

The Modernized Anti-Sicilians

Volume 1: The Rossolimo

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Volume 1: The Rossolimo

Ravi Haria

Thinkers Publishing 2020



Key to Symbols

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

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Preface

In my first volume of the Anti-Sicilians, we will be examining the Rossolimo variation. The Sveshnikov and Classical Sicilians, where Black begins with 2...♘c6, have consistently been a popular way for Black to acquire counter-attacking chances straight from the opening. These openings are the favourites of many top-level Grandmasters; none more so than Magnus Carlsen, who most famously fashioned the Sveshnikov Sicilian against Fabiano Caruana in the 2018 World Championship match.

The Rossolimo variation with 3.♗b5 is the clearest indication that we are attempting to frustrate Black's counterplay. By delaying opening the centre, we can simply wait for Black to show us how he intends to continue before we make any big commitments. Most importantly, we have the positional threat of ♗xc6, which Black has to be wary of if he himself tries to open the centre too quickly. In nearly all variations our principal aim is to achieve rapid development, ensuring optimal conditions for a timely central break. In the main three systems (3...d6, 3...e6 and 3...g6), my multiple suggestions are based on the dual concepts of playing as actively as possible, whilst simultaneously frustrating Black's ideals.

Our repertoire against 3...d6 emphasizes our ability to consistently interfere with Black's co-ordination. We'll immediately break open the centre with 6.c3 and 7.d4, before attempting to create endless practical difficulties in the mainline with an e5-e6 push. It's important to pay attention to the continuous theme of both pawn and exchange sacrifices, where piece quality is often prioritised over piece quantity. As usual, the various lines continuously offer 'safer alternatives' – which are by no means worse, but instead offer the opportunity to take the game in a different direction.

Against 3...e6, I offer two alternatives: either playing critically with 4.0-0 and 5.d4, or frustrating Black's development with 4.0-0 and 5.♙e1. The first option will result in positions similar to Open Sicilians, except that Black has a slightly inferior knight on g6, as opposed to f6. The latter aims for optimal piece placement which will make it difficult for Black to open the centre – whereas we are ideally positioned to break with c2-c3 and d2-d4.

3...g6 is arguably the most critical line against the Rossolimo. As usual, I analysed two distinct options – either capturing on c6 immediately, or playing 4.0-0 and 5.c3 with the aim of occupying the centre. In both lines, we'll often encounter themes revolving around Black's weakened dark-squares, as well as attempts to suppress Black's g7-bishop with a strong e5-pawn. You will quickly realise that a combination of our own dynamic piece play, alongside attempting to create endless practical difficulties for our opponent, are at the heart of every variation we discuss.

I'd like to thank Daniël Vanheirzeele and Romain Edouard for the opportunity to write this series; Daniel Fernandez for finding the time to continuously critique and edit my analysis; and above all my parents, for their endless support throughout my chess journey.

Ravi Haria

London, November 2020

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 he seeks 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 different 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

