Understanding before Moving 3

Sicilian Structures Part 2

Taimanov – Kan – Richter Rauzer

Herman Grooten

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Symbols used:

!	strong move	±	White has a clear advantage
?	weak move	∓	Black has a clear advantage
!!	brilliant move	+–	White has a decisive advantage
??	blunder	–+	Black has a decisive advantage
!?	interesting move	→	with an attack
?!	dubious move	↑	with the initiative
□	only move	⇆	with counterplay
=	equal position	Δ	with the idea of…
∞	unclear position	⌓	better is…
⩲	compensation for lost material	N	novelty
⩱	White is slightly better	#	checkmate
∓	Black is slightly better	+	check

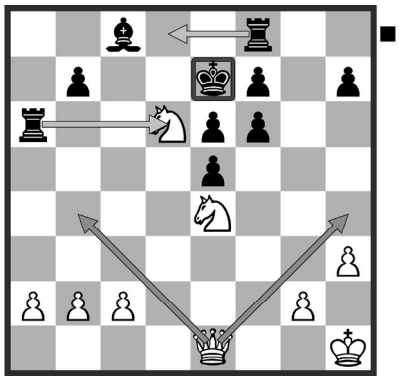
Next to most diagrams you will find a small box. The colour of the box indicates which side is to move in that position.

Bibliography

Fundamental Chess Openings	– Paul van der Sterren
Experts vs. the Sicilian	– Jacob Aagaard & John Shaw
Garry Kasparov on Chess Kasparov vs Karpov	– Garry Kasparov
The Sicilian Taimanov Move by Move	– John Emms
The Taimanov Sicilian	– Graham Burgess
The Sicilian Kan	– John Emms
The Classical Sicilian	– Alex Yermolinsky
Megadatabase	– Chessbase

Explanation of visual aids

In this book we will regularly make use of various types of visual aids. As a chess coach I have observed the impact that these can have on students' understanding.



This means that my diagrams will feature arrows (to indicate the specific manoeuvres that one or both sides would like to execute) as well as highlighted squares or pieces which are the ones being targeted in a more general sense.

Since this book – in contrast to the (Dutch-language) first volume – is not printed in colour, it fell to our software developer Hub van de Laar to nevertheless find ways to illustrate the visual aids in the book so that the positions can be understood at a glance. In the diagram above we can immediately see what White threatens, as well as the weapons that are still in his arsenal. The position comes from a variation in the great attacking game, Kasparov-Anand, Tilburg 1992, in which White went for great attacking prospects.

We will not be using letters to denote chess pieces (as these might not be familiar to non-native English speakers) but rather the 'figurine' symbols, as follows:

Chess piece	Letter	Figurine
King	K	♔
Queen	Q	♕
Rook	R	♖
Bishop	B	♗
Knight	N	♘
Pawn	–	–

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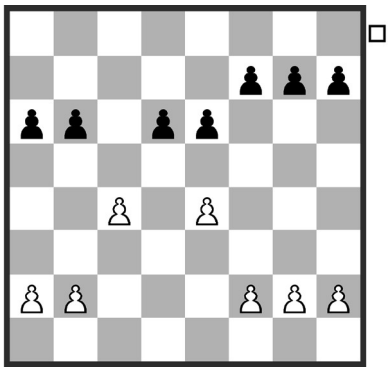
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Foreword

Before you lies the second volume in a trilogy about the Sicilian Defense. The first volume dealt with the Najdorf and Scheveningen variations, and it is now time to pay attention to three other extremely popular systems: the Taimanov, Kan and Richter-Rauzer variations. After careful consideration within the Thinkers Publishing team, we decided that it made sense to group these variations together. In particular, the first two are closely related and share the feature that, in both cases, Black plays **…e7-e6** and **…a7-a6** at an early stage. They typically have the idea of retaining more options for their king's bishop by postponing **…d7-d6** (or even omitting it entirely.) The bishop may go to b4 or c5 in different lines.

The Richter-Rauzer is, in theory, just one of the possible developments from a Classical Sicilian. We have already dealt with a few games that started with the Classical and where Black shortly played **…e7-e6**; and **6.♗c4** (the Sozin variation) was rightly treated within the Scheveningen pages. However, it is clear that White's most popular counter, the Richter-Rauzer variation (**6.♗g5**) deserves separate attention.

