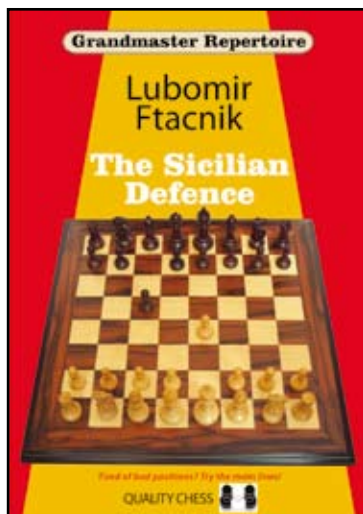


The Sicilian Defence

By

Lubomir Ftacnik



Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

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Grandmaster Repertoire 6 - The Sicilian Defence

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Series Foreword

Creating the Grandmaster Repertoire series seemed a natural idea. There is a glut of opening books at the *Starting Out* level. These books have certainly been refreshing, but they have almost completely replaced high-level opening books.

As chess fans, we felt we were missing out, and because we can, we decided to do something about it.

The books in the Grandmaster Repertoire series are written by grandmasters, edited by grandmasters, and will certainly be read by grandmasters. **This does not mean that players who are not grandmasters cannot read them.** We have worked hard to make our books clear in their presentation and to make it possible for the readers to decide the depth to which they want to study them.

When we were young and trying to be up-and-coming, we understood that you do not have to remember everything in an opening book in order to use it. It is our hope that those readers who find this repertoire too extensive and detailed, will ignore many of the details. Even now that we are grandmasters, we see the bolded moves as what we want to memorize, and the notes as explanations and illustrations.

It is our conviction that you will eventually be more successful by playing the main lines, simply because they are based on better moves. Instinctively most players know this, but they fear losing to a prepared line and thus turn to unambitious systems, or unhealthy surprises. The opponent will not be able to use his preparation but, sadly, will not need it. These sidelines generally end in uninspiring positions almost automatically.

Possibly the main reason why high-level opening books have disappeared is the rise of databases. It has been assumed that there is no point in having traditional opening books anymore, as you can look it all up in the database. Some rather lazy authors have a system: collect a few hundred games from the database, give Fritz a few moments, then hit Print. Such books add nothing to chess literature. We have seen enough of them and have never wanted to add to that pile.

In these days of multi-million game databases, we all have access to information, what is lacking is understanding. In the Grandmaster Repertoire series, very strong players will share their understanding and suggest strong new moves that are in no one else's database.

We are excited about this series and hope that the reader will share some of that excitement.

John Shaw & Jacob Aagaard
Quality Chess

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Introduction

From ~~Russia~~ Sicily with Love

First I would like to express my gratitude to the reader for opening this book on the Sicilian Defence. Credit must go to the Quality Chess team and their excellent authors whose efforts resulted in the creation of a real buzz about the Grandmaster Repertoire series. To follow in the footsteps of the previous titles made for a daunting challenge and I hope that the present book, the sixth volume in the series, will live up to the readers' high expectations.

The unparalleled popularity of the Sicilian has led to the creation of an entire chess galaxy that is too vast for even the best and brightest minds to comprehend fully. Each player chooses his Kan, Sveshnikov, Dragon or other pet variation, around which he creates his own Sicilian world. My own modest expertise lies in the domains of the Najdorf and Scheveningen systems, which I have been playing and studying over the past two decades. The Scheveningen system represents a kind of foundational core, from which virtually all knowledge about thematic Sicilian structures and plans can be traced. Although the official subject of this book is the Najdorf variation, the two systems share many common themes and can often transpose to one another. In certain places, such as Chapters 12 and 13 (which deal with the variations 6.f4 and 6.♗e2 respectively), the decision to recommend the response 6...e6, instead of equally valid alternatives such as 6...e5, was influenced by my fondness for the Scheveningen set-up. I make no apologies for this, as I believe that an author can make the most useful contribution when writing about his own areas of expertise.

At the end of the day this repertoire book is about cherry-picking the best and brightest ideas from the enormous jungle of variations available. In some sense the repertoire is notable not only for the recommendations that were included, but also for the attractive ones that (sometimes after agonizing deliberations) did not make the final cut. The whole Sicilian Defence creates something of a 'win-win' situation, in the sense that the unbalanced positions often result in bloodshed for one side or the other. In some variations Black may have to defend for a while, but it rarely kills his chances for a subsequent counterattack and ultimate success.