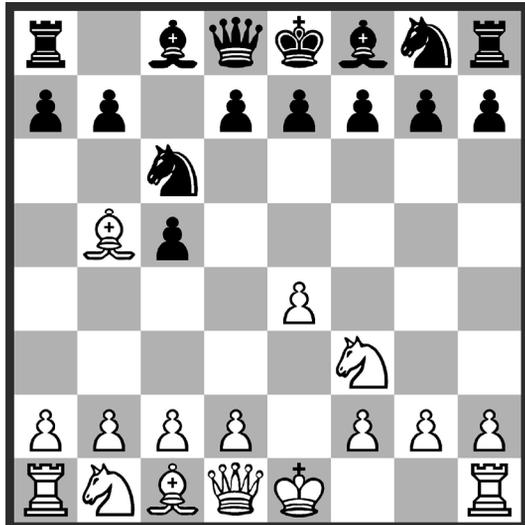
Sidelines





Rare 3rd Moves

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♚b5



Chapter Guide

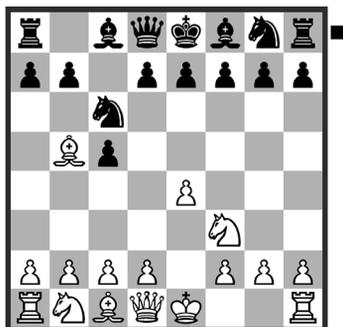
Chapter 1 – Rare 3rd Moves

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a) 3...--

1. e4 c5 2. ♖f3 ♘c6 3. ♘b5



Position after: 3. ♘b5

3... b6?!

However Black attempts to avoid the mainline, our plan invariably remains the same: castle, establish a lead in development, and attempt to control the centre.

A) 3... d5?! This doesn't feel right. Generally in Rossolimo positions where we capture on c6 and Black has doubled c-pawns, the move ...d7-d5 is a serious positional mistake – Black is always left with a weak c5-pawn. This position is no exception, and it is quite easily refutable. 4. ♘c3!

(see analysis diagram next column)

A1) 4... e6 5. exd5 exd5 6. 0-0 ♘e7 7. d4± We'll end up with an extremely favourable version of an IQP position.



Position after: 4. ♘c3!

A2) 4... dxe4 5. ♘xe4 e6 6. ♘xc6+ bxc6 7. 0-0±

A3) 4... d4 5. ♘a4 e6 6. ♘xc6+ bxc6 7. 0-0



Position after: 7. 0-0

Black is already positionally lost. He'll be tied down to the c5-pawn after we play something like b2-b3 and ♘a3, and the c4-square is another nice outpost for our f3-knight to utilize. This position is basically everything that Black is trying to avoid in the Rossolimo, and underlines why ...d7-d5 is conventionally a really bad move.

A4) 4... ♘f6 5. exd5 ♘xd5 6. 0-0



Position after: 6. O-O



Position after: 3... h5?!

6... ♖xc3 [6... e6 7. ♗xd5 ♕xd5 8. c4 ♖d6 9. b4! cxb4 10. ♔b2±] 7. dxc3! Trading queens is perfectly fine as we are simply increasing the scope of our lead in development. Black will struggle to prevent weaknesses being created in his position. 7... ♕xd1 8. ♖xd1 f6 [8... ♗g4 9. ♗e3±] 9. ♗e3 e5 10. ♗d2 ♗f5 11. ♗b3 ♗xc2 12. ♖d2 ♗xb3 13. axb3



Position after: 13. axb3

The bishop pair more than make up for the sacrificed pawn, and at any moment we can capture on c6 and play ♖a5. 13... ♗e7 14. f4±

B) 3... h5?! Magnus Carlsen played this move in his rather suspicious match against Ding Liren in the Carlsen Online Invitational, and repeated it in a reversed Rossolimo with the White piec-

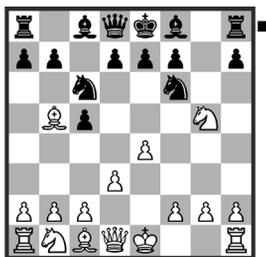
es against Peter Svidler - but I think it's fair to say that we don't need to analyse it too deeply. 4. O-O [4. h3 was played by Ding but it feels too slow. He still managed to get a great position, which probably illustrates just how bad 3...h5 is. 4... e6 5. c3 ♗f6 6. e5 ♗d5 7. d4!? Ding Liren – Carlsen, M chess24.com INT 2020.] 4... e6 Black should probably try to be consistent with 3...h5 by going for ...g7-g5 as soon as possible, but if we're reasonably accurate then Black will doubtless weaken his own king more than ours. 5. ♗xc6 bxc6 6. e5! g5 7. d3 g4 8. ♗fd2 f6



Position after: 8... f6

9. f4! ♗h6 10. b3 Black will struggle to cope with his self-inflicted dark-squared weaknesses. 10... ♗f5 11. ♗e4 ♗g7 12. ♗b2!+-

