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Introduction

This book deals with the study of the Sicilian Defence; however, the theoretical development has been so significant in recent years, that trying to cover all the variations of such a popular defence is somehow a utopian dream. Therefore, this book is content to offer a repertoire for White based on 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 followed by 3.d4.

The Sicilian is the most widely used defence. According to different databases and different periods, percentages may vary, but will be around 20%; if we take into account only those games starting with 1.e4, the percentage of Sicilians may reach 40%. Furthermore, those figures have been increasing in recent years.

Therefore, my proposal is a repertoire based on the Open Variation, that starting with 2.♘f3 and virtually always followed by 3.d4. I think it only logical to devote our best studying efforts to a position that will probably arise quite frequently in our games, and to choose secondary lines against defences we won't face so often. Vast practical experience also indicates that, against the Sicilian, the prospects of an advantage with other moves than 2.♘f3 are not great. Flexibility and the surprise factor is one thing, and basing our repertoire on harmless lines is a quite different one.

My general philosophy for developing an opening repertoire is based on the following approach: against main lines, play main lines; against secondary lines, play secondary lines; against unsound lines, play the refutation. Some amateur

players have asked me why, and I will try to state my case now:

- Main lines are usually the best and the most frequent in practice. Being the most frequent, it is worth being well prepared against them; being the best, we are not likely to find a way to an edge in secondary lines.

- We won't face secondary lines so often therefore it is less profitable to spend a long time on them in our preparation. A further point is that we would run the risk of reaching a good position, but one in which our opponent has far clearer ideas. A secondary defence is much more likely to offer secondary lines with good prospects for an edge.

- Finally, it is worth searching and finding a refutation against a weak system, since it will work forever. Besides, these defences will usually take us by surprise and we need a convincing preparation against them.

Of course, this is a basic approach and must be adapted to each particular case. Quite frequently, main lines may become secondary and vice versa; even some unsound lines may be rehabilitated, though this is less likely to happen. A flexible approach is always necessary.

Our playing style must have its influence as well when it comes to building our repertoire. However, if our style does not involve an open game against the Sicilian, then we should consider whether 1.e4 is right as our first move after all.

Although this book recommends main lines, from the point of view of the cur-

rent state of chess theory, the repertoire we present also tries to fulfil the principles of economy and coherence, by choosing lines that can transpose into one another, whenever possible, or that share strategic ideas.

Thus, there is one set-up which constitutes the core of this repertoire. It can be used (obviously, with important adjustments) against a wide range of variations (Najdorf, Scheveningen, Classical, Taimanov, Dragon, Kupreichik and some secondary lines). This set-up is based on the moves $f2-f3$, $\text{♙}e3$, $\text{♖}d2$ and 0-0-0.

I have always considered castling on the queenside in the open Sicilian to be rather logical: the rook immediately occupies the only open file (for White).

The position of the f-pawn allows some discussion. For many years, the general trend and almost a sacred rule was the idea that White cannot develop any active play against the Sicilian without the move $f2-f4$. Although well founded upon a wide experience, I have the feeling that this theory has been indiscriminately applied, thus leading White into trouble in several variations. The reason is that it fuels Black's counterplay along the a8-h1 diagonal, with pressure on e4 and, from that weak point, on White's position as a whole.

In the $f2-f3$ set-up, the point e4 has a solid defence. There is no need for White to worry about this square, and his plan is clear-cut and easy to carry out. This might be, if not a theoretical, at least a practical reason why White's results with this set-up have generally been so remarkable. Fischer's comment that the Sicilian Dragon was a weak defence because an amateur as White could easily defeat a Grandmaster with

the Rauzer Attack, can be applied to a certain extent to other lines.

About the structure of this book

I have decided to present the book as a collection of annotated games, because I think this way the material will appear less dull. The readers may use it as a reference book or read it from beginning to end, in order to become familiar with the most frequent tactical ideas, transpositions and strategic plans.

A division has been made in four main Sections. The first contains minor second moves for Black after $2.\text{♟}f3$, Section 2 deals with $4...e5$, $4...g6$ and $4...\text{♞}c6$ systems after the exchange on d4, and in Sections 3 and 4, respectively the systems with $2...e6$ and those with $2...d6$ are discussed. Almost all systems have an individual chapter, though some have far less material. In my view, the current preparation and competition methods (I'm thinking especially about open and rapid chess tournaments) force us to possess an accurate knowledge of some specific refutations and favour the use of surprise variations. Many of these surprise weapons, despite their theoretical weakness, pose almost insurmountable complications in over-the-board play.

