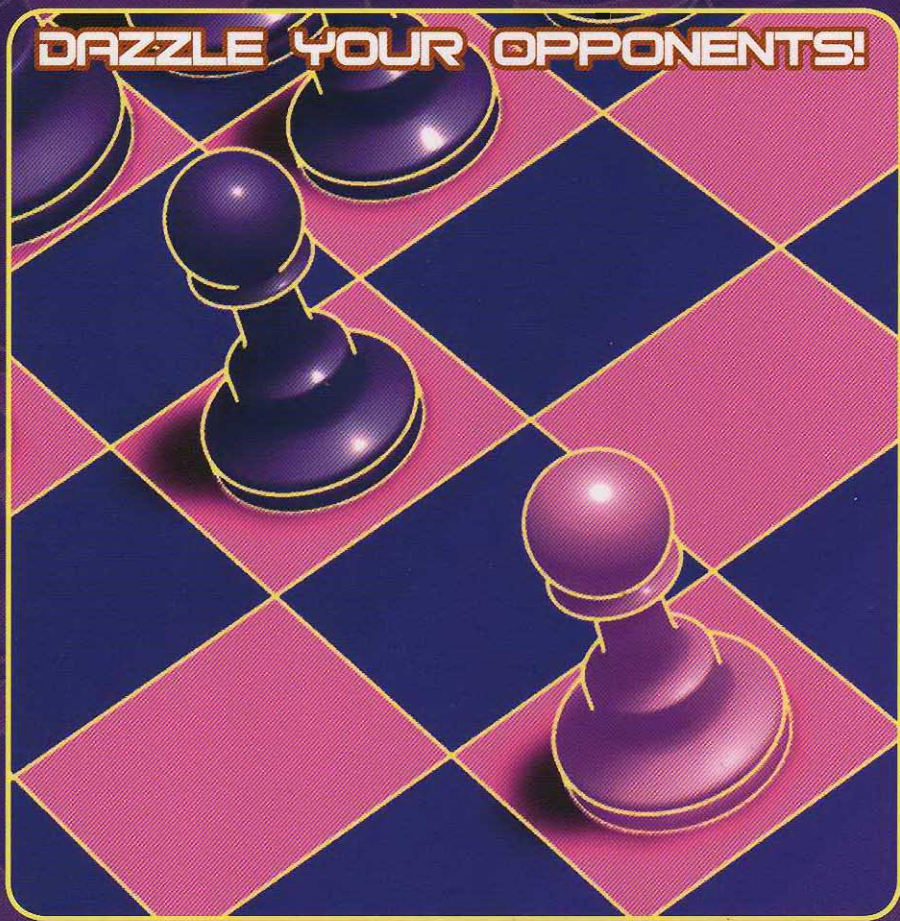


# DANGEROUS WEAPONS: THE FRENCH

DAZZLE YOUR OPPONENTS!



JOHN WATSON

EVERYMAN CHESS



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JOHN WATSON

**EVERYMAN CHESS**

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# Preface

The original concept behind *Dangerous Weapons* was to take a major chess opening and to approach it in a completely different way: to concentrate on variations that are ambitious, sharp, innovative, disruptive, tricky, enjoyable to analyse; ones not already weighed down by mountains of theory, and ones unfairly ignored or discredited. To me this seemed like an author's paradise, which I'm sure contributed somewhat towards the inspiration behind this series!

The main motivation behind studying major openings in such a way is to be able to present the reader (not forgetting the author!) with a considerable number of fresh, hard-hitting opening weapons for both White and Black; in some cases to create repertoires and in others to enhance and rejuvenate existing ones.

*Dangerous Weapons: The French* is the third book in the series (the first two covered the Sicilian and the Nimzo-Indian). I was delighted when John Watson agreed to take on this project. Author of the highly acclaimed *Play the French* books, John's writings and experience in the French Defence need no introduction. When compared to his previous books on the French, this time he faced a slightly different challenge: selecting variations for White as well as Black!

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## What is a Dangerous Weapon?

For the purpose of choosing opening variations for this series, usually a *Dangerous Weapon* fits into one or more of these overlapping categories:

**1) Moves that create complex, original positions full of razor-sharp tactics and rich positional ideas where creative, attacking play is rewarded; moves which are new, rare or very fresh, leaving plenty of scope for research.**

It should be pointed out that even though mainline theory produces a vast number of wonderfully complicated positions, these opening variations lose out heavily in the 'danger' stakes. No matter how sharp and difficult the position, the opening phase is nowhere near as hazardous for your opponent if he is able to fall back on that comfort blanket known as theory. I've played plenty of incredibly

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

sharp lines without any real fear simply because of reasonable book knowledge and some solid home preparation. Thus in *Dangerous Weapons* the emphasis has mainly been on non-theoretical lines, where your opponent is left to his own devices at a very early stage.

### **2) Moves that are highly ambitious; ones which aim for total domination.**

Perfect for those not satisfied with a quiet theoretical edge as White and eager to search for a big advantage or even a direct refutation, albeit at some risk; or for those as Black who prefer to strive for the initiative at any cost, preferring this over a manageable disadvantage or sterile equality.

### **3) Moves that have been previously ignored, discarded or discredited by theory, perhaps unfairly so or maybe for the wrong reasons.**

Discredited lines can be especially dangerous – the psychological element cannot be ignored. Facing an opening like this, I find myself asking the question, ‘Why is he playing this variation if it is meant to be bad?’ Often there is a very good reason (a logical improvement, perhaps, which overturns a previous assessment), and in any case how are you supposed to remember a hypothetical 15-move refutation when you only browsed it in a book once, and that was a few years ago?

### **4) Moves that are visually shocking; moves which seem to contradict the laws of the game.**

Disregarding the question of objective merit for the moment, there’s no doubt that a crazy-looking move has at the very least some psychological value. Unleashed on an opponent, it can produce a range of emotions: uncontrolled laughter, perhaps followed by over-confidence; anger (at being insulted by such a move) followed by over-aggression; or perhaps discomfort, followed by timidity. Of course you may instead encounter understanding followed by objectivity – you have to pick and choose your opponents.

## **Dangerous for Whom?**

---

It would be difficult, probably impossible, to guarantee that every single variation in this book is 100% sound. You have to understand that in some cases ‘dangerous’ can sometimes mean ‘dangerous for both sides’. What I do expect, however, is that your opponent’s ride throughout the opening should be far bumpier than yours!

## Guiding You Through

---

Throughout the book there are various icons together with explanatory notes to emphasize significant points. They should be fairly self-explanatory, but here's a brief summary:



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** This signifies a game, variation, sub-variation or position where the Dangerous Weapon has obviously produced the desired effect.



**BEWARE!** Pointing out immediate danger for the player using the Dangerous Weapon.



**ROLL THE DICE!** Signifying a variation or sub-variation which is perhaps more suited for games with short time-limits or for players who enjoy taking risks.



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** This indicates a transposition to a different opening variation. Using different move orders to reach a desirable position or to trick your opponent into something with which he is unfamiliar is becoming a weapon of increasing value.

As the title suggests, *Dangerous Weapons* may not be for the faint-hearted! More than anything, it is aimed at players of all levels who like to be entertained, those who are happy to try out fun-to-play openings at their local chess club, on the Internet, in tournaments, wherever they choose to play.

Good luck studying and playing your *Dangerous Weapons*!

John Emms,  
Everyman Chess



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# Introduction

The French Defence is a popular opening among players of all strengths. It is defined by 1 e4 e6; in this book we will be discussing variations that begin after the standard continuation 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 (Diagram 1).

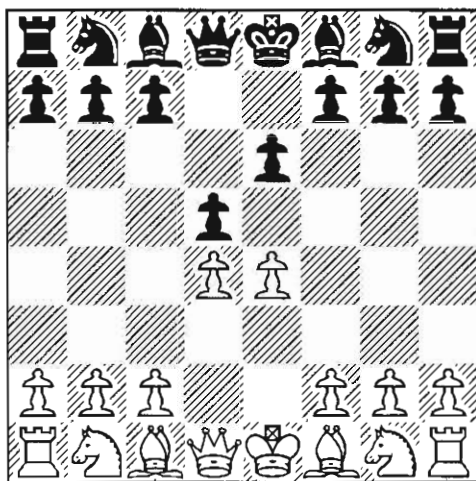


Diagram 1 (W)

Black's second move strikes back in the centre and challenges White to make a decision with respect to his e-pawn. Depending upon the inclinations of the players, the French can lead to wild tactical battles or the quietest of manoeuvring games. In most variations, White will play e5 at some point, setting up a 'pawn chain' on the central dark squares d4 and e5. This wedge serves to both grab space and prevent Black's pieces from developing actively, in particular the bishop on c8 and knight on g8. Black's task is to attack that chain of pawns and break it down,

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

or to coordinate his pieces and pawns in such a way as to actively work around the chain.

My selections for White are dangerous weapons in the sense of aggressively attacking Black's position, with a good dose of tactical content. For Black, the French Defence is primarily a counterattacking opening that begins with measured steps, emphasizing positional strategy. Therefore most of my suggested variations for Black are not violent, but dangerous weapons in the sense of being ignored, discredited, or visually shocking, as laid out in the Preface.

I have suggested opening variations that, with two exceptions, have very little theory attached to them. As far as I can see, none of them allow your opponent an easy way to advantage, and none are unsound. I should add that the proposed lines do not overlap with those previously given in my *Play the French* books; indeed, I have included variations that I have misassessed or skipped over in the past.

At the end of every chapter, each variation is characterized in terms of certain attributes, using a point scale of 1 to 5. They are as follows:

### **Difficulty**

---

In one sense, the suggested systems are all easier to play than mainstream ones because their theory is less developed. In other words, you don't need to study as much to be able to achieve a playable position, all the more so because most of your opponents will be thrown upon their own resources. Nevertheless, I think that it's useful to point out, especially to the inexperienced, the frequency with which variations can become critical from both an offensive and defensive point of view.

### **Attacking Nature**

---

How sharp the variation is in terms of aggressive assaults and tactically charged situations.

### **Positional/Strategic Nature**

---

The extent to which the variation is characterized by manoeuvring, and concentration upon static features such as pawn structure, weaknesses, quality of the pieces, and the like.

### **Risk**

---

The degree to which your position is hurt when your strategy breaks down. For

example, the chance of achieving lost or very poor positions due to one bad move or a miscalculation. In this book, 3 Nc3 variations are usually riskier than 3 Nd2 variations.

## Reward

---

The degree to which you benefit if your strategy succeeds. For example, you may come out with a material advantage or even win the game outright. Usually this correlates to risk.

## Theoretical Depth

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The amount of theory associated with the opening, and especially theory that is outside what only a few specialists know. Of course, any new theory presented in this book doesn't count. Since none of the lines in this book are extremely theoretical, the scale is relative. For example, the Guimard Variation of the Tarrasch and 6 Be3 in the MacCutcheon receive the highest rankings (5) in spite of being played in only about 7% of Tarrasch Variations and 10% of MacCutcheon Variations respectively.

I didn't add a Fun Factor, but I've tried to find variations that are entertaining as well as effective. As you bamboozle your opponents, remember to enjoy yourself!

John Watson,  
January 2007

## Chapter One

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# A Confounding Retreat

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 (Diagram 1)

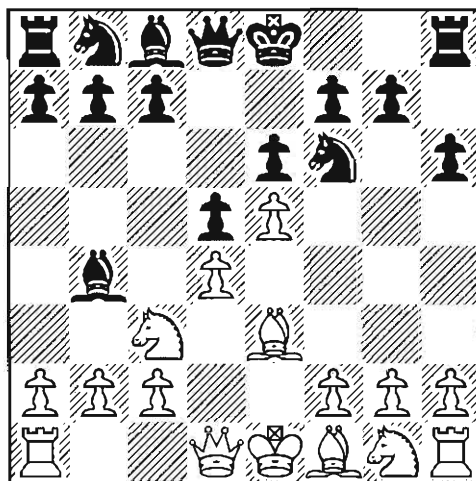
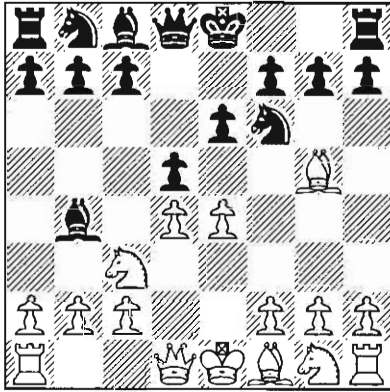


Diagram 1 (B)

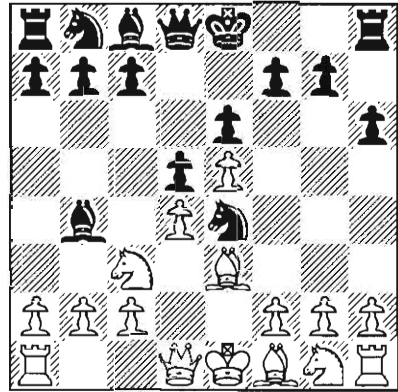
Here's the situation: you play 1 e4, so naturally you need something to use against the French Defence. After 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5, you've decided that 3 Nd2 and 3 e5 are too prosaic and opt for the spirited 3 Nc3. Having put a great deal of time into

studying the Winawer Variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4) and the Classical Variation (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7), you may still be uncomfortable when confronted with the double-edged MacCutcheon Variation:

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 (Diagram 2)**



**Diagram 2 (W)**



**Diagram 3 (W)**

Black threatens to win White's e-pawn. Now the main line goes 5 e5 h6 (forced) 6 Bd2 Bxc3 7 bxc3 Ne4. But there are volumes of theory about that position, and even if you learn it all, it turns out that the verdict isn't half bad for Black. In addition, there's always the danger that your opponent is an expert in the intricacies of the resulting positions. What to do?

Our featured move is 6 Be3!, a dangerous continuation that is still little known to the average chess player.

Over the years this bishop retreat has always been considered a minor line. For example, 6 Be3 appears in the best-known databases on even fewer occasions than the move 6 exf6, which is considered completely harmless, and about a tenth as often as the main line 6 Bd2. Today, however, the virtues of 6 Be3 are being recognized and while it hasn't actually refuted the MacCutcheon, players of Black don't quite seem to know how to answer it, even those at the highest levels. In fact, because of the enthusiastic acceptance of 6 Be3, this will be one of the most theoretical chapters of this book.

The main action starts with 6...Ne4 (**Diagram 3**).

At first sight 6 Be3 doesn't seem to make much sense, because now White will find it awkward to defend c3, and he can lose tempi in doing so. Even the paradoxical move 6 Bc1 is more logical in some respects, because if there is a capture on c3, the bishop may become very effective by rerouting to a3.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

But 6 Be3 has two key advantages:

a) It protects the vital d4-square, and the bishop can occupy that square if Black attacks in the centre with ...c5 followed by ...cxd4, or if White responds to ...c5 by playing dxc5.

b) In contrast to 6 Bd2, White's bishop won't normally be traded off, and thus it can partake in a kingside attack.

When I was writing about 3 Nc3 Nf6 in my book *Play the French*, I refrained from advocating the MacCutcheon, in part because 6 Be3 was so difficult to meet. Now I have a chance to recommend it for White!

## Illustrative Games

□ A.Naiditsch ■ D.Stellwagen

Wijk aan Zee 2006

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4

6...Nfd7?! is inferior; we'll examine it in our 'Looking a Little Deeper' theory section below.

7 Qg4 (Diagram 4)

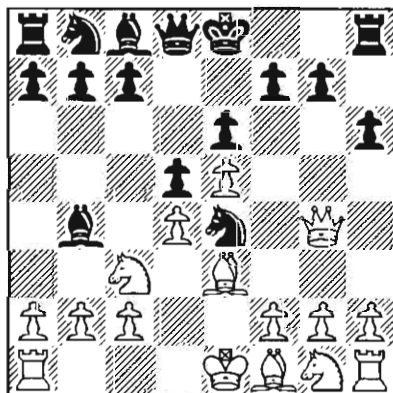


Diagram 4 (B)

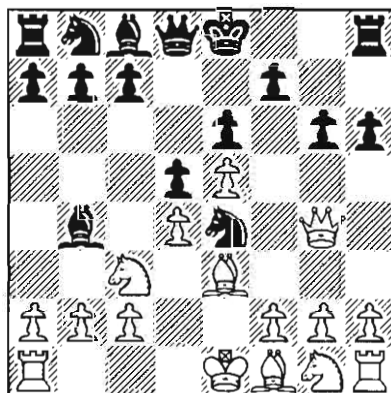


Diagram 5 (W)

White makes a direct threat to the g-pawn, which must be attended to. Nothing else creates any difficulties for Black.

7...g6

This and 7...Kf8 have been the main moves over the years, but 7...g5 is also very

important, as we will see in the next game.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! Two other plausible moves for Black are simply bad:**

a) 7...Nxc3? 8 Qxg7 loses all the dark squares; for example, 8...Ne4+ (after 8...Rf8, White has 9 a3 Ba5 10 Bd2, or here 9 Bd2 Nxa2 10 c3) 9 c3 Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 Ke7 11 f3 Ng5 12 h4 Nh7 13 Bd3 (or 13 Bxh6) 13...Qf8 14 Bxh6 Nd7 15 Qxf8+ Nhx8 16 Bg5+ f6 17 exf6+ Nxf6 18 Nh3 Bd7 19 Nf2 Kf7 20 Kd2 N8h7 21 Bf4 Rag8 22 g4 Nf8 23 Be5 1-0 B.Valuet-A.Chailot, Issy les Moulineaux 2001.

b) White's direct attack was impressive after 7...Bxc3+?! 8 bxc3 Kf8 9 Ne2 c5 10 f3 Ng5 (10...h5 11 Qh3 Ng5 12 Qg3) 11 h4 Nh7 12 Rh3! f5 13 Qg6! Qe8 14 Nf4 Qf7 15 g4 fxg4 16 Qxg4!? (16 fxg4 is also strong, since a rook or two comes to the f-file) 16...Ke8 17 Bd3 Kd8 18 Nh5 g5 19 Kd2 Nc6 20 Bxh7! Rxh7 21 Nf6 cxd4 22 cxd4 gxh4 23 Nxh7 Qxh7 24 Rg1 1-0 G.Carreto Nieto-F.Hernandez Rojo, Hermosillo 2003.

Returning to 7...g6 (Diagram 5).

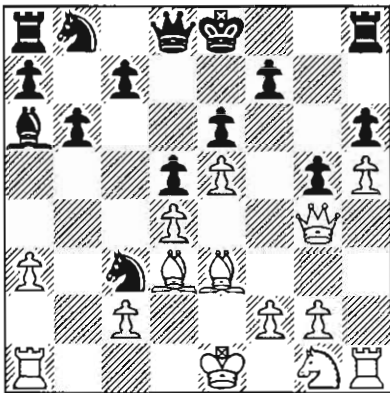
**8 a3 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 Nxc3**

Whether or not to grab this pawn is always a key decision in the 6 Be3 variation.

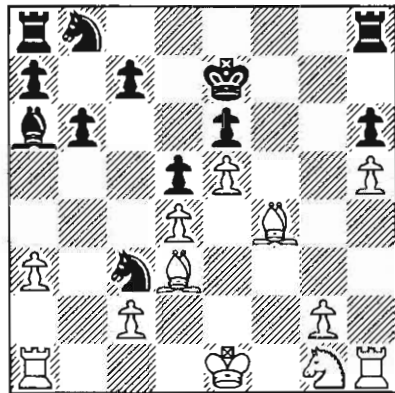
**10 Bd3 b6!?**

Black wants to trade light-squared bishops by means of ...Ba6. The alternatives 10...Nc6 and 10...c5 will be seen in the theory section.

**11 h4 Ba6 12 h5 g5 (Diagram 6)**



**Diagram 6 (W)**



**Diagram 7 (B)**

Black cannot afford the opening of White's h-file.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 13 f4

Naiditsch suggests 13 Bxa6 Nxa6 14 Ne2! Nxe2 (14...Na4 15 f4) 15 Qxe2 Nb8 16 0-0 Nc6 17 f4 with the initiative. This is very promising in view of 17...gxf4 (17...g4!? 18 f5!) 18 Rxf4 Ne7 19 g4 followed by Raf1 and in some cases Bf2-h4. In fact, this line may cast doubt upon 10...b6.

### 13...gxf4

V.Tseshkovsky-E.Kobylykin, Krasnodar 2004, continued 13...Qd7?! 14 fxg5!? (14 Bd2! Ne4 15 fxg5 Nxd5 16 Nh3! Bxd3 17 cxd3 with the idea 17...Rg8 18 Nxd5 hxd5 19 h6, or here 17...Nxd3?? 18 Qg7 Rf8 19 Bxh6) 14...Bxd3 15 cxd3 Qb5 16 g6! Qxd3?; White is better in any case, but here 17 Rh3! would leave Black with no adequate defence.

### 14 Qg7 Kd7

14...Ke7 15 Qf6+ Kd7 16 Qxf7+ transposes.

### 15 Qxf7+ Qe7 16 Qxe7+ Kxe7 17 Bxf4 (Diagram 7)

Here Naiditsch gives White a slight advantage. Black feels that he has to eliminate the two bishops, even though the exchange on d3 takes away e4 and c4 as outposts for the knights. That's a wise decision, because it allows him to develop before White activates his pieces and wins the h-pawn.

### 17...Bxd3 18 cxd3 Kd7 (Diagram 8)

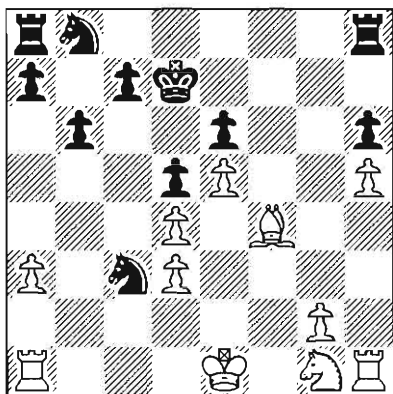


Diagram 8 (W)

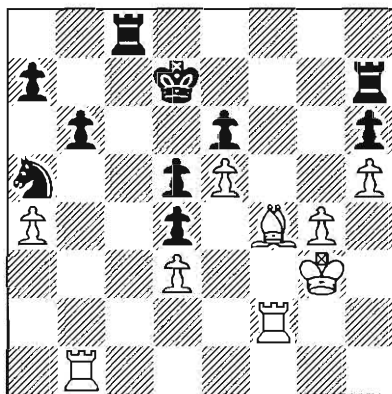


Diagram 9 (B)

### 19 Nf3?!

White could prove his opening advantage by 19 Bd2! Nb5 20 Ne2 Nc6 21 Be3 a5 (to rescue the b5-knight from being trapped after a4) 22 a4 Nba7 23 0-0; White stands better, with Rf7+ or Rf6 to come, followed by doubling rooks and/or Nf4.

**19...Nc6 20 Kd2?**

Naiditsch assesses the position after 20 Bd2! Nb5 21 Be3 as slightly better for White, but unlike the case in which White's knight was on e2, Black can afford the luxury of the typical French Exchange sacrifice 21...Raf8! (21...Rag8 22 a4!) 22 a4 Rxf3! 23 gxf3 (23 axb5? Rxe3+ 24 Kd2 Nxd4!) 23...Nbx4; for example, 24 Kf2! Nc2 25 Rag1 Nxe5 26 Rg7+ Kc6!? 27 d4 Nxe3 28 dxe5 d4! 29 Rc1+ Kd5 with a sort of dynamic balance.

**20...Nb5 21 Ke3 Raf8 22 Rhf1 Ne7**

Instead 22...a5 23 a4 Nba7 24 Nh4 is unclear.

**23 g4?! c5 24 a4 Nxd4 25 Nxd4 cxd4+ 26 Kf3 Rh7**

26...Rc8! was a good alternative. Black has some typical French Defence advantages, although his kingside situation is a bother.

**27 Kg3 Nc6 28 Rfb1 Rc8**

Naiditsch queries this, suggesting 28...Rg8 29 a5 Rhg7 30 axb6 Rxd4+ 31 Kf3 axb6 32 Rxb6 Kc7 33 Rab1 with equality.

**29 Ra2 Na5?!**

But this is a more serious mistake, I think, since the knight lacks a future here.

**30 Rf2!? (Diagram 9)**

Very risky. 30 Bd2! is the straightforward approach.

**30...Rg8?**

This leads to a desperate situation, if not an outright loss. My computer claims that 30...Rc3! is winning.



**ROLL THE DICE! But maybe White can go for broke with 31 Kh4 Rxd3 32 Bxh6! Rxh6 33 g5 Rh8 34 g6.**

Then a crazy line goes 34...Nc6 35 g7 Rg8 36 h6 Nxe5 37 Rg1! Nf3+! 38 Rxf3 Rxf3 39 h7 Rff8! 40 gxf8Q Rxf8 41 Rg8 Rf1! 42 h8Q Rh1+ 43 Kg4 Rxh8 44 Rxh8, and in spite of Black's pawns I suspect that White should be able to find his way to a win.

**31 Rc2 Rc8**

After 31...Rhg7 32 Rbc1! Rxd4+ 33 Kf3 Black will have to give up his knight on c4 just to stop the mating threat.

**32 Rxc8 Kxc8 33 Kh4! Nc6**

33...Nb7 34 Bxh6 Rxh6 35 g5 is too strong.

**34 Rc1 Kd7 35 Rxc6! Kxc6 36 Bxh6 Kd7**

Or 36...Rxh6 37 g5 Rh8 38 g6 Rg8 39 Kg5, and so forth.

**37 Kg5 Ke8 38 Kg6 Rf7 39 Bg7 Rf4 40 g5 1-0**

□ R.Panjwani ■ N.Arsenault

Toronto 2006

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4 7 Qg4 g5!? (Diagram 10)

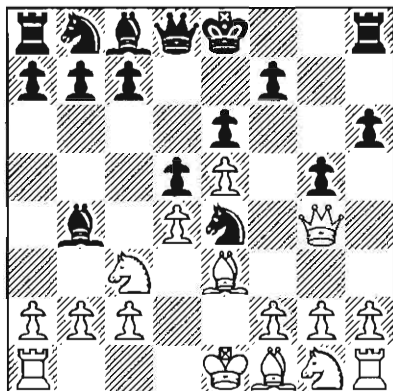


Diagram 10 (W)

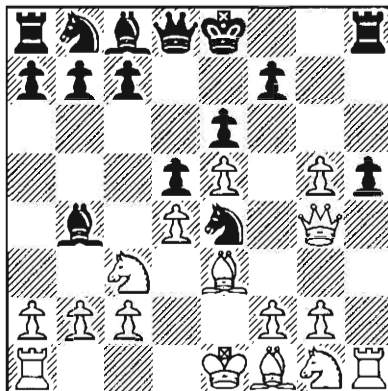


Diagram 11 (B)

This bold advance has some advantages over 7...g6; namely, Black can force White's aggressively positioned queen to retreat when he plays ...h5 (or so it seems). Furthermore, there will now be no piece sacrifices involving Bxg6 followed by Qxg6+. On the flip side, 7...g5 is weakening.

I will showcase the most popular and wildest line here. It keeps on scoring points for White.

**8 h4!?**

A very energetic attempt to rip apart Black's kingside pawn structure. The less exciting 8 a3 h5 9 Qd1! will be looked at in the theory section; it seems to favour White and is a good alternative line.

**8...h5!**

The best move to prevent the destruction of Black's kingside. The tempting 8...Nxc3 can be answered by a standard trick 9 Bd2!; for example, 9...Be7 (9...Nxa2 10 Rxa2 Bxd2+ 11 Kxd2 followed by Nf3 and some form of attack along the h-file will give White a significant advantage) 10 Bxc3 h5 11 Qg3 g4 12 0-0-0, again with much superior development. Ne2-f4 might follow, and then f2-f3 or c2-c4.

**9 hxg5!?! (Diagram 11)**

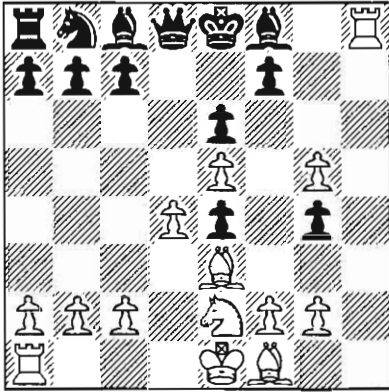


**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** It's not at all surprising that the idea of this move in conjunction with 8 h4 was brought to prominence by Shirov – an attacking genius. White gets only a rook and pawn for the queen, but ties Black down, claims central dark squares, and gains in development. In fact, after move 12 of this game, Black still won't have any pieces out!

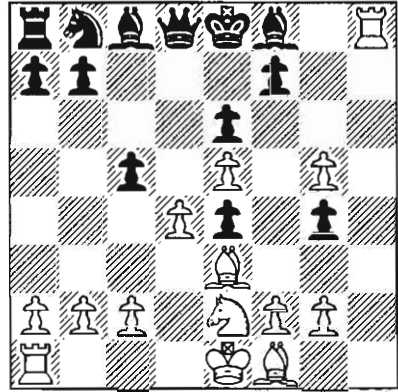
### 9...hxg4

McDonald offers the line 9...Nxc3 10 Rxh5! Rxh5 11 Qxh5 Ne4+ 12 c3 Bf8 13 Bd3 with the idea of g5-g6, among others.

**10 Rxh8+ Bf8 11 Nxe4 dxe4 12 Ne2 (Diagram 12)**



**Diagram 12 (B)**



**Diagram 13 (W)**

White's simple threat is to play Ng3 or Nc3 followed by Nxe4 with a killing attack on the dark squares. He also has the idea of g6 and g7 (or Bh6), along with 0-0-0. Given all this, Black has a tough task. On the other hand, he's up a bundle of material.

### 12...c6!?

Black wants to get his queen out quickly while not allowing the opening of lines that might follow after 12...c5 and a later dxc5. There have been a number of games from the position after 12 Ne2, including these:

a) In S.Ganguly-H.Nakamura, Internet (blitz) 2006, 12...Kd7!? was tried. This was only a blitz game, but worth showing because it's entertaining. Black threatens ...Bb4+, but I doubt that he can defend. Once White wins the e-pawn he will have a rook and two pawns for the queen with a terrific attack: 13 0-0-0 c6 14 Ng3 Qe7 15 Nxe4 Kc7 16 Rh7 Nd7 (what else?) 17 g6 Qe8 18 Rxf7 Be7 19 Nf6! Bxf6 20 exf6 Qg8

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

21 Bf4+ Kb6 22 Bd3 Nxf6 23 Bc7 mate.

b) 12...c5 (**Diagram 13**) was Black's defence in the stem game A.Shirov-S.Volkov, Rethymnon 2003 (three years earlier!).

The advantage to this move is that it threatens to break up the all-important central chain. A disadvantage is that a later Bb5 will gain time and tie up Black's pieces. Another problem for Black is that g6 and Bh6 in some order may win the bishop on f8. Let's see how this plays out:

b1) The original game went 13 0-0-0 Qa5! (A.Karlovich-L.Mokriak, Alushta 2004, diverged with 13...Nd7!? 14 Nc3 Qa5 15 dxc5 Ke7? and now White could have won by 16 g6! fxc6 17 Rh7+ Ke8 18 Bb5) 14 Nc3 cxd4 15 Bxd4 Nc6 (now the game is drawn) 16 Nxe4 Nxd4 17 Nf6+ Ke7 and the players agreed a draw on account of the perpetual check after 18...Rxd4 Qxe5 19 Ng8+ Ke8 20 Nf6+.

I'm not sure what later players of White had prepared against 12...c5, but here are two other interesting and unclear continuations:

b2) 13 c3!? (**Diagram 14**) is a cold-blooded move. For example, 13...Qa5 14 dxc5! Nd7 15 Ng3 Nxe5 16 Nxe4 Ke7 17 g6 Bg7 18 Rg8, or here 15...Qa4 16 b3 Qc6 17 0-0-0.

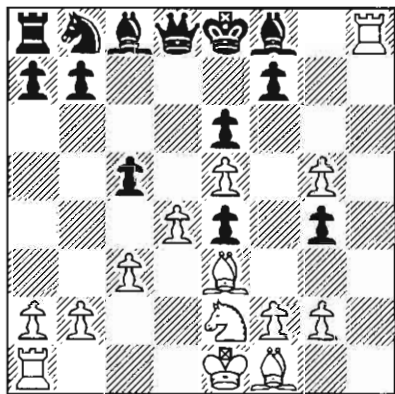


Diagram 14 (B)

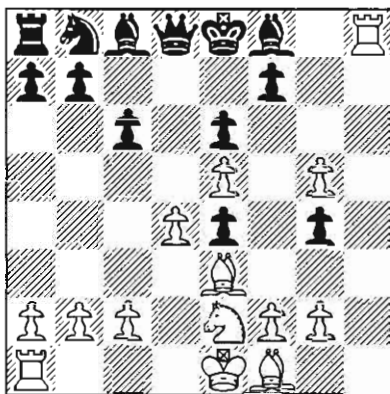


Diagram 15 (W)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Any line in which the centre holds is at least dangerous. For example, 13...cxd4 14 cxd4 Qa5+!? 15 Nc3 Nd7 (usually necessary to defend against the g6/Bh6 combination; worse is 15...g3? 16 0-0-0 gxf2 17 Nxe4) 16 0-0-0 a6 17 Kb1 with good prospects; g6 and Nxe4 are the main ideas.

b3) 13 g6!? is less controlled: 13...fxg6 (g7 was threatened) 14 Nc3 Kf7 (14...cxd4 15 0-0-0 Nd7 16 Rxd4 Qc7 17 Nxe4 wins for White: 17...Qxe5 18 Nd6+ Ke7 19 Rh7+ Bg7 20 Nc4 Qf6 21 Rf4 etc.) 15 Nxe4 (15 0-0-0 Kg7! 16 Rh2 Nd7 17 Bb5 cxd4 18 Rdh1 g5! 19 Bxd4 a6 20 Be2 and the situation is still unclear, but Black has to avoid 15...Qa5 16 Bb5! Bd7 17 Rdh1!, when the attack is more than worth the investment, in view of 17...Bxb5? 18 R1h7+ Ke8 19 Bg5!) 15...Kg7 16 Rh2 g3!? (16...Nd7) 17 fxg3 cxd4 18 0-0-0 Be7 19 Bxd4 Nd7 20 Bc4 is a real mess. White wants to play Rdh1 and Rh7+, so a plausible continuation is 20...Nf8 21 Be3 Qc7 22 Bh6+ Kf7 23 Rf1+ Ke8 24 Bb5+ Bd7 25 Nd6+ Bxd6 26 exd6 Qxd6 27 Rxf8+ Ke7 28 Rxa8 Qxg3 29 Rh1 Bxb5 30 Rxa7 when the situation is far from resolved.

With all the strong and knowledgeable players still using this line as White, I suspect that they have improvements upon Shirov-Volkov. The reader might want to try his hand.

Returning to 12...c6 (Diagram 15).

**13 Ng3 Nd7 14 Nxe4 Qa5+ 15 Bd2 Qb6?**

Hitting b2 and d4, but it turns out that 15...Qa4 and 15...Qd5, both unclear, were better.

**16 0-0-0!? Qxd4 17 Nf6+?!**

This almost loses except for a miracle save. Surprisingly, White could win by 17 Nd6+! instead: 17...Ke7 (17...Kd8 18 Ba5+) 18 g6 (threatening Bg5+) 18...Qxe5 19 Nxf7!.

**17...Nxf6 (Diagram 16)**

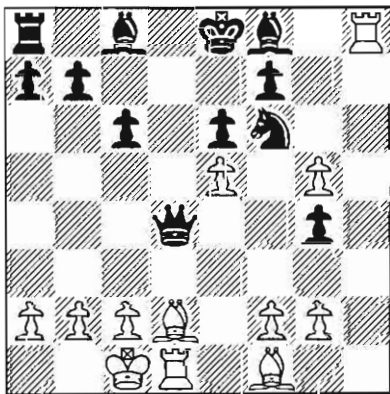


Diagram 16 (W)

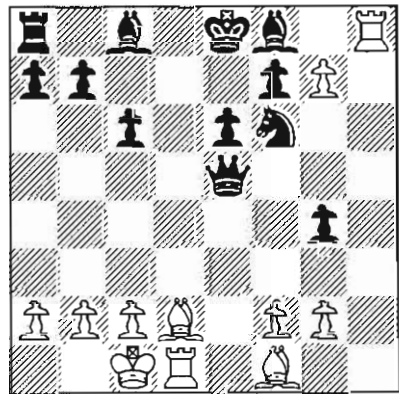


Diagram 17 (B)

Now White appears to be lost.

**18 g6!!**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Threatening g7 followed by g8Q or Bh6, as appropriate. Now 18...fxg6?? 19 Rxf8+! Kxf8 20 Bh6+ Kf7 21 Rxd4 Nd7 22 Bf4 is an easy win for White.

### 18...Qxe5 19 g7 (Diagram 17) 19...Qc5??

Black misses the counter-miracle 19...Ng8!! 20 gxf8Q+ (or 20 Rxf8 Qxg7 21 Rxf8 Bxg7) 20...Kxf8 21 Bh6+ Ke7 22 Rxf8, when it's unclear, although White's pieces look awfully strong; for example, 22...f5 23 Be3! f4?! (23...g3 24 Rxf8 b6 25 f4) 24 Bd4.

### 20 Be3 Qe7 21 Rxf8+ Qxf8 22 Rd8+! Kxd8 23 gxf8Q+ 1-0

A knock-down battle! It is still an open question whether 9 hxg5!!? truly yields an advantage, but I'd be very surprised if White stands worse. If you want a less crazy game while retaining winning chances, the move 8 a3 should fit the bill. See the theory section.

---

□ **A.Goloshchapov** ■ **S.Volkov**

European Championship, Istanbul 2003

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### 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4 7 Qg4 Kf8 (Diagram 18)

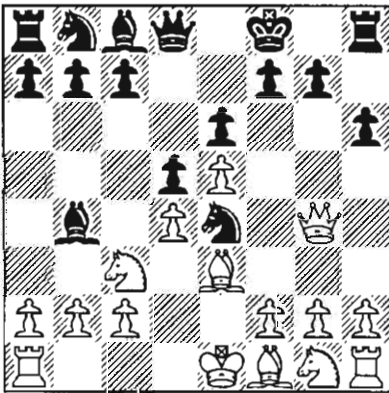


Diagram 18 (W)

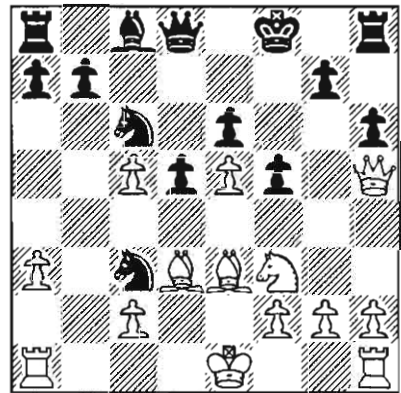


Diagram 19 (B)

With 7...Kf8 Black avoids the weaknesses created by 7...g6 and 7...g5. The downside is that he can't castle on either wing. Generally speaking, White's strategy is to hold the centre together and attack on the flanks, whereas Black will try to attack the centre by playing ...c5 and gain space within which to defend.

### 8 a3 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3

This is a hugely important juncture. Black very often plays 9...Nxc3 without ...c5 next. Then he has an extra pawn but takes obvious risks in terms of development

and kingside defence. See the 'Deeper Look' section for the details, as well as for Black's main alternatives along the way.

### 9...c5 10 Bd3 Nxc3

Now that Black has ...c5 in, he's ready for moves such as ...Nc6 and ...Qa5 on the queenside.

### 11 dxc5 Nc6 12 Nf3 f5

Black has come to play this move most of the time. He feels that it's necessary to slow White down on the kingside. In a few games, Black played 12...f6, when 13 exf6 Qxf6 followed, as in the next note. Some annotators have suggested that this is a way for Black to bypass 12...f5 13 Qh5 (or another queen move). But I don't think White needs to transpose.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! Instead, 12...f6 13 0-0! looks strong:**

**13...fxe5 (or 13...Nxe5? 14 Nxe5 fxe5 15 Bd2! d4 16 Bxc3 dxc3 17 Rad1 and White is already on the verge of winning) 14 Bd2!**

**e4! (14...d4 15 Bxc3 dxc3 16 Rad1 Qf6 17 Rfe1 Bd7 18 Bb5;**

**14...Qa5 15 Qh5! e4 16 Ng5 Qc7 17 Bxc3 exd3 18 cxd3) 15 Bxc3**

**e5 16 Qh5 exf3 17 Qxf3+ Kg8 18 Rad1 and White is on top of the situation.**

### 13 Qh5 (Diagram 19)

The variation 13 exf6 Qxf6 14 Qh5 e5 15 Bg6 Be6 is still being debated, but I suggest using this move, which is somewhat less forcing.

### 13...d4!?

This attack has been played several times but is only one of several moves:

a) The logical development by 13...Bd7 is examined in the game Fressinet-Libiszewski of the theory section (see Line B2).

b) McDonald suggests 13...Qc7 with the idea of ...Nxe5 or ...Qf7 (**Diagram 20**).

He gives 14 0-0!? Qf7!, which at any rate looks complicated and unclear. Alternatively, he rightly calls 14...Nxe5 'risky' on the basis of 15 Nxe5 Qxe5 16 Rfe1 Qf6 17 Bf4 or 17 c6!? with the idea of 18 Bc5+.

Instead of 14 0-0, however, I think that White can cast 13...Qc7 into doubt by 14 Nh4! Qf7 15 Ng6+ Kg8 (or 15...Ke8 16 g4 Rg8 17 f3 Bd7 18 Bf2! and Black is tied up) 16 g4! Rh7 17 Rg1 with advantage.

c) After 13...Qe8 McDonald thinks that White gets the edge after 14 Qxe8+ Kxe8 15 Rg1, intending g4. That can at least be argued. White also has the interesting alternative 14 Qh3; for example, 14...Qg6 (14...Qf7) 15 0-0 Qg4 16 Qxg4 fxd4 17 Nd4 Nxe5 18 Bf4 (18 f3!); 18 f4 Nxd3 19 cxd3) 18...Nxd3 19 cxd3 Bd7 20 f3 Kg8 21 fxd4 Rc8 22 Bd6 Nb5 23 Nxb5 Bxb5 24 Rf3 Kh7 25 Rb1 Bc6 26 d4.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

All of 'a' through to 'c' could use further investigation.

### 14 Bd2 Qd5

Black tried to improve with 14...Qa5 in K.Szabo-Hoang Thanh Trang, Budapest 2006, and succeeded, but White has convincing ways to cast this move into doubt. Refer to 'Looking a Little Deeper' for the theory on this and other continuations.

### 15 Bxc3 dxc3 16 Rd1 Qxc5 17 0-0 Kg8?! (Diagram 21)

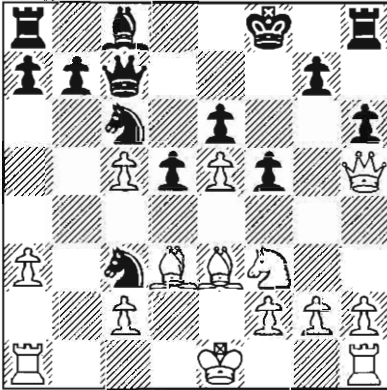


Diagram 20 (W)

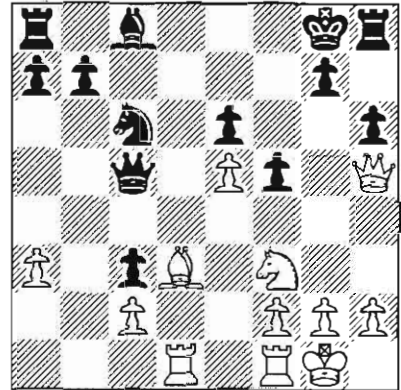


Diagram 21 (W)

This is logical but slow. Perhaps 17...Qe7 was called for, with the idea of ...Qf7 and ...Bd7, and answering 18 Nh4 with 18...Nxe5 19 f4 g5. Nevertheless, one has to like White's prospects overall.

After 17...Kg8?!, White has to move quickly before Black gets his king to safety and exploits his extra pawn.

### 18 Bxf5!!

An astonishing sacrifice! It is based upon White's next move.

### 18...exf5 19 Rd6! (Diagram 22)

This slow move covers e6 and threatens simply Rfd1 and Rd8+. There's almost nothing that can be done against it!

### 19...Be6

Easily the best try in a bad position. Black acquiesces and returns the piece. Getting his bishop out by 19...b5 fails to 20 Qe8+ Kh7 21 Qg6+ Kg8 22 Rfd1 Bb7 (to cover c6) 23 Qe6+ Kh7 (Diagram 23) (23...Kf8 24 Nh4!) 24 Ng5+! hxc5 25 R1d3 and White mates because of the pretty idea 25...g4 26 Rh3+! gxh3 27 Rd3 etc.

