

MODERNIZED: THE OPEN SICILIAN

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METROPOLITAN CHESS PUBLISHING

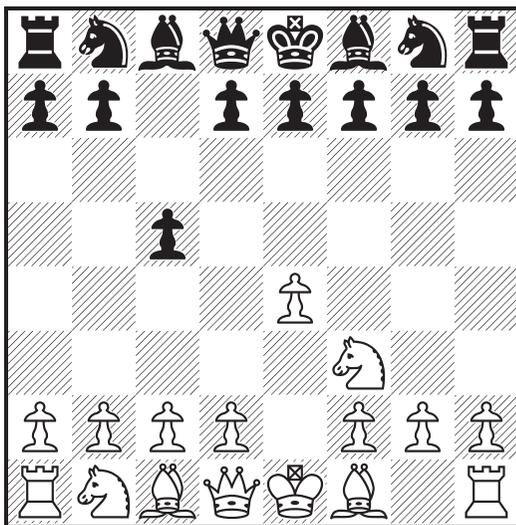
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Symbols

!	Good move
!!	Excellent move
?	Bad move
??	Blunder
!?	Deserves attention
?!	Dubious
#	Checkmate
□	Forced; the only move
∞	Unclear position
=	Equal position
±	Slight advantage for White
∓	Slight advantage for Black
±	Distinct advantage for White
∓	Distinct advantage for Black
+−	White is winning
−+	Black is winning
↑	with the initiative
→	with the attack
∞	insufficient compensation for the material
∞	sufficient compensation for the material
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea...
⊂	better is...
N	Novelty
⊕	Time pressure

Introduction



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3

The Sicilian Defense is one of the most complex and powerful defenses available to Black, and it duly remains the choice of many top players as their favorite response to **1.e4**. Historically, it has mainly been believed that the critical test of this opening was to attack it directly via the Open Sicilian, which occurs after **1.e4 c5 2.Nf3** followed by **3.d4**, opening up the center. The dynamics of the resulting positions are such that White will get a lead in development while Black will have an extra central pawn. This leads to incredibly sharp middlegames as both sides try to make use of their advantages.

Throughout this book we will attempt to either transform White's lead in development into a devastating kingside attack, or choose a more positional approach, playing for strategic pluses such as having extra space or a healthier pawn structure.

However, our ambitious approach is not without risk; often, the first player to err or lose the thread of the struggle will be quickly punished. It is no surprise that the Sicilian is one of the most popular openings around—it offers Black great potential not just to equalize, but to fight for victory as well! If you feel that you are up to the challenge and interested in pursuing the sharpest way of meeting the Sicilian Defense, then we have written this book for you.

In our humble opinion we believe that the modern philosophy of opening study is to blend the opening and middlegame stages together. Nowadays most professional players make their opening decisions based on the kinds of middlegame positions that they would like to reach. They then study the ins and outs of those middlegames as much (if not more) as the specific moves of each opening.

This is exactly what we believe is the best approach to building an opening repertoire. True mastery of the opening occurs when a player knows the specific theory and understands the future complexities of the structure. After all, what good is it to get a decent position out of the opening if you have no idea what to do with it afterwards?

With this in mind, our main goal in choosing lines to recommend was to reach middlegame positions with well-defined plans for both sides. We then hope to illustrate how to handle a typical middlegame in each variation through the use of instructive games.

The purpose of this book is not only to provide a complete repertoire for the White side of the Open Sicilian, but also to ingrain a number of thematic positional and tactical motifs as well.

After analyzing hundreds of high-level games for this book, we chose only the most instructive to feature, and included many others in variations. Studying each game in depth will definitely broaden your understanding of the Open Sicilian, as well as your understanding of chess as a whole. In addition to providing you with the latest theory, each game also includes a variety of common strategic topics, such as the initiative, positional sacrifices, weak squares, outposts, advantage of the two bishops, pawn storms, opposite side castling—but of course!, positional binds, restriction, and prophylaxis, to name a few. We hope to provide you with meaningful insight as to what it takes to manage the White side of the Open Sicilian successfully.

We'd also like to take this opportunity to manage your expectations. We cannot promise a huge advantage in every line—if that was the case then the Sicilian would certainly not be one of Black's most reliable openings among all levels! The truth is that many of the main lines remain perfectly playable for Black, but that doesn't mean that the well-prepared player shouldn't be optimistic about his or her chances. We have armed you with top notch analysis as well as a repertoire of strategic plans and ideas that you will be able to rely on deep into the middlegame. As is almost always the case, when two players are equally matched in their opening knowledge it will be the player with the better understanding of the ensuing middlegame who will have the upper hand.

