

# **Understanding before Moving 3**

## **Sicilian Structures Part 1 Najdorf & Scheveningen**

**Herman Grooten**

First edition 2019 by Thinkers Publishing  
Copyright © 2019 Herman Grooten

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission from the publisher.

All sales or enquiries should be directed to Thinkers Publishing, 9850 Landegem, Belgium.

Email: [info@thinkerspublishing.com](mailto:info@thinkerspublishing.com)  
Website: [www.thinkerspublishing.com](http://www.thinkerspublishing.com)

**Managing Editor:** Herman Grooten

**Assistant Editor:** Daniel Fernandez

**Software:** Hub van de Laar

**Graphic Artist:** Philippe Tonnard

**Cover Design:** Mieke Mertens

**Photo Cover:** Ab Scheel †

**Photos:** Jos Sutmuller, Frans Peeters and Harry Gielen

**Production:** BESTinGraphics

**ISBN:** 9789492510631  
D/2019/13730/16

# **Understanding before Moving 3**

## **Sicilian Structures Part 1 Najdorf & Scheveningen**

**Herman Grooten**

**Thinkers Publishing 2019**



[www.thinkerspublishing.com](http://www.thinkerspublishing.com)

## Symbols used:

!	strong move	±	White has a clear advantage
?	weak move	∓	Black has a clear advantage
!!	brilliant move	+−	White has a decisive advantage
??	blunder	−+	Black has a decisive advantage
!?	interesting move	→	with an attack
?!	dubious move	↑	with the initiative
□	only move	↔	with counterplay
=	equal position	Δ	with the idea of...
∞	unclear position	∩	better is...
∞	compensation for lost material	N	novelty
±	White is slightly better	#	checkmate
∓	Black is slightly better	+	check

Next to most diagrams you will find a small box. The colour of the box indicates which side is to move in that position.

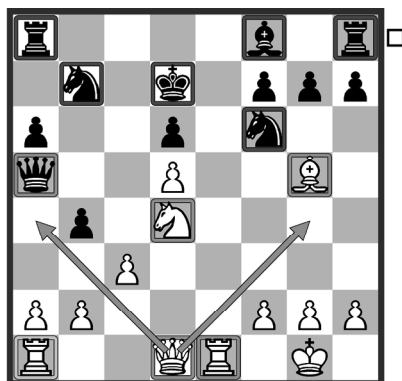
## Bibliography

Fundamental Chess Openings	– Paul van der Sterren
Beating the Sicilian 3	– John Nunn
Winning with the Najdorf	– Daniel King
Experts vs. the Sicilian	– Jacob Aagaard & John Shaw
The Sicilian Scheveningen	– Garry Kasparov & Alexander Nikitin
Sicilian: Najdorf	– Michael Stean
Najdorf for the Tournament Player	– John Nunn
The Complete Najdorf 6. ♘g5	– John Nunn
The Najdorf Variation SICILIAN DEFENSE	– Geller, Gligoric, Kavalek & Spassky
The Polugayevsky Variation	– F.R. van der Vliet
Garry Kasparov on Chess Kasparov vs Karpov	– Garry Kasparov
Megadatabase	– Chessbase

## Explanation of visual aids






In this book we will regularly make use of various types of visual aids. As a chess coach I have observed the impact that these can have on students' understanding.

This means that my diagrams will feature arrows (to indicate the specific manoeuvres that one or both sides would like to execute) as well as highlighted squares or pieces which are the ones being targeted in a more general sense.



Since this book- in contrast to the (Dutch-language) first volume- is not printed in colour, it fell to our software developer Hub van de Laar to nevertheless find ways to illustrate the visual aids in the book so that the positions can be understood at a glance. In the diagram above we can immediately see what White threatens, as well as the weapons that are still in his arsenal. The position comes from a great attacking game, Areschenko-Akbarinia, Kuala Lumpur 2002, in which White had sacrificed a piece for great attacking prospects.

We will not be using letters to denote chess pieces (as these might not be familiar to non-native English speakers) but rather the 'figurine' symbols, as follows:

Chess piece	Letter	Figurine
King	K	
Queen	Q	
Rook	R	
Bishop	B	
Knight	N	
Pawn	—	—

# Contents

<b>Symbols and bibliography</b>	-----	4
<b>Explanation of visual aids</b>	-----	5
<b>Contents</b>	-----	6
<b>Foreword</b>	-----	7
<b>Chapter 1</b>	Study of openings -----	13
<b>Chapter 2</b>	Background of the Sicilian -----	19
	Section 2.1 Introduction-----	19
	Section 2.2 Standard Tactics-----	21
	Section 2.3 Typical Manoeuvres and Strategic Concepts -----	48
	Section 2.4 The Origin of the Najdorf-----	57
	Section 2.5 Fundamentals of the Scheveningen-----	66
<b>Chapter 3</b>	Model Games with the Najdorf-----	69
	Section 3.1 Background of the Najdorf-----	69
	Section 3.2 Variation Overview of the Najdorf -----	70
<b>Chapter 4</b>	Model Games with the Scheveningen -----	227
	Section 4.1 Background of the Scheveningen-----	227
	Section 4.2 Variation Overview of the Scheveningen -----	229
<b>Chapter 5</b>	Exercises-----	381
<b>Chapter 6</b>	Solutions -----	386
<b>Game Index</b>	-----	395

## Foreword

After the first two volumes of the series had been produced (the first about Ruy Lopez and Italian structures after **1.e4 e5**, the second about Queen's Gambit structures after **1.d4 d5**), it was time for me to consider the third volume. Since the Sicilian is such a popular opening among club players, the choice was virtually automatic and resulted in the book you now hold. It was, however, clear from early on that such a nuanced and wide-ranging opening could never fit in a single volume. That is why the series will continue with more Sicilian books after this one. As my former teacher, the late Huub van Dongen, once said: "There is more literature about the Najdorf variation alone than about the Middle Ages!" And, you know, maybe he's right. The complexities of the Sicilian are such that it is quite the job to explain them in the style I established with the first two volumes on more classical openings. Each Sicilian variation has quite specific characteristics and deserves separate treatment. But in placing the systems in books I tried to group together those that are most similar to each other. Hence, the Dragon does not go with the Sveshnikov; in the present book you will find the Najdorf and Scheveningen variations, which are altogether more similar to each other and even have some overlap. But before we go any further we should unpack a small question: why play any Sicilian at all?

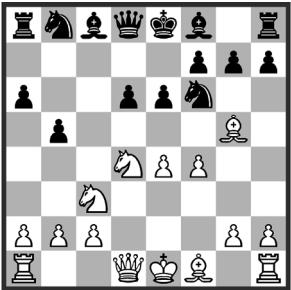

As covered in the 1<sup>st</sup> volume of *Understanding Before Moving*, there is nothing wrong with **1.e4 e5**. This is still the case today. But it seems strong players who are playing against lower-rated players with Black sometimes find it difficult to create enough winning chances there if White isn't so inclined. Hence many players play the Sicilian alongside their main choice: sometimes a sharp fight is what is needed!

The second question I should answer first is how the aforementioned Sicilian lines (Najdorf and Scheveningen), which have been in the repertoires of practically all world champions, could be meaningfully presented for the club-player audience. This is done according to the concept of this series: facilitating an understanding of the typical manoeuvres and common strategic or tactical concepts of the opening. These will be presented in a structured way using annotated games in the different lines in the Najdorf and Scheveningen. Each line (essentially, each White 6<sup>th</sup> move in the two variations) gets an extensive intro and a selection of *entire* games. This is a conscious decision: experience shows that players who have entire games in

mind (including even the deep endgame) have a better idea of how to gain opening advantages and – having got them – how they can be converted into victories.

