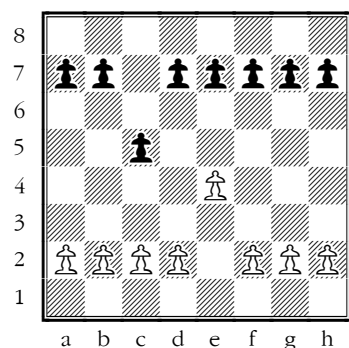


The Sicilian Jungle

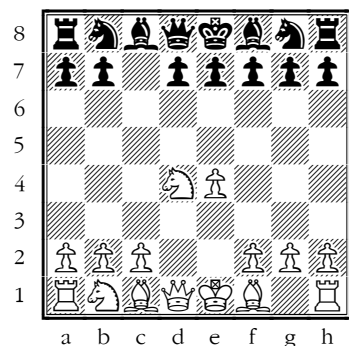
- *Winning with Black: the joys and perils of tension.*

How hard is it to equalise with Black? Maybe it's impossible... but you can get a solid and fairly equal position (somewhere between = and +=) in maybe lots of openings. I can remember in their 1974 match, the great Viktor Korchnoi shrugged off Karpov's legendary technique in endless IQP positions from the French Tarrasch. He was never going to win any of them, but he was reserving his winning attempts for the White pieces. But that's match tactics. In a tournament, in a Swiss, you have to be able to win with the Black pieces. And that is when the French may be less suitable, and an opening that retains more complexity, more tension, and more risk, is more suitable. We must play the Pirc, or the Sicilian.

I The Sicilian Skeleton:

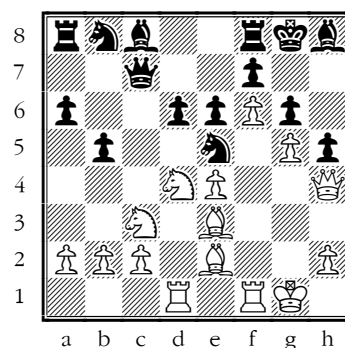


Black sets up an immediate tension in the centre.



After d4 and the exchange of pawns, Black has some long-term advantages and some short-term problems. Black might lose some short games but hope to win some long ones.

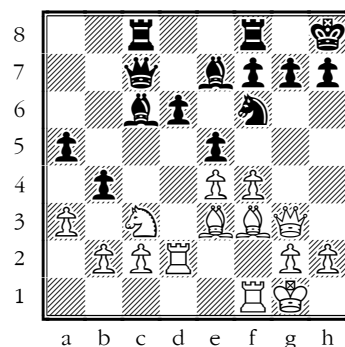
White's King-side attack



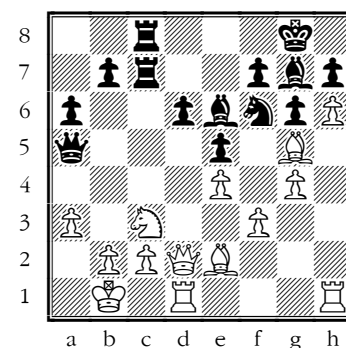
White has space and time and can guess where the Black King will be, so there is a natural plan to play a King's-side attack. Of course, White can play the Sicilian with a more positional approach, but there is always this idea up White's sleeve.

Competing pawn storms

White may try to break through on the King's-side with Pawns, since Black has no weaknesses there. Black often replies in kind on the other wing:

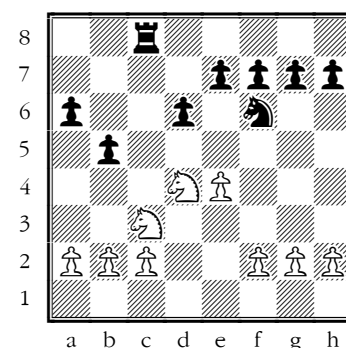


Opposite-side castling

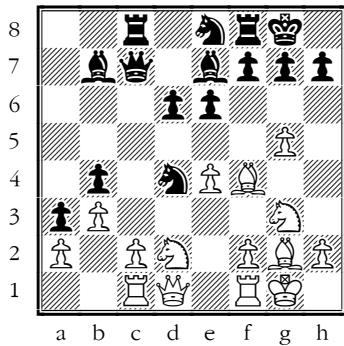


In order to speed up development and get the King out of the way of the open lines on the King's-side, White may castle long. This sharpens the fight, because of course that puts the White King in the firing line of Black's counterplay.