While looking at the variation structure for the Kan and Taimanov and deciding on which model games to use, I noticed a lot of possible transitions to the 'Hedgehog' structure, shown on the right. The key features are white pawns on e4 and c4, and at least four black pawns on a6, b6, d6 and e6. This structure is ideally suited to the task of playing for a win as Black, because of the very complicated middlegames that arise. (And one often needs complicated middlegames to have a better chance of 'converting' a rating advantage!) The 'Hedgehog' is definitely a structure rather than a variation, but it has such a distinctive character of its own that I chose to examine it first in chapter 2. This simplifies later discussion of the Taimanov and Kan variations by removing the need to discuss every possible way of entering a Hedgehog structure.



A few further comments regarding the Hedgehog. This way of setting up the pieces simply on the back two rows, with four 'spikes' directly in front, has been used by many strong players, including world champions. (That is because it can also be used in various other openings, including the Symmetrical English or Queen's In-

dian.) As for myself, this setup has long been a favorite, and from my very first acquaintance with the structure I was immediately mesmerized by the possibilities for rich strategic play. It is fascinating to see how strong players manage to outwit their – sometimes equally esteemed – opponents even while staying so far within their own territory. In that respect, a parallel may be drawn with the famous "Catenaccio" style in which the Italian national football (soccer) team used to play.

Catenaccio is the Italian word for 'chain' and the style is associated with a well-organized defense, to neutralize the attacks of the opponents before they get started. The moment the opponent finally tries to get inside the fortifications, a counter-attack will come with impressive speed. Thus it is also with the Hedgehog in chess. Black stays on the back few rows and White, who has more space, sometimes falls into a trap. When the position suddenly opens, very often the small latent weaknesses in White's camp will prove to be his undoing. In this book I give a schematic representation of the plans developed both sides have developed over the years, illustrated through model games. Very often, authors will say that they 'could write a whole book' on one of their topics; in this case, the wealth of strategic play in the Hedgehog prompted me to do just that. In 'Key Concepts of Chess – The Hedgehog', the first in a new series (by the same publisher) you will find this fascinating beast examined in even greater detail, should you be interested.

In each chapter, the majority of the space is taken up by discussion of model games. This is exactly what I also did in previous volumes of this series and represents a core tenet of the *Understanding Before Moving* philosophy. The main idea is that the reader can thus increase his understanding of practical middlegames that actually arise from the variation in question, and in so doing also develop a better feel for how to handle the opening responsibly.

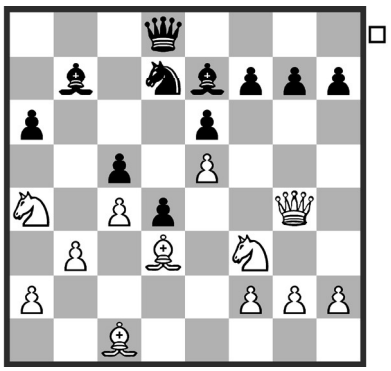
It remains for me to thank the English grandmaster Daniel Fernandez for ably translating my work into English and offering his advice on technical and linguistic questions; Jos Sutmuller for his assistance with all the photo material; and the proofreader Daniel Vanheirzeele.

I hope the reader will benefit from studying this book!

IM Herman Grooten
Eindhoven, January 2021.

§ 3.3 Structure-based strategic ideas

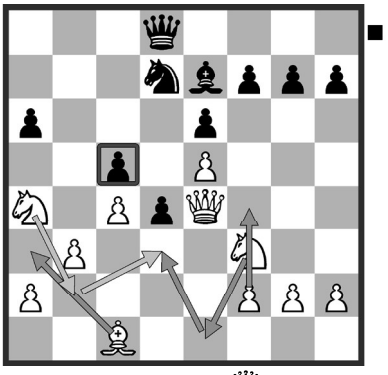
♙ Schematic Diagram 1



In this schematic diagram we can see one of the structures typical for this variation. Black has been able to push his central pawns forward, clearing the long diagonal for his c8-bishop. But because his structure is fixed, he will still have to deal with certain problems. So White trades the light-squared bishops and prepares the very nice e4-square for his pieces.

1. ♗e4 ♗xe4
2. ♕xe4

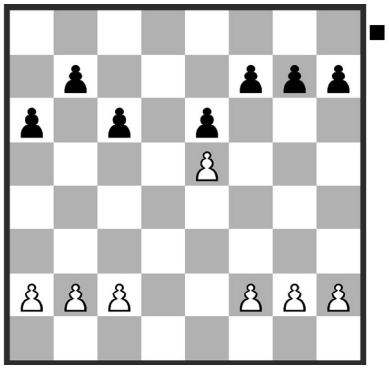
Black has, as a result of this trade, been saddled with a bad e7-bishop.