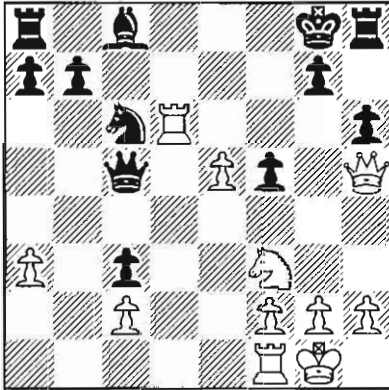
### 20 Rxe6

Now the material is level and the relative position of each side's kings and pieces

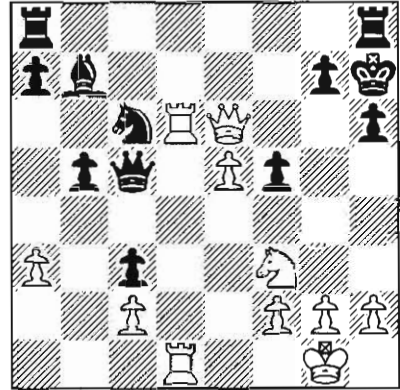
shows who is winning. First, Black must defend f5 and try to chase White's queen away. On top of everything else he has the passed e-pawn to deal with.

**20...Qf8 21 Qh3!?**

21 Rb1 is also strong.



**Diagram 22 (B)**



**Diagram 23 (W)**

**21...Rd8 22 Re1 h5?!**

Further loosening the kingside. Nevertheless, something like 22...Qf7 23 Rd6! is going to win rapidly for White. For one thing, the move Nh4 will create multiple threats.

**23 Ng5 Nd4 24 Rd6! Qe7 25 Qxc3 Qxg5 26 Qxd4 Kh7 27 h4 Qe7 28 Rd1 Rde8**

Or 28...Rxd6 29 exd6 Qd7 30 Re1 and Re7 follows. In any case White's passed pawn is too strong.

**29 e6 Rhg8 30 g3 b6 31 Qe5 Qf6 1-0.**

Perhaps Black ran out of time, but there are various wins; e.g. 32 Qxf6 gxf6 33 Rc6! followed by Rd7.

## Looking a Little Deeper

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4**

6...Nfd7 is considered inferior, for example:

a) 7 a3 Be7 (7...Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 compares poorly with similar lines in the Winawer Variation because ...h6 is a weakness and the knight on d7 can't protect the kingside, as the one on e7 does) 8 f4 g6 9 Nf3 c5 10 Qd2 (**Diagram 24**).

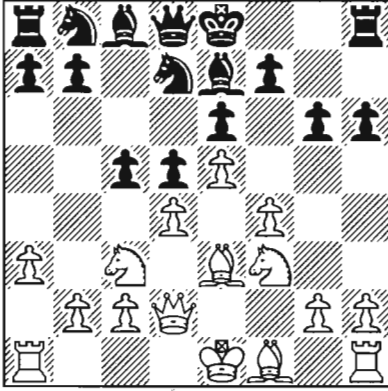


Diagram 24 (B)

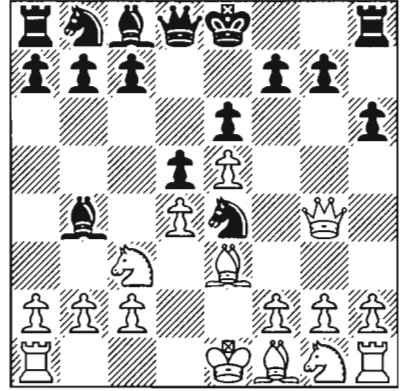


Diagram 25 (B)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Here we have a Classical Steinitz Variation in which White is well ahead in development and Black's kingside is compromised.

S.Chekhov-S.Riabtsev, Voronezh 2004, illustrated the standard way in which White builds up in such positions: 10...Nc6 11 dxc5 Bxc5 12 Bxc5 Nxc5 13 0-0-0 a6 14 Nd4 Bd7 15 g4 Rc8 16 Bg2 Nxd4 17 Qxd4 b5 18 Bxd5! Qc7 19 Kb1 a5 20 Ne4 exd5 21 e6 Nxe4 22 exd7+ Kxd7 23 Qxe4 Kc6 24 Rxd5 Qb6 25 Rd8+ Kc7 26 Rxh8 1-0.

b) 7 Qg4 Bf8 8 f4 (if White gets this move in safely it's a good sign that he stands better) 8...a6 9 Nf3 c5 10 dxc5 Nc6 11 0-0-0 Qa5 12 Bd3 Nxc5 13 Bxc5 Qxc5 14 f5! Nb4 15 Nd4 Nxd3+ 16 Rxd3 h5 17 Qf3 Bd7 18 fxe6 fxe6 19 Nce2 Qa5 20 Kb1 0-0-0 21 Qf7 Rh6 22 Nf4 and Black is obviously in bad shape, V.Jansa-K.Sorri, Harra-chov 1967.

**7 Qg4 (Diagram 25)**

The main line. Now we examine:

**A: 7...g6**

**B: 7...Kf8**

**C: 7...g5**

**A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4 7 Qg4 g6 8 a3 Bxc3+**  
Rare but still important is 8...Ba5!? 9 Nge2! c5 10 dxc5 (Diagram 26).

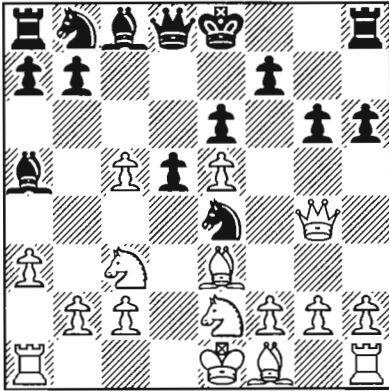


Diagram 26 (B)

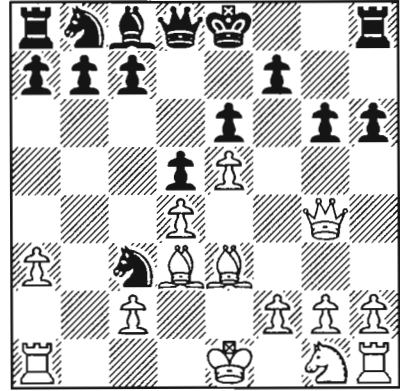


Diagram 27 (B)

For example, 10...Nc6 (after 10...h5 11 Qh3 g5?! 12 Bd4 Nc6 13 0-0-0 f5 14 Nxe4 fxe4 15 f3! exf3 16 Qxf3 White has lasting play against Black's various weaknesses, S.Ionov-A.Alavkin, St Petersburg 2003) 11 b4 Nxe5 12 Qh3 Nxc3 13 Nxc3 Bc7 14 Nb5 Bb8 15 c4 (15 Nd6+! Bxd6 16 cxd6 Qxd6 17 Qg3 with the idea of Bd4 was the best try for advantage – White has an attack for the pawn) 15...a6 16 Nd6+ Bxd6 17 cxd6 Qxd6 18 Bc5?! (18 c5 Qe7 19 Bd4 f6) 18...Nf3+! 19 Qxf3! Qe5+ 20 Kd2 Qb2+ 21 Ke3 Qxa1 (21...Qe5+ repeats, with a draw) 22 Bd3 Qe5+ 23 Kd2 Bd7 24 Rc1 Bc6 25 b5 d4 26 bxc6 Qxc5 27 cxb7 Rb8 28 h4 0-0 29 g4 Kg7 30 Rb1 Qxa3 31 h5 Qa5+ 32 Kc2 Qc3+ 33 Kd1 f5 34 gxf5 gxf5 35 Qg3+ Kf6 36 Qg6+ Ke5 37 Qg7+ Kd6 38 Rb6+ Kc5 1-0 B.Kadziolka-I.Radziewicz, Warsaw 2004. A pretty game with some theoretical value.

### 9 bxc3 Nxc3

White can open up the game productively after 9...c5?! 10 Bd3 Nxc3 with 11 dxc5! Nc6 (11...Qa5 12 Qb4 Qxb4 13 axb4 gives White two bishop and a large endgame advantage) 12 Nf3 Qa5 13 0-0 Qa4 (Z.Hracek-A.Vaisser, European Team Ch., Pula 1997) and here Finkel suggests 14 Qh3! Bd7 15 Rfe1 d4?! 16 Bg5 Qa5 17 Bf6 Rg8 18 Nd2 with a clear advantage.

### 10 Bd3 (Diagram 27)

Now we examine:

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**A1: 10...Nc6**

**A2: 10...c5**

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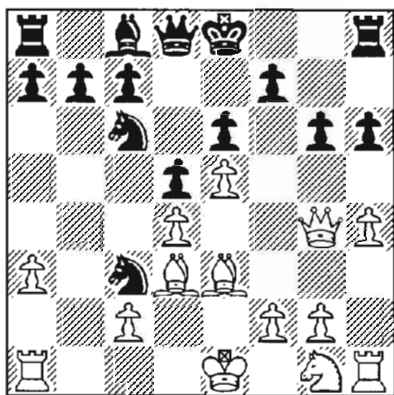
## Dangerous Weapons: The French

10...b6 was seen in our illustrative game Naiditsch-Stellwagen, and looked pretty good for White. 10...Qe7 is slow and invites a direct attack: 11 h4 Nc6 12 h5 g5 13 f4 gxf4 14 Qxf4 Bd7 15 Nh3! 0-0-0 16 Bf2 Qf8 17 Bh4 with considerable pressure, T.Ernst-S.Brynell, Swedish League 2002. It will be hard for Black to hold his king-side together, although in fact he won after White played inaccurately.

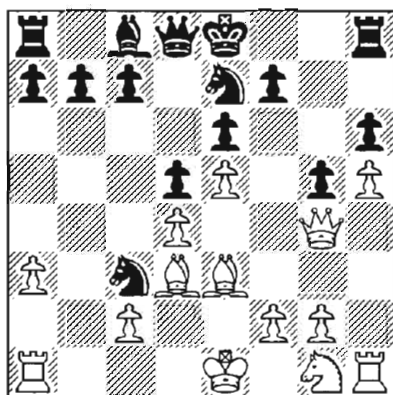
**A1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4 7 Qg4 g6 8 a3 Bxc3+9 bxc3 Nxc3 10 Bd3 Nc6**

The theory of both this move and 10...c5 has grown significantly in the past few years, so I'll just follow some main lines and give a few tips. My overall impression is that I'd rather play White, but in general I'd just call it a good fight.

**11 h4 (Diagram 28)**



**Diagram 28 (B)**



**Diagram 29 (W)**

Grabbing space. The similar 11 Nf3 Bd7 12 h4 Qe7!? 13 h5 g5 led to double-edged play in P.Svidler-S.Vysochin, Brussels (rapid) 2000 after 14 Nh2!? 0-0-0 15 Qf3 f5 16 exf6 Qd6 17 Ng4 e5 18 Nxe5 Nxe5 19 dxe5 Qxe5 20 0-0 Rhf8.

**11...Ne7**

11...Qe7?! has done very poorly in the last two years after 12 h5 (or, similarly, 12 Nh3 Bd7 13 h5 g5 14 f4 gxf4 15 Bf2, although White's knight more often goes to f3) 12...g5 13 f4 gxf4 14 Qxf4 Bd7 15 Bf2! with the idea of Bh4 and taking over the dark squares. There are a variety of move orders expressing this basic idea of f4 gxf4; Bf2, normally with the Qxf4 recapture.

**12 h5 g5 (Diagram 29) 13 f3!?**

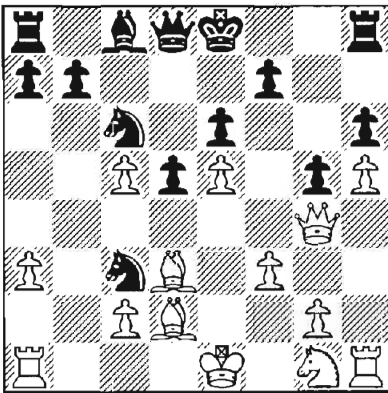
The main line. White tries to keep a knight out of e4, but he should probably search for something else:

a) A recent game, E.Najer-I.Nepomniachtchi, Moscow 2006, saw the modest 13

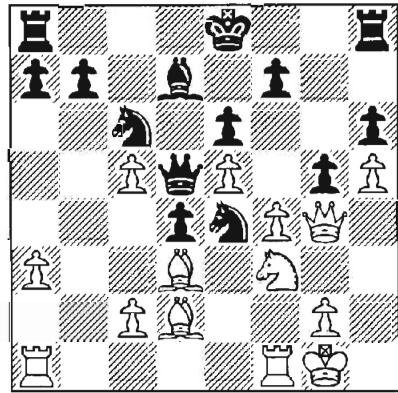
Ne2!? Nxe2 14 Qxe2, trying to exploit Black's general weaknesses. Black incurred a small disadvantage after 14...c5 15 dxc5, so perhaps 14...Nf5 15 0-0 Bd7 was correct (15...0-0?! 16 g4!), with castling queenside the leading possibility. I'm sure that this will receive more tests.

b) 13 f4 codes light squares like e4, but attacks g5 immediately and should be given attention. For example, the sequence 13...Nf5 14 Bc1 (14 Bd2 Ne4 15 fxg5 Nxd2 16 Kxd2 Qxg5+ 17 Qxg5 hxg5 leads to almost precisely equal chances) 14...c5 15 fxg5 Qc7 16 gxh6 Ne4 17 Ne2 cxd4 18 Qf4 with the idea of g4 is very complex but I think a bit better for White, as is 13...Nf5 14 fxg5 Ne4 15 Bc1 hxg5 16 Ne2. At any rate these are full-bodied lines.

**13...c5 14 dxc5 Nc6 15 Bd2!?** (Diagram 30)



**Diagram 30 (B)**



**Diagram 31 (W)**

Black seems to be well off after this. Amonatov gives 15 f4 Qa5 16 Bd2 Qxc5 17 fxg5 Nxe5 18 Qb4 Qxb4 19 axb4 with a small advantage, although 19...Nxd3+ 20 cxd3 d4 looks fine.

**15...d4!?**

This has been played in many games, but the obvious 15...f5(!) went untested for some time. In S.Zawadzki-J.Owczarzak, Polanica Zdroj 2005, play continued 16 Qg3 (16 exf6 Qxf6 17 Bg6+ Ke7 looks strong for Black, since 18 Rc1 is the only way to avoid material loss, but then 18...e5 must favour Black) 16...Na4 17 Qf2 a6 (17...Qc7) 18 f4 g4 19 Ne2 d4 20 Rb1 Nxc5 and Black stands solidly. This indicates that White might want to look into earlier options.

**16 f4 Qd5 17 Nf3 Bd7**

A.Tukhaev-J.Glud, Herceg Novi 2005, took the course 17...Ne4 18 fxg5 Nxd2 19 Kxd2 Nxe5 20 Nxe5 Qxe5 21 g6!? f5. White has several possible set-ups, of which I think that 22 Qh4 Qxc5 23 Rae1 offers the best return.

**18 0-0 Ne4 (Diagram 31)**

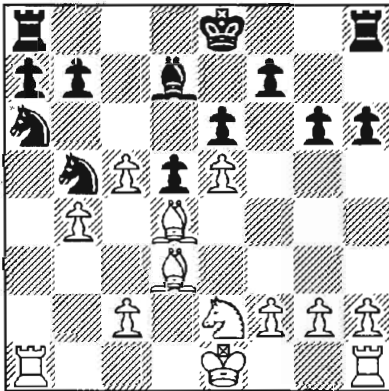
Possibly better was 18...0-0-0 19 fxg5 hxg5 20 Rae1 Rdg8 21 Bxg5 Qxc5, but here 21...Be8?! 22 Qh3 Qxc5? quickly went sour after 23 h6 Nd5 24 h7 Rg7 25 Bf6 Nf4 26 Qh6 (or 26 Bxg7 Nxh3+ 27 gxh3 Rxh7 28 Bxh7) 26...Rxc2+ 27 Kh1 Nxd3 28 Bxh8 Qxc2 29 Bf6 Nxe1 30 Nxe1 Qe2 31 Nxc2 Qxf1+ 32 Kh2 1-0 F.Amonatov-I.Glek, Vladimir 2004.

After 18...Ne4, R.Castellanos-H.Herraiz Hidalgo, Calvia Olympiad 2004, continued 19 Bxe4 Qxe4 20 Rae1 Qf5! 21 Qxf5 exf5 22 fxg5 hxg5 23 Nxc5!? Rxh5 24 e6! fxe6 25 Nxc6 Kf7 26 Ng5+ Kg6 27 Nh3 Rh4 28 Rb1 Nd8. At this point 29 Nf4+! would show up the weaknesses in Black's structure; for example, 29...Kf7 30 Rb4 (or 30 c3!?) 30...Ne6 (30...Bc6 31 Rxd4 Rg4 32 Rd6) 31 Rxb7 Nxc5 32 Rc7 Rc8 33 Rxa7 and Black is a pawn down, while his pieces are still exposed.

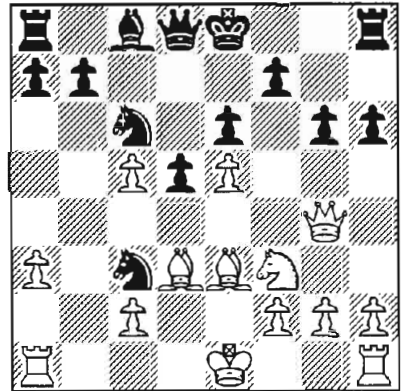
White has scored quite well in this main line, but 15...f5! looks like a good solution for Black. So you might want to investigate earlier options, particularly on White's 13th move. We see that 6 Be3 hasn't quite refuted the MacCutcheon yet!

**A2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4 7 Qg4 g6 8 a3 Bxc3+9 bxc3 Nxc3 10 Bd3 c5 11 dxc5 Nc6**

A good answer to 11...Qa5 is 12 Qb4! Qxb4 13 axb4 Bd7 (13...Nc6 14 Ra3! d4 15 Bxd4 Nd5! 16 c3 Nxd4 17 cxd4 Nxb4 18 Be4 favours White) 14 Bd4 Nb5 15 Ne2 Na6 (Diagram 32).



**Diagram 32 (W)**



**Diagram 33 (B)**

Black's problem in these frequently arising positions is that White's pawns on e5 and c5 constitute a space advantage that can't be challenged except by making serious concessions. Exchanging off White's bad bishop centralizes White's knight, but otherwise the bishop pair can cause trouble: 16 c3 Nac7 17 Kd2 (17

Be3!) 17...Bc6 18 f3 Kd7 19 h4 h5 20 Be3 a6 21 Bg5 Na7 22 Bf6 Rhg8 23 g4!? (23 Nd4! Bb5 24 Bc2) 23...Bb5 24 gxf5 gxf5 (S.Zawadzki-D.Varga, Olomouc 2006) and here 25 Rhg1 eventually led to a win, but 25 Nf4! would have left Black under too much pressure on the kingside.

### **12 Nf3 (Diagram 33)**

Also interesting is 12 Bd2!? Nc4 13 Bxe4 dxc4 14 Qxe4 Qd4 15 Qxd4 Nxd4 16 0-0-0, M.Rutkowski-M.Bronowicki, Marianske Lazne 2005.

### **12...d4!?**

The danger is that White will blockade the position while Black is stuck with his bad bishop; another line is 12...Qe7 13 0-0 a5?! 14 Rfe1 (a good move, and 14 a4! is also attractive) 14...Bd7 15 h4!? 0-0-0 16 a4! f5? 17 exf6 Qxf6 18 Qxg6!? (or 18 Qf4!) 18...Qe7 19 Qg3 Ne4 20 Bxe4 dxe4 21 Nd2 e5 22 Nxe4 and White was winning, A.Kosteniuk-Xu Yuhua, Krasnoturinsk 2005.

Going back, 13 a4! with the idea of Ra3 and/or a4-a5 is a characteristic manoeuvre; for example, 13...Bd7 14 Ra3!? d4 15 Bxd4 h5! 16 Qf4 Nd5 17 Qe4 Nxd4 18 Qxd4 0-0-0!? (intending ...Bc6), and here 19 0-0 Bc6 20 Bb5 seems to favour White. The rook is well placed on the third rank in these lines.

### **13 Bxd4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Qd5 15 Nf3**

Or 15 0-0 Qxe5 16 Rfe1 Qg5 17 Qxg5 hxg5 18 a4!. White keeps Black's knight out of a4 and supports a possible Nb5.

### **15...Qxc5 16 0-0**

16 Qb4!? Qxb4!? 17 axb4 gives White a standard advantage in space and activity. Better would be 16...b6!.

### **16...Bd7 17 Qh4 Bc6 18 Rfe1**

With complications, perhaps slightly in White's favour, R.Zakhartsov-R.Borovlev, Kamensk-Shakhtinsky 2004. Obviously there are all kinds of options along the way.

### **B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4 7 Qg4 Kf8**

This has been played in many recent contests and the theory ricochets from equal to better for White depending upon the latest innovation. Right now White seems to be on top.

### **8 a3 Bxc3+**

Occasionally 8...Ba5 is seen, but White seems to gain an advantage after 9 Nge2. For example, 9...c5 10 dxc5 Nxc3 11 Nxc3 Nc6 12 b4 (12 Qg3! Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 Qa5 14 Bd2 Qxc5 15 Bd3 also looks good) 12...Nxe5 13 Qh5 Bc7 14 Nb5 Bd7 15 Nxc7 Qxc7 16 Be2 Ba4 17 Rc1 Nc4 (V.Iordachescu-G.Singh, Calcutta 2000) and now 18 Bxc4! dxc4 19 Qh4 Bb5 20 0-0 leaves Black's king stuck.

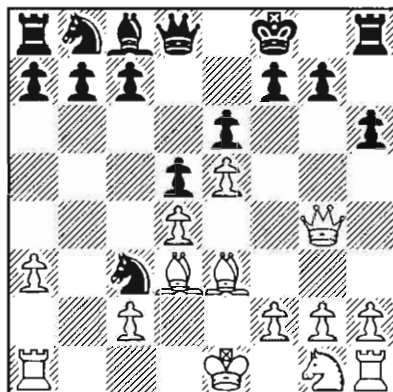
### **9 bxc3**

At this point Black has two important moves:

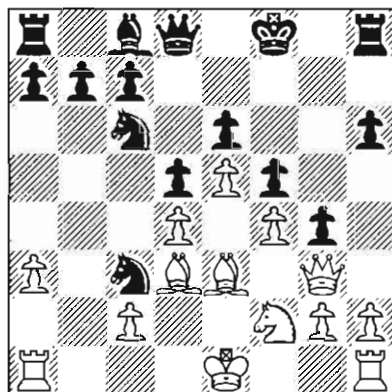
**B1: 9...Nxc3**

**B2: 9...c5**

**B1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4 7 Qg4 Kf8  
8 a3 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 Nxc3 10 Bd3 (Diagram 34)**



**Diagram 34 (B)**



**Diagram 35 (B)**

**10...Nc6**

10...Bd7?! gives White time enough to get a knight to f4 and create kingside chances. A.Zontakh-S.Volkov, Sochi 2004, went 11 Nh3! Nc6 12 Nf4 Ne7 13 Nh5 g6 14 Nf6 Bb5 15 h4! Bxd3 (McDonald points out the cute line 15...h5 16 Qf4 Bxd3? 17 Qh6+ Rxb6 18 Bxb6 mate) 16 cxd3 Nf5 17 h5 g5 (17...Nxe3 18 fxe3 g5 19 0-0) 18 Bd2! Nb5 19 f4! c5 20 dxc5? (White misses 20 fxg5! Nbx4 21 0-0, when g6 will lead to an overwhelming position) 20...Nbd4 21 0-0 Nb3 22 fxg5 Nxd2 23 Rxf5 exf5, and here Zontakh still could have played 24 Qxf5! with the idea 24...Qc8 25 Nd7+ Ke7 26 Re1!.

**11 Nh3!?**

I think that 11 h4, having Nh3-f4 in mind, is more flexible. For example, 11...f5 12 Qf4 Ne7 (12...Bd7 has also been played) 13 h5 Qe8 (obviously Black's last two moves are not the only ones) 14 g4 Qf7 15 g5 hxg5 16 Qxg5 Ne4 17 Bxe4 dxe4 18 Ne2 Bd7 19 Nf4 Ke8 20 0-0-0 b5 21 Rdg1 Rg8 22 h6 gxh6 23 Qxh6 a5 24 Rxb8+ Nxb8 25 Qh8 Qf8 26 Ng6 Qxa3+ 27 Kd1 1-0 N.Zhukova-H.Groffen, Gibraltar 2006. This line will doubtless receive more tests.

**11...f5! 12 Qg3**

12 Qh5 Qe8! has been played successfully by Black. White won't make progress on the kingside.

**12...g5**

Or:

a) Finkel gives 12...Ne7 13 Nf4 Kf7 14 h4 Ne4 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 h5 with excellent compensation for a pawn.

b) 12...Qe8 13 f3!? (to keep Black's knight out of e4; 13 f4 would have the idea of Rg1 and, after the queen moves, g2-g4) 13...g5 (to prevent Nf4 and h2-h4, as well as the idea of trapping the c3-knight by a3-a4) 14 Bd2!? (14 0-0 might initiate various sacrifices after ...f4, none of which seem at all clear) 14...Na4 15 Bb5 Nb6 16 f4 g4 17 Bxc6 (17 Nf2) 17...Qxc6 (White meets 17...bxc6 with 18 Nf2 followed by h2-h3) 18 Qh4 (or 18 Nf2) 18...Qe8 19 Nf2 with an unclear position.

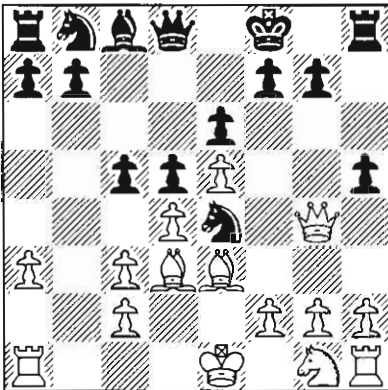
**13 f4!? g4 14 Nf2 (Diagram 35) 14...Ne4**

Here Finkel analyses 14...h5 15 h3 Kf7 (or 15...h4 16 hxg4 hxg3 17 Rxh8+ Kg7 18 Rxd8 gxf2+ 19 Kd2 Nxd8 20 Kxc3 fxg4 21 Bxf2 with a winning advantage) 16 hxg4 hxg4 17 Rxh8 Qxh8 18 Kd2 Na4 19 Rh1 with the initiative.

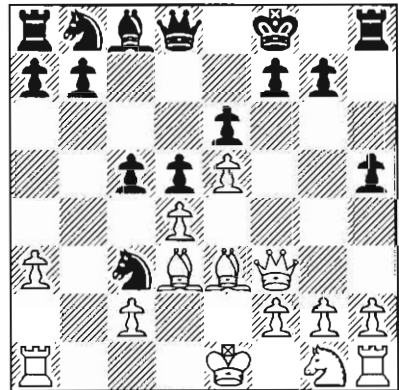
After 14...Ne4, 15 Nxe4 dxe4 16 Bc4! is promising for White but extremely difficult to assess. Instead, A.Areshchenko-S.Volkov, Gibraltar 2006, went 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 h3 gxh3! 17 Rxh3 Qe7 18 c4!? b6?! 19 d5 with some advantage. Black should have played something more neutral such as 18...Kf7, when equality seems to be a fair verdict.

**B2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4 7 Qg4 Kf8 8 a3 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 c5 10 Bd3 Nxc3**

A key alternative is 10...h5 (Diagram 36).



**Diagram 36 (W)**



**Diagram 37 (W)**

Black tries to force White's queen onto an undesirable square. Although not a popular move, games thus far have failed to show an advantage for White:

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

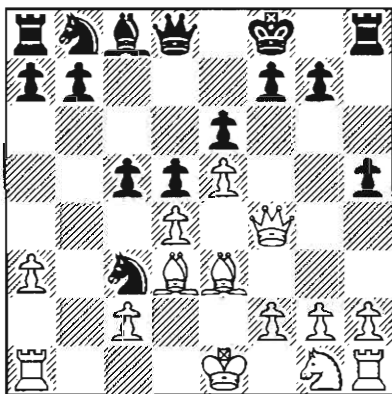
a) The big-time game G.Kasparov-V.Korchnoi, Kopavogur 2000, went 11 Qf4 Qa5 12 Ne2 Nxc3 13 0-0 Nxe2+ 14 Bxe2 Nc6 15 c4 cxd4 16 Bxd4 Nxd4 17 Qxd4 Bd7 18 cxd5 exd5 19 Bf3 Bc6 ½-½. Notice that in this line 13 Bd2 Nxe2 hits f4; compare 11 Qf3 where that isn't true.

b) 11 Qf3 and now:

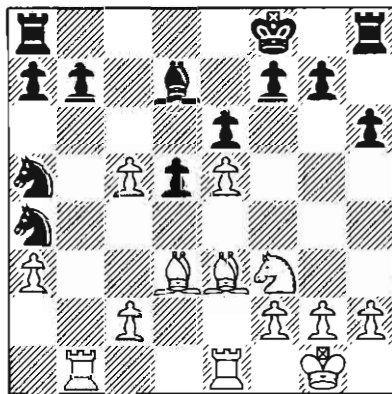
b1) McDonald mentions the possibility of 11...Qa5 12 Ne2 Nxc3, but then 13 Bd2! cxd4 14 Nxd4 is strong: 14...Qc7 15 0-0 Ne4 16 Bxe4 dxe4 17 Qxe4 Nd7 18 Bb4+ Kg8 19 Bd6 Qc4 20 Rad1 and White is clearly better; Rd3-g3 is one idea.

b2) After 11...Nxc3 (**Diagram 37**), A.Goloshchapov-B.Reefat, Dhaka 2003, continued 12 dxc5 Nc6 13 Qf4 d4 14 Bd2 Na4? (14...Nd5! was much better and fully equal; for example, 15 Qe4 f5 16 exf6 Nxf6 17 Qg6 e5 18 f3 Qd5) 15 Bb5! Nxc5 16 Bxc6 bxc6 17 Bb4 Qd5 18 0-0-0! Kg8 19 Nf3. White has a winning game with his large lead in development, open lines, and active pieces.

Exchanging on c5 is held to be best in all these positions, but I think that holding on to the centre has its advantages. White might try 12 Qf4!? (**Diagram 38**) and:



**Diagram 38 (B)**



**Diagram 39 (W)**

b1) After 12...cxd4 13 Qxd4 Qc7 14 Nf3 b6 White retains the better position following either 15 Ng5 Ba6 16 Rfe1 or 15 0-0.

b2) 12...Qa5? 13 Bd2 and there's no knight to capture on e2!

b3) 12...c4 13 Bg6 Qc7 may be best, although one still prefers White a bit after 14 Qf3 h4 15 Nh3 Kg8 16 Bh5.

b4) 12...Nc6 13 Nf3 cxd4 14 Nxd4 g5 (or 14...Ne7 15 Bd2 Qc7 16 0-0 Bd7 17 Rfe1 with the idea of Re3) 15 Qg3 Nxd4 16 Bxd4 Ne4 17 Qe3! (White threatens to trap the knight with f3) 17...b6 18 0-0 Bb7 19 f3 Nc5 20 f4 Nxd3 21 cxd3 g4 22 f5 and again Black's exposed king leaves him worse off.

12 Qf4 is an important attempt to preserve White's advantage in this variation.

**11 dxc5 Nc6 12 Nf3 f5**

12...Qa5 13 0-0 Bd7 14 Rfe1 (Finkel gives the line 14 a4!? Qb4! 15 Qxb4 Nxb4, but then 16 a5! retains the pawn and good chances) 14...Qa4 was played in L.Fressinet-G.Vallin, French League 2005. Now White should play 15 Qxa4! Nxa4 16 Rab1 Na5 (**Diagram 39**). The two bishops still have their influence; for example, 17 Bd2 (or 17 Nd2 Rc8 18 c6 Nxc6 19 Rxb7) 17...Nc6 18 Rxb7 Nxc5 19 Rc7 Ke7 20 Nd4! Nxd4 21 Bb4 and White has a significant advantage.

**13 Qh5 (Diagram 40) 13...Bd7**

Heading for e8 to drive White's queen away. The main line is 13...d4 14 Bd2 Qa5!? (trying to improve upon 14...Qd5, which is seen in the illustrative game Goloshchapov-Volkov) 15 0-0 (15 Nh4 Nxe5 16 f4 Nxd3+ 17 cxd3 isn't clear) 15...Bd7 16 Rab1 Rb8 17 Rb3 (17 Ng5!? Nd8 18 Rb4! is an option, chasing down the d-pawn at all costs; for example, 18...Qxc5 19 Rc4! Qd5 20 Nf3 Nc6 21 Nxd4! Nxe5 22 Nxe6+ Qxe6 23 Rxc3 and White has a clear advantage, if only due to Black's exposed king) 17...Qxc5 18 Nxd4 Nxd4 19 Rxc3 Qxe5 20 Re1 Qf6 (K.Szabo-Hoang Thanh Trang, Budapest 2006) and here 21 Rc7! Be8 22 Qh3 leaves Black with all kinds of problems on the dark squares, in view of the ideas Bf4 and Bc3. After 22...e5, 23 Bc4! is a killer.

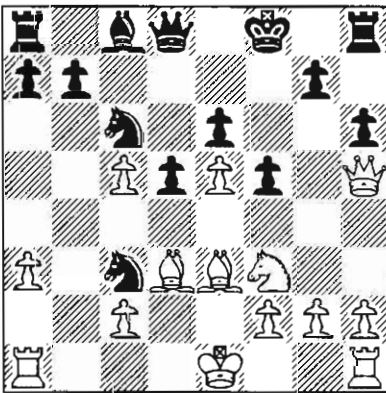
**14 g4 Be8**

14...d4 is met by 15 Bf4.

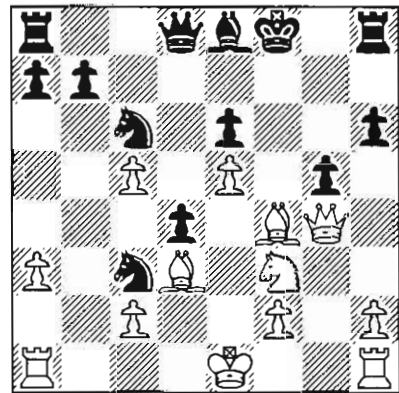


**BEWARE! But not 15 Nxd4?? Nxd4 16 Bxd4 Be8, winning a piece!**

**15 Qh3 d4 16 Bf4 fxe4 17 Qxe4 g5 (Diagram 41)**



**Diagram 40 (B)**



**Diagram 41 (W)**

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It looks like there are too many white pieces on the kingside to get away with this. And there are.

**18 Rg1! Bf7 19 h4! gxf4 20 Qg7+ Ke7 21 Qf6+ Kd7 22 Qxf7+ Qe7 23 Qxe7+ Nxe7 24 Nxd4**

Black has got out of the attack alive, but faces a hopeless situation.

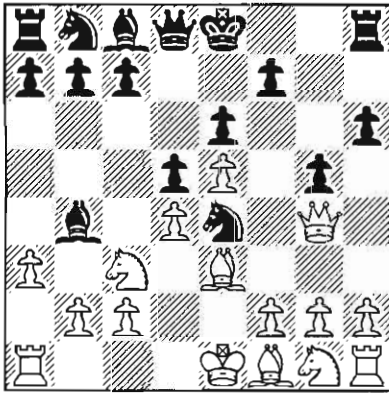
**24...Rac8 25 Nb3 Rcg8 26 Kd2 Ned5 27 Nd4 h5**

Preventing White from playing h5, which in turn would threaten Rg6 followed by doubling rooks.

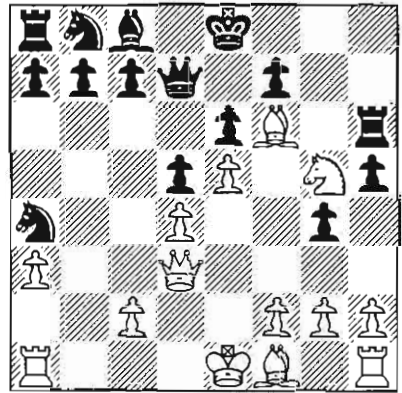
**28 Rg5! Rxg5 29 hxg5 h4 30 g6 h3 31 Rh1 Ke7 32 c6! bxc6 33 Nxc6+ Kf8 34 Nd4 Ke7 35 Nc6+ Kf8 36 Nxa7 Rh5 37 Nc6 Rg5 38 Nb4**

White has three passed pawns and will soon simplify, L.Fressinet-F.Libiszewski, French League 2005.

**C) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4 7 Qg4 g5!? 8 a3 (Diagram 42)**



**Diagram 42 (B)**



**Diagram 43 (B)**

This move is safer than 8 h4!? (see the illustrative game Panjwani-Arsenault). At first 8 a3 seems like an unlikely try for an advantage because Black develops rapidly. Still, a fully satisfactory sequence for Black has been hard to find.

**8...h5 9 Qd1!**

10 Qf3 is another try but it uses up the f3-square for White's knight and hasn't yielded anything.

**9...Bxc3+**

The main move, but two plausible alternatives have been tried:

a) 9...Nxc3 10 Qd2! (10 Qd3 isn't bad, although 10...Ba5 11 Bd2! is probably better

than 11 b4 Ne4 12 f3 c5!, as has been played) 10...Ba5 11 bxc3 g4 12 Bg5! Bxc3 13 Qxc3 Qxg5 14 Qxc7 with a limited but definite advantage.

b) 9...Ba5!? 10 Nge2! (10 b4 Nxc3 11 Qd3 c5! 12 Qxc3 cxd4 13 Bxd4 Bc7 gave Black counterplay in D.Stojanovski-A.Roghani, Yerevan 2001, although White may be able to find a small edge here) 10...c5 11 dxc5 Nc6 12 Bd4 (or 12 b4! Nxc3 13 Nxc3 Bc7 14 Bd4) 12...Bc7 13 f3 Nxc3 14 Nxc3 Nxe5 (14...Bxe5 15 Bxe5 Nxe5 16 Qd4 f6 17 h4 Nc6 18 Qf2 Kf7 19 0-0-0 Bd7 20 Nb5 Kg7 21 Nd6 gives good prospects for White) 15 Bb5+ Bd7 16 Bxd7+ Qxd7 17 h4! and regardless of what Black does, White will exploit the vulnerable position of the knight on e5. For example: 17...gxh4 18 f4; or 17...0-0-0 18 hxg5 Rhg8 19 Qe2! Nc4 20 0-0-0, or 20 b3.

**10 bxc3 Nxc3 11 Qd3 Na4 12 Nf3 g4**

After 12...c5 13 Bxg5 Qb6 14 Be2 Bd7 15 0-0 Black's kingside was seriously damaged in S.Zawadzki-O.Kurmann, Balatonlelle 2002.

**13 Bg5 Qd7 14 Bf6 Rh6**

Now, although 15 Nh4 should probably have given White some advantage in V.Belov-A.Alavkin, Sochi 2004, Finkel's suggestion of 15 Ng5! (**Diagram 43**) is strong. After 15...Qc6, he analyses 16 h3 gxh3 17 Nxh3 Nd7 18 Bg5 Rg6 19 Bd2 and Nf4, while also strong is 16 Qb3 Qc3+ (16...Nd7 17 Bd3) 17 Qxc3 Nxc3 18 Bd3 Rxf6 (18...Nd7 19 Bg7) 19 exf6 Nd7 20 Kd2 Na4 21 h3, when Black will end up with nothing for the exchange.

**Conclusion**

---

The real point of all this analysis is that 6 Be3 is sound and quite promising. I doubt that it gains an advantage by force, but leading players are still unsure how to achieve equality as Black. 6 Be3 will set your opponents many problems, ones that will be particularly frustrating for those who have spent their time studying 6 Bd2.

**Characterization of 6 Be3**

---

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣
Attacking Nature	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣
Positional/Strategic Nature	♣ ♣ ♣
Risk	♣ ♣ ♣
Reward	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣
Theoretical Depth	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

## Chapter Two

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# A Beginner's Move?

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7  
7 Qh5!? (Diagram 1)

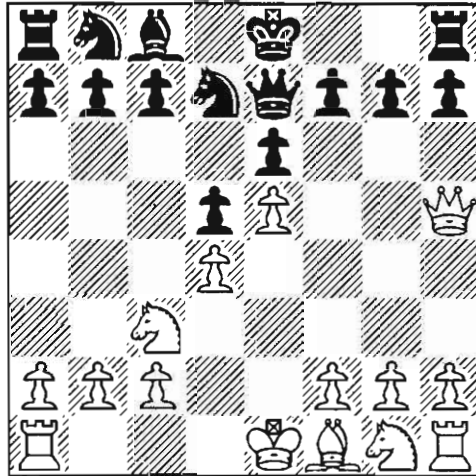


Diagram 1 (B)

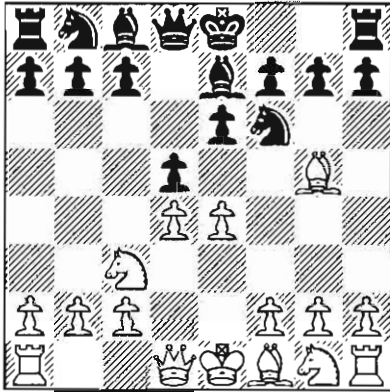
What can White do about the Classical Variation of the French, where it seems as though every line has been worked out in detail? After all, quite a lot of theory had already been developed by the 1920s, and the Classical Variation has also en-

joyed a revival in modern, computer-dominated times. I wasn't confident about finding a corner of theory that was worthwhile and yet open to truly fresh investigation. After scouring around, however, I located an unusual move that produces play ranging from the ultra-positional to the ultra-tactical, giving us original positions galore! As far as I can see, it is perfectly satisfactory from a theoretical point of view as well.

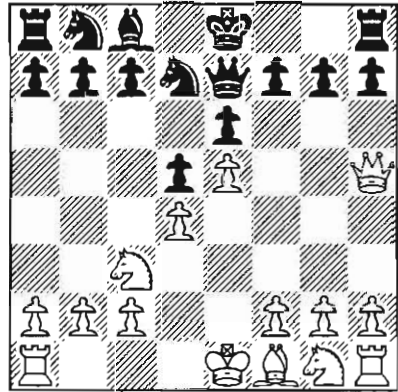
**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5**

My suggestion involves foregoing 4 e5, another major variation.

**4...Be7 (Diagram 2)**



**Diagram 2 (W)**



**Diagram 3 (B)**

This position defines the 4 Bg5 Classical Variation. 4...Bb4 would enter into the MacCutcheon Variation (see Chapter 1!).

**5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7**

Now we're in the main line. White has tried many moves here, including 7 Nf3 and 7 Qg4 (these are considered inferior), 7 Bd3, 7 Nb5, 7 Qd2 and 7 f4. The latter is the main approach, shoring up the centre against dissolution by ...c5 and ...cxd4, and/or ...f6. A move that has received almost no attention is...

**7 Qh5!? (Diagram 3)**

A beginner's move! Of the major authors and books that I'm aware of, only Tiemann, Minev, and *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings (ECO)* give 7 Qh5 even a passing mention. The wordless *ECO* refers to 7 Qh5, but says only '7 Qh5 0-0!' with a slight advantage for Black, a judgment they rightly accredit to Keres. Tiemann assigns 7 Qh5 a '?' and is satisfied with quoting one brief excerpt to show Black's advantage. Unfortunately, that excerpt ends in a position in which White has a one-move tactic which after some forced moves gives him a winning advantage!

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

To Tiemann's credit, this indicates computer-free analysis, a rare and valuable practice that probably accounts for many of the fresh ideas in his excellent book. Nevertheless, 7 Qh5 escapes his book with its reputation unscathed.

Minev is the open-minded one, giving 14 moves of the Fuderer-Guimard game below. He also quotes Keres, but suggests that 7 Qh5 0-0 8 f4 c5 9 Nf3 Nc6 10 0-0-0 could use a practical test. I should also mention that several books deal briefly with the related line 7 f4 a6 8 Qh5, a transposition of 7 Qh5 a6!? 8 f4!?. We look at this below.

### What is the point of 7 Qh5?

---

On the most obvious level, it develops the queen and puts it in a good position to pursue a kingside attack. For example, after ...0-0, the moves Nf3 and Bd3 are useful in that regard, and White can also consider ideas such as h4 (possibly with Rh3-g3), or Re1-e3 and swinging the rook to the kingside, or f4 and Rf3, doing the same. Of course Black is by no means obligated to go along with all this, but 7 Qh5 has other virtues. For one thing, it stops ...f5 and ...f6, two of Black's most common moves in the Classical. Compare this with 7 Qg4, which encourages ...f5 and does little useful about ...f6 (in fact, if White plays exf6 at some point, he is subject to a later ...e5 with tempo).

It's worth comparing the standard 7 f4 plan, in which White plays the moves Nf3 and Qd2. In that case White's queen performs extremely useful central functions, but doesn't have easy access to the kingside. As in several variations of the French Defence, 7 Qh5 brings the queen out in front of the development of White's knight to f3, before it is blocked off by that move.

This brings up a serious weakness of 7 Qh5, and one that can create tactical excitement. White's queen abandons the defence of her centre, in particular the key d4-square, so that in many lines you will see the centre at least partially broken down while White pursues his ambitions against the king. Obviously central collapse is not a desirable long-term trade-off, but by virtue of the first move and the placement of his pieces, White can usually stake a claim to some central squares and avoid the destruction of his pawn chain. Alternatively, he may be able to get to Black's king in return.

