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5 Sicilian Defence

1 e4 c5

The Sicilian is the most popular defence to 1 e4. The reason is simple: Black immediately exerts pressure on the centre without taking on the symmetry of 1...e5. Black is able to maintain the tension and play soundly for a win. On top of this, Black has a great deal of flexibility in how to arrange his forces and White needs not only to know but also to understand a labyrinth of variations if he is to play the Open Sicilian (i.e. 2 ♘f3 and then 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4). To play those lines, White needs to keep abreast of a massive and constantly changing body of theory. Instead we are offering a set of variations that soundly seek an edge and maintain a certain amount of surprise value, particularly at club level. This is a large chapter and there is undeniably some groundwork needed before they can be used over the board, but it is a fraction of that needed to play Open Sicilians, and far less maintenance work will be needed after that point.

This chapter is split into four sections depending on how Black meets 2 ♘f3:

Part 1: 2...♘c6 3 ♗b5.

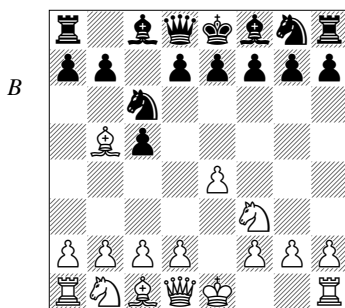
Part 2: 2...d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♖xd4.

Part 3: 2...e6 3 ♘c3.

Part 4: 2...a6, 2...♘f6 and 2...g6.

Part 1: Rossolimo

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 (D)



White develops a piece and avoids the immediate opening of the position with 3 d4. Meanwhile he maintains the flexibility to open up the position at his convenience. Also White may decide to play c3 before d4, maintaining a pawn on d4. Black has tried no fewer than ten(!) serious replies on move three, which shows there is no clear consensus on how Black should seek equality. Let's look at Black's options in turn:

A:	3...♘a5?!	50
B:	3...♘d4?!	51
C:	3...e5	52
D:	3...♗b6	54
E:	3...a6?!	56
F:	3...♗c7	59
G:	3...♘f6	63
H:	3...e6	68
I:	3...g6	72

The tenth option for Black, 3...d6, is likely to transpose, via 4 d4 cxd4 (4...♗d7?! 5 d5 gives White an obvious advantage) 5 ♖xd4, to Line D of Part 2 of this chapter.

A)

3...♘a5?!

This quirky move gained some notoriety in the 1990s. But if it can be justified, it is only due to the time Black will gain by playing ...a6.

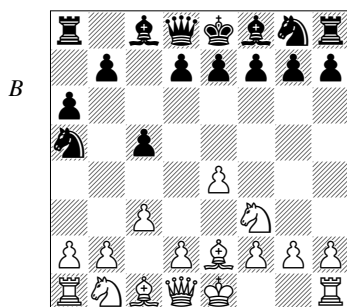
4 c3 a6

After 4...♘f6?! 5 e5 ♘d5 6 d4 cxd4 7 ♖xd4 we have reached a type of c3 Sicilian (1 e4 c5 2 c3 ♘f6 3 e5 ♘d5 4 d4 cxd4 5 ♖xd4 e6 6 ♘f3) where Black seems to be tempi down due to the knight on a5.

5 ♗e2! (D)

White's intention is to show that the 'gain' of tempo by Black in getting his knight to a5 is a liability rather than an asset. If it merely has to return to c6, tail between its legs, Black will have clearly lost a tempo.

5...e6



This seems Black's best attempt to achieve a playable game. Other moves:

a) 5...♖c7?! 6 d4 d6?! 7 0-0 e5 8 b4! ♘c6 9 bxc5 dxc5 10 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 11 dxe5 ♗xe5 12 f4 gives White an overwhelming initiative, Karlik-Vales, Litomysl 2005.

b) 5...b5?! 6 0-0 ♘f6?! 7 b4! (7 a4?! b4! is less clear, but 7 d4! cxd4 8 a4 is also very strong) 7...cxb4 8 cxb4 ♘c6 9 d4 ♘xe4 10 d5 and Black is really getting pushed around.

c) 5...d6?! is not assertive enough to justify ...♗a5, and after 6 d4 cxd4 7 cxd4 g6 any normal plan of development keeps White comfortably on top. Even the abnormal 8 ♗d2 ♗d7 9 ♗c3!? ♗g7 10 ♗d2 ♘c6 11 d5 ♘e5 12 ♘xe5 dxe5 13 ♗a3 leaves White well placed, Shtyrenkov-Lysenko, Russian Team Ch, Podolsk 1993.

d) 5...d5?! 6 exd5 ♗xd5 7 d4 cxd4 (7...c4? 8 0-0 ♘f6 9 ♘e5 ♗d7 10 ♗a3 is winning for White) 8 cxd4 gives White an improved c3 Sicilian, as the knight accomplishes little on a5.

e) 5...♘f6?! 6 e5 ♘d5 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♗xd4 and again we have reached a favourable form of c3 Sicilian.