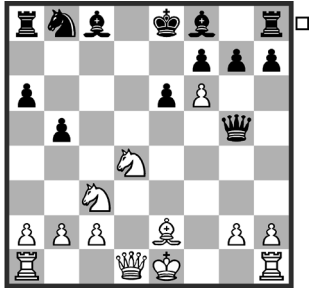
Remember what I said about the Sicilian not fitting in one book? Well, if I were to be exhaustive about it, neither would the Najdorf. My chess library has two books- one of which is thick- about the Polugaevsky variation of the Najdorf. I played this a fair bit when I was around 20 years old: the variation tree is dense and extremely hard to memorise, yet memorise it you must since strategy plays a limited role here.

There is also the famous Poisoned Pawn variation, popularised by Fischer and never refuted. It leads to positions which are no less insane, and the theoretical verdict is still pending. I think if I were to include both of these lines and try and do them justice, my publisher would justifiably express concern about the page-count. Instead, I will just explain here what I mean when I refer to them, and then move on:

Polugaevsky variation	Poisoned Pawn variation
<p>1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♙g5 e6 7.f4 b5</p>	<p>1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♙g5 e6 7.f4 ♖b6</p>
 <p>A chessboard diagram showing the position after 7... b5 in the Polugaevsky variation. White pieces are on e4, f3, d4, c3, g5, and f4. Black pieces are on c5, d6, f6, a6, e6, and b5. The board is oriented with a1 at the bottom-left.</p>	 <p>A chessboard diagram showing the position after 7... ♖b6 in the Poisoned Pawn variation. White pieces are on e4, f3, d4, c3, g5, and f4. Black pieces are on c5, d6, f6, a6, e6, and b6. The board is oriented with a1 at the bottom-left.</p>
<p>Position after: 7... b5</p>	<p>Position after: 7... ♖b6</p>



8. e5 dxe5 9. fxe5 ♖c7 10. exf6 ♜e5+ 11. ♘e2 ♜xg5



Position after: 11... ♜xg5

8. ♜d2 ♜xb2 9. ♖b1 ♜a3



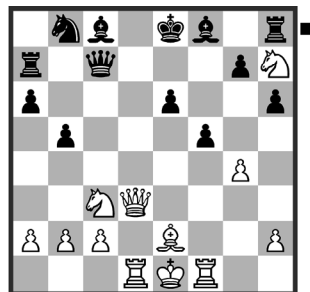
Position after: 9... ♜a3

The Poisoned Pawn is just like the Polugaevsky in that nowadays, a player could learn as much about it as desired with computer analysis and memorisation. A top player like Vachier Lagrave, who plays it frequently, has done a lot of both. He discovered that the insertion of 7 ...h6 8. ♘h4 before 8 ...♜b6 is clever, for instance.

But I am writing for an audience that, by and large, is not interested in chess as a memory contest. So I'm not going to offer you lots of novelties and dense variation trees. On the contrary. The approach is to take the reader into the seemingly impenetrable labyrinth of variations without flinching, but then to base my comments on plans and concepts instead of computer analysis. (This means that verbal comments dominate.) The examples need to be clear enough and leave enough impression on your mind that, no matter how complicated the game becomes, you can adapt that which you have already learned to the new situation. Even with this hyper-sharp opening, the understanding of strategic basics is of tremendous importance. Supported by these, you stand a better chance of navigating the variation tree. Of course some variations will be indispensable, but I will try and use them to illustrate my point, rather than them being the point. The better your insight into the position, the less dependent you become on specific move-sequences anyway.

I have something else to say about the Polugaevsky variation, which is an anecdote that previously was not very well known. When, in the distant past (actually, the late seventies) I went to study Information Technology in Eindhoven, I soon disco-

vered that there were two other chess players on the same course. They were Johan van Mil and Peter Boll. The latter played correspondence chess and he mainly did that to iron out the wrinkles in his opening repertoire. He asked us if we would like to regularly come to his house for tea to analyse openings. We did so; the 'tradition' eventually expanded to last one whole afternoon a week and although the tea was usually quickly replaced by bottled beer, we



tried to look together at some variations that we all played. There was a booklet called *The Polugaevsky Variation* (F.R. van der Vliet) in which we came across a completely ridiculous idea. One ancillary diagram, deep in a variation, was the one shown above. White has just answered black's ...h7-h6 with the insane ♖g5-h7!?!? Before we go further, it is necessary to introduce the author of this booklet to you. Fred van der Vliet, from The Hague and a lawyer by profession, was a strong player in the seventies and eighties. He didn't play much, but mostly in the club competition, where he played for many years in a row for the professional team Volmac / Rotterdam, and usually achieved high scores. Also, being a strong master-class player, he qualified many times in a row for the Dutch championships. At that



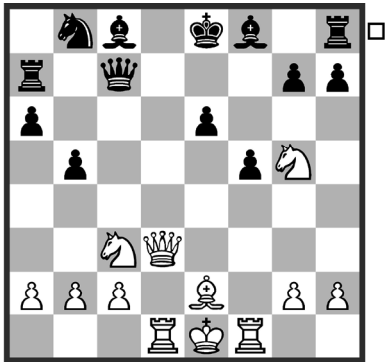
*FM Fred van der Vliet (left) playing against Professor and computer expert Jaap van den Herik*

time, if you had a rating above 2400, you were among the top 20 in our country. He never became an IM but as a lawyer he would always nevertheless have 'letters' before his name! He always looked neat with his jacket and tie, although sometimes he would not behave so well. He was also a formidable fast-chess player who won many a tournament. In between the rounds he would often set up a position from the Polugaevsky variation and then showed interested people some of his analysis, which he tried to test for accuracy. It is hard to imagine now,

time, if you had a rating above 2400, you were among the top 20 in our country. He never became an IM but as a lawyer he would always nevertheless have 'letters' before his name! He always looked neat with his jacket and tie, although sometimes he would not behave so well. He was also a formidable fast-chess player who won many a tournament. In between the rounds he would often set up a position from the Polugaevsky variation and then showed interested people some of his analysis, which he tried to test for accuracy. It is hard to imagine now,

but at that time there were no (strong) chess programs, so chess players had to rely on their own analysis skills. Van der Vliet had a style that he once called “pull and punch”, and a repertoire to match. With White he liked to play 1.  $\text{Nf3}$  or 1.  $\text{d4}$  and proceed slowly, in measured positional fashion. However, with Black he played the exact opposite way. "You have to do something to compensate for the tempo that you are behind," he used to tell me. That is why he had, among other things, the Polugaevsky variation in his repertoire. And that resulted in a small but very detailed booklet, in which Van der Vliet proved to be able to analyze very well. He once told me he had offered the book to Polugaevsky himself, who later said that he was impressed by his analysis. We return to the diagram. This arises as follows:

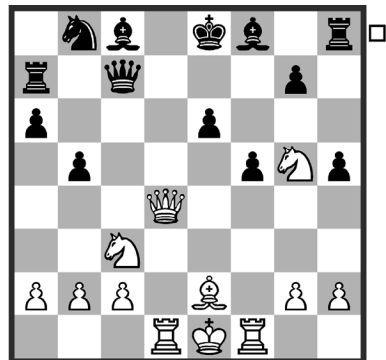
1.  $\text{e4}$   $\text{c5}$  2.  $\text{Nf3}$   $\text{d6}$  3.  $\text{d4}$   $\text{cxd4}$  4.  $\text{Nxd4}$   $\text{Nf6}$  5.  $\text{Nc3}$   $\text{a6}$  6.  $\text{Qg5}$   $\text{e6}$  7.  $\text{f4}$   $\text{b5}$  8.  $\text{e5}$   $\text{dxe5}$  9.  $\text{fxe5}$   $\text{Qc7}$  10.  $\text{exf6}$   $\text{Qe5+}$  11.  $\text{Qe2}$   $\text{Qxg5}$  12.  $\text{Qd3}$   $\text{Qxf6}$  13.  $\text{Rf1}$   $\text{Qe5}$  14.  $\text{Rd1}$   $\text{Ra7}$  15.  $\text{Nf3}$   $\text{Qc7}$  16.  $\text{Ng5}$   $\text{f5}$  17.  $\text{g4}$