The half-open c-file/minority attack



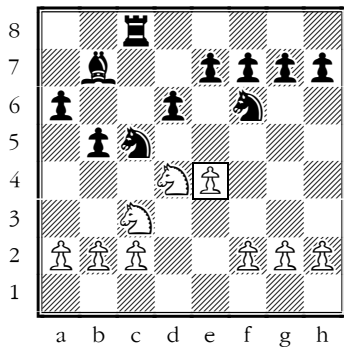
Black has pressure down the half-open c-file, assuming Black has got in ...Nf6 and White has replied with Nc3.



Conrady-Benkö, 1957

White is waving his arms over on the King's-side but is losing on the Queen's-side.

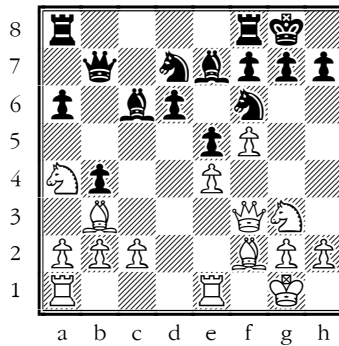
Pressure on e4



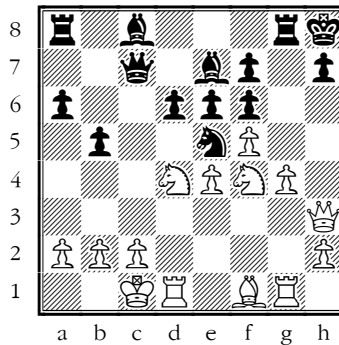
The White Pawn on e4 is the nearest target for Black and a natural point for counter-attack: if White has to commit pieces to its defence, then White is not so free to attack.

The break with ...d5

The square d5 is critical in the Sicilian; if White can keep control of it, Black will find it difficult to transfer pieces to defend the King, while if Black can blow up the centre with the pawn break ...d5, the loss of central control usually means that White's attack will founder.



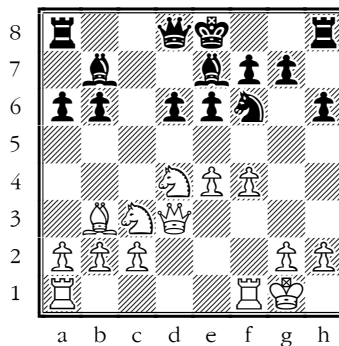
Fischer-Tal 1959: 17...d5!



Gligorić-Fischer 1959: 16...d5!

Too many pawn moves

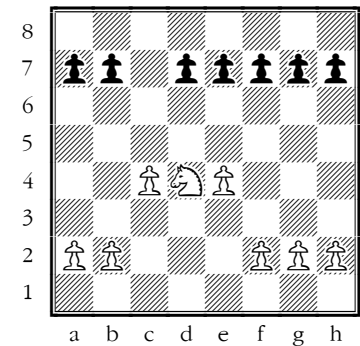
One reason that the Sicilian doesn't always go so well at club level is because it has a number of counter-intuitive features. Black adopts a position with less space, gets behind in development, and makes lots of pawn moves... really, all the things we tell beginners not to do! It can be hard even for Grandmasters to be sure when Black is going to make one pawn move too many...



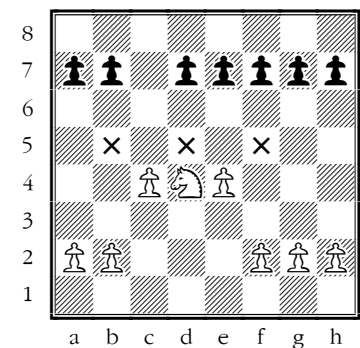
Stean-Browne 1976: 13.Nxe6!

The Maròczy Bind (Sicilian without 4...Nf6)

We have seen how the pawn moves ...b5 and ...d5 play a key role in creating counterplay for Black in the Sicilian. Wouldn't it be nice if White could cut out all of that with c2-c4? Well, yes, it would! So Black usually plays 4...Nf6, expecting White to reply 5.Nc3, when all the notes above still apply. But if Black chooses some other fourth move, White can employ the dreaded Maròczy Bind. It's not quite so dreaded as it used to be, but you still have to know what you're doing as Black to avoid being squashed flat.



