

The Modernized Anti-Sicilian

Volume 2 Moscow Variation & Sidelines

Ravi Haria

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Email: info@thinkerspublishing.com
Website: www.thinkerspublishing.com

Managing Editor: Adrien Demuth

Assistant Editor: Daniël Vanheirzeele

Proofreading: Conor O'Donnell

Software: Hub van de Laar

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The Modernized Anti-Sicilian

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Key to Symbols

!	a good move
?	a weak move
!!	an excellent move
??	a blunder
!?	an interesting move
?!	a dubious move
□	only move
N	novelty
☉	lead in development
⊙	zugzwang
=	equality
∞	unclear position
∞̄	with compensation for the sacrificed material
±	White stands slightly better
∓	Black stands slightly better
±	White has a serious advantage
∓	Black has a serious advantage
+−	White has a decisive advantage
−+	Black has a decisive advantage
→	with an attack
↑	with initiative
↔	with counterplay
Δ	with the idea of
△	better is
≤	worse is
+	check
#	mate

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Preface

This second and final volume of my Anti-Sicilian series covers our approach for all alternatives to 2...♘c6. The choice against 2...d6 was obvious. The Moscow variation is the only critical alternative to 3.d4 that has caused any concerns for Black – by developing with a tempo, we force Black to make an immediate decision on move 3 and wait for the right moment to open the position.

Whilst in the Rossolimo book I tried to achieve an objective advantage against every line, my choices in the Moscow were mainly selected by their ability to create practical difficulties for the opponent. Naturally, it is not possible to find an advantage in every variation but I have ensured to add many detailed explanations to guide plans and aid understanding in the various positions we'll encounter.

Against 3...♘d7, I analyse two distinct options – either castling immediately with the aim of breaking in the centre with c2-c3 and d2-d4, or first playing 4.a4 and denying Black their typical counterplay on the queenside. Against the solid 3...♙d7, I offer two choices of achieving central control. 5.c4 aims for a more positional Maroczy structure, whereas the alternative 5.0-0 transforms the position into a French advanced-type structure, where we develop interesting chances on the kingside. We already discussed 3...♘c6 in the first volume from the move order 2...♘c6 3.♙b5 d6, but I've analysed a second option – 6.h3 instead of 6.c3. The point is to limit Black's piece activity by suppressing the scope of the c8-bishop.

It was a bit harder to choose between 3.c3 or 3.g3 against 2...e6 – so I analysed both! The former transposes to an Alapin where my recommendations generally revolve around generating an attack against Black's king – this is even attempted in the more 'positional' lines after 3...d5 4.exd5 ♔xd5. The latter aims for a slower build-up before striking in the centre with d2-d4. Particular attention is given to Black's attempts to generate immediate activity with a ...d7-d5 push, and I think my analysis here makes Black's path to equality extremely narrow.

Finally, I thought it was important to also consider the less popular second moves (2...g6, 2...a6, and 2...♘f6). In particular, I examined both 3.c3 and 3.c4 against 2...g6. The latter transposes to an Accelerated Dragon, which I can justify including in an Anti-Sicilian book as I believe it's correct to enter an 'Open-Sicilian' type position if it benefits us. This approach has been emphasised across both volumes and it is made especially clear in the chapter against 2...g6.

On a personal note, in the two years since I published the first volume I have graduated from university, attained the Grandmaster title, represented England at the World Cup, European Teams', and Olympiad, and started a new job. I hope this somewhat justifies the delay in releasing this second volume – and for the few readers of this book, I hope the wait has been worth it. Theory has moved on from two years ago and it will continue to change, but I'm confident that this Anti-Sicilian series will provide a strong lifetime repertoire, and a foundation to respond to future theoretical developments.

My thanks to Kimberley Rubio for her generosity and skill in designing an amazing cover; Conor O'Donnell and Adrien Demuth for their extensive help and patience in editing and finalising this publication; my friends without whom this series would have been completed a lot faster; and as always my parents, simply for everything they do.

Ravi Haria

London, February 2023.