C) 3... g5? An unimpressive pawn sacrifice, which isn't too difficult to refute. 4. ♖xg5 ♜f6 [4... ♜d4 5. ♚h5 ♜h6 6. ♜a3+- This is an even better version of 4... ♜f6.] 5. d3



Position after: 5. d3

5... ♜d4 [5... ♚g8 6. 0-0 ♜d4 7. ♚a4+-] 6. ♚a4!N [Black hopes for 6... ♚c4, after which 6... d5 7. exd5 b5∞ is a bit too messy for my liking.] 6... b5 [6... ♚a5+ 7. ♜c3 b5 8. ♚b3 ♜xb3 9. cxb3+-] 7. ♚b3 d5 8. e5+-

D) 3... f5? As we'll encounter in future chapters, we ordinarily don't mind sacrificing a pawn in the Rossolimo for positional gains. 3...f5 gives us a pawn, whilst still creating positional weaknesses for us to exploit. 4. exf5 a6 5. ♚xc6 dxc6 6. ♚e2 ♚xf5 7. d3±



Position after: 7. d3±

E) 3... ♜a5 A weirdly understandable way for Black to conserve his pawn structure, but with the obvious downfall of losing time. Yet again, it shouldn't be too hard to prove an advantage by playing normal moves. 4. c3 a6 5. ♚e2



Position after: 5. ♚e2

5... ♜f6 [5... e6 6. d4 cxd4 7. cxd4 ♜f6 In Tiits – Korze, ICCF email 2009, the simplest continuation was just 8. ♚d3 b5 9. 0-0 ♚b7 10. ♚e1 ♚e7 11. ♜bd2±] 6. e5 ♜d5 7. d4 The position resembles an Alapin, except that Black's b8-knight has lost a lot of time going to a5 - eventually it will go back to c6 anyway. 7... cxd4 8. 0-0 e6 [8... ♜c6 9. cxd4 e6 10. ♜c3±] 9. c4!



Position after: 9. c4!

E1) 9... ♜b4 Both of Black's knights look completely misplaced here. 10.

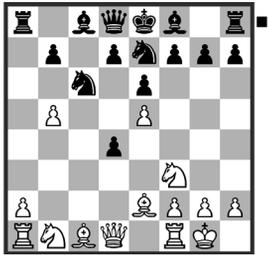
♞xd4 ♔c7 11. ♙e3 ♞ac6 12. ♞c3
♞xe5



Position after: 12... ♞xe5

Our development advantage and Black's awkward pieces ensure that we have more than adequate compensation for the pawn. 13. ♖c1 ♞g6 14. f4 ♙e7 15. f5→

E2) 9... ♞e7 10. b4! ♞ac6 11. b5 axb5 12. cxb5



Position after: 12. cxb5

12... ♞b4 [12... ♞a5 13. ♙b2 b6 14. ♔xd4±] 13. ♞xd4 d6 14. ♞f3 ♞g6 15. ♙g5 ♔c7 16. ♞bd2±

F) 3... a6?! Directly attacking the bishop can often be shrewd in variations further down the line where we haven't chosen to capture on c6. However, here it's too early and most likely we'll

find ourselves getting an improved version of the g6 – Rossolimo as Black has wasted a tempo playing ...a7-a6, simultaneously creating a weakness on b6. 4. ♙xc6



Position after: 4. ♙xc6

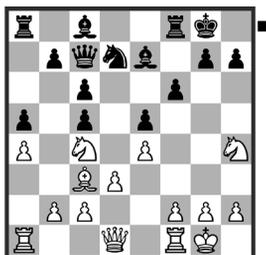
F1) 4... dxc6 There are multiple ways for White to continue. In particular, plans with a4-a5 can be very effective - especially if Black has to waste another tempo playing ...a6-a5. 5. d3 ♔c7 6. a4