Position after: 16...  $\text{f5}$

This move is no longer played in practice but Fred van der Vliet analysed it. It looks logical because white puts pressure on the  $\text{f5}$ -pawn. Meanwhile, Tal played (in the fourth game of his 1980 match against Polugaevsky) the interesting 17.  $\text{Qd4}!$ ? threatening  $\text{Qh5+}$ . Black

has nothing better than the weakening move 17...  $\text{h5}$ , whereupon Tal continued with the rook sacrifice 18.  $\text{Rxf5}!$ ? After 18...  $\text{exf5}$  19.  $\text{Nd5}$   $\text{Qd7}$  the game eventually ended in a draw. One of my analysis partners made the prescient remark that normally in a position where Black plays ... $\text{f5}$  and ... $\text{h5}$ , White then tries to get a knight to  $\text{g5}$ . In this position, the knight goes to  $\text{g5}$  *first* and then Black plays ... $\text{f7-f5}$  and ... $\text{h7-h5}$ . A complete reversal of normality!



Position after: 17...  $\text{h5}$

17...  $\text{Qe7}$

As a note in this position, Van der Vliet gives 17 ... h6!? and now 18. gxf5 exf5 and so on. As an alternative, he suggested (you guessed it) 18. ♖h7.

He didn't offer any comment on the move. But surely, such an insane move demands an explanation! I remember well that one of us, referring to the book, played out this move on the board in front of us. And that the three of us looked speechlessly at the board for about one minute and then – no doubt partly under the influence of the beer – burst into an uncontrollable shower of laughter that must have lasted more than 10 minutes. When we

also made the following moves: 18 ... ♖xh7 19. gxf5 and saw that White is actually winning here, we stopped laughing: Fred had not only been serious, but also correct. In my copy of the book I added a comment 'hahahaha' in pencil in the margin.

This anecdote shows how absurd these types of variations within the Polugaevsky can get. That's why I stopped playing it. The same can be said of the "Poisoned Pawn", as mentioned. It is also very hard to understand for an outsider, and I decided to let that one slide without any comments at all.

It is always proper to give acknowledgement to the people whose support has helped with your work. I would like to thank the English grandmaster **Daniel Fernandez** for his work on this book. He was involved in the English translation; and also, being a connoisseur of the Sicilian himself he was able to give useful advice on a number of points.

In addition, I greatly appreciate the contribution made to this work by **Daniel Vanheirzeele**, who took on the thankless task of proofreading. I also thank **Jos Sutmuller**, **Frans Peeters** and **Harry Gielen** for making their photos available. We wish the reader every pleasure in working through this third book of this series.

IM Herman Grooten, November 2019.



# Study of Openings

## § 1.1 Introduction

Almost every self-respecting chess player nowadays uses an enormous range of information. Opening books have traditionally been very popular, but software and videos are now beyond the scope of the word 'ubiquitous', and we should use 'universal' instead. After I was handed a crushing opening defeat in a Sicilian-themed rapid tournament this year, my opponent (who had played almost everything *à tempo*) asked me: "don't you watch chess videos?" Never mind that I hardly had the time to keep up with cutting-edge theory in one line, let alone to spend 12 hours a week watching every new video produced in every opening that might come up! It surprised him, clearly, that I hadn't known the merits of the crazy system which he had played against me; but even more so that I had not seen that video...!

It is clear (and unsurprising) that studying openings is a major hobby for many club players. With the current state of technology, almost all your opponents will have a large number of games available- mere clicks away on free online databases. Within minutes you can get an idea of what openings you might be seeing the next day. 'Prep' also happens between events; many players enjoy looking

through variations (with a book and laptop, naturally) after the main part of their day is over, as befits a true hobbyist. Such post-dinner analysis sessions inevitably end all too soon; time will tell just how much the players recall in their next competitive game. Aside from questions of memory, of course, one must also ask: How comprehensive was the preparation? What happens when the opponent uncorks a surprise?

I have given quite a few chess courses for adults. And they always asked me some variant of the following question: "What do I do when my preparation is over?" To answer them, I needed to see sets of their games; so I asked for these to better understand what they were going through. When replaying the games, I noticed that - despite a good basic knowledge - they indeed had significant trouble at the moment when theory ended (or possibly the opponent deviated.) They were left to improvise for themselves and sometimes that didn't go so well.

The middlegames would then become so scrappy that my students lost the thread. Which, of course, was understandable if they had never been shown the 'thread' to begin with. So I started to focus on that in training. How could we work to increase the cohesion between successive moves they made in unfamiliar situations?

Grandmasters know, as few others do, how to design a plan. In looking into how they do this, the first stage in our search should be the first world champion, Wilhelm Steinitz, who listed out the basics of chess strategy and made the first attempt at a systematic method of chess pedagogy. The essence of Steinitz's method is that all plans arise from the pawn structure. "The pawn structure is the skeleton of the position. Everything else hangs on that skeleton", said the patriarch.

The pawn structure, for starters, determines where the pieces can or cannot go. Steinitz showed that plans (for both sides) follow almost 'by force'. And we don't have to do the work of deriving plans! We



*Wilhelm Steinitz*

shortcut the procedure by looking at games by strong players, who often know with high precision where their pieces should go: we can observe their plans, then adapt them slightly to the needs of our own positions. This all raises some questions:

- Where do we want to place our pawns in the opening?
- Can we construct a plan here using one from a completely different opening?
- How does a top player distil the right plan from the position's characteristics?
- Which pieces would we like to trade, and which would we rather not trade?
- How can we set up an attack?
- How do we cross the opponent's plans?

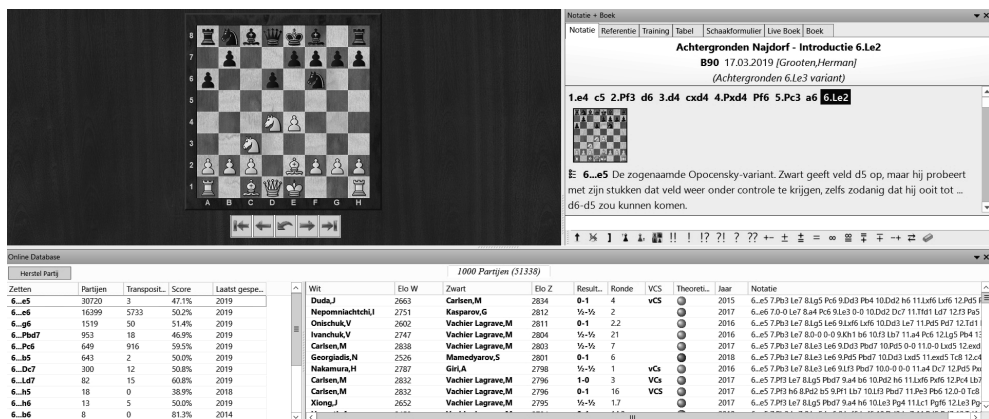
Having these questions in the back of your mind will help keep your opening study 'on track', i.e. informed by the bigger picture. This series is all about the bigger picture: *why* is the theory the way it is? Famous Ukrainian GM and coach Adrian Mikhalchishin once said that model games are a great way of improving a player's insight; especially annotated ones. The ones you will find here have text annotations as well as variations, which I think beats pure variation-based annotation. (Learning the theory itself, while I do give some, is almost incidental, which is the way it should be; two birds with one stone.) My aim is that you understand the opening. That's why I called the series '*Understanding before Moving*'.