6 d4 cxd4

6...d5?! 7 exd5 exd5 8 dxc5 opens the game to White's great advantage and highlights the a5-knight's misplacement.

7 cxd4 d5

7...♘f6 8 ♗d3 and now 8...d5 9 e5 ♘e4 10 0-0 gives Black a headache with the e4-knight while 8...b5 9 0-0 ♗b7 10 ♖e1 leaves White very comfortable.

8 exd5

8 e5 is an improved version of an Advance French for White.

8...exd5

8...♗xd5 9 ♘c3 is once again a favourable version of a c3 Sicilian in that Black's knight is not well placed on a5.

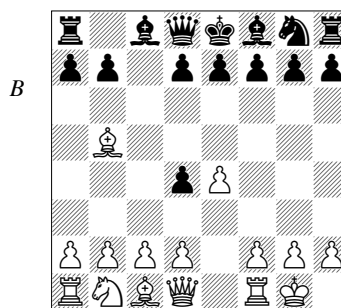
9 0-0

White is a little better thanks to his lead in development.

B)

3...♘d4?! 4 ♘xd4 cxd4 5 0-0 (D)

5 c3 is the main alternative, and also hard for Black to meet.



5...e6

Black can instead try:

a) After 5...♗b6 6 ♗a4 the black queen is not constructively placed, while the troubling pin on the d7-pawn remains.

b) 5...e5?! is a poor idea. King's Gambit-style lines like 6 f4!? exf4 7 d3 g5 8 g3 ♗b6 9 ♗a4 fxg3 10 ♗xg5!? gxh2+ 11 ♗h1 are undeniably fun, but the simple 6 d3! is a better practical choice. White intends f4 and if Black wishes to support the e5-pawn by playing ...d6, he will need to loosen his queenside with ...a6 and ...b5. Either way he will be structurally worse with nothing to show for it. For instance, 6...a6 7 ♗a4 b5 8 ♗b3 ♘f6 9 f4 d6 10 a4, when 10...b4 serves up the c4-square to the white knight.

c) After 5...g6, 6 c3 is a well-timed liquidation of the d4-pawn since the black bishop will not be secure on d4:

c1) 6...♗g7 7 cxd4! ♗xd4 8 ♗a4! is awkward for Black, as the pin on the a-file means that ...a6 will not free Black's queenside.

c2) 6...dxc3?! 7 ♘xc3 ♗g7 8 d4 e6 9 ♗f4! (probably stronger than the immediate 9 d5, Kasparov-BCF Girls, London simul 1997) 9...♗b6 10 ♗e3 a6 11 d5 ♗a5 12 ♗e2 and with ♘a4 a threat, White has a huge opening advantage.

c3) 6...a6 7 ♗a4 (this can arise from line 'd') 7...♗g7 (after 7...b5 8 ♗b3 ♗b7 9 ♗f3 ♘f6 10

d3, Black has nothing better than exchanging on c3) 8 cxd4 ♗xd4 9 ♘c3 and Black's basic problem is that if he drops his bishop back White can set up a big pawn-centre, but otherwise it could end up stranded on d4. 9...e6 (9...b5 10 ♗c2; 9...♘f6?! 10 ♘e2) 10 ♘e2 ♗g7 11 d4 b5 12 ♗c2 ♘e7 (Ovechkin-Vorobev, Sukhumi 2007) 13 ♗g5 ♗b7 14 ♖d2 gives White an obvious advantage.

d) After 5...a6 pretty much all the bishop retreats have their points, but 6 ♗a4 is logical, as the pin on the d7-pawn reduces Black's options, while playing ...b5 forces the bishop to a great square on b3 and gives White queenside targets. Meanwhile White intends a calm build-up with d3, maybe f4, and methodical development. After 6...b5 (6...e6 7 d3 ♗c5 8 ♖g4 is annoying for Black; 6...g6 7 c3 transposes to line 'c3') 7 ♗b3 ♗b7 8 d3 e6 9 a4 White gains new queenside targets while retaining a variety of options on the kingside.

