, IM Andrew Greet and Nikos Ntirlis.

I hope you enjoy reading this book, and that *Playing 1.e4* leads you to success.

John Shaw
Glasgow, May 2018

Introduction to the Repertoire

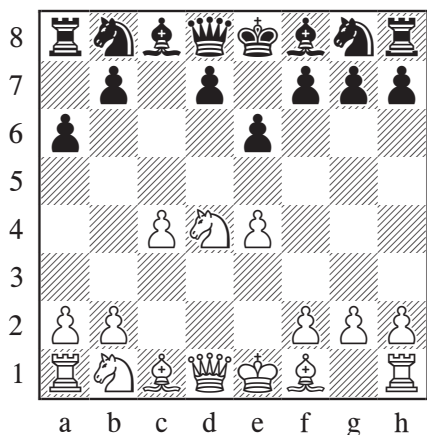
After 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 we shall deal with Black's three main second moves roughly in the following order: 2...e6, 2...♗c6 then 2...d6. Admittedly some defences – such as the Four Knights, Taimanov or Classical – could use two different second moves, but that should not trouble us unduly.

Chapter 1 Four Knights

After 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 ♗c6 we select the direct and effective 6.♗xc6.

Chapter 2 Kan

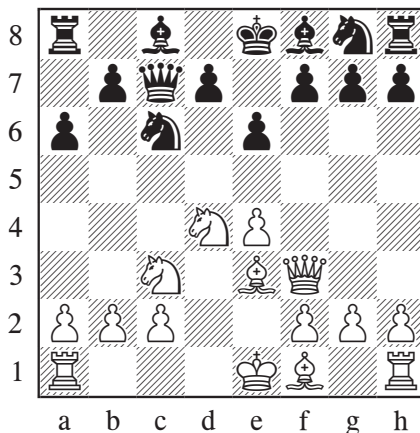
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 a6 reaches the flexible Kan, when we go for the space-gaining 5.c4. This will be a common theme throughout the repertoire: when we can play c2-c4, we usually do.



Chapter 3 Taimanov

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗c6 5.♗c3 ♖c7 is the main line of the Taimanov,

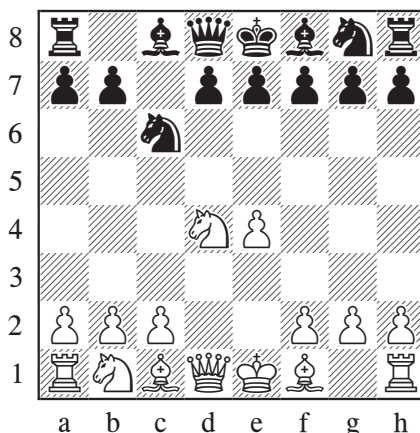
when our line is the active and trendy 6.♙e3 a6 7.♗f3.



Chapters 4-6

Lowenthal, Kalashnikov and Sveshnikov

These three chapters branch out from the position after 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4.



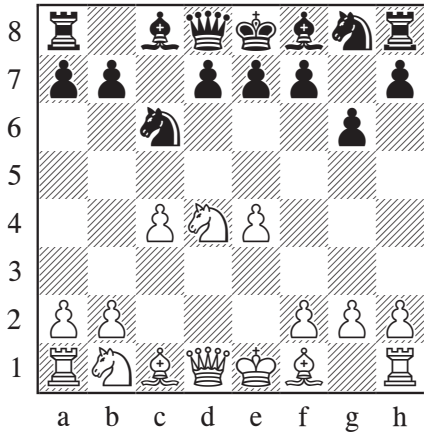
4...e5 5.♗b5 a6 is the Lowenthal, which of course we meet with 6.♗d6† ♙xd6 7.♗xd6.

4...e5 5.♗b5 d6 is the Kalashnikov, which allows our standard advance 6.c4.

4...♟f6 5.♞c3 e5 is the Sveshnikov, one of the toughest tests for a 1.e4 player. I recommend the positional main line 6.♞db5 d6 7.♙g5 a6 8.♞a3 b5 9.♞d5.

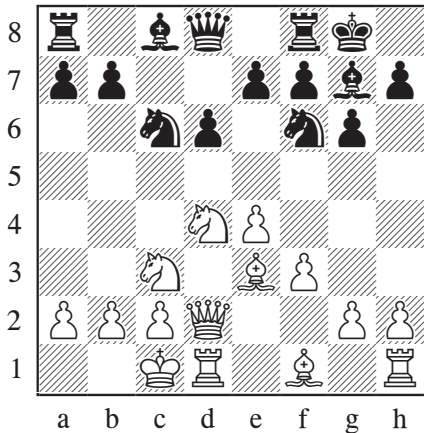
Chapter 7 Accelerated Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 ♞c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 g6 allows our favourite space-gainer, so we go 5.c4.