## § 1.2 How to Study Openings Properly

In the course of my coaching, it has become clear to me that for people to study openings in a responsible and objective way, the link had to be made between 'rarefied' grandmaster practice, and their own experience. With the help of modern databases and software, every club player can enter their own games and subject them to close, computer-aided scrutiny with an engine. As part of the same process, the player should look for other games which went a similar way but featuring a much stronger player than themselves. Good examples may sometimes feature a class disparity between the two players, so that the plans and concepts can be shown in their full glory. If the game also came with annotations-perfect. It can then be added to a special database on the player's computer, created just to store everything to do with that particular variation.

Now for some details on the procedure of how to use these grandmaster games. I take the 6. ♗e2 Najdorf as my example in what follows.

First, enter the moves to reach this position from the initial one, then save it in a new database, with the game name '6. ♗e2 introduction.' Second, using the 'reference' tab, bring up the list of games that have reached the position. Third, search by "Elo B" to get those games played by the 'big boys' with Black. We see the name Magnus Carlsen right at the top. Since the VCS field is filled in with "vCS", we know that ChessBase premium members are able to view analysis of the Carlsen game.



The screenshot shows the ChessBase Online Database interface. On the left is a chessboard with the position after 6...e5. On the right is the game details for 'Achtergronden Najdorf - Introductie 6.Le2' by B90, dated 17.03.2019. The moves listed are 1.e4 c5 2.Pf3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Pxd4 Pf6 5.Pc3 a6 6.Le2. Below the board is a table of 1000 parties with columns for Zetten, Partijen, Transpoort, Score, and Laetst gespe... The table lists various players and their performance statistics.

Zetten	Partijen	Transpoort	Score	Laetst gespe...
6...e5	30720	3	47.1%	2019
6...e6	16399	5733	50.2%	2019
6...g6	1519	50	51.4%	2019
6...Pbd7	953	18	46.9%	2019
6...Pc6	649	916	59.5%	2019
6...b5	643	2	50.0%	2019
6...Dc7	300	12	50.8%	2019
6...Ld7	82	15	60.8%	2019
6...h5	18	0	38.9%	2018
6...h6	13	5	50.0%	2019
6...b6	8	0	61.3%	2014

Screenshot from ChessBase Online Database

We can click on this game, view the annotations, and add it to our database. A club player would learn most if the game were presented with clear verbal explanation and not too many lines. In this case, the annotations were made by Indian IM (and prolific annotator) Sagar Shah, who is good at these strategic explanations.

Note that we could hardly call the White player in this game 'weak', yet in this game he gets outclassed by a player of even greater calibre, who manages to show the ideas Black has in this structure with outstanding clarity.

To recap the selection and use of such games:



First determine your starting position. Which pawn-structure do you want to know about? Pick a tabiya (typical and commonly reached opening position, with diverging onward moves) with which to begin. Find a game between a top grandmaster and a relatively weak (say, 150 points lower) opponent.





Screenshot from ChessBase of the game Duda-Carlsen

- 👉 The games must clearly demonstrate the strategic themes of the opening.
- 👉 The games must be annotated, preferably in your first language. Where a symbol like  $\pm$  or  $\infty$  is used, it should be explained. There should be a narrative element and this should be dominated by words, and not variations.
- 👉 Analyse the game yourself based on the notes by the existing annotator. You should verbalise that which you have learned from the game. Having written down your newfound insights, you will be more likely to remember them should there arise an appropriate occasion in a real game.

## § 1.3 Pitfalls

Students of chess, even with all the zeal in the world, sometimes lose their way while trying to follow a procedure like the one I gave above. So I have identified the common mistakes people make, and outline some simple steps to avoid them:

- 💡 As indicated above, it is wise to avoid analysis from (for example) Informator, which uses only symbols. The  $\pm$ ,  $\odot$  or  $\leftrightsquigarrow$  do not improve our understanding; rather, this would come from verbal explanations by the authors.
- 💡 Be critical of the content: sometimes a strong engine is used without the author also applying their own brain. Superficiality and mistakes often result.

- ☀ Some books are unsuitable. Similarly to above, the authors can be superficial or, worse, have an agenda. For opening manuals, choose the ones with a lot of text, and preferably 'game-based' instead of 'tree-based'.
- ☀ Lots of analysis is available in other languages; it is okay to use this material, but only if you have mastered the language; else, confusion can result. It would be better, in this case, to annotate the game yourself, in your own language.
- ☀ In modern times, many chess videos can also be found online. A lot of content is available on [chessbase.com](http://chessbase.com), [chess.com](http://chess.com), [chess24.com](http://chess24.com) and YouTube.
- ☀ With modern chess programs, you can create diagrams with arrows (as in this book!) which accentuate the point you want to make. Many players already use this feature well!



# Background of the Sicilian

## § 2.1 Introduction

Many chess players study openings by rote memorisation. Of these, some lucky ones also have a good enough memory for this study to actually be enjoyable. Unfortunately, there are also a number of players who (in spite of the numerous good theoretical manuals which do exist out there) would not obtain any particularly remarkable result by investing hours in such work. For this demographic, it is necessary to work in a different way: a conceptual or plan-based approach. In my experience, when substantially lower-rated players read a tree-type book (with variation codes such as A2241 in each chapter) by a grandmaster or international master, they are often puzzled by the evaluation symbols given in it, such as  $\pm$ .

Rather than expect my readers to work out from such sparse details how they should play a given position (or what they should look out for) I will take the opposite approach. We will start from strategic considerations in each chapter, explaining how the plans of the two sides play off each other in a given scenario. When I give a variation, you may expect there to be a good reason. However, in order to be able to do that without pulling the wool over your eyes (for the Sicilian is, in fact, a rather tactical opening) I have included the present chapter, so that you can un-



*Miguel Najdorf, the man who played an important role in developing the Najdorf Variation*

Understand the stereotypical tactics that may arise in the Sicilian for both sides and be aware of them while reading the remainder of the book. Remember, in the Sicilian you generally can't afford to miss a trick; do so and you may find yourself lost.

At the end of this chapter there are two historical sections: the first on the development of the Najdorf variation and its genesis in the ideas of Boleslavsky; the second being a short introduction to the Scheveningen variation.

White's hegemony over the d5-square itself. Until Black's last move, in fact, White could have played a knight there at almost any time, so we could have considered the square an integral part of White's territory. There are of course two ways the push could happen now, depending on whether White plays f4-f5 next. If he does not, then Black can sometimes play his push without exchanging on f4 first, but is more likely to flick in the swap. If White does play f5, though, it is instructive to note that Black is on time with his central break in case of 12. f5 ♖d7 13. g4 ♖c6 14. ♖f3 d5 when Black has a better game. If not for this idea of re-routing the bishop to c6, then White would be justified in pushing g2-g4- in both this and other situations.