Position after: 6. a4

F1.1) 6... e5 7. a5 This is positionally very bad for Black, as the c5-pawn is basically lost. Black's attempt to play actively in Ivanov – Menshchikov, ICCF email 2015 was easily refuted after 7... ♞f6 8. ♞bd2 ♙e6 9. 0-0 c4 10. ♞g5! cxd3 11. ♞xe6 fxe6 12. cxd3±

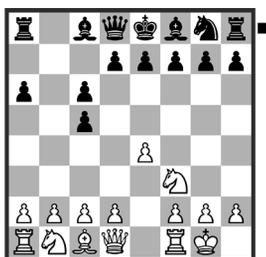
F1.2) 6... a5 7. ♖a3 e5 8. ♕e3
 ♗f6 9. ♗c4 ♗d7 10. 0-0 ♕e7 11.
 ♕d2 0-0 12. ♕c3 f6 13. ♗h4→



Position after: 13. ♗h4→

We have a massively improved version of the typical structures that we'll encounter in the g6 – Rossolimo.

F2) 4... bxc6 5. 0-0



Position after: 5. 0-0

As we progressively learn about Rossolimo structures, it will become pretty clear why this approach doesn't make sense for Black at this particular time. I will show a couple of variations to clarify that an advantage is easy to achieve.

F2.1) 5... d5?! Hopefully you'll already recognise that such a move is

a positional blunder, as the c5-pawn will be extremely weak. 6. d3 e6 [6... f6 7. e5! ♕g4 8. h3 ♕xf3 9. ♖xf3 e6 10. ♖e1±] 7. c4! ♗e7 8. ♗c3



Position after: 8. ♗c3

Followed by ♗a4, b2-b3 and ♕a3. It's also a good idea to play e4-e5 before Black can achieve an e5-d4 pawn structure himself. 8... ♗g6 9. e5±

F2.2) 5... d6 6. e5!± Further chapters will exemplify why White already has a fantastic position.

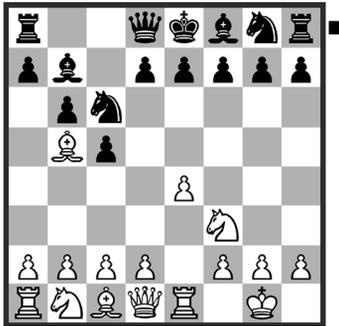
F2.3) 5... e6 Black is a tempo down on the line 3...e6 4. ♕xc6, but I'm only suggesting 4. 0-0 in this particular line. Therefore it's important to note how to play from this position, although I wouldn't be too concerned considering that Black has wasted time with ...a7-a6. 6. b3! ♗e7 [6... ♖c7 7. e5 ♗e7 8. ♗a3±; 6... d6 7. e5 ♗e7 8. exd6 ♗f5 9. ♕a3 ♕xd6 10. ♗c3±] 7. ♕a3 ♗g6 8. d4! ♖a5 This critical position was reached in the email game Tiemann – Van Tricht, ICCF 2015.



Position after: 8... ♖a5

In the game, White played 9. e5, but the simpler 9. ♖e1 poses Black greater difficulties, e.g. 9... ♗e7 [9... d5 10. h4! h5 11. c3 ♗e7 12. ♖c2 ♗d7 13. ♗xc5 ♗xc5 14. dxc5 ♖xc5 15. ♗bd2±] 10. e5! Now we play this move with better circumstances - obviously with the intent of exploiting Black's dark-squared weaknesses. 10... 0-0 11. ♗xc5 ♗xc5 12. dxc5 ♖xc5 13. ♗bd2±

4. 0-0 ♗b7 5. ♖e1



Position after: 5. ♖e1

5... e6

5... a6 6. ♗xc6 ♗xc6 7. c4 [7. d4 is also very good but, as we'll encounter in future lines, my preference is to play with

a Maroczy structure against Black's light-squared bishop.] 7... e6 8. ♗c3



Position after: 8. ♗c3

A) 8... ♗f6 9. b3 d6 10. d4 cxd4 11. ♗xd4 ♗b7 12. ♗d5! A standard resource, guaranteeing that Black can't even claim a bishop-pair advantage.