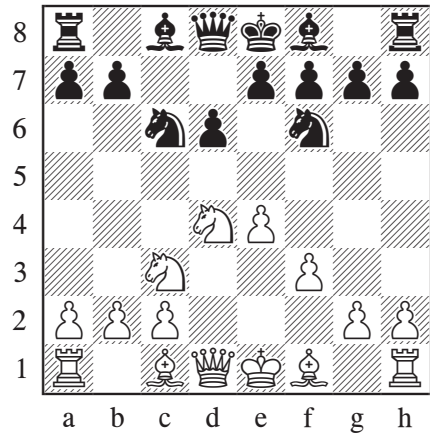
Chapter 8 Dragon

I recommend meeting 1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♟f6 5.♞c3 g6 with the main line 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♞d2 ♞c6 and then 9.0-0-0, which gives more controlled play than the hair-raising ♙c4 lines.



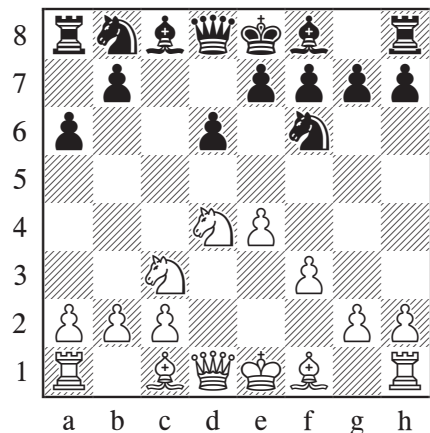
Chapter 9 Classical

After 1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♟f6 5.♞c3 ♞c6 we go for 6.f3, which is essential to keep our repertoire complete, as will be clearer when you see our line against the Najdorf-Scheveningen.



Chapters 10-11 Najdorf

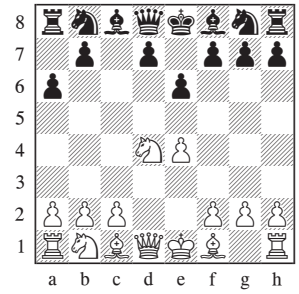
Against the mighty Najdorf 1.e4 c5 2.♞f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♟f6 5.♞c3 a6 our line is 6.f3.



Chapter 10 covers lines with ...e7-e6, including Scheveningen lines which can reach here using many move orders.

Chapter 11 covers ...e7-e5 lines.

Chapter 2

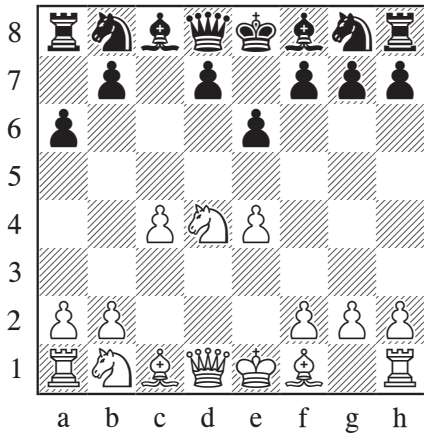


Kan

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4

A) 5...b6	47
B) 5...g6	48
C) 5...♘f6 6.♘c3	49
C1) 6...d6?! 7.♙e2 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.f4!?	50
C11) 9...♖e8	51
C12) 9...♗c7	53
C2) 6...♗c7 7.a3	55
C21) 7...♘xe4?! 8.♘xe4 ♗e5 9.♗c2!	56
C211) 9...♗xd4	56
C212) 9...f5	58
C22) 7...b6 8.♙e3 ♙b7 9.f3	62
C221) 9...♘c6	63
C222) 9...d6	65
C23) 7...♘c6 8.♙e3	69
C231) 8...b6	69
C232) 8...♙d6!?	71
C233) 8...♙e7	74
C3) 6...♙b4 7.♗d3!?	77
C31) 7...♙xc3†!?	78
C32) 7...d5	78
C33) 7...0-0	81
C34) 7...♗c7	82
C35) 7...d6 <i>Game 9</i>	83
C36) 7...♘c6 <i>Game 10</i>	87

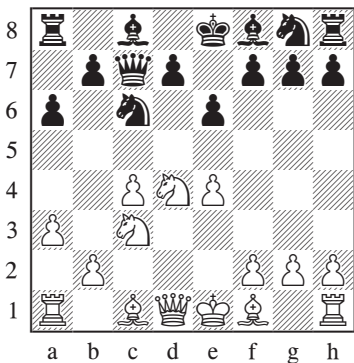
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.c4



One of the themes of our repertoire is that, given the choice between alternatives of roughly equal value, we will usually opt for a set-up with c2-c4. In the case of the Kan, the text move ranks well behind 5.♘c3 and 5.♙d3 in terms of popularity, but I believe it offers at least as many chances for an opening advantage.