We'll begin with a relatively slow-placed manoeuvring game to show the positional side to playing 7 Qh5. White gains the upper hand before going astray, something that also occurs in the game that I've placed in the notes. Nevertheless, it's a good sign that both players are put upon their own resources very early on, in contrast to the normal Classical lines.

## Illustrative Games

□ R.Scheipl ■ H.Lieb

Menden 1974

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 7 Qh5 a6 (Diagram 4)

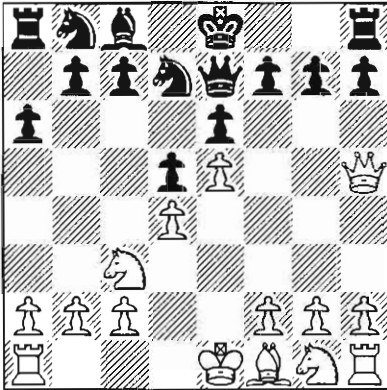


Diagram 4 (W)

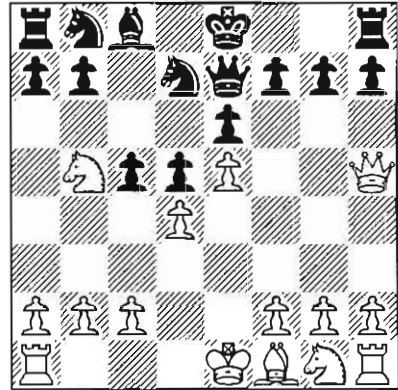


Diagram 5 (B)

This is a commonsense response, preparing ...c5 without allowing Nb5. Black feels that he is saving a tempo by not castling, as well as staying out of the way of a kingside attack. The downside is that White can keep his centre intact and enjoy a lasting space advantage. In most variations Black will have a bishop that is passively placed behind its own lines. In general the play will be driven by positional concerns.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Every *Dangerous Weapon* should have its own tricks and traps. At this point there is a simple one in 7...c5?, when White can grab the opportunity to play 8 Nb5! (Diagram 5), which threatens both Nc7+ and Nd6+.

This can lead to something along the lines of 8...0-0 (8...g6 9 Qh6) 9 Nc7 cxd4 10 0-0-0! (and not 10 Nxa8?, as has been played more than once: 10...Qb4+ 11 Kd1 Qxb2! 12 Rc1 Nc5! 13 Nf3 Ne4 14 Qh4 Nc3+ 15 Kd2 Ne4+ 16 Kd1 Nc3+ with perpetual check) 10...g6! (better than 10...Nb6 11 Nxa8 Nxa8 12 Nf3 or 10...Nxe5 11 Nxa8 Nbc6 12 f4!) 11 Qh6 Nxe5 12 Nxa8 b6 13 Ne2! Bb7 14 Nxb6 axb6 15 Nxd4, and White's material is the key factor; for example, 15...Ng4 16 Qf4 f5 17 Re1 e5 18

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

f3 Qb4? (although White is well on top after 18...Qg7 19 Qg3 Ne3 20 Ne6 Qh6 21 f4) 19 Rxe5 Nxe5 20 Qxe5.

### 8 Bd3

White plays an irregular move order to prevent Black from castling, but it transposes. See the note to White's tenth move, and then Line A2 of the theory section for the safe 8 f4.

### 8...c5 9 dxc5

A characteristic move of this variation. White surrenders the centre, but eliminates the need to defend d4 and gives his knights a good operating point on that square.

### 9...Nc6 10 Nf3 (Diagram 6)

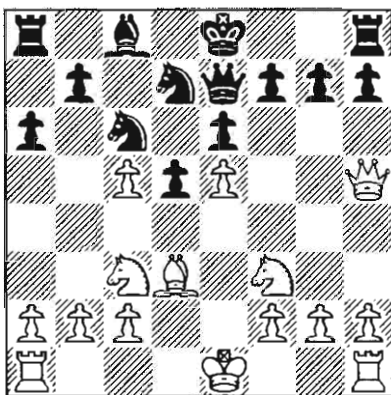


Diagram 6 (B)

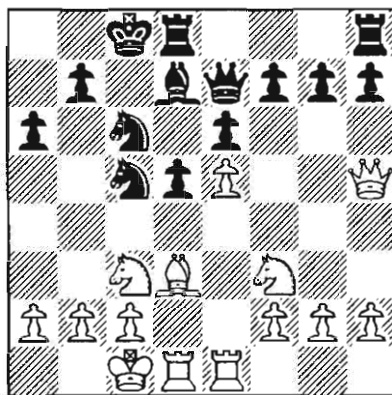


Diagram 7 (W)

This position will more likely arise via 8 Nf3 c5 9 dxc5 Nc6 10 Bd3, as occurred in the Fuderer-Guimard game cited below. It is rather unique in that White has foregone f2-f4, his normal method of supporting his centre. In part that is because ...a6 is a rather slow move which gives White time to secure e5 (and ultimately d4) without running into any tactics. A positional struggle ensues.

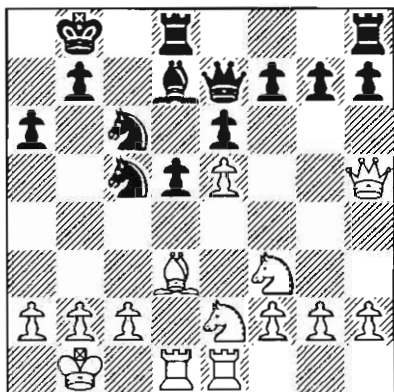
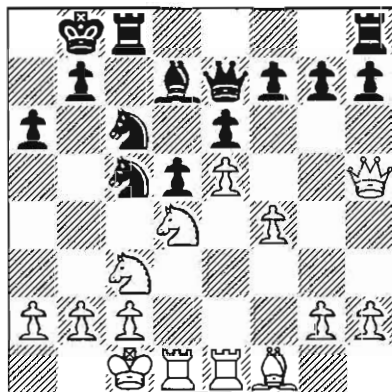
### 10...Nxc5 11 0-0-0 Bd7 12 Rhe1 0-0-0 (Diagram 7)

Here we have a calm set-up for both sides in which Black has avoided the tactics that can arise when he castles kingside. In those lines he depends upon either ...f6 or ...f5 to disrupt the centre. In our game, Black has castled queenside and developed his pieces logically, not even attempting to undermine the centre. In the meantime, White has overprotected his pawn on e5.

Black's other logical move, 12...Nxd3+, can be answered by 13 Rxd3, covering d4 while possibly eyeing squares such as g3 or c3 with attacking ideas in mind. Or White can play 13 cxd3, a standard pawn structure that we'll see elsewhere.

**13 Bf1**

White saves his bishop. 13 Kb1 was played in the early game A.Fuderer-C.Guimard, Amsterdam Olympiad 1954: 13...Kb8 14 Ne2 (**Diagram 8**).

**Diagram 8 (B)****Diagram 9 (B)**

Here Mineev comments, 'White has a more comfortable position'. True, occupation of d4 is a plus, particularly since it supports the thematic advance f2-f4-f5. Nevertheless, it will be very difficult to organize such an attack, and the advantage is small. In fact, I think that a more accurate move is 14 a3!, preventing ...Nb4. Black should probably try to break up the centre with something like 14...Ka8 15 Qg4 f6 16 exf6 Qxf6 17 Qg3 Rc8 18 h4. White is concerned with modest goals such as the expansion of his territory, but the important thing is that Black lacks a plan and White can poke around on the kingside; for example, 18...b6 19 Nh2 Kb7 20 Ng4 Qf7 21 Be2 h5 22 Ne5 Nxe5 23 Qxe5 Qf6 24 Bf3 with an edge.

Returning to the game Fuderer-Guimard, play continued 14...Rc8 15 Ned4 Nxd3 16 Rxd3 Na5 17 Qg5!? (the theme of 'knight versus bad bishop' motivates White to exchange queens, but Black declines) 17...Qf8 18 Qf4 h6 19 Nd2! Rc7 20 Rf3 Bc8 21 c3 Qe7 22 h4 b5 23 b4!? (23 Rg3!) 23...Nc4 24 Nxc4 dxc4 (24...Rxc4 25 Qxf7) 25 Rg3 g6.

White has achieved a clear positional advantage (good knight versus bad bishop, space, queenside attacking chances). One good move is 26 Kb2 with the idea of Ra1 and a4. Unfortunately, Fuderer became careless at this point and played 26 Qf6?, which simply freed Black's position after 26...Qxf6 27 exf6 Rd8 28 Re5 Bb7 29 Kc2 Rd5 30 Rxd5 Bxd5 and the game ended in a draw. If anyone, Black stands slightly better now that his bishop is free.

**13...Kb8 14 Nd4**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

This square serves as an excellent blockade point from which White can direct activity.

### 14...Rc8 15 f4 (Diagram 9)

We will see this f4 structure in several variations. Here the presence of the bishop on f1 makes it more difficult for Black to simplify. Instead, 15 Qg4 is poorly timed in view of 15...f5! 16 exf6 Qxf6 and ...e5 is threatened. Nevertheless, both sides should be on the lookout for this move and idea.

### 15...b5

Since White hasn't played Kb1, Black feels justified in advancing his pawns to attack. A question now is whether this will end up restricting his bad light-squared bishop even further. The alternative 15...f5 is met by 16 exf6 Qxf6 17 Nxc6+ Bxc6 (17...Rxc6 18 Qe5+ Qxe5 19 Rxe5 has the ideas of f5 and Ne2-d4, with g3 and Bg2 or Bh3 being options; in this line 18...Ka7? 19 Qxf6 gxf6 20 b4! Nb3+ 21 Kb2 wins a piece) 18 Qe5+ (or 18 g3) 18...Qxe5 (18...Ka7 19 Qxf6 gxf6 20 f5!) 19 Rxe5 with a small pull.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Whether or not the whole variation with ...a6 and ...c5 is objectively equal, White seems to have more practical opportunities to gain positional advantages.

### 16 a3 Nb7!?

16...Nxd4 17 Rxd4 is rather passive, and White can still aim for f5.

### 17 f5!?

But this is too rash and gives away White's advantage. There was plenty of time to support a break with both pawns and pieces.

### 17...g6!

Also possible was 17...Nxd4 18 Rxd4 exf5, since 19 Nxd5 Qc5 hits c2 and prepares to finally activate the bad bishop via ...Be6.

### 18 Nxc6+ Bxc6 19 f6?! (Diagram 10)

This amounts to a gambit.

### 19...Qc5

Which Black doesn't accept! He should make White prove his compensation after 19...Qxa3! 20 bxa3 gxh5. Probably the first player was counting upon rounding up Black's h-pawn, but that's easier said than done after 21 Ne2 Nc5 with the idea 22 h4 Rhg8!. As the game goes, White maintains a nice bind.

### 20 Qh4 a5 21 Qd4 Bd7 22 Qxc5 Rxc5 23 Rd4 Rhc8 24 Bd3 Nd8 25 Rh4 h5 26 Ne2 Kb7 27 Nd4 Kb6 28 Rg1 (Diagram 11)

Preparing the obvious break. Regardless of whether the course of the game was ideal, one can see that White is much better, and indeed he converted the point in

the end:

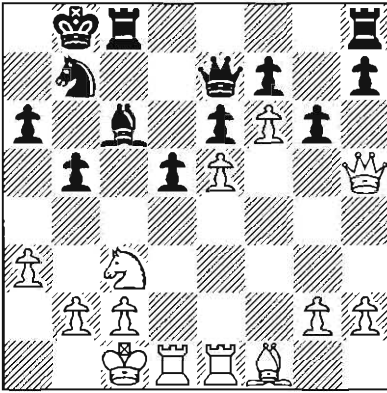


Diagram 10 (B)

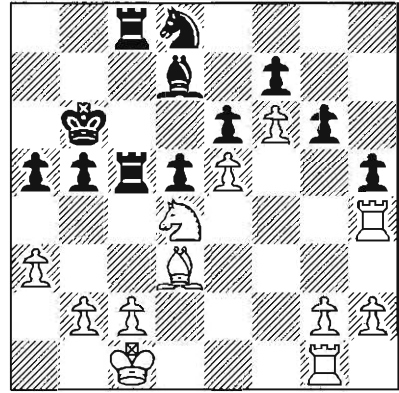


Diagram 11 (B)

**28...R5c7 29 g4 hxg4 30 Rgxg4 Nc6 31 Nxc6 Bxc6 32 Rh7 Be8?! 33 Kd2 Kc5 34 c3 Rd7 35 Ke3 Rcd8 36 Rh8 Rb7 37 h4 b4?**

Black had to wait around, however depressing that might have seemed.

**38 axb4+ axb4 39 Rxb4 Rxb4 40 cxb4+ Kxb4 41 Bxg6! d4+ 42 Kd2 Rd5 43 Rxe8 Rxe5 44 Bxf7 1-0**

□ V.Vojtek ■ Z.Hagarova

Slovakian League 1997

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 7 Qh5 0-0 (Diagram 12)**

As mentioned, this move was given an ‘!’ by Keres, who claimed that Black already has a small advantage! Minev comments dryly that this assessment is ‘too early’ and calls it questionable. At any rate, the verdict has been passed down for half a century.

**8 f4**

For the riskier and much more entertaining 8 Nf3!?, see the theory section. I would recommend that move to committed attacking players, since it leads to wild and unexpected complications. But 8 f4 can get complicated and should pose Black some problems as well, as White could have played aggressively on move ten below.

**8...c5 9 Nf3 f6?!**

A traditional and natural attempt to destroy White’s pawn chain, but it seems to be inferior to 9...Nc6, which we’ll also see in the analytical section. In the next

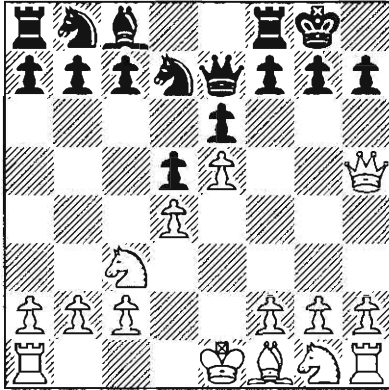
## Dangerous Weapons: The French

game, Black plays a third option, 9...f5.

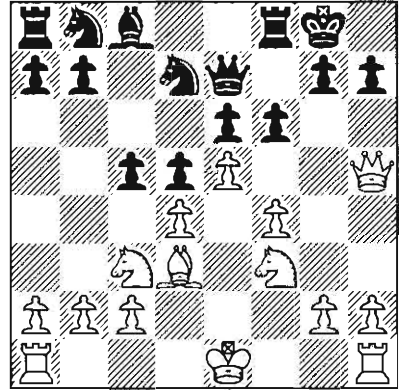
**10 0-0-0?!**

Playable, of course, but not best. White has two instructive options, one quite effective:

a) 10 Bd3 (**Diagram 13**). Now Black can play:



**Diagram 12 (W)**



**Diagram 13 (B)**

a1) 10...f5?! (innocent-looking, but...) 11 Qg5! Qxg5 (or 11...Nc6 12 Nb5!? Rf7 13 Qxe7 Rxe7 14 c3 with a grip) 12 Nxg5 Re8 13 Nb5 Na6 14 c3 h6 15 Nd6 Re7 16 Nf3 with a clear advantage. The Qg5 offer to exchange queens is a handy weapon for White in several lines.

a2) 10...g6! 11 Qh4!? (or 11 exf6 Rxf6 12 Qh6) 11...Nc6 12 0-0 (better than the riskier 0-0-0 in such positions) 12...fxe5 13 Qxe7 Nxe7 14 fxe5 cxd4 15 Nb5 Nc5 16 Nfxd4 Rxf1+ 17 Rxf1 Nc6 18 Nxc6 bxc6 19 Nd4 with a small edge, Rf6 and b2-b4 being themes. But it's not much.

b) 10 Nb5! (**Diagram 14**).



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** White uses (and needs) this resource in several variations in order to keep an advantage. He immediately threatens Nc7 and is looking gleefully at placing a knight on d6, but the modest defence of d4 is also useful. In addition, the knight sortie carries with it the idea of c3, shoring up White's centre for good.

After 10 Nb5!, the game might proceed 10...fxe5 11 dxe5 (11 Qg5!?) 11...Na6 12 Bd3 g6 13 Qh6 Qg7 14 Qh4 and White has control over the key squares.

**10...Nc6 11 Bd3 g6 12 Qh4 cxd4**

Black also had 12...fxe5 13 Qxe7 Nxe7 14 fxe5 cxd4 15 Nb5 Nc5 16 Nfxd4 Bd7, securing an equal game.

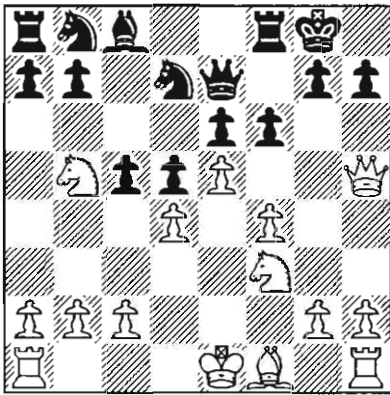


Diagram 14 (B)

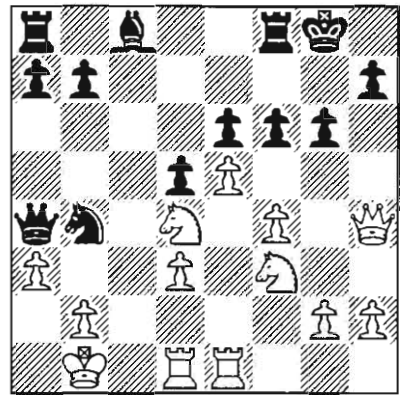


Diagram 15 (B)

**13 Nb5 Nb4?!**

13...Nc5 14 Nbx d4 Nxd3+ 15 Rxd3 fxe5 16 Qxe7 Nxe7 17 fxe5 Nc6! 18 Nxc6 bxc6 19 Rc3 Bd7 20 Rc5 a5 21 Rd1 a4 22 a3 Kf7 23 Rd4 is nominally better for White, but Black should be able to defend easily.

**14 Kb1 Nc5 15 Rhe1 Qd7 16 Nbx d4 Qa4 17 a3 Ncx d3?!**

Better is 17...Nbx d3 18 cxd3 fxe5 19 fxe5 b6 20 Qh6 a5! 21 Ng5 (21 h4 Ra7!) 21...Qd7, intending ...Ba6. Then Black is probably holding, although he may have to suffer a bit.

**18 cxd3 (Diagram 15) 18...Nc6?**

This leads to a losing position. 18...fxe5 19 fxe5 Nc6 was possible, when 20 Rc1! maintains the upper hand.

**19 Nxc6 bxc6 20 exf6 Rb8**

Black tries to counterattack, which was the idea behind 18...Nc6. There isn't much else to do.

**21 Ng5 h5**

(Or 21...Rb7 22 f7+ Rbx f7 23 Nxf7 Rxf7 24 d4.

**22 f7+ Kg7 23 Qf2**

23 Rd2! Qxa3 24 Nxe6+ Bxe6 25 Rxe6 Rxf7 26 Qg5 decides matters.

**23...Bd7 24 Rd2 Rb3 25 Ka2 Rb5 26 Qe3 d4 27 Nxe6+ Bxe6+ 28 Qxe6**

The rest is relatively easy.

**28...Rf5 29 g3 R8xf7 30 Rc1 c5 31 Rdc2 Qb5 32 Qc4 Qa5 33 b4 cxb4 34 Qxd4+ R5f6**

**35 Qxb4 Qxb4 36 axb4 Rb6 37 Rc4 Rfb7 38 Rc7+ Kf6 39 Rxb7 Rxb7 40 Kb3 Rd7 41 Rc6+ Kf5 42 Kc4 Rg7 43 h3 h4 44 Rc5+ Kf6 45 g4 1-0**

□ I.Rogers ■ I.Bjelobrk

Ballarat 2002

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 7 f4 0-0 8 Qh5 c5**

The game has transposed into one of our main variations: 7 Qh5 0-0 8 f4 c5.

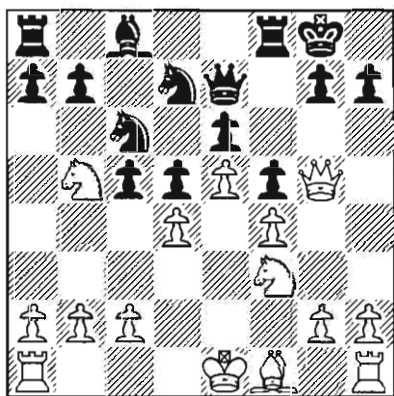
**9 Nf3**

9 Nb5 Nc6 10 Nf3 Nb4!? seems to give Black some play, but then 11 0-0-0! Nxa2+ (or 11...a6 12 Nd6 cxd4 13 Rxd4 a5 14 Kb1) 12 Kb1 Nb4 13 c3 Nc6 14 Bd3 with Ng5 to come is very promising. 10...a6 11 Nd6 cxd4 12 Bd3 g6 13 Qh6 f6! is better.

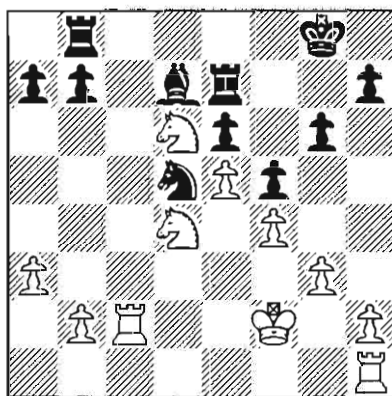
**9...f5**

Blocking the kingside.

**10 Nb5 Nc6 11 Qg5! (Diagram 16)**



**Diagram 16 (B)**



**Diagram 17 (B)**

We will see this standard manoeuvre in several positions stemming from 7 Qh5.

**11...Rf7**

11...Qxg5? 12 Nxg5 either wins a pawn or White comes out on top:

a) 12...a6 13 Nc7 Nxd4 14 Nxa8 Nxc2+ 15 Kd2 Nxa1 16 Nxe6 Re8 17 Nec7 Rf8 18 Be2 and White wins.

b) 12...Nxd4 13 Nxd4 cxd4 14 Nxe6 Rf7 15 Nxd4 Nc5 16 c4! Ne6 17 Rd1 Nxf4 18 g3 Ne6 19 cxd5 Nxd4 20 Rxd4, again winning.

**12 Qxe7**

12 c3 cxd4 13 Qxe7 Rxe7 14 cxd4 offers a clear advantage, as does 12 0-0-0.

### 12...Rxe7 13 c4!?

Not bad, but 13 c3! is very strong, permanently securing White's central and space advantage. Black will be playing defence for the rest of the game, probably unsuccessfully.

### 13...Nb4!? 14 Kf2 dxc4 15 Bxc4 Nb6 16 a3!? N4d5 17 Bxd5 Nxd5 18 g3 Bd7?!

Best is 18...c4!.

### 19 Nd6 cxd4 20 Nxd4 Rb8 21 Rac1 g6 22 Rc2 (Diagram 17)

Now White is controlling the action.

### 22...Kf8 23 Rhc1 a6 24 Nb3

There are several alternative plans, but this is fine.

### 24...h6

24...Ba4? 25 Rc8+ Rxc8 26 Rxc8+ Kg7 27 Nd4 is crushing.

### 25 Nc5 Bc6 26 b4 Ra8?!

Instead of waiting, Black might as well do something. Here 26...g5 was worth trying, because 27 Nxa6?! Ra8 would gain counterplay.

### 27 Nb3 Ba4 28 Rc8+ Rxc8 29 Rxc8+ Kg7 30 Nc5 Bc6 31 Rb8 b6 32 Nb3!?

32 Nxa6! turns out perfectly after 32...Ra7 33 b5 Bxb5 34 Nb4! Nxb4 35 Nxb5 Ra5 36 Rxb6.

### 32...g5 33 Nd4 Bd7 34 fxc5 hxg5 35 Ra8 Bb5 36 N6xb5 axb5 37 Nxb5

The rest is not well played, but White converts his decisive advantage.

37...f4 38 Ra7 Rxa7 39 Nxa7 Kg6 40 Nc6 Kf5 41 a4 Nc7 42 b5 Nd5 43 a5 bxa5 44 Nxa5 Kxe5 45 Nc4+ Kf5 46 b6 Nb4 47 b7 Nc6 48 g4+ Ke4 49 Nd2+ Ke5 50 Nf3+ Kf6 51 Ke2 Nb8 52 Kd3 Nd7 53 Kc4 e5 54 Nd2 Ke6 55 Ne4 Nb6+ 56 Kb5 Nd7 57 Nc5+ 1-0

## Looking a Little Deeper

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Here I'll try to cover the most important possibilities as I see them. Unfortunately, there are so very few games with 7 Qh5, and even fewer of decent quality, so what follows will be dominated by analysis. The upside is that I can put a lot of energy into the fun lines!

### 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 7 Qh5 (Diagram 18)

The variations split into:

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**A: 7...0-0**

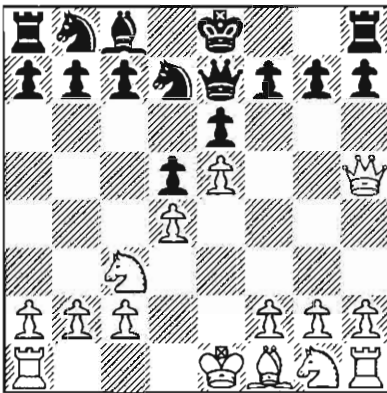
**B: 7...a6**

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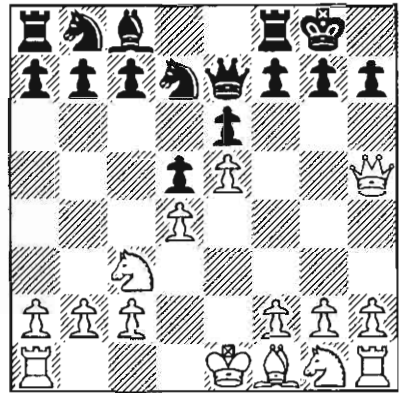
## Dangerous Weapons: The French

The slow 7...b6 intends to trade off Black's bad bishop, but 8 f4 (or 8 Nf3) 8...Ba6 9 Bxa6 Nxa6 10 Nf3 gives White all the play. For one thing, Black has to watch out for the blunt attack with f5, supported by g4 if necessary; for example, 10...c5 11 0-0-0 (11 Nb5! 0-0 12 c3 cxd4 13 Nfxd4 is also good; note how c3 makes White's centre very difficult to break up) 11...Nc7 12 Rhe1 0-0 13 f5.

**A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 7 Qh5 0-0 (Diagram 19)**



**Diagram 18 (B)**



**Diagram 19 (W)**

Remember that this is the move recommended by Keres and the few authors who discuss 7 Qh5. Now we'll look at two moves:

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**A1: 8 Nf3**

**A2: 8 f4!?**

---

**A1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 7 Qh5 0-0 8 Nf3**



**ROLL THE DICE! This is the move to make when you're intent upon attacking and don't mind burning your bridges!**

It can lead to some incredible attacks. Black has no easy options, and must enter into complications of one sort or another. To me, this variation in itself is reason enough to play 7 Qh5!

**8...c5**

At this point there are two fascinating alternatives:

a) 8...f5 and now:

a1) 9 Ng5 h6 10 h4! (**Diagram 20**) threatens 11 Qg6. Then 10...Qe8 (10...Re8 11 0-0-0 Nf8! 12 Nh3 c5 13 dxc5 Nc6 14 f4 Bd7 15 g4 threatens gxf5 and pries open the g-file) 11 Qxe8 Rxe8 12 Nxe6! (or 12 Nf3 a6 13 Ne2!? c5 14 c3) 12...Rxe6 13 Nxd5 and White threatens Nxc7 (as well as Bc4, Nf4), to which there is no satisfactory response. For example, Black is lost after 13...Rc6 14 Ne7+ Kf8 15 Nxc8 Na6 16 Bb5 Rxc8 17 Bxc6 bxc6 18 Rh3! intending Ra3. But no better is 13...Nxe5 14 0-0-0 Ng4 15 Nxc7 Re7 16 Bc4+ Kf8 17 Nxa8 Nxf2 18 Rhe1 Nxd1 19 Kxd1 Nc6 20 c3 with Rxe7 and Nc7 to come.

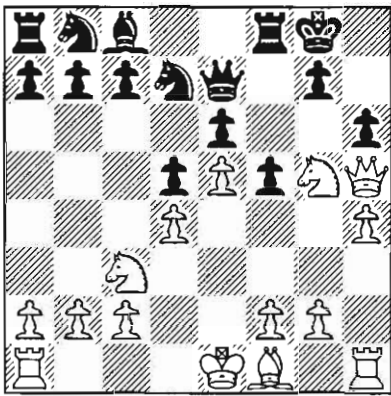


Diagram 20 (B)

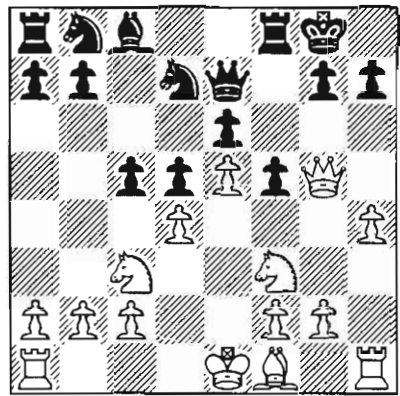


Diagram 21 (B)

a2) 9 h4 c5!? and now again 10 Qg5!? (**Diagram 21**), trying to divert Black's queen from the defence of e6 and c5: 10...Qxg5 (10...Nc6 is met by 11 Qxe7 Nxe7 12 Nb5) 11 Nxc6 (11 hxg5!? Nc6 12 Nb5 gives a small advantage) 11...cxd4, and here 12 Nb5 is promising. Then 12...Na6 13 Nxe6 Re8 14 Nbx4 Nxe5 15 Bxa6 Bxe6! 16 Bb5 seems to give White an edge, so Black might try 12...Nxe5 13 f4 Ng4 14 Nc7 Bd7 15 Nxa8 Rc8. Again, White has some pull, e.g. 16 Nf3 Nc6 17 Rd1 Ne3 18 Rd2 Rxa8 19 Bb5.

b) 8...f6 9 Bd3! (**Diagram 22**).

Now 9...g6 10 exf6! Nxf6 11 Qh4 is very awkward for Black. 9...f5!? seems to lose a tempo by comparison with 8...f5, but Black hopes to exploit the fact that White's bishop can be removed from d3 by, for example, ...c5-c4 or ...cxd4 and ...Nc5, or even ...Nb4. So White must attack quickly: 10 g4! g6 11 Qh3 fxg4 12 Qxg4 (**Diagram 23**) and things get wild:

b1) 12...Nb6 13 h4 Nc6 14 h5 Qf7 15 Rh3! Nb4 16 hxg6 Nxd3+ 17 cxd3 Qxg6 18 Qh4

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Kh8 19 Ke2! Rxf3 (otherwise Rg1 creams Black) 20 Rxf3 Bd7 21 Rh1 Rg8 22 Rg3 and White wins.

b2) More tactical delights appear after 12...c5 13 Bxg6 hxg6 14 Qxg6+ Qg7 15 Qxe6+ Kh8 16 Rg1 Qf7 17 Qh3+ Qh7 18 Qg3 Rxf3 (Black had to prevent 19 Ng5) 19 Qxf3 Nc6 20 Rd1 Nxd4 21 Rxd4! cxd4 22 e6 dxc3 23 Qxc3+ with mate imminent.

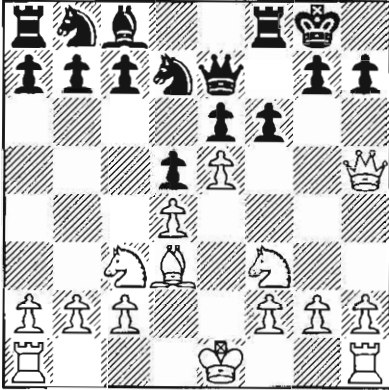


Diagram 22 (B)

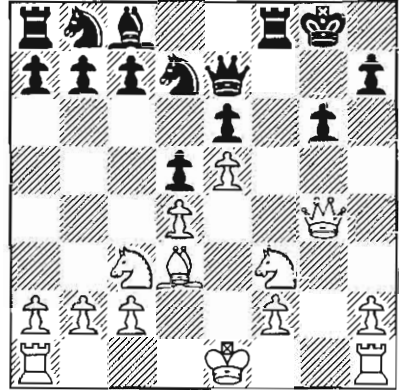


Diagram 23 (B)

### 9 Bd3 g6

Again Black has options:

a) 9...f5 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 Qh4 cxd4 is recommended by Tiemann 'with advantage for Black', but 12 Bxh7+ (**Diagram 24**) effectively wins:

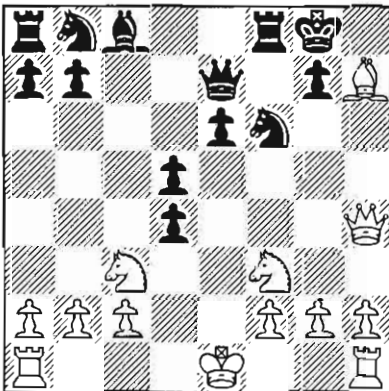


Diagram 24 (B)

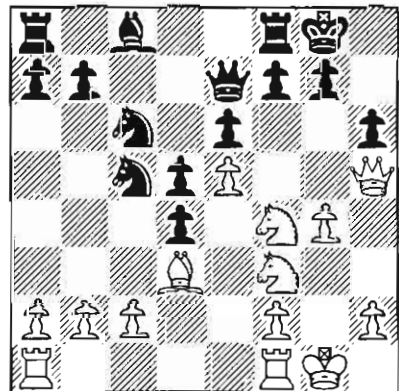


Diagram 25 (B)

12...Kf7! (12...Kh8?? 13 Ne5; or 12...Nxb7 13 Qxe7 dxc3 14 bxc3, or 14 Qa3 cxb2 15 Qxb2, or 14 b3, when Black has only two pieces for the queen) 13 Bg6+! (13 Ne5+ Ke8 14 Bg6+ Kd8 15 Qxd4 isn't bad either, a pawn and position ahead) 13...Kg8 (13...Kxg6 14 Ne5+ Kf5 15 f4 leads to mate in seven moves) 14 Ne2 Nc6 (14...Qb4+ 15 c3 Qxb2 16 Rb1 Qxa2 17 Ng5 Nc6 18 Nf4 Ne5 19 Bh7+ Kh8 20 0-0 and White will win quickly) 15 Ng5 Qb4+ 16 Kf1 Qxb2 17 Nf4! Qxa1+ 18 Ke2 d3+ 19 Kd2! etc. So Black should play 11...Nc6!, when play might go 12 dxc5 Qxc5 13 0-0 Qb4 14 Qxb4 Nxb4 15 Nb5 (15 Ne5? Nd7; 15 Rae1 Nh5 16 Ne5 Nf4) 15...Nxd3 16 cxd3 Bd7 17 Nbd4 with a small advantage for White.

b) 9...h6 10 0-0 (or 10 dxc5 Nxc5 11 0-0 Nxd3 12 cxd3 with the ideas, among others, of Nb5-d6 and Nd4 followed by f2-f4-f5; Black may have adequate resources but White's position is the easier one to play) 10...cxd4 11 Ne2 Nc6 12 Nf4!? is of some interest.



**ROLL THE DICE!** If Black plays the obvious 12...Nc5 a move such as 13 Rfe1 is logical, but the crazy 13 g4!?! (Diagram 25) deserves attention.

This is really risky because of White's weak kingside, but here are two wild lines that Black might rush into and then regret:

b1) 13...Qc7 14 g5! Nxe5 15 gxh6 Nxf3+ 16 Qxf3 Nxd3 17 cxd3 gxh6 18 Kh1! and White wins in all lines: 18...Qe7 19 Rg1+ Kh8 (19...Kh7 20 Nh5 f5 21 Qg3!) 20 Qh5 Qf6 (20...Kh7 21 Rg6 fxg6 22 Qxg6+ Kh8 23 Qxh6+ Kg8 24 Rg1+) 21 Ng6+ Kg7 22 Nxf8+ Kxf8 23 Rg3 e5 24 Rf3 Qe6 25 Rg1 e4 26 dxe4 dxe4 27 Qc5+ and it's over.

b2) 13...Nxd3 14 cxd3 g5 15 Kh1! (Diagram 26) 15...gxf4 (or 15...Kg7 16 h4! gxf4 17 g5 Rh8 18 Rg1 Kf8 19 gxh6 Ke8 20 Rg7 Qf8 21 Rag1 Ne7 22 h7 Bd7 23 Qg5 Rc8 24 Qf6, winning) 16 g5 Nb4 (16...b6 17 Rg1 Ba6 18 Qxh6! Bxd3 19 Rg4 is decisive) 17 Rg1 Nxd3 18 Raf1! and White will win.

### 10 Qh6 Nc6!

This is better than 10...f6 11 exf6 Nxf6 12 dxc5 e5 (Black gains the centre at too high a cost in development and weaknesses) 13 Qg5! (Diagram 27). White threatens the e5-pawn, but also 14 Nxd5! Nxd5 15 Bc4. He keeps an advantage after 13...Nc6 14 0-0 Bd7 (14...e4? 15 Nxd5) 15 Rae1 Rae8 16 b4! Nxb4 17 Nxe5 Nxd3 18 Nxd3 Qf7 19 Ne5 etc.

### 11 Nb5!?

This sortie has the usual idea of 12 Nc7 Rb8 13 Ng5 f6 14 Ngxe6. Instead, 11 Ng5!? (going all out) is double-edged after 11...f6! 12 exf6 Rxf6 (12...Nxf6 13 dxc5 opens more lines for White, but this is also not a clear position) 13 dxc5 Nxc5 14 0-0 Qg7! 15 Qh4 h6 16 Nf3 g5 17 Qg3 Nxd3 18 cxd3, when Black has good activity but White controls e5.

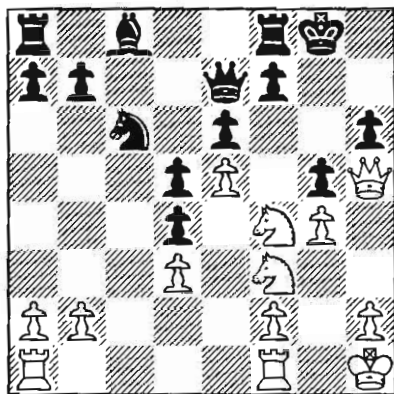


Diagram 26 (B)

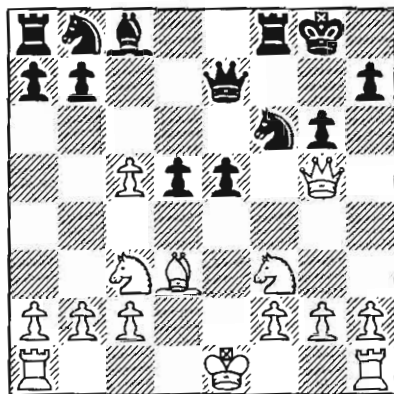


Diagram 27 (B)

**11...c4! 12 Be2 f6**

12...Qb4+? 13 c3 Qxb5? 14 Ng5 is winning for White.

**13 exf6 Nxf6 14 Nc3**

With yet another position in which both sides have dynamic possibilities. I wouldn't venture to assess it.

**A2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 7 Qh5 0-0 8 f4!?**

This was a modest move in the line 7...a6 8 f4, but after 7...0-0 it's the introduction to a furious attack!

**8...c5 9 Bd3**

Alternatively:

a) Notice that 9 Nb5?! doesn't threaten Nd6+, so simply 9...Nc6 10 0-0-0 a6 11 Nd6 Nxd4 12 Bd3 g6 13 Qh6 f6! defends just in time.

b) 9 Nf3 Nc6! is natural but risky: 10 0-0-0 a6! (not 10...f6? 11 Nb5, but 10...Nxd4 should be tried) 11 Bd3 f5 12 g4! (12 Ng5!?) 12...cxd4? (Black should play 12...g6, when White replies 13 Qh3) 13 gxf5! dxc3 14 fxe6 cxb2+ 15 Kb1 g6 16 Rhg1!, when White's attack is too strong.

Better after 9 Nf3 is 9...cxd4 (9...f5 was played in Rogers-Bjelobrk above) 10 Nxd4 Nc6 11 0-0-0 Nxd4! 12 Rxd4 f6! (**Diagram 28**).

This is a good freeing move which should equalize. Best is 13 exf6 Qxf6 14 Qd1! Nc5 15 Kb1 b6! 16 g4! Bb7 17 g5 Qf7 18 h4, and White launches his pawns forward with obscure prospects.

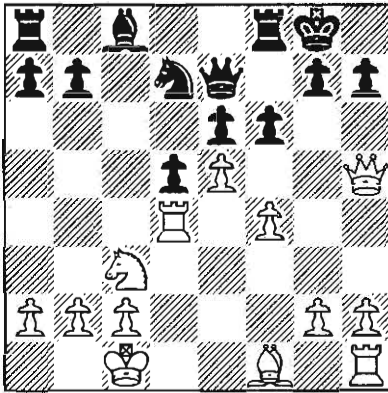


Diagram 28 (W)

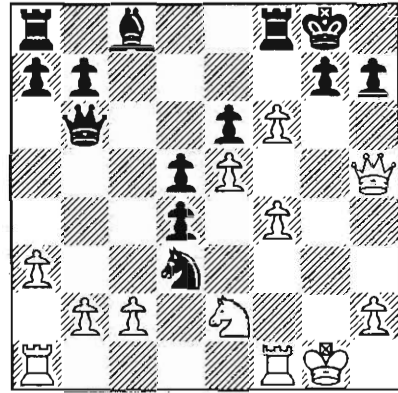


Diagram 29 (B)



**BEWARE!** White has to be careful not to play 13 Bd3?!, when Black answers 13...g6 14 Qh4 Qc5!, threatening ...Qxd4 and ...fxe5.

9...f5

9...g6 10 Qh6 is undesirable for Black.

**10 Nf3 Nc6 11 0-0**

11 0-0-0 cxd4 12 Ne2 Nc5 13 g4 Nxd3+ 14 cxd3 (14 Rxd3 Nb4) 14...Bd7 15 Rhg1 fxg4 16 Rxc4 Be8 17 Qh3 is unclear, as is usual in these lines. Black has to avoid 17...Bg6?? (17...Rc8 18 Kb1) 18 Rxc6! hxg6 19 Ng5.

**11...Nxd4 12 Nxd4 cxd4 13 Ne2 Qb4 14 a3 Qb6 15 g4! Nc5 16 gxf5 Nxd3 17 f6!**  
(Diagram 29)

A beautiful piece sacrifice with some subtle points.

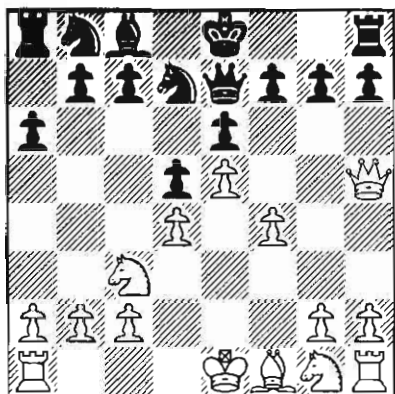
**17...Nc5**

An incredible line is 17...Nxb2 18 Kh1 Rf7 (or 18...gxf6 19 Rg1+ Kh8 20 exf6 Qc7 21 Rg7 Qxc2 22 Ng3, and it's mate in ten! – with the computer's help, of course) 19 Rg1 Qc5! (the only defence) 20 Qxf7+!! Kxf7 21 Rxc7+ Ke8 22 f7+ Kf8 23 Rag1 Bd7 24 Rg8+ Ke7 25 Rxa8 Kxf7 26 Rag8 and Black has to sacrifice his queen to stop 27 R1g7 mate!

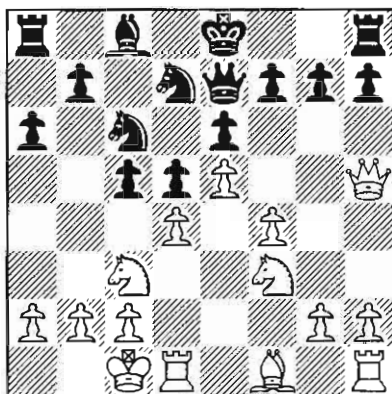
**18 Kh1 Ne4 19 Rf3 Bd7 20 Rg1 Rf7 21 Qh6 g6 22 f5 exf5 23 Nf4 Nxf6 24 exf6 Qxf6 25 Nxc6 Rg7 26 Rg3**

White wins. The first threat is 27 Ne7+.

**D) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d8 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bxe7 Qxe7 7 Qh5 a6 8 f4 (Diagram 30)**



**Diagram 30 (B)**



**Diagram 31 (B)**

This position normally arises by means of 7 f4 a6 8 Qh5. In contrast to the quick-developing 8 Nf3 or 8 Bd3 (which we saw in the illustrative game Scheipl-Lieb above), 8 f4 is the more careful continuation, protecting e5.

### **8...c5 9 Nf3**

I think that leaving open the possibility of 0-0 is worth looking into, especially as White's king can end up getting harassed if he castles queenside. This strategy would begin with 9 dxc5; for example, 9...Qxc5!? (9...Nxc5 10 Nf3 Nc6 11 Be2 0-0 12 0-0 is equal) 10 Nh3 (or 10 Bd3 Qb4 11 Nge2 Qxb2 12 0-0 with an enormous lead in development and many potential attacking methods) 10...Qe3+ 11 Be2 and White is ready for Rf1-f3 or even Nd1, expelling the queen. These positions are not necessarily better for either side, but at least they're not dull!