Position after: 12. ♗d5!

12... ♗e7 13. ♗xe7 ♖xe7 14. f3± It is clear that our dark-squared bishop is significantly better than Black's light-squared bishop.

B) 8... ♗e7 9. d4 cxd4 10. ♖xd4 ♗g6 11. ♗d5!± This time, Black will have to make a concession in order to develop his f8-bishop. In the meantime, we can start to think about fun ideas such as h4-h5.

6. c3



Position after: 6. c3

The resulting positions will tend to resemble a French structure, after a likely ...d7-d5 advance is met with e4-e5. In these scenarios, it appears that Black's bishop on b7 is misplaced - whereas our pieces are positioned perfectly to embark on a kingside attack.

6... ♖f6

A) 6... a6 7. ♙xc6 ♙xc6 8. d4



Position after: 8. d4

A1) 8... d5 This time we don't have the possibility of ♖c3 and ♙a4+, but our c-pawn can help us to open the centre. 9. c4!

A1.1) 9... dxc4 10. d5 ♙b7 11. ♖c3



Position after: 11. ♖c3

The pawn deficit is insignificant, given Black's predicament. 11... ♖f6 [11... b5 12. ♙f4 Followed by ♙e2 and ♙ad1.] 12. a4 ♙e7 13. d6! ♙xd6 14. e5 ♙c7 15. exf6 gxf6 16. ♙xd8+ ♙xd8 17. ♖d2± Black doesn't have enough compensation for the piece.

A1.2) 9... dxe4 10. ♖e5 ♙d6 [10... ♙b7 11. ♙a4+±] 11. ♖xc6 ♙xc6 12. d5±

A2) 8... cxd4 9. cxd4



Position after: 9. cxd4

9... d5 The only way to preclude a d4-d5 push, but Black's lack of development will engender his downfall. [9... b5 10. d5 ♙b7 11. d6!± Black will undoubtedly suffer in passivity for a while.] 10. ♖e5! ♙b7 11. ♖c3 The

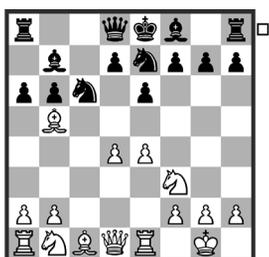
threat of ♔a4+ means Black has to continue delay development. 11... b5 12. exd5 ♙xd5 13. ♖h5! g6



Position after: 13... g6

14. ♘xg6! Perhaps not necessary, but Black can't do anything about the resulting variation. 14... ♘f6 15. ♖h3 fxg6 16. ♘xd5 ♘xd5 17. ♖xe6+ ♙e7 18. ♗e5 ♘c7 19. ♖b3 ♖xd4 20. ♗xe7+ ♙xe7 21. ♙g5+ ♙f8 22. ♙h6+ ♙e7 23. ♗e1+ ♙d6 24. ♗d1+–

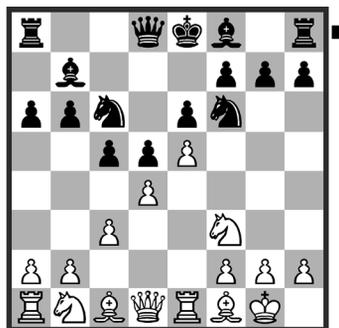
B) 6... ♘ge7 7. d4 cxd4 8. cxd4 a6



Position after: 8... a6

In Bohm – Bellon Lopez, Niemeyer 1969, I preferred 9. ♙d3 ♘b4 10. ♙f1! d5 11. e5± and White quite clearly has a very good version of a French advanced system.