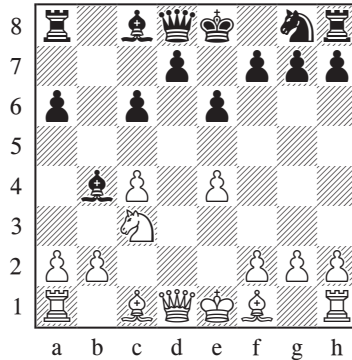
We will consider the sidelines **A) 5...b6** and **B) 5...g6**, before moving on to **C) 5...♘f6**, which is the main line by far. I also checked a few other oddities:

5...♙c7 has been a frequent choice but it almost always transposes to one of our main lines after a subsequent ...♘f6. After 6.♘c3 ♘c6 7.a3 I don't see any advantage to Black's chosen move order, for instance:

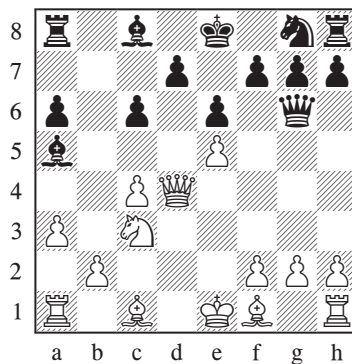


7...♘e5 (Black should prefer 7...♘f6, transposing to variation C23) 8.♙e3 ♘xc4? 9.♙xc4 ♙xc4 10.♖c1 and White is winning.

5...♘c6 6.♘c3 ♙b4 (6...♙c7 leads to the note above) 7.♘xc6 bxc6



8.♙d4! ♙f6 (8...♘f6 9.e5± was also no fun for Black in Sprotte – De Oliveira, Sao Bento do Sul 2013) 9.e5 ♙g6 (9...♙e7 occurred in Grabarczyk – Siebrecht, Germany 2013, when 10.a3!N ♙c5 11.♙g4 f5 12.♙g3± would have been strong) 10.a3 ♙a5 In Geenen – Marte, Charleroi 2013, White should have continued:



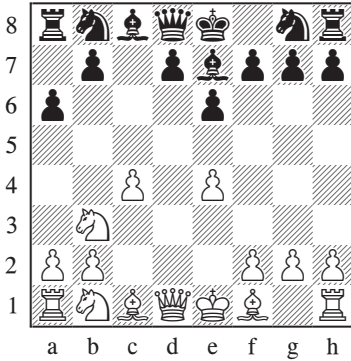
11.♙d2!N ♘e7 12.0–0–0 0–0 13.h4!± Starting an attack while exploiting Black's misplaced queen.

5...♙c5

This isn't a bad move, but White can reach a comfortable position with simple development.

6. ♖b3 ♘e7

6... ♗a7 7. ♘c3 ♘c6 8. ♘e2 ♘f6 9. 0–0 0–0 has been played in an engine game. No one has really played like this yet, so it's not that important. My choice from here would be 10. ♘g5 N±, setting up an unpleasant pin.

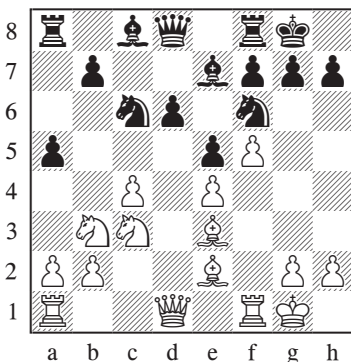


7. ♘c3 d6 8. ♘e2 ♘f6 9. 0–0 0–0 10. ♘e3 ♘c6 11. f4 e5

11... ♖c7 12. ♖c1 b6? 13. ♘d5± gave White an easy advantage in Claisse – Ernouf, Fontenay le Fleury 2003.

12. f5 a5

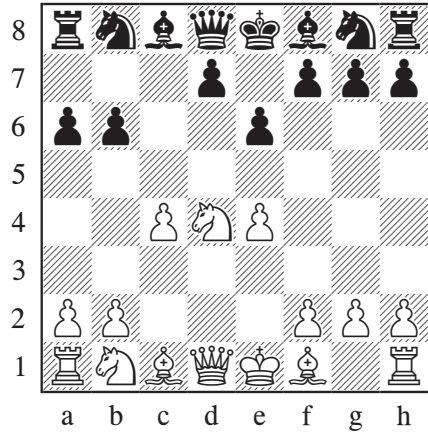
This position was reached in another engine game. I think the right way for White to continue is:



13. ♖c1 N ♘d7 14. ♘a1! ♖c8 15. ♘c2±

White simply improves his pieces while waiting to see how Black is going to deal with his obvious positional problems.

A) 5...b6



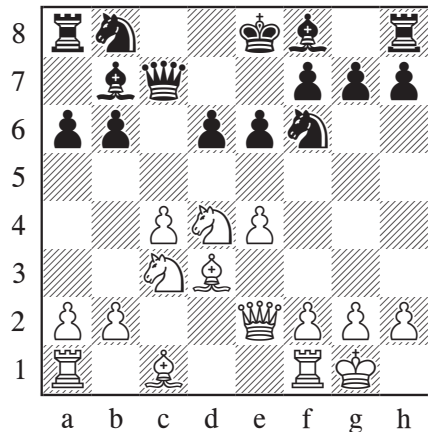
When you look at the statistics in the reference database, you will notice that this move gives Black a plus score. Don't let this bother you, as White has excellent prospects.

