

Cyrus Lakdawala

Anti-Sicilians

move by move

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About the Author

Cyrus Lakdawala is an International Master, a former National Open and American Open Champion, and a six-time State Champion. He has been teaching chess for over 30 years, and coaches some of the top junior players in the U.S.

Also by the Author:

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Introduction

Why Does White play Anti-Sicilian, rather than Open Sicilian?

Bent Larsen once wrote that when White plays 3 d4 entering an Open Sicilian, he or she basically sets up a cheap series of tactical tricks in exchange for a serious concession: White just allowed 3...cxd4, exchanging a wing pawn for White's more valuable central pawn.

When I was a hopelessly untalented kid, I began to play Najdorfs, hoping to be the next Bobby Fischer (no need to state the obvious, that it didn't work out as planned). Virtually 90% of my opponents responded to my 1...c5 with Open Sicilians, at least at my D-E level of play. As the years went by, this number continued to decrease, until today, I will bet that half the time you respond to 1 e4 with 1...c5, your opponents dodge the Open Sicilian, and opt for some version of an Anti-Sicilian. Now why would they do this? For several reasons:

1. We chess players live in a society of records and stored data. Make a new move – even accidentally – and somebody, somewhere, records it. These days new opening ideas travel almost instantly into the collective consciousness, laden with the latest and newest ideas. This can be a burden, since we are in a never-ending task of keeping up with the latest TN. Every time I manage to remember a long string of opening theory over the board, it reminds me of the end of the children's alphabet song: "Now I know my ABC's, next time won't you sing with me?" As the decades roll on, we face information overload.

If you play an Open Sicilian as White, there is a staggering load of data you must memorize and understand. If the opponent is a Dragon player, he or she obsessively studies the lines until move 23. Dragon players are far less likely to study the Grand Prix Attack or Closed Sicilian with the same degree of passion. So White is motivated to dodge our area of expertise. A substantial proportion of players decide they don't want to invest energy and time into a knife-edge Open Sicilian, a place where a favourite line can be rendered instantly obsolete by the finding of a single new idea for Black.

2. In an Open Sicilian, you as Black, get to pick if the game will be a Dragon, a Najdorf, a Kan, etc. When White plays the Anti-Sicilian, it is he or she who decides whether to play a King's Indian Attack, or c3-Sicilian.

3. If White studies, let's say the c3-Sicilian, there are only a few lines he needs to cover and study. Not so with Open Sicilians, where he must be ready for the Najdorf, Dragon, Kan, et al and ad nauseam! So in a sense, the Anti-Sicilians are kind of a lazy Sicilian, easy to study and easy to play – with far less likelihood for White to get theoretically ambushed.

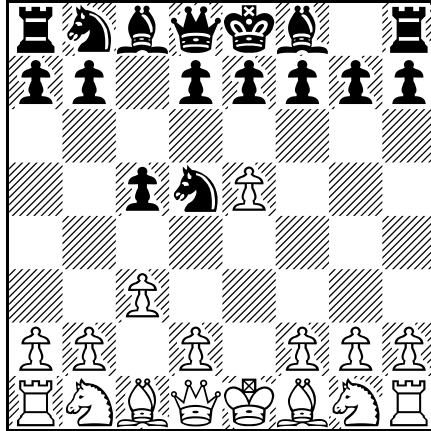
4. When you first learn how to drive a car, every step must be thought about. A decade later, our driving is completely automatized (pun intended), and instinctual, where we can be daydreaming and still reach our destination in relative safety. Now if you play Dragon for 10 years, you just have a feel for it, from sheer volume of experience. Essentially, we become lab rats who memorized the route to the cheese. When White plays an Anti-Sicilian like a b3-Sicilian, it doesn't matter how long we as Black studied it. We simply won't know and understand its subtleties to the same degree as we do the Dragon. So White removes our experiential advantage – our feel for the line – from the equation.

Handling the Anti-Sicilians

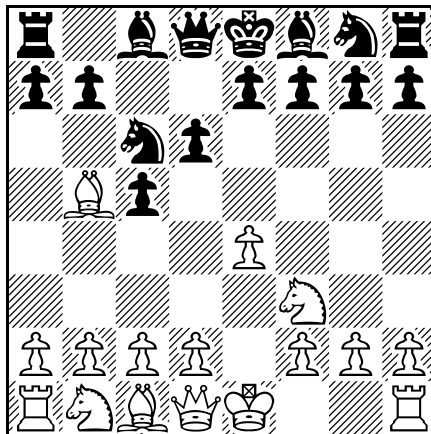
A book is a theoretical entity, while our over-the-board battle is a direct experience of its practical application. Now how do we deal with these myriad Anti-Sicilian lines over the board? In high school, your writer was an unimpressive B – average student. In college my grades jumped to a near 4.0 (it would have been 4.0 if it hadn't been for the completely unnecessary, required math and science classes!). The difference? I finally learned that it's far better to continuously go over my study material very lightly – but all semester long – rather than cram, pulling an all-nighter, before the exam. So just do a study rotation of all your potential Anti-Sicilians, rather than just prepare for one line against a specific Anti-Sicilian opponent.

Sometimes when I browse an opening book, written in the 1980s or '90s, it feels as out of date as watching the 'news' from one of those black and white 1930s news reels, which warns of the danger of war brewing in Europe. The Anti-Sicilians, once mere offshoots, are now close to surpassing the old main lines of the Open Sicilian and every bit as mainstream. The Antis aren't going away, so we must be ready for all of them.