Position after: 2. ♕g4-e4

White can now play one of his knights (preferably the one on f3) to the d3-square, where it blockades Black's protected passed pawn and also pressures the supporting pawn on c5. Then White can protect his advanced e5-pawn in the logical way with f2-f4, keeping a future onward push to f5 (and possible kingside attack) on the cards. If White is looking to initiate a kingside attack, it might also be logical to use the a4-knight to blockade on d3, in the name of shifting his pieces towards that side of the board. Another idea is to use the c1-bishop on a3 to attack the c5-pawn and place further pressure on Black's c5-pawn.

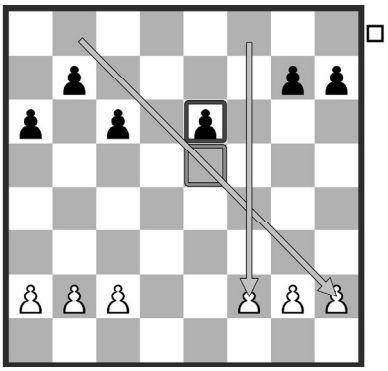
♙ Schematic diagram 2



In this position, with the pawn structure being symmetrical, White has more space due to his advanced pawn on e5. In principle, White should overprotect this pawn so that it can be used for various purposes going forwards. To briefly summarise the advantages of this pawn's position in a middlegame:

- First and foremost, the pawn covers the d6-square so that it can be used as a staging point for White's pieces.
- Next, White can manoeuvre his pieces quite easily behind this pawn, in particular to direct them at Black's kingside.
- The pawn has deprived Black of an important defensive square for his pieces on the kingside (usually, it has already driven a knight from f6), which enriches White's attacking chances.
- Besides the possibility of attacking Black's kingside with pieces, White may also have an h-pawn march in mind. If the pawn gets to h6, having good control over the f6-square will become even more relevant.
- Finally, the pawn prevents Black from getting his pieces into the game easily. If Black tries to get free with ...f7-f6 (or ...f7-f5) then White can take it (e5xf6), whereupon taking back with a piece will leave the e6-pawn fatally backward and isolated. Observe how this unfolds:

1... f6
2. exf6 *xf6



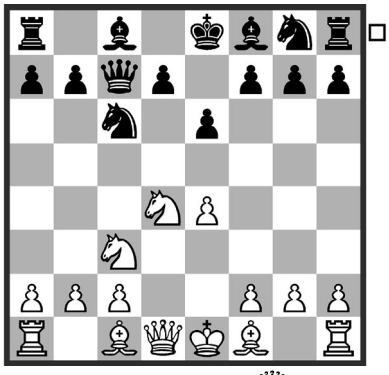
Position after: 2... *xf6

In place of the strong e5-pawn, White has gained the e5-square for his pieces. The e6-pawn is weak and Black will have three pawn islands against two (the principle is that, usually, it's better to have fewer pawn islands.)

In compensation for this, Black might be able to get his pieces into the game more easily (the b8-h2 diagonal and f-file have been opened, potentially increasing his activity.)

§ 3.4 Variation Tree and Model Game Links for the Taimanov

1. e4 c5 2. ♘f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘c6 5. ♘c3 ♕c7

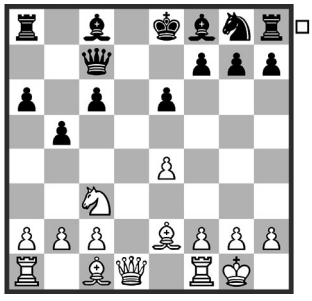


Position after: 5... ♕c7

6. ♗e3

A) 6. ♗e2 a6 7. 0-0

A1) 7... b5 8. ♘xc6 dxc6



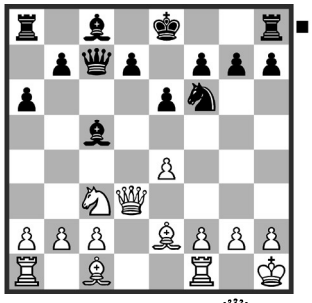
Position after: 8... dxc6



□ *Model game 14*
Kramnik – Leko

[8... ♕xc6]