Furthermore, my aim has been to provide the reader with a complete repertoire and therefore to answer clearly to the question of what to play in all reasonable positions.

At the beginning and at the end of each chapter I have included short sections intended to make the study easier, but not strictly necessary for an experienced player.

The chapters open with the title and the diagram reflecting the starting position

of our study. The stars (* to *****) are a subjective evaluation that can guide the not-so-expert readers on the importance of the variation. For most readers, the stars will show the author's respect towards each set-up. They are intended to evaluate the theoretical strength, the historical importance, the frequency of use and the practical virtues of a specific system; of course, every player could have his own evaluation. In my opinion, there are a lot of underrated variations in the Sicilian (and a few, overrated). I have the feeling, reinforced by writing this book, that many are playable and pose problems for White, if the first player intends to achieve an edge.

The introduction tries to guide the readers on the themes of the chosen line and its relationship with other variations.

The historical note is a small homage to those people who have contributed the most to the development of the variation. Due to obvious space constraints, a deep research on the issue is out of the question. Here I feel obliged to mention the real father of the Sicilian Defence, Louis Paulsen (1833-1891). He was born in Germany but developed as a chess player in the United States. Paulsen investigated most of the important variations and understood the spirit of counterplay inherent in this defence. If the Sicilian wasn't named after him, it was due to random circumstances.

A deeper analysis of the ideas contained in every variation would have been interesting, but the book is already rather thick, so I considered it more important to go deeply into certain lines.

This structure should altogether help black players to choose some lines for

their repertoires, though in this case they must complete their study with the attacking lines for White that we don't mention here.

In some cases, transpositions are frequent and, for the sake of clarity, the first moves of a game are not always presented as they were actually played, but following the most frequent theoretical order. I think it is better to explain that here, rather than mention the exact order in every particular case.

We have tried to present the material in a very clear way, without complex trees and with move-by-move explanations, with the exception of the more often repeated moves. We considered it very important to understand the position and to know the purpose of every move, in order to fix our memory and prevent our opening study from becoming useless, if we forget the lines after a few days or weeks. However, in some cases it has been impossible to avoid presenting a potentially disturbing branch.

This book is a revised version of the Spanish original *Desmontando la Siciliana*. We can't talk about a second edition, as most of the material has been changed rather than merely updated. Furthermore, some chapters are completely new and, in those which keep recommending the same lines, many model games are more recent and recommended subvariations have quite often changed as well. Nevertheless, we cannot talk about a new book either, since the structure and base material are the same. In some cases, I have changed my recommendations because some new lines are clearly better or have cast doubts on the old ones; at other times, the previously recommended line is still

Dismantling the Sicilian

equally interesting and the reasons for the change are less conclusive. In those cases (and some others) I refer to the original text, identified with the abbreviation 'DLS'. Of course, comparing both versions may be interesting for those who have the original book.

Despite all the hours devoted to this work, I'm perfectly well aware that some variations will not resist the passing of time and I hope the readers will show their sympathy. I also encourage them to continue their research and

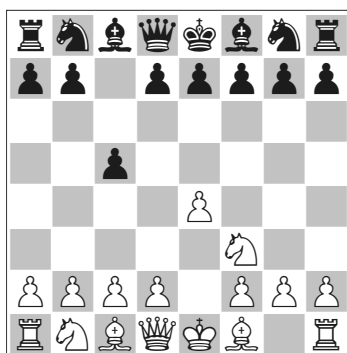
complete their repertoires, when necessary, consulting other sources and analysing on their own. However, I hope the recommendations from this book can help the readers improve their repertoire, bring them some sporting pleasure and let them have a good time with the analysis of memorable games and interesting positions.