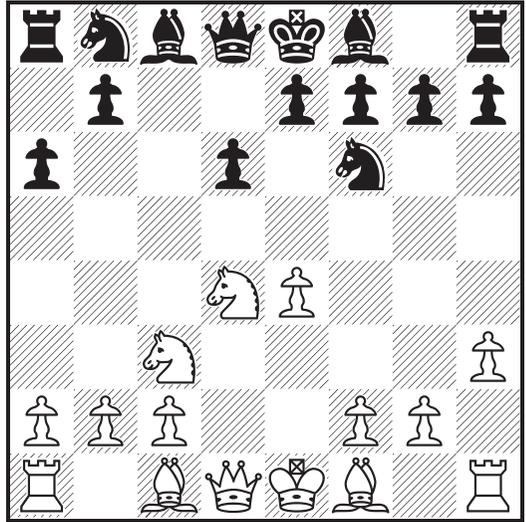
While computers remain a trusted ally in the world of opening analysis, it is important not to rely on the silicon beast too much. We've analyzed and checked each line with the strongest engines available, and while you shouldn't hesitate to verify our analysis, we hope that you'll avoid the novice mistake of depending on the computer's opinion too much.

The ideal way to study this book is to play each move out on a physical chess board—actually moving the pieces with your hand should increase your retention of the material and allow you to absorb more in the long run.

With that, we'd like to wish you the best of luck on your journey and we sincerely thank you for giving us the opportunity to help you improve.

Chapter 1

The Najdorf Variation



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3

To this day, the Najdorf Sicilian remains one of the most popular openings in all of chess, and for good reason. Named after legendary Grandmaster Miguel Najdorf, this combative opening was a favorite choice of none other than Bobby Fischer and Garry Kasparov, as well as countless of other Grandmasters. With that in mind, we've decided to start our courageous journey here.

The **6.h3** variation has been dubbed the Adams Attack, attributed to American master Weaver Adams, who first played the line in the 1940s. 20 years later, Fischer then used it to success in games against Reshevsky, Bolbochan, and even Najdorf himself! Despite this, the variation was not considered as challenging as the more popular **6.Be3** or **6.Bg5** up until just a few years ago, when suddenly many top players started including it in their repertoire.

Nowadays, this line is hotly contested at high levels, and has been used more than once by super-GMs Carlsen, Anand,

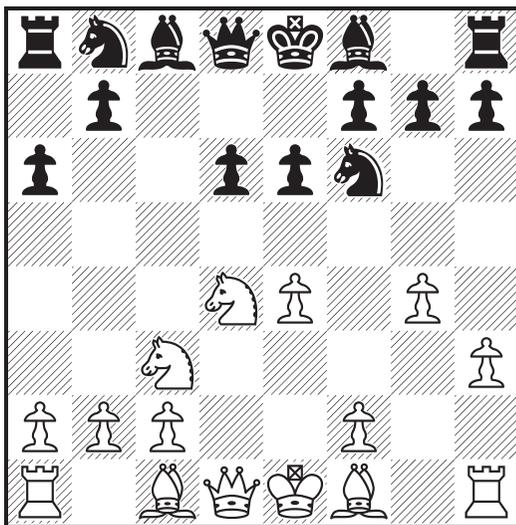
Nakamura, Karjakin, Svidler, and Nepomniachtchi, among others.

In the following chapter we will see White advance g2-g4 and fianchetto the light-squared bishop, which will act as a force to be reckoned with along the long diagonal. Additionally, the g-pawn will also play a vital role in many middlegames, often contributing to a kingside attack.

Chapter 1a will be dedicated to the flexible **6...e6**, Chapter 1b will feature **6...e5**, and Chapter 1c will include all of Black's less popular options, such as **6...Nc6** and **6...g6**, as well as the Scheveningen Variation, which starts with **5...e6**.

Chapter 1a

Najdorf – 6.h3 e6



**1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6
7.g4**

We start this chapter with Black's most flexible response to our seemingly innocuous 6th move. This is the move you are most likely to face over the board, as Black's options are still wide open in terms of development.

After the natural **7.g4**, Black has mainly chosen between **7...d5**, **7...b5**, **7...Be7**, and **7...h6**. We will cover each of these responses in depth in six instructive games, highlighting dozens of plans and ideas along the way.

One thing to watch out for in this chapter will be the various move order transpositions in certain lines, which can get tricky and will often bear repeating. In our view, the best way to deal with any confusion is to play through each variation on a chess board several times, as this process will help you retain more information.