I have tried to address all the most important ideas in every chapter, but practice will inevitably bring some new challenges, so please be prepared for some surprises. Nobody can foresee the future – it is often difficult enough to 'predict' the past (just ask any decent historian).

I have often hankered for a bit of colour in our seemingly dry, black and white world of technical annotations, symbols and diagrams. As a young man I came across a game that is played in social situations, involving association with the names of films. Movies can often be symbolic, full of cultural references and associative bridges – evoking colours and emotions unlike any other form

of media. I hope for some readers the chapter titles will evoke some positive feelings and help to place the struggle to master chess into a broader perspective.

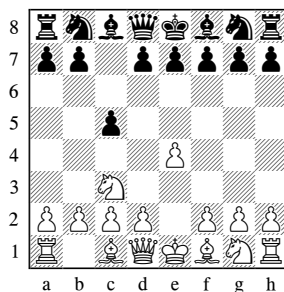
This entire project has at times threatened to pull me down and drag me under the deep waters of endless lines and multiplying ideas. I am greatly indebted for the help and encouragement of John Shaw, Jacob Aagaard and Andrew Greet of Quality Chess. The love, care and understanding of my wife Katarina went so far that she is happy to be woven between the lines.

I appreciate the attention of any reader who glances beyond this preface. The main rule of the survival guide in Black's Sicilian galaxy is to *Die Another Day* – be prepared to go under at any moment, but try to resist and strike back. The final (or should that be *Fatal*?) attraction of the Sicilian is the fact that it is truly dangerous – for both sides!

Lubomir Ftacnik
Bratislava, June 2010

Chapter 4

Closed Systems



Up Close(d) and Personal - Without g3

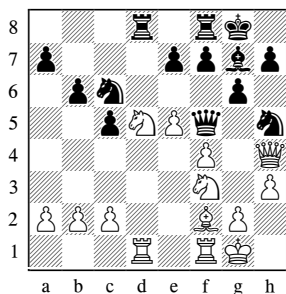
Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3

2...d6

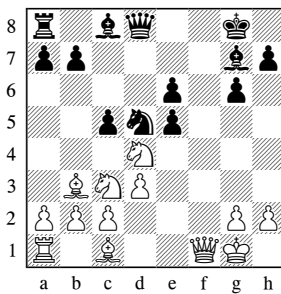
A) 3.♘ge2	68
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C21) after 17.♘d5



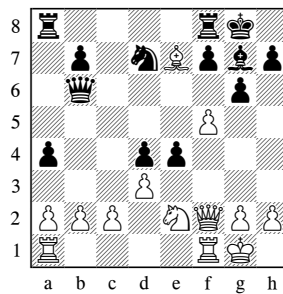
17...♙xd5!

C31) after 14.♚xf1



14...cxd4!N

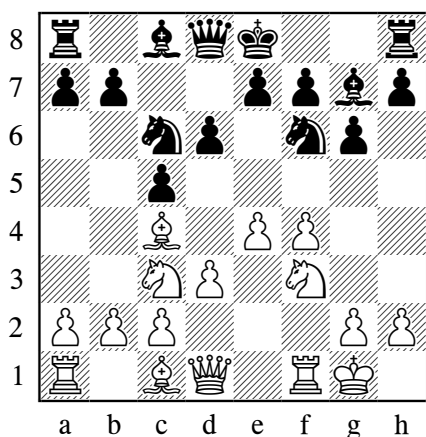
C323) 17.♙xe7



17...♚fe8N

Black has an extra pawn and healthy central control. True, the extra e-pawn may not be hurting White directly, but it certainly improves Black's control over the important central squares.

C32) 7.d3



This is the standard developing move.

7...0-0 8.♖e1

White's entire system is geared towards a kingside attack, and this move plays a key role. White's typical plan involves some combination of f5, ♖h4, ♔h6, ♘g5 followed by mate on h7. It is all rather crude, but can certainly be dangerous if Black does not know how to respond.

Sometimes White switches things around with the immediate:

8.f5 e6

As mentioned previously, it would be risky to accept the pawn, although it may be theoretically okay.

9.fxg6

9.♖e1 is well met by 9...d5!, which gives Black good chances to fight for the advantage, for instance: 10.♔b3 c4! 11.dxc4 dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♘xe4 13.♖xe4 exf5, Vo Hong Phuong – Xu Yuhua, Istanbul (ol) 2000.