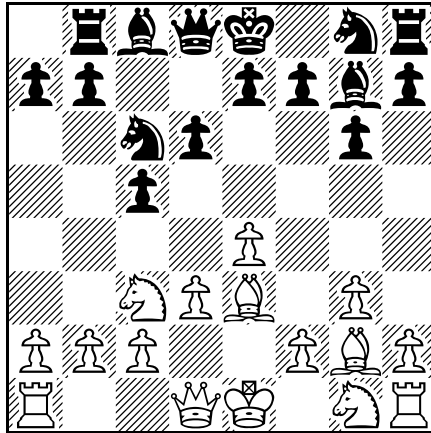
Some Anti lines may be both rigorous and exacting to our defensive abilities, yet our position's inherent soundness is never in doubt. I hope to explain the lines with only a minimal element of theoretical legalese in the process. In some variations, however, veering from observances of theory can spell immediate disaster for the unknowledgeable, or the experimenter, and theory sometimes hems in our imagination's freedom. Opening study is simultaneously the most tedious, as well as the most satisfying part of the game. So let's know our lines well. Our battlegrounds:



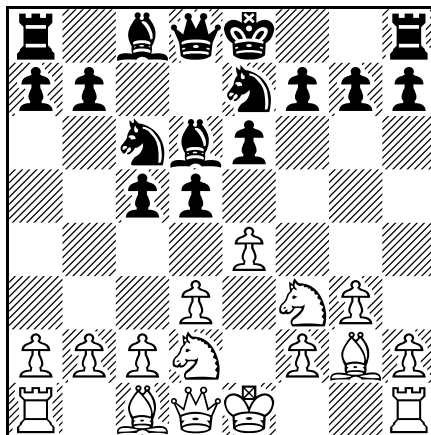
The c3-Sicilian, besides the Rossolimo and Moscow, is White's safest and soundest Anti-Sicilian.



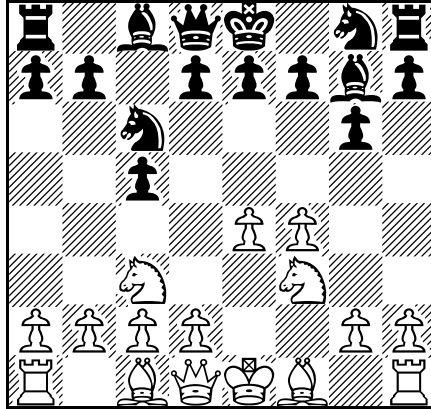
There is a big divide between learning and knowing. Here we find ourselves in both Rossolimo and Moscow variations, where we absolutely must learn our lines in detail, which isn't merely a pedant's pleasure. We must know and understand the plans, since our survival depends upon it.



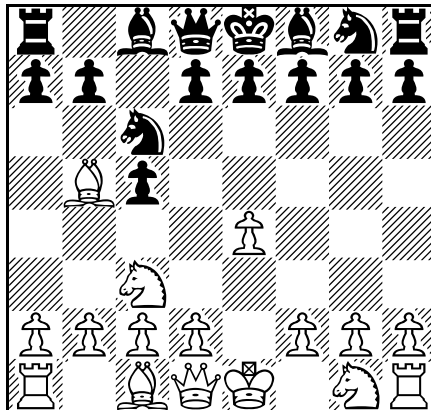
Against Closed Sicilian systems, we play an early ...♖b8, intending to make territorial gains on the queenside, while at the same time keeping our opponent guessing about how we will later set up on the kingside. Will we play ...e6 and ...♘ge7, or ...e5 and ...♘ge7, or ...♘f6? Only we know, while our opponents can only guess.



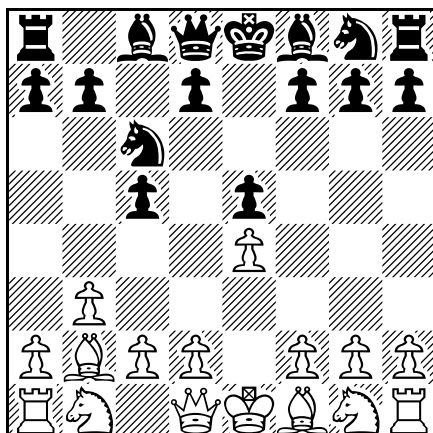
The King's Indian Attack is a one crop society. If that single crop fails, so goes the society. I advocate a line which can also arise from the French Defence vs. KIA, where we remain flexible. We make White's intended e5 – a standard move in most KIAs – next to impossible to implement, since we may follow with ...♖c7 and ...f6.



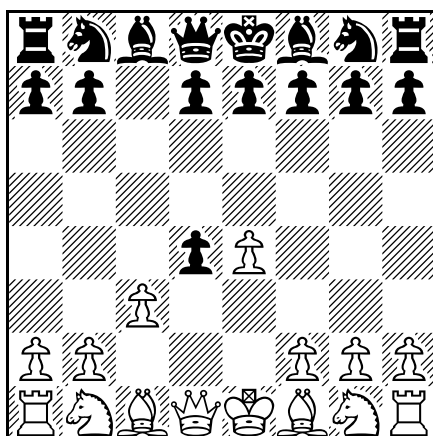
Grand Prix Attackers tend to have an unbounded propensity for violence. Unfortunately for them, modern day theory drains the attacking fun out of their line. In the 1960s and '70s almost everyone played their bishop to c4, hoping to generate an attack with $O-O$, $d3$, $\text{♞}e1$, $f5$ and $\text{♜}h4$, with an ominous build-up around Black's king. Today, however, almost everyone knows the defensive mechanisms which render White's plan rather amateurish. Then later, White switches to the most positional $\text{♞}b5$. We respond with $\dots\text{♝}d4$, after which we either pick up the bishop-pair, gain a future tempo with $\dots a6$, or chase the bishop to awkward squares like $c4$ or $d3$ – neither of which is comfortable for the bishop. So a highly feared attacking line of the past has been defanged in the present.