Anti-Maròczy Pawn-breaks



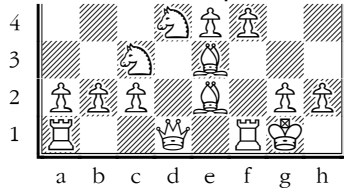
Black is going to die once White gets organised, so should aim to make a break with one of the light-square challenges.

2 Approaches for White:

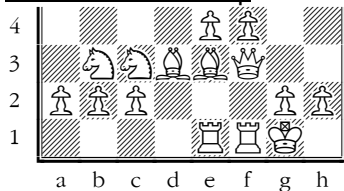
You can pretty well use any of these against any of the Black systems, and there is some sense in doing just that.

• Schemes for developing (Bf1)

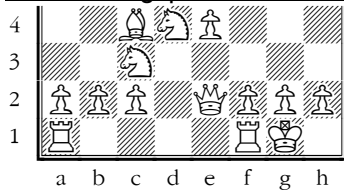
Be2 Classical development



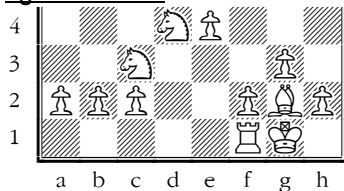
Bd3 Third-rank line-up



Bc4 Central grip Sozin/Velimirovic

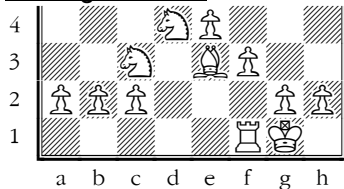


Bg2 Fianchetto



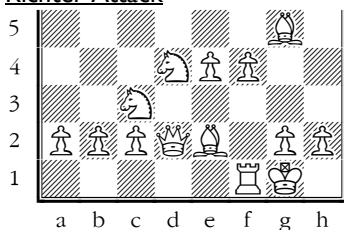
Playing for small advantages and not the big attack.

The English Attack



(Or the Yugoslav.)

Richter Attack



The idea is to get the Bishop on the other side of the f-pawn.

• Sacrificial ideas

White is trying to arrange an accident for Black on the King's-side (or the centre) before Black can finish developing and either wipe out White's Queen's-side or blow up the centre. Because Black is so solid, and White is in a hurry, this often pushes White into a sacrificial solution. David Levy in his book *Sacrifices in the Sicilian* lists various methods:

1. Nf5
2. Rx6
3. Bxb5
4. Nxb5
5. Bd5
6. Nd5
7. Ne6
8. Bxe6
9. Nxe6

and there are a couple of sacrificial approaches for Black:

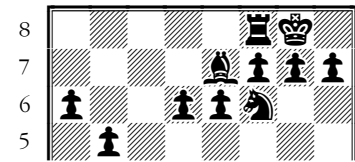
- A. ...Rxc3
- B. ...d5

I might add: Bxh7 as it is always around in any opening.

3 Approaches for Black:

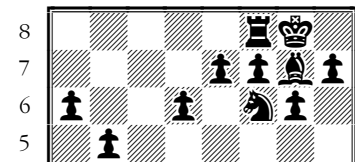
• Schemes for developing Bf8

Be7 Classical development



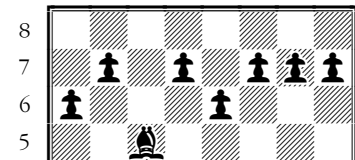
Sensible

Bg7 Breathing fire



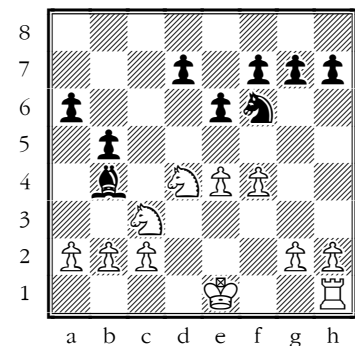
Active

Bc5 Unusual



After the expected Nb3, you can drop it back to a7.

Bb4 (delayed)



Needs careful timing.

4 The Sicilian Menagerie

• The Big Beasts:

Classical Sicilian



The most logical way to develop, and always has fans. White will usually try the Richter or Sozin approach; other tries are too wet.