Introduction

The Sicilian Defence has historically been Black's most popular weapon against 1.e4. Its prestige is grounded on a combative nature and fighting approach; Black isn't just playing for equality, but rather seeks to acquire counter-attacking chances straight from the opening. In response, the prevalence of Anti-Sicilians (alternatives to 3.d4) propagated due to their value in reducing the effectiveness of Black's counterplay. In this series, I aim to provide the foundation of a repertoire which seeks to retain the core values of Anti-Sicilians. Namely, I have consistently attempted to create endless practical difficulties for Black, whilst wisely waiting for the right moment to open the position and generate a dangerous initiative.

For too long, Anti-Sicilian rhetoric has centred on the logic of simplicity, geared towards reaching playable positions with easy plans while simultaneously avoiding depths of theory. The danger of this logic is the ease with which we can fall into the trap of inactivity; of mindlessly playing an opening without striving to trouble Black; of solely playing an Anti-Sicilian to avoid theory. In contrast, throughout the volumes I will advocate an active approach – with continuous underlying themes of achieving rapid development, dynamic piece play and dominant central control, with an important focus on denying Black the counterplay that they seek when choosing the Sicilian Defence.

In nearly every system against the various Sicilians, I have provided the reader with multiple options to choose from. Modern-day openings are constantly changing, and the necessity of flexibility in preparation has never been more vital. Having the ability to play different systems against the same opening is also beneficial in increasing our enjoyment of chess. Moreover, each alternative varies in style, enabling us to directly target our opponent's weaknesses – as well as concentrate on our own strengths. Obviously I can't promise that every line will ensure us an advantage. But by providing a wide variety of options, we can consistently make life difficult for Black and continue to create new and interesting ideas.

Although every variation has been checked and inspired by a combination of Leela Zero and Stockfish, the emphasis has always been on choosing the most human lines. Readers may notice that the analysis is often extensive – I felt this was often necessary in justifying my suggestions. Nevertheless, the focus in these volumes should be inspiration by the various ideas, rather than memorisation of long lines.

In tandem with textual explanations, my fundamental hope is for the reader to absorb the interconnected ideas between each variation. This will be extremely useful in responding to future developments in the Anti-Sicilian.

Part I

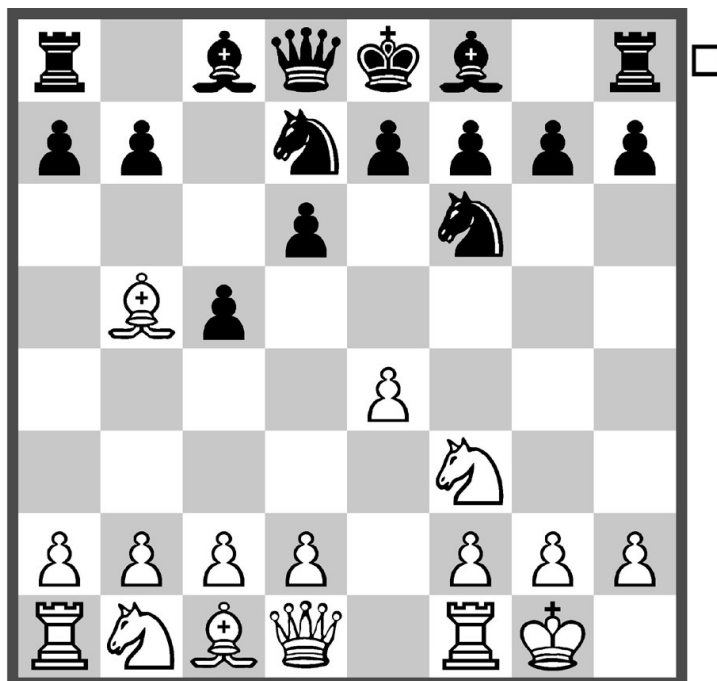
Moscow with 3...d7



4.0-0 gf6







1.e4 c5 2.  f3 d6 3.  b5+  d7







4.0-0  gf6



Chapter Guide

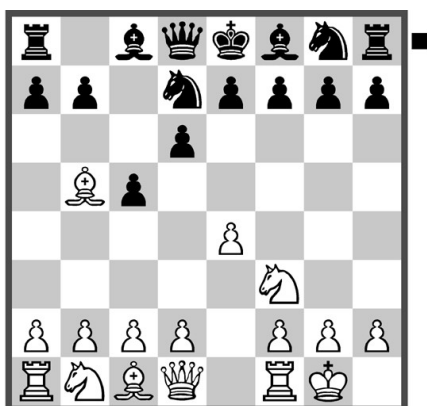
Chapter 1 – 4.0-0 gf6

1.e4 c5 2.  f3 d6 3.  b5+  d7 4.0-0  gf6 5.  e1 a6 6.  f1

a) 6.--.....	15
b) 6...e5 7.c3  e7 8.d4 --	19
c) 6...e5 7.c3  e7 8.d4 0-0.....	23
d) 6...b6 7.d4 cxd4 8.  xd4  b7 9.c4 --	25
e) 6...b6 7.d4 cxd4 8.  xd4  b7 9.c4 e6	27