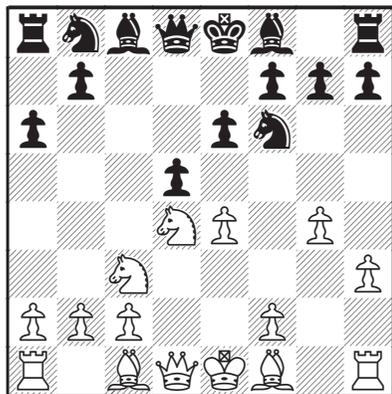
Game 1

Alekseev – Karjakin

4th FIDE Grand Prix

Nalchik 2009

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4
4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6
7.g4 d5

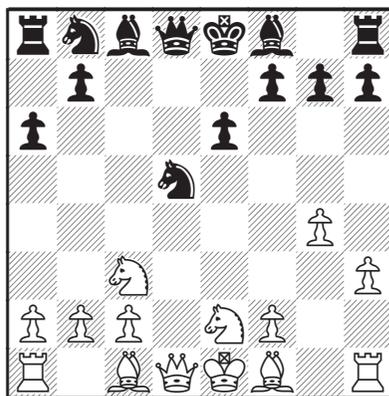


It is logical to start our investigation with this line, as it is a very direct answer to our ambitious plan of 6.h3 and 7.g4. Black moves the d-pawn for the second time in order to create tension in the center and exploit White's kingside expansion.

8.exd5 Nxd5

Now Black threatens Nxc3, and White should avoid the doubled c-pawns unless it comes at the price of Black's dark-squared bishop, which can often be an advantageous trade for us.

9.Nde2



This move has been favored by most major proponents of 6.h3, such as Anand, Nepomniachtchi, and Vachier-Lagrave. White defends the knight and threatens to leave Black with an isolated queen pawn by means of Nxd5.

Less common is 9.Bd2, but it has been played a number of times by strong players. We dislike it since it does not create the threat Nxd5 and allows Black to develop more freely. For instance, 9...b5 seems to be quite reasonable for Black.

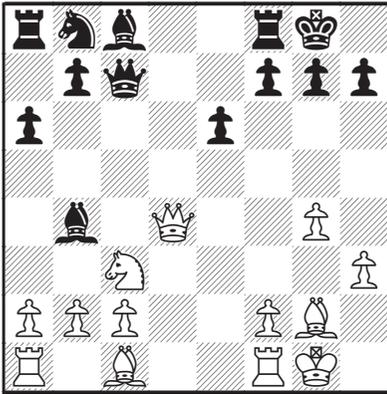
9...Bb4

This is by far the most popular and natural move—Black develops, puts more pressure on c3, and prevents Nxd5. Let's take a look at some of Black's lesser attempts for equality:

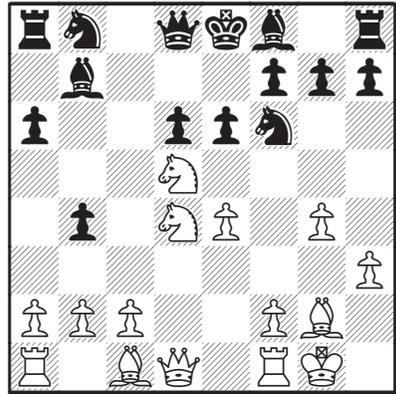
9...Nxc3?! leads to a slightly worse endgame for Black with no chances of winning, not exactly something a Najdorf player strives for! 10.Qxd8+ Kxd8 11.Nxc3 Bd7. The main attempt to equalize, trying to neutralize White's powerful light-squared bishop. White can fight for the advantage with simple moves:

Memory Markers

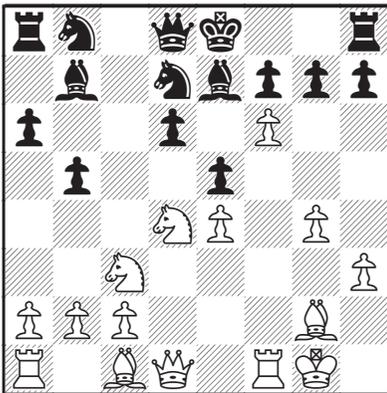
Here are reminders of some of the ideas and motifs in this chapter.