Scheveningen Variation



A sensible way to play, getting castled and holding up things in the centre.

Dragon Variation



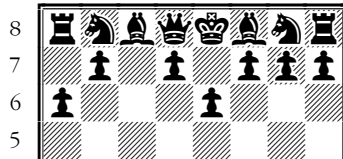
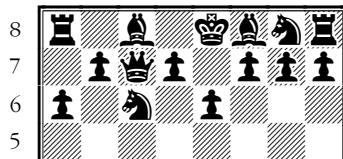
The Bishop's best square, aiming at the centre and perhaps White's King, but offering a point of leverage for White's attack down the h-file.

Najdorf Variation (sharpest)



Reserving all the options and thinking about ...e5, but spending another tempo moving an unimportant pawn...

Taimanov/Paulsen/Kan Variations (safest)



Here are some fancy move orders to try and get something more out of the opening: maybe an opportunity to swap a pair of minor pieces, maybe a chance to play ...d5 in one move, maybe the chance to put the Bf8 on a more active square.

Dunno why Chess Stars call this the safest...

Sveshnikov Variation (easiest)



Easiest?! Well, the structures are very similar in each line, so the plans are the same, and there aren't that many variations that are worth trying for White.

Accelerated Dragon



Possibly the actual safest Sicilian; White never gets in the usual attacks and either has to go for a roughly equal gambit variation or try to win slowly with the Maròczy Bind.

• The Small Cats:

Four Knights' Variation



Logical, active, and the basis of Everyman's Meeting 1 e4. There is one pain in the situation, which is the variation with

Löwenthal Variation and Kalashnikov Variation



White will play Nb5 and then Black can either force the issue with ...a6 (Löwenthal) or block with ...d6 (Kalashnikov).

Grivas Variation



A device to push the Nd4 to b3, when White is less well-placed for a snap attack.

Hyper-accelerated Dragon



For Accelerated Dragon players who don't like Bb5 and do like a bit of variety. White can play Qxd4 and Black can try to get away without playing ...cxd4 immediately.

O'Kelly Variation



One good idea (...e5) which White can easily avoid by playing one of the standard Anti-Sicilians, where Black is likely to find ...a6 a waste of time.

Nimzowitsch Variation



Mixing the Alekhin and the Sicilian defences. Sharp and not so well known, but White should get the edge.

Katalimov Variation



It's a move...

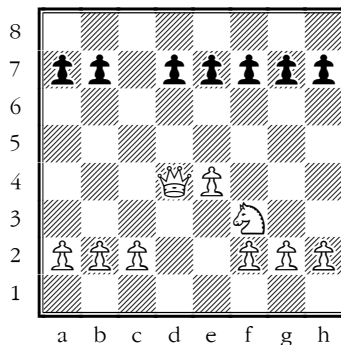
Basman Variation



It's an idea...

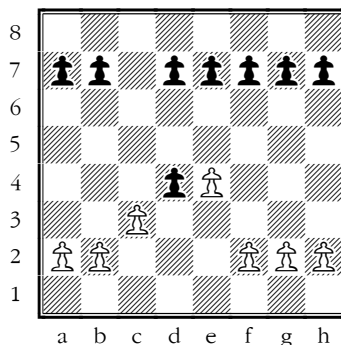
• *The Anti-Sicilians*

Qxd4



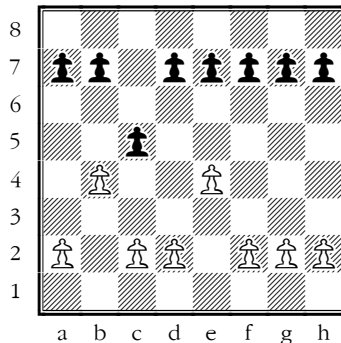
Hoping to gain time, but of course, White might lose that time after ...Nc6.

Morra Gambit



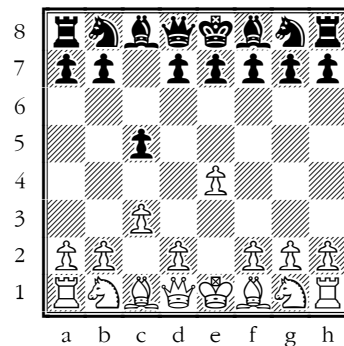
A gambit seeking an even greater lead in development than White normally gets in the Sicilian.