a) 6.--

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. ♙b5+ ♘d7 4. 0-0 e6

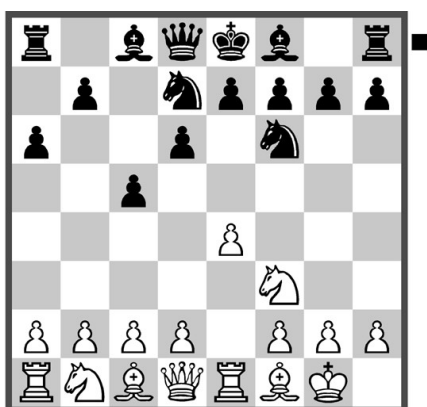


Position after: 4. 0-0

4... ♘gf6

By forcing us to play ♖e1, Black avoids our early c2-c3 option. However, the downside to this is our bishop is able to immediately retreat to f1 after ...a7-a6. As a result, White is essentially given an extra tempo to use in attempting to control the centre.

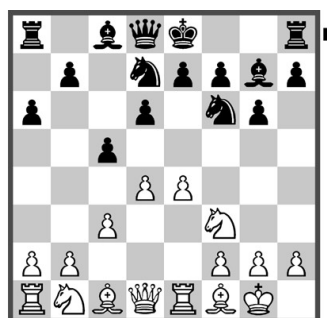
5. ♖e1 a6 6. ♙f1



Position after: 6. ♙f1

A) 6... b6 is the most popular continuation, aiming to prevent c2-c3 and d2-d4 by exerting pressure on the e4-pawn. I will illustrate how to instead continue in Maroczy style in the next subchapter.

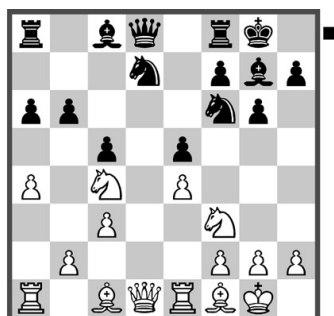
B) 6... g6?! Gifting us both the centre and an initiative. 7. c3 ♙g7 8. d4 Hinting at e5, so for now Black has no time to push ...b5.



Position after: 8. d4

B1) 8... e5 9. dxe5 dxe5 [9... ♘xe5 10. ♘xe5 dxe5 11. ♙xd8+ ♙xd8 12. a4 ♙e6 13. ♘a3±] 10. a4! b6 11. ♘a3 0-0 12. ♘c4!

(see analysis diagram next page)



Position after: 12. Nc4!

[I played 12. Qg5± and went on to win a nice game in Haria – Sargissyan, Batumi 2018, but 12. Nc4 seems even more convincing.] 12... Qb7 [12... Qc7 13. Qd6!+- Forcing huge concessions.; 12... Re8 13. Nd6 Re7 14. Qc4+- followed by Ng5 is overwhelming.] 13. Nd6 Qc6 14. Ng5!

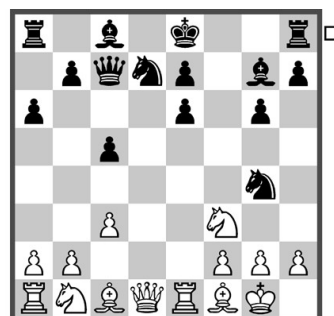


Position after: 14. Ng5!

It's pretty much impossible for Black to defend the f7-square, e.g. 14... b5 15. Qb3 c4 16. Qxc4!+-.

B2) 8... cxd4 9. cxd4 0-0 10. a4! transposes to 8... 0-0.