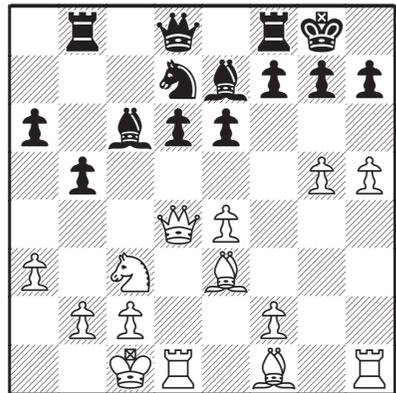
1. After 13.Qd1-d4! The most active way to fight for an advantage, preparing Bf4 and Ne4 next. See diagram on page 18.



2. After 10.Nd5!? The critical piece sacrifice. See diagram on page 29 in Game 2, Nakamura–Ninov.



3. After 12.f5-f6! A powerful pawn sacrifice, clearing the f5 square for White's knight. See the full attack unleashed in Game 3, Nepomniachtchi–Frolyanov, on page 40.



4. After 15.h5! Threatening h5-h6 and forcing Black to play e6-e5. A critical and thematic position for the Najdorf, see diagram on page 51.

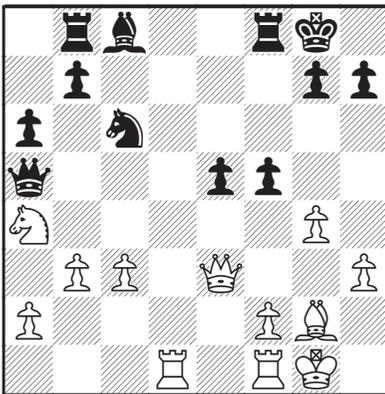
Exercises

White to play!

With these situations from actual games, you, as White, can practice finding some of the breakthroughs, tricks, combinations, and positional opportunities that may appear in our response to the Najdorf Variation.

Solutions to the exercises begin on page 514.

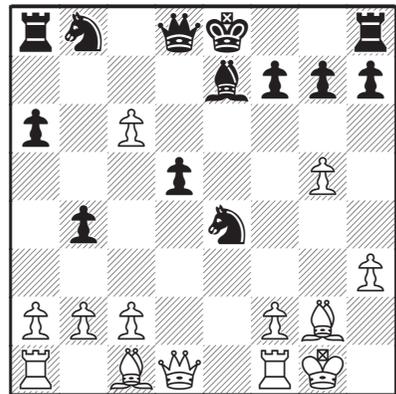
Exercise 1



Kokarev – Dvoirys
Izhevsk 2011

Black has just played f7-f5, seeking some much-needed counterplay. How should White react?

Exercise 2



Aroshidze – Fluvia Poyatos
Barcelona 2012

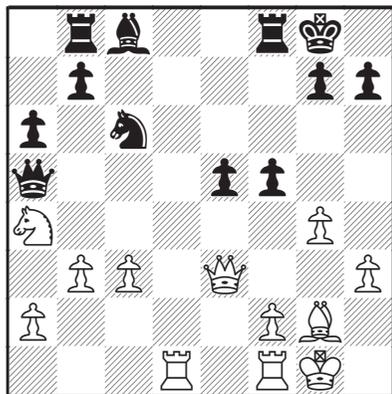
Black has survived White's opening sacrifice and everything is under control, or is it?

Solutions to the Exercises

Chapter 1: The Najdorf Variation

Chapter 1a: Najdorf – 6.h3 e6

Exercise 1



Kokarev – Dvoirys

Izhevsk 2011

Black has just played f7-f5, seeking some much-needed counterplay. How should White react?

21. Bd5+! Kh8 22. f3!

Restricting Black's development. The bishop on c8 still has no future and Black is much, much worse.

22...Bd7

Not 22...fxg4? 23.fxg4! Bd7 24.Nb6, and White is just winning.

Better was 22...f4 23.Qc5 Qxc5+ 24.Nxc5+-. The difference in piece activity is paramount.

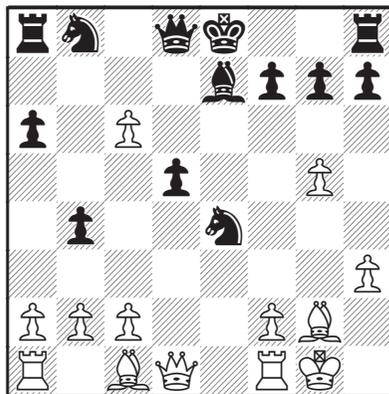
23.Nb6!

Not only embarrassing the bishop, but also Black's queen.

23...Be8 24.b4 Qa3 25.Qc5! Bf7

26.Nd7+- 1-0

Exercise 2



Aroshidze – Fluvia Poyatos

Barcelona 2012

Black has survived White's opening sacrifice and everything is under control, or is it?