Wing Gambits b4



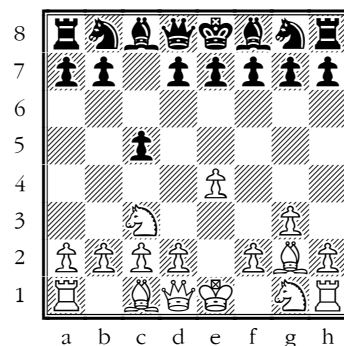
A gambit seeking extra development and central control.

Alapin Variation



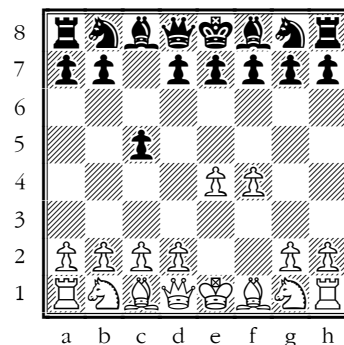
Looking for more central control, but falling behind in development. IQP positions often arise, so if you like to play these, then this is a natural choice.

Closed Variation



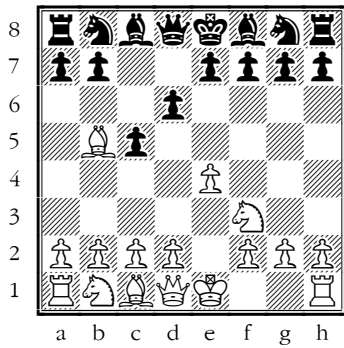
The fianchetto isn't essential, but it's in the way everywhere else.

Grand Prix Attack

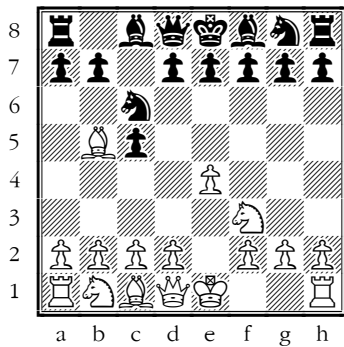


Well, nearly everywhere: you can play a version of the Closed with the Bf1 outside the pawn chain on c4 or b5. 2.f4 can be met by 2...d5 and 3...Nf6, so White usually precedes this push with 2.Nc3

Bb5(+) Rossolimo (Moscow)

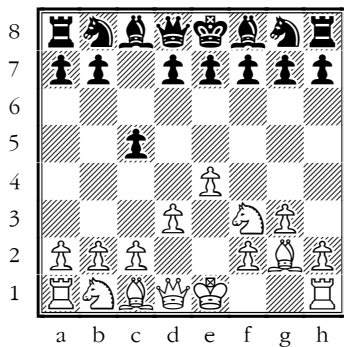


A positional try which can turn sharp. Black can equalise with 3...Bd7 or try for more but with more risk.



The Sicilian version of the Ruy Lopez, positionally rich and still posing some problems for Black.

King's Indian Attack



The KIA recipe can happily be tried against the Sicilian.

• Anti-Anti-Sicilians

If you have any affection for the French and you play Sicilian systems with ...e6, you can play ...e6/...d5 against most of these systems.

Otherwise, you can spend some time getting your Bf8 out from behind the c-pawn with ...g6 and ...Bg7.

5 Theory: how bad has it got?

In the Sveshnikov Variation of the Sicilian Defense, the game Korneev-Devereaux, 2006, featured a theoretical novelty on Black's 29th move, improving on a previous high-level game Topalov-Leko, Linares 2005.

(Wikipedia)

[Event "XXII Torneo Ciudad de Linares"]

[Site "Linares ESP"]

[Date "2005.02.26"]

[Round "4"]

[Result "1/2-1/2"]

[White "Veselin Topalov"]

[Black "Peter Leko"]

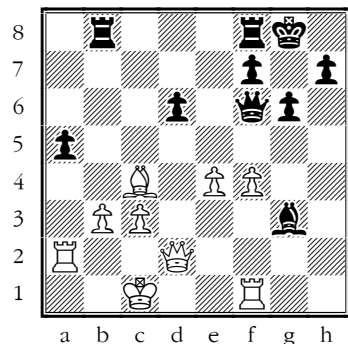
[ECO "B33"]

[PlyCount "113"]