*Jesus de la Villa Garcia
Pamplona, May 2009*

CHAPTER 1

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘f6

Nimzowitsch Variation and other moves



Evaluation **

This chapter will be a hodgepodge. Here, we will study all the options for Black on the second move, lacking a chapter of their own. The moves we will consider are 2...♘f6, 2...g6, 2...h6 and 2...♖c7. One of them, 2...g6, does not have its own chapter because the system we propose for White will be covered in the chapters devoted to its big brothers from the nice Dragon family. Two others (2...h6 and 2...♖c7), perhaps don't deserve separate chapters, but the case of the Nimzowitsch could be a bit unfair, so we will actually consider this chapter as the chapter on the Nimzowitsch Sicilian and will bring together the irregular lines here.

The move 2...♘f6 is perfectly sound and offers good prospects of equality, although it doesn't enjoy a vast popularity. The reasons are hard to understand. Perhaps it has to do with the fact that White can choose different ways and thus set

the tempo of the game. On the other hand, 2...♘f6 may be appealing because it can transpose to main lines (such as the Najdorf) while avoiding annoying lines such as 3.♗b5 or 3.c3.

Precisely because of this, I have thought it convenient to recommend two lines: one is intended for those players willing to switch to main lines and playing 3.♘c3; the other line is intended for those who prefer to avoid these transpositions and 'punish' a possible bluff from the opponent. Since our repertoire in the main lines always involves ♘c3, our main line should be 3.♘c3 against the Nimzowitsch Sicilian, and this is the move played in our model game.

I think the 'official refutation', 3.e5 and 4.♘c3, is rather debatable and not very economical, as it requires an enormous effort to study, involves a possible minefield and finally, offers only a slight edge in the endgame.

History and Ideas

The move 2...♟f6 is just one more contribution to opening theory from the Hypermodern School. This one fits their ideas especially well: Black attacks White's pawn centre and provokes its advance, in order later to show its weakness. Nimzowitsch used it, quite successfully, many times. Other contemporary players, such as Rubinstein and Tartakower, also incorporated this line into their repertoires. The rise of 4.♟c3 and the alleged refutations lowered its popularity and thus it never reached the top players.

Recently, some investigators have found different improvements for Black and more or less well-prepared players use it now and then. However, it looks like its destiny is to be a surprise weapon.

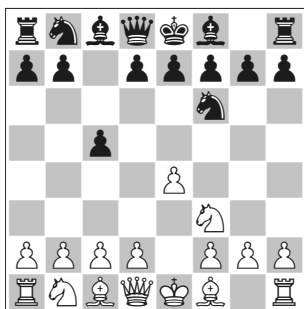
The main original idea is to provoke White's central pawn to advance in order to attack it later. There are different set-ups, with a quite different nature, but open play, quick development and the search for immediate targets are the top priorities.

GAME 1.01

Yakovenko, Dmitry
Llobel Cortell, Enrique

San Sebastian Open 2006

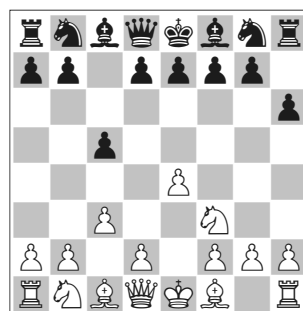
1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♟f6



This provocative move characterizes the Nimzowitsch Sicilian. Other alternatives for Black without an individual chapter but deserving attention are:

● **2...g6 3.d4 ♟g7** Black can also choose this move order, but it wouldn't alter our plans, since after 3...cxd4 4.♟xd4 Black has no reasonable follow-up apart from transposing to the Dragon or the Accelerated Dragon: 4...♟c6 (4...♟g7 5.♟c3) 5.♟c3 – see Chapter 5. **4.♟c3** This is the simplest move to switch to the recommended variations against the Dragon or the Accelerated Dragon. Black is almost forced to capture on d4. As I mentioned above, I consider transposition the most effective and economical method, but for those players willing to go deeper and to have a specific treatment for this line, I recommend the following line: 4.dxc5 ♖a5+ 5.c3 ♜xc5 6.♟a3! although, we will stick to our approach and will not delve into this.

● **2...h6 3.c3**



The virtues of the Alapin set-up look strengthened here. White is going to build a classical pawn centre, whereas ...h6 doesn't seem useful against this set-up. 3.d4 cxd4 4.♟xd4 ♟f6 5.♟c3 e5 6.♟db5 d6, when the g5-square is defended, illustrates Black's main idea very well. **3...e6** The fact that the main