6. ♘c3 ♘b7 7. ♘d3!

We will often see the bishop go to e2 in this chapter. However, taking into account the early development of the bishop to b7, it is logical to give the e4-pawn extra support. A natural and popular continuation is:

7... ♖c7 8. 0–0 ♘f6 9. ♖e2 d6

This position has arisen via several move orders, totalling over a hundred games in my database. Amazingly, I can present a stunning novelty:



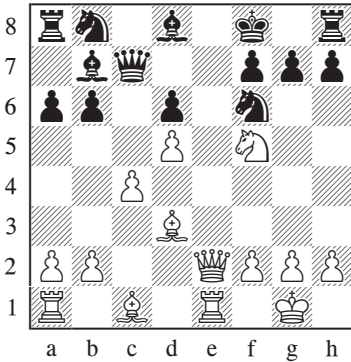
10. ♖d5!!N

This sacrifice is too tempting to ignore.

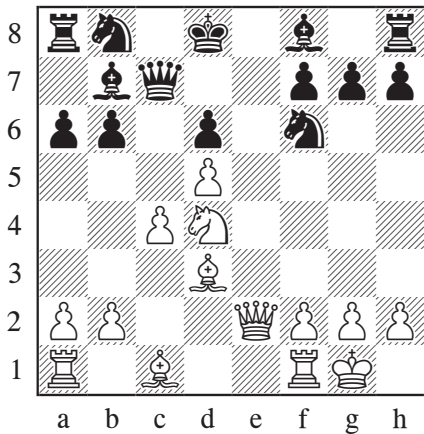
10...exd5 11.exd5† ♕d8

11...♖e7 12.♗f3± makes things easier for White.

11...♙e7 12.♘f5± is also nasty for Black, especially as 12...♙f8? loses immediately: 13.♞e1 ♙d8



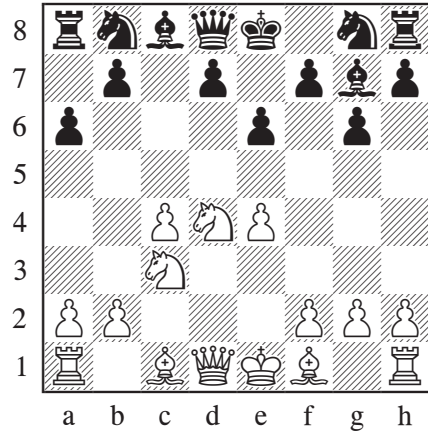
14. ♙h6!! gxf6 15. ♗e3+- and mate is near.



12. ♞e1 ♘bd7 13.a4!±

White has a lasting initiative, and will develop his attack with moves like ♙f4, a4-a5, b2-b4 and so on. Black has an extra piece but he will not be able to use it for quite some time.

B) 5...g6 6. ♘c3 ♙g7



Black resorts to a kingside fianchetto in several Kan lines, but here White is well placed to meet it.

7. ♙e3 ♘e7 8. ♗d2!

8. ♙e2 0-0 9. ♗d2 is also somewhat better for White, but it gives Black a chance to simplify matters: 9...d5 10.exd5 exd5 11.cxd5 ♘xd5 12.♘xd5 ♗xd5 13.0-0 ♘d7 14.♞fd1 ♘e5 This was Bogner – Prosviriakov, Hastings 2014, when 15. ♙h6N looks like the right way to maintain some initiative. Still, White's edge could easily evaporate.

8...♘bc6

I also considered 8...0-0, when 9.♞d1!N is an important measure to discourage the ...d5 push. Play may continue 9...♘bc6, when 10.h4!± looks rather unpleasant for Black.

9. ♙e2 0-0 10. ♘xc6!

This seems objectively strongest.

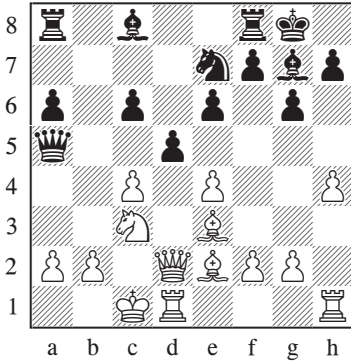
That said, some players may be attracted by the following possibility:

10.h4!±

This certainly looks like an interesting way to create problems for Black.

10...d5 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.0-0-0 ♗a5

12...♖e8N± looks like a better try, although I still prefer White's chances.

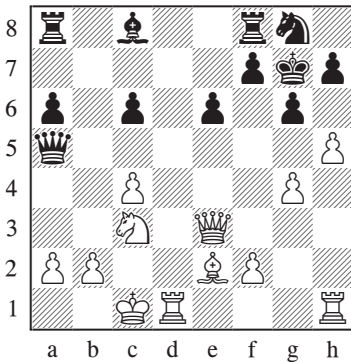


13.♙h6 dxe4?

After this Black is torn to pieces on the kingside.