15.c7!

Passed pawns must be pushed!

15...Qd7 16.Qxd5!

There are certain factors that give you a hint that a combination like this is possible: the advanced c7 pawn, hanging pieces along the h1-a8 diagonal, and of course the uncastled Black king.

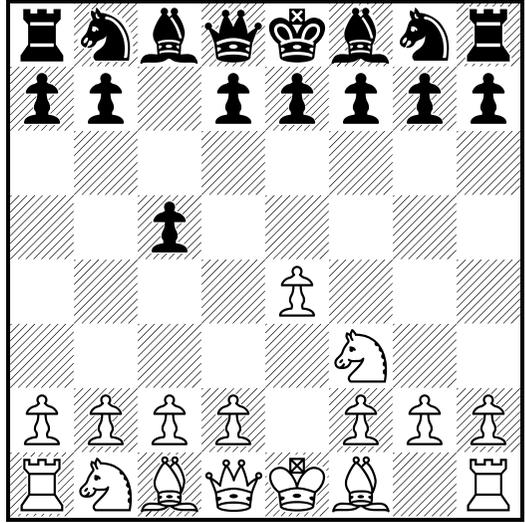
16...Qxd5 17.c8Q+ Bd8 18.Re1

Winning the piece back, with a decisive advantage.

18...Nd7 19.Bxe4! Rxc8 20.Bxd5+ Kf8 21.Bf4+-

With an extra pawn, connected rooks, and the two bishops, White

Conclusion



1.e4 c5 2.Nf3

We hope this book was as enjoyable to read as it was to write. Over the process of many months we discovered many wonderful ideas and came away with a better understanding of not only the Sicilian Defense, but of chess itself. Our goal was to provide you, dear reader, with a full repertoire against Black's most combative opening, as well as an arsenal of positional and tactical motifs to boot.

If we could leave you with a few words of advice, we'd stress that in order to truly absorb all of the material covered in this book, one must put it into practice and develop an intuitive feel for the ensuing positions. Being well-prepared is one thing, but being well-experienced is another.

Thus, we cannot recommend enough the practical value of training games. Find someone to play the Black side of a line, and challenge them to a few games to test out your knowledge.

We often feel ready to employ certain openings, but once we get to the board we are surprised by our lack of feeling for the position. Whenever you try a new opening, it is important to first test it out in training in order to build up experience and confidence. One of the best ways of improving is to analyze your own games—find your strengths, weaknesses, and further your chess knowledge!

We sincerely wish you all the best.

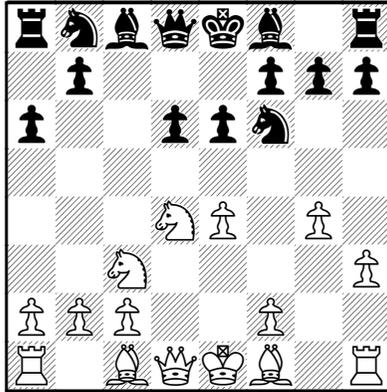
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Index of Variations

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Chapter 1a: Najdorf – 6.h3 e6

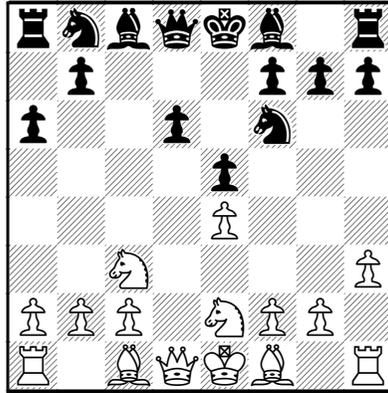
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 a6 6.h3 e6 7.g4



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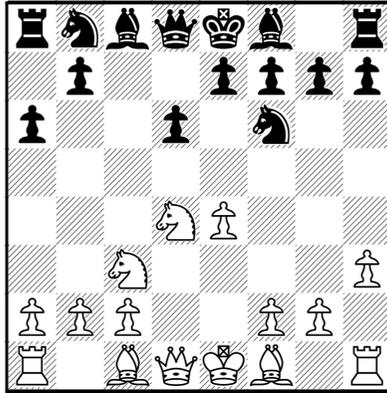
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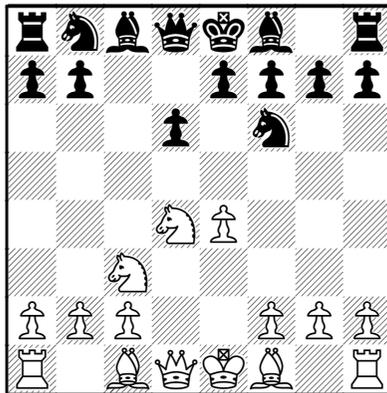
Chapter 1c: Najdorf – 6.h3 Various