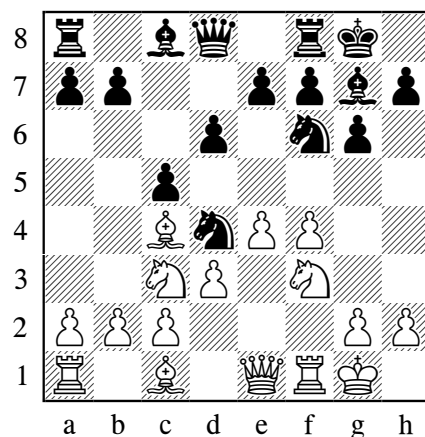
9...fxg6 10.♔g5 h6 11.♔h4

It is a similar story after 11.♔d2 d5 12.exd5 exd5 13.♔b3 ♔h7 14.♖e1 ♔g4. Black has all his pieces in play and the b3-bishop has trouble finding a useful role.

11...g5 12.♔e1 d5 13.♔b3 ♘a5

White's position was already becoming uncomfortable, Meulner – Ploetz, Wildflecken 1988.

8...♘d4



Here we will consider the ultra-aggressive but not quite sound C321) 9.f5?!, followed by the calmer alternatives of C322) 9.♘xd4 and C323) 9.♔b3.

C321) 9.f5?!

This was tried in Gofshtein – Pigusov, Bourbon Lancy 1997, and does not appear to have been repeated since.

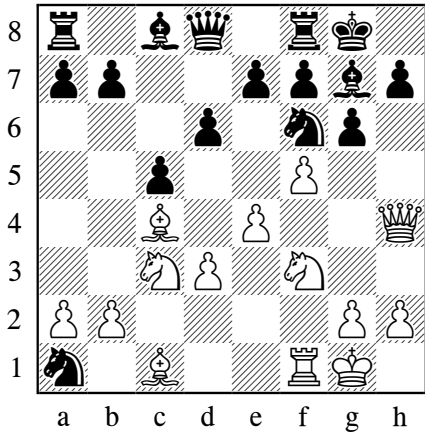
9...♘xc2!N

Black must not be intimidated. He should be able to survive the attack and win with his extra material, although strong nerves may be required at certain key moments.

10.♖h4 ♘a1

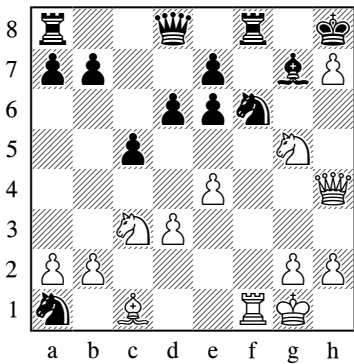
From this point on, the key to Black's defence will be to neutralize the c4-bishop.

The goal might be achieved by capturing the bishop outright, diverting it away from the a2-g8 diagonal, or blocking the said diagonal. Once this had been achieved, the remaining defensive moves should not be too difficult to find, as you can see in the following variations.



11. ♖h6

11.fxg6 should be met by 11...♙e6!, immediate going after the bishop. 12.gxh7† (After 12.gxf7† ♙xf7 Black should defend without much difficulty, for instance: 13.♙xf7† ♖xf7 14.♘g5 ♘c2 15.♘d5 [15.♘f7 ♖xf7 16.♗xh7 ♘d4+]) 15...♗f8+ 12...♗h8 13.♙xe6 fxe6 14.♘g5



14...♘g4! 15.♘xe6 ♙d4† 16.♘xd4 cxd4 17.♖xf8† ♗xf8 18.♗xg4 dxc3 19.bxc3 ♗f7 and Black should win.

11...b5!

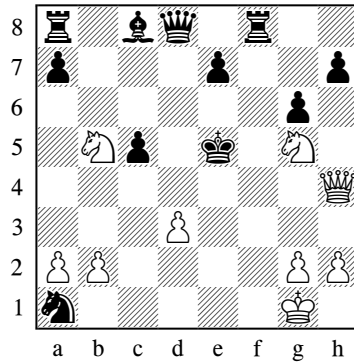
Once again, the c4-bishop is the target. 11...e6!? seems to be playable, but the text move is so obviously strong that there is no point in analysing anything else in detail.

It should briefly be noted that 11...d5? is much worse, for instance: 12.♘xd5 ♘xd5 13.♘g5! ♘f6 14.fxg6 hxg6 15.♙xg7 ♖xg7 16.♖xf6+-

12. ♙xb5

12.fxg6? bxc4 gives White nothing; alternatively after 12.♙d5? ♘xd5 13.♘xd5 Black kills the attack with 13...f6!+-.