13...♙xc3 was Black's best chance, although 14.♗xc3 ♗xc3† 15.bxc3 ♖e8 16.♙f3± reaches a rather unpleasant endgame for him.

14.♙xg7 ♖xg7 15.h5 ♘f5 16.g4 e3 17.♗d3 ♘e7 18.♗xe3 ♘g8



19.hxg6 fxg6 20.c5 ♗c7 21.♙d6 ♗f7 22.♖xc6 ♙b7 23.♗e5† ♘f6 24.♖c7 ♙xh1 25.g5+-

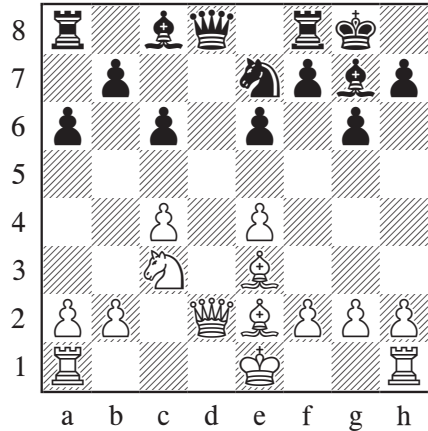
White won easily in Salokangas – Franssila, Tampere 1989.

10...dxc6

Black opted for 10...♘xc6 in B. Andersen – B. Petersen, Faxe 2015, when 11.c5N± would have established a nasty bind on the queenside.

10...bxc6 11.♗d6± is also unpleasant for Black.

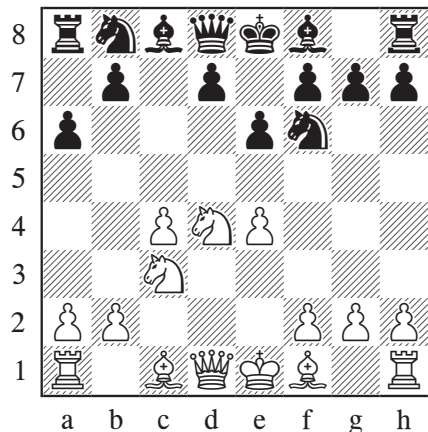
We have been following McKellar – Gray, San Francisco 2016. A simple improvement is:



11.♗d1!N ♗xd2† 12.♙xd2

Black finds himself in a dire situation, as his dark squares are too weak.

C) 5...♘f6 6.♘c3



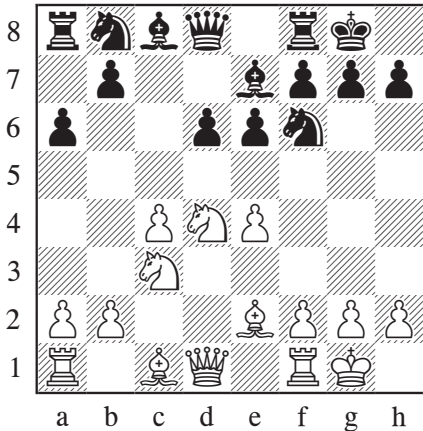
This is the main tabiya for the 5.c4 line. Black must deal with the threat of e4-e5 (since ...♗a5† is no longer available), so he almost always opts for one of **C1) 6...d6!±**, **C2) 6...♗c7** or **C3) 6...♙b4**.

C1) 6...d6!:

This move is not altogether bad, but it restricts the dark-squared bishop and gives White the freedom to build a powerful attacking position straight out of the opening.

7.♘e2 ♘e7 8.0-0 0-0

It is worth comparing this position to a well-known variation of the Taimanov, which occurs after 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘c6 5.♘b5 (rather than 5.♘c3 as I recommend in Chapter 3) 5...d6 6.c4 ♘f6 7.♘1c3 a6 8.♘a3 ♘e7 9.♘e2 0-0. For a long time, this was one of White's foremost tries for an advantage against the Taimanov. White suffers from a misplaced knight on a3, but the reasoning behind it was that it was worth making this concession in order to provoke ...d6 and establish a space advantage with c2-c4. In the present variation, White enjoys those same benefits without having had to waste two tempos moving his knight to an inferior square, so his prospects are excellent.

**9.f4!:**

White has a great deal of freedom against Black's solid but passive set-up. Another decent approach involves solidifying the e4-point and aiming for queenside pressure, as seen after:

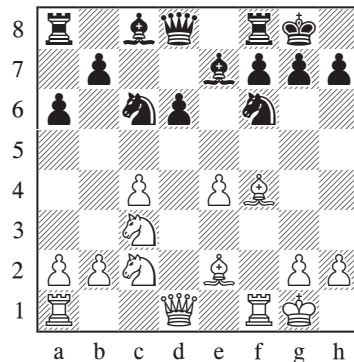
9.♘e3 b6 10.f3 ♘b7 11.♙d2 ♙c7 12.♞ac1 ♘bd7 13.♞fd1 ♞fc8 14.b4 ♞ab8 15.a3 ♘e5 16.♘a4± Karjakin – Yu Yangyi, Heixiazi 2015. White won this game and generally does well in this type of position. If this appeals to you, you can play it with minimal preparation, as there aren't really any forcing theoretical lines to remember.