A2) 7... ♘f6 8. ♔h1 ♘xd4 9. ♕xd4 ♗c5 10. ♕d3

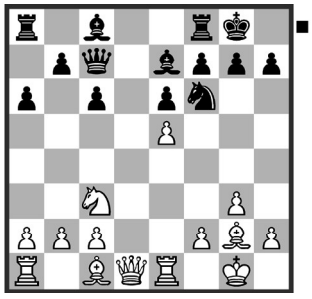


Position after: 10. ♕d3



■ *Model game 15*
Dervishi – Kasimdzhanov

B) 6. g3 a6 7. ♗g2 ♘f6 8. 0-0 ♘xd4 [8... ♗e7 9. ♖e1 0-0 10. ♘xc6 dxc6 11. e5]

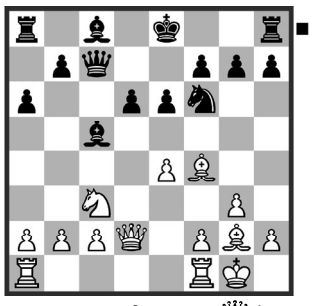


Position after: 11. e5

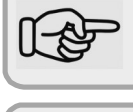


□ Model game 16
Tiviakov – Adams

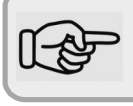
9. ♕xd4 ♗c5 10. ♗f4 d6 11. ♕d2



Position after: 11. ♕d2

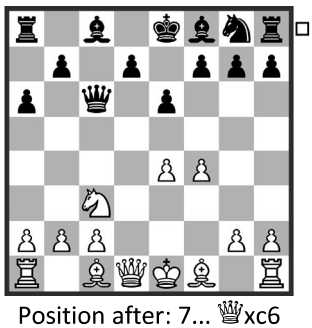


□ Model game 17
Sutovsky – J.Polgar



■ Model game 18
Short – Anand

C) 6. f4 a6 7. ♘xc6 ♕xc6

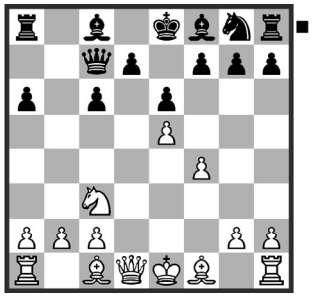


Position after: 7... ♕xc6



■ Model game 19
Rublevsky – Papin

[7... bxc6 8. e5]



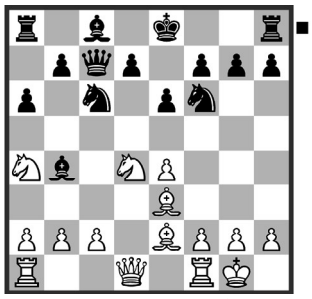
Position after: 8. e5



□ Model game 20
A.Haast – Hortensius

6... a6

6... ♘f6 7. ♗e2 [7. f4 ♗b4 8. ♘db5 ♕a5] 7... a6 8. 0-0 ♗b4 9. ♘a4



Position after: 9. ♘a4



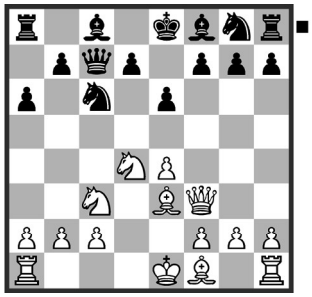
□ Model game 21
Kasparov – Lautier



■ Model game 22
Paulet – A.Haast

7. ♕d2

A) 7. ♕f3



Position after: 7. ♕f3

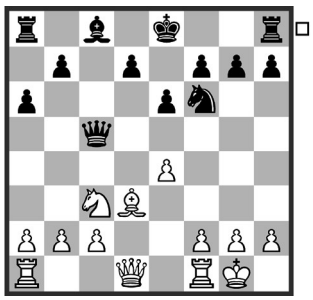


□ *Model game 23*
Wei Yi – A.Haast



■ *Model game 24*
Saric – Giri

B) 7. ♗d3 ♘f6 8. 0-0 ♘e5 [8... ♘xd4 9. ♗xd4 ♗c5 10. ♗xc5 ♕xc5]