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 e5 6. Ndb5 d6 7. Bg5 a6 8. Na3 b5 9. Nd5 Be7 10. Bxf6 Bxf6 11. c3 O-O 12. Nc2 Bg5 13. a4 bxa4 14. Rxa4 a5 15. Bc4 Rb8 16. b3 Kh8 17. Nce3 g6 18. h4 Bxh4 19. g3 Bg5 20. f4 exf4 21. gxf4 Bh4+ 22. Kd2 Ne7 23. Kc1 Nxd5 24. Nxd5 Be6 25. Qd4+ Kg8 26. Ra2 Bxd5 27. Qxd5 Qf6 28. Qd2 Bg3 29. Rf1 h5 30. Rxa5 Ra8 31. e5 Qf5 32. Rxa8 Rxa8 33. Kb2 h4 34. Qxd6 Re8 35. Bb5 Rf8 36. Bd3 Qe6 37. Qd4 Qe7 38. Bc4 Kh7 39. b4 h3 40. Qd3 Qh4 41. f5 Bf4 42. e6 fxe6 43. Qd7+ Kh6 44. fxe6 Bcl+ 45. Rxc1 Qxc4 46. e7 Ra8 47. Qxh3+ Kg7 48. e8=N+ Kg8 49. Nf6+ Kf7 50. Qd7+ Kxf6 51. Qd4+ Qxd4 52. cxd4 g5 53. Rc6+ Kf5 54. b5 g4 55. Kb3 g3 56. Rcl Ke4 57. Rgl 1/2-1/2

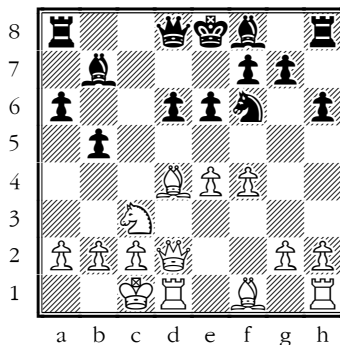
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 [Date "2006.09.23"]
 [Round "1"]
 [Result "1/2-1/2"]
 [White "Oleg Korneev"]
 [Black "Maxim Devereaux"]
 [ECO "B33"]
 [PlyCount "117"]

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. d4 cxd4
 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 e5 6. Ndb5
 d6 7. Bg5 a6 8. Na3 b5 9. Nd5
 Be7 10. Bxf6 Bxf6 11. c3 O-O
 12. Nc2 Bg5 13. a4 bxa4 14.
 Rxa4 a5 15. Bc4 Rb8 16. b3
 Kh8 17. Nce3 g6 18. h4 Bxh4
 19. g3 Bg5 20. f4 exf4 21. gxf4
 Bh4+ 22. Kd2 Ne7 23. Kc1
 Nxd5 24. Nxd5 Be6 25. Qd4+
 Kg8 26. Ra2 Bxd5 27. Qxd5
 Qf6 28. Qd2 Bg3 29. Rf1



29...d5 30. Bxd5 g5 31. Kb2
 Bxf4 32. Rxa5 Rbc8 33. Qd3
 Kh8 34. b4 Rc7 35. Kb3 Rb8
 36. Ra6 Qg7 37. c4 Be5 38.
 Ra8 Rxa8 39. Bxa8 Rc8 40.
 Bd5 Rd8 41. c5 g4 42. Qe2 f6
 43. Rc1 Qh6 44. Rc2 Qh3+ 45.
 Ka4 Rb8 46. b5 g3 47. b6 Qh1
 48. Ra2 Qg1 49. Kb5 Qb1+ 50.
 Ka6 Qb4 51. Qb5 Qc3 52. Qa5
 Qf3 53. Qd2 Qf1+ 54. Ka5
 Qg1 55. Kb5 Qf1+ 56. Kc6 Bf4
 57. Qe2 Rc8+ 58. Kd7 Qxe2
 59. Rxe2 1/2-1/2

A GM innovation (Nunn-
 Fedorowicz)



How do you deal with the
 avalanche of theory?

- *Learn what you can*
- *Play what you know*
- *Stick with the same lines*
- *Look up the theory after you
play a game.*
- *Train/Test yourself against:
other players
Fritz/Rybka
training software*
- *Play less-obvious lines.*
- *Play your own theory.*

6 Bibliography

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 behind the Sicilian Defence

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CHESS STARS The *_est Sicilian