### 8... 0-0

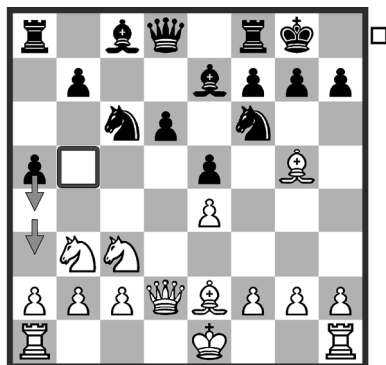
Black continues developing. As you might have seen from the last note, though, the whole game is still based around Black trying to achieve that push of primary importance in all Sicilian lines: ...d6-d5. It turns out that while the e5-pawn is not useful in preparing that break, it is very useful in limiting White's options immediately afterwards- meaning of course that White can no longer reply to ...d6-d5 with his own push e4-e5, chasing away Black's knight from f6. Particularly if there were still many pawns on the board, Black would then become constricted. In general, Black only allows this development if he gets

something else in return, or is at least able to reply by moving his knight forwards (i.e. to e4, or possibly g4.) This reasoning is key in understanding the validity of Boleslavsky's conception.

### 9. ♔d2

After this normal-looking move, Boleslavsky is able to show his idea.

### 9... a5!?



Position after: 9... a5!?

### 10. a4 ♞b4

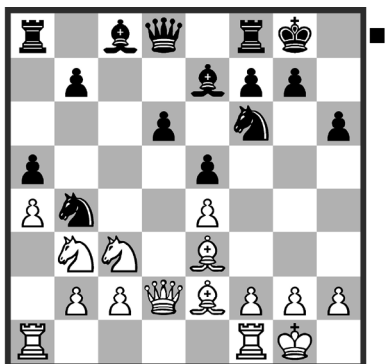
White having played a2-a4, there is now no immediate convincing answer to the thematic advance of Black's knight to this square (as mentioned before) and so Boleslavsky plays it without delay.

### 11. 0-0 h6

Forcing White to make a decision regarding this bishop. In particular, it is good to note that Black plays this move before White gets a rook to d1, as that

would then help set up tactics against Black's d6-pawn.

### 12. ♖e3?!



Position after: 12. ♖e3?!

Yanofsky tries to keep his bishop, but in doing so, he somewhat backs himself into a corner.

White had an opportunity to play the equally instructive sequence of 12. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 and now

**A)** Not 13. ♘d5?! which has been given in some annotators' work. 13... ♗g5 14. ♖d1 ♘xd5 15. exd5 [White normally wants to recapture on d5 with a piece in such lines, but in this case it won't be staying there long: 15. ♖xd5 ♖e6 and the Black pieces coordinate marvellously.] 15... ♖d7 and here too it is the second player who has all the prospects.

**B)** 13. ♘b5!? White's utmost aim should be getting c2-c3 in. 13... ♖e6 This is a double-edged position in

which the main question is whether Black can continue with his plan. The biggest problem with it was that White wanted to push away the b4-knight with c2-c3. Now Black has solved this problem, but perhaps only in the short-term. [Definitely not the immediate advance 13... d5? though: that simply loses a crucial pawn to 14. c3! and White is much better.]

### 12... d5!

There is no reason to delay this advance. Black gains tempo both with the advance itself, and the subsequent recaptures.

### 13. exd5 ♘fxd5 14. ♖xd5 ♘xd5

We can already see the first result of ...d6-d5: Black has a very strong knight on d5. However, from a pragmatic point of view, White should still avoid trading it for his dark-squared bishop, or else Black's advantage will take on a more long-term nature.

### 15. ♖c5 ♘f4

Boleslavsky wants to use the activity and range of his knight in concrete fashion.

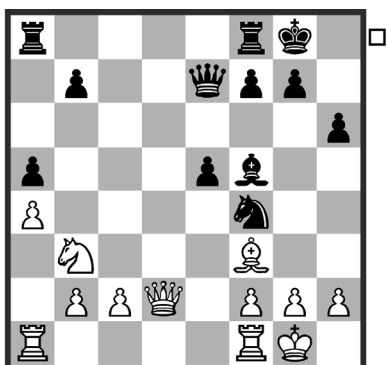
### 16. ♖xe7?!

Not the most accurate.

A) 16. ♖xd8? fails for a simple reason: the 'zwischenzug' 16... ♘xe2+ will leave Black up two pieces for a rook.

B) 16. ♖e3 was preferable, although after some trades Black will still find himself with a better minor piece.

16... ♖xe7 17. ♕f3 ♕f5



Position after: 17... ♕f5

18. ♖fe1

White badly needs to reinforce his position in this way -Black is already slightly better- and there is definitely no time to waste on taking the meaningless a5-pawn.

If we look for a concrete reason why White can't take this pawn, there is one of those available too. 18. ♘xa5? ♖fd8 19. ♖e1 Otherwise ...e5-e4 will come with even more devastating effect. 19... e4

A) On the natural 20. ♘b3 there follows 20... ♖g5 21. ♕xe4 ♖e8 with decisive material gain.

B) 20. ♖a3 White wants to play the innovative ♖a3-e3, but this is too slow and doesn't stop the main threat. 20... ♖c7! Black simply wins a piece. [It is also possible to play 20... ♖g5!? 21. ♕xe4 ♖e8 in spite of the third-rank rook swing: 22. ♖g3 ♖e7 23. f3 ♖c5+ and Black nevertheless picks up the a5-knight.]

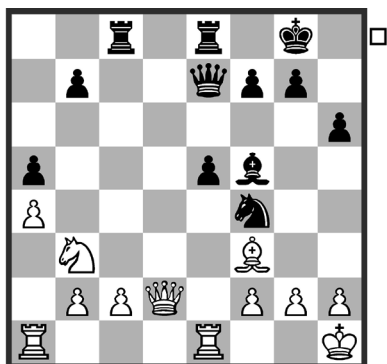
C) Black is threatening to attack two pieces and win one of them with ...♖c7. 20. g3 ♘h3+ Black can carry out his threat once more after this immediate check. 21. ♔h1 Now the queen leaves the e-file pin with gain of tempo: 21... ♖c7! and Black wins a piece.

18... ♖fe8 19. ♔h1

Here, too, there wasn't really time to take on a5.

Here there is no direct win, but after 19. ♘xa5?! ♖g5 20. ♘b3 ♖ac8 21. ♖ac1 e4 White's problems are steadily piling up and the extra queenside pawn will be of absolutely no use. In fact, to avoid losing a piece immediately, White must give back the pawn: 22. h4 ♖xh4 23. g3 but after the logical 23... ♘h3+ Black's attack will continue unabated.

19... ♖ac8

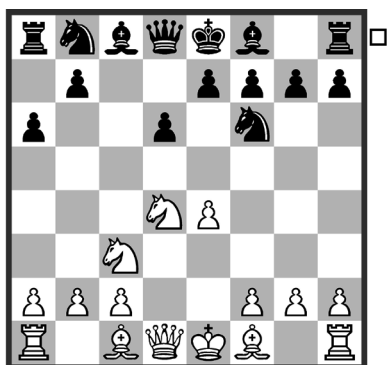


Position after: 19... ♖f8

Black has developed all his forces and he is clearly the one dictating the further development of events. His opening can be considered a success.

Now we finally come to a brief rationale for the Najdorf variation.

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



Position after: 5... a6

This move is named after the Polish – Argentinian grandmaster Miguel Najdorf. As we can see, this unassuming move doesn't develop anything, but it

does nevertheless accomplish two noteworthy purposes:

1) Keeping the White light-squared bishop and knights away from the b5-square.

2) Preparing the advance ...b7-b5. This advance would not only gain space for Black on the queenside, but also put White under slight pressure because of the idea of ...b5-b4 winning the e4-pawn.