Ultimately though, I believe it is even more promising to play actively on the kingside and in the centre. True, it takes a bit more work to understand the tactical motifs which may occur, but it's worth the effort – in many lines, White can achieve a substantial advantage with forceful play.

We will focus on **C11) 9...♞e8** and **C12) 9...♙c7**.

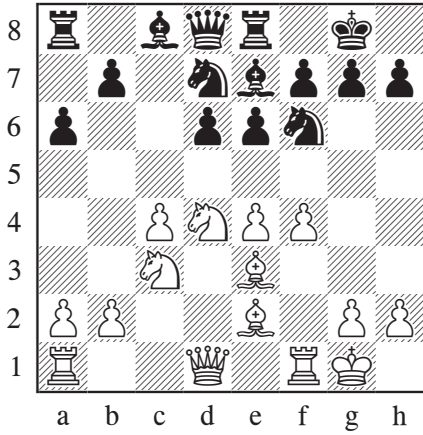
9...♘bd7 10.♘e3 will either transpose to one of the ...♘bd7 set-ups covered under the two main lines, or lead to a similar situation where White gets a fine game using the same ideas.

9...e5!? is playable, if rather committal. 10.♘c2 exf4 11.♘xf4 ♘c6 occurred in Borrell – Incze, corr. 1994. A normal continuation would be:



12.♙d2N ♘e6 13.♞ad1 ♞e8 14.b3± White can strengthen his position with ♘e3, while Black will find it hard to create counterplay.

C11) 9...♖e8 10.♙e3 ♘bd7



11.♙e1!

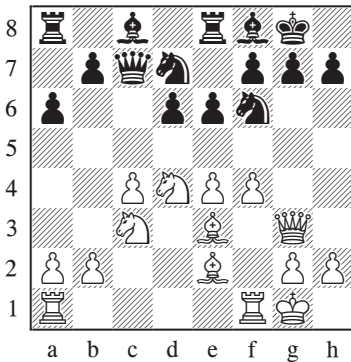
The queen will be perfectly placed on g3, menacing the black king and supporting the e4-e5 push.

11...♙c7 12.♙g3 ♖b8

Here are some other lines which demonstrate White's extensive resources.

12...♙f8

In Nunn – Szmetan, Biel 1982, White played 12.♖ad1 and stood better, but he missed something even stronger.



13.♘f3!N ♘c5

Black seems to be ready to meet e4-e5, but White's next move creates huge problems for him.

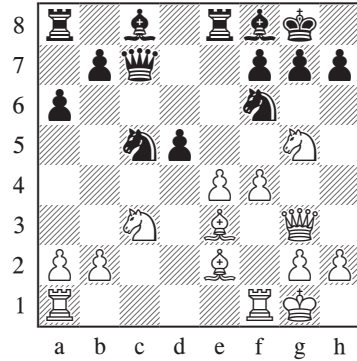
14.♘g5! d5

14...h6 15.e5 ♘h7 16.♘xh7 ♙xh7

17.♖ad1+ – gives White a decisive initiative.

The engines suggest the text as Black's best try, but White keeps up the pressure after:

15.cxd5 exd5



16.♖ac1! h6

16...dxe4? runs into 17.♘a4 b6 18.b4 ♙c6

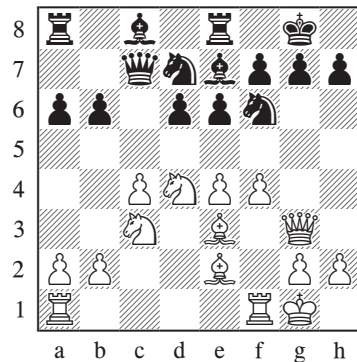
19.♙d1 and White wins a piece.

17.e5! hxg5 18.exf6 ♙d6 19.♖fd1±

Another logical try is:

12...b6

I only found one game from here, Kast – Heinemann, Oberhof 2010. White's play can be improved with:



13.♙f3!N

Once again, White just has to choose the right way to threaten e4-e5.

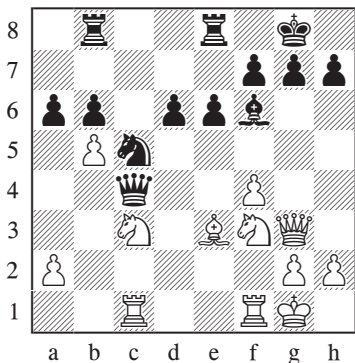
13...♖b8

13...♙b7? is impossible as 14.e5! wins a piece.