Opening theory, as we all understand, is endlessly mutable. With each alteration, the opening becomes less and less like what it was in the past. This is Tiviakov's line, which is Rossolimo/Grand Prix-like, yet not either, since Black doesn't give White the chance to play $\text{♞}xc6$. Black plays $3\dots\text{♝}d4$ $4 \text{♞}c4$ $e6$, after which we later harass the White's bishop with either $\dots a6$ and $\dots b5$, or a properly timed $\dots d5$ break.



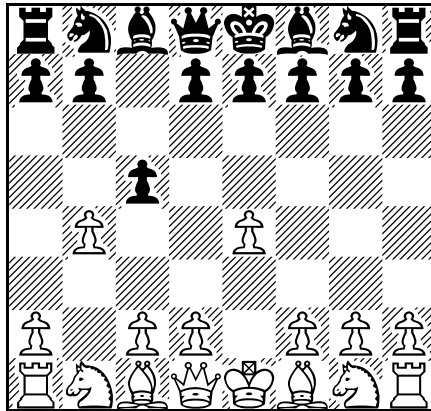
We meet the b3-Sicilian, which is rising in popularity, with a pawn wall on e5, blunting the effectiveness of White's prized b2-bishop.



Sometimes reason, rationality and logic are asked to give way to imagination – but not without complaint. There is something in human nature where the larger the contradiction to reason, the more we seek to defy it. In this chapter the lure of attack extinguishes all other concerns. The Gambits chapter (Smith-Morra and Wing Gambit) differs from all the others, primarily in a level of intensity. If you think about it, isn't it strange to give away a pawn with the white pieces, when theory says a '+=' is our natural birthright? I guess they want to bribe their way to the initiative. Of course, a positional player like me lacks the psychological metric for properly evaluating the alien mind state of the gambiteer, who doesn't strike me as a law abiding citizen of the chessboard.

To challenge and take on a single member of a cult, is to take them all on. When we accept the Smith-Morra Gambit, we do just that, walking into the lair of preparation, with

the single consoling thought: the gambit may only be borderline sound (I realize this statement will earn me the undying hatred of Smith-Morra Gambiteers worldwide). The mad scientist's dream is to build a machine or a creature which thinks, feels and speaks. Of course, the second it's built, it turns evil and tries to destroy its creator. We must take on the role of the creature when facing these gambits, turning their power against White, their creator.



To declare such a gambit refuted, is to make excessive demands upon the reader's trust. This is the Wing Gambit (well, when you were young, didn't you sometimes hang out with disreputable friends?). It's time to enter never-never land, where White mixes ideas seen in both the Evans and Benko gambits. Gambiteers – they are essentially martyrs in search of a religion – defend the soundness of their lines, as vigorously as Clarence Darrow defended Darwin's theories in the Scopes trial.

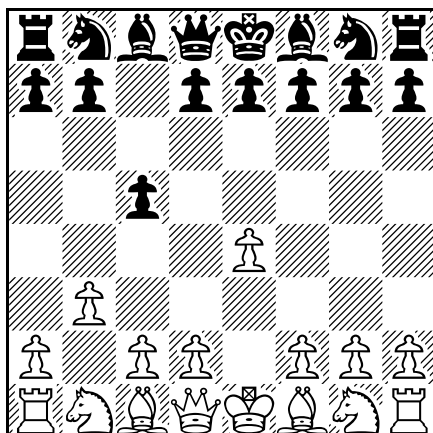
One of my misguided students loves the Wing Gambit. I advise him: "Dump it. It doesn't love you back!" Of course, he doesn't believe me, since gambits are dopamine surges for the attacking addict. I think the Wing Gambit – more than the Smith-Morra – is an opening where the effort and cash outlay aren't commensurate with White's investment's return. For younger players though, I think gambits are fun and a good way to circumvent the theoretical legal process, and just go after the opponent in vigilante-style.

Anti-Sicilians are not New

They have been around, about as long as Open Sicilians, as shown in the following game:

Game 1
O.Strobl-G.Breyer
Vienna 1921

1 e4 c5 2 b3!?



When it comes to opening theory, there is no such thing as an unalterable truth. That which is old and discarded is in the present, new again. The b3-Sicilian is gaining ground in popularity, mainly through the advocacy of super-GMs like Kramnik, Morozevich and Carlsen. The inherent problem with blindly following the dictates of complex theoretical lines is that we abandon our own research, and rely upon others to form *our* convictions. So players today seek less booked up alternatives (to the Open Sicilian), like the b3-Sicilian.

As you can see, Anti-Sicilians have been around for quite a while. A fianchetto was a strange sight in 1921, unless you were a card-carrying member of the Hypermodern movement, as Breyer was. In this instance his opponent beats him to it. The b3-Sicilian is an odd mix of Classical and Hypermodern theories, where White both seeks to occupy the centre with e4, and also control it from the wings with 2 b3.

2...♖f6

How unfortunate that Breyer didn't have access to this excellent book, otherwise he might have followed its suggestions: 2...♖c6 or 2...g6!?

3 e5 ♘d5

The game resembles an Alekhine's Defence, with the inclusion of b3 and ...c5, which may help Black.

Question: How does this inclusion favour Black?

Answer: To me b3 is an odd posting for White's bishop, in conjunction with e4, while our c5-pawn hinders White's d4-break.

4 c4?!