### **9...Nc6 10 0-0-0 (Diagram 31)**

A standard position with which both sides have their advantages. White will blockade d4 and keep Black's light-squared bishop restricted, while Black will build up pressure on the queenside.

### **10...b5**

Notice that 10...0-0 transposes to 7 Qh5 0-0 8 f4 c5 9 Nf3 Nc6 10 0-0-0 a6, discussed in the 7...0-0 section (Line A2, note 'b' to White's 9th move).

10...cxd4 has been played in a number of games. J Van der Wiel-Yu Shaoteng, Wijk aan Zee 2002, went 11 Nxd4 Nb6!? 12 h4 h6 13 Qg4 0-0 14 Rh3 f6 15 Re3 Bd7 16 g3 Rac8 17 exf6 Qxf6 18 Nxc6 Rxc6 19 Re5 Rfc8 with a complicated position and chances for both sides.

11 dxc5 Qxc5 12 Kb1 Nb6?! (Diagram 32)

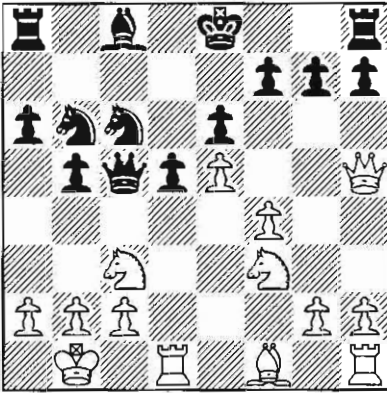


Diagram 32 (W)

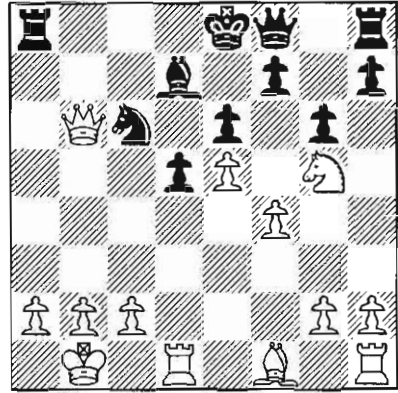


Diagram 33 (B)

12...b4 13 Ne2 only strengthens White's control of the critical square d4.

13 Ng5! Qf8 14 Nxb5! g6

After 14...axb5 15 Bxb5 Kd7! (15...Bd7 16 Nxe6! breaks through) 16 c4! White has an ongoing attack. Probably Black had to play this way regardless.

15 Qe2 axb5 16 Qxb5 Bd7 17 Qxb6 (Diagram 33)

White has netted two pawns and Black's counterattack fizzles out.

17...Rb8 18 Qe3 Qb4 19 b3 Ra8 20 Qd2 Qa3 21 c3 0-0 22 Nf3 Ra7 23 Qb2

1-0 J.Van Mil-B.Vigh, Budapest 1991.

## Characterization of 7 Qh5

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♠ ♠
Attacking Nature	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Positional/Strategic Nature	♠ ♠ ♠
Risk	♠ ♠ ♠
Reward	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Theoretical Depth	♠

## Chapter Three

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# Down with the King!

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 Qg4 (Diagram 1)

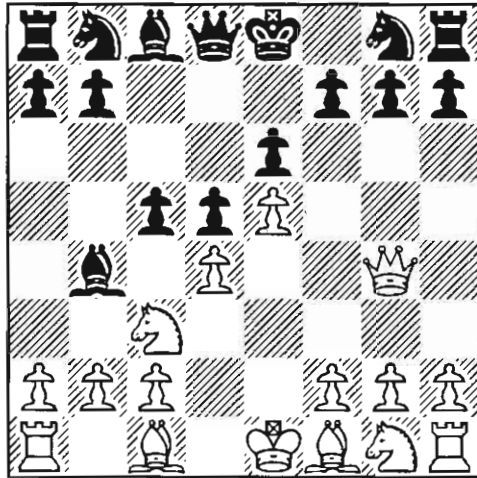


Diagram 1 (B)

Let's face it: the Winawer (3...Bb4) is still the king of variations after 3 Nc3. How can we get promising play against it, or even something fairly new and fun to play? I have been asked this question many times through the years, and for this

book I had to come up with something good! After some initial failures, I found a continuation that is both little-played (requiring less study) and extremely flexible for both sides.

### **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 Qg4**

This sortie has been played a fair amount, but in my opinion has been underrated through the years. It is sound and has great upside, especially as a practical weapon. The recommended variations with 5 Qg4 are aimed at keeping the pressure on Black; as you'll see, I'm proposing an approach for White that isn't in most books (including my own), one that players in general won't be familiar with. These days those who use 3 Nc3 have to take so much time to prepare for the common continuations in the Winawer that even advanced players won't be able to pay much attention to sidelines of 5 Qg4. In any case, players will get a weapon involving many original positions!

What is going on with 5 Qg4? On the positive side, White attacks the pawn on g7 (the capture of which wins a good deal of material). Another main idea is that by bringing the queen to the kingside White is able to play Nf3 without cutting off the queen from her aggressive role on that side of the board. As a bonus, the move dxc5 can be employed to attack Black's bishop on b4.

Naturally we cannot claim to have refuted the Winawer, and 5 Qg4 has its downsides. Black gains a free hand to undermine White's centre, which is no small matter. Essentially, the tempo spent on Qg4 does not further White's control of d4, whereas the normal reply, 5...Ne7, speeds the attack on White's centre via ...Nf5 or ...Ng6. Furthermore, the moves ...f5 and ...f6 can only be answered by the normal exf6 at the *possible* cost of allowing ...e5 with tempo.

My own previous and longstanding experience with 5 Qg4 was that White could mount certain dangerous attacks, but that Black could defend with accurate play, and very often gain the advantage thereafter because of the weak state of White's centre. Only recently have I noticed that a couple of original moves in some critical positions will result in messy and hard-to-assess positions. Unless Black plays very accurately, these can easily lead to White establishing positional plusses or holding on to a material lead. Knowledge and understanding of the associated variations is essential for success. Even if equality is the ultimate theoretical verdict (as it is for all major openings), 5 Qg4 poses difficulties and lead to a high number of positions that have hardly begun to be worked out.

## **The Early Moves**

---

Before moving on to another game, let's talk a little about the first moves.

### **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5**

Some subtleties involving the move 4...Ne7 will be addressed in the theory section below.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 5 Qg4

Now, 5...Kf8 is seen in our illustrative game Bogoljubow-Fry, but Black almost always plays...

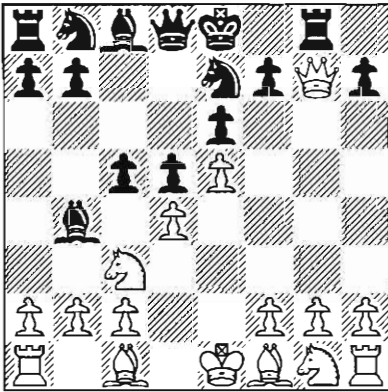
### 5...Ne7

At this point, I'm recommending...

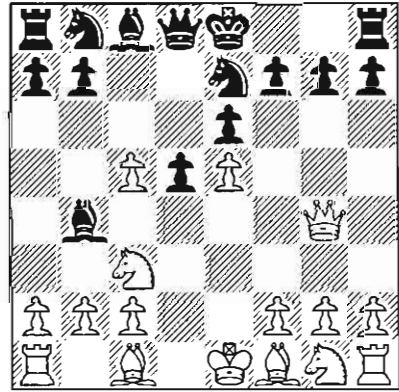
### 6 dxc5

Over the years, White has tried moves such as 6 Nf3 and 6 Bb5+ with varying success, but neither should be too bothersome if Black just follows the known remedies.

The obvious reply is 6 Qxg7, which after 6...Rg8 (**Diagram 2**) compares poorly from White's point of view with later lines. It's useful to see why Black gets good play here, as opposed to the problems that he faces after, for example, 5 Qg4 Ne7 6 dxc5 Nd7 7 Qxg7.



**Diagram 2 (W)**



**Diagram 3 (B)**

After 6 Qxg7 Rg8, we have:

a) 7 Qxh7 cxd4 8 a3 Qa5 9 axb4 Qxa1 10 Nce2 Nbc6 11 Nf3 (11 Qd3 Nxe5) 11...d3! 12 Qxd3 (12 cxd3 Nxb4) 12...Nxb4 13 Qd1 Bd7. White has a pawn for the exchange, which is insufficient in view of Black's active rooks and good development. Moves such as ...Rc8, ...Rg4, ...Na2 and ...Ba4 are in the air.

b) 7 Qh6!? cxd4 8 a3 and now:

b1) 8...Ba5 9 b4 Bc7 10 Nb5 a6 11 Nxc7+ Qxc7 is satisfactory.

b2) The obvious move is 8...Qa5!?, which wins in other positions, but here 9 axb4! Qxa1 10 Nb5 (the bishop on c1 is defended now) 10...Nf5 11 Qd2 is complicated. With accurate play, Black probably has a slight advantage.

b3) 8...Bxc3+! 9 bxc3 Qc7 10 Ne2 dxc3!? 11 f4 Bd7 12 Rb1 Nbc6 13 Ng3 0-0-0 and Black stood better in G.Sigurjonsson-W.Uhlmann, Hastings 1975/76.



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: 10...Nbc6! may be even more promising, as 11 f4 Bd7 12 Qxh7 0-0-0 is a transposition to one of the two main lines of the Winawer Variation, with Black a full tempo ahead! That is a huge advantage in such a tactical line.**

So we return to 6 dxc5! (**Diagram 3**). With 6 dxc5, White attacks the bishop on b4 and opens up lines for his pieces. The downside is that he's weakening his centre and allowing Black a pawn majority in that sector.

Now we come to a fundamental fork in the road:

---

**A: 6...Bxc3+**

**B: 6...Nbc6**

---

Both moves are entirely playable, and it would be hard to say which one best challenges White to come up with an effective strategy. We have almost a century of experience with these positions to draw upon.

## Illustrative Games

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Many of the fundamental themes are best shown by illustrative games, with a moderately-sized theoretical section thereafter. We will begin by taking a quick look at 5 Qg4 Kf8.

□ **E. Bogoljubow** ■ **J. Fry**

*Southsea 1950*

---

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 Qg4 Kf8?! (Diagram 4)**

This passive move is unlikely to work on general grounds. One way to look at it is to compare 5 a3 cxd4 6 axb4 dxc3 7 Qg4 Kf8, in which White has used a tempo on a3.

**6 dxc5!**

The game F.Bohatirchuk-M Botvinnik, Moscow 1927, saw another promising course for White: 6 Nf3 cxd4 7 Nxd4 Qa5 8 Bd2 Nc6 9 a3 f5 10 Qf4 (10 Nxc6 fxg4 11 Nxa5 Bxa5 12 Nb5 Bxd2+ 13 Kxd2 is difficult for Black) 10...Nxd4 11 Qxd4 Bc5 12 Qf4 Qd8 13 Na4!? (or 13 Bd3 Ne7 14 0-0 Ng6 15 Qg3) 13...Be7 14 g4?! (14 c4!) 14...Nh6! 15 Rg1 Nf7? (15...Bd7) 16 gxf5 exf5 17 Qd4 (or 17 0-0-0) 17...Be6 18 Nc5 Qb6 19 Nxe6+ Qxe6 20 0-0-0 Qxe5 21 Qxe5 Nxe5 22 Bc3 with a decisive advantage.

6...Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 Nc6 8 Nf3 (Diagram 5) 8...Qa5

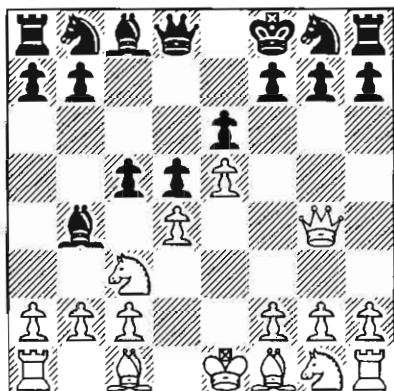


Diagram 4 (W)

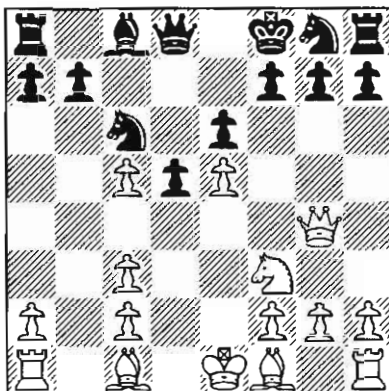


Diagram 5 (B)

White's development and bishops combine to give him the better game; for example, 8...Nge7 9 Bd3 Ng6 10 Qg3 Qc7 11 0-0! Ngxe5 12 Kh1!. This gets out of the way of ...Nxf3+ and threatens Bf4 followed by Re1. Black has gained the centre but at too great a cost in time. A sample line is 12...f6 13 Bf4 Qe7 (or 13...g5 14 Bxe5 Nxe5 15 Rae1) 14 Bxe5 fxe5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Qxe5 Qf6 17 f4!? Qxe5 18 fxe5+ Ke7 19 Rab1 g6 20 c4 dxc4 21 Bxc4 Rf8 22 Rxf8 Kxf8 23 Bd3 a6 24 Be4 with a bind for White.

**9 Bd2 Qxc5 10 Bd3 Nge7 11 0-0 Ng6 12 Rfe1 Nce7 13 Qa4 Qc7 14 Rab1**

White still has the two bishops and a space advantage.

**14...Bd7 15 Qb4 b6 16 h4! Ke8 17 h5 Nc6 18 Qg4 Nge7 19 Qxg7 Rg8 20 Qxh7 Kd8 21 h6 1-0**

The threats are 22 Qxg8+! and 22 Ng5.

□ G.Klompus ■ A.Nagaitsev

Correspondence 1967

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 Ne7 5 Qg4 c5 6 dxc5 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 (Diagram 6)**

Black's natural defensive method is to cripple White's pawns by ...Bxc3. However, in comparison to a main-line Winawer with 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 Ne7 7 Qg4, White gains something: he hasn't had to play a3. This has won him a tempo, as well as kept open the idea of Ba3. Of course, whether the move dxc5 is a very good way to use that tempo isn't clear.

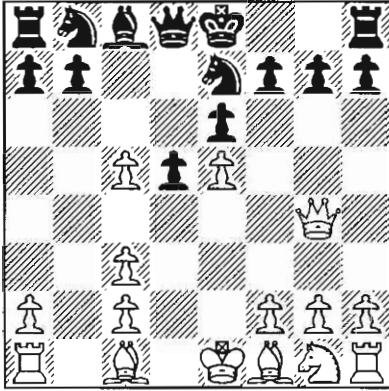


Diagram 6 (B)

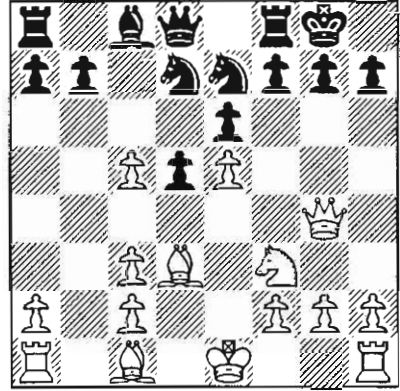


Diagram 7 (B)

7...0-0?!



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Surprisingly, this may already be categorized as a mistake!

7...Qa5 also seems inaccurate, because after 8 Bd2 White has enough time to protect e5, e.g. 8...Ng6 9 Nf3 Nc6 (9...Qxc5 wins the wrong pawn, and allows White to develop and attack immediately by 10 h4 h5 11 Qg3 Nc6 12 Bd3) 10 Bd3 0-0 (10...Qc7 11 0-0 gives White the extra and useful move Bd2 by comparison with normal lines) 11 Qh5! Qxc5 12 0-0 with Rfe1 and Rab1 to assist in the coming attack.

Stronger seventh move alternatives for Black will be discussed in the next game and also in the theory section.

### 8 Bd3 Nd7

8...Qc7 is a common and important option: 9 Nf3 (or 9 Qh5 Ng6 10 Nf3 Nd7 11 0-0 f6 12 Re1!? with the idea 12...Ndxe5 13 Rxe5 fxe5 14 Ng5) 9...Nd7 (9...Nbc6 10 Bf4, and 9...Qxc5 10 0-0 leave no difficulties with White's centre and thus he gets a free hand to attack on the kingside) 10 Bf4 (10 Bxh7+ Kxh7 11 Qh4+ Kg8 12 Qxe7 gives White a large advantage according to Melao, but 12...Qxc5 13 Qxc5 Nxc5 looks acceptable for Black) 10...Qxc5 (10...Nxc5? 11 Bxh7+!) 11 0-0 and White stands better because he still has an attack and his centre is secure.

### 9 Nf3 (Diagram 7) 9...Ng6?!

This is equivalent to 7...Ng6 8 Nf3 Nd7 9 Bd3 0-0, another common move order. Also inferior is 9...Nxc5? due to 10 Bxh7+! Kxh7 11 Ng5+ Kg8 12 Qh5 Re8 13 Qh7+ Kf8 14 Qh8+ Ng8 15 Nh7+ Ke7 16 Bg5+ and wins.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

9...f5 is the best try: 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 Qh4 Qc7 was played in H.Melao-A.Moreira, correspondence 1999. Instead of the game's 12 Bg5 Nf5 13 Bxf5 exf5 14 Bxf6 Rxf6, which is equal, I think that White should play 12 0-0!. For example, 12...e5 (12...Qxc5 13 Be3 Qd6 14 Bf4 Qa3 15 Be5, or here 13...Qa3 14 Qb4, and as so often, the queenless situation will favour the two bishops; furthermore, 12...Nf5 13 Bxf5 exf5 14 Qd4 threatens Bf4, Re1 and the like) 13 Qg3 Nc6 14 Re1 Nh5 (14...Re8 15 Bg5 – or 15 c4!? dxc4 16 Bxc4+ Be6 17 Bb3 – 15...Nd7 16 c4 d4 17 Bf4! increases the pressure) 15 Qh4 Nf6 16 c4! d4 17 Nxe5! Nxe5 18 Bf4, and Black is in big trouble after 18...Nf3+ 19 gxf3 Qxc5 20 Be5 h6 21 Bxd4 or 18...Re8 19 Qg3 Nfd7 20 Re2 Qxc5 21 Rae1.

### 10 Bxg6! hxg6 (Diagram 8)

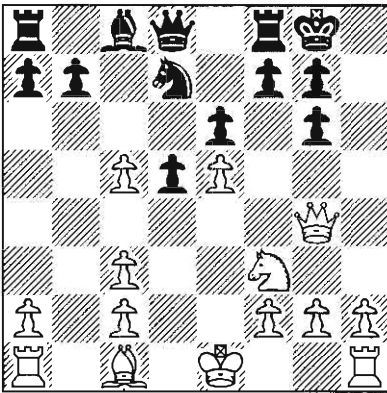


Diagram 8 (W)

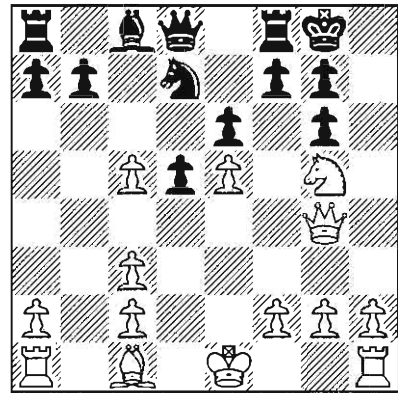


Diagram 9 (B)

An unhappy decision, but 10...fxg6 11 Qxe6+ Kh8 12 Qd6! would have been awful.

### 11 h4

White misses his chance for 11 Ng5! (Diagram 9) (always be on the lookout for this when Black has made a recapture with ...hxg6) and Black will suffer defensively: 11...Re8! (the toughest defence; not 11...Nxe5?? 12 Qh4 Re8 13 Qh7+ Kf8 14 Qh8+ Ke7 15 Qxg7 Rg8 16 Qxe5 f6 17 Qd4 and wins; or 11...Qc7 12 Bf4 Re8 – 12...f5?? 13 Qh3 – 13 Qh4 Nf8 14 0-0-0 and there's no satisfactory defence, e.g. 14...Qxc5 15 Rd3 f6 16 exf6 gxf6 17 Rh3) 12 Qh4 Nf8 13 0-0 with a grip on the position, based upon the tactic 13...Qc7 14 Be3! Qxe5 15 Qh8+! Kxh8 16 Nxf7+ Kh7 17 Nxe5.

### 11...Qa5

Black in turn misses 11...Qc7! 12 Qd4 (12 Qg3 Nxc5; 12 Bf4 Nxc5) 12...Nxc5, intending ...Ne4, when White's advantage is limited.

### 12 Bd2 Qc7

12...Qxc5 13 h5 Qc4 falls short after 14 Qg3 (14 Qxc4 dxc4 15 h6! is also strong, winning all the dark squares) 14...Qe4+ 15 Kd1.

### 13 Qg3 f6

Now 13...Nxc5!? is less effective because c3 is covered and 14 h5 Ne4 15 Qh2 is possible.

### 14 h5 (Diagram 10)

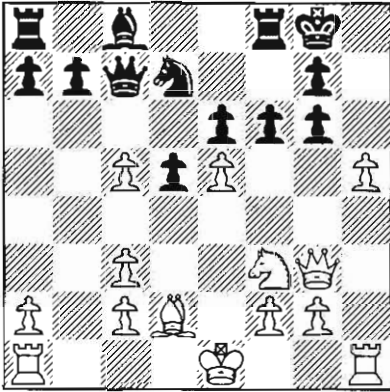


Diagram 10 (B)

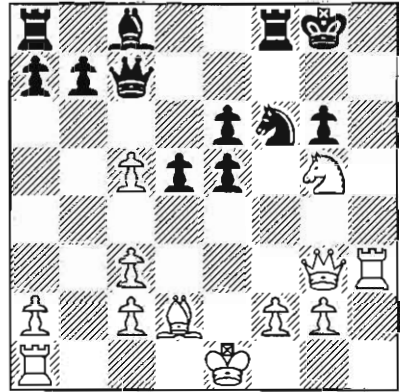


Diagram 11 (W)

### 14...gxh5

14...Nxe5 15 hxg6 Nxf3+ 16 Qxf3 Qe5+ 17 Kf1 Qf5 18 Qg3 Re8 19 c4! has the positional idea of 20 cxd5 exd5 21 Bf4, and the tactical idea 19...Bd7? 20 c6! bxc6 21 Rh8+! Kxh8 22 Qh4+ Kg8 23 Qh7+ Kf8 24 Bb4+ Re7 25 Qh8 mate.

### 15 Rxh5 fxe5?

15...Nxe5 16 0-0-0 favours White, but Black can defend by bringing the king to f7 at the right moment.

### 16 Ng5! Nf6 17 Rh3 g6 (Diagram 11) 18 0-0-0

18 Nf3! wins more quickly.

### 18...Qg7 19 Rdh1 Nh5 20 Qh4 Rf4 21 g4 Rc4 22 f4! exf4 23 gxh5 e5 24 h6 1-0

□ J.Leconte ■ M.Apicella

Clichy 1999

### 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 Ne7 5 Qg4 c5 6 dxc5 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 Ng6

This move is no more common than 7...Nd7 or 7...Qc7. Transpositions can occur, but those moves do allow 8 Qxg7 (see the theory section).

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 8 Nf3 Nd7

Although this has been the most successful placement of the knights, it's not problem-free. 8...Qc7 9 Bd3 Nd7 10 0-0 Ndx5 11 Nxe5 Qxe5 12 Qd4! transposes to the note to Black's ninth move.

### 9 Bd3 (Diagram 12)

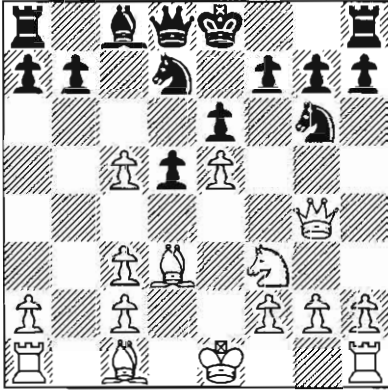


Diagram 12 (B)

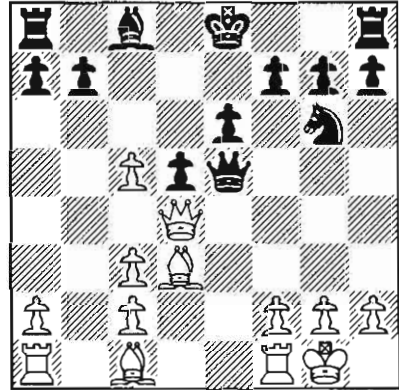


Diagram 13 (B)

9 Be3 has the idea of Bd4, but it's a bit slow. One solution (not the only one) goes 9...Qc7 10 Bd4 Nxc5 11 Bd3 0-0 12 h4 f5 13 exf6 Nxd3+ 14 cxd3 gxf6 15 h5 Qf4! 16 Qxf4 Nxf4 17 Kd2 e5 18 Be3 Ne6 with equal play.

### 9...Nxc5

9...Qc7 is arguably the best way to handle this variation, immediately challenging e5. Black has generally come close to, but still short of equality. In fact, most of the variations are open to improvement for both sides. A sample continuation would be 10 0-0 (not 10 Qd4 Ndx5 11 Nxe5 Qxe5+) and now:

a) 10...Ndx5 11 Nxe5 Qxe5 12 Qd4! (Diagram 13). This is the kind of two-bishop situation that White wants. He threatens 13 Bxg6 Qxd4 14 Bxf7+, so a likely continuation would be 12...f6 (12...Qxd4 13 cxd4 strengthens White's pawns) 13 f4 Qc7 14 f5 (14 c4 is also good) 14...Ne5 15 Bf4 0-0 16 Rae1.

b) 10...Nxc5 11 c4 Nxd3 (or 11...dxc4 12 Qxc4 Nxe5 13 Nxe5 Qxe5 14 Bb2! Qxb2 15 Qxc5 Bd7 16 Be4) 12 cxd3 dxc4 13 dxc4 Bd7 14 Ba3 Nxe5 15 Nxe5 Qxe5 16 Rae1 Qf6 17 Qg3 Rc8 (17...Bc6 is met by 18 Qc7) 18 Re4 with a small advantage.

### 10 0-0 Qc7 11 Rb1!? (Diagram 14)

### 11...Bd7

Alternatively:

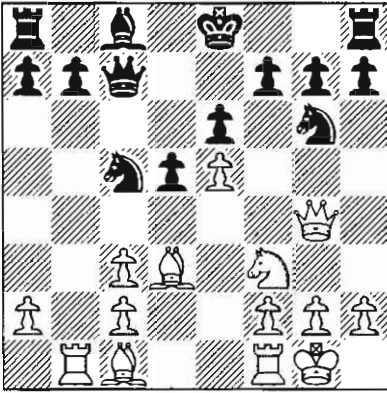


Diagram 14 (B)

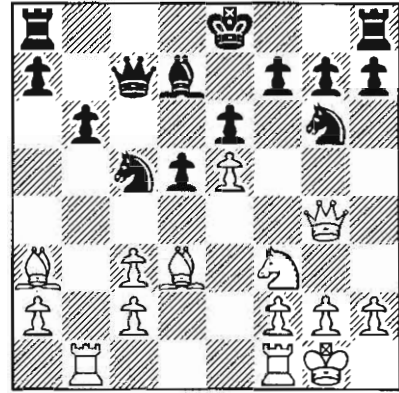


Diagram 15 (W)

a) 11...Nxd3 12 cxd3 Qxc3 13 Rb3 Qa5 14 Ba3 h5 15 Qg5!? (15 Qd4 is promising, and perhaps better, with the idea 15...Bd7 16 Nh4!) 15...Qd8 16 Qxd8+ Kxd8 17 Rc1 leaves White a pawn down but with greater control of space and the more effective bishop. White has ideas of Bd6, Ng5, d4 and Rc7, so play might go 17...f6 18 Bd6 b6 19 Rbc3 Bd7 20 Rc7 Rc8 (20...Rg8!?) 21 Rxc8+ Bxc8 22 Rc7 with an edge.

b) 11...Ne4 seems a good answer, with Black only mildly worse after 12 Re1 h5! 13 Qh3 Nxe5 14 Nxe5 Qxe5 15 c4; White has Bb2 or Ba3 in mind, generally after an exchange on e4.

### 12 Ba3

The solid alternative 12 Re1 may well be best. It has the tactical idea 12...Nxd3 13 cxd3 Qxc3 14 Rxb7 Qxd3? 15 Rxd7! Kxd7 16 Qa4+ Kc7 17 Re3 Qb1 18 Qa3, when White's attack is too strong. These are just typical lines and hardly forced, of course.

### 12...b6 (Diagram 15) 13 Rfe1?!

13 c4! is more testing, here and on the next move. It is a major theme in this variation.

### 13...0-0 14 Qh5? Nxd3 15 cxd3 Rfc8!

Suddenly Black stands better.

### 16 Re3 Qxc3

16...Nf4 17 Qh4 Qxc3 is also convincing.

### 17 d4 Qc2!

▲ queen or bishop on the b1-h7 diagonal can stifle many an attack.

### 18 Rbe1 h6

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

18...Bb5! adds the idea of ...Nf4 followed by ...Nd3 or ...Ne2+ into the mix. Black should be winning.

**19 g4 Bb5 20 g5 Qf5 21 Kh1 Rc2 22 Kg1 Nf4 23 Qh4 Nh3+ 24 Kh1 Nxf2+ 25 Kg1 Nh3+ 26 Kh1 Nf2+ 27 Kg1 Nh3+ 28 Kh1 ½-½.**

It's not clear to me what occurred here – perhaps Black accidentally repeated the position one too many times! At any rate, he could win in a few moves with either 28...hxg5 29 Qg3 Bd3 or 28...Nxg5 29 Nxg5 hxg5 30 Qg3 Rf2 and ...Rc8-c2.

Nevertheless, the variation as a whole promises White a dynamic game with good chances for advantage. See especially his options on moves 12 and 13.

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□ Flipper ■ JEB\_Stuart

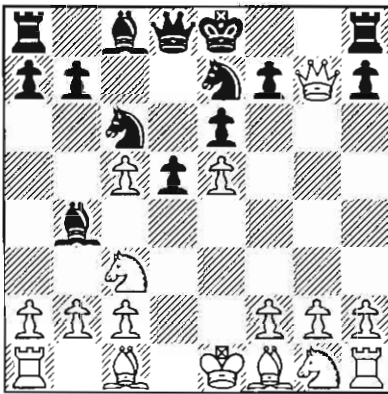
Playchess 2003

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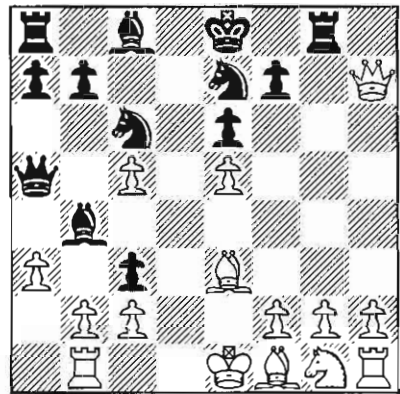
**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 Qg4 Ne7 6 dxc5 Nbc6**

Black wastes no time in immediately increasing the pressure on the vulnerable d4-square.

**7 Qxg7 (Diagram 16)**



**Diagram 16 (B)**



**Diagram 17 (B)**

Long criticized, this move can be revived by a computer-like idea.

**7...Rg8 8 Qxh7**

I saw the move 8 Qh6 suggested years ago by Minev in a short note. It was neglected for many years and then there was a flurry of games, all favourable for White. The point is shown in the line 8...d4 9 a3 Qa5 10 axb4 Qxa1 11 Ne4! (better than 11 Nb5, which has actually been played in correspondence chess). I was very excited by this move until, unfortunately, the computer found the dampening re-

ply 8...Rg6!, which I haven't been able to get around.

### 8...d4 9 a3

This is forced.

### 9...Qa5

This is the purported refutation. Now White has to concern himself with avoiding material loss.

### 10 Rb1!

Seldom taken seriously. There have been many games with 10 axb4 Qxa1 11 Nce2, but after 11...Nxb4 (threatening ...d3), White has never managed to equalize against accurate play, and hence the demise of 7 Qxg7. However, that isn't the end of the story.

### 10...dxc3 11 Be3!! (Diagram 17)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! This is the point, and the idea that everyone missed for years.**

We all assumed that 11 axb4 Qa2 was the inevitable course of play, when of course Black is winning. The idea of 10 Rb1 and 11 Be3 isn't mentioned by any of the major sources (including Watson!). And with good reason: it's unusual to throw in such slow moves when so much is hanging.

### 11...Bd7!?

Black in turn makes a surprising response, particularly when there are moves like 11...Bxc5, 11...cxb2+ and 11...Nxe5 available – see the theory section. With 11...Bd7, Black intends to get castled quickly, and can use the bishop productively on c6 or even a4.

### 12 Nf3 cxb2+ 13 axb4 Qxb4+ (Diagram 18)

13...Nxb4 14 c3! turns out rather well. Notice that the queen on h7 guards c2 and b1.

### 14 Bd2

14 Nd2?! a5!? (of course, 14...0-0-0 is also reasonable) 15 Qe4 Nd5! 16 Qxb4 axb4 17 Rxb2 Ra1+ 18 Rb1 Nxe3 19 fxe3 Rxb1+ 20 Nxb1 Nxe5 is very comfortable for Black.

### 14...Qxc5 15 Qe4

Again, 15 Rxb2 is slow: 15...Nxe5 16 Rxb7 Bc6 17 Rb3 Nxf3+ 18 gxf3 Qe5+ 19 Be2 Rd8 etc.

### 15...Qa3 16 c4?!

Here White had 16 c3!, guarding d4 and b4. This looks quite good for the first player: 16...Rd8 (or 16...Ng6 17 h4! a5 18 h5 Rh8 19 Rh3 and Black is driven back) 17 h4 Bc8 18 h5 b6 19 h6 Bb7 20 h7 Rh8 21 Qc2, when White prepares Bg5-f6 and stands better.

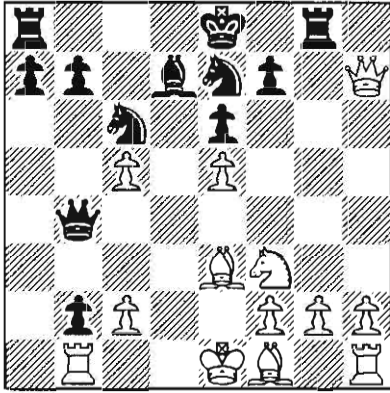


Diagram 18 (W)

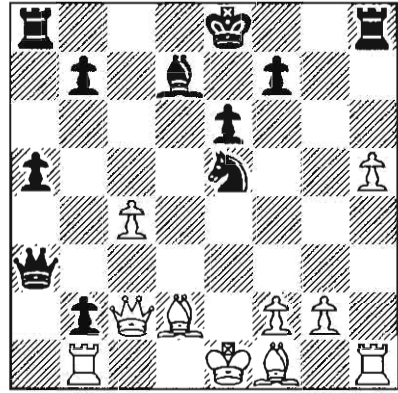


Diagram 19 (W)

**16...Ng6?!**

Better is 16...Rd8 17 Be2 (or 17 Ng5!? Rxc5! 18 Bxc5 Nb4) 17...Rxc2

**17 h4 a5? 18 h5 Rh8 19 Qc2**

Now 19 Rh3! is virtually winning.

**19...Ngxe5 20 Nxe5 Nxe5 (Diagram 19) 21 Qxb2?!**

21 Rh3! is strong, activating White's pieces. Once the b-pawn falls Black will have trouble defending everything.

**21...Qxb2 22 Rxb2 Bc6 23 Bc3 f6 24 Bxe5 fxe5 25 f3**

Probably 25.Rh3 was a better try, but White's winning chances have become slim in any case. As the game goes, the play is roughly equal until White falls for a mini-tactic and then is lucky to draw.

**25...e4! 26 fxe4 Bxe4 27 Rh4 Bc6 28 h6 a4 29 Ra2 Ke7 30 Bd3 Ra5 31 Rh3 Re5+ 32 Kd1 Rg5 33 g3 e5 34 Bc2 Bd7 35 Rh1 Rxc3 36 Bxa4 Bg4+ 37 Ke1 Rc3 38 Rc2 Ra3 39 Rh4 Ra1+ 40 Kd2 Bf5 41 Bb3 Bxc2 42 Bxc2 Kf6 43 h7 Rd8+ 44 Kc3 Kg7 45 Re4 Ra3+ 46 Kb4 Ra2 47 Kb3 Ra5 48 Kb4 b6 49 Rg4+ Kh8 50 Rg6 Rc5 51 Be4 Rdc8 52 Bd5 Kxh7 53 Rxb6 Kg7 54 Re6 R5c7 ½-½**

**Looking a Little Deeper**

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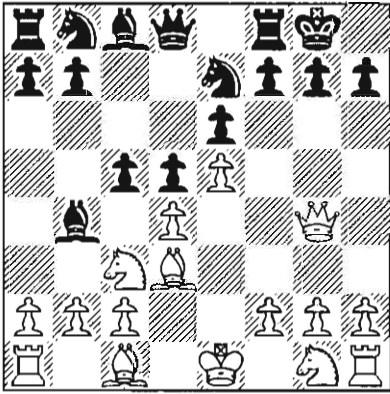
**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5**

Unfortunately, the move order 4...Ne7 5 Qg4 can lead to a long discussion, and I've tried to shorten it by indicating what seem to me the most interesting points and analysis. So the reader may wish to study this more carefully.

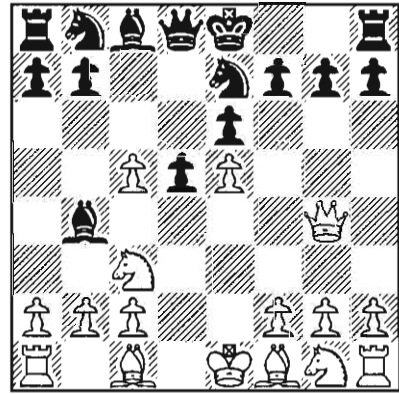
The first point is simple: if Black plays 5...c5, we have transposed. The alternative

5...Nf5 has quite a bit of theory behind it. White should keep a small advantage; for example, 6 Bd3 (after 6 Nf3, the popular idea 6...c5 is best answered by 7 dxc5! and 7...d4 8 Bb5+ Bd7 9 0-0! or 7...Nc6 8 Bd2 Bxc5 9 Bd3 h5 10 Qf4 Nce7, and here aside from the main move 11 Nh4, 11 0-0! is better for White) 6...h5 (or 6...g6 7 Nf3 c5 8 dxc5 Nc6 9 0-0 Bxc5, V.Anand-M.Enders, Frankfurt (simul) 1994, when among other moves, 10 Bg5! is strong) 7 Qf4 Qh4 8 Nf3! Qxf4 9 Bxf4 c5 10 0-0 with a clear advantage, F.Delile-F.Waquet, French League 2004.

More interesting is 5...0-0 6 Bd3 c5 (**Diagram 20**).



**Diagram 20 (W)**



**Diagram 21 (B)**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Strange to say, Black's move order already has him in some difficulties here.

White enjoys several promising moves:

- 7 Nf3 Ng6 (7...Nf5?! 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Bg5; 7...c4?? loses to 8 Bxh7+ Kxh7 9 Qh5+ etc.) 8 dxc5 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 Qc7 10 Qh5! Nd7 11 0-0 with a limited advantage.
- 7 Qh5 is complicated; for example, 7...Ng6 8 Nf3 cxd4 9 a3 Qa5 10 0-0! dxc3 11 Ng5 h6 12 Nxf7 Rxf7 13 Bxg6 Rc7 14 axb4 Qxa1! (14...Qxb4 15 b3 is practically winning) 15 Bxh6 Qxf1+ 16 Kxf1 gxf6 17 bxc3 Nc6 18 Bd3 and although it's not at all clear, I'd rather be White.
- 7 dxc5 Nbc6 is an odd position: it is as though Black has played 4...c5 5 Qg4 Ne7 6 dxc5 Nbc6 7 Bd3?! 0-0?!, instead of 7...Bxc3+ 8 Bxc3 Nxe5. Thus White gets opportunities that he wouldn't get in our main 4...c5 5 Qg4 lines; for example, 8 Nf3 f5 (8...Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 Nxe5 10 Bxh7+) 9 exf6 Rxf6 10 Bg5.

### **5 Qg4 Ne7 6 dxc5 (Diagram 21)**

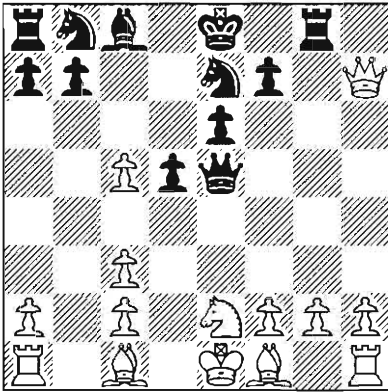
This is the main line of 5 Qg4. Now we'll examine:

**A: 6...Bxc3+**

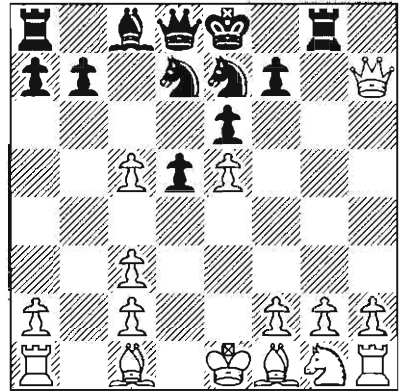
**B: 6...Nbc6**

**A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 Ne7 5 Qg4 c5 6 dxc5 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 Nd7**

This knight development will often transpose to the 7...Ng6 lines of Leconte-Apicella above if White plays 8 Nf3. But both 7...Nd7 and 7...Qc7 allow 8 Qxg7, for better or worse. Here's an example of the latter case: 7...Qc7 8 Qxg7 Rg8 9 Qxh7 Qxe5+ 10 Ne2 (**Diagram 22**)



**Diagram 22 (B)**



**Diagram 23 (B)**

10...Rg4! (to stop 11 Bf4) 11 f4 (or 11 Rb1 Nbc6 12 f4) 11...Qf6 12 Qd3 Nbc6 13 h3 Rg8 14 g4!? (14 Be3!) 14...e5 15 Be3! exf4 16 Bxf4 Ng6? 17 Qe3+! Be6 18 0-0-0 Qd8 19 Bg2 Nge7 20 Nd4 Nxd4 21 cxd4 was R.Zunker-M.Hoehn, Hessen 1992; White has two extra pawns and the bishop pair, but both sides had alternatives in the opening phase.

**8 Qxg7 Rg8 9 Qxh7 (Diagram 23) 9...Nxe5**

Another path is 9...Nxc5 10 Nf3 Ne4?! 11 Bd3, when White has an easy life.

**10 Bd3 Nxd3+**

An important option is 10...Qc7 (Yakovich gives 10...Qa5 11 Ne2 Nxd3+ 12 cxd3 Rxd3 13 Kf1! Rg8 14 Rg1! Rxd3 15 Kxg1 Qxc5 16 Bg5 with a clear advantage to White) 11 Ne2 Nxd3+ 12 cxd3 e5 13 d4! Bf5 14 Qh5! (or 14 Qh4, intending 14...0-0-0 15 Bg5, 14...Rxd3 15 Ng3, or 14...Bd3 15 Qf6) 14...exd4 15 cxd4 Bg4 16 Qh4 Bxe2 17 Kxe2 0-0-0 18 Be3 with two extra pawns (White will castle by hand), Y.Yakovich-N.Legky, USSR 1988. In general White stands better after 10...Qc7.

**11 cxd3 e5 12 Nf3 Bf5 (Diagram 24)**

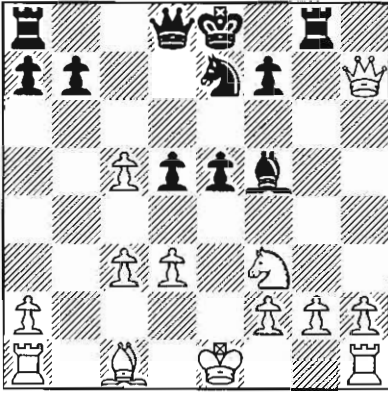


Diagram 24 (W)

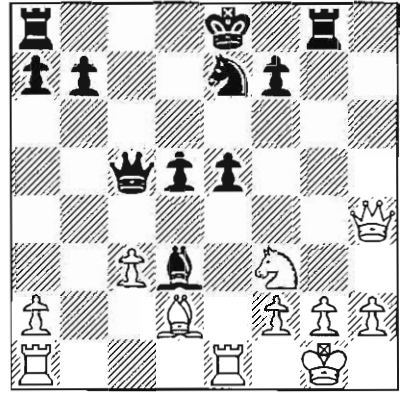


Diagram 25 (B)

**13 Qh4**

13 Qh5! was also strong. Black's opening is logical, but he gives up too much in order to gain activity.

**13...Qa5**

13...Nc6 14 Qxd8+ Rxd8 15 Kd2!? (or 15 Bg5! Rd7 16 0-0-0) 15...Rxc2 (Black was two pawns down) 16 Nh4 Rg5 (16...Rxf2+? is met by 17 Ke1) 17 Ke2 Rh5 18 Nxf5 Rxf5 19 Rb1 Rd7 20 h4 offers some edge to White.