6 d3

6 c3 is good too.

6...♗c5

6...♗e7?! 7 ♘d2 (7 ♗a4!? is more flexible) 7...a6 8 ♗a4 b5 9 ♗b3 ♗b7 10 ♖g4 ♘f6 and now 11 ♖xg7?! ♗g8 12 ♖h6 was played in Dittmar-Peussner, Dortmund 1993, after which 12...♖c8! intending ...♗c5 gives Black serious compensation. 11 ♖g3 offers White a promising game while permitting far less counterplay.

7 ♖g4 ♖f6 8 f4 ♖g6 9 ♖f3 f5 10 exf5 ♖xf5 11 g4! ♖f7 12 f5

Black is in danger as it is hard to solve the problem of what to do with his king. For instance, after 12...♘e7?, as played in Bologan-Gillani, Manila Olympiad 1992, 13 ♘d2! intending ♘e4 gives White a huge plus.

C)

3...e5

Black occupies the centre, realizing that 4 ♗xc6 dxc6 5 ♘xe5? leads to nothing after 5...♖d4.

4 0-0

Now:

C1: 4...d6?! 52

C2: 4...♘ge7 53

Or:

a) 4...♖c7 transposes to note 'b' to Black's 4th move in Line F.

b) 4...♗d6 has seen some high-level use, but 5 c3 looks like a good response:

b1) 5...♘ge7 6 d4 cxd4 7 cxd4 exd4 8 ♘xd4 a6 9 ♗c4 0-0 (Šolak-Jobava, European Ch, Legnica 2013; 9...♖c7 10 h3 is similar) 10 ♘c3 ♖c7 11 h3 ♘xd4 12 ♖xd4 ♗c5 (12...♗e5 13 ♖d3 and 12...b5 13 ♗b3 ♗b7 14 ♖d1 also fail to solve Black's problems) 13 ♗f4 and White is better due to Black's weak d-pawn.

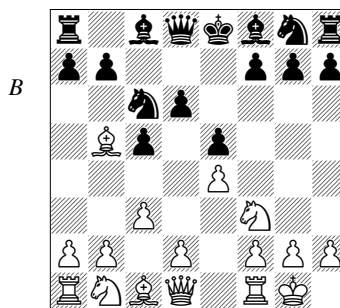
b2) 5...a6 6 ♗a4 (6 ♗xc6 dxc6 7 d4 exd4 8 cxd4 ♗g4! gave Black counterplay in Giri-Rapport, Shenzhen 2019) 6...b5 7 ♗b3 looks like a Lopez where White is playing natural moves but Black's pieces are on odd squares.

C1)

4...d6?!

This position more often arises from 3...d6 4 0-0 (here our repertoire choice is 4 d4) 4...e5?!. The move looks a little odd from this move-order as it has the obvious drawback of inviting c3 and d4-d5.

5 c3 (D)



5...♘e7

Black has no ideal response to White's simple plan of pushing his d-pawn. Other moves:

a) 5...♖b6 6 ♘a3! does little to help Black's cause.

b) 5...♗e7?! 6 d4 exd4 7 cxd4 ♗d7?! 8 ♘c3 (8 dxc5! dxc5 9 ♗c4 viciously focuses on f7) 8...cxd4 9 ♘xd4 ♘f6 10 ♗f4 and White has an edge due to Black's disrupted pawn-structure, Lendwai-Fauland, Austrian League 1990/1.

c) 5...♗g4?! 6 h3 (simplest, though 6 d4! is good too) 6...♗xf3 (6...♗h5? 7 d4 cxd4 8 cxd4 exd4 9 g4! ♗g6 10 ♘xd4, as in Lukin-Kozlov,

Yaroslavl 1990, is already hopeless for Black because the e4-pawn is untouchable and both his developed minor pieces are in grave peril) 7 ♖xf3 ♜f6 8 a4 leaves White better thanks to the bishop-pair and his control of the central light squares, Stefanov-Susterman, Odorheiu Secuiesc 1993.

d) 5...♜f6 looks natural but fails to prepare for White's central advance. 6 d4 exd4 (after 6...♙d7 7 dxc5 dxc5 8 ♜bd2 White is better due to Black's weaknesses on e5 and the a2-g8 diagonal) 7 cxd4 ♖b6?! (7...♗c7? 8 ♜c3! leaves Black in a mess) 8 ♜c3 and with 8...♙d7? Black is desperately hoping to stabilize the structure into some sort of Benoni, but 9 e5! shatters that notion. So Black has nothing better than exchanging on d4 (on move 7 or 8), with a clear structural inferiority.