B3) 8... Qc7 9. e5! This move is even stronger when Black hasn't castled yet. 9... dxe5 10. dxe5 Ng4 11. e6 fxe6



Position after: 11... fxe6

In Munoz Santana – Gruenfeld, Tromso 2014, the best continuation for White was 12. Qa4! c4 [12... Ng5 13. Ng5! Qb6 14. Na3 0-0 15. Qh4 h6 16. Nxe6!+-] 13. Qxc4 Qxc4 14. Qxc4 Ng5 15. Nxe5 Nxe5 16. Qf1± with a very pleasant queenless middlegame.

B4) 8... 0-0



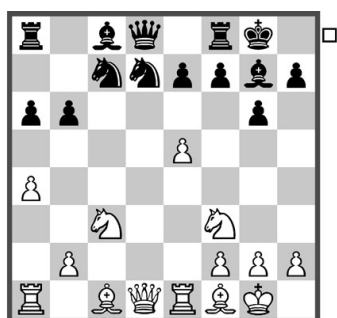
Position after: 8... 0-0

B4.1) 9. e5!? is always an interesting possibility:

B4.1a) 9... dxe5 10. dxe5 Ng4 11. Qf4! Nxe5 Black's g4-knight is trapped, so this is almost forced. Black is able to win back the piece but faces an unpleasant ending. 12. Qxd8 Rxd8 13. Nxe5 Nxe5 14. Qxe5 Qxe5 15. Rxe5 Rxd1

16. f3 ♘f5 17. ♔f2 ♖xb1 18.
♖xb1 ♘xb1 19. a4! ♔f8 20.
♖xc5±

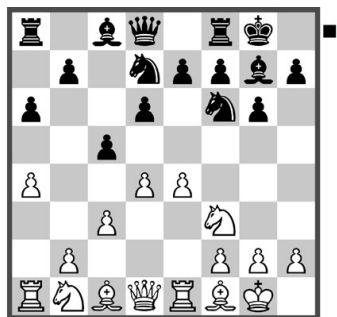
B4.1b) 9... ♘e8 10. a4 [10. h4!?
seems logical too. 10... dxe5 11.
dxe5 ♘c7 12. ♖e2 b5 13. a4 ♘b7
14. h5→] 10... cxd4 11. cxd4 dxe5
12. dxe5 ♘c7 13. ♘c3 b6



Position after: 13... b6

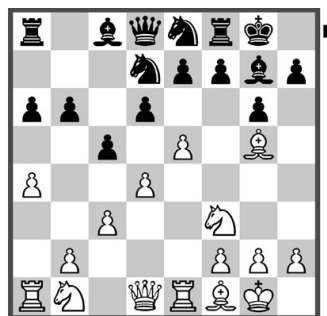
14. h4! Once again the position
calls for an advance of the
h-pawn. Things remain very com-
plex, and there is much more that
can be analysed after 9.e5. Never-
theless, it seems like a very decent
option for us. 14... ♘e6 15. h5
♘b7 16. h6 ♘h8 17. ♘e3±

B4.2) 9. a4! As always I'm keen to
prevent Black from playing ...b7-b5.



Position after: 9. a4!

B4.2a) 9... b6 10. e5! An im-
proved version of 9. e5. 10... ♘e8
11. ♘g5!

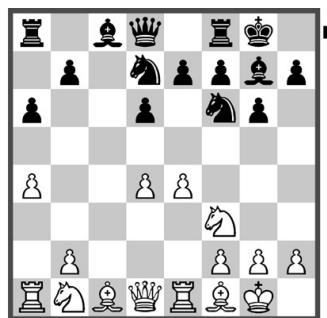


Position after: 11. ♘g5!

Threatening to capture on d6.
11... dxe5 12. ♘xe5 ♘xe5 13.
dxe5 ♖c7 14. ♖e2± Again Black
is left with a very passive position,
and his queenside pawns risk be-
ing exposed as critical weaknesses
later in the game.

B4.2b) 9... e5 10. dxe5 ♘xe5 11.
♘xe5 A draw was prematurely
agreed in Roganovic – Sarenac,
Ruma 2017. White was clearly
better after the natural 11... dxe5
12. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 13. a5!±.