**14 Bd2 Qxc5 15 0-0!?**

Much better was simply 15 Nxe5! Rxc2 16 Qh8+ Rg8 17 Qf6.

**15...Bxd3 16 Rfe1 (Diagram 25)**

This position was reached in Y.Meister-P.Cech, Ceske Budejovice 1995. At this point, instead of 16...0-0-0?! 17 Rxe5!, Black could have played 16...Be4! 17 Ng5 f5, which keeps matters complicated.

My general conclusion is that 6...Bxc3+ should be playable, but that Black has considerable difficulties maintaining the balance.

**B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 Qg4 Ne7 6 dxc5 Nbc6 7 Qxg7 Rg8**

Defending the rook by 7...Ng6?! allows White to keep his material advantage; for example, 8 Bd3 (8 Bd2!? Bxc5!, and not 8...Ncxe5 9 f4 Nd7 10 Bd3 etc.) 8...Ncxe5 9 Be3 Nxd3+ 10 cxd3 f6 11 Nge2 Qe7 12 Qxe7+ Nxe7 13 a3 Bxc3+ 14 Nxc3 e5 15 d4.

**8 Qxh7 d4 9 a3 Qa5 10 Rb1 dxc3**

The obvious 10...Bxc5 begins an important line: 11 b4 (Diagram 26)

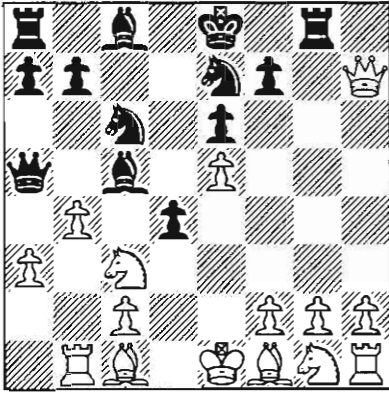


Diagram 26 (B)

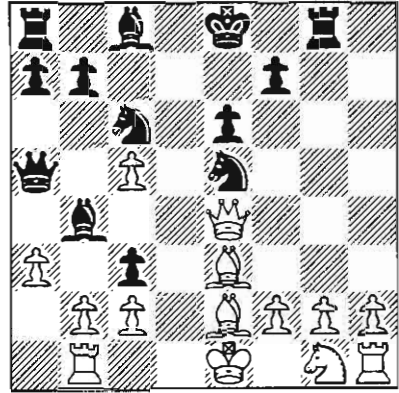


Diagram 27 (B)

11...Nxb4 (11...Qd8?? loses to 12 Ne4, and 11...Bxb4 fails to 12 axb4 Nxb4 13 Bd2 dxc3 14 Bxc3) 12 axb4 Bxb4 13 Nge2 Bxc3+ (or 13...dxc3 14 Qe4) 14 Nxc3 Qxc3+ 15 Bd2. White can consolidate his advantage of the two bishops; for example, 15...Qc7 16 Qe4 Nc6 17 f4 b6 18 Qh7!? Rf8 (18...Ne7 19 Rb4!) 19 Bc1!? (or 19 Bb5 a6 20 Be2 Bb7 21 0-0 0-0-0 22 Bf3) 19...Bb7 20 Ba3 Ne7 21 Bb5+ Bc6 22 Bd6 Qb7 23 0-0 Bxb5 24 Rxb5 and here 24...0-0-0? runs into 25 Rb4!, winning due to the threat of 26 Rc4+.

**11 Be3! Bxc5**

Here's where we saw 11...Bd7 in the illustrative game above. There are two other options at this critical juncture:

a) 11...Nxe5 12 Qe4 N7c6 13 Be2 (**Diagram 27**) (13 Qh7 Ne7 repeats the position with an implicit draw offer) 13...cxb2+ (on 13...f5 14 Bh5+ Ng6 15 Qf3 cxb2+ 16 axb4 Nxb4, White can force the play by 17 Bxg6+! Rxg6 18 Qh5! Nxc2+ 19 Ke2 Kf7 20 Nf3 Qb5+ 21 Kd2 Nxe3 22 Ne5+ Kf6 23 Qxg6+ Kxe5 24 Rhe1) 14 axb4 Nxb4! (after 14...Qa2 15 c3, White has covered all of the key squares, with Qc2 to come; and 14...Qxb4+?! 15 Qxb4 Nxb4 16 Rxb2 leaves White clearly better) 15 c3 and now:

a1) 15...Nd5?! 16 Bd2 Qa2 17 Nf3 (**Diagram 28**). In this wild-looking position White is ready to castle and consolidate his advantage, and he is well prepared if Black lashes out tactically: 17...Rg4?! 18 Qc2 Nc4 19 0-0 Bd7 20 Qh7! 0-0-0 21 Bxc4 Rxc4 22 Ne5 Rxc5 23 Nxf7 and the rook has nowhere to go, but 23...Nf6 24 Qe7 yields a winning attack.

a2) In this very complicated position, Black might be able to do better with resourceful play: 15...Nbc6! 16 Rxb2 Qa1+ 17 Rb1 (here 17 Qb1!? is possible) 17...Qxc3+ 18 Kf1 Ng4! 19 Bc1!? (19 Bxg4 Rxg4 20 Qxg4 Qd3+ 21 Ne2 Qxb1+ 22 Nc1 Qh7 is equal) 19...Nf6 20 Qc4! Qxc4 21 Bxc4 (**Diagram 29**) with a complex and ap-

parently balanced position. Black's better pawn structure and the poor white king position may compensate for White's bishops and weapons such as his passed h-pawn.

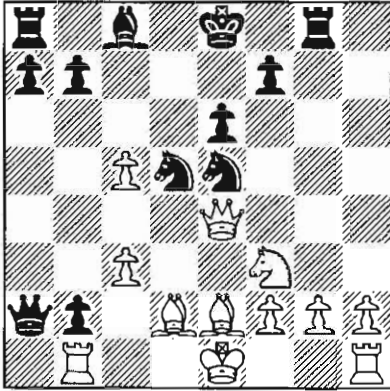


Diagram 28 (B)

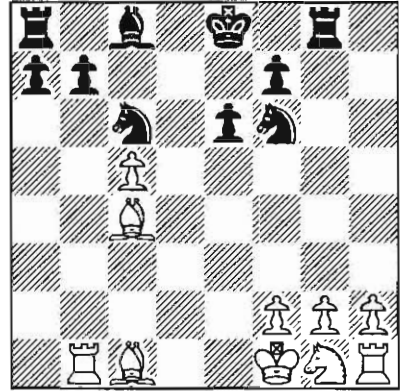


Diagram 29 (B)

b) D.Pirrot-R.Meessen, German League 2002, went 11..cxb2+ 12 axb4 Qxb4+ 13 Bd2 Qxc5 14 f4!? Bd7, and now instead of the game's 15 Rxb2? Nxe5! 16 Rxb7 Ng4 with excellent counterplay, White could have played 15 Nf3. A simpler idea was 14 Qe4 Nxe5 (after 14...Qxe5?! 15 Qxe5 Nxe5 16 Bc3 Nd7 17 h4! the passed pawn may prove irritating for Black) 15 Rxb2 N7c6 16 Nh3 Ng4! 17 Be2, with an unclear position. All of this invites further investigation.

### 12 b4 Bxb4

After 12...Qxa3 13 Bxc5! Bd7 14 Nf3 0-0-0 15 Qe4 White is simply two pawns ahead.

### 13...Nxb4

The alternative is 13...Qxe5, when the play might go 14 Nf3 Qf5 15 Qxf5 Nxf5 16 Bc5 b6 17 b5! bxc5 18 bxc6 Nd4 19 Nxd4 cxd4 20 f4, and White is simply better; for example, 20...f6 21 Kf2 e5 22 fxe5 fxe5 23 Bc4 Rf8+ 24 Kg3 Ke7 25 Rb5 Kf6 26 Rf1+ Bf5 27 c7 Rac8 28 Rc5 a5 29 Ba6 Rg8+ 30 Kf2.

### 14 Nf3 Bd7

From this position in the game R.Davids-L.Frost, correspondence 1997, White played 15 Ng5?, which should have been met by the sequence 15...Rgx5! 16 Bxg5 Qxe5+ 17 Be3 Ned5!, since 18 Qg8+ Ke7 19 Qxa8 Nxc2+ 20 Kd1 Ndx3+ leads to a forced mate.

Much better is 15 Be2! (Diagram 30).

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

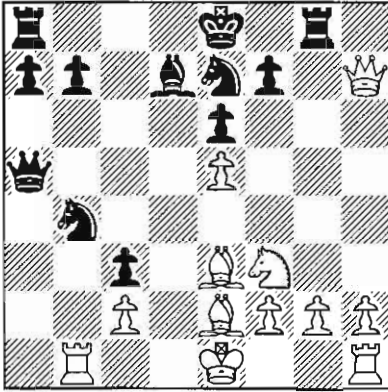


Diagram 30 (B)

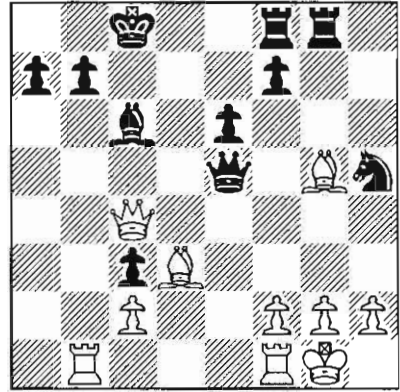


Diagram 31 (W)

Here are a couple of sample lines:

- a) 15...0-0-0 16 Bg5!? (the most straightforward move is 16 0-0 Nf5 17 Ra1 and I prefer White) 16...Ng6! 17 0-0 (17 Bxd8 Nxc2+ 18 Kf1 Qa2!) 17...Rdf8 18 Qh3 (or 18 Be3) 18...Nd5 (18...Nxc2 19 Rfc1 Ba4 20 Qg4 Na3 21 Ra1 and White wins) 19 Bd3. We have reached a terribly complicated position in which White keeps a very small edge, if that. Here's an entertaining line: 19...Ndf4 20 Qg3 Nh5 21 Qg4 Nxe5 22 Nxe5 Qxe5 23 Qc4+ Bc6 (**Diagram 31**) 24 Qxc6+! bxc6 25 Ba6+ Kd7 26 Rb7+ Ke8 27 Re7+ Kd8 28 Rd1+ Qd5 29 Rxd5+ exd5 30 Rxf7+ Ke8 31 Re7+ Kd8 32 Bh4 Rf4 33 Rg7+ Rxh4 34 Rxc8+ Kc7 35 Rf8! Ra4 36 Bf1 Ra1? 37 g4! d4 38 Kg2 and White will win!
- b) 15...Ba4 16 Nd4 0-0-0 (16...Rxc2 17 Qe4 Qd5 18 Bf3) 17 0-0 Rxd4 18 Bxd4 Nxc2 with unclear complications, perhaps somewhat advantageous for White.
- c) 15...Rxc2? 16 Bg5! Ng6 17 Kf1 Rg4 18 Qg8+ Nf8 19 h3! Re4 20 Bf6 with a dominating position.

## Conclusion

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What to conclude from all of this? Naturally, Black is not without chances in these lines, but even in the midst of all the tactics, White can achieve a large positional advantage if his opponent isn't careful. The two bishops play a large role, and Black needs to play quite dynamically to keep them in check. In any case, 5 Qg4 will produce the double-edged play that White is usually looking for in the Winawer.

## Characterization of 5 Qg4

---

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Attacking Nature	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Positional/Strategic Nature	♠ ♠ ♠
Risk	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Reward	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Theoretical Depth	♠ ♠ ♠

# Chapter Four

## Leaving the Unbeaten Path

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qf3 (Diagram 1)

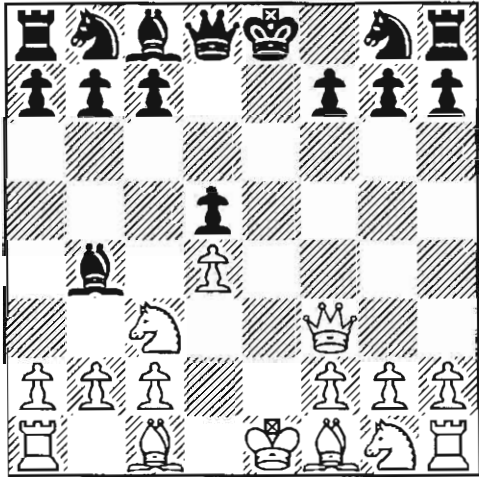


Diagram 1 (B)

How about a quieter way to attack the Winawer? I've come to respect a system that offers a safe way to avoid high theory and leaves open plenty of room for complicated play. It involves playing an apparently harmless set of moves as follows:

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qf3**

You can surprise just about anyone by playing 5 Qf3, which has not received general approbation, to say the least! The move has very few adherents and doesn't even seem to have much pedigree. Mineev says that 5 Qf3 is 'Tartakower's idea, revived in the '60s by Larsen'. I haven't found any games by the always eccentric Tartakower, but it is highly believable that he would continue in this manner, given that he played such things as 1 e4 e6 2 b3. Larsen's contribution is usually cited, and only his use of 5 Qf3 brought players' attention to it in the first place.

A brief overview of what the major French Defence authors have said about 5 Qf3:

- a) John Moles and Kevin Wicker: '?!'... 'Despite its initial successes, the move is not good';
- b) Lev Psakhis: 'It's no wonder that this hasn't been seen in strong tournaments for ages';
- c) Tiemann: 'Today it's no longer played';
- d) Bent Larsen himself gave it a '?!' and stopped playing it soon after he started;
- e) Watson refrains from insulting comments but shows Black doing very well;
- f) We'll see Steffen Pedersen's opinion in the first note to the first illustrative game.

But there are virtues to 5 Qf3 which have been obscured by the purported 'refutation' shown in this game. For one thing, it prevents the doubled pawns that are normally inflicted when Black chooses to play ...Bxc3, because the queen can recapture on c3. Non-trivially, Qf3 attacks d5, which means that Black has to pay attention to the pawn there, particularly if White unpins his knight. And of course Qf3 brings White one move closer to castling queenside, which is a standard French Exchange Variation option. Other considerations have to do with both sides' piece disposition. For example, Black normally brings a bishop to either f5 or g4, neither possible at the moment. And White can answer ...Nf6 with a slightly embarrassing pin by Bg5. Naturally there are other advantages and drawbacks to consider, but now we'll turn to over-the-board events.

## Illustrative Games

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A.Raudive  A.Betkowski

Polanica Zdroj 1996

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**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qf3 Qe7+ (Diagram 2)**

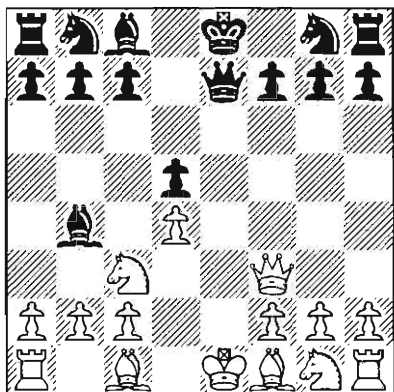
There is usually an '!' attached to this move. Indeed, practically every author and theoretician gives 5...Qe7+ as the complete solution to 5 Qf3. Steffen Pedersen's 2001 extensive volume on 3 Nc3 covers 5 Qf3 in one sentence, saying that 'Black

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

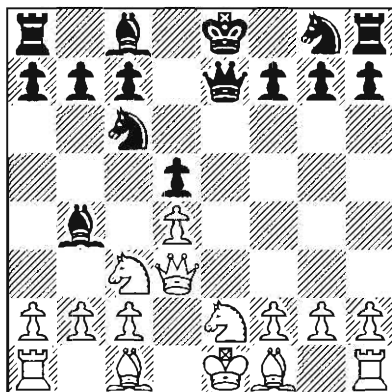
has no problems at all after the accurate 5...Qe7+! 6 Be3 Nf6'. The other authors agree, albeit with supporting analysis.

Black's idea is simple: White's pieces will get in each other's way regardless of how he responds to the check. In the games and analysis we'll test that theory.

**6 Nge2! Nc6 7 Qd3! (Diagram 3)**



**Diagram 2 (W)**



**Diagram 3 (B)**

White deviates from the scanty experience with 5 Qf3, thus leaving the already unbeaten path! It was this move that drew my attention to 5 Qf3 again, inspired by theorist Stefan Bucker. In the context of an article, Bucker cited the game before us in passing, and I realized that 7 Qd3 should be looked at again.

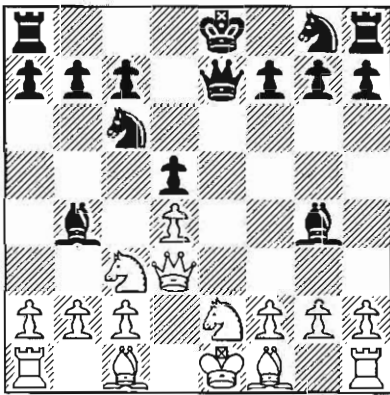
With a seeming disregard for development and time, White moves his queen again. He does this for several reasons, above all in order to defend his d-pawn. This protection is particularly important because White would like to attack the bishop on b4 by a2-a3, which if played immediately would lose a pawn to ...Nxd4. Why is a2-a3 important? Because if Black has to play ...Bxc3+, he will cede White the two bishops without creating doubled pawns on c3. The presence of two bishops is beneficial in any case, and an endgame with the existing weakness-free pawn structure would at the very least subject Black to a long and difficult defence. If, after a3, Black plays ...Bd6, he loses time and White may be able to win the bishop pair anyway by Nb5. The relevant comparison is with the traditional move 7 Be3, when Black will soon double White's pawns on c3 by ...Bxc3+, either immediately or after ...Nf6. The move ...Nf6 also threatens ...Bg4 with tempo in many cases. 7 Qd3 avoids these problems. You might also want to compare 5 Bd3 Nc6, when White's most important continuation is 6 a3 Bxc3 7 bxc3. On the strategic front, 7 Qd3 prepares to play Be3 (or perhaps Bf4 or Bg5) and then 0-0-0, when White can develop quickly and perhaps bring a rook to e1 with an attack on the

queen on e7. His own queen continues to cover f5 and thus limit the movement of Black's light-squared bishop because ...Bg4 can be answered by f3 or h3.

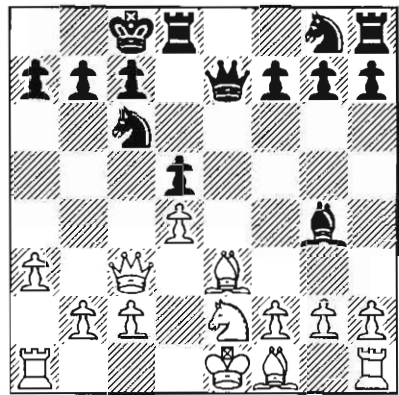
Obviously, Black has his own advantages. First, and non-trivially, 7 Qd3 costs White a move. And, although ...Bf5 is temporarily prevented, Black may eventually play ...Bf5 with tempo, which would probably occur after ...g6 (although it should be noted that ...g6 creates weaknesses on the dark squares). If Black plays ...Nf6, he may be threatening ...Ng4 or ...Ne4, so White will often play f3, which weakens e3 (and perhaps makes a target of a bishop on that square). Sometimes the attacking move ...Nb4 can also become a problem.

To claim that 7 Qd3 gains a forced advantage would be disingenuous. It's hard to imagine that with accurate play Black can't achieve equality. However, that's true of every line in the Winawer, according to both theory and practice. Furthermore, I'm not aware of any specific remedy and, most importantly, there's no way for either side to avoid an unbalanced game. That is pretty much what we are aiming for in this book.

**7...Bg4 (Diagram 4)**



**Diagram 4 (W)**



**Diagram 5 (B)**

I suspect that this is the best move, since now Black not only threatens to capture the knight in many lines, but gets the possibility of playing ...Bh5-g6, avoiding the passivity that can result from 7...Be6. The latter move is analysed below, along with 7...g6 and 7...Bxc3+.

**8 a3**

8 f3 is another option and this will be discussed in the theory section.

**8...Bxc3+**

Black loses a pawn after 8...Ba5? 9 b4 Bb6 10 Nxd5. So White gains the two bishops

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

and Black needs to find compensation before his opponent catches up in development and piece placement.

### 9 Qxc3 0-0-0 10 Be3 (Diagram 5) 10...f5?!

One idea of this move is to prevent White's kingside expansion by h3 and g4, but Black also wants to stop White from castling by means of 11 0-0-0 f4. Still, this is very artificial, and the normal-looking 10...Nf6 is more logical: 11 f3 (11 Ng3 would also cover e4, with the idea of Bb5 and 0-0) 11...Rde8 (or 11...Bf5 12 0-0-0 Rhe8 13 Bf2; here White could also play 13 Bd2 Kb8 14 Ng3, intending 14...Bg6 15 Bb5 or 14...Bd7 15 Bf4) 12 Bf2 Bf5 13 0-0-0. White untangles and still has the two bishops, although again one can't make too much of this. A space grab by 13...h5 and perhaps ...h4 seems appropriate, while White might switch to looking for simplification by 14 Qc5!? .

### 11 f3 Bh5 12 h4!?

There's nothing terribly wrong with this, but it might be time for development by 12 0-0-0. White apparently feared 12...g5, although then something like 13 h4! gxh4 (13...f4 14 Bd2) 14 Nf4 Bf7 15 Bb5 is obviously favourable.

### 12...Nf6 13 0-0-0 Bf7?!

An artificial manoeuvre. If Black wanted to play this way, then 13...Be8 14 Ng3 Bd7 15 Bf4 Rhe8 makes more sense. White stands better in that case, but would have to proceed more slowly.

### 14 Ng3 g6 15 Bf4 Be6 16 Bb5 Bd7 (Diagram 6)

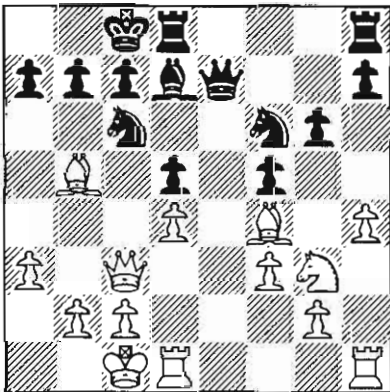


Diagram 6 (W)

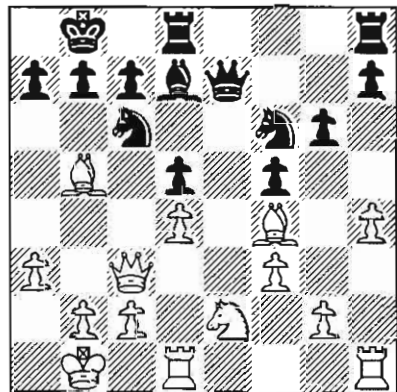


Diagram 7 (B)

### 17 Kb1?!

A reasonable, but too cautious move. It turns out that 17 Rhe1! Qf7 18 Qc5! would make the defence extremely difficult. For example:

a) 18...a6? 19 Bxc6 Bxc6 20 Re7.

b) 18...Kb8? (to protect a7; otherwise Bxc6 and Qxa7) 19 Bxc6 Bxc6 20 Re7.

c) 18...b6 19 Ba6+ Kb8 20 Qc3 Rhe8 21 b4 Rxe1 22 Rxe1 Be8 23 Nf1!? with the idea Nd2-b3 or in some cases a combination of a3-a4 and a4-a5 or b4-b5; White has a very large advantage.

**17...Kb8 18 Ne2 (Diagram 7) 18...h6?!**

Weakening, although it's hard to find a good plan.

**19 Qd2 Qg7 20 Nc3 b6 21 Ba4 Ne7 22 Bxd7!?**

22 Bb3! Bc6 23 Rhe1 has several ideas, including Re6.

**22...Nxd7?**

Black should play 22...Rxd7 23 Rhe1 Nc6.

**23 Rhe1**

Or 23 Nb5 Rc8 24 Qc3 Qf6 25 Nxc7 Kb7 26 Rde1 Qg7 27 a4 a6 28 Re6.

**23...Rh7 24 Bxc7+! Kxc7 25 Rxe7 Qg8**

25...Qxe7 loses the queen to 26 Nxd5+.

**26 Nxd5+ Kb8 27 Qf4+ Ka8 28 Qc7 Qxd5 29 Rxh7 1-0**

This next game is the best-known encounter with 5 Qf3, a mini-masterpiece for White. I'll lean heavily upon Larsen's own notes.

**B.Larsen**  **L.Portisch**

Amsterdam 1964

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qf3 Nc6 (Diagram 8)**

Black develops the knight with tempo, attacking d4. This is the second most important response to 5 Qf3. Now White has to commit to a piece configuration.

**6 Bb5**

Developing quickly; other moves are slow.

**6...Nge7 7 Bf4 0-0 8 0-0-0 Na5!?**

Queried by the commentators. Larsen comments: 'A premature attack, as far as I can see. But afterwards we are all so very wise.' In fact, it's not clear to me that 8...Na5 is a mistake. If nothing else, it strengthens d5. Black goes wrong more seriously later on.

8...Be6 is studied in the theory section.

**9 Nge2 c6 10 Bd3 b5 11 h4! (Diagram 9)**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Larsen was a great fan of moving rook pawns. Here he says: 'The right prelude to the attack, because it very quickly creates a threat, gaining an important tempo.'

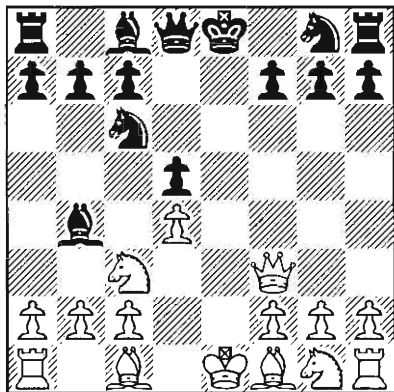


Diagram 8 (W)

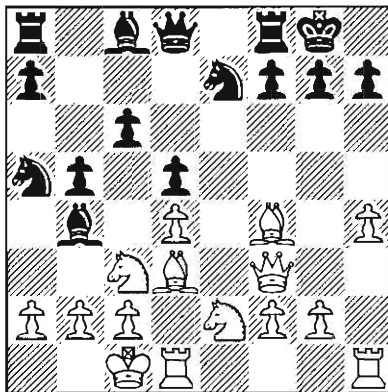


Diagram 9 (B)

**11...Nc4 12 h5 f6**

Or:

a) Wicker offers 12...h6 13 g4 a5 (13...f6!?) 14 g5.

b) 12...Qa5? 13 h6 wins! 14 hxg7 will be overwhelming, but 13...g6 14 Bc7! Qxc7 15 Qf6 mates shortly.

**13 g4 Qa5?!**

A natural attacking move that turns out badly. Larsen analyses 13...a5 14 Qg3 a4 15 g5 (15 a3 Ba5 16 Bxc4 dxc4 17 h6 g6 18 Bd6 is unclear) 15...f5 16 Bxc3 16 Bxc4 dxc4 17 h6 with a clear advantage. But here 15...Nf5! improves and may even grant Black the advantage. So I wonder about the merits of 14 Qg3. Instead, 14 Rdg1! a4 15 a3 Ba5 16 g5 looks correct, when Black is under a considerable pressure, and now 16...Nf5 17 h6 g6 18 Bxc4 dxc4? leaves c6 hanging, but 18...bxc4 19 gxf6 gains the dark squares with a powerful attack.

**14 Bxc4 dxc4 15 a3! Bxc3**

Black gives up the dark squares, but after 15...Bxa3? 16 bxa3 Qxa3+ 17 Kd2 b4, 18 Ra1 bxc3+ 19 Nxc3 Qb4 20 Rhb1 wins the queen.

**16 Nxc3 Qd8 (Diagram 10) 17 Rhe1!**



**BEWARE!** Not 17 Nxb5? Qd5!; for example, 18 Qxd5+ Nxd5 19 Nc7 Nxf4 20 Nxa8 Bxg4 21 Nc7 Bxd1 22 Kxd1 Rd8 23 c3 Nd3.

**17...a5!? 18 Qg3 Ra7?**

18...b4?! is met by 19 Bd6! with the idea 19...bxc3? (19...Rf7) 20 Bxe7 cxb2+ 21 Kb1. Nevertheless, 18...Nd5! would have limited White's advantage. After 18...Ra7 Larsen is fully in control.

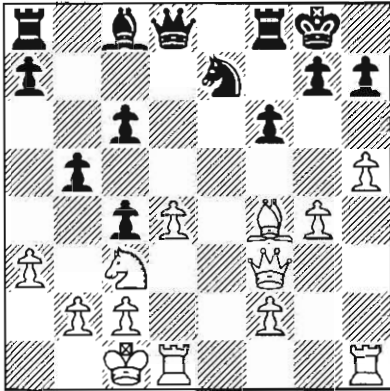


Diagram 10 (W)

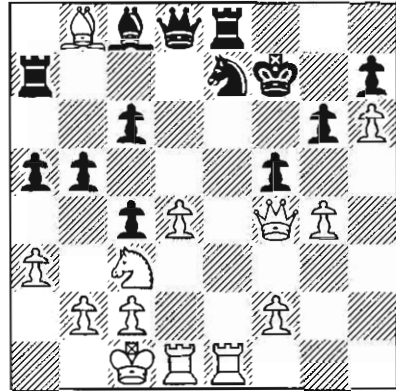


Diagram 11 (B)

**19 h6! g6 20 Bd6 Re8 21 Qf4!?**

A clearer course is 21 Bc5! Rb7 22 Qf3 and Black should be close to resignation.

**21...Kf7?**

A nice combination follows 21...Nd5 22 Nxd5 cxd5 23 Qxf6! Qxf6? 24 Rxe8+ Kf7 25 Rf8+ Ke6 26 Re1+, but 23...Rf7! 24 Qh4 Qd7 keeps the game going.

**22 Be5 f5 23 Bb8! (Diagram 11) 23...Rb7 24 Qe5 Rg8 25 g5 b4 26 Qf6+ Ke8 27 Qxc6+**

27 d5! would have instantly ended the whole affair.

**27...Kf7 28 Qf6+ Ke8 29 d5 Rf8 30 Qc6+ Qd7 31 Bd6 Rf7 32 Bxe7 bxc3 33 Bb4+ 1-0****Looking a Little Deeper****1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 exd5 exd5**

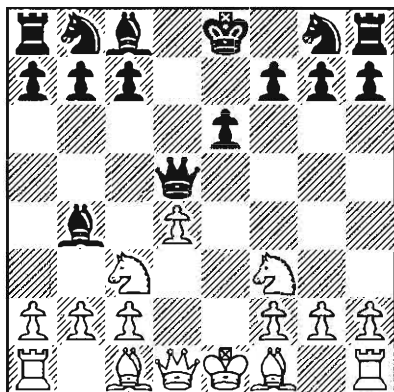
Sometimes 4...Qxd5!? is played, when 5 Nf3 (**Diagram 12**) is a natural continuation:

a) Ftacnik gives 5...Nf6 6 Bd3 Ne4 7 0-0!?, when Black will be subject to a strong attack if he takes the pawn by 7...Nxc3 8 bxc3 Bxc3 9 Rb1. However, this really isn't necessary, since White has the option 7 Bd2! Nxc3 8 bxc3 Be7 9 c4 Qd6 10 c5 Qd8 11 Qe2 Nc6 12 c3.

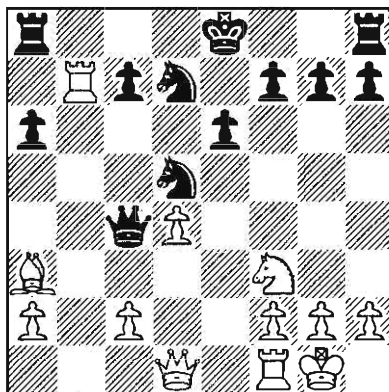
b) 5...Bd7 6 Bd3 Bb5 7 0-0 Bxc3 8 bxc3 Nd7 9 Rb1 a6 (9...Bxd3 10 cxd3) 10 c4!? (Ra-

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zuvaev likes 10 Qe2! Bxd3 11 cxd3 with a clear advantage) 10...Bxc4 11 Bxc4 Qxc4 12 Rxb7 Ngf6 13 Ba3 Nd5 (**Diagram 13**) was played in Y.Razuvaev-G Kuzmin, Baku 1972. Here 14 Rb3! is strong: for example, 14...Nc3 15 Qe1 Ne2+ 16 Kh1 Nxd4 17 Nxd4 Qxd4 18 Qe2!, having in mind Rd1, Bb2, Rd3, and Black has trouble defending.



**Diagram 12 (B)**



**Diagram 13 (W)**

### 5 Qf3

Now I'll examine:

---

**A: 5...Qe7+**

**B: 5...Nc6**

**C: 5...Ne7**

**D: 5...Others**

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### **A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qf3 Qe7+ 6 Nge2**

I won't spend much time on 6 Be3?!, since it is not my recommendation and has a horrendous record in practice. The most widely-quoted game is Z.Mestrovic-R.Maric, Kraljevo 1967: 6...Nf6 7 Bd3?! c5! 8 Kf1 Bxc3 9 bxc3 c4 10 Bf5 Bxf5 11 Qxf5 0-0 and Black has a large advantage because of White's serious pawn weaknesses and unfortunate king placement.

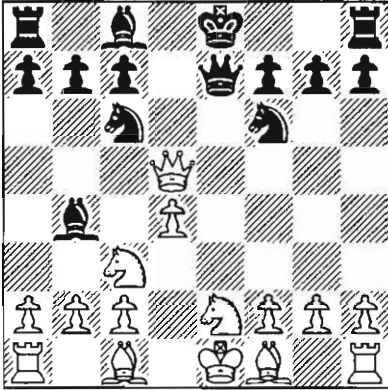
b) Wicker says of 6 Qe3 that 'wretched as this is, there's nothing better'. Again, the details aren't important, but one game went 6...Nc6 7 Bb5 Bf5 8 Qxe7+ Ngxe7 9 Bf4 Bxc2 10 Bxc7 Rc8 11 Bf4 a6 12 Bxc6+ Nxc6 with a small advantage for Black.

**6...Nc6**

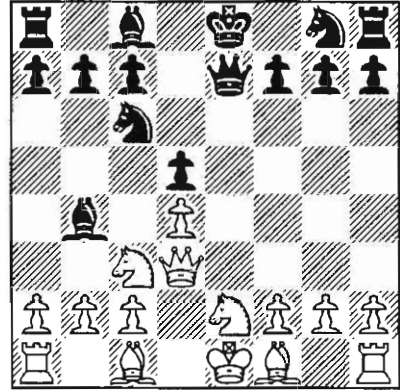
The move that justifies 5...Qe7+.

### 7 Qd3

7 Qxd5 Nf6 (**Diagram 14**) is generally given as good for Black, for obvious reasons: a lead in development, White's pinned pieces, and the prospects of gaining more time on the queen.



**Diagram 14 (W)**



**Diagram 15 (B)**



**ROLL THE DICE!** But the situation is not so clear, and a greedy and/or courageous player may want to try this.

Mineev's idea is 8 Qb5 (he also gives 8 Qc4 Be6 9 Qd3, but here I think that 8...Bf5! should be good, e.g. 9 Qb5 – attacking f5 and b7 – 9...Qd7! 10 Qxb7 Rb8 11 Qa6 Bxc2) 8...Bd7 (8...0-0 9 Be3 a6 10 Qg5!?) 9 Qd3; for example, 9...0-0-0 10 Be3 'intending 0-0-0'. Then 10...Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 Rhe8 obviously gives Black excellent compensation, and 11 Qxc3 Nd5 is even better for him, but 11 Nxc3! is a better and interesting try; for example, 11...Nb4 12 Qd2 Bf5 13 Rc1 Rhe8 14 Bc4.

Nevertheless, that's all a little hard to stomach, so let's return to the relative sanity of 7 Qd3 (**Diagram 15**):

### 7...Bg4

Alternatively:

a) 7...Be6 8 a3 Ba5 9 Bf4 0-0-0 10 0-0-0 g5!? 11 Be3 h6 12 h4 gxh4 13 f3! Qf6 14 Bf2 h3 15 g3 Nge7 16 Bxh3 (or 16 Nf4 Kb8 17 Bxh3 Bxh3 18 Rxh3) 16...Ng6 (A.Stavrinovs-R.Kupruks, Riga 1993). White has had the better of it throughout the opening, but here instead of 17 Bg2!?, he could have tied down Black's forces effectively by playing 17 Bxe6+ fxe6 18 Rh5!.

b) 7...Bxc3+!? 8 Qxc3 Bf5 9 Bd2 Nf6 10 f3! a5 was A.Raudive-R.Jedynak, Olomouc 2001. White stands better, and 11 g4! would have initiated his thematic kingside

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

expansion at the best time. 11...Bg6 (Diagram 16)

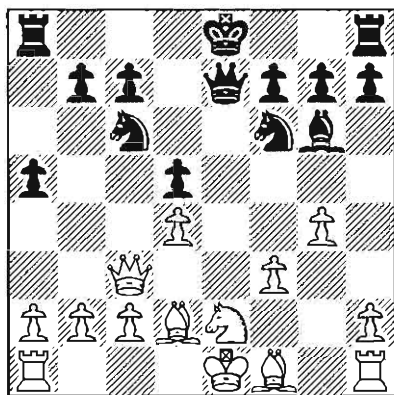


Diagram 16 (W)

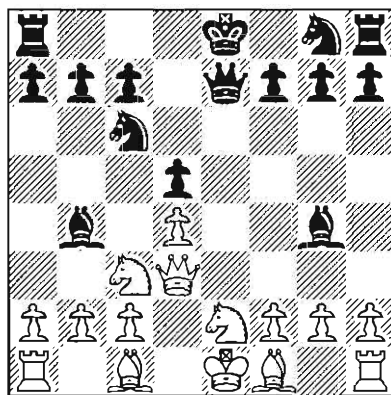


Diagram 17 (W)

and now:

b1) 12 Kf2 is a good move, and White's two bishops and space advantage express themselves in variations such as 12...0-0 13 h4 Qb4 14 h5! Qxc3 15 Nxc3 Bxc2 16 g5 Nd7 17 Nxd5 Nxd4 18 Rh4 c5 19 Rc1. An instructive line.

b2) 12 h4! is still better: 12...Nb4 13 Kf2! (13 h5? is met by 13...Ne4! 14 fxe4 Bxe4) 13...Nxc2 14 Rd1 0-0 (the best chance; inferior options are 14...h6? 15 Nf4 Bh7 16 Bd3, 14...h5? 15 g5 Nd7 16 Nf4, and 14...Nb4 15 Ng3! 0-0 16 a3 Nc6 17 Re1 Qd6 18 h5) 15 Nf4 c5! (15...Nb4? 16 a3 Nc6 17 Re1 Qd6 18 h5 Be4 19 Bg2) 16 Qxc5 Qxc5 17 dxc5 and White stands much better; for example, 17...h5 18 g5 Nd7 19 Rc1 Nd4 20 Nxd5 etc., or 17...d4? 18 h5 Ne3 19 Rc1!.

c) 7...g6 would enforce ...Bf5 and must be a reasonable idea, but it does use up a move and weakens the dark squares in return. Some sample analysis: 8 Be3 Bf5 9 Qd2 Nf6? (after 9...0-0-0 10 a3! Black has to decide whether to retreat to a5, away from the kingside dark squares, or yield the bishop pair to White) 10 f3! Bxc3 (or 10...Na5 11 Ng3 Bxc2 12 Kf2 Bf5 13 Bg5 0-0-0 14 Nxf5 gxf5 15 Re1 Qd6 16 Qd3 and White stands much better) 11 Nxc3 Nb4 12 0-0-0 0-0-0 (12...Bxc2? 13 Re1) 13 g4 Rde8 14 Bf2! Be6 (14...Bxc2? 15 Re1 Qd7 16 a3) 15 Bh4 and Black is in trouble. All very optimistic for White, obviously, but a surprisingly harsh punishment for 9...Nf6.

Back to 7...Bg4 (Diagram 17).

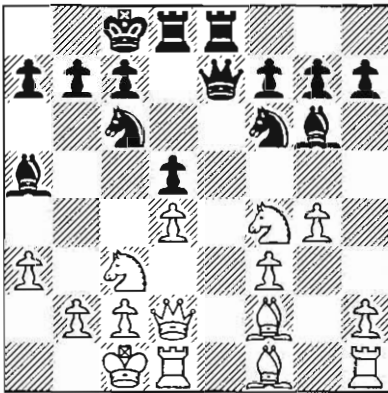
### 8 f3!?

This is '?!' according to both Mineev and Psakhis. However, it's not at all as bad as they make it out to be.

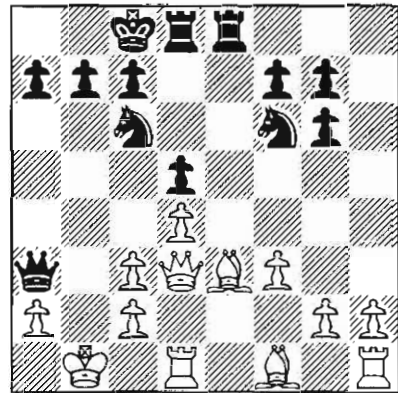
As alternatives, for 8 a3! see the illustrative game Raudive-Betkowski above, and Roizman's 8 Be3 is also worth looking into.

After 8 f3, play is complex:

a) 8...Be6 yields a flexible position in which both sides have options on almost every move: 9 a3 (9 Bf4 0-0-0 10 0-0-0) 9...Ba5 (9...Bxc3+) 10 Be3 (10 b4 Bb6) 10...Bf5 11 Qd2 0-0-0 (11...Bxc2? 12 b4!) 12 0-0-0 (12 Ng3 Bxc2! 13 Kf2 Bg6) 12...Nf6 13 g4 (13 Ng3 Bg6 14 Bb5 Rhe8 15 Bf4 Qd7 – taking steps against Bxc6 – 16 b4 Bb6 17 Na4 and I think that White has some advantage if only because he can get the two bishops in several positions) 13...Rhe8 14 Bf2 Bg6 15 Nf4 (**Diagram 18**) and I'd rather be White, who has ideas of h4, Nxc6, and Bb5 to play around with. Black's pieces aren't able to penetrate down the e-file, which is typical for this line. Nevertheless, White's advantage is hardly decisive!



**Diagram 18 (B)**



**Diagram 19 (B)**

b) Psakhis dismisses 8 f3 due to 8...Bh5 9 Be3 (9 a3 Bg6 is unappealing) 9...Bg6 'with a splendid position'. Let's see. 10 Qd2 and now:

b1) 10...Nf6 11 0-0-0 (11 a3!?) 11...0-0-0 12 Nf4?! (Roizman suggests 12 Kb1 with the idea 12...Bxc3!? 13 Nxc3 Nb4 14 Rc1 with a little advantage for White, but in this line 13...Rhe8 14 Bf2 a6 stops Bb5 and equalizes) 12...Bxc3 13 bxc3? ('Forced. 13 Qxc3? Nb4!', says Minev, but then White has 14 Qa3! Nxa2+ 15 Kd2 Nb4 16 Nxc6 hxc6 17 Qxa7 Nc6 18 Qa4, which is probably a bit better for White with his bishop pair; 14...Rhe8 15 Nxc6 fxc6 16 Re1 is also advantageous for White) 13...Qa3+ (or 13...Rde8 14 Bf2 Qa3+ 15 Kb1 Na5 16 Qc1 Qxc3 17 Qb2 Qxb2+ 18 Kxb2 c6) 14 Kb1 Rhe8 15 Nxc6 hxc6 16 Qd3? (**Diagram 19**) 16...Rxe3! 17 Qxe3 Nb4 18 Qf2 Nxa2 19 Rd3 Rd6 20 c4 Rb6+ 21 Rb3 Nc3 mate (0-1) L.Bilenko-G.Kaidanov, USSR 1973. Obviously White has improvements, notably on moves 12 and 13.

b2) Also interesting is 10...Bxc2!?!; for example, 11 a3 Bxc3 (11...Ba5? 12 b4 Bb6 13

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Nxd5) 12 Nxc3 Nf6 13 Bb5! 0-0 14 Bxc6 bxc6 15 0-0 Bb3! (stopping Na4-c5; after 15...Rab8?! 16 Rfe1 Bf5 17 Na4! Qd8 18 b4 White has pressure all over the queen-side) 16 Rfe1 (16 Bg5!?) 16...Rfe8 17 Bf4 Qd8, and the position is objectively equal, but with more possibilities for White because of Black's pawn structure. Black's bishop can be chased back, and the squares a5 and c5 are inviting. This isn't much but it would be worth playing out.

Conclusion: the line with 8 a3 from our illustrative game may be the best way to play for an advantage versus 5...Qe7+, but 8 f3 creates its share of problems.

### B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qf3 Nc6

As I pointed out above, I feel that this is the second most important challenge to 5 Qf3.