This is probably premature, since in some cases White posts a piece on c4. The modern interpretation runs 4 ♗b2 ♖c6 5 ♗f3 g6 6 ♗c4 ♖b6 7 ♗b5. This move turns the position into a kind of funky Rossolimo: 7...♗g7 8 ♗xc6 bxc6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖e1 d6 11 h3 a5 12 c4 (I would avoid this move, which weakens b3, and play 12 d3) 12...♗e8 13 a4! (this also weak-

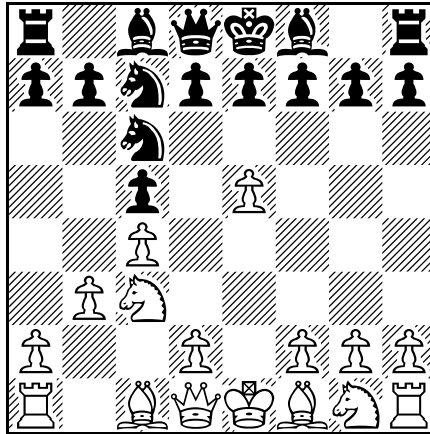
ens b3, but if White allowed Black ...a4, then after ...axb3; axb3, b3 is weakened all the same) 13...♙f5 and Black achieved a decent-looking Rossolimo-style position, H.Nakamura-A.Grischuk, Moscow (blitz) 2012.

4...♘c7 5 ♘c3?

Question: Why would you fault a developing move?

Answer: A plan should be worked out in advance, rather than a wing-it, work in progress. White's move is inaccurate, since it blocks the path of White's bishop to protect e5.

5...♘c6



6 ♘f3

Question: If White experiences difficulty defending e5, with pieces, then why not play 6 f4?

Answer: The move fails to develop. White looks somewhat overextended after 6...d6 7 exd6 (or 7 ♘f3 dxe5 8 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 9 fxe5 g6 10 ♙b2 ♙g7 11 ♚e2 b6 and White is already in trouble with a hole on d4 and backward d-pawn) 7...♚xd6 when White worries about a backward d-pawn, as well as weak d3- and d4-squares.

6...g6!

Breyer, a Hypermodern, establishes his own fianchetto. Now defence of e5 becomes an unsolvable issue for White.

7 ♙b2 ♙g7 8 ♘d5

After 8 ♚e2 0-0 9 g3 d6 White must hand over a pawn, since 10 exd6?? exd6 11 0-0-0 ♚e8 is completely busted for White, who finds his queen caught in the middle.

8...0-0 9 h4?!

An ambitious opponent is easy to bait. The nature of an unwise decision is the current

joy we experience in chasing a folly, is met with our future pain, when the effects of our decision ripen. Saleable goods are worthless if they are unable to reach the market. White's 'attack' never emerges, despite his open h-file. To change one's mind if the data calls for it is not such a great transgression; to change one's mind based on an arbitrary whim, is. White's counterplay, already late, just got later. I just read a *Washington Post* article where new research suggests that optimism is an overrated commodity, since optimists tend to push their luck too far, while pessimists, on the other hand, proceed with a kind of wise, self-preservatory caution:

a) 9 ♠e2 d6 10 exd6 ♠xb2 11 dxc7 ♣d6 12 ♠b1 ♠g7 13 0-0 e6 14 ♠c3 ♣xc7 is strategically awful for White, since Black owns the bishop-pair, the dark squares, a d4 hole and may pick on White's backward d-pawn.

b) 9 ♣c2 ♠e8! 10 ♠e2 d6 11 ♠xc7 (White's best is to maybe just hand over a pawn with 11 0-0) 11...♠f5 12 d3 ♣xc7 13 exd6 ♣a5+ 14 ♠f1 ♠b4 15 ♣d2 ♠xb2 16 ♣xb2 ♠ad8 with enormous pressure.

9...d6 10 h5

If 10 ♠xc7 ♣xc7 11 exd6 ♣xd6 12 ♠xg7 ♠xg7 13 h5 ♠g4 14 h6+ ♠g8 15 ♠e2 ♠ad8 and White is busted.

10...dxe5 11 hxg6 hxg6 12 ♣c2 ♠xd5

12...♠f5 13 ♣c3 ♠xd5 14 cxd5 ♠b4 also looks grim for White.

13 cxd5 ♣xd5 14 ♠c4 ♣d6

Covering against White's crude ♣xg6 threat.

15 ♠h4

Renewing the threat to g6, while preventing ...♠f5.

15...♠e6

Eliminating White's most dangerous piece. Now the would-be white initiative drains away, as quickly as it arose.

16 ♠xe6

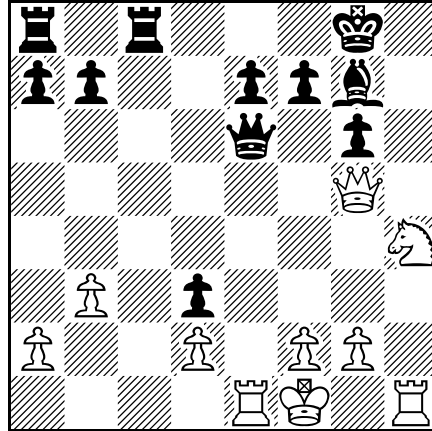
16 ♠xg6 is just a shallow cheapo. Black simply responds with 16...fxg6! (most certainly not 16...♠xc4?? 17 ♠xe7+ ♠xe7 18 ♣h7 mate) 17 ♣xg6 ♠xc4 18 ♣h7+ ♠f7 19 bxc4 ♠h8 20 ♣f5+ ♣f6. White's checks run out and he must trade queens, down a piece.

16...♣xe6 17 ♣xc5 ♠d4

Also strong were 17...e4 or 17...♠fc8.