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1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3

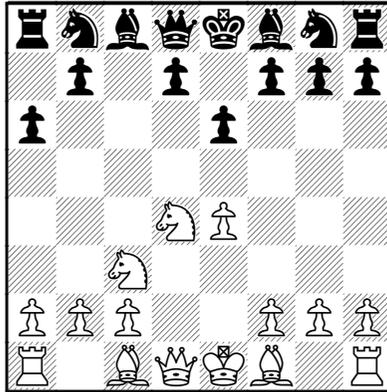


5...e6 6.g4! e5 7.Bb5+ Bd7 8.Bxd7+ Qxd7 9.Nf5	143
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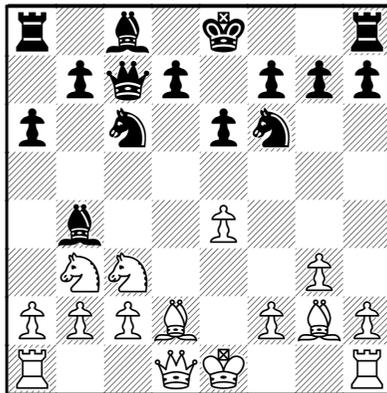
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5...b5 6.a3 Bb7 7.g3 Nf6 8.Bg2

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5...Qc7 6.g3 Bb4 7.Bd2 Nf6 8.Bg2 Nc6 9.Nb3



9...O-O 10.O-O Be7 11.f4 d6 12.g4!

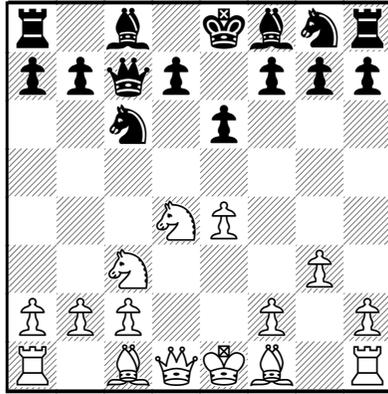
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Chapter 2b: The Taimanov Variation

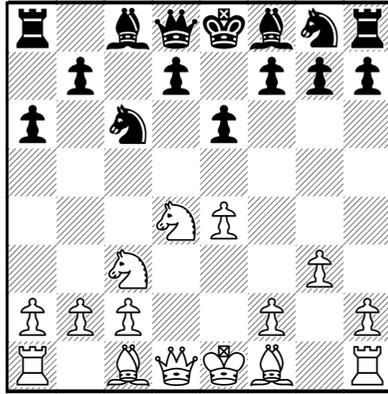
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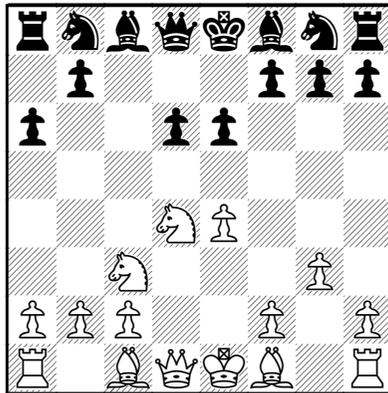
Chapter 2b: The Taimanov Variation (continued)

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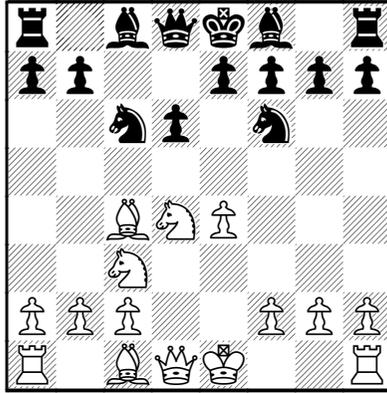
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Chapter 3: The Classical Variation

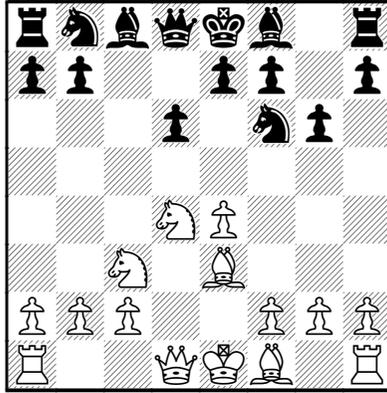
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 Nc6 6.Bc4