B4.2c) 9... cxd4 10. cxd4

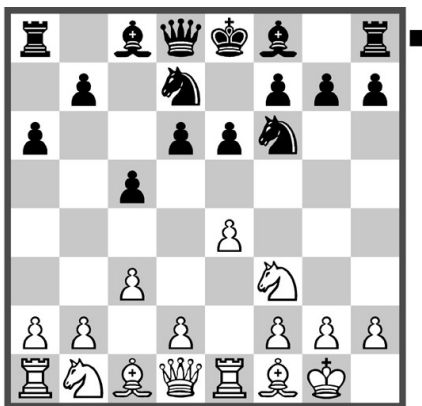


Position after: 10. cxd4

10... e5 This central break is probably critical, but we can continue with the simple plan of creating a space advantage on the queenside. [10... b6 11. ♖c3 ♙b7 12. h3± is very pleasant too.]
 11. d5 ♘c5 12. ♘fd2 a5
 13. ♘c3±

9... ♘xf3+ [9... ♘g6 10. a4 ♙e7 11. ♘c3±] 10. ♙xf3 ♙e7 This position was reached in a Garry Kasparov simultaneous game. Here it's possible for White to take over the initiative with 11. e5! dxe5 12. dxe5 ♘d5 13. ♙g3 ♙f8 14. ♖d1 ♙d7 15. ♘c3 ♘xc3 16. bxc3 ♙c7 17. h4→.

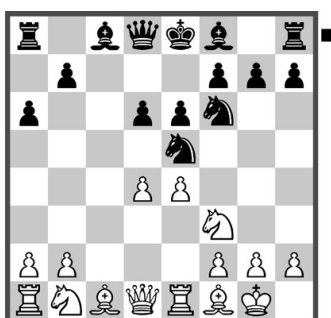
7. c3



Position after: 7. c3

7... ♙e7

A) 7... ♘e5?! has been played several times but shouldn't really concern us. 8. d4 cxd4 [8... ♘xf3+ 9. ♙xf3 e5 10. dxe5 dxe5 11. ♘d2± Ricardi – Zair, Ubeda 1999.] 9. cxd4



Position after: 9. cxd4

B) 7... b6 8. d4 ♙b7 9. d5!



Position after: 9. d5!

Playing against the b7-bishop. White will stand clearly better in the resulting pawn structure. 9... exd5 10. exd5+ ♙e7 11. c4 0-0 12. ♘c3±

C) 7... b5 8. d4 ♙b7 This move order has occurred in a few top-level games, but White has a strong continuation: 9. e5! ♘d5 10. dxc5!



Position after: 10. dxc5!

10... dxc5 Now our simplest continuation is to take the positional approach.

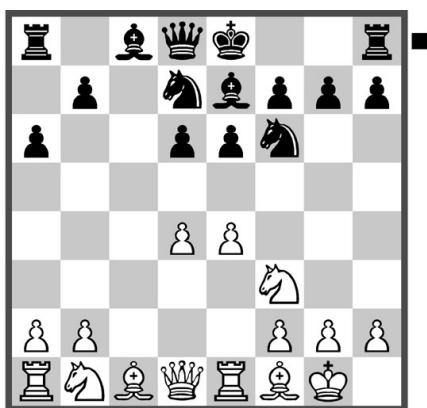
[10... ♘xe5 11. ♘xe5 dxe5 12. b4±; 10... ♘xc5 11. b4! ♘d7 12. a4±] 11. c4 bxc4 12. ♘fd2!±

8. d4 cxd4

8... 0-0 9. a4 b6 10. d5! A common idea if Black refrains from capturing on d4.

10... exd5 11. exd5 ♙b7 12. c4±

9. cxd4



Position after: 9. cxd4

9... b5!

Pretty much forced, or else Black gets way too passive. However we still have a pretty comfortable position with normal moves.

9... 0-0 10. a4± Black's position is feeling increasingly cramped.

10. ♙d3

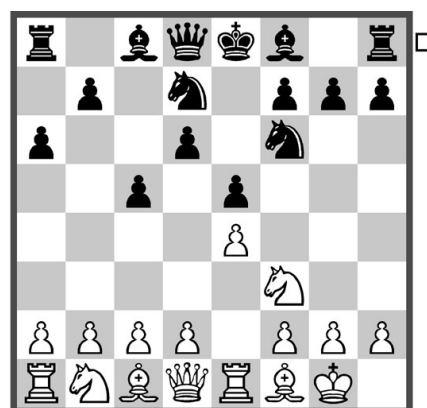
10. a4 ♙b7 11. d5!? is potentially even stronger.