18 ♠xd4 exd4+ 19 ♠f1 ♠fc8 20 ♣g5 d3! 21 ♠e1??

When your goal is long-term survival, the fact that you are alive in the present isn't good enough, although 21 ♠b1 ♣e2+ 22 ♠g1 ♠d4 23 ♣f4 e5 24 ♣g3 ♣xd2 25 ♠xg6 ♠c1+ 26 ♠xc1 ♣xc1+ 27 ♠h2 ♣h6+ 28 ♠h4+ ♠f8 29 ♣g4 d2 is also hopeless for White.



Exercise (combination alert): White just blundered in a completely lost position. When an opponent issues a mating threat, it threatens to cast aside all other considerations. How did Breyer finish the game?

Answer: Queen sacrifice/weak back rank.

21... ♔xe1+

The black queen and rook's interests align. White's king was safe for a while in his secret hiding chamber, until he was unsuccessful in muffling a sneeze, which attracted his sister's attention. "We all learn life's lessons according to our mental propensities. Yours, as you may have guessed, is at a 'remedial' level," rudely lectures the queen, as she makes air quotes, stressing the word 'remedial'.

22 ♖xe1

Of course for White, this is wealth accumulated in a dream, which evaporates to nothing the moment he awakens.

22... ♖c1 mate 0-1

Summary: Today, the Anti-Sicilians rival Open Sicilians as the main line, so let's be prepared for all of them.

Acknowledgements

Thanks as always to Editor GM John Emms, to IM Richard Palliser for the final edit, and to Nancy, proofreader-in-chief. May we all be so well prepared, that we make our opponents regret their choice of dodging our Open Sicilian.

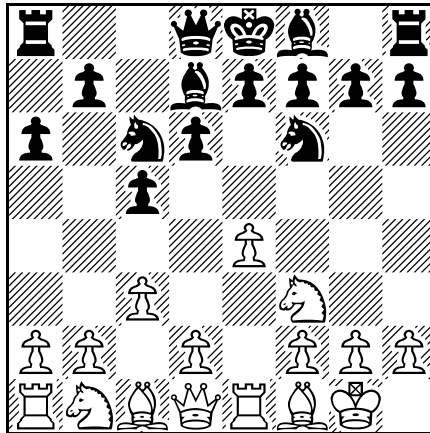
Cyrus Lakdawala,
San Diego,
March 2016

Game 11
B.Macieja-L.Aronian
 Stepanakert 2005

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 ♙b5+ ♘c6 4 0-0 ♙d7 5 ♖e1 ♘f6 6 c3

6 h3 has the idea that Black lacks the resource ...♙g4 later on, which often impedes White's d4 intent. Likewise, 6...e6 makes sense, now that we don't have ...♙g4 later on. Following 7 c3 d5 (or 7...♙e7 8 d4 cxd4 9 cxd4 d5 10 e5 ♘e4 11 ♙d3 and now Black has a pawn sacrifice idea with 11...♘b4! 12 ♙xe4 dxe4 13 ♖xe4 h5! – preventing ♗g4 – 14 ♘c3 ♙c6 15 ♗e1 ♙xf3 16 gxf3 ♗d7, Z.Hracek-M.Parligras, Dresden 2007; greedy *Houdini* still prefers White, while I think Black's control over d5 and also White's weak pawn structure offers Black ample compensation for the pawn) 8 d3 (8 e5? just hangs a pawn to the trick 8...♘xe5!) 8...a6 9 ♙a4 b5 10 ♙c2 dxe4 11 dxe4 e5 the players reach a kind of Closed Lopez position, common to this variation of the Moscow/Rossolimo. The game looks approximately even to me and was covered in *Carlsen: Move by Move*, V.Bologan-M.Carlsen, Biel 2012.

6...a6 7 ♙f1



Question: What are the differences between 7 ♙f1 and 7 ♙a4?

Answer: When White plays 7 ♙a4, he or she offers Black free tempi with ...b5. On the plus side, White's bishop is probably better posted on c2, than on f1, since the c2-square allows the bishop to watch over the key e4-square. The idea of ♙f1 is to regroup without loss of tempi, and then later slowly build for a d4 push.

7...♙g4

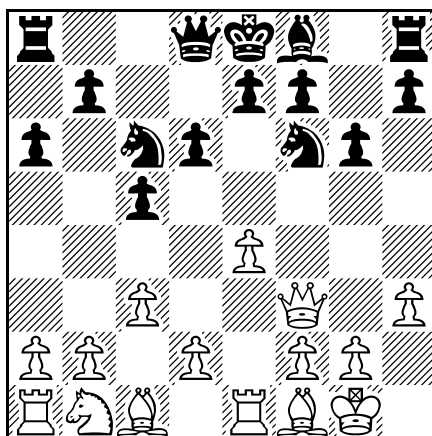
We do all we can to make the d4 push difficult for White.

8 d3

White can also kick immediately with 8 h3:

a) I think 8...♔h5!? is rather risky, and would avoid this line: 9 g4! ♕g6 10 d4! (White offers e4, banking on his development lead and open e-file, should Black accept) 10...cxd4 11 cxd4 e5! (11...♕xe4? is met with the tactic 12 ♖xe4! ♜xe4 13 d5 and White gets two pieces for the rook and two pawns, since Black's c6-knight is unable to move due to the ♖a4+ threat; White stands clearly better after 13...♖c8 14 dxc6 ♖xc6 15 ♜bd2 with a huge development lead) 12 ♜c3 ♕e7 13 ♜d5! 0-0 14 ♜xe7+ ♖xe7 15 d5 ♜b8 16 ♕g5 ♜bd7 17 ♜d2. I prefer White, who owns greater space, and also Black's remaining bishop feels shut out of the game, Z.Efimenko-A.Moiseenko, Kiev 2012.

b) 8...♕xf3! is Black's safer and probably superior alternative to backing up the bishop. Black hands over the bishop-pair, but gains considerable time after 9 ♖xf3 g6.