e) 5...a6?! 6 ♙xc6+ bxc6 obtains the bishop-pair but at too high a price, as is often the case in lines where Black plays ...a6 at some stage. White has a significant lead in development, good squares for his pieces and a superior pawn-structure. In a protracted battle in a closed position, Black might have time to create scope for his bishops, so it actually makes sense for White to open the game and immediately carve out good squares for his knights with 7 d4 cxd4 8 cxd4 exd4 9 ♖xd4 (9 ♜xd4 is also good). Then 9...♜f6 is unpleasantly met by 10 e5, while 9...c5 creates more targets for White.

f) 5...♙d7 6 d4! ♖c7 (Black can exchange twice on d4, but then he is at least a little worse; 6...♙e7 7 dxc5 dxc5 8 ♜bd2 ♖c7 9 ♜c4 ♜f6 10 ♙xc6 ♙xc6 11 ♜fxe5 and White has won a pawn since 11...♙xe4?! 12 ♖a4+ ♙f8 13 ♙f4 gave him a devastating attack in Kreiman-Sevillano, Los Angeles 2004) 7 d5 ♜ce7 8 a4 is very good for White.

6 d4 a6 7 ♙c4 b5

Not 7...♙g4?? 8 ♙xf7+ ♙xf7 9 ♜g5+, while 7...♖c7?! 8 dxc5 dxc5 9 ♙e3 ♜d8 10 a4 ♜ec6 11 ♜bd2 ♙e7 12 ♙d5! (occupying the centre while making way for the knight on c4) 12...a5 13 h3 0-0 14 ♜c4 gives White everything one could want in terms of development and piece placement while Black's position looks cluttered and disjointed, Kovalevskaya-Strutinskaya, Russian Women's Ch, Elista 1995.

8 ♙b3 c4 9 ♙c2

Although Black seems to have gained some time, his queenside pawns are likely to come under pressure while White maintains superior development especially as Black has yet to move his dark-squared bishop in preparation for castling. For example, after 9...♙g4 (S.Kasparov-V.Smironov, Belarus Ch, Minsk 2003) 10 d5 ♜b8 11 ♙e3 ♜d7 12 h3 ♙h5 13 a4 White has a pleasant position.

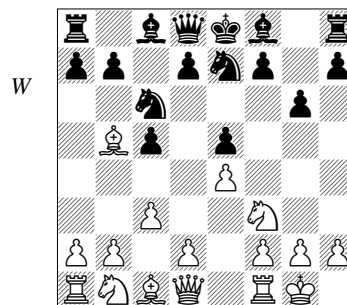
C2)

4...♜ge7 5 c3

Another good option is 5 ♙c4, targeting f7 before Black can comfortably defend it.

5...g6 (D)

Other moves are of little significance; e.g., 5...a6 6 ♙c4, or 5...♖b6?! 6 ♜a3 ♜g6 7 d3 a6 8 ♙c4 ♙e7 9 ♙d5 d6 10 ♜c4 ♖d8 11 a4 h6 12 a5 0-0 13 ♖b3 and White has a strong bind, Kroeze-Bark, Enschede 1996.



6 d4 cxd4

6...exd4 gives White the extra option of 7 ♙f4 intending ♙d6.

7 cxd4

7 ♙xc6!? is interesting and untried, throwing in this exchange while the pawn is still on e5, so Black has to recapture with the knight. Then 7...♜xc6 8 cxd4 exd4 9 ♜xd4 ♙g7 10 ♜b5 gives Black some problems with d6 and c7.

7...exd4 8 ♙f4 ♙g7

The careless 8...d6?? 9 ♖xd4! ♜g8 10 ♜a3 a6 11 ♜c4! gave White an overwhelming position in Ulybin-V.Peicheva, Oakham (juniors) 1990.

9 ♙d6

9 ♜a3?! allows Black to break free with 9...d5!.

9...0-0 10 ♖bd2 a6

Black must repel the white pieces.