### 6 Bb5 Nge7 7 Bf4 (Diagram 20)

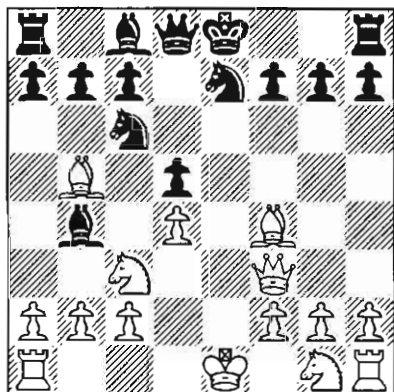


Diagram 20 (B)

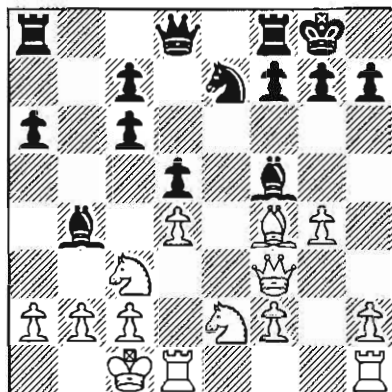


Diagram 21 (B)

The insertion of 7 Bg5!? f6 8 Bf4 weakens e6, although that didn't hurt Black in V.Sukhanov-S.Krasnov, Moscow 1971: 8...0-0 9 0-0-0 a6 10 Bd3?! (10 Bxc6! bxc6 11 Nge2 is not better from a positional point of view, but in that case a knight on f4 or possibly a4 would eye that e6 weakness) 10...Nxd4! 11 Bxh7+ Kxh7 12 Rxd4 c5 13 Rd1 Bxc3 14 Qxc3 Bf5 15 Ne2 d4. Black stands better because his pieces coordinate so well.

### 7...0-0!?

7...Bf5!? 8 0-0-0 Qd7 9 Nge2 0-0-0 is given as equal by Konstantinopolsky, since Black has his pieces on active squares. Nevertheless, White can create interesting problems by 10 a3 Bd6 (10...Ba5 11 Na4! a6 12 Nc5 Qe8 13 Ba4!; best may be 10...Bg4 11 Qg3 Bxc3 12 Qxc3 a6) 11 Rhe1 Bxf4+?! (11...a6! 12 Bxd6! Qxd6 13 Bxc6

Qxc6 14 Ng3 Be6 15 Nh5! Rhg8 16 Nf4) 12 Nxf4 with the idea 12...Bg4? (12...g5 13 Nd3) 13 Rxe7!, winning material.

**8 0-0-0!?**

It's possible that this is too rushed and thus not quite as accurate as 8 Nge2, when White might play a3 before deciding upon which way to castle. D. Van Geet-N. Rossolimo, Wijk aan Zee 1968, continued with 8...Bf5, which gives White an incentive to go queenside: 9 0-0-0 a6, and here Gheorghiu suggests 10 Bxc6 bxc6 11 g4! (**Diagram 21**).



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** This kind of kingside pawn advance is one of the main ideas behind 5 Qf3. The game is up for grabs, but now White's plan is clear, since once the players have castled on opposite sides the faster pawn assault tends to win.

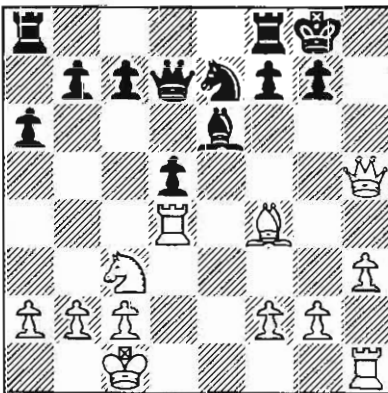
**8...Be6**

Portisch played 8...Na5 against Larsen in our illustrative game above.

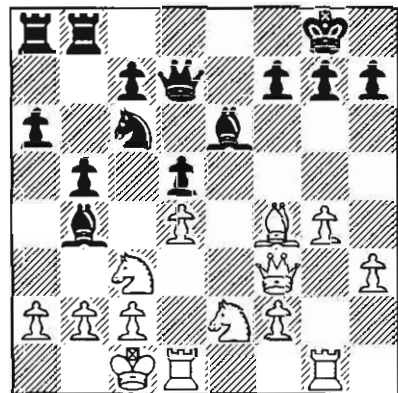
Situated on e6, the bishop comes in handy to protect d5. Still, 8...Bf5 is more aggressive. Then 9 g4!? is given by Wicker, but 9...Bxc3 10 gxf5 (10 Qxc3 Bxg4) 10...Bxd4! or 10...Nxd4 would favour Black. Better is simply 9 h3! with the familiar goal of kingside attack, whereas 9 Bxc6!? bxc6 10 Nge2 is double-edged.

**9 Nge2 Qd7**

Or 9...a6 10 Bd3! (safer is 10 Bxc6 Nxc6 11 Qg3!, when 11...Rc8 12 h4 Ne7 is approximately equal) 10...Qd7 11 h3 Bxc3! 12 Nxc3! Nxd4 13 Bxh7+ Kxh7 14 Qh5+ Kg8 15 Rxd4 (**Diagram 22**)



**Diagram 22 (B)**



**Diagram 23 (W)**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

and now:

a) 15...Nc6 16 Rd2 leaves Black's d-pawn weak: 16...d4 (16...Ne7 17 Rhd1 f6!?) 17 Rhd1 Bf5 18 Be3 Bg6 19 Qh4 d3 20 cxd3 Ne5 21 Qd4 Qxd4 22 Bxd4 Nc6 23 Be3 with d4 to follow, and Black has insufficient compensation.

b) 15...c5 yields an odd position that I left unassessed in my book, but with a clear implication of advantage for Black because of his extra, mobile centre pawn. That was my belief, but looking at it now, I'm not so sure. Black's king is a little loose, White's pieces are active, and the opposite-coloured bishops may help White to attack weak points in Black's position. Probably 'equal with mutual chances' is a fair conclusion.

### 10 h3 a6 11 Bxc6

11 Ba4 is answered by 11...b5 12 Bb3 Na5!

### 11...Nxc6 12 g4 b5 13 Rhg1 Rfb8 (Diagram 23)

(Z.Mestrovic-W.Uhlmann, Sarajevo 1965) Psakhis says that Black has 'a perfectly respectable position'. Both sides had plenty of options over the last few moves. With Black's rook on b8, White might play to attack d5 by 14 Bg3 Na5 15 Nf4 Bxc3 16 Qxc3 Nc4 17 Rge1, which is hard to assess.

It seems as though 5...Nc6 leads to the kind of complex positions in which Black can hold his own with accurate play. White has plenty of ways to create problems, as does his opponent, with Black having slightly the more difficult task.

### C) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qf3 Ne7 (Diagram 24)

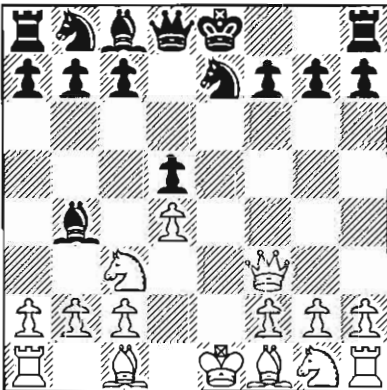


Diagram 24 (W)

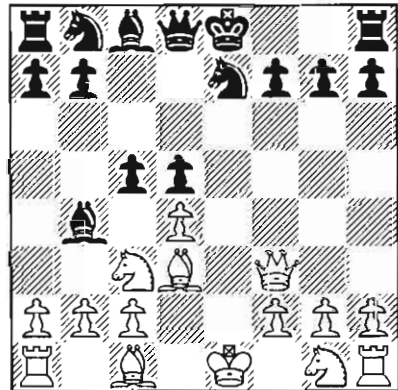


Diagram 25 (W)

### 6 Bd3!?

Another move that is almost always queried because of tactical drawbacks. Apart

from those alleged problems, however, 6 Bd3 makes the most sense, preventing ...Bf5 and preparing Nge2; that is the standard Exchange Variation plan, and it seems more impressive with the queen on f3.

There are two much safer alternatives that you may want to play:

a) 6 a3 has been employed to force Black into a decision about his strategy. Then 6...Bxc3+ cedes the two bishops (although it is of course fully playable), so Black often turns to 6...Bd6, having in mind that 7 Nb5?! (7 Bd3! 0-0 8 Nge2 is just a chess game, but I feel that White has the more comfortable position) 7...Bf5 8 Nxd6+ Qxd6 gives Black development in exchange for the bishop pair, and even the threat of ...Bxc2. So the logical follow-up is 9 Bd3 Nbc6! (or 9...Qg6 10 Bxf5 Nxf5) 10 Ne2 Qg6 11 Bxf5 Qxf5!?, and Black plays against the bad bishop; for example, 12 Qxf5 Nxf5 13 c3 0-0-0 14 Bf4 Rhe8 etc. In view of the simple 7 Bd3 option, however, Black may prefer to capture on c3 on move six.

b) The plan of 6 Bf4 followed by 0-0-0 should also be considered. White develops quickly, although he risks being vulnerable to a queenside attack. In a game A.Csulits-F.Franz, Annaberg-Buchholz 1965, Black tried 6...c5!? (obviously he can play more slowly) 7 0-0-0!? (7 Bb5+ Nbc6 8 Nge2 is slightly better for White, according to Wicker, although 8...cxd4 9 Nxd4 0-0 10 0-0-0 a6 looks fine for Black; at least it would be interesting to play these lines) 7...Bxc3!? 8 Qxc3 cxd4 9 Qxd4 (9 Qg3!? Nf5 10 Qa3!? is a computer recommendation) 9...0-0 10 Nf3 Nbc6 11 Qc3 (11 Qd2 stays away from the c-file) 11...Bg4 12 h3 d4! 13 Qa3 Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Qa5 15 Kb1 Rac8 with an unclear position.

### 6...c5! (Diagram 25)

This is supposed to refute 6 Bd3. The move 7...cxd4 is threatened, and even ...c4 is an attractive move (especially after 7 Nge2??). Instead, 6...Nbc6 7 Nge2 is what White wants: 7...Be6 8 0-0 Qd7 9 a3 Ba5 10 Be3 (Larsen suggests 10 Re1 Bb6 11 Be3 0-0-0 12 b4) 10...0-0-0 11 b4 Bb6 12 Na4 (A.Muslimova-V.Kolovskaya, Riga 1968) when Wicker says 'White is leading the attacking race'.

### 7 dxc5!? (Diagram 26)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! Here's the idea! Sources give this move a '??' (or at least a '?') because it appears to lose material. But White wants to go on the attack at all costs.**

Instead, White can bail out with 7 Bb5+, arguing that...c5 has been a weakening move, but it's hard to believe that he can be satisfied with 7...Nbc6 8 Nge2 cxd4 9 Nxd4 0-0.

### 7...d4 (Diagram 27)

There not much material on other moves, since this is supposed to win:

a) I prefer White after 7...Nd7 8 Nge2 Nxc5 9 Bb5+ (or 9 Bf4 Nxd3+ 10 Qxd3 0-0 11 0-0-0!?) 9...Bd7 10 0-0. A typical line after 8...0-0 would be 9 Be3 Nxc5 10 Bxc5 Bxc5

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

11 0-0 Be6 12 Nf4. White can also play 9 a3 Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 Nxc5 11 0-0 Re8 12 Be3 Nxd3 13 cxd3, which is unclear.

b) 7...Nbc6 8 Nge2 (8 Bd2 is a good option) 8...d4?! 9 a3 Qa5 10 axb4 Qxa1 11 Ne4 has the idea 12 Nd6+. Then 11...0-0 12 Nf6+! gxf6 13 Qxf6 is winning for White, with moves like 0-0 and Bh6 to follow.

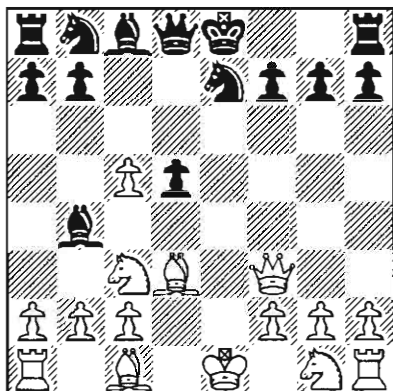


Diagram 26 (B)

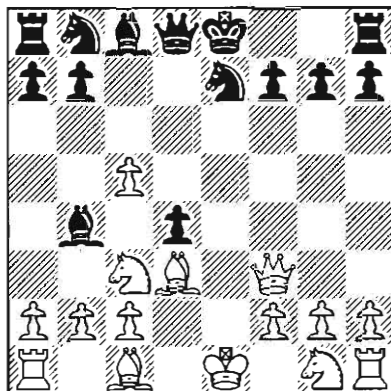


Diagram 27 (W)

### 8 a3 Qa5

This is Black's whole point. 8...Ba5 9 b4 dxc3 10 bxa5 Qxa5 looks like a ...Ba5 Winawer in a favourable form for White, and 8...dxc3? 9 axb4 is positionally awful for Black.

### 9 Rb1!

9 axb4 Qxa1 10 Nce2 Nbc6! hits b4 and helps Black to save his queen. 10...Qa4 is also feasible, although White might get some compensation in that case by 11 c3 dxc3 12 bxc3.

### 9...dxc3 10 axb4!

Improving upon the game that everyone quotes: 10 b3 Bxc5 11 b4 Qb6 0-1 G.Makarov-R.Jakhin, Rostov on Don 1972!

### 10...Qa2 (Diagram 28)

A whole rook is lost, and authors understandably stop here. But I think that White can give Black a real scare.

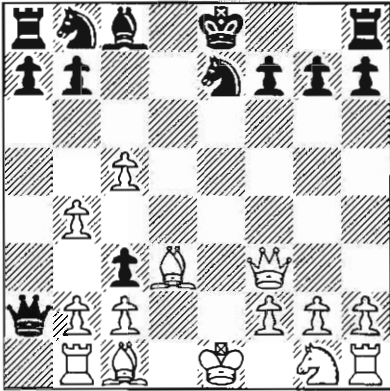
### 11 Ne2! Qxb1 12 b3! (Diagram 29)



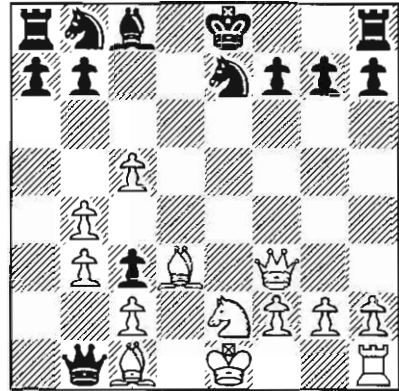
**ROLL THE DICE!** Now Black has to take care not to get his queen trapped, and White hopes to make something of his bishop pair and rapid development.

Even 12 bxc3 has some point, although the tripled pawns look a little bizarre.

**12...a5**



**Diagram 28 (W)**



**Diagram 29 (B)**

Going for immediate play along the file. Obviously, Black will win with his extra rook if he gets his queen out quickly. Lines after 12...0-0 13 0-0 illustrate White's counterplay, when the ideas of Nxc3 and Bd2 are starting to make Black feel uncomfortable:

a) 13...Ng6 14 Bxg6! hxg6 15 Qxc3! threatens Bb2 with mate or the win of the queen for a rook: 15...Rd8 (15...Qa2? 16 Bb2 f6 17 Ra1) 16 Nd4! (16 Bd2? Qa2 17 Ra1?? Rxd2) 16...Nc6! (16...Rxd4 17 Qxd4 threatens Qd8+, when White wins; for example, 17...Nc6 18 Qc3 and Black's queen faces the same trouble) 17 Nxc6! bxc6 18 Bb2 Qxf1+ 19 Kxf1 Ba6+ 20 Ke1 Re8+ 21 Kd2 Rad8+ 22 Kc1 f6 23 b5! Bxb5 24 Qa5 and White is untangling with a safe king and active queen. That is enough to give him a small advantage.

b) 13...Nbc6 14 Nxc3 Qa1 (14...Ne5 15 Qe4 Nxd3 16 Nxb1) 15 Bd2 Qb2 16 Bc1 repeats the position. White can go for more by 15 Bf4!? Qa3 16 b5, but this is probably asking too much of the position following a line such as 16...Nd4 17 Qe4 Nef5 18 Bd6 Rd8 19 g4 Nf3+! 20 Qxf3 Nxd6.

**13 0-0 axb4 14 Bg5! (Diagram 30)**

**14...Qb2!**

White's attack is surprisingly poisonous after 14...Qa2 15 Bxe7 Kxe7 16 Re1; for example, 16...Qa5! 17 Qg3 Qxc5 (17...Kf8 18 Qd6+ Kg8 19 Nf4! is winning because of the threats of Re8+ and Nd5) 18 Qxg7 Re8 19 Nxc3+ (19 Nd4+ Kd8) 19...Be6 (19...Kd8? 20 Rxe8+ Kxe8 21 Ne4) 20 Ne4 with a powerful attack, in view of the ideas Bc4, Qf6+ and the like.

15 Bxe7 Kxe7 16 Bc4 (Diagram 31) 16...Be6

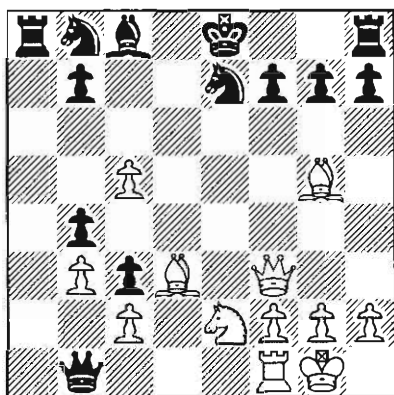


Diagram 30 (B)

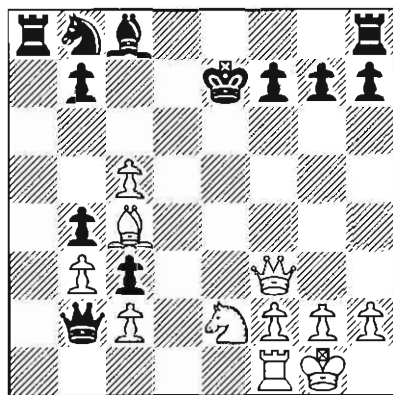


Diagram 31 (B)

It's odd that Black would need to give back material. On the other hand, 16...Kd8? 17 Nd4! Re8 18 Qd5+ Nd7 (18...Bd7?? 19 Qxb7) 19 c6! bxc6 20 Qd6 Bb7 21 Rd1 Re1+! 22 Rxe1 Ra1 23 Qe7+ Kc7 24 h4 gives some advantage for White.

**17 Qxb7+**

17 Bxe6 fxe6 18 Qg3 Rf8! 19 Qxg7+ Rf7 20 Qg5+ Ke8 21 Qg8+ Ke7 22 Qg5+ ends in a repetition.

**17...Nd7 18 Nd4!? Ra1**

18...Kf6? 19 Bxe6 fxe6 20 Qf3+.

**19 c6 Kf6!**

19...Rxf1+? 20 Bxf1 Rb8 21 Qc7.

**20 cxd7**

20 Qb5!? is worth looking into.

**20...Bxc4 21 d8Q+ Rxd8 22 Qb6+ Ke7 23 Nf5+ Ke8 24 Nxg7+**

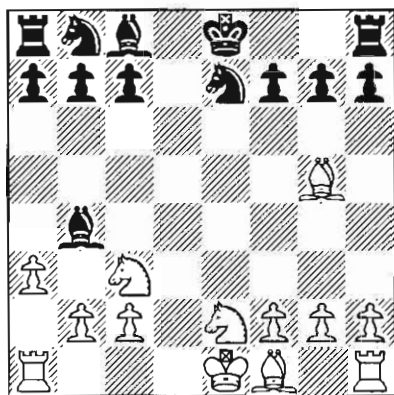
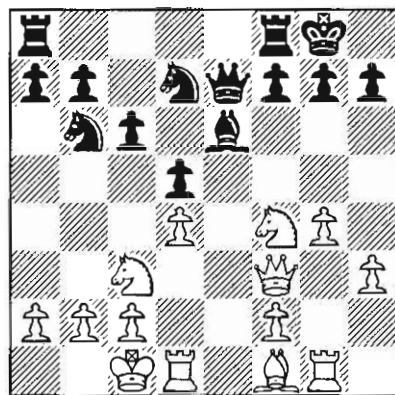
...and the analysis ends in perpetual check.

It would be fun to try to improve upon this. I have to admit that White is taking some chances; in practice, however, it will be difficult for Black to wend his way through the whole mess. On the other hand, if you're playing someone who has both read this book and has a stupendous memory, you might want to play 6 a3 or 6 Bf4 to guarantee yourself winning chances. My suggestion would be to put some time into these positions and do some original analysis; at least you won't be surprised by some improvement that an opponent springs on you, and in the meantime you'll improve your tactical understanding.

**D) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qf3 Others**

We'll finish up by looking at a few lesser 5th moves:

- a) 5...c5?! 6 dxc5 d4? now falls short to 7 a3 Qa5 8 Rb1! dxc3 9 Qe4+ Ne7 10 Qxb4.  
 b) 5...Qf6 6 Qxd5 Ne7 and instead of 7 Qe5? Qxe5 8 dxe5 Nbc6 with a Black initiative, 7 Qg5! is a simple and strong option. If Black wants his pawn back by 7...Qxd4, he must subject himself to tempo-gaining attacks: 8 Nge2 Qg4 (8...Bxc3+? 9 Nxc3 h6 10 Qf4 Nbc6 11 Nb5) 9 a3 Qxg5 (9...Bd6 10 Nb5 Nbc6 11 Nxd6+ cxd6 12 h3 Qxg5 13 Bxg5 Be6 14 0-0-0) 10 Bxg5 (**Diagram 32**)

**Diagram 32 (B)****Diagram 33 (B)**

10...Ba5 (not wanting to cede the two bishops after, for example, 10...Bd6 11 Ne4), and now White can indulge in a promising forcing line: 11 b4 Bb6 12 Bxe7 Kxe7 13 Nd5+ Kd8 14 0-0-0 Nd7 (14...Bd7 is an option, when 15 Nd4!? Nc6!? 16 Nxb6 axb6 17 Nxc6+ bxc6 18 Bc4 Rxa3 19 Kb2 Ra8 20 Bxf7 favours White; this is just an example, but a realistic one) 15 Nxb6 axb6 16 Kb2 Re8 17 Nd4 c6 (17...g6? 18 Bc4 Re7 19 Rhe1 Rxe1 20 Rxe1) 18 Bc4 Ke7 19 Rhe1+ Kf8 20 Rxe8+ Kxe8 21 Re1+ (or 21 Nf5) 21...Kf8 22 Nf5 Nc5 23 Nd6 Ne6 24 f4 b5 25 Bxe6 Bxe6 26 Nxb7 with a clear extra pawn.

c) 5...Be6 6 Bf4 (6 Be3 Nf6 7 Bd3 c5!; 6 Bd3 Qf6 7 Bf4 is Larsen's suggestion, with advantage to White – 7...Qxd4 8 Nge2 Qf6 9 Qg3 keeps the initiative) 6...Nf6 7 0-0-0 c6 (or 7...0-0 8 h3 with a kingside advance in store) 8 Nge2 Nbd7 9 h3 0-0 10 g4 Nb6 11 Bg5 Be7 12 Rg1 Nfd7 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 14 Nf4 (**Diagram 33**) is a typical position arising from expansion on the kingside; both sides have chances: 14...Qd6 15 Bd3 Nc4 16 Rde1 Ndb6 17 g5 g6? 18 Nh5! gxh5? (18...Nd7 19 Bxc4! dxc4 20 Ne4 leaves White with an attack) 19 Bxh7+ Kxh7 20 Qxh5+ Kg8 21 g6 Rfd8 22 Qh6 f5 23 Qh7+ Kf8 24 g7+ 1-0 V.Adhami-Y.Hadjitofis, Siegen Olympiad 1970.

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d) 5...Nf6 6 Bg5 Nbd7 7 0-0-0 Bxc3 (White has the advantage after 7...Be7 8 Bd3 c6 9 Nge2 0-0 10 Ng3 Nb6 11 Nf5) 8 Qe3+! Qe7 9 Qxc3 Ne4? 10 Bxe7 Nxc3 11 Re1 Ne4 12 Ba3 (O.Hindle-P.Lee, Hastings 1964/65). White not only has the bishop pair but it's hard for Black to coordinate at all.

## Conclusion

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As indicated, 5 Qf3 cannot claim to be the solution to the Winawer, nor to achieve a long-term advantage in every line. But there is no variation of 5 Qf3 in which imbalances don't arise, and the positions are unexplored in comparison with White's normal 5th-, 6th-, and 7th-move alternatives.

## Characterization of 5 Qf3

---

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♣ ♣
Attacking Nature	♣ ♣
Positional/Strategic Nature	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣
Risk	♣ ♣
Reward	♣ ♣ ♣
Theoretical Depth	♣ ♣

## Chapter Five

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# A World of Difference

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6  
7 Ndf3 (Diagram 1)

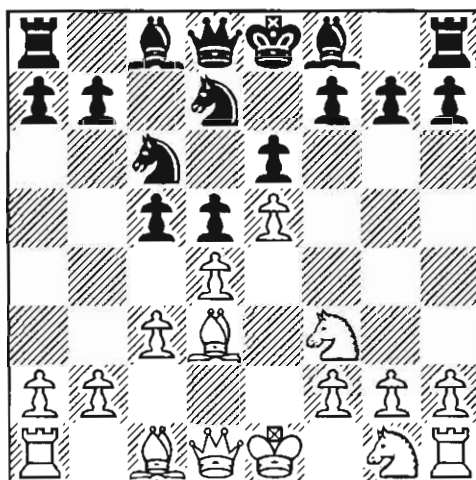


Diagram 1 (B)

In this chapter we look at one of the oldest variations in the Tarrasch: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6. At this juncture the most popular move has always been 7 Ne2, and in recent years a lot more has been seen of 7 Ngf3.

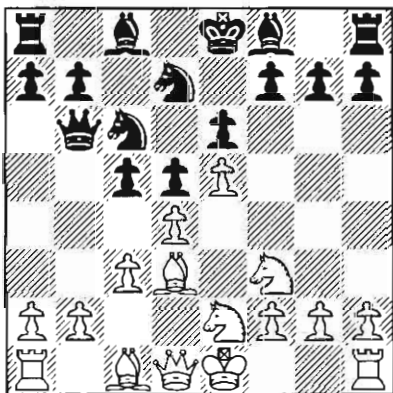
## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Remarkably, in over a century of practice extremely few strong players have tried the obvious 7 Ndf3 (**Diagram 1**) until the last few years.

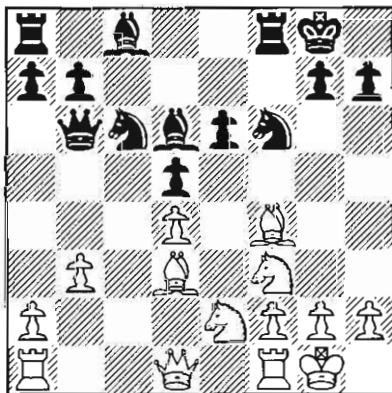
John Emms brought my attention to the potential virtues of this move, one that I had given only the briefest of treatments in my own writing. He had done some analysis with Jonathan Rowson about the most important lines, and the two generously shared their ideas with me for this book. In spite of some initial scepticism, I slowly realized that Black had no evident line to clear equality, and that White wasn't limited to a narrow sequence of moves in order to keep the play interesting. In particular, he has a variety of independent continuations to choose from, none of which have been shown to be inferior and all of which have promise. Naturally, it is not possible to claim a forced advantage after 7 Ndf3 (nor after 7 Ne2 or 7 Ngf3), but at least Black is confronted with unfamiliar and tricky problems to grapple with, and precisely how to equalize is not yet established. As it turns out, there's a world of difference between the three knight moves. Hey, maybe we've been playing the wrong one all this time?



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** Let me begin by pointing out that 7 Ndf3 introduces a complex of transpositions that White can use to his benefit. For example, 7...Qb6 8 Ne2 (**Diagram 2**) is what used to be the French Tarrasch main line; it normally derives from 7 Ne2 Qb6 8 Ndf3. Indeed, many players of White will handle 7 Ndf3 Qb6 by playing 8 Ne2.



**Diagram 2 (B)**



**Diagram 3 (B)**

So what's the difference? The point of using this move order is that White has avoided the modern main lines which arise from 7 Ne2 cxd4 8 cxd4 f6 9 exf6 Nxf6 10 Nf3. In that latter position, played far more than lines with ...Qb6, Black plays

either of two moves: 10...Bd6 or 10...Qc7. Both of these have mountains of theory attached to them, and both are considered satisfactory for Black. Ask any Tarrasch (3 Nd2) player how much work White would save if he didn't have to deal with these incredibly complex lines. Worse, the systems beginning with 7 Ne2 include so many forced variations that a great mass of material simply must be committed to memory. By limiting your study obligations to the 7 Ndf3 Qb6 8 Ne2 variation, you get the best of both worlds, because White has a somewhat easier time playing against it. This is true in practice and, arguably, in theory. I have written extensively about the 7...Qb6 lines and I have to admit, for example, that the popular line 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 f6 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 0-0 Bd6 12 b3 0-0 13 Bf4 (**Diagram 3**) is irritating for Black to play against, and it is easy to learn for White. Alternatively, there are plenty of more exciting options at White's disposal which lead to more open-ended positions than do the confined variations initiated by 10...Bd6 and 10...Qc7. Having said all that, White can also speculate by playing 7 Ndf3 Qb6 8 a3!?, as I have examined in the 'Deeper Look' section, under 7...Qb6.

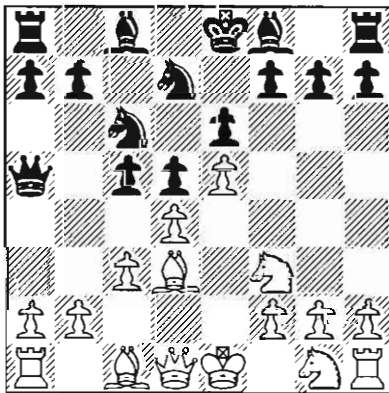
Let's plunge into this variation by looking at actual practice.

## Illustrative Games

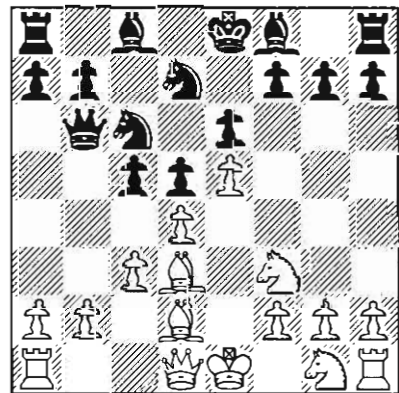
□ E.Ghaem Maghami ■ D.Barua

Doha 2003

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 Qa5 (**Diagram 4**)



**Diagram 4 (W)**



**Diagram 5 (W)**

This is Black's most unique and most critical attempt to make something out of

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

White's extra knight move. He threatens 8...Nxd4 immediately and might like to support ...b5-b4.

### 8 Bd2!?

White takes up the challenge. The complex alternative 8 Kf1 is seen in the next game.

### 8...Qb6 (Diagram 5)

Black's main idea in playing ...Qa5-b6 is to move the queen to its normal spot but at the same time attack b2 and reinforce pressure on d4. Notice that White's queen is now blocked from the defence of d4 by two pieces.

### 9 Qc2!?

White makes a bold decision, gambiting a pawn and creating complications regardless of whether it is accepted. It makes sense to use the one virtue of 8 Bd2, which is quick development.

Another gambit begins with 9 Ne2, which we will look at later. Finally, 9 Qb3 has sometimes been played, but a smooth answer in that case is 9...Qxb3 (or 9...Qc7!?) 10 axb3 cxd4 11 cxd4 Nb4, intending 12 Bb1 b6 and...Ba6.

### 9...cxd4 10 cxd4 Nxd4

The important alternative 10...Nb4 will be examined in the theory section below.

### 11 Nxd4 Qxd4 12 Nf3 Qc5 (Diagram 6)

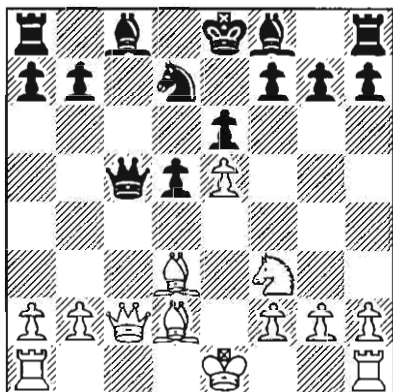


Diagram 6 (W)

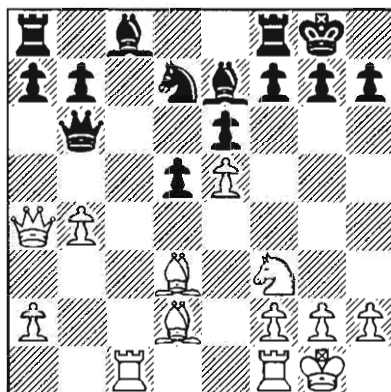


Diagram 7 (B)



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** This is very much like the well-known gambit line 7 Ngf3 Qb6 8 0-0 cxd4 9 cxd4 Nxd4 10 Nxd4 Qxd4 11 Nf3 Qb6 12 Qc2 Qc5, except that in our case White has played Bd2 instead of 0-0.

This bishop development can help White's cause because the move b2-b4 is so useful in keeping Black's pieces off c5. Having the bishop on d2 can also be of assistance if Black plays 12...Qb6 (instead of 12...Qc5): 13 0-0 (13 Bxh7!?) 13...h6 14 Rac1 (having in mind Qxc8+ at some point; also good is 14 b4) 14...Be7 15 Be3 Qb4 16 a3 Qa5 and here White has two moves of particular interest:

- a) 17 b4!? Qd8 18 Qd2 b6 19 Rc2 Bb7 20 Rfc1 Rc8 21 Rxc8 Bxc8 22 Rc2 (or 22 Qc3!?) 0-0 23 Qd4 with the idea of Qg4) 22...Bb7 23 Qc1 Qb8 24 Bb5 Bd8 25 Bd4 a6 26 Bxd7+ Kxd7 27 a4 Bc7 28 h4  $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$  A.Seiler-J.Falato, correspondence 1998.
- b) 17 Rfe1! 0-0 (17...Qd8 can be met by 18 Qa4; another line is 17...Nf8 18 b4 Qd8 19 Nd4 Bd7 20 f4) 18 Qe2, when White has ideas such as Bb1, Rc3 and Qc2, or simply Qd2 with the hard-to-stop threat of Bxh6.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Few players with the black pieces are eager to enter into the conventional gambit line above (with 8 0-0), and the substitution of Bd2 for 0-0 is unlikely to be to White's detriment.

### 13 Qa4

13 Bxh7 Qxc2 14 Bxc2 isn't much, although White should hold a small advantage by virtue of space and quick development. Alternatively, Black can play 13...g6 14 Bxg6 Rg8 (14...fxg6? 15 Qxg6 eventually leads to a large advantage) 15 Bd3 Rxg2 16 Bc3! and White stands better.

### 13...a6?!

Müller prefers 13...Qb6, although 14 b4 Be7 15 Rc1 0-0 16 0-0 (**Diagram 7**) looks good. 16...f6 (16...f5? 17 Rxc8! Raxc8 18 Qxd7 Rc7 19 Qa4) 17 Qc2! (17 Rxc8!? Raxc8 18 Qxd7 Rc7 19 Qb5 Qxb5 20 Bxb5 fxe5 21 Nxe5 Bd6 22 Nf3 Rc2 isn't clear), and:

- a) 17...Nxe5 18 Nxe5 fxe5 19 Bxh7+ Kh8 20 Bg6 (with the idea of Qd1 and Rc3) 20...Rf6 (or 20...Qd4 21 Qd1 Qh4 22 Rc3) 21 Qd1 Rxg6 22 Qh5+ Kg8 23 Qxg6 and White is winning.
- b) 17...f5 18 Kh1! a6! (18...Nb8?! runs into 19 Qxc8! Rxc8 20 Rxc8+ Kf7 21 a4 a5 22 Bb5!), and one ambitious plan is 19 Rg1!; for example, 19...Qxf2 20 Rcf1 Qb6 21 g4 g6 22 gxf5 exf5 23 e6 Qxe6 (23...Nf6 24 Bxf5 Bxe6 25 Bxg6! Kh8 26 Bh6 Rac8 27 Qe2 hxg6 28 Nh4!) 24 Nd4 Qb6 25 Nxf5 Bxb4 26 Nh6+! Kg7 27 Rxf8 Bxf8 28 Bc3+ d4 29 Bxd4+! Qxd4 30 Nf5+ and White wins.

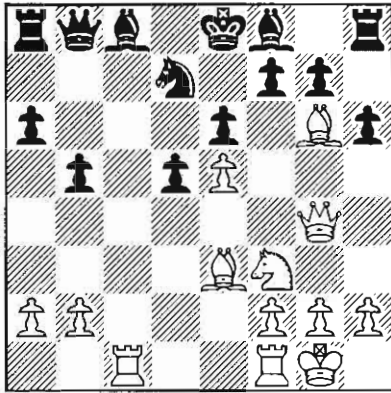
### 14 0-0 b5?!

14...Be7 15 Rac1 (or 15 Qg4 g6 16 Rac1 Qb6 17 b3) 15...Qb6 16 b4 has the idea 16...0-0?! 17 Rxc8 Rfxc8 18 Qxd7, a standard tactic.

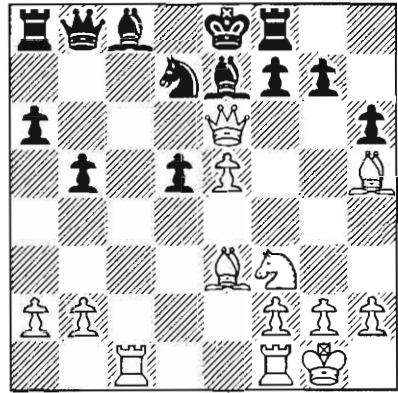
### 15 Qg4 h6?!

Not ideal, but 15...Qc7 16 Rfe1 Nc5 17 Rac1 Qd8 18 Bb1 leaves White with a terrific position.

**16 Rac1 Qa7 17 Be3 Qb8 18 Bg6!! (Diagram 8)**



**Diagram 8 (B)**



**Diagram 9 (B)**

**18...Be7**

18...fxg6? is met by 19 Qxe6+ Kd8 (or 19...Be7 20 Qxg6+ Kd8 21 Nd4 Nxe5 22 Qxg7 followed by f4 and Black collapses) 20 Ng5 hxg5 21 Bxg5+ Nf6 22 Bxf6+ gxf6 23 Qxf6+ etc.

**19 Qxe6 Nxe5**

Müller gives this a '?' but it's probably as good as anything in view of 19...Rf8 20 Bh5 (Diagram 9). Unfortunately, proving that this is good for White requires some detailed analysis: 20...Qb7 (after 20...Nf6, 21 Rxc8+ will win, but the fancy way is 21 Qc6+!? Bd7 22 exf6! Bxc6 23 fxe7 Kxe7 24 Rxc6 and White's attack is far too strong) 21 Nd4 (or 21 Rfd1 Nf6 22 Rxc8+, and now 22...Rxc8 23 exf6 gxf6 24 Nd4!, or 22...Qxc8 23 Qxc8+ Rxc8 24 exf6 Bxf6 25 Bg4, when White has two pieces for a rook and pawn, as well as better development, two bishops, and an attack!) 21...Nc5 22 Qc6+ Qxc6 23 Nxc6 Nd3 24 Nxe7 Kxe7 (24...Nxc1 25 Nxd5 wins material) 25 Rc7+ Kd8 (25...Ke6 26 f4) 26 Bb6 Ke8 27 Rd1 Bf5 28 e6! g6 29 e7 Rg8 30 Bf3 etc.

**20 Rxc8+! Qxc8 21 Qxe5 0-0!**

21...fxg6? loses to 22 Qxg7 Rf8 23 Qxg6+ Rf7 24 Ne5 Qf5 25 Qc6+.

**22 Qxd5**

Or 22 Qxe7! fxg6 23 Bd4 Rf7 24 Qd6.

**22...Qd8 23 Qb3 Qd6 24 Be4 Rad8 25 Bb1 Rc8 26 a4 Qb4 27 Qxb4 Bxb4 28 axb5 axb5 29 Nd4 Bc5 30 Nxb5 Bxe3 31 fxe3 Rb8 32 Bd3 Rfe8 33 Bc4 Rxe3 34 Rxf7 Kh8 35 b3**

...and White won. Black played on but he could have easily resigned here.

□ S.Milan ■ M.Maedler

Correspondence 1966

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 Qa5 8 Kf1!? (Diagram 10)

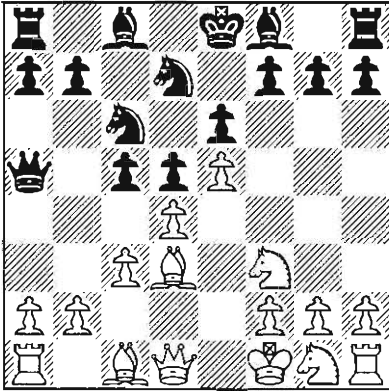


Diagram 10 (B)

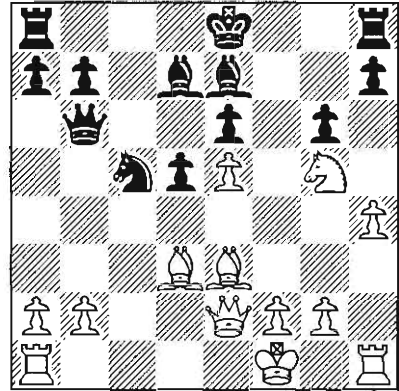
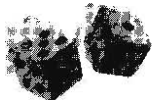


Diagram 11 (B)



**ROLL THE DICE!** This king move, which will be subjected to a more detailed scrutiny in the theory section, looks risky. However, as we will see it can lead to exciting complications.

**8...cxd4 9 cxd4 f6 10 Qe2 fxe5 11 Nxe5 Ncxe5?!**

Maedler offers up 11...Ndx5 12 dxe5 Qc7 13 Nf3 Bc5 14 h4, although here 14 Bxh7! Rxh7 15 Qc2 should definitely be considered. Black can try 15...Nxe5 (15...Rh5 16 Qxc5 b6 17 Qc3 Ba6+ 18 Kg1 Rc8 19 Bf4!?) 16 Nxe5! Qxe5 17 Qxh7 Bd7, but White's exchange counts for more than the bishop pair.

**12 dxe5 g6 13 Nf3**

Another option is 13 h4!? with the attack and some advantage.

**13...Nc5 14 Bd2 Qb6 15 Be3 Bd7 16 h4!? Be7 17 Ng5!? (Diagram 11)**

Now wild tactics ensue. Maedler suggests 17 Kg1!, but the simple 17 h5! g5 18 Kg1 may be best of all.

**17...Qb4!?**

Threatening ...Nxd3 followed by ...Bb5; 17...Qa5 would be a better way to do the same thing, but that's not obvious. Instead, a combination follows 17...Bxg5?! 18 hxg5 0-0 19 Rxh7! Bb5 (19...Kxh7? 20 Qh5+) 20 Bxb5 Kxh7 21 Kg1!, so that after 21...a6 22 Bd3, ...Nxd3 isn't check. Also, Kh2 followed by Rh1 is on the cards.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

18 a3 Qb3 19 Bxc5 Bxc5 (Diagram 12)

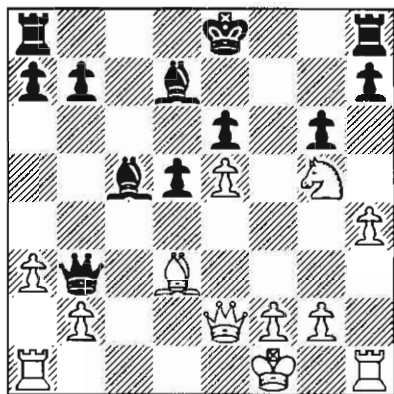


Diagram 12 (W)

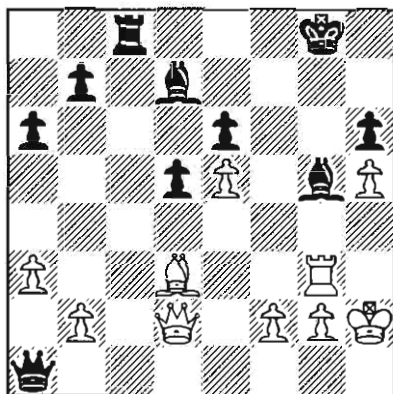


Diagram 13 (B)

20 Rh3?

20 Rc1! b6 (20...Qb6 21 Nxh7 Ke7 22 Nf6) 21 Nxh7! Rxh7 22 Bxg6+ Ke7 23 Rc3 is winning (and not 23 Bxh7?? Bb5).

20...0-0! 21 Nf3

21 Bxg6?? loses to 21...Rxf2+ 22 Qxf2 Bb5+!

21...a6!



**BEWARE! Black is threatening ...Qxd3 followed by ...Bb5.**

22 Rc1 Rac8 23 Rc3 Qa2 24 Kg1

24 h5 is met by 24...Qa1+.