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Chapter 4: The Dragon Variation

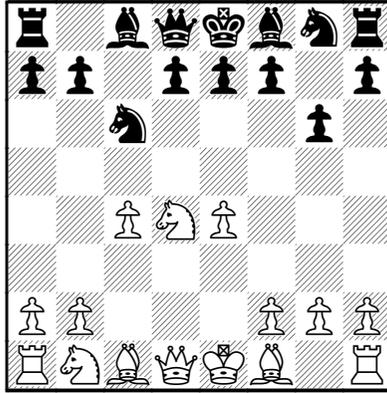
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10.O-O-O Bb7 11.h4	324
8.Qd2 other	323
7.f3 Nc6 8.Qd2 h5 9.O-O-O Bd7 10.Bc4 Rc8 11.Bb3	285
8.Qd2 Bd7 9.O-O-O Rc8 10.g4	287
7.f3 O-O 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.O-O-O Be6 10.Kb1	297
6...Bg7 7.f3 O-O 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.O-O-O Bd7 10.g4!	
10...Rc8 11.h4 h5 12.gxh5 Nxh5 13.Rg1!	293
11.h4 Ne5 12.Be2!	291
10...a6?! 11.h4 b5 12.h5	288
10...Qa5?! 11.Nb3!	289
10...Ne5 11.h4	289
6...Bg7 7.f3 O-O 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.O-O-O Nxd4 10.Bxd4 Be6 11.Kb1!	
11...Qa5?! 12.Nd5!	298
11...Nd7 12.h4!	298
11...a6 12.g4	300
11...Qc7 12.h4	300
6...Bg7 7.f3 O-O 8.Qd2 Nc6 9.O-O-O d5 10.Qe1!?	
10...e5 11.Nxc6 bxc6 12.exd5 cxd5 13.Bg5!	312
12.exd5 Nxd5 13.Bc4 Be6 14.Kb1!	315
10...e6 11.h4	308

Chapter 5: The Accelerated Dragon

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 g6 5.c4!

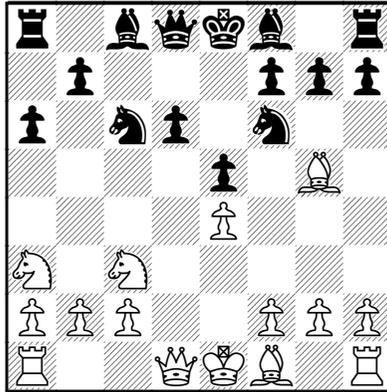


5...Nf6 6.Nc3 d6 7.Be2 Nxd4 8.Qxd4 Bg7 9.Be3 O-O 10.Qd2	
10...Be6 11.O-O Qa5 12.b3!	339
10...Bd7?! 11.O-O	338
10...Ng4 11.Bxg4 Bxg4 12.Bd4	338
10...a5!? 11.Rd1!	345
5...Bg7 6.Be3 Nf6 7.Nc3 Ng4!? 8.Qxg4 Bxd4?! 9.Bxd4 Nxd4 10.O-O-O!	351
8.Qxg4 Nxd4 9.Qd1 Ne6 10.Rc1!	354
9.Qd1 Nc6 10.Qd2	352
9.Qd1 e5 10.Nb5!?	352
7.Nc3 O-O 8.Be2 d6 9.O-O Bd7 10.Qd2	365
8.Be2 b6!? 9.O-O Bb7 10.Nxc6!?	361
8.Be2 Nxd4 9.Bxd4 d6 10.O-O	363
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 g6 3.d4 Bg7 4.c4	334

Chapter 6: The Sveshnikov & Cousins

Chapter 6a: The Sveshnikov Variation

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3 e5 6.Ndb5 d6
7.Bg5 a6 8.Na3



8...Be7?! 9.Nc4!