7. d4 a6 8. ♙f1 d5 9. e5



Position after: 9. e5

9... ♘d7

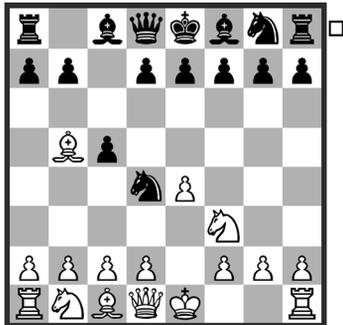
9... ♘e4 10. ♘bd2 ♙e7 11. ♙d3 ♘xd2 12. ♙xd2±

10. ♙e3±

Followed by ♘bd2 and ♙d3. Our kingside prospects seem more prosperous than anything Black can muster up on the queenside. A timely c3-c4 push is also worth keeping an eye on.

b) 3... ♞d4?!

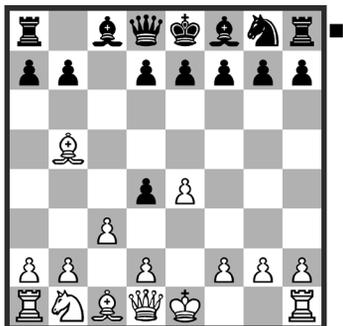
1. e4 c5 2. ♞f3 ♞c6 3. ♚b5 ♞d4?!



Position after: 3... ♞d4?!

This move makes more sense if our b1-knight is already on c3, but here it's easy enough for White to quickly grab control of the centre.

4. ♞xd4 cxd4 5. c3!



Position after: 5. c3!

It's best to play this move before Black can adequately support the d4-square. Black has several ways to continue, but in each case active play will lead to a compelling advantage.

5... ♚b6

The most common move here, but I feel that ultimately the b6-queen is misplaced and will most likely be hit by a future knight on c4. In the meantime, we can just continue as normal, and the queen isn't exactly the best piece to block our central advances.

A) 5... ♞f6 6. e5 ♞d5 [6... ♚a5!? was an interesting attempt in Schmidt - Rook, ICCF email 2016. The strongest continuation seems to be 7. ♚a4! ♚xa4 8. ♚xa4 ♞d5 9. cxd4±] 7. 0-0 There's no need to immediately capture on d4, as even if Black plays ...dxc3 this will only aid us in our own development. 7... e6 8. ♚g4!



Position after: 8. ♚g4!

8... a6 [8... ♚b6 9. ♚a4 will just transpose to 5... ♚b6] 9. ♚e2 dxc3 10. ♞xc3 d6 11. d4 h5 Black wants to kick the queen from g4 in order to release his f8-bishop, but this consequently reduces the safety of the Black king. [11... g6? Aesthetically this looks really bad

for Black, and it can be punished by the simple 12. ♖e4+–] 12. ♔f3 ♕d7 13. ♖e4 ♕c6 14. ♕g5 ♔b6 15. exd6

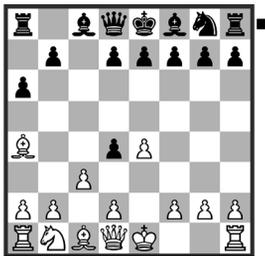


Position after: 15. exd6

15... f6 [15... ♔xd4 16. ♖ad1 ♔e5 17. d7+! ♕xd7 18. ♕c4 ♕c6 19. ♖fe1+–] 16. ♕d2 ♔xd4 17. ♖ad1±

B) 5... dxc3 6. ♖xc3 Our development lead and control of the centre already confirms a sizeable advantage, e.g. 6... g6 7. d4 ♕g7 8. 0-0 a6 9. ♕e2 e6 10. ♕f4 d5 11. ♕e5!±

C) 5... a6 6. ♕a4



Position after: 6. ♕a4

In general I always prefer to retreat to a4 rather than c4, as we're forcing Black to play ...b7-b5 before moving his d-pawn. This will no doubt construct further weaknesses in his position.