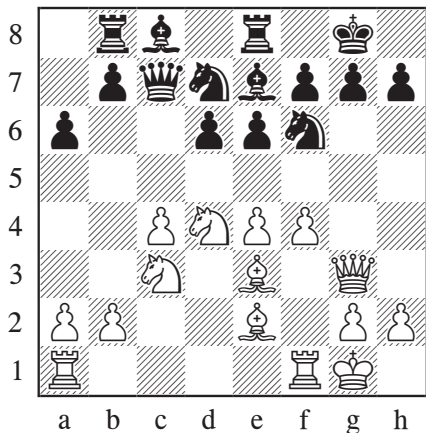
14.♖a1 ♙b7 15.b4±

White has a promising position after preventing ...♗c5. The critical line continues: 15...♗xc4 16.b5! ♗c5 17.e5 ♙xf3 18.exf6 ♙xf6 19.♗xf3±

Black does not have enough compensation for the missing piece. An important tactical point is:



19...♙xc3! 20.♖xc3! ♗xc3 21.♙d4
And White wins.



13.♖ad1!N

Improving on 13.♗h1? b6 14.♖ad1 as played in Nunn – Sunye Neto, Wijk aan Zee 1982.

I can vaguely remember reading in John Nunn's xenophobic-sounding work from the 1980s, *Beating the Sicilian*, that White should move his king to h1 when the black queen goes to c7 in such positions. However, in this instance it merely loses a tempo without adding any value to White's position. White went on to win the above game in good style, but Black's play could have been improved. White's advantage is much more significant when he avoids wasting time on the unnecessary king move.

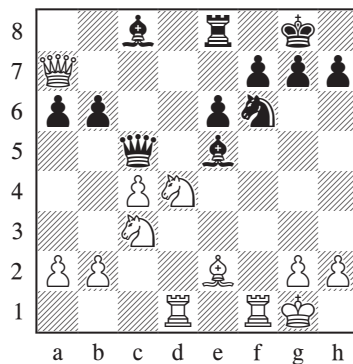
13...b6

13...♗c5 14.♙f3± hardly seems like an improvement for Black.

After the text move, White can utilize the saved tempo and strike immediately with:

14.e5! dxe5 15.fxe5 ♗xe5

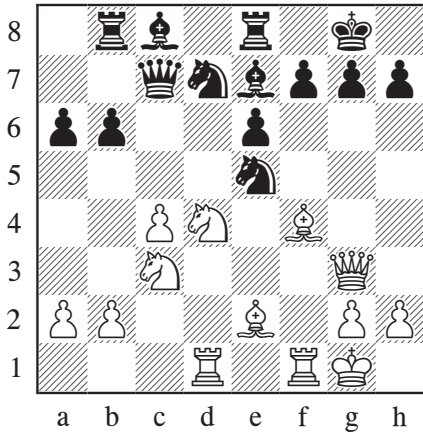
15...♗xe5 is not too difficult to refute. 16.♙f4 ♗c5 17.♙xb8 ♗xb8 18.♗xb8 ♙d6 (18...e5 19.♖xf6 ♙xf6 20.♗e4 wins) 19.♗a7 ♙e5 Black seems to be staying in the game, but White can fatally weaken his kingside with:



20.♗h1 ♙xd4 21.♗e4! ♗e5 22.♗xf6† gxf6 23.♙h5! ♖f8 24.♖f3+- Black is material down and his king is too exposed.

16.♙f4 ♗fd7

16...♙d6 runs into 17.♗b3! and White wins a piece.

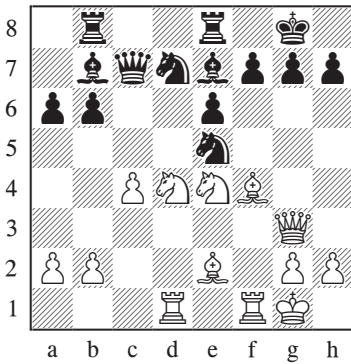


17. **d4**

White has a decisive initiative, as the following lines demonstrate. Your goal here should not be to memorize every detail, but rather to notice the main tactical themes and combinations in order to add them to your mental library.

17... **g6**

17... **b7** allows an immediate breakthrough:



18. **x6!!** **fx6** 19. **xd7** **xd7** 20. **x5** **d8**
 (20... **g6** 21. **c3!**) 21. **d1** **e7** 22. **f6†** and
 White wins.

18. **g4!**

A great idea, setting up possible sacrifices on e6.

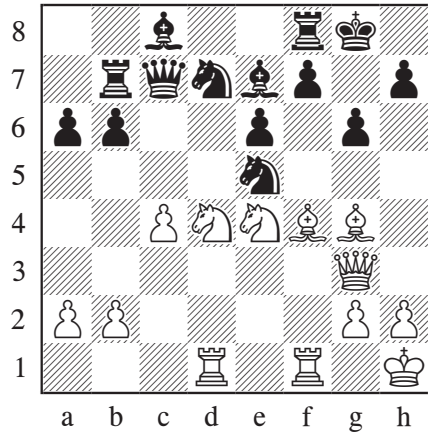
18... **b7**

18... **b7** 19. **f2!** **xg4** 20. **xg4** also gives
 White a winning attack.