With a bishop posted on g7, Black fights for control over d4:

b1) With 10 ♖d1 White wants to achieve d4 in one go. Black's next move crosses this plan: 10...♕h6! is a very annoying idea for White:

1. Who is still unable to play d4.
2. Who is prevented from playing f4.
3. Nor does White want to swap off the light-squared bishops, since this would dismantle his bishop-pair.

After 11 ♜a3 0-0 12 ♜c2 e5 13 g3 (or 13 d4 ♕xc1 14 ♖xc1 exd4 15 cxd4 ♖e8 and Black doesn't stand worse) 13...b5 14 d4 ♕xc1 (at last) 15 ♖xc1 ♕g7 Black achieved an even Lopez position, since he managed to swap off two sets of minor pieces, E.Sutovsky-S.Tiviakov, Leon 2001.

b2) 10 d3 (White is willing to lose a tempo to prevent Black's intended ...♕h6!) 10...♕g7 11 ♕e3 ♜d7 12 ♜d2 0-0 13 ♖d1 (in preparation for ♜f3 and d4, but White takes so long on the project, that it allows Black to drum up queenside counterplay) 13...b5 14 ♜f3 ♜de5! (swaps help Black) 15 ♜h2 (White refuses to oblige) 15...♖b8 16 f4 ♜d7 17 ♜f3 ♜b6 (also

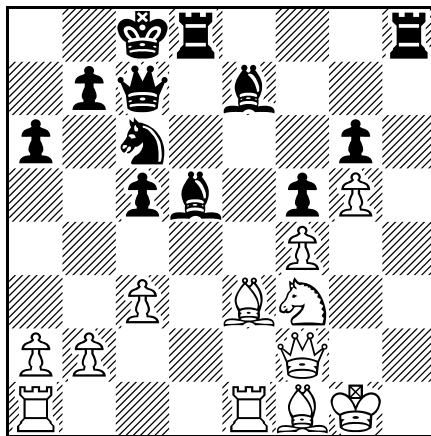
possible is the very sharp idea 17...e5!? 18 f5 gxf5 19 exf5 ♖e7 20 g4 ♗d5 21 ♕f2 b4 22 c4 ♗f4 when I prefer White, who is strong on the light squares) 18 ♖c1 ♗d7 19 d4 cxd4 20 cxd4 d5 (at some point, White's mammoth centre must be challenged) 21 e5 ♗c4 22 ♗c2 ♖fc8 when Black's queenside play compensates White's central and kingside space, Y.Kuzubov-Z.Andriasian, Martuni 2014.

8...e6

Not the only approach. With 8...g6 9 ♗bd2 ♕h6! we once again use our ...♕h6 resource to eliminate White's bishop-pair: for example, 10 h3 ♕xf3 11 ♗xf3 ♕xc1 12 ♖xc1 0-0 13 d4 e5 14 ♗d2 ♖g7. Once again, Black reached a Closed Lopez-style position where the pair of piece swaps helped him equalize, A.David-M.Vachier Lagrave, Paris 2008.

9 h3

Another high-level encounter saw 9 ♗bd2 ♕e7 10 h3 ♕h5 11 g4 ♕g6 12 ♗h4 ♗d7! (Black is happy to open the h-file if he is uncastled, since he can castle long and go after White's king) 13 ♗g2?! (this move loses time; 13 ♗xg6 hxg6 14 ♗f3 ♗de5 is dynamically balanced) 13...h5 14 f4 (Black also stands slightly better after 14 ♗f4 ♕g5 15 ♗c4 ♕xf4 16 ♕xf4 ♗de5 17 ♗xe5 dxe5 18 ♕e3 hxg4 19 hxg4 ♗e7) 14...hxg4 15 hxg4 ♗c7 16 ♗f3 0-0-0 (Black's king is safer than White's) 17 ♗e3?! (correct was 17 d4) 17...♗b6! 18 ♗c4? (18 f5 was necessary) 18...♗xc4 19 dxc4 f5 20 exf5 exf5 21 g5 ♕f7 (preparing to open the game later on with ...d5) 22 ♗c2 g6 23 ♗f2 d5 (it becomes clear that White's king is in serious trouble) 24 cxd5 ♕xd5 25 ♕e3.



Exercise (combination alert): Carlsen found a combination here, without sight of the board. Can you find it?

Answer: Clearance/overloaded defender: 25...♕xg5!, V.Anand-M.Carlsen, Nice (blindfold) 2009. If 26 fxg5 (26 ♗xg5?? ♖h1 mate) 26...♕xf3! and White is unable to recapture, due to the mate threat on h2.

9...♙h5

9...♙xf3 doesn't make as much sense here.

Question: Why?

Answer: GM Jonathan Rowson responds after 10 ♖xf3: "Generally speaking, ...♙xf3 works better in conjunction with ...g6, and ...♙h5 works better with ...e6."

10 g4

10 ♖bd2 ♙e7 transposes to the Anand-Carlsen note above.