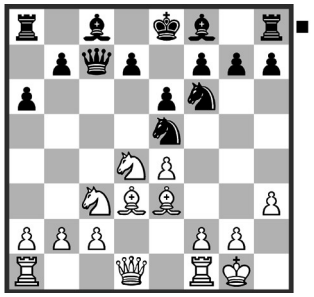


Position after: 10... ♕xc5



■ *Model game 25*
Olivier – Caruana

9. h3



Position after: 9. h3



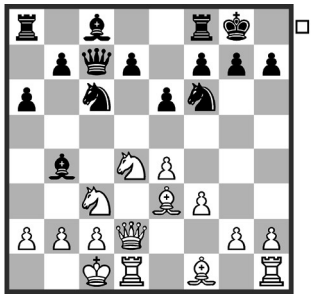
□ *Model game 26*
Kasparov – Anand

7... ♘f6

7... b5

8. 0-0-0 ♗b4 9. f3 ♘e5

9... 0-0

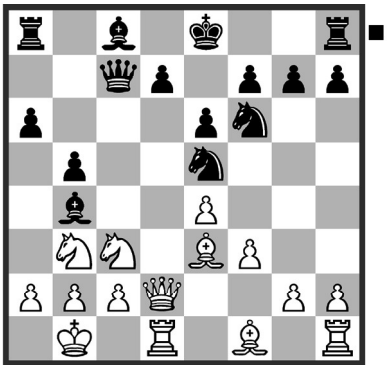


Position after: 9... 0-0



■ *Model game 27*
Idani – Vidit

10. ♘b3 b5 11. ♔b1



Position after: 11. ♔b1



□ *Model game 28*
Topalov – Lutz



■ *Model game 29*
Morozevich – Vitiugov



Veselin Topalov (photo Jos Sutmuller)

Section 2 – Model Games

Model Game 14

♙ Kramnik, Vladimir (2770)
♟ Leko, Peter (2743)
WDR Match TV g/60 2000

This game was played for German television, in a program that was very interesting for active players and fans of the time (like myself) to watch. The two players battled it out at first a normal rapid time control, and then a shorter one. What was special about it was that the players themselves spoke about how their thought processes during the game. The audio was in German, but it was still interesting to see how the top grandmasters made their decisions, as well as how they handled their uncertainties and the pressure of the clock.

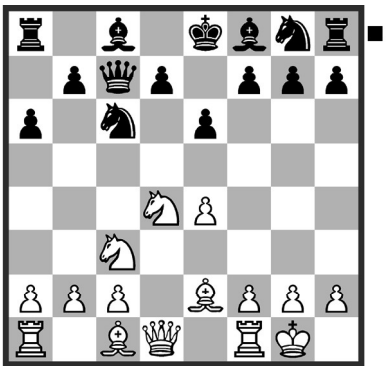
1. e4

For Kramnik it was quite rare that he opened with his king's pawn.

1... c5

Leko also had 1... e5 in his repertoire.

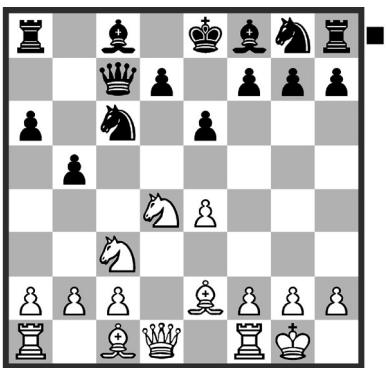
2. ♘f3 e6 3. d4 cxd4 4. ♘xd4 ♘c6 5. ♗e2 ♕c7 6. ♘c3 a6 7. 0-0



Position after: 7. 0-0

7... b5

This variation was not so popular at the time, but Kramnik had nevertheless done his homework in it. Judit Polgar has also played this line a couple of times.



Position after: 7... b5

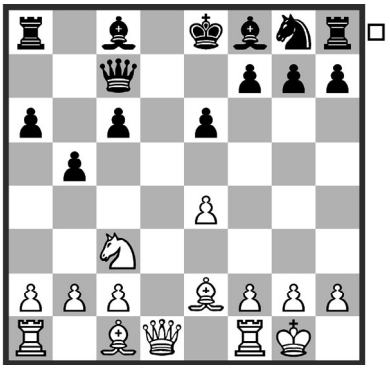
The alternative is 7... ♘f6

8. ♘xc6

In that time, this was the most frequent continuation, and it still is today. It's the most principled way to play, and we shall soon see why.

One very annoying fact for White is that after a normal continuation such as 8. ♗e3 ♗b7 9. f4 he would find himself pinned: 9... ♗c5 and the pin on the d4-knight severely hinders White's efforts to get into an attacking setup. That's why the exchange on c6 comes at a somewhat inconvenient moment for Black.