Najdorf, naturally, had more ideas behind his setup and we shall see some of these in due course. In this position White has a wide range of moves, but for now let us focus on the response which was most popular during the earliest years of Najdorf's system:

6. ♕e2

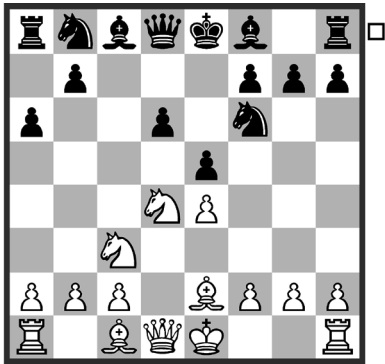
In the 70's this was known as the Opocensky variation and it was frequently played by (then current) world champion, Anatoly Karpov, among others.

6... e5

Najdorf was also fond of this pawn push, which is analogous to the one we saw in the Classical Sicilian and which signs up for the "Boleslavsky structure".

The White knight should, in its retreat, consider not blocking the f-pawn to be more important than its own happiness.



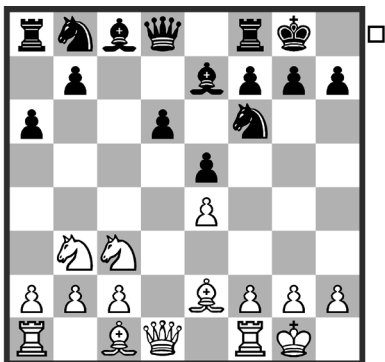


Position after: 6... e5

7. ♘b3

For the next few moves, both sides try to complete their development as soon as possible and castle kingside.

7... ♞e7 8. 0-0 0-0

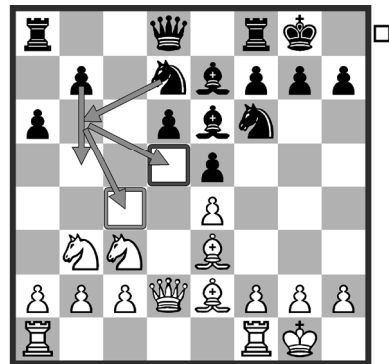


Position after: 8... 0-0

The contours of the future middlegame are now clear. As is customary in the Sicilian, White will play with f2-f4 on the king's wing and at the same time keep in mind the possibility of using the outpost on d5. As a rule, though, the second idea is only beneficial for him if he

can arrange to make his last recapture there with a piece. Therefore, as in the Boleslavsky system, Black should try and control the d5-square with his pieces.

9. ♞e3 ♞e6 10. ♚d2 ♞bd7



Position after: 10... ♞bd7

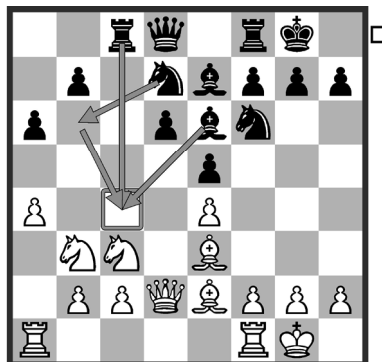
Only with this move does Black's plan become clear. It was less practical here to play ... a6-a5-a4, so he tries for something else. In most cases he will try and further develop this knight to b6, where it controls the d5-square- preferably after including the pawn break ...b7-b5. If Black manages to make both of those moves he will be able to face the future with confidence. Besides the development of the queen's knight (using the route d7-b6 rather than c6-b4) we can also enumerate a few other differences with the Boleslavsky system. Firstly, on its new outpost the queen's knight will only be vulnerable to an a-pawn advance; only rarely will the c-pawn ever threaten to go to c5; whereas in the Boleslavsky system we saw White play

c2-c3 with some regularity in the different variations. Secondly, in those variations we saw that Black invariably had to prepare ...♞c6-b4 with an a-pawn thrust, which necessarily weakened the light squares on his queenside. This meant that White had a permanent hold over the b5-square, which a knight could use to target the d6-pawn; this also ruled out one of Black's best sources of play, which was the minority attack based on ...b7-b5 itself.

### 11. a4

This was obligatory now, otherwise Black would definitely have played ...b7-b5.

### 11... ♖c8



Position after: 11... ♖c8

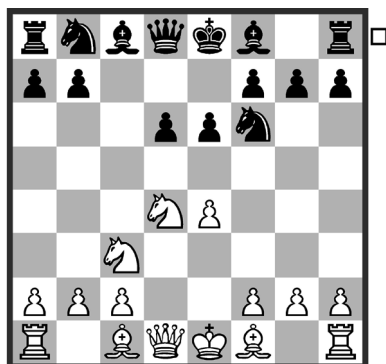
Reaching a key position which has arisen in numerous practical examples. Black may consider different kinds of operations on the c-file, which can include the exchange sacrifice as well as the simple transfer of a bishop or knight to the c4-square.

## § 2.5 Fundamentals of the Scheveningen

Lots of players have asked me how to get started in the Sicilian, or which line to learn first. The question might be asked by a player with a classical style who is looking for something a bit more interesting than 1.e4 e5, or by anyone who wants an opening to play against lower-rated players with Black. In either case, almost any Sicilian line would be acceptable, because there is a lot of play in the resulting positions. But where to start? Almost all World Champions have mastered at least one variation of the opening from the Black side. Garry Kasparov, for example, popularised the Scheveningen variant, which he then published a book about, together with his trainer/second Alexander Nikitin. The most important reason to start with the Scheveningen system is that this opening can actually be played without too much theoretical knowledge, provided you have a fair degree of common sense. Of course, there are traps, but my experience is that generally well-educated players manage to survive in unfamiliar positions, unless they are just too complicated. The following outline describes the essence of the Scheveningen system. Black develops his knights to the logical squares f6 and c6, the bishops go to e7 and d7, the king castles quickly so that the rooks are connected, and the queen sits happily on c7. She is unlikely to be disturbed there because at one moment or other black has typically included ...a7-a6 to protect against a knight intrusion on b5. Moving into the early middlegame, Black can also try and gain space on the queenside with ...b7-b5. There are various choices for the Black rooks, but a common formation is to have them on c8 and e8. We often see that they go to c8 and e8. A typical trade he may choose to execute is ...♞c6xd4, freeing up the c6-square for his bishop and ensuring that a future ...e6-e5 wins a tempo.

1. e4 c5 2. ♞f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♞xd4  
♞f6 5. ♞c3 d6

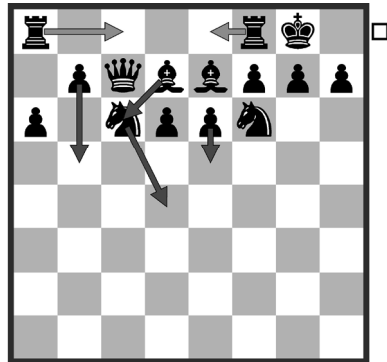
We take this to be the 'official' way of reaching the Scheveningen. Of course, one has to bear in mind that there are two orders by which this position can be reached, as well as various ways to transpose (from other Sicilian systems) into the material that follows. The Scheveningen's debut in high-level play was made at a strong tournament held



Position after: 5... d6

in 1923 a Dutch spa town of the same name (it is situated near The Hague, on the North Sea.) Several players tried the opening during the event (including local hero and future world champion Euwe, who played it against Maróczy), hence the choice to name it after the town instead!

The basic set-up is as mentioned:



- ♞ knights to f6 and c6
- ♞ bishops (usually) to e7 and d7
- ♞ short castling
- ♞ queen on c7
- ♞ rooks on c8 and e8
- ♞ ...a7-a6, and then either ...b7-b5-b4 (if possible) or
- ♞ a knight manoeuvre to c4.