380

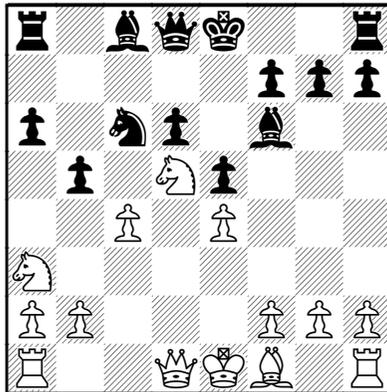
8...Be6 9.Nc4 Rc8 10.Bxf6

380

8...b5 9.Nd5 Qa5+ 10.Bd2 Qd8 11.Bd3

383

8...b5 9.Nd5 Be7 10.Bxf6 Bxf6 11.c4



11...b4 12.Nc2 O-O 13.g3

396

12.Nc2 a5 13.g3

392

12.Nc2 Rb8 13.b3

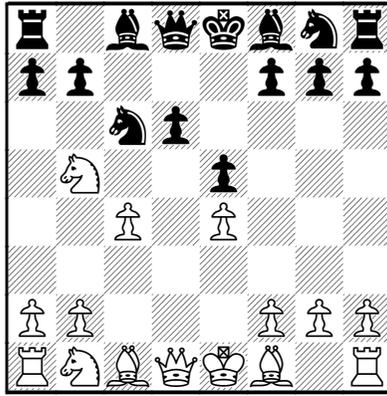
393

11...other

385

Chapter 6b: The Kalashnikov and Löwenthal Variation

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 d6 6.c4

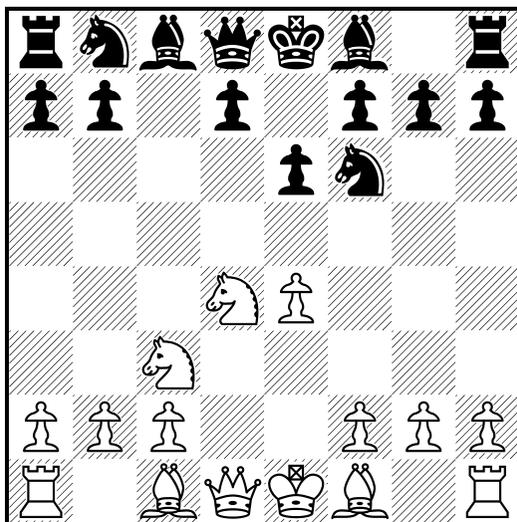


6...a6 7.N5c3 Be6?! 8.Nd5	409
6...Be6 7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3	409
6...Be7 7.N1c3 a6 8.Na3 f5!? 9.exf5 Bxf5	409
8.Na3 Nf6 9.Be2 O-O 10.O-O Be6 11.Be3 Rc8 12.Rc1	412
8.Na3 Be6 9.Be2 Bg5 10.O-O Bxc1 11.Rxc1	419
9.Be2 Nd4 10.O-O	418
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 e5 5.Nb5 a6 6.Nd6+ Bxd6 7.Qxd6	424

Chapter 7: Minor Sicilians

Chapter 7a: The Four Knights Variation

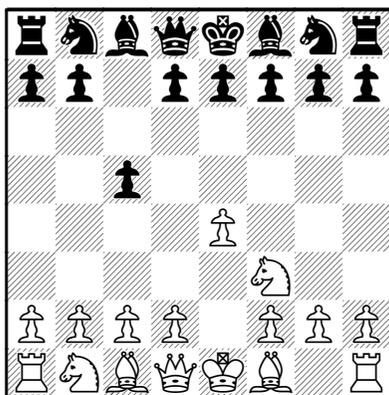
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nf6 5.Nc3



5...Nc6 6.Ndb5 Bb4 7.a3! Bxc3+ 8.Nxc3 d5 9.exd5 exd5 10.Bd3	443
9.exd5 Nxd5 10.Bd2!?	441
6.Ndb5 Bc5 7.Bf4	463
5...Bb4 6.e5!	454
1.e4 c5 2.Nf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Nc6 5.Nc3 Bb4 6.Ndb5	453

Chapter 7b: Rare Sicilians

1.e4 c5 2.Nf3



2...Nc6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Qb6 5.Nb3 Nf6 6.Nc3 e6 7.Qe2!	476
5.Nb3 e6 6.Nc3 a6 7.Bf4!	476
2...Nf6 3.Nc3 d5 4.exd5 Nxd5 5.Bb5+ Bd7 6.Ne5!	490
5.Bb5+ Nc6 6.O-O	489
3.Nc3 Nc6 4.d4 d5!? 5.exd5 Nxd5 6.dxc5 Nxc3 7.Qxd8+	486
2...b6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Nxd4 Bb7 5.Nc3 a6 6.g3	499
5.Nc3 other	497
2...a6 3.Nc3 e6 4.d4 b5 5.d5! Bb7 6.Be2	504
5.d5! d6?! 6.dxe6!N	503
3.Nc3 Nc6 4.d4 cxd4 5.Nxd4 e5 6.Nf5!	502

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Chessbase DVDs:

- Alejandro Ramirez - *The Sicilian Taimanov-Scheveningen*
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Electronic Resources:

- Chessbase
- Mega Database 2014

Engines:

- Houdini 4
- Komodo 8
- Stockfish 5