10... 0-0 11. a3 ♙b7 12. h3 e5 13. ♘c3± With a solid edge.

b) 6...e5 7.c3 ♙e7 8.d4 --

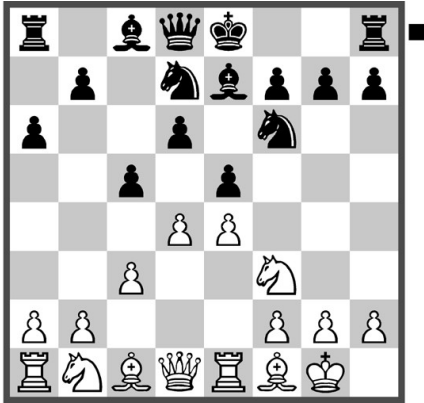
1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 d6 3. ♙b5+ ♘d7 4. 0-0 ♘gf6 5. ♖e1 a6 6. ♙f1 e5

(see diagram opposite column)



Position after: 6... e5

7. c3 ♖e7 8. d4

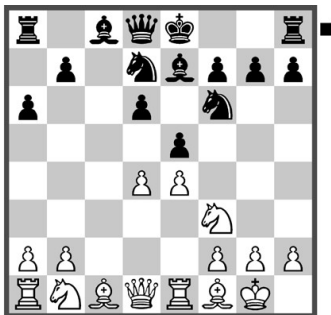


Position after: 8. d4

It's important to note that in this position we have the choice between two different plans to pursue. It's been very common to capture on e5 and try and positionally exploit Black's d5-square. However, another interesting plan is to play with d4-d5 and a2-a4. In this case, our knight will stand well on c4 and Black could face greater long-term problems with weaknesses on d6 and b6. We'll choose between these plans informed by how Black decides to arrange their forces in the meantime.

8... ♔c7

A) 8... cxd4 9. cxd4



Position after: 9. cxd4

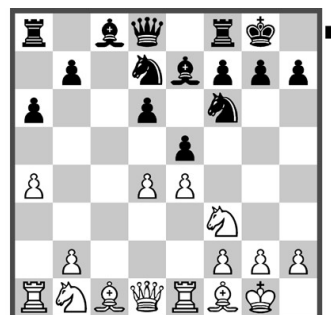
A1) 9... b5!? It might make sense for Black to play this before castling, but we can alter our piece set-up to maintain a good position. 10. a4 b4 11. ♗g5!



Position after: 11. ♗g5!

It's useful having a bishop here, as it often means that Black won't be able to enact a central break. 11... 0-0 12. ♞bd2 h6 13. ♗h4 ♗b7 14. a5 ♖c8 15. h3± Black still doesn't have a way to effectively break in the centre, and their queenside pawns look like they could become targets for attack.

A2) 9... 0-0 10. a4!



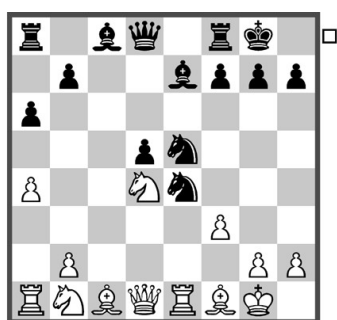
Position after: 10. a4!

We want to prevent Black from gaining space on the queenside with ... b7-b5.

A2.1) 10... b6 11. ♘c3 ♙b7 12. d5!
Gaining this space advantage means any action on the queenside will be favourable for White. Also, the e4-d5 pawn construction is a good way to play against Black's light-squared bishop. 12... ♖c8 13. ♘d2 ♘e8 14. ♘c4±

A2.2) 10... d5!? Black sacrifices a pawn to gain some activity, but I don't think they'll be getting full compensation for it. 11. exd5 exd4 12. ♙xd4 ♙c5 13. ♙c4±

A2.3) 10... exd4 11. ♘xd4 d5 [11... ♘c5 12. ♘c3 ♖e8 13. b4 ♘e6 14. ♘f5 ♙f8 15. ♙b2± White had a great position in Bartel – Zakhartsov, Tallinn 2016.] 12. e5 ♘e4 13. f3 ♘xe5!?