A short introduction, but it's almost enough to get started with already. You might as well try and use this knowledge to play practice games with the Scheveningen, so you have some experience and fun while you set up your repertoire- then enter your game in a database, look for other similar games, rinse and repeat! You're on your way to becoming a Sicilian player...





## Model Games with the Najdorf

### § 3.1 Background of the Najdorf

One of the most beautiful (but also most difficult!) variations in the Sicilian is the Najdorf. It draws its name from the Argentine grandmaster Miguel Najdorf, who brought a whole lot of new ideas to the table in this system. Actually, he wasn't born as Miguel; but rather as Mieczyslaw, on the 15th of April 1910 in Poland. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Mieczyslaw was at the Olympiad in Argentina. Deciding not to return to Poland, he instead naturalised as an Argentine citizen and, *en route*, altered his name to the rather more Hispanic-sounding Miguel.

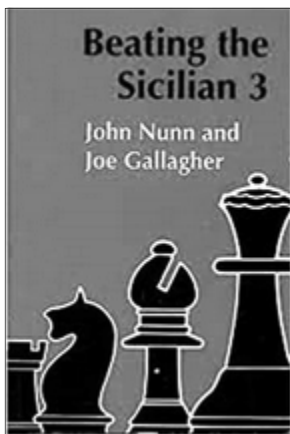
The story of the opening's inventor could occupy a great many more pages, but I will limit myself to the following sobering recollection. In 1946 Miguel played a blindfold simultaneous on 45 boards- a tremendous feat, and a record at the time. He hoped that the worldwide publicity would attract the attention of his family members who stayed behind in Poland. Instead, he received the news that they had all perished in concentration camps. *Lest we forget.*

Miguel died in 1997 and, by that point, the opening had become firmly entrenched as one of the choices of practically every world champion. This is his legacy: an opening whose complexity and popularity exceed that of almost any other. Top grandmasters go for it, in large part, because Black keeps a healthy pawn-structure and because the imbalances in the position allow them to play for a win at every level.

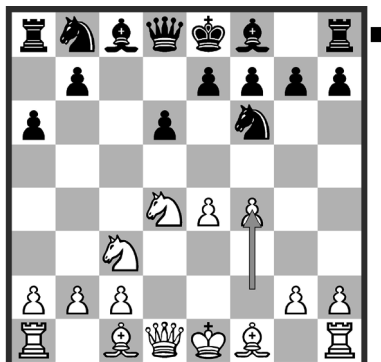
## § 3.2 Variation Overview of the Najdorf

Now let's move on to an overview of the key lines.

### a) Najdorf with 6.f4

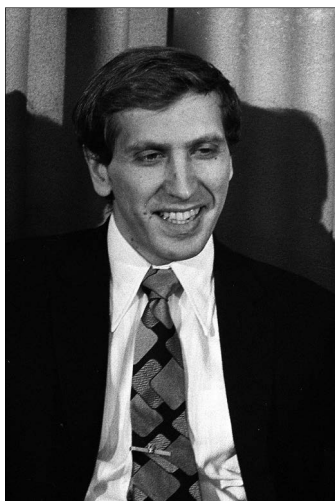


1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4  
 ♜f6 5. ♞c3 a6 ♞f6 5. ♞c3 a6 6. f4

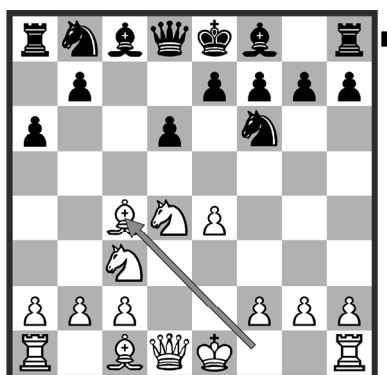


Position after: 6. f4

### b) Fischervariant with 6. ♞c4



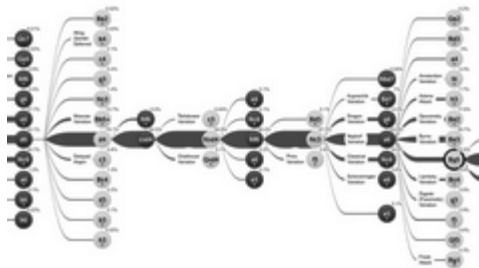
1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4  
 ♜f6 5. ♞c3 a6 6. ♞c4



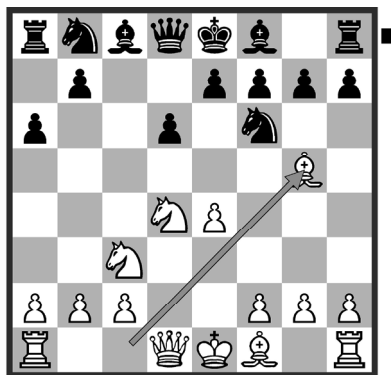
Position after: 6. ♞c4

**c) Main variation with 6. ♖g5**

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4  
 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 a6 6. ♖g5



(Source: [www.nettree.net](http://www.nettree.net))

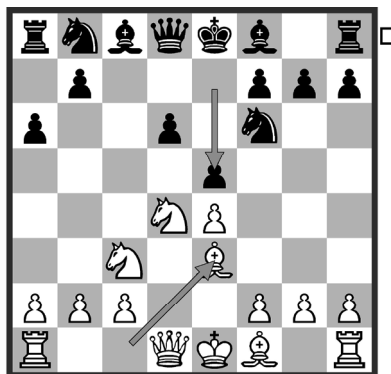


Position after: 6. ♖g5

**d) English Attack with 6. ♖e3 e5**



1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4  
 ♘f6 5. ♘c3 a6 6. ♖e3 e5



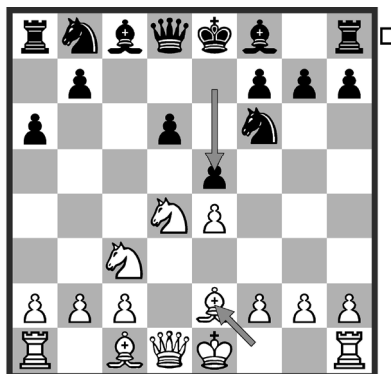
Position after: 6... e5



### e) Opočenský variation: 6. ♗e2 e5

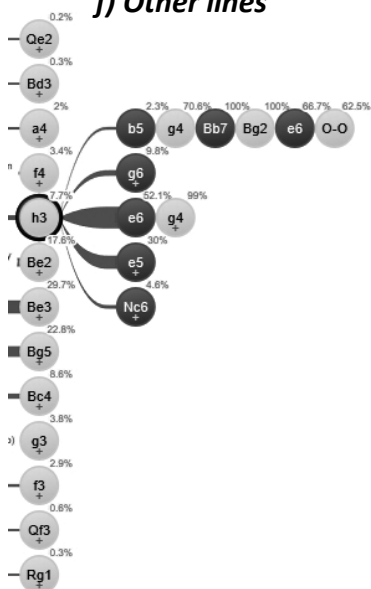


1. e4 c5 2. ♗f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♗xd4  
 ♗f6 5. ♗c3 a6 6. ♗e2 e5