11 ♗d3

It's easy to like White's chances here:

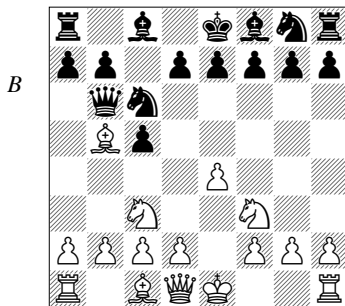
a) 11...♗e8?! leaves f7 too weak, as shown by 12 ♖g5 or 12 ♗c4.

b) Black isn't ready for 11...b5?! since 12 a4 breaks up Black's queenside.

c) 11...b6 12 a4 ♗b7 (Black wants to unravel with ...♗e8 and ...♖c8 – it's a slow plan but may survive; 12...♗e8? is still premature due to 13 ♖g5, while 12...♖a5? 13 ♗c1 eyes c7) 13 ♗b3 (13 b4 ♗e8 14 b5 is another option; e.g., 14...axb5 15 axb5 ♗xa1 16 ♗xa1 ♖a5 17 ♗e1) 13...♖a7 (13...♖a5 14 ♗a2 ♗c6 15 b4 ♖b7 16 ♗f4 also offers White good prospects) 14 ♗ac1 ♖ac8 15 ♗c7 ♗e8 16 ♗g3 d6 and Black continues to resist, but his pieces are still awkwardly placed, while White has a variety of plans on both sides of the board.

D)**3...♗b6**

A slightly odd-looking move but it is direct and to the point and far more popular than you might expect. From the viewpoint of our repertoire, the main difference from the ...♗c7 lines is that we'll now have our knight on c3 (cutting out options with c4 for the time being) but the black queen will be more exposed to a variety of ideas.

4 ♖c3 (D)**4...e6**

Black should not neglect the d5-square:

a) 4...g6?! is basically refuted by 5 d4!. Black's position is a wreck in the case of 5...♖f6 6 d5 ♖d4 7 a4, 5...♗g7 6 ♖d5 ♗d8 7 ♗f4 d6 8 dxc5 or 5...cxd4 6 ♖d5 ♗d8 (6...♗c5? 7 ♗xc6

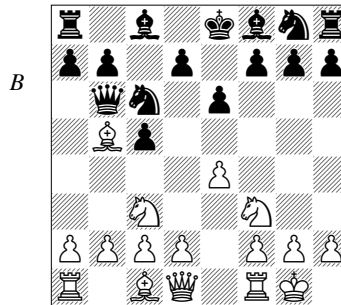
♗xc6 8 ♖xd4 and ♖b5) 7 ♗f4 d6 (7...♗a5+ 8 b4) 8 ♗xd4!, while it also made very little sense after 5...e6 6 dxc5 ♗xc5 7 0-0 in Zhi-galko-Kurajica, Istanbul Olympiad 2012.

b) The active-looking 4...♖d4?! lands Black in trouble due to a neat piece of tactics: 5 ♖xd4! cxd4 6 ♖d5! and now:

b1) 6...♗c5 7 d3 e6 (7...a6 is best met by 8 c3! with the point that 8...axb5 9 cxd4 ♗c6? 10 ♗f4 followed by ♗c1 is winning for White) 8 b4 ♗d6 9 ♗f4 e5 10 ♗g3 gives White a huge plus as his pieces have great squares whereas Black's game makes no sense.

b2) 6...♗d8 7 ♗h5! a6?? (7...e6?? loses to 8 ♗e5!, while after 7...♖f6 8 ♖xf6+ gxf6 9 d3 White has a comfortable opening plus) 8 ♗e5 f6 9 ♖c7+ ♖f7 10 ♗d5+ 1-0 Smirin-Afek, Israeli Ch, Ramat Gan 1992.

c) 4...a6?! 5 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 (5...dxc6 covers d5 but is otherwise illogical; even the simple 6 h3 ♖f6 7 0-0 ♗c7 8 a4 leaves White better for reasons we shall see in Line E2 where Black plays ...a6 and after ♗xc6 recaptures with the d-pawn) 6 0-0 d6 (6...e6 transposes to note 'b' to Black's 5th move below) 7 d4 cxd4?! 8 ♖xd4 ♗c7 was played in Hulak-Simić, Yugoslav Ch, Bor 1976. The most incisive is then 9 ♖d5! ♗d8 10 ♗g5, when White's development advantage is likely to prove overwhelming.

5 0-0 (D)**5...♖ge7**

Or:

a) 5...♖d4?! 6 ♗c4 (6 ♗a4 is a good alternative, one idea being 6...♗a5 7 a3 b5 8 b4!, as in Tal-Čirić, Sarajevo 1966) 6...♖e7 7 ♖xd4 cxd4 8 ♖e2 ♖g6 (8...d5 9 exd5 ♖xd5 {9...exd5 10 ♗b3 is nice for White} 10 ♗xd5! exd5 11 ♖f4 is awkward for Black to meet) 9 d3 ♗e7 10 c3 (after 10 a4!? White will either gain space