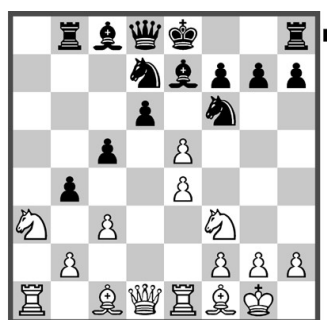


Position after: 13... ♘xe5!?

Another way that Black can sacrifice material to gain activity, but invariably I don't think that it's enough compensation. [13... ♘ec5 14. ♘f5+–] 14. fxe4 ♙c5 15. ♙e2! ♙b6 16. ♙e3 ♙xb2 17. ♘a3± Most likely followed by ♘ac2, and White has consolidated well.

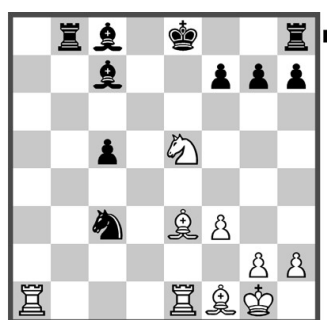
B) 8... b6 9. a4 0-0 10. d5!±

C) 8... b5 9. a4 ♖b8 10. axb5 axb5 11. ♘a3 b4 In Christiansen – Anisimov, St Petersburg 2018, White missed a clever intermediate move. 12. dxe5!



Position after: 12. dxe5!

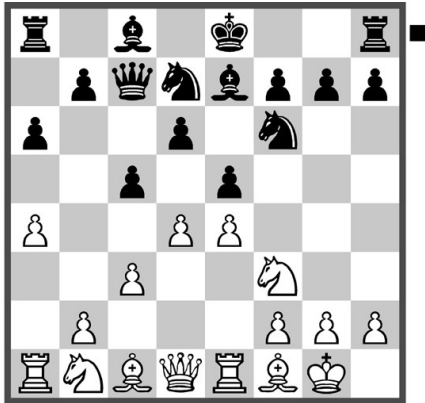
12... ♘xe5 [12... dxe5 13. cxb4 cxb4 14. ♘c4 ♙c7 15. ♙g5 0-0 16. ♖c1+–] 13. ♘xe5 dxe5 14. ♙xd8+ ♙xd8 15. ♘c4 ♙c7 16. ♙e3 bxc3 17. bxc3 ♘xe4 18. f3 ♘xc3 19. ♘xe5!



Position after: 19. ♘xe5!

19... ♙xe5 20. ♙xc5 f6 21. f4+– Despite material being pretty much balanced, White is completely winning due to the power of their bishop-pair and the activity of their rooks.

9. a4!



Position after: 9. a4!

In this case I prefer not to play 9. dxe5 because after 9... dxe5! 10. c4 ♞b8! Black has already protected the e5-pawn, and now the queen's knight can immediately be rerouted to c6. Even if White retains some pressure after 11. ♞c3 ♞c6 12. ♞d5 ♚d8 13. ♙e3 0-0, Black remains solid and I fear the advantage might dissipate soon.

9... 0-0

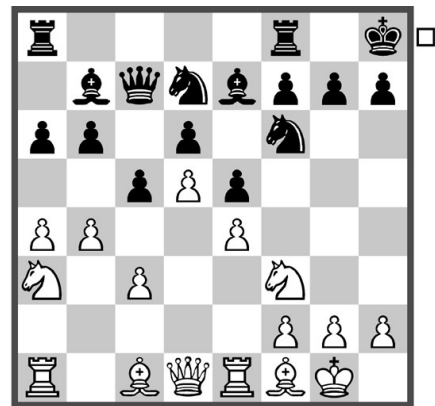
9... b6 10. d5! Black's queen seems misplaced on c7, and once again I really like this structure for White. 10... 0-0 11. ♞a3 ♚h8 12. b4 ♞g8 13. ♞c4 f5 14. exf5 ♜xf5 15. h4!



Position after: 15. h4!

We're obviously unable to play b4-b5 yet, but Black's attempts to do something on the kingside have opened up new avenues for us to explore. 15... ♙b7 16. ♞g5→

10. d5! b6 11. ♞a3 ♙b7 12. b4 ♚h8



Position after: 12... ♚h8

It's probably wise for Black to prepare a kingside break, but we'll continue with the same plan of b4-b5.

13. ♜b1! ♞g8 14. b5 a5 15. g3±

Our knight will sit fantastically on c4, and we can begin to manoeuvre our pieces over to the kingside.