24...Be7 25 Rxc8 Rxc8 26 h5 g5! 27 Nxg5!

The beginning of a sterling combination.

27...Bxg5 28 Rg3 Qa1+

On 28...h6, 29 Qd2 or 29 Kh2 follows.

29 Kh2 h6 30 Qd2! (Diagram 13)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! Black is a whole piece ahead, but faces annihilation.**

30...Qc1!

Both 30...Kf8 31 Rxg5! hxg5 32 Qxg5 Qc1 33 Qf6+ Kg8 34 h6 and 30...Rc1 31 Rxg5+

hxg5 32 Qxg5+ Kf7 33 Qf6+ Kg8 34 Qd8+ Kg7 35 h6+ lead to mate.

**31 Qxc1 Rxc1 32 f4 Kg7 33 fxg5 hxg5 34 Rxg5+?**

This activates Black's king. 34 h6+! wins after 34...Kh8 35 Rxg5 Bb5 36 Bxb5 axb5 37 Rg6 etc., or 34...Kxh6 35 Rh3+ Kg7 36 Rh7+.

**34...Kh6 35 Rg8 Kxh5 36 Kg3 Bb5! 37 Bxb5 axb5 38 Re8 Kg5 39 Rxe6 Rc2**

Now Black has just enough play to draw and the game concluded that way.

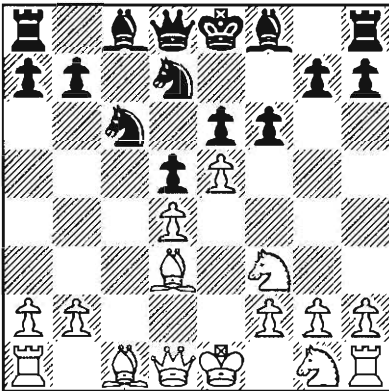
**40 b4 Rc3+ 41 Kf2 Kf5 42 Re8 Rxa3 43 e6 Rb3 44 g4+ Kf6 45 g5+ Kxg5 46 Rf8 Rb2+ 1/2-1/2**

Black is drawing, in view of 47 Kf3 or 47 Kf1 (but not 47 Ke1? Rxb4!).

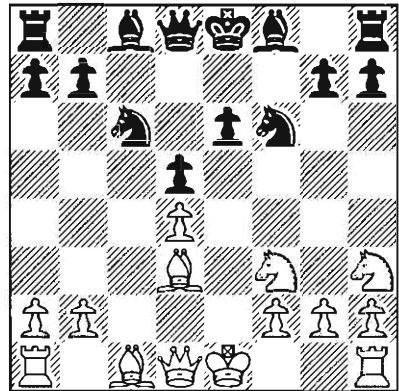
□ L.Oil ■ C.Matamoros Franco

Aviles 1992

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 cxd4 8 cxd4 f6 (Diagram 14)**



**Diagram 14 (W)**



**Diagram 15 (B)**

This traditional assault on the centre is Black's other important way to meet 7 Ndf3. Note that this is the usual way of meeting the 7 Ne2 variation.

**9 exf6 Nxf6 10 Nh3! (Diagram 15)**

White refuses to revert to the standard 3...Nf6 line with 10 Ne2. Although the knight on h3 doesn't protect d4 as the one on e2 would do, it can redeploy to g5 or f4 and it leaves the queen's path to g4 or h5 less blocked. Furthermore, by defending f2, 10 Nh3 allows the move Re1 to be played with less risk.

**10...Bd6 11 0-0 Qc7**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Black intends an early ...e5. He may be trying to avoid the main line transposition via 11...0-0 12 Bf4 (12 Bg5!? Qc7 13 Rc1!? can be answered by 13...Ng4!, but other 13th moves are possible) 12...Bxf4 13 Nxf4. But in this line 12...Qc7!? 13 Bxd6 Qxd6 would be possible, apparently losing a tempo yet leaving White's knight sitting on the difficult square h3. Then, for example, 14 Re1 might lead to 14...h6 (with the idea of ...Ng4) 15 Qe2 Bd7 (or 15...Ng4) 16 Rad1 Ng4 (threatening ...Rxf3) 17 Ne5 Ngxe5 18 dxe5 Qb4 with mutual chances.

White can also try moves such as 12 Re1, analysed in the theory section. All this territory is wide open for investigation!

### 12 Bd2

A very interesting move. 12 Nhg5!? 0-0 13 Re1 is an ambitious alternative that will be examined in the analytical section. It can of course also arise via 12 Re1 0-0 13 Nhg5!?

### 12...0-0 13 Rc1 h6 14 Kh1! Ng4 (Diagram 16)

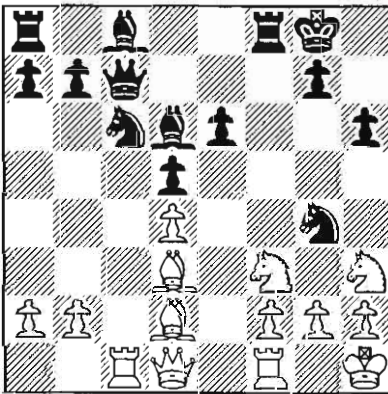


Diagram 16 (W)

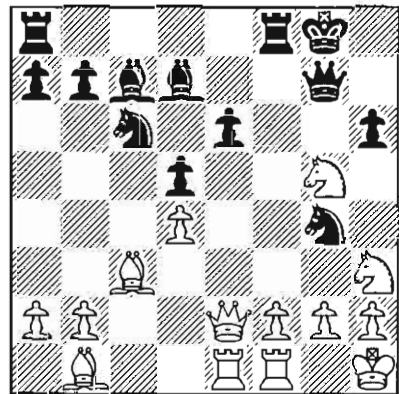


Diagram 17 (W)

### 15 Bb1!?

The correct move was 15 Nh4! with the idea 15...Nhx2? 16 Re1, after which White threatens the simple Qh5 and Bxh6. So 16...e5 17 dxe5!? Bxe5 18 f4 Bxb2 19 Qb3! might follow, when the tactics favour White.

### 15...Qf7

15...g5! was probably the best move. From here on White seems to have the better of things.

### 16 Qc2

16 Bc3 or 16 Nh4 Qh5 17 g3 is also a bit better for White.

**16...g5 17 Bc3 Bd7 18 Rce1!? Bc7 19 Qe2!? Qg7? (Diagram 17)**

19...e5!? seems to come up a little short after 20 Nxe5 Ngxe5?! (20...Bxe5 21 dxe5 d4 22 e6!) 21 dxe5 Bxh3 22 gxh3 d4 23 Bd2 Bxe5? (23...d3 limits the disadvantage after 24 Bxd3 Nxe5 25 Bc2) 24 f4! Bxf4 25 Rxf4! gxf4 26 Qg4+ Kh8 (26...Qg7 is met by 27 Qh5 and Rg1) 27 Re6 with a winning attack.

19...Qe7 may be best.

**20 Nfxg5! Nxf2+**

20...e5 21 dxe5 Bxe5 22 Nf3 is good for White.

**21 Rxf2 Rxf2 22 Qxf2 hxg5 23 Rf1 1-0.**

The database reports Black's resignation. This is probably mistaken, although he does stand worse. Some analysis might be useful: 23...Bd8! (23...Bd6 24 Nxc5 Rf8 25 Nf3 leaves Black a pawn down) 24 Qg3!? Bf6!? (24...Be7 is probably better, when 25 Qc7 will either win a pawn or reduce Black to passivity) 25 Bd2! Bxd4 (25...g4 26 Nf4; or 25...Nxd4 26 Nxc5 Bxc5 27 Bxc5 and Black is in trouble) 26 Nxc5 Rf8 27 Bh7+ Kh8 28 Rxf8+ Qxf8 29 Bd3 Qf2! 30 Qh3+ Kg8 31 Qh7+ Kf8 32 Nf3 Bg7 33 h4! and the pawn threatens to march on, so something like 33...e5 34 Bf5! e4 35 Bh6! Qxb2 36 Qh8+ Kf7 37 Bxc7 Qxc7 38 Ng5+ could follow.

## Looking a Little Deeper

---

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ndf3**

And now:

---

**A: 7...Qa5****B: Other Seventh Moves**

---

**A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 Qa5 8 Bd2**

We saw an example of 8 Kf1!? (**Diagram 18**) in the game Milan-Maedler above. It is risky-looking, but in fact a valid alternative that might repay good preparation.

a) The first idea is 8...Qb6 9 Ne2 with an interesting position in which the lack of the resource ...Bb4+ for Black leads to intriguing lines such as 9...cxd4 10 cxd4 f6 11 Nf4!? (**Diagram 19**) 11...fxe5 12 dxe5 Ndx5 (or 12...Nc5 13 Bc2 Be7 14 Ng5!?) 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 Be3! Qa5! 15 Qh5+ Nf7 16 Qe2!? with ideas of Bd2, Nxd5, and Nxe6. Then 16...Bd7 17 Bd2 or 16...Be7 17 Re1 offers good compensation for the pawn.

b) As I pointed out in my book, Black also has the positional idea of 8...b6!? intending ...Ba6, for example:

b1) 9 Bd2 cxd4 (else 10 c4 can be a problem) 10 cxd4 (after 10 a3!? dxc3!? 11 b4 Bxb4 12 axb4 Qxb4 13 Ra4 Qc5 14 Be3 Qe7, Black's three pawns and threat on the e-pawn seem worth the piece, but this assessment could be challenged) 10...Bb4 11

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Bxb4 (11 Bf4!? Ba6 12 a3) 11...Nxb4 12 Be2 Ba6 13 a3 Nc6 14 b4 Bxe2+ 15 Nxe2 Qa6 16 h4 gives approximate equality. White's space advantage weighs in against his king position and Black's command of the queenside light squares.

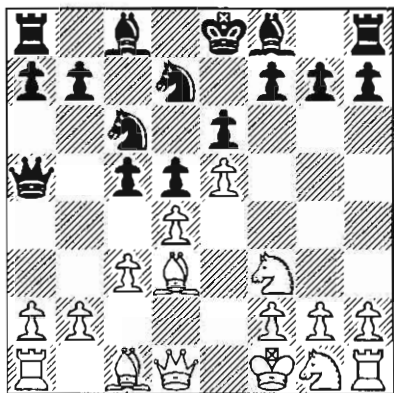


Diagram 18 (B)

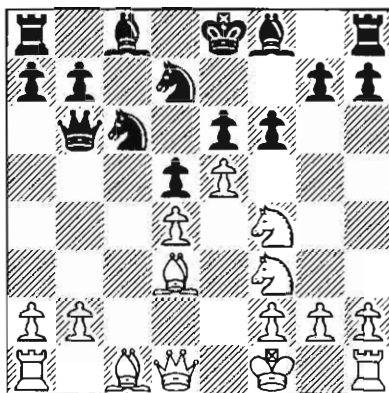


Diagram 19 (B)

b2) Emms and Rowson give 9 Qe2 cxd4 10 cxd4 Nb4 11 Bd2 Ba6 12 Bxa6 Qxa6 13 Qxa6 Nxa6 14 Rc1 with a small advantage, but I'm not so sure. White doesn't have any entry points, so Black might play slowly via 14...Be7 15 Ne2 (or 15 h4 0-0 16 Nh3 Rac8) 15...0-0 16 a3 (16 g3 can be met by 16...f6! 17 exf6 Nxf6) 16...b5!? with the idea of ...Nb6.

Nevertheless, Black doesn't look very comfortable after 8...b6.

c) 8...f6 (Diagram 20)

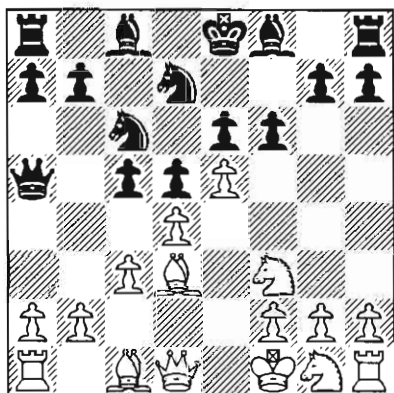


Diagram 20 (W)

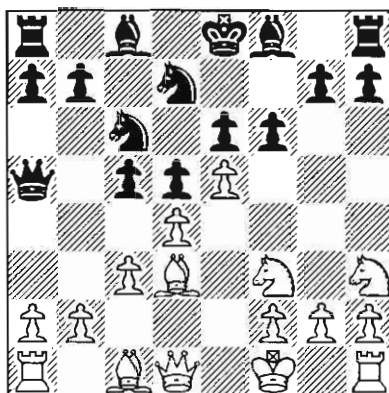


Diagram 21 (B)

is a variant on 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 f6, as seen in Milan-Maedler above. White can play speculatively or more solidly:

c1) 9 dxc5!? Qxc5 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 Bf4 is safe but uninspiring.

c2) The only game I have with 9 exf6 Nxf6 went 10 Bf4 Bd7 11 Nh3 cxd4 12 cxd4 Qb6 13 b3 Ba3 with a good game for Black, G.Gaasland-I.Nordhaug, Porsgrunn 1996.

c3) 9 Qe2! deserves a look and may yield a small advantage; e.g. 9...fxe5 10 Nxe5 Ndx5 11 dxe5 g6 12 h4! etc.

c4) 9 Nh3!? (**Diagram 21**) would require pages of analysis to assess. Here are some lines in brief: 9...fxe5 (9...cxd4 10 cxd4 fxe5 11 dxe5 Ndx5 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 Qh5+ Nf7 14 Ng5 g6 15 Qe2 is messy) 10 dxe5 Ndx5 11 Nxe5 Nxe5 12 Qh5+ Nf7 13 Bxh7!? (or 13 Ng5 g6 14 Qe2 Nfg5 15 Bxg5 Qc7 16 Bb5+ Kf7 17 h4 Bd7 18 Bxd7 Qxd7 19 h5) 13...Qa6+! (13...Be7 is answered by 14 Nf4) 14 Kg1 e5! (14...Rxh7!? 15 Qxh7 Qe2 16 Be3 Qxb2 17 Rc1) 15 Ng5 Qf6 16 c4!? (Black seems to have enough for a pawn after 16 Nxf7 Qxf7 17 Qxe5+ Be6 18 Bc2 0-0-0 19 Qf4) 16...dxc4 (16...d4? 17 Nxf7 Qxf7 18 Qxe5+ Be7 19 Be4) 17 Ne4 Qe6 18 Be3 b6? (Black should play 18...Be7) 19 Ng5 Qf6 20 Nxf7 Qxf7 21 Qxe5+ Be6 22 Qe4 and White is better.

In conclusion, 8 Kf1 holds up theoretically and provides another dangerous weapon that you can direct your opponent's way.

### 8...Qb6

a) An interesting line that resembles other 3...Nf6 variations is 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 Bb4 (9...Qb6?! unnecessarily allows 10 Bc3, whereas 10 Qc2 transposes to the main game) 10 Ne2 Bxd2+ 11 Qxd2 Qxd2+ and now 12 Kxd2 f6 13 exf6 Nxf6 14 Ne5 favours White only slightly, but he can also play 12 Nxd2!? (**Diagram 22**).

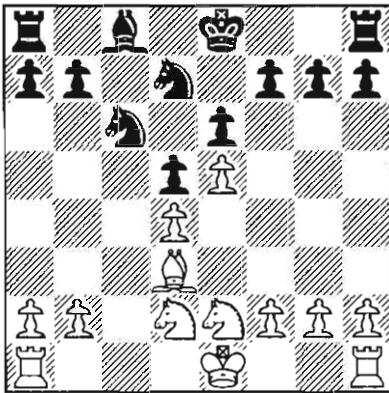


Diagram 22 (B)

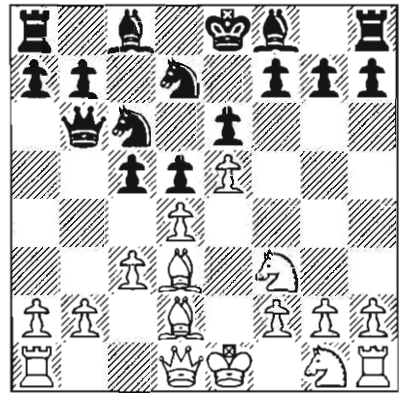


Diagram 23 (W)

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

The knight has returned to d2, from where it started. A sample of possible play would be 12...f6 13 f4 0-0 14 0-0 (14 Rc1) 14...Nb4 (or 14...fxe5 15 fxe5 Nb4 16 Bb1 Rxf1+ 17 Nxf1 b6 18 a3 Nc6 19 Bd3, again with some advantage) 15 Bb1 b6 16 f5! exf5 17 a3 Nc6 (17...Ba6? is met by 18 axb4 Bxe2 19 Re1 Bh5 20 Ba2 with a winning advantage: after Bxd5+, e6-e7 will follow) 18 Bxf5 fxe5 19 Be6+ Kh8 20 Rxf8+ Nxf8 21 Bxd5 Bd7 22 Nc4!, picking up a pawn for nothing.

b) 8...b5 tries to open queenside lines. G.Coco-G.Crispino, correspondence 1986, went 9 Ne2 b4 10 0-0 (or 10 a3; for example, 10...bxc3 11 Bxc3 Qb6 12 0-0 cxd4 13 Bxd4 Nxd4 14 Nexd4 Bc5 15 Nb5 Ba6 16 a4 with a small edge) 10...Ba6 (10...bxc3?! 11 Bxc3 Qb6 12 Rb1 cxd4 13 Bxd4 Nxd4 14 Nexd4 Bc5 15 Qa4 0-0 16 Nc6! is good for White) 11 cxb4!? cxb4 12 Bxa6!? Qxa6 13 Bg5 h6 14 Bh4 Rc8 15 Qd2 Nb6 16 b3 Ne7 17 Rfc1 Nf5 and Black had no problems, but 12 Qb1! has the idea Rc1 and retains kingside options of Nf4 and h4-h5.

Returning to 8...Qb6 (**Diagram 23**).

After 8...Qb6 the material divides into two promising gambits:

---

**A1: 9 Ne2**

**A2: 9 Qc2**

---

**A1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 Qa5 8 Bd2 Qb6 9 Ne2!?**

White sacrifices the b-pawn for development and attack.

**9...c4**

Black has several ways to capture the b-pawn:

a) The game I.Gurevich-J.Borges Mateos, Trinidad 1991, went 9...Qxb2!? 10 0-0 Qa3 (10...c4 11 Bc2 Qa3 12 Nf4 g6 is assessed as unclear by Gurevich, but 13 Ng5! is very dangerous, with ideas such as Qg4, h4-h5 and Rfb1) 11 Re1 (or 11 Qc2!? with the idea 11...g6!? 12 Bb5!) 11...Be7 12 Nf4 (**Diagram 24**)

12...cxd4!? (Gurevich suggests 12...c4! 13 Bc2 g6 with a slight advantage for Black, but then 14 Ne2! intends Bh6, and 14...h6 15 Bc1 Qa5 16 a4 with the idea Ba3 gives excellent compensation) 13 cxd4 Nb6 (13...g5 14 Nxe6! is very dangerous; for example, 14...fxe6 15 Bb5 threatening both Re3-b3 and 16 Nxe6) 14 Re3 Qa4 15 Bc2 Qa6 16 Rb3? (now Gurevich suggests 16 Nh5! g6 17 Nf6+ Bxf6 18 exf6 with a clear advantage) 16...Nc4? (16...g6) 17 Nh5 g6 18 Nf6+ Bxf6 19 exf6 Nxd2 20 Qxd2 and here Black has a hard time dealing with the possibilities Qh6 and Qf4.

b) 9...cxd4 10 cxd4 Qxb2?! 11 0-0 Qb6 12 Rb1 Qd8 (**Diagram 25**) gives White a huge lead in development. Now B.Maksimovic-A.Vaissier, Vrnjacka Banja 1986, went 13 Ng5!? Be7 14 Nxe7? (14 f4! is promising) 14...g6, when White has to forfeit material. Another way to approach the position is to combine play on both wings by 13

Nf4, planning 13...Be7 14 Qc2 g6 15 Bb5! Ndb8 16 Rfc1 a6 17 Bd3.

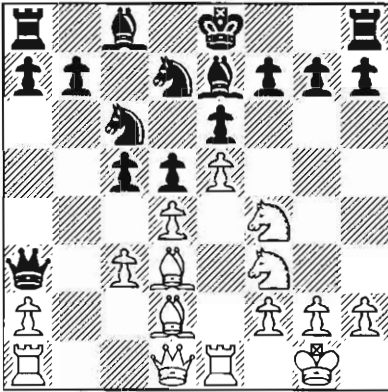


Diagram 24 (B)

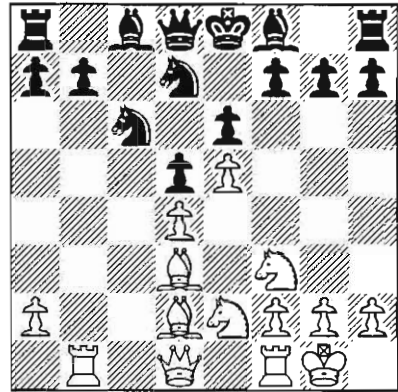


Diagram 25 (W)

### 10 Bc2 Qxb2 11 Ng5!?

This doesn't lead to anything.

a) White can prove the worth of his pawn sacrifice by playing 11 a4 Qb6 12 0-0; for example, 12...h6 (preventing 13 Ng5) 13 Nf4 or 13 Bc1 intending Ba3. If Black plays more slowly with 12...Qa5 13 Ng5 h6, then 14 Nxf7! Kxf7 15 Nf4 produces a stronger attack than in the main text.

b) The calmer 11 0-0 h6 12 a4! or 12 Nf4 promises some advantage as well.

### 11...h6 12 Rb1!? Qxa2!?

Mikhail Gurevich analyses 12...Qa3?! 13 Nxf7 (better would be 13 Nh3 in order to prepare 0-0 and f4-f5) 13...Kxf7 14 Nf4 g5? (14...Kg8! is more of a problem) 15 Qh5+ Ke7 16 Ng6+, winning.

### 13 Nxf7!?

Greedy, but retreating would be a little depressing.

### 13...Kxf7 14 Nf4 (Diagram 26) 14...g5!?

After 14...Nb6, Gurevich suggests the repetition by 15 Ra1 Qb2 16 Rb1 etc. Then 16...Qa3 17 Ra1 Qe7?? 18 Ng6 wins for White.

### 15 Nxe6?!

White keeps attacking, but a better way to do so was with Gurevich's suggestion 15 Nxd5! exd5 (or 15...Ndx5 16 Nc7! Rb8 17 dxe5 Nxe5 18 0-0 with an attack) 16 Qh5+ Ke7 17 Bxg5+ hxg5 18 Qxg5+ Kf7 (Diagram 27).

However, this only leaves White with the draw by 19 Qg6+ Ke7 20 Qg5+ etc. and Black can even try for more with the risky 18...Nf6!?

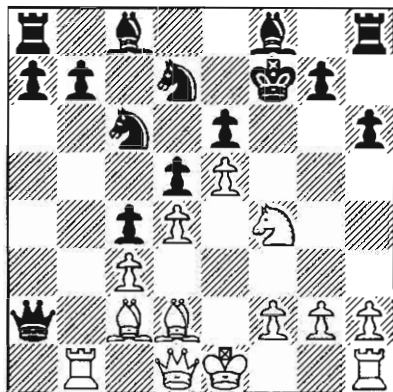


Diagram 26 (B)

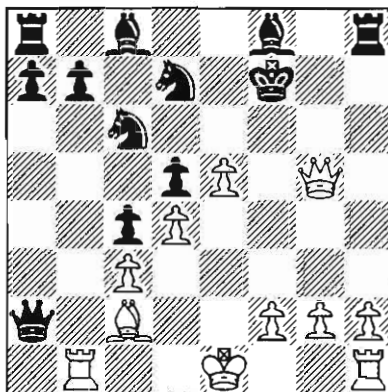


Diagram 27 (W)

It seems that the whole project begun by 11 Ng5 hasn't turned out that well. Probably best was going for a draw by 15 Ra1, when Black's only way of playing for a win is 15...Qxa1!? (15...Qb2 16 Rb1 Qa2 repeats) 16 Qxa1 gxf4 17 Qd1 h5. Then Black has a nice material edge and an unobstructed passed a-pawn, but obviously his king is exposed, so this is extremely hard to assess.

**15...Ndx5**

15...Kxe6 16 Qg4+ Ke7 17 Bxg5+ hxg5 18 Qxg5+ transposes to the previous note.

**16 dxe5?**

16 Nc7! Bg4 is double-edged.

**16...Kxe6! 17 0-0**

Suddenly White has no attack to speak of; e.g. 17 Ra1 Qb2 18 Rb1 Qa3 19 Qh5 Nxe5 20 f4 Nd3+ 21 Bxd3 cxd3 22 Qg6+ Kd7 and Black escapes, material in hand.

**17...Kd7! 18 Ra1 Qb2 19 Ba4 Kc7 20 e6 Bg7!**

Black is consolidating, and went on to win in L.Yurtaev-M.Gurevich, Manila Olympiad 1992. Nonetheless, we can see that playing the gambit via 9 Ne2 is quite promising. Against 9...Qxb2 and 9...cxd4 10 cxd4 Qxb2, White's attacks are at worst difficult to defend against, so the best course is 9...c4 10 Bc2 Qxb2, when White should play 11 a4 or 11 0-0, with good prospects in both cases.

**A2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 Qa5 8 Bd2 Qb6 9 Qc2 (Diagram 28)**

We saw this in the illustrative game Ghaem Maghami-Barua. Here's some further study material:

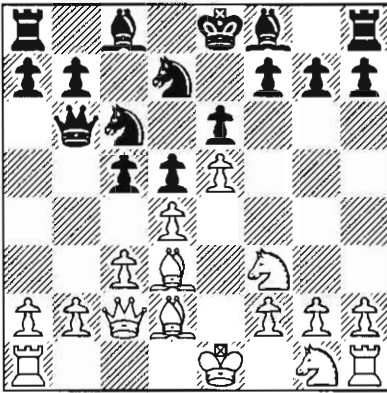


Diagram 28 (B)

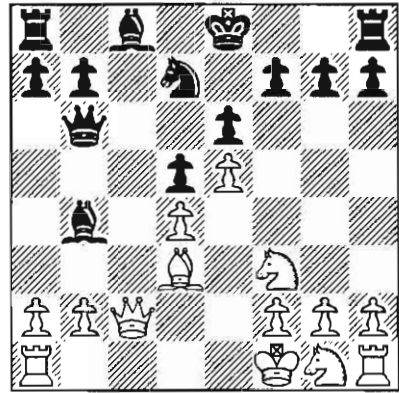


Diagram 29 (B)

### 9...h6

a) 9...cxd4 10 cxd4 Nxd4 was Ghaem Maghami-Barua, while 10...Nb4!? gains the bishop pair at the cost of time: 11 Bxb4 Bxb4+ 12 Kf1 (12 Ke2!? is an interesting alternative that may yield a small advantage by connecting the rooks at the cost of forfeiting the chance for Ne2).

After 12 Kf1 (**Diagram 29**) Black has a choice:

a1) After 12...f5, John Emms suggests 13 Ne2 0-0 14 Rc1! intending 14...Nb8? 15 Qxc8! Rxc8 16 Rxc8+ Kf7 17 Nf4. Also weak is 14...Qd8? 15 Nf4 Nb8 16 g4! with an attack that will win material after gxf5 and Qb3; if Black plays 16...g5?, 17 gxf5! gxf4 18 Rg1+ Kh8 19 f6 wins easily. Finally, White's best course after 14...Be7 15 h4 Qd8 is probably 16 g4! Nb6 17 Rg1 Bd7 18 gxf5 exf5 19 Qd2 with a terrific attack.

a2) L.Ljubojevic-J.Timman, Tilburg 1987, continued 12...h6 13 Ne2 0-0 14 h4 Nb8 (14...f6 15 Nf4; 14...f5 15 Nf4 Re8 16 a3 Be7 17 g4 or 15 a3 Be7 16 Nf4) 15 Ng5! Qc6 (15...hxg5 16 Bh7+ Kh8 17 hxg5 Rd8 18 Qd3! and wins) 16 Qb3 Qb6 17 Bh7+ Kh8 18 Qd3 Qa6 19 Qe3!? (19 Qb1! threatens Bg8) 19...Nc6? (19...Bd7) 20 Bd3 ½-½ (**Diagram 30**).

A strange conclusion, because White has what should be a winning advantage. One sample of the attack would be 20...Qa5 (or 20...Qb6 21 Nh7 Rd8 22 Qf4) 21 Nh7 Rd8 22 Qf3 Rd7 23 a3 Qa4 24 Rc1 Ba5 25 Qf4 Bb6 26 Rh3 Bxd4 27 Nf6 Rd8 28 Ng4 Rf8 29 Rg3! Bd7 30 Nf6! Nxe5 31 Rxg7! Kxg7 32 Nxd4 with the idea of Nh5+.

b) John Emms analyses what may be the best line for Black: 9...Be7 10 Rc1!? (10 Ne2?? loses to 10...c4 11 Bxh7 Nf8) 10...h6 11 a3 (11 Qb1 is a noteworthy alternative) 11...Na5 (11...a5 12 Be3) 12 b4 c4 13 Be2 Nb3 14 Rb1, which is unclear. If Black tries to penetrate on the queenside via 14...a5, White can reorganize by 15 Be3

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

axb4 16 axb4 Qa7 17 Nh3 Qa2 (17...g5?! 18 Nd2) 18 Rb2 Qa1+ 19 Bd1 and 0-0, which is still hard to assess.

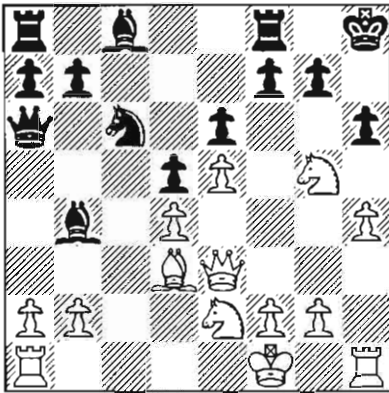


Diagram 30 (B)

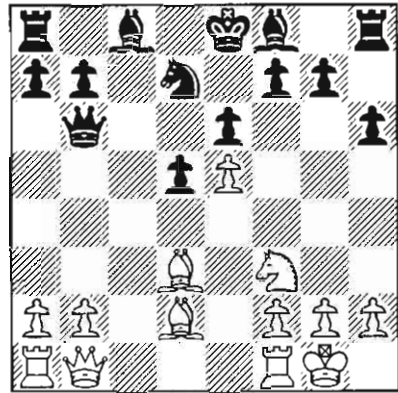


Diagram 31 (B)

### 10 Qb1!

This looks like a good try for an advantage, making room for the bishop to move to c2 and thus preparing Ne2. Alternatively:

a) 10 Nh3? cxd4 11 cxd4 g5!.

b) 10 h4 cxd4 11 cxd4 Nxd4 12 Nxd4 Qxd4 13 Nf3 Qg4! 14 Be3 Qb4+ 15 Bd2 Qg4 16 Be3 Qb4+ 17 Bd2 Qg4 ½-½ F Holzke-D Bunzmann, German League 2002.

### 10...cxd4 11 cxd4 Nxd4

11...Nb4 12 Bxb4 Bxb4+ 13 Kf1 Be7 14 Ne2 leaves White with various ways to develop, including h2-h4 and Rh3-g3; White's centre is intact and Black's pieces aren't coordinating.

### 12 Nxd4 Qxd4 13 Nf3 Qb6

13...Qg4? 14 h3 Qxg2? is met by 15 Ke2 Nxe5 and now 16 Nh4!.

### 14 0-0 (Diagram 31)

This is a fairly normal gambit position in which most players would prefer to be White. Black's pieces are passive and White can vary between queenside expansion and kingside attack.

## B) Other Seventh Moves

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 c3 c5 6 Bd3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 (Diagram 32)

We will consider:

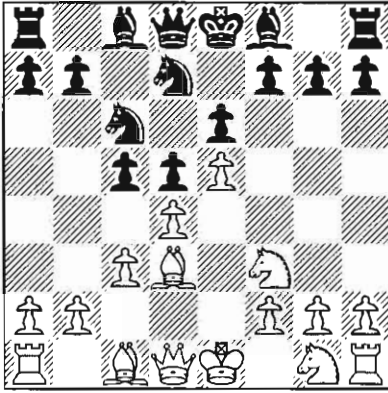


Diagram 32 (B)

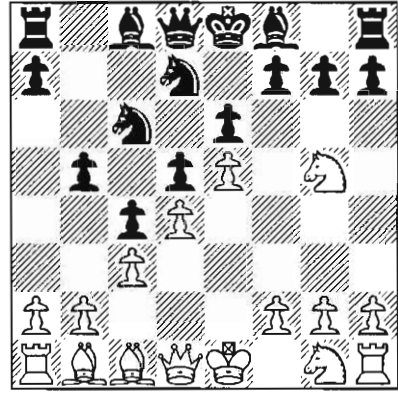


Diagram 33 (B)

B1: 7...Qb6

B2: 7...f6

B3: 7...cxd4

The nice thing about other 7th moves for Black's is that after 8 Ne2 most of them lead to inferior versions of the standard 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ne2 Tarrasch Defence. For example, 7...Be7 8 Ne2 or 7...a6 8 Ne2 etc.

7...c4! is played surprisingly often. This advance is generally welcomed by White in these positions because it releases some pressure on his centre. Naturally, Black still has ...f6 and ...b5-b4 to play with, but in most situations White's kingside plans are easier to carry out if his d-pawn hasn't been isolated by ...cxd4.

a) 8 Bc2 is the natural move. Play could continue along the lines of 8...Be7 9 Nh3 h6 (or 9...f6 10 Nf4 Nb6 11 exf6 Bxf6 12 0-0 0-0 13 Re1) 10 0-0 b5 (after 10...0-0 White can play 11 Be3 with ideas of Qd2/Bxh6 and also Nf4-h5) 11 Ne1!?, clearing the way for Qg4 or a plan with f4-f5.

b) After 8 Bb1, 8...Be7 is natural, when White gets the advantage by playing either 9 Ne2 or even 9 h4! h6 10 h5, grabbing space on the kingside and in some lines planning Rh3-g3.



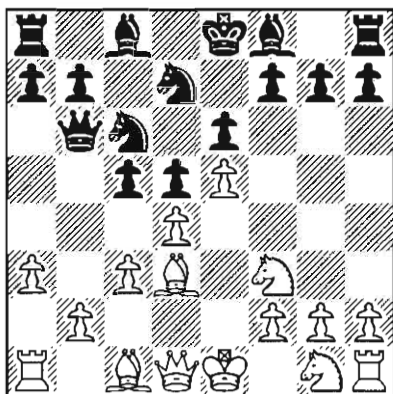
**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** In positions like the one after 8...b5? (A.Eisenbeiser-V.Shtyrenkov, Alushta 2005), 9 Ng5! (Diagram 33) is an idea to put in your memory banks.

Play continues 9...Be7 (9...h6? 10 Qh5 wins material in view of 10...Qe7 11 Nxf7!)

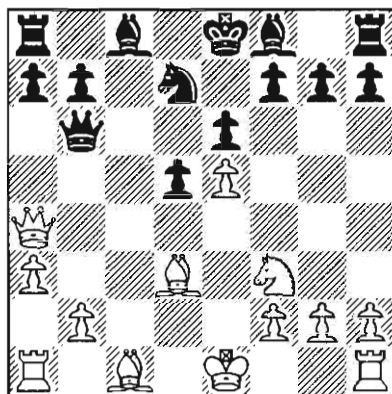
## Dangerous Weapons: The French

10 N1h3! g6 (10...Nb6 11 Qf3! forces 11...Bxg5 12 Nxg5, when f7 and h7 are still hanging; 10...Bxg5 11 Nxg5 Nf8 12 Qh5 Qc7 13 0-0 is good for White) 11 Qf3 f6 12 exf6 (or 12 Nxe6!? Ndx5 13 Qxd5!) 12...Nxf6 13 0-0 0-0 14 Nf4 and Black can hardly defend in view of 14...Qd6 15 Qg3!, threatening Nxf7. All this from one bad move (8...b5?).

**B1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 c3 c5 6 Bd3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 Qb6 8 a3!? (Diagram 34)**



**Diagram 34 (B)**



**Diagram 35 (B)**

White avoids the transpositional move 8 Ne2, discussed at the very beginning of the chapter. Instead, he sacrifices a pawn for activity. 8 a3 also has the ideas of playing b2-b4 and covering the b4-square from checks by Black's bishop or queen. **8...cxd4 9 cxd4 f6!**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! Accepting the gambit is very risky: 9...Nxd4 10 Nx4d4 Qxd4 11 Nf3 Qb6 12 Qa4! (Diagram 35).**

White has a nice bind and the idea of 13 Be3, since 13...Qxb2?? would then lose to 14 Bd4. A sample line would be 12...Bc5?! (or 12...Be7 13 Be3 Qd8 14 0-0 0-0 15 Qc2 with pressure) 13 0-0 0-0? 14 Qh4 f5 15 b4!, forcing 15...Nxe5 16 Nxe5 Bd4 17 Bf4 Bxa1 18 Rxa1 and effectively winning because Black is so tied up.

**10 exf6**

10 Nh3 fxe5 11 dxe5 g6! threatens ...Ndx5 as well as ...Bg7.

**10...Nxf6 11 Nh3!?**



**ROLL THE DICE!** This is the consistent follow-up, but objectively it may be a bit much to put White's knight on the rim after a slow move like 8 a3.

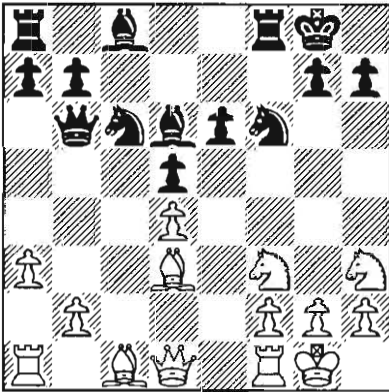
Instead, 11 Ne2 Bd6 12 0-0 0-0 is a known variation from the standard 7 Ne2 Qb6 8 Nf3. This is certainly playable, although theory considers it comfortable for Black.

**11...Bd6 12 0-0!**

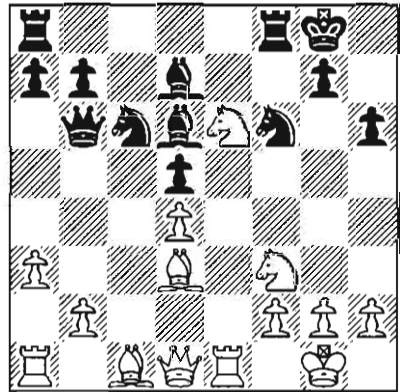


**BEWARE!** 12 Nhg5 is too ambitious: 12...0-0 13 Qc2 h6 14 Nh7 Nxf7 15 Bxf7+ Kh8 16 Be3 Rxf3! 17 gxf3 Nxd4, and as usual Black has more than compensation for the exchange.

**12...0-0 (Diagram 36)**



**Diagram 36 (W)**



**Diagram 37 (B)**

**13 Re1!**

Weaker are 13 b4?! e5! and 13 Bf4?! Nxd4! 14 Nxd4 e5.

**13...Kh8**

A crazy line is 13...Bd7 14 Nhg5 h6!? 15 Nxe6 (**Diagram 37**) 15...Rfe8! 16 Bf5! (16 Nf4!? Bg4!? 17 Rxe8+ Rxe8 wins the d-pawn with continued pressure) 16...Re7! (threatening ...Rae8, but also preparing ...Nd8). This is a mess, but Black appears to hold his own; for example, 17 Bxh6!? gxh6 18 Qd2 Nd8! 19 Qxh6 Nxe6 20 Qxf6 Ng7! (a lucky shot, threatening ...Bxh2+) 21 Bh7+! Kxh7 22 Qh4+ Kg8 23 Rxe7 Bxe7 24 Qxe7 Qxb2 and White's attack is insufficient.

**14 Bc2 Qc7 15 Qd3**

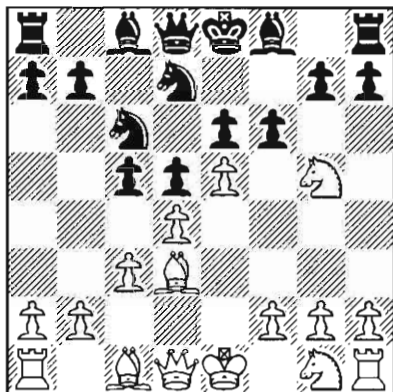
Not 15 Qe2? Bxh2+! 16 Nxh2 Nxd4.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

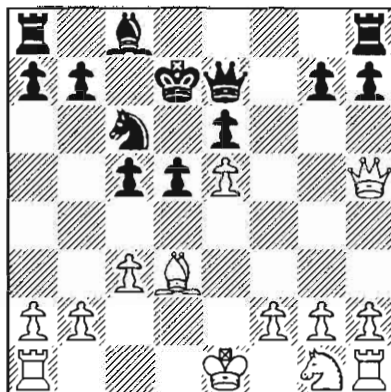
**15...e5! 16 dxe5 Nxe5 17 Nxe5 Bxe5**

Black stands very actively. But this is all just analysis!

**B2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 c3 c5 6 Bd3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 f6 8 Ng5!?** (Diagram 38)



**Diagram 38 (B)**



**Diagram 39 (B)**

This is adventurous! The sober line is 8 exf6 Nxf6 9 Ne2 (9 Nh3!? transposes to Line B3 if Black plays 9...cxd4 10 cxd4) 9...Bd6! (9...cxd4 10 Nexd4!? gives up the centre but for the sake of regaining it: 10...Bd6 11 Qe2 Qe7 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Ne5 0-0 14 0-0 with some pull, but nothing too serious) 10 0-0 cxd4 11 cxd4, and we've reached the conventional main line of the 3...Nf6 Tarrasch again.

**8...Ndx5!**

White gets through after 8...cxd4? 9 Nxe6 Qa5 10 Qh5+ g6 11 Bxg6+ hxg6 12 Qxh8 dxc3 13 b3.

**9 dxe5 fxg5 10 Qh5+ Kd7 11 Bxg5 Be7**

11...Qe8 may be better.

**12 Bxe7 Qxe7 (Diagram 39) 13 Ne2**

Or 13 0-0-0 Kc7 14 f4 Bd7 with equal chances.

**13...Kc7 14 f4 Bd7 15 0-0**

...and the position was level in M.Alcover-M.Mena, correspondence 1999.

**B3) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 c3 c5 6 Bd3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 cxd4 8 cxd4** (Diagram 40)

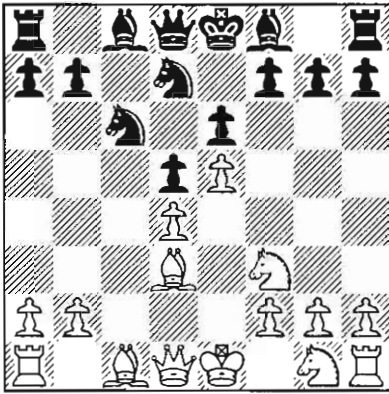


Diagram 40 (B)

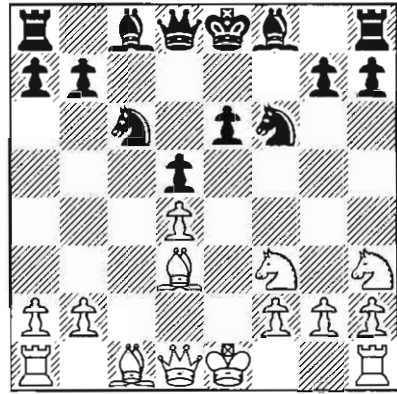


Diagram 41 (B)

**8...f6**

There are a few alternatives for Black:

a) 8...Qa5+ gives White the option of 9 Bd2 Qb6 10 Bc3. If Black wants to play this way, 7...Qa5 8 Bd2 Qb6 is better.

b) 8...Qb6 9 Ne2 is that old main line again, whereas 9 Bc2?! f6 (9...Bb4+ 10 Kf1 f6 is also an option) 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 Ne2 Bd6 12 0-0 0-0 is a poor version for White of the normal ...Qb6 lines.

c) 8...a5 has been played periodically, but the best Black can do against 9 Ne2 (9 Nh3?! Qb6) is probably to set up with the Leningrad formation after 9...Nb6 (or 9...Be7 10 0-0 h5 11 Be3 g6) 10 0-0 Be7 11 Nf4 h5 12 Ne1 g6, which is rightly considered in White's favour.

**9 exf6 Nxf6**

The key test: does White have anything better than transposing to the main modern lines with their accompanying headaches?

**10 Nh3! (Diagram 41)**

Yes! Well, at least something different that has gotten good results so far. 10 Ne2 is that sad transposition just mentioned.

**10...Bd6**

Another serious attempt is 10...Bb4+ 11 Bd2 Qb6 (**Diagram 42**). In this little-tested position, we have three moves:

a) The game R.Meessen-R.Claesen, Belgian Ch. 2002, went 12 0-0?! (probably not best, especially in the sense of maintaining the initiative) 12...Nxd4 13 Nxd4 (13 Qa4+ Nc6 14 Be3 Qa5 15 Qc2 e5! defends successfully) 13...Qxd4 14 Be3 (14 Qa4+!? Bd7 15 Qxb4 Qxd3 16 Nf4 Qf5 17 Bc3 is unclear) 14...Qxb2! 15 Bd4 Qd2 16 Qb3 Be7

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

and Black was two pawns up. Now 17 Qb5+! Kf8 18 f4 would at least have put some pressure on Black's position, but probably not enough.