8... dxc6



Position after: 8... dxc6

The queen recapture 8... ♕xc6 also has its adherents, such as Graf (at the time called Nenashev), and the move makes sense because it keeps alive the prospects of the much-beloved Sicilian counterplay down the half-open c-file. However, it's a bit unpleasant for Black after 9. ♗f3 threatening e5 and a skewer on the long diagonal.

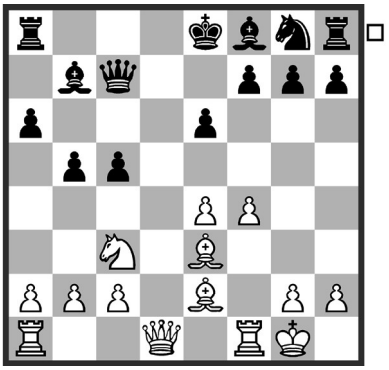
9. ♗e3

Kramnik keeps a healthy structure.

Another option is to insert 9. a4 here, which although it loses time, is an interesting way of playing. After 9... b4 10. ♘b1 ♘f6 11. ♘d2 White hopes that the time spent moving his knight (c3-b1-d2-c4) will be well compensated by the strong grip he has gained on that final destination square. In two games Navara – Movsesian, 2016, Black wasn't able to solve the problems.

9... ♗b7 10. f4 c5?!

At the time this was a normal move. Black threatens ...b4, after which the e4-pawn would drop. But in his ambition Black temporarily neglects the development of his kingside pieces.



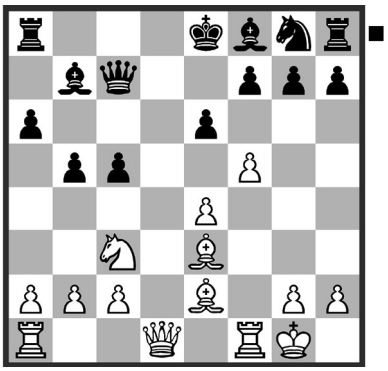
Position after: 10... c5?!

Nowadays we know that Black should probably prefer to start with 10... ♗e7 to complete his development as swiftly as possible. Indeed, the present exam-

ple was among the games that helped us reach that conclusion.

11. f5!

White has to play accurately, or else he will get into difficulty himself. With this move, he tries to turn his development advantage into an attack on Black's king, which seems quite natural considering that it's still in the centre and that none of Black's kingside pieces have been developed.



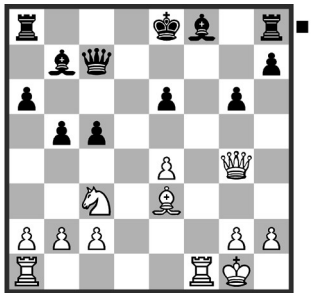
Position after: 11. f5!

11... ♖d8

Black could also have developed with 11... ♘f6 but major problems would await after 12. fxe6 fxe6 13. ♗h5+ ♘xh5 14. ♕xh5+ g6 15. ♕g4

(see analysis diagram next column)

when in the old game Stein – Taimanov, 1962 (ultimately drawn) White stood significantly better. The black king is so unsafe that after accurate play there is



Position after: 15. ♕g4

actually no salvation for it. 15... 0-0-0 16. a4 b4 and now 17. ♘d5 would have been incredibly strong. After 11... exf5 White applies the boot to Black's position with 12. ♗f4 ♕b6 and Black's problems are stacking up. [Even the queen trade isn't that helpful for Black: 12... ♕d7 13. ♕xd7+ ♔xd7 14. a4 b4 15. ♖fd1+ followed by ♘d5, when Black's complete dearth of piece activity will be the death of him.] 13. ♘d5! ♗xd5 14. ♕xd5 ♖d8 15. ♕xf5 All White's pieces are fully in the game, except the rook on a1, while Black's pieces remain woefully underdeveloped. There is no player in the world that could hold this against good play from White. Naturally we have to see what happens after Black executes his original idea. But after 11... b4? 12. fxe6 fxe6

(see analysis diagram next page)

White found 13. ♘b5!, leading to a winning position, in Gascon del Nogal – Davy, 2015. After 11... ♗d6!? White plays 12. fxe6: 12... fxe6 [12... ♗xh2+ 13. ♔h1 fxe6 14. ♗xb5+ axb5 15. ♕h5+ g6 16. ♕xh2 with a decisive ad-