The following line is more interesting: 12.♘b5 d5! Having drawn the knight away from the centre, this becomes an excellent move. Once again we are targeting the bishop. 13.♙xd5 ♘xd5 14.♘g5! The best try. 14...♘f6 15.fxg6 fxg6 16.♙xg7 ♖xg7 17.♖xf6 ♖xf6! 18.e5† ♖xe5



The king is surprisingly safe, for instance: 19.♗e4† ♖f6 20.♘h7† ♖g7 21.♘xf8 ♙f5 and Black wins.

12...♘c2!

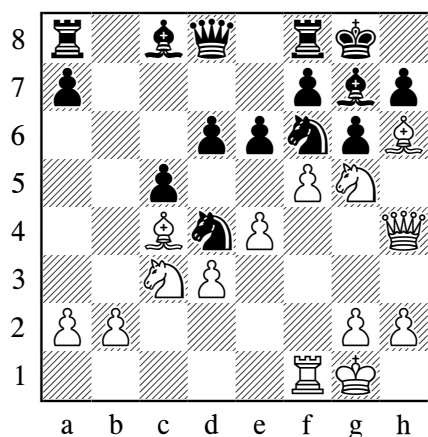
The knight is not only safeguarding itself from a potential capture, but also playing an active role in the defence.

13. ♙c4

Other moves are no better, for instance: 13.♖g5 ♖e3! Not only attacking the rook, but also threatening ...♙xh6 followed by ...♖eg4.

13...♖d4 14.♖g5 e6!

Thanks to the lost tempo involved in White's ♙xb5-c4 manoeuvre, Black had enough time to recentralize his knight, supporting the pawn on e6 and thereby preventing the bishop on c4 from playing an active role in the attack.



15.fxg6

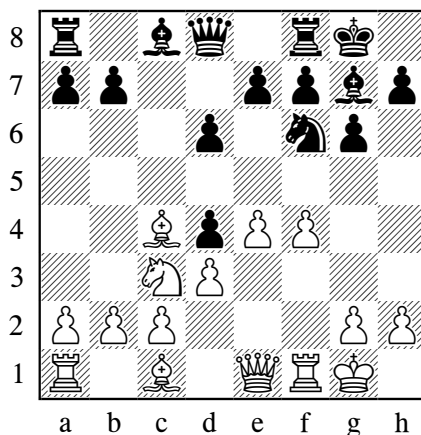
There is not much else that White can do.

15...fxg6 16.♙xg7 ♖xg7 17.♙xf6 h6!-+

The attack runs out of steam. As you can see, a certain amount of precision was required in order to defend correctly. At the same time, the ideas were quite easy to understand and follow: just take away the influence of the bishop on c4, and everything else more or less falls into place.

C322) 9.♖xd4 cxd4

The direct exchange in the centre may be White's best option, although it is not much of a try for an advantage.



10.♖d5

White should avoid 10.♖e2?! d5! 11.exd5 ♖xd5 when the resulting pawn structure favours Black. Here is one example: 12.♗f2 ♖e3 (Also interesting is 12...b5!?N 13.♙xb5 ♗b6 with promising compensation.) 13.♙xe3 dxe3 14.♗xe3 ♙xb2 15.♖ab1 ♙g7 16.♗f3 ♖b8 17.♖g3 e6 18.♖h1 b6 With the bishop pair and a sounder structure, Black was in full control in Kolosowski – Nediiko, Warsaw 2006.

10.♖d1 is not so bad, although Black should be able to obtain a comfortable game after 10...d5 11.♙b3 dxe4 12.dxe4, Armbrust – Fruebing, Willingen 2006. In this position it looks promising to pre-empt the possible e5-push with 12...♖d7!?N 13.♖f2 ♗c7 14.♖d3 a5! 15.a4 ♖c5 16.♖xc5 ♗xc5 when Black has good chances on the queenside.

10...♖xd5 11.♙xd5

White can also consider 11.exd5, J. Peters – D. Lee, Los Angeles 1999. White wants to attack along the e-file, but the downside is that his bishop has a restricted view of the board. Black should develop calmly with 11...♙d7N with the possible continuation 12.a4 a5 13.♙d2 ♖e8, with roughly even chances.

11...e6 12.♙b3 a5 13.a4 ♖h8!?

This is a sensible precaution.