C1) 6... ♖f6 7. d3 dxc3 8. ♖xc3 b5 9. ♕b3



Position after: 9. ♕b3

9... ♕b7 [9... d6 10. a4! b4 11. ♖d5 ♖xd5 12. ♕xd5 ♖b8 13. ♕g5 ♕b7 14. ♕b3± Black has to worry about the threat of ♔f3. In any case, we evidently have a comfortable advantage.] 10. e5! b4 11. exf6! bxc3 12. bxc3

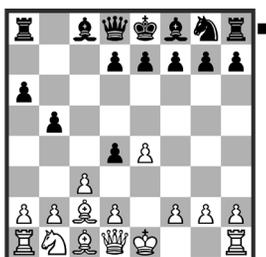


Position after: 12. bxc3

Black faces an uncomfortable choice about how to deal with the f6-pawn considering that ♕xf7 is a potential threat. 12... e6 Perhaps the most pragmatic move, but White will simply emerge a pawn up. [12... gxf6 13. ♕xf7+ ♔xf7 14. ♔b3+ e6 15. ♔xb7±; 12... ♔c7 13. 0-0 ♔c6 14. ♔g4 ♔xf6 Despite managing to maintain his structural integrity,

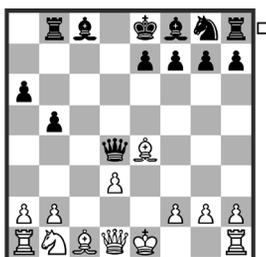
Black's lack of development will now prove costly, for example after 15. ♖b1± followed by d2-d4.] 13. fxg7 ♙xg7 14. d4±

C2) 6... b5 7. ♙c2!



Position after: 7. ♙c2!

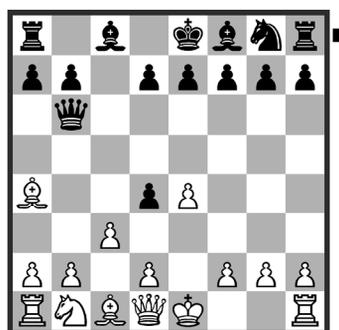
Here we prefer the c2-square for our bishop so that we don't have to waste another move defending the e4-pawn. 7... d5 [7... ♖b6 8. 0-0 e6 9. cxd4 ♙xd4 The queen isn't a good blockader, and will easily be removed. 10. d3 ♙b7 11. ♘c3 ♖c8 12. ♙e3 ♖b4 13. ♙b3± White had a considerable advantage in Palac – Colpa, Omis 2004.; 7... e5 8. cxd4 exd4 9. ♙b3! ♙b7 10. d3 ♙c5 11. 0-0 d6 12. ♖g4 ♖f6 13. f4±] 8. cxd4 dxe4 9. ♙xe4 ♖b8 10. d3 ♙xd4



Position after: 10... ♙xd4

In all of the resulting positions, Black will face consistent problems due to the weaknesses incurred by his premature queenside expansion. 11. ♙e3! ♖xb2 [11... ♖d7 12. ♖f3 ♙b7 13. ♘c3 ♘f6 14. ♙f4 ♘xe4 15. dxe4 ♖c8 16. 0-0±] 12. ♙c6+ ♙d7 13. ♙xd7+ ♖xd7 14. ♘d2±

6. ♙a4!



Position after: 6. ♙a4!

6. ♖e2 and 6. ♙c4 have been more common, but I really like the text move. The bishop seems very secure on a4 whilst simultaneously inhibiting Black's own ...d7-d6 or ...d7-d5 ideas.

6... ♘f6

A) 6... g6 was a creative way to avoid recapturing on d4 with the queen, but after 7. cxd4 ♙g7 8. d5! ♙xb2 9. ♙xb2 ♖xb2 10. ♘c3± Black's dark squares proved to be too weak in Saric – Humeau, Bastia 2014.

B) 6... ♖g6 doesn't seem to place the Black queen in better stead. 7. ♖f3 d3?