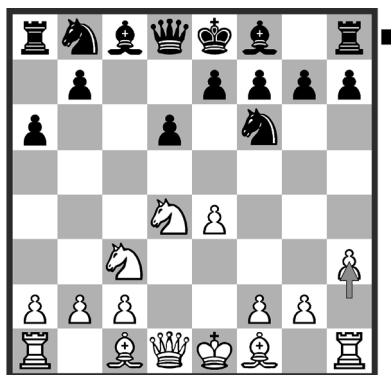
Position after: 6... e5

### f) Other lines



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

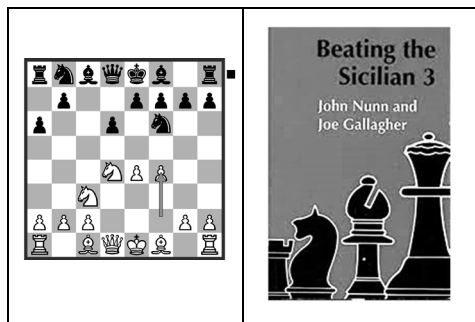
- 6. h3
- 6. g3



Position after: 6. h3

(Source: [www.nettree.net](http://www.nettree.net))

### a) Najdorf with 6.f4



#### Introduction

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♗xd4 ♜f6 5. ♞c3 a6 6. f4

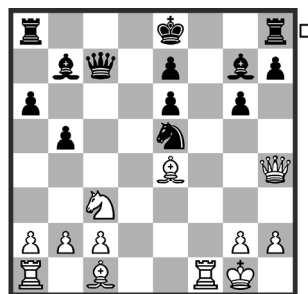
In this line and others, if Black continues ...e6 then we will transpose into a Scheveningen. For now, I will omit those lines so that the book is self-contained from the point of view of Najdorf players, leaving them until the last illustrative game.

6... e5

A) 6... ♖c7 7. ♙d3 g6 8. 0-0 ♙g7 9. ♜f3 ♜bd7 10. ♚e1

A1) 10... e5?! An example of the dangers to be found here for Black: the illustrated game Nunn – Cserna in a few pages' time. (We would transpose to it directly if White played 11.a4 here.) Meanwhile, in another of our games Black chose to castle on this move instead.

A2) 10... b5 11. e5 [11. ♔h1 ♙b7 12. a3 ♞c5 13. ♙d2 d5 Petrov – Sammalvuo, 2001.] 11... dxe5 12. fxe5 ♞g4 13. e6 fxe6 14. ♚h4 ♞de5 15. ♞xe5 ♞xe5 16. ♙e4 ♙b7 with dynamic equality was seen in Almasi – Lalic, 1996.



Position after: 16... ♙b7

B) 6... g6 7. ♙e2 ♙g7 8. ♙e3 [8. 0-0 offers fewer chances for an advantage. 8... 0-0 9. ♔h1 ♞bd7 10. a4 ♚c7 11. a5 b5 12. axb6 ♞xb6 and Black's position could be considered favourable in Lutz – Svidler, 1999.] 8... 0-0 9. 0-0 ♞bd7 10. ♔h1 ♚c7 11. ♚d2 Fishbein – Izoria, 2006.

7. ♜f3 ♞bd7 8. a4

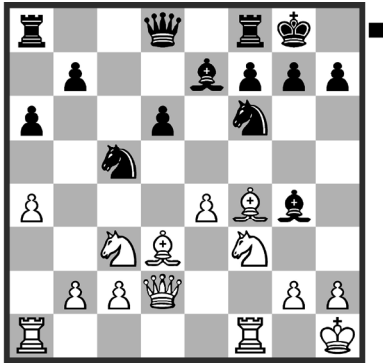
To hinder ...b7-b5.

After 8. ♙d3 Black would probably still castle first, but after 8... ♙e7 9. 0-0 0-0 if White still didn't stop it then Black would advance the b-pawn: 10. ♔h1 b5

8... ♙e7 9. ♙d3 0-0 10. 0-0 ♞c5 11. ♔h1 exf4

These days, the direct 11... d5 would be chosen. The last word on this position has not yet been spoken.

12. ♖xf4 ♗g4 13. ♕d2



Position after: 13. ♕d2

Polgar – Kamsky, 1996.

13. ♕e1 A sharp move, whereby White brings the queen over to the kingside to commence for an attack. This was seen, for instance, in the game Polgar – Ivanchuk, 1995.



## MODEL GAME for White

♖ Nunn, John DM  
♚ Cserna, Laszlo  
♜ Lugano 1984

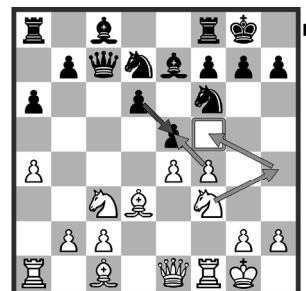
1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♗f6 5. ♘c3 a6 6. f4 e5

Nunn wrote in "Beating the Sicilian 3" that this was Black's most popular choice.

7. ♘f3 ♕c7 8. a4 ♖bd7 9. ♗d3 g6

It is important for Black to get his f8-bishop into the game in some way. The development to e7 seems logical, however this has a drawback- namely, it allows White the idea of ♘f3-h4-f5 gaining tempo against the bishop.

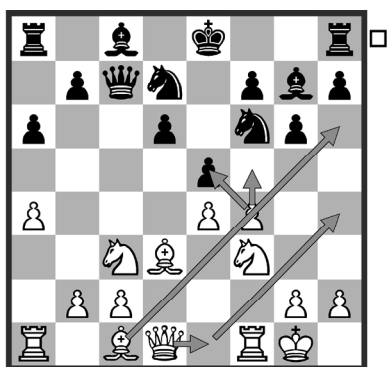
To help illustrate the last comment, let us give an example line. 9... ♗e7 10. 0-0



Position after: 11. ♕e1

and now the further development of Fernandez – Gulamali, 2003, was that White's f3-knight (after a preparatory fxe5, ...dxe5) reached h4 and threatened to go to f5. If and when Black plays ...g6 here, he will surely wish that he had begun with that move and then nestled the dark-squared bishop safely in the fianchettoed position.

### 10. 0-0 ♖g7



Position after: 10... ♖g7

A good moment for White to take note of his various ideas. It is fairly clear that Black wants to castle kingside, and therefore equally clear that White should direct his attack thence. This he can accomplish in a few ways, but most of them include the manoeuvre ♖d1-e1-h4. At that moment White can choose how to unveil his c1-bishop: with fxe5 (so as not to lose time) or else with f4-f5. With this in mind we can see the reason why White hasn't developed his bishop to e3 or d2: Nunn would like to bring it from c1 all the way to h6 in a single move!

### 11. ♕e1 0-0?!

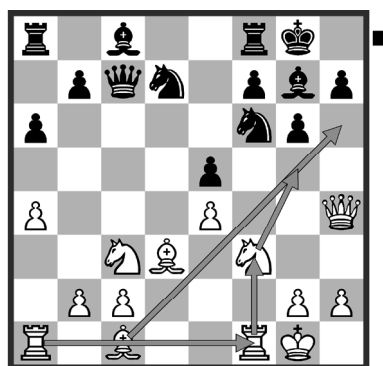
Black 'castles into it'. With hindsight, this was inadvisable.

One move that comes into consideration is 11... b6. Black develops his queen's flank and retains the option of playing ...h7-h6 in case White tries the ♖h6 ideas mentioned in the last note.

### 12. fxe5 dxe5

Here 12... ♖xe5?! isn't the right solution for Black because of 13. ♖xe5 dxe5 14. ♖g5 ♕d6 15. ♕h4± when it is already a bit hard to avoid material loss.

### 13. ♕h4



Position after: 13. ♕h4

The queen has arrived at the square where she will find most 'fulfilment' in the upcoming struggle. Note that all White loses no time in his attack: in particular White is developing his queen's bishop to h6 in one move. The question then arises of how White can develop