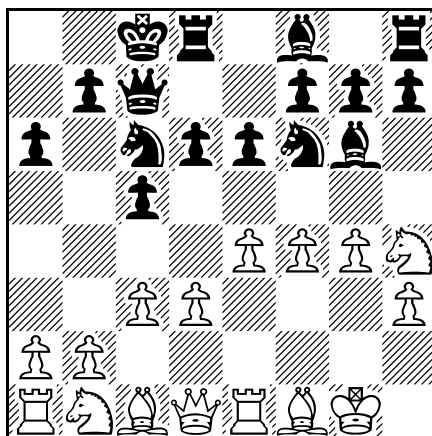
10...♙g6 11 ♘h4 ♚c7

With 11...♖d7 Black induces White into ♖xg6 or ♖g2, but after 12 ♖xg6 hxg6 13 d4 g5 14 ♙e3 ♚f6 15 b4! I prefer White, who owns the centre and the bishop-pair, M.Glazman-A.Kazoks, correspondence 2006.

12 f4

Threatening to smother Black's g6-bishop with f5, next.

12...0-0-0!



Which Black ignores! Aronian discovers structure in the position's apparent randomness, with a move which declares to the opponent that his previous views are about to be contradicted.

Question: Isn't Black just losing now?

Answer: Black deals with White's f5 threat tactically (as we will see in the coming notes). Now if f5 doesn't work, then this means that White pushed a lot of pawns in front of his king, endangering it.

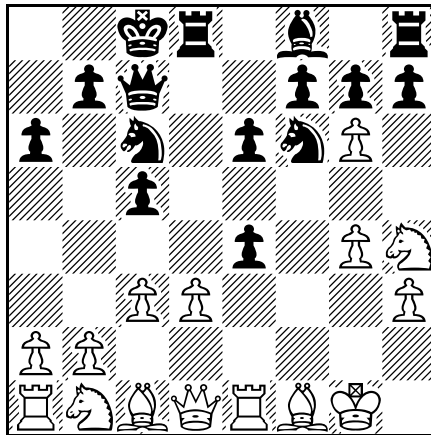
13 ♖d2!

Events right themselves in due course, contingent that White finds the correct plan.

Macieja deftly extracts the kernel of truth from a bewildering array of temptations: Black's bishop is indeed trapped, but the cost is too high for White. White has a choice of two plans in ascending order of chances of success:

1. Take the offered piece and expose his king.
2. Decline the piece and just play for central space.

If White succumbs to temptation, hardening himself to the coming inevitable wave, with 13 f5? he faces disaster after 13...d5! when the terrain makes for treacherous footing for White, whose position is unable to withstand the comp's scrutiny after 14 fxg6 (or 14 exd5 ♖xd5 15 ♖f3 ♗d6 16 fxg6 ♗g3 17 ♖xf7 ♖d7 18 ♖xe6 ♗xh4 19 ♖e2 hxg6 and White's king remains seriously exposed) 14...dxe4!:



a) 15 gxh7 ♖g3+ 16 ♖g2 (16 ♗g2 ♖e5 is also rough for White) 16...♗d6 with mounting threats. It doesn't require Nostradamus' power of inner sight to realize that all is not well in White's position, with the likelihood that matters will get worse in the coming moves.

b) 15 ♖g2 hxg6 16 g5 ♗h5 17 ♖xe4 ♗d6 18 ♖f2 ♗h2! 19 ♗e3 ♖g3 with threats of ...♖xe4 and also ...♖xh3.

c) 15 g5 hxg6 16 gxh6 ♖xh4 17 ♖d2 exd3 18 ♖f3 ♖h5 19 fxg7 ♗xg7 20 ♗e3 ♖g3+ 21 ♗g2 ♖xh3 and White is highly unlikely to survive.

13...d5!

Black's position bubbles over with a yeasty malevolence. Once again, he doesn't concern himself with the protection of his 'trapped' g6-bishop.

14 e5

It feels as if the g6-bishop remains damned in eternal perdition, yet all attempts to trap it seem to work out badly for White. 14 f5? is still suicide for White after 14...♖g3+ 15 ♖g2 ♗d6 with a winning attack.

14...♖d7 15 ♖df3

Sometimes we are perfectly aware of a truth in our hearts, yet our conscious mind fears to acknowledge it. 15 f5? once again overextends White after 15...exf5 16 gxh5 ♗e7! when

he doesn't even win a piece for his miserable position.

15...♙e7 16 ♙g2

GM Meier attempted to improve on White's play a couple of years later with 16 ♗e2 ♙b8 17 ♙d2 ♖de8 18 ♗g2 f6 19 exf6 ♙xf6 20 g5 ♙d8 21 ♘xg6 hxg6 22 ♖e2 ♗d6 23 ♖ae1 ♙c7. The game remains uneasily even, G.Meier-G.Gopal, Yerevan 2007.

16...♙b8 17 ♙e3 f6

Black finally chips away at White's huge centre.

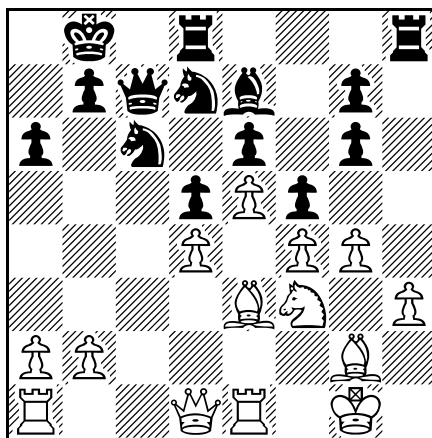
18 ♘xg6 hxg6 19 d4

White's king is now reasonably safe, with the centre stabilized.

19...cxd4

It may have been a better plan to retain central tension and play for a ...g5 break, since opening the c-file probably helps White.

20 cxd4 f5!?



Aronian offers to close the kingside and take his chances on the queenside.

21 g5 ♖c8

"Now the position seems about equal, but White has the more probable weaknesses, and the position is a lot easier for Black to play," writes Rowson.