19. **h1!**

On this occasion, it is useful to tuck the king out of harm's way before breaking through.

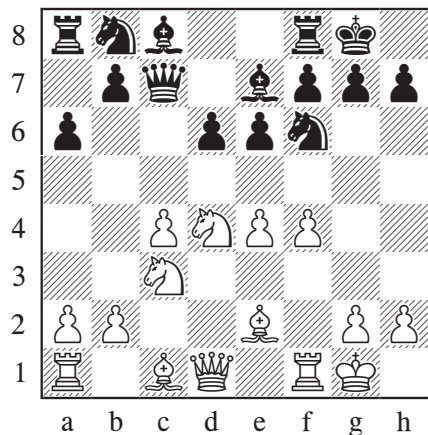
19... **f8**



20. **x6!** **fx6** 21. **x6†** **h8** 22. **g5+–**

The black position is collapsing under the many threats.

C12) 9... **c7**



This looks similar to the previous line, but it's more popular and can lead to some different

Abridged Variation Index

The Variation Index in the book is 7 pages long. Below is an abridged version giving just the main variations, not the sub-variations.

Chapter 1 – Four Knights

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♞f6 5.♞c3 ♞c6 6.♞xc6!?

6...bxc6 (6...dxc6?!)	7.e5 ♞d5	8.♞e4	10
A) 8...♞b7!?	<i>Game 1</i> (8...♞a6?)		10
B) 8...f5			15
C) 8...♞a5†			17
D) 8...♞c7	9.f4		19

Chapter 2 – Kan

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 a6 5.c4

A) 5...b6	47	
B) 5...g6	48	
C) 5...♞f6	6.♞c3	49

Chapter 3 – Taimanov

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♞c6 5.♞c3

A) 5...a6	92	
B) 5...♞c7	6.♞e3	94
B1) 6...♞f6	94	
B2) 6...a6	7.♞f3	95

Chapter 4 – Lowenthal

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♞c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 e5 5.♞b5 a6 6.♞d6† ♞xd6 7.♞xd6

A) 7...♞e7	150	
B) 7...♞f6	8.♞c7!?	151

Chapter 5 – Kalashnikov

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♞c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 e5 5.♞b5 d6 6.c4

A) 6...g6!?	158	
B) 6...♞e7	7.♞5c3!?	160

Chapter 6 – Sveshnikov

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♞c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♞f6 5.♞c3 e5 6.♞db5

6...h6	<i>Game 13</i>	172	
6...a6?! <i>Game 14</i>		176	
6...d6	7.♞g5 a6	8.♞a3	180
Minor 8th Moves: 8...♞e6 (8...d5?; 8...♞b8; 8...♞e7)	<i>Game 15</i>		180
8...b5	9.♞d5		186

Chapter 7 – Accelerated Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 g6 5.c4

A) 5...♗f6 6.♗c3 d6 7.f3! ♗xd4 (7...♙g7) 8.♖xd4 ♙g7 9.♙e3 0–0 10.♖d2	233
B) 5...♙g7 6.♙e3 ♗f6 (6...♗h6) 7.♗c3 (7...d6)	238

Chapter 8 – Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 g6 6.♙e3 ♙g7 7.f3

A) 7...a6 8.♖d2 (8...♗c6; 8...b5)	269
B) 7...♗c6 <i>Game 24</i>	275
C) 7...0–0 8.♖d2 ♗c6 9.0–0–0 (9...♖a5; 9...♙e6)	278

Chapter 9 – Classical

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 ♗c6 6.f3

A) 6...♗xd4	306
B) 6...a6	307
C) 6...♖b6?!	310
D) 6...e5 7.♗b3	312

Chapter 10 – Najdorf-Scheveningen

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4

4...♗c6 5.♗c3 d6 6.♙e3 (6...♙e7)	335
6...♗ge7	335
6...a6	336
4...♗f6 5.♗c3 d6 6.♙e3 ♙e7 7.f3	
7...e5	337
7...♗c6 The Classical Scheveningen line	338

Najdorf – 1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.f3

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6...e6 7.♙e3	
7...♙e7 The English Attack at club level <i>Game 28</i>	351
7...d5!? (7...♖b6?!) <i>Game 29</i>	353
7...h5 (7...b5 8.♖d2 h5?!; 7...♗bd7) <i>Game 30</i>	356
7...♗c6 8.♖d2	360
7...b5! 8.♖d2	367

Chapter 11 – Najdorf with 6...e5

1.e4 c5 2.♗f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♗xd4 ♗f6 5.♗c3 a6 6.f3 e5

7.♗b3 ♙e6 (7...b5, 7...♙e7, 7...♗bd7, 7...♗c6) 8.♙e3	404
8...♗bd7 (8...d5, 8...♗c6!?) 9.g4!	405
8...♙e7 9.♖d2 0–0 10.0–0–0	414
8...h5!? <i>Game 46</i>	436
8...♙e7 9.♖d2 h5 <i>Game 47</i>	442