22 ♖e2 ♘a5 23 ♖c1

23 b3 allows 23...♙a3, seizing control over c1, and therefore the c-file.

23...♗b6 24 ♖xc8+ ♖xc8 25 ♖c2 ♘c4 26 ♙c1 ♖c6 27 ♙f1

Note that Black must keep his knight on d7, since he must meet ♘h4 with ...♘f8.

27...♘a5 28 ♙f2 ♙d8 29 ♙e3 ♘c4

I imagine that Aronian did this while his opponent was rather short of time.

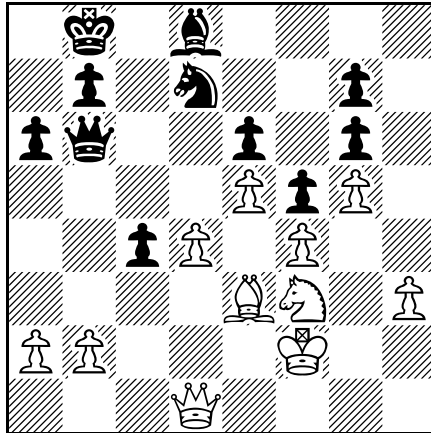
30 ♙xc4!?

White gives away his best piece, for one of Black's best pieces. The move weakens his light squares. 30 ♙c1 is safer and keeps the game in the balance.

30...♖xc4 31 ♖xc4!?

Each loss is a chronicle of our shortcomings. In this case Macieja overpressed, pushing too hard to unbalance the game. It's always dangerous if our confidence rises to the level where we can't even imagine the possibility of defeat. 31 b3 ♖xc2+ 32 ♗xc2 ♕e7 33 ♘h4 ♘f8 is equal.

31...dxc4



32 d5!?

White recognizes that he can't allow Black to blockade d5, so he sacrifices a pawn to break through in the centre. He might have waited to implement his d5 idea with 32 b3! ♗c6 33 bxc4 ♗xc4 34 ♗b3 ♗xb3 35 axb3 ♕e7 36 d5!? exd5 37 ♘d4 ♘f8 38 h4 ♕b4 39 e6 ♕c7 40 h5 (undermining f5) 40...♕d8 41 hxg6 ♕c3 42 ♘xf5 ♘xe6. The position is tricky, and should work out to a draw with correct play.

32...♗xb2+ 33 ♕g3?

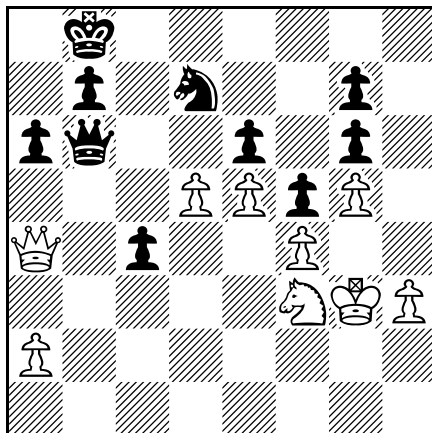
This looks like time-pressure reflex, more than conscious decision. The king looks completely safe on g3, but it is the wrong square, which falls afowl to Black's future tactical tricks.

White should play 33 ♕f1! exd5 34 ♗xd5 ♕b6! 35 ♘d4 ♗a3 36 ♕f2 ♘c5 37 ♗g8+ ♕a7 38 ♗xc4 ♘e4+ 39 ♕e2 ♗b2+ 40 ♗c2 ♗a1 41 ♘c6+! (this move saves White) 41...bxc6 42 ♕xb6+ ♕xb6 43 ♗b3+ ♕c7 (or 43...♕c5 44 ♗a3+ ♕b5 45 ♗d3+ and Black is unable to evade the checks) 44 ♗f7+ with perpetual check.

33...♕b6! 34 ♕xb6

34 ♗g1 ♕xe3 35 ♗xe3 ♗b6! gives Black a winning position: 36 ♘d4 (or 36 ♗xb6 ♘xb6 37 dxe6 ♘d5 38 ♘d4 ♕c7 39 h4 c3 40 ♕f3 ♕d8 41 a4 b6 42 ♘c6+ ♕e8 43 ♘d4 b5! when the blockade is broken; after 44 axb5 axb5 the b-pawn can't be taken and Black's queenside passers win the game) 36...♘c5! 37 ♕f3 ♗d8! 38 d6 ♗a5 39 ♘c2 ♗b5. White's single passer is blocked, while Black's queenside majority rolls forward, like pallbearers sombrely walking the coffin to the grave.

34...♗xb6! 35 ♗a4?



Exercise (combination alert): One king is about to lose his kingdom, while the other retains his. White's last move was a mistake in an already lost position. How did Aronian end the game?

Answer: Mating net. Black either wins a second pawn, or weaves a mating net.

35...♞c5! 0-1

An unseen enemy is a hundred times more dangerous than the one who stands openly before you. From nowhere, White's king is faced with insoluble threats. It's mate after 36 ♜xc4 (or 36 ♜c2 ♞e4+ 37 ♚g2 exd5 when White is helplessly tied down to defence of f2, and can resign) 36...♞e4+ 37 ♚g2 ♜f2+ 38 ♚h1 ♞g3.

Summary: After 7 ♟f1, we play 7...♟g4 to stall White's intended d4 plan. Remember: if we decide to set up with ...g6, then play a future ...♟xf3 on White's h3; if we set up with ...e6, then play ...♟h5, provoking the weakening g4, as in this game's continuation.

Game 12
Wen Yang-Wang Yue
 Shandong Zonal 2007

1 e4 c5 2 ♞f3 ♞c6 3 ♟b5 d6 4 0-0 ♟d7 5 c3