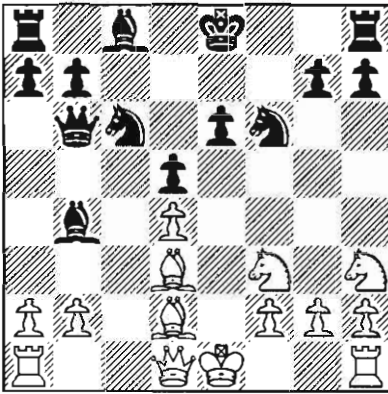


Diagram 42 (W)

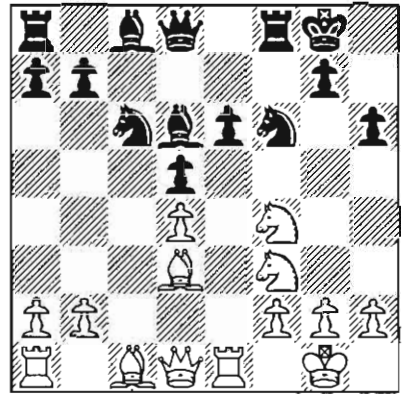


Diagram 43 (B)

- b) White could protect d4 by 12 Bc3, when 12...Ne4 13 0-0! Nxc3 14 bxc3 Bxc3 15 Rc1 Qb4 (15...Bb4 16 Nfg5!) 16 Qc2 Bxd4 17 Bxh7 gives very good compensation.
- c) 12 a3!? Bxd2+ 13 Qxd2 0-0 14 0-0 Kh8 15 Bc2 Ne4 (15...Bd7 16 Rfe1 has the idea of Nhg5, and 16...Rae8 17 b4 gives Black few options) 16 Bxe4 dxe4 17 Ne5 Qxd4 18 Qxd4 Nxd4 19 Rae1 offers White an edge because of his better pawn structure.

### 11 0-0 0-0 12 Re1

For 12 Bd2, see the illustrative game Oll-Matamoros Franco.

### 12...Qc7



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** In a game between grandmasters rated around 2550, Black decided to prevent 13 Nhg5 by 12...h6, but he completely lost control of e5 and g6 after 13 Nf4 (Diagram 43).

Play continued 13...Bxf4 (13...Ng4!? 14 Ng6 Nxd4 15 Nxf8 Qxf8 16 Bh7+ Kxh7 17 Qxd4 Qf5 favours White, who will end up with control of e5; still, he has to be careful not to let Black's centre advance to good effect) 14 Bxf4 Ne4 15 Bg3!? (15 Be3!) 15...Nxc3 16 hxg3 Qb6 17 Bc2 Rf6 (17...Qxb2!? is tricky; Black intends ...Rxf3 in response to almost any move other than 18 Rb1!, when the almost-forced line 18...Qxa2 19 Qd3 Rxf3 20 gxf3 Nxd4 21 Qxd4 Qxc2 22 Rbc1 Qf5 23 Rc7 Qf8 24 Rec1 a5 25 Qc3! d4 26 Qxd4 wins for White!) 18 Qd3 Bd7 19 Qh7+ Kf7 20 Re3 Rf8 21 Ba4! Qxb2?! (a mistake, but it's a last stab, as Black faces Bxc6 followed by Ne5+) 22 Rb1 Qxa2 23 Rxb7! Qxa4 24 Rxd7+ Ne7 (24...Ke8 25 Rxc7) 25 Rb7 Ke8 26 Qxg7

R6f7 27 Qxh6 Rf6 28 Qh7 R6f7 29 Qb1 Qa6 30 Rb8+ Nc8 31 Rc3 Ke7 32 Qc1 1-0  
E.Vorobiov-V.Kosyrev, Sochi 2006.

### 13 Nhg5 (Diagram 44)

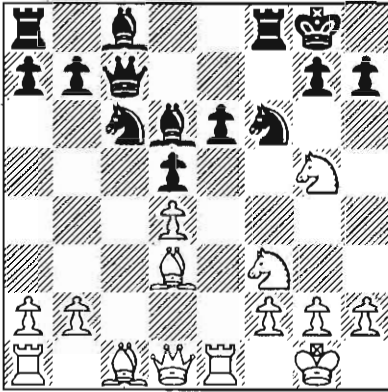


Diagram 44 (B)

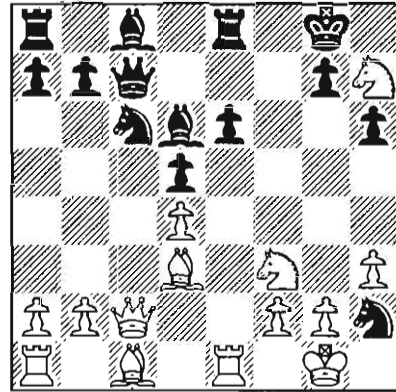


Diagram 45 (W)

Recent practice has seen some action in this tactically charged position, but it takes analysis to get near to the truth. White has been on top so far.

### 13...Re8

Or:

a) 13...e5? 14 dxe5 Nxe5 15 Bxh7+! Kh8 (15...Nxh7 16 Nxe5 and White comes out a pawn ahead with a good position, A.Karpatchev-M.Schaub, Selestat 2000) 16 Nh4! 16...Nxb7 (or 16...Nfg4? 17 Rxe5 Nxe5 18 Ng6+ Nxb7 19 Bxb7) 17 Ng6+ Nxb7 18 Qh5 with mate in two.

b) 13...h6!? 14 Nxe6 Bxe6 15 Rxe6 Ng4 16 g3!? leads to great complications. For example, 16...Qd7 17 Qe2 (after 17 Rg6!? we have a tactical position in which White seems to have somewhat better chances, but it's a mess) 17...Bc7! 18 Kg2 Nxd4! 19 Re7! Qd8 20 Bxh6! Nxe2 (20...gxf6 is answered by 21 Nh4! Rxf2+ 22 Qxf2 Qxe7 23 Qxd4) 21 Rxb7+ Kh8 22 Rxb7! (22 Rh7+ draws) 22...Qf6! 23 Bxf8 Rxf8 24 Rh4+ Kg8 25 Rg4+ with a probable draw anyway!

So maybe 13...h6 is acceptable, or maybe not!

### 14 Qc2

Another attempted solution to this position is 14 Ne5!? and now:

a) 14...Nxe5 15 dxe5 Bxe5 16 Nxb7! Bxb2+ 17 Kh1 Bd6 18 Nxf6+ gxf6 19 Qh5 and White's attack is too strong (Bh6 and Re3-h3 are ideas), V.Savtchenko-S.Dierckens, Herceg Novi 2005.

b) 14...Nxd4! 15 Ng4! (15 Bf4!? is more ambitious) 15...Re7! 16 Bxh7+ Nxb7 17

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Qxd4 Nxc5 18 Bxc5 Rf7 19 Rac1 Qb6 20 Qxb6 axb6 21 a3 with an edge for White.

### 14...g6

John Emms shows the pretty line 14...h6 15 Nh7 Ng4 16 h3 Nh2 (**Diagram 45**), with an amazing picture of near symmetry! After 17 Ne5 Nxe5 18 dxe5 Bxe5 19 f4 (or 19 Qe2) 19...Bxf4, 20 Qa4! forks f4 and e8.

### 15 Bd2 Qg7

A standard idea, protecting the kingside and targeting d4. It shouldn't work, but Black's position is marginal anyway. Now in V.Potkin-V.Kosyrev, Russian Cup 2004, White erred with 16 Re2? h6 17 Bxc6 (17 Nh3 g5!) 17...hxc6 18 Bxe8 g4 and Black was winning. But White had two better possibilities: 16 Bc3 h6 17 Nh3 g5 18 Ne5, and 16 Bb5! Bd7 17 Bxc6 Rac8 (17...bxc6 18 Ne5) 18 Qd3 bxc6 19 Ne5, with the strong ideas of Ngf7, Qa6, and Rac1.

## Conclusion

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The system in this chapter is designed to avoid most conventional theory that follows 3 Nd2 Nf6. When White plays 7 Ndf3, he still has important decisions to make. After 7...Qa5 8 Bd2 Qb6, he can gambit a pawn in two ways: by 9 Qc2 or 9 Ne2. Both of them create full-bodied play and real chances for the advantage. In addition, White can try the slightly eccentric 8 Kf1!?, which is a lot more dangerous (to Black) than one would think. Each of these options poses difficult challenges to Black, and regardless of their precise assessment the resulting positions are full of content.

If Black chooses a system with ...f6, White can decide whether to revert to traditional theory or go off on his own. The key line is 7 Ndf3 cxd4 8 cxd4 f6 9 exf6 Nxf6 10 Nh3, a fresh approach to an ancient position. 10 Nh3 is perfectly sound, interesting, and has scored fairly well in practice. I suspect that Black can equalize with accurate play, but that shouldn't put off someone looking for a battle.

## Characterization of 7 Ndf3

---

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♣ ♣ ♣
Attacking Nature	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣
Positional/Strategic Nature	♣ ♣
Risk	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣
Reward	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣
Theoretical Depth	♣ ♣

## Chapter Six

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# Breaking the Chain

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6  
7 Nb3 (Diagram 1)

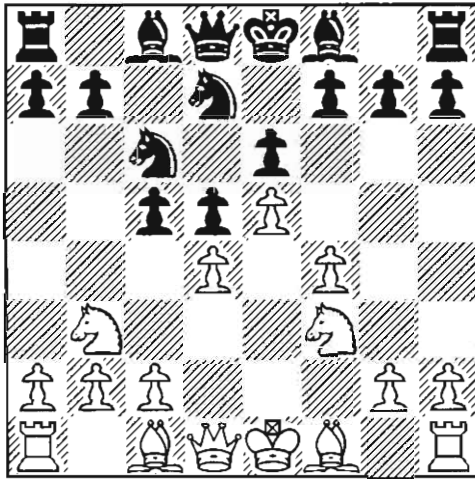


Diagram 1 (B)

When confronted with 3 Nd2, Black chooses 3...Nf6 in a large percentage of games and there almost always follows 4 e5 Nfd7. Now the main moves are 5 Bd3 (or 5 c3 c5 6 Bd3) and 5 f4. The first plan is more popular, and those who choose 3...Nf6

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

are generally less afraid of (and sometimes hoping for!) the move 5 f4. The main variation goes 5 f4 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ndf3 and both players can arrange their pieces in a variety of ways. Black is normally well prepared for these.

But are there any alternatives for White?

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3!?** (Diagram 1)

This move is given short notice in recent books and none at all in the 1996 edition of my book *Play the French*. It wasn't until well after the publication of my book that a good number of titled players began to play 7 Nb3. In part because it can transpose to better-known lines, its independent value has been neglected.

### What is the point of 7 Nb3?

---

On the most basic level, White wants to recapture on d4 with a piece, thus avoiding the static target that a pawn on that square offers. That consideration alone provides a rationale for the knight move, and it turns out that White has plenty of attacking chances without suffering too much risk.

White gains some practical advantages as well. As indicated, 7 Nb3 avoids the theory associated with the main lines of 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7, including *both* 5 f4 and 5 Bd3, because these include the move c3 and the recapture cxd4 when Black plays ...cxd4. Not only is there an enormous amount to learn in those lines, but the variations tend to be extremely critical and forcing. What's more, Black currently stands satisfactorily in both theory and practice, so it's not as though you're losing a great deal by playing something else as White.

Furthermore, when French Defence players attack the base of a d4/e5 pawn chain by playing ...c5, they are generally more at home with variations in which White has played c3. The attack on a pawn chain from c3 to e5 is a major part of their preparation and practice throughout the French Defence, since it occurs in the overwhelming majority of games in the Advance and Tarrasch Variations, most of the lines that follow 3 Nc3 Nf6 and even the main Winawer variations. Thus there's a fair chance that players of Black will feel less comfortable trying to create something against a centre defined by a piece on d4. Obviously, neither of these factors establishes an objective advantage for White, but they do indicate that this might make a good practical weapon to add to your arsenal.

### Illustrative Games

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□ S.Smagin ■ M.Gurevich

Essen 2001

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**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3 c4** (Diagram 2)

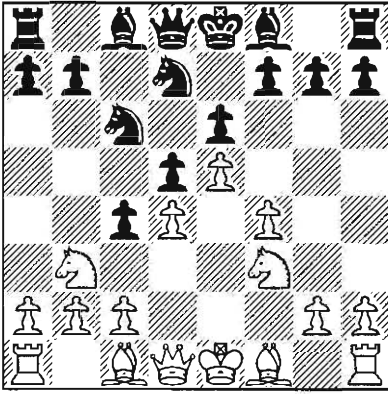


Diagram 2 (W)

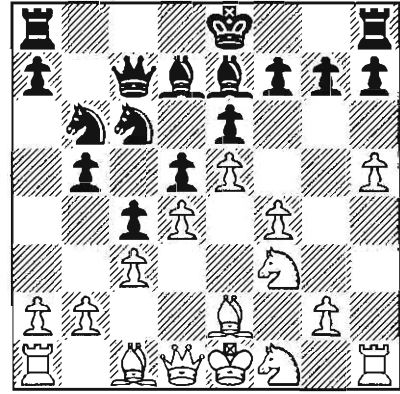


Diagram 3 (B)

This is not the only move, of course, as we shall see in the next game and the corresponding analytical section. It is, however, a common response by top players, since it gains a tempo on the knight and forces it back into a passive position on d2. Then in order to get his bishop on c1 developed, White will usually have to move the same knight again, and you can see that it doesn't have many squares available! However, there is one major drawback in Black's strategy. As mentioned above, he no longer exerts any pawn pressure upon d4, which is of course the usual point of attack.

### 8 Nbd2 b5

Again, the move most frequently seen. Having claimed space on the queenside, Black would like to attack there. As it turns out, White will normally play c3 at some point, when ...b4 initiates an attack on a different part of White's pawn chain.

### 9 Be2 Qb6

Smagin had pursued the same strategy in an earlier game versus K.De Francesco in Bad Wiessee 1999, which went 9...Nb6 10 Nf1 Be7 11 c3 Bd7 12 h4 Qc7 13 h5 (Diagram 3). White stakes out space, the logical consequence of having a rock-solid pawn triangle d4/e5/f4: 13...h6 14 Qc2 b4 15 Ne3 Na5!? (White stands somewhat better after 15...bxc3 16 bxc3 Nd8 17 a4 a5 18 f5) 16 f5! b3 17 Qb1 bxa2 18 Rxa2 Nb3 19 0-0 0-0-0 20 fxe6 Bxe6?! (Black can limit White's advantage by 20...fxe6 21 Qg6 Rdf8) 21 Nf5 Nxc1 22 Nxe7+ Qxe7 23 Qxc1 (from now on the combination of White's space advantage on the kingside and Black's queenside weaknesses combine to give White a large plus, which he quickly converts) 23...Rd7 24 Qf4 Kb8 25 Bd1 Rb7 26 Bc2 Nc8 27 Qg3 Qf8 28 Nh4 Ne7 29 Bg6 Nc6 30 Bf5 Qd8 31 Qxg7 Rg8 32 Qf6 1-0.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 10 Nf1! (Diagram 4)

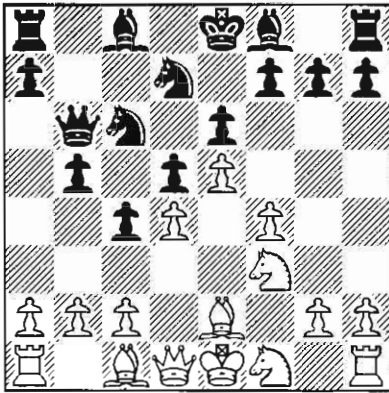


Diagram 4 (B)

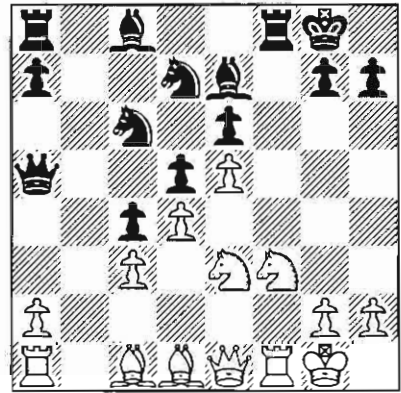


Diagram 5 (B)

White's plan is likely to be based upon the attack f4-f5, or at least the threat of it, so the idea of Nf1-e3 makes a lot of sense. In addition, the plan of g2-g4 with Ng3 is introduced. In such a 'closed' position (there is no confrontation in the centre), lengthy piece manoeuvres are more common than in open ones.

#### 10...f6!

Black wants some breathing room on the kingside. He may also get tactical opportunities involving a ...Nxe5 move.

#### 11 Ne3

11 Be3 and 11 Ng3 are logical alternatives.

#### 11...fxe5 12 fxe5

Now it looks as though White has got the moves f4-f5 and fxe6 for free, opening lines for his pieces. That's true, and unquestionably beneficial, but things are not so simple. For one thing, such an attack is best played when White has castled and developed all of his pieces. Also, White's move f5 is sometimes a prelude to attack by f6, not fxe6. The position is difficult to assess.

#### 12...Be7 13 c3

This will be played sooner or later.

#### 13...0-0 14 0-0 b4 15 Qe1

Trying to counter Black's queenside advance by playing 15 b3 is double-edged. Gurevich gives 15...cxb3 16 c4 Ndx5! 17 Nxe5 (17 dxe5? b2) 17...Nxe5 18 Rxf8+ Bxf8 as unclear.

#### 15...bxc3 16 bxc3 Qa5 17 Bd1! (Diagram 5)

An excellent move. White repositions his bishop and targets Black's king with another piece. This is an ideal result for White after 7 Nb3: his centre is intact and he has a powerful kingside attack.

**17...Rf7 18 Bc2 Nf8**

A variation demonstrating White's superiority of forces is 18...Rb8 19 Ng4 Kh8 20 Ng5! Rxf1+ 21 Kxf1 Bxg5 22 Bxg5 Rb2 23 Rc1. Then 24 Qh4 is a huge threat, so Black has to exchange off pieces by 23...Qxa2! 24 Ra1 Rxc2 25 Rxa2 Rxa2. But even the reduced material doesn't kill off the attack after the surprising 26 Nf6! (threatening 27 Nxd7 followed by Qb1-b7) 26...Nf8 27 Qh4 Ra1+ (27...a5 28 Qh5 leads to mate) 28 Ke2 Ra2+ 29 Kf3 Ne7 30 Qh5 Neg6 31 Nxf7, winning.

**19 Nd1 Bd7 20 Qg3 Nd8 21 a4 Nc6 (Diagram 6)**

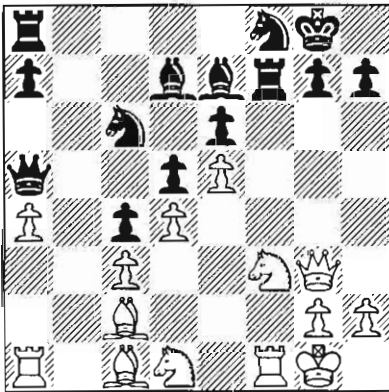


Diagram 6 (W)

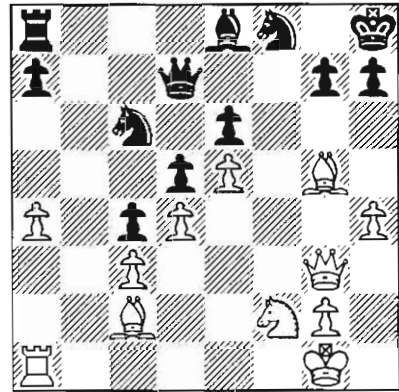


Diagram 7 (B)

**22 Bh6!?**

A better demonstration of White's strategy would be 22 Re1! Rb8 23 Ng5 Bxg5 24 Bxg5 Ng6 25 Nf2!, mounting the pressure. For example, 25...Nce7 26 Ng4 Nf5 27 Qh3 Rb2 28 Rec1 h6 29 Bxh6 gxh6 30 Bxf5 Rxf5 31 Qxh6!

**22...Be8 23 Rf2 Kh8 24 Bd2 Qd8 25 Ng5 Rxf2 26 Nxf2 Bxg5!?**

Gurevich suggests 26...h6 27 Nf3 Rb8. Nevertheless, White's attack persists with 28 Rf1!. After 28...Rb2 29 Ne1 Qa5 30 Bc1 Rb8 31 Ng4, Black cannot effectively defend against Bxh6, Nf6 and other threats.

**27 Bxg5 Qd7 28 h4! (Diagram 7)**

Or 28 Rf1 Bg6 29 Bd1!, with ideas of Qh4, Ng4 etc.

**28...Bg6?!**

Dubious, but Black won't survive after 28...Rb8 29 Rf1 Bg6 30 Bxg6 (or 30 Bd1!

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

with the idea h5-h6) 30...Nxb6 31 h5 Nge7 32 h6 (32 Qf4 Qe8 33 h6 is also winning) 32...Nf5 33 Qf4!

**29 Bxg6 Nxb6 30 h5 Nge7 31 h6 Nf5 32 hxg7+?**

The right way was 32 Qf4! with the idea g4, hxg7 etc. and White has a decisive advantage. Now Black gets his queen back into defence.

**32...Qxg7 33 Qf4 Qg6 34 Bf6+?**

White is losing the thread. 34 Ng4! keeps the attack going, although his advantage is limited.

**34...Kg8 35 Kh2?! Rb8 36 g4 Nh6**

After 36...Qh6+, White's attack is at an end and Black takes over the initiative on the queenside. There are a few minor inaccuracies on both sides' parts in what follows, and then White blunders. But the reader should note that his position was excellent coming out of the opening.

**37 Rg1 Rb2 38 Kh3 Na5 39 Rg3 Nb3 40 Be7 Nf7 41 Nd1!? Rd2 42 Ne3 Qb1 43 Nf1 Rd3 44 Rf3??**

After 44 Kh4! White can still hold the balance; e.g. 44...Qe1 45 Qf6 Qe4 46 Rxd3 cxd3 47 Qxe6 Qh1+ 48 Kg3 Qg1+ 49 Kh4.

**44...Qxf1+ 0-1**

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□ T.Tolnai ■ T.Fogarasi

Budapest 1992

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1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3 cxd4 8 Nbx4 (Diagram 8)

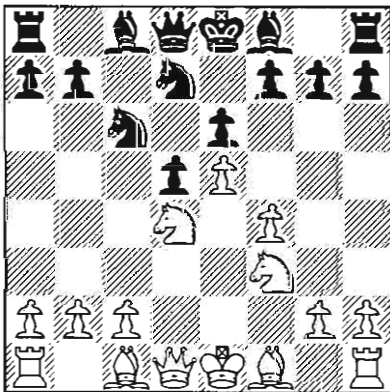


Diagram 8 (B)

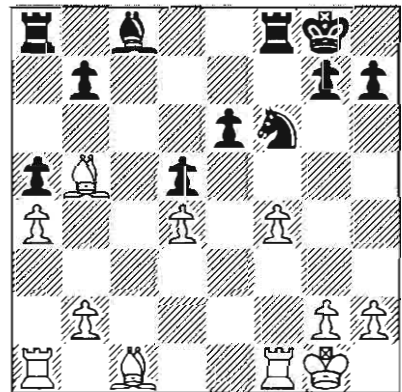


Diagram 9 (W)

In fact, the game was played via 1 e4 Nf6 2 Nc3 d5 3 e5 Nfd7 4 d4 e6 5 f4 c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Ne2 cxd4 8 Nexd4, but I've given our repertoire move order.

We have reached a fundamental and important position for the Tarrasch Variation, one that can also arise in the Classical Variation.



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** Apart from the Alekhine Defence move order given above, we have five conventional French move orders that lead to the diagrammed position!

They begin with 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5, and now:

- a) 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3 cxd4 8 Nbx4 (the order for our repertoire);
- b) 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ndf3 Nc6 7 Ne2 cxd4 8 Nexd4;
- c) 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 cxd4 7 Nxd4 Nc6 8 N2f3;
- d) 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Nce2 Nc6 7 Nf3 cxd4 8 Nexd4;
- e) 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Nf3 cxd4 7 Nb5 Nc6 8 Nbx4.

### 8...Nxd4

A number of alternatives will be examined in the 'Deeper Look' section.

### 9 Nxd4 Be7

This is solid. An unambitious option is 9...Qb6, when if White wants to he can pursue a technical edge with 10 c3 Bc5 11 a4 a5 12 Bb5 0-0 13 0-0 f6 14 exf6 Bxd4+ 15 Qxd4 Qxd4+ 16 cxd4 Nxf6 (**Diagram 9**).

This isn't forced, but it's an interesting example of multiple exchanges on d4. This type of position tends to be somewhat better for White, although in this exact position it is only slightly so. The simple advantage of his better light-squared bishop, and in particular Black's difficulty in developing his own, somewhat outweighs Black's strong outpost on e4. Given a few moves White's own bad bishop on c1 will come into play; for example, if b3 were already in, White would have a very large advantage. As it stands, the fair result is probably a draw, but White can make Black work to achieve that. The game I.Nataf-V.Baklan, European Ch., Istanbul 2003, continued 17 Re1 (or 17 b3 Bd7 18 Bxd7 Nxd7 19 Ba3 Rfc8 20 f5 Ra6 21 Rae1, with a limited advantage) 17...Ne4 18 Bd3?! (inviting his opponent to obtain light-squared counterplay) 18...Bd7 19 Bxe4 dxe4 20 Rxe4 Rac8 21 Re2 Rc4 22 Bd2 ½-½. Too many of the pawns have disappeared and in any case, Black's bishop will be terrifically strong on c6.

Going back, it's logical to bring the dark-squared bishop into activity by playing 18 b3! b6 19 Ba3!? Rxf4 20 Rac1. White has sacrificed a pawn, but creates difficulties and retains some advantage. In this line, 19 g3 Ba6 20 Bd7 Rf6 21 g4!? is another interesting try.

### 10 c3 Nb8?!

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This knight redeployment is a standard French idea to challenge the d4-square by ...Nb8-c6. But in this position it allows White time that he can use precisely to strengthen his grip on that square and, by implication, to bolster e5.

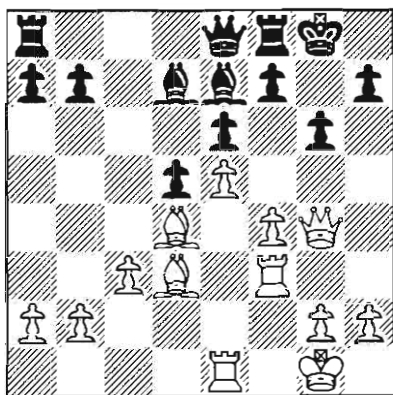
**11 Be3 Nc6 12 Bd3 Nxd4 13 Bxd4 g6**

Played to avoid f4-f5. This partially simplified position looks fairly solid for Black, but it is already close to lost.

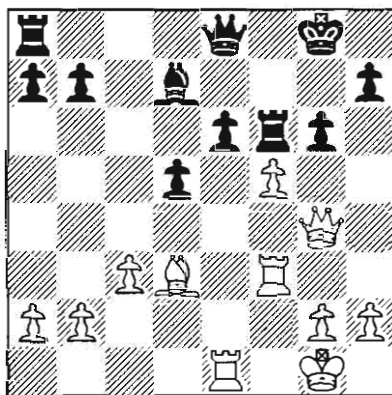
**14 0-0 0-0**

Perhaps 14...b6, intending ...Bc5, was worth a try.

**15 Qg4! Qe8 16 Rae1 Bd7 17 Rf3 (Diagram 10)**



**Diagram 10 (B)**



**Diagram 11 (B)**

Diagram 10 is the picture of a classic space advantage.

**17...f5**

Or 17...Bb5 18 f5 Bxd3 (18...exf5 19 Bxf5) 19 f6 and White is winning; for example, 19...Qb5 20 fxe7 Rfe8 21 Qh4 Qa6 22 Be3! intending Qf6 and Bh6.

**18 exf6 Bxf6 19 Bxf6 Rxf6 20 f5! (Diagram 11) 20...e5 21 Qg5 1-0**

There's no use playing on, with f6, e5, and g6 all attacked. One line is 21...Qd8 22 Rxe5 Rf7 23 fxg6 hxg6 24 Bxg6 Rxf3 25 Bh5+ and White will end up three pawns ahead.

## Looking a Little Deeper

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3**

We'll examine these branches:

A: 7...c4

B: 7...cxd4 8 Nexd4

C: 7...others

A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3 c4 8 Nbd2 b5 (Diagram 12)

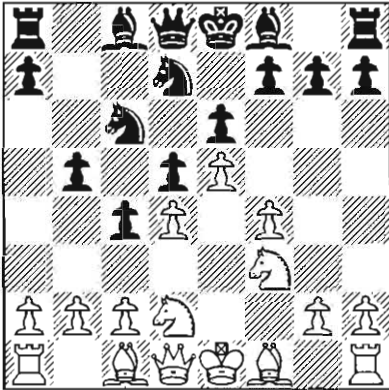


Diagram 12 (W)

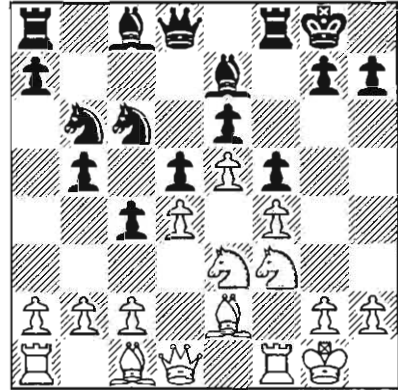


Diagram 13 (W)

Black can also try to block the kingside immediately by 8...f5, as in Zhang Pengxiang-D.Barua, Jodhpur 2003: 9 Be2 Be7 10 Nf1 (White pursues the 'normal' plan, as does Black) 10...b5 11 Ne3 Nb6 12 0-0 0-0 (**Diagram 13**) 13 g4?! (a wild thrust) 13...fxg4 14 Ne1 Bh4 (or 14...h5 15 h3 Bh4! 16 hxg4 Bxe1) 15 c3 Ne7 (15...h5!) 16 Bxg4 Nf5 17 Nxf5 exf5 18 Bf3 Be6 19 Ng2 (now White can combine pressure on the centre with an attack along the g-file, while Black can pursue queenside ambitions) 19...Be7 20 Bd2 a5 21 Ne3, and here Black could play, for example, 21...Qd7 with equal chances.

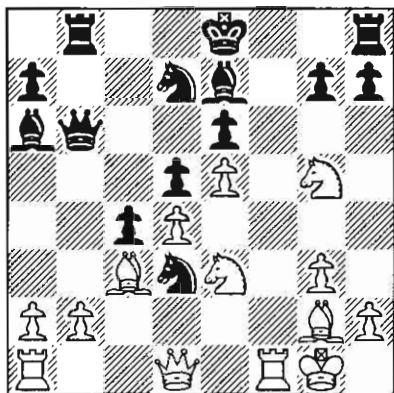
White should take another look at his position just before move 13, as in my opinion he has the better game. It's not clear to me why White can't prepare the advance g2-g4 slowly with 13 Kh1!, followed by Rg1, possibly prefaced by c3. Black can play for a queenside attack in the meantime, but it looks awfully slow to me. Thus ...f5 not only offers White a target but leaves Black without ...f6 in reserve, which could be an important defensive resource.

**9 Be2**

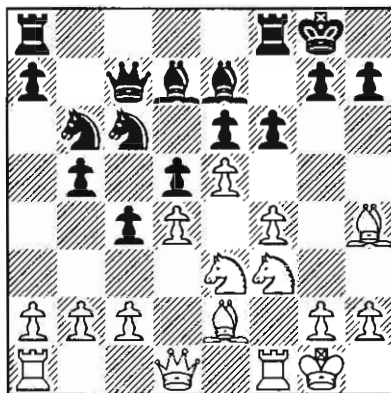
9 c3 b4 10 g3 is a slower way to develop White's pieces. He will arguably be in better shape to counter ...f6; on the other hand, after he plays Bg2 his bishop has

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no easy way of aiming at the kingside (compare this with Be2-d1-c2, as played in our illustrative game Smagin-Gurevich). Following 10 g3, H.Krueger-E.Noire, correspondence 2001, continued 10...Rb8 11 Bg2 Be7 12 Nf1 Qa5 13 Bd2 bxc3?! (13...0-0) 14 Bxc3 Qb6 15 Ne3 Nb4 16 0-0 Ba6?! (16...Nd3 is met by 17 b3; 16...0-0! 17 f5 Nd3 is unclear and potentially wild) 17 f5 Nd3 18 fxe6 fxe6 19 Ng5! 1-0 (**Diagram 14**).



**Diagram 14 (B)**



**Diagram 15 (B)**

This is a premature resignation. Nevertheless, the situation is bad, as can be seen by the following variations: 19...Bxg5 20 Qh5+ Kd8 21 Qxg5+ Kc7 (21...Kc8 22 Qxg7) 22 Bxd5 N3xe5 23 Qxg7; 19...N7xe5 20 Nxe6 Qxe6 21 Nxd5 Rb7 22 Qa4+ Bb5 23 Qxb5+ Rxb5 24 Nc7+ Kd7 25 Nxe6 Kxe6 26 Bh3+; and 19...h5 20 Nf7 Rh7 21 Qf3 g5 22 Nxd5! exd5 23 Qf5 Rg7 24 Bxd5.

### **9...Nb6**

Gurevich played 9...Qb6 against Smagin. The notes to that game discussed 9...Nb6 10 Nf1 Be7 as well.

### **10 Nf1 Bd7 11 Ne3 Be7**

It's hard to dispense with this move entirely because at some point Ng5 will be a problem, perhaps after f4-f5.

### **12 0-0 Qc7 13 Bd2 f6**

Black retains maximum flexibility: he might play on the kingside or queenside. Now White finds an original plan:

### **14 Be1 0-0!?**

14...fxe5 15 fxe5 0-0 looks more accurate. Black can also consider playing ...0-0-0 in conjunction with ...g5 and ...h5, but White will obviously have play on the queenside.

**15 Bh4! (Diagram 15)**

Now 15...fxe5 16 Bxe7 Nxe7 decentralizes Black's knight and gives White enough time to establish himself on e5 via 17 Nxe5 Nc6 18 N3g4 with a comfortable edge.

**15...Kh8 16 Kh1 a5 17 Qd2**

17 c3! Na4 18 Qc2 aims for the move f5, either before or after g4. I like White in that case.

**17...b4 18 b3!? c3?!**

18...Na7, with the idea of ...a4, seems better. It would keep the queenside open,

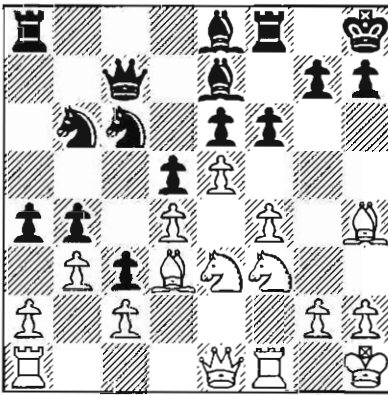
**19 Qe1**

The idea is that as Black has come to a halt on the queenside, White can gather his forces on the kingside.

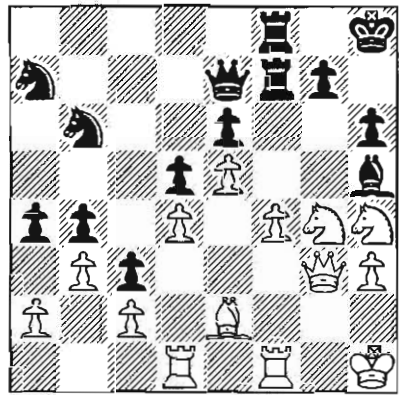
**19...a4**

19...Be8 20 Bd3 f5!? would close the kingside. White will play for g4/Rg1 and Black for ...a4/...axb3. Since Black's queenside follow-up is unclear, I'd have to favour White.

**20 Bd3 Be8 (Diagram 16)**



**Diagram 16 (W)**



**Diagram 17 (B)**

**21 Rd1!?**

21 exf6 is strong, with the idea 21...gxf6 (21...Bxf6 22 Ng4!) 22 f5 axb3 23 axb3 Rxa1 24 Qxa1 e5 25 dxe5 fxe5 26 f6! intending 26...Bxf6 27 Ng5!. Regardless, White has won the positional battle.

**21...f5 22 h3 Bxh4 23 Qxh4 Qe7 24 Qf2 h6 25 g4!?**

25 Rg1! is more patient.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 20...fxg4 26 Nxg4

The alternative is 26 hxg4!? Rxf4 27 Qh2 Rxf3! 28 Rxf3 Nxd4 29 Rf4 Nc6 30 g5 Nd7 31 Rdf1 when it's not clear whether White's initiative or the centre weighs more heavily.

### 26...Bh5

Or 26...Rxf4?! 27 Qe3! Rf8 28 Nxb6 with a strong attack. White still has the upper hand.

### 27 Qg3 Rf7?! 28 Bb5!? Na7 29 Be2 Raf8 30 Nh4 (Diagram 17) 30...axb3??

30...g5!? was the most interesting, if not fully adequate move. For example, 31 fxg5 Rxf1+ 32 Rxf1 Rxf1+ 33 Bxf1 axb3 34 axb3 Qxg5 35 Nf3! Qc1 36 Kg1 threatens Qh4 and Bd3.

### 31 Nxb6 Bxe2

White wins after 31...bxc2 32 Bxb5 cxd1Q 33 Ng6+ Kh7 34 Bxd1. We are following the game V.Malakhov-S.Volkov, Panormo 2001, which concluded:

### 32 Ng6+ Kh7 33 Nxf7! Qxf7 34 Qh4+ Kxg6 35 Rg1+ Kf5 36 Rg5+ Ke4 37 f5+ Ke3 38 Rg3+ Bf3+ 39 Rxf3+ Kxf3 40 Rf1+ Ke3 41 Qf4+ 1-0

This whole line is quite attractive for White.

### B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 cxd4 7 Nb3 Nc6 8 Nbx4 (Diagram 18)

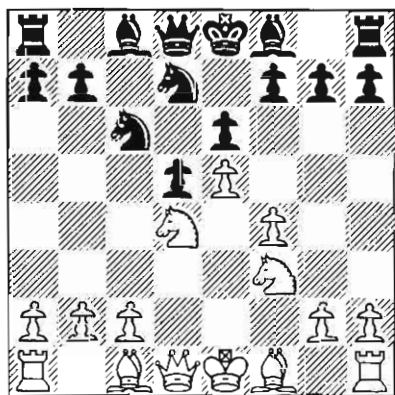


Diagram 18 (B)

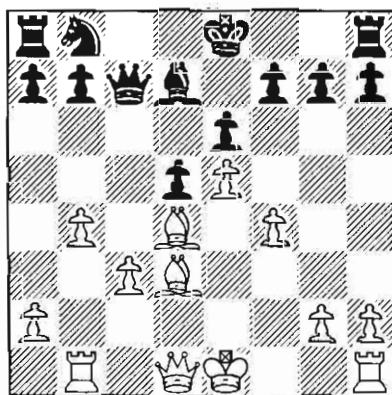


Diagram 19 (B)

This position has been somewhat favourable to White over the years. It should be said that his advantage is modest and sometimes dissipates in just a few moves. On the other hand, an innocent-looking inaccuracy or two can leave Black in a

permanently passive position. Fortunately, both players can aim for double-edged positions, which is about as much as one can ask from an opening. For the sake of inspiring the reader to take up this *Dangerous Weapon*, I'm showing mostly positive themes and encouraging outcomes for White.

### 8...Nxd4

Or:

a) 8...Be7 is quite playable but can be a little passive if Black isn't careful. C.Bauer-N.Gouliev, Bad Zwosten 2004, continued 9 c3 0-0 10 Be3 Nc5 11 Nb3!? b6 12 Be2 Bd7 (12...Ne4!? 13 Bd3 Bb7) 13 0-0 Nxb3 14 axb3 Bc5 15 Qd2 a5 16 Bd3 f6 17 exf6 Qxf6 and Black was close to equality.

b) 8...Bc5 9 c3 Qb6 10 Rb1! Ndb8? 11 Be3 Bd7 12 b4! Nxd4 13 Nxd4 Bxd4 14 Bxd4 Qc7 15 Bd3 (**Diagram 19**) and White was already well on top in S.Klimov-D.Egorov, St Petersburg 2002. He got a terrific bind after 15...b6 16 Qg4 0-0 17 b5! a6 18 a4 axb5 19 axb5, and won routinely on the kingside: 19...Be8 20 0-0 (or 20 f5 exf5 21 Qxf5 g6 22 Qf3) 20...Nd7 21 Rf3 g6 22 Qh4 Nc5 23 f5! (**Diagram 20**)

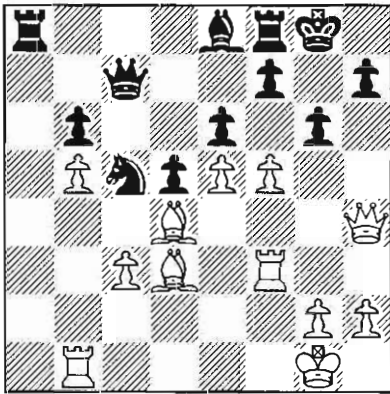


Diagram 20 (B)

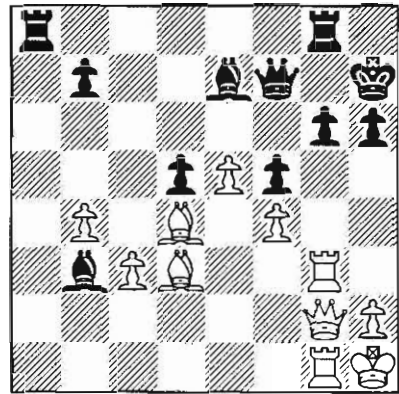


Diagram 21 (W)

23...exf5 24 Bxf5 Ne6 25 Bxe6 fxe6 26 Rxf8+ Kxf8 27 Qf6+ Qf7 28 Qh8+ Ke7 29 Bxb6 Rc8 30 Be3 Rxc3 31 Bg5+ Kd7 32 Rf1 1-0.

### 9 Nxd4 Bc5

Again Black has alternatives:

a) The typical position that arises after 9...Qb6 10 c3 Nb8 11 Qb3!? Bc5 12 Qxb6 Bxb6 13 Be3 can make life unpleasant for Black: 13...Nc6 14 Kd2 Nxd4 15 Bxd4 Bd8 (or 15...Bxd4 16 cxd4 Bd7 17 Rc1 with the better bishop) 16 Bd3 h5 17 g3 Bd7 18 h3 with an eventual kingside expansion in store, although Black managed to draw in V.Jansa-M.Matlak, Czech League 1994.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

b) 9...Nb8 works in some French lines but doesn't equalize here: 10 Be3 Nc6 11 c3 Qb6 12 b4!? a5 13 a3 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 Qd8 15 Bd3 Be7 16 0-0 0-0 17 Qc2 h6 18 Qe2 f5 19 Rae1 (19 exf6 Bxf6 20 Bc5!? is another idea) 19...Bd7 20 Kh1 axb4 21 axb4 g6?! (21...Be8) 22 g4 Kh7 23 Rg1 Qe8 24 Rg2 Qf7 25 Reg1 Rg8 26 Rg3 Ba4 27 Qg2 Bb3 (D.Baramidze-I.Zaragatski, Deizisau 2003) and here White missed the forced win by 28 gxf5 exf5 (**Diagram 21**) (28...gxf5 29 Bxf5+! exf5 30 e6 Rxd3 31 Qxd3 Qg8 32 Qg7+) 29 e6!! Qxe6 30 Qh3! with the idea of 31 Qxh6+!, which is undoubtedly what was overlooked. Black loses after 30...Bf6 31 Rxd3 Rxd3 32 Bxf5 or 30...h5 31 Rxd3 Qxd3 32 Bxf5.

### 10 c3 Qb6

A miniature stemmed from 10...0-0 11 Be3 Qh4+ 12 g3 Qe7 13 Bg2 in O.Renet-B.Zueger, Swiss Ch. 1992: 13...f6 14 exf6 Nxf6 15 0-0 Bd7 16 Re1 Rae8 17 Nf3 b6 18 Bd4 Qd6 19 Qe2 Re7 20 Kh1 Be8?? 21 Bxf6 and Black resigned, as 22 b4 follows.

### 11 a4! a5 12 Bb5 0-0 13 Be3 f6!

The only try for counterplay.

### 14 Qh5!?

Probably not the most accurate move. 14 Qg4 fxe5! 15 Nxe6 Rf7 16 Nxc5 Nxc5 is complex. Then White can try 17 Qf3 exf4 (17...e4 18 Qd1) 18 0-0 Be6 19 Bd4 with promising play for the pawn. 14 exf6 Nxf6 15 0-0 is also unclear.

### 14...Rf7?!

Black could achieve true equality by 14...g6! 15 Qe2 fxe5 16 fxe5 Rf7! (16...Nxe5?! 17 Bh6).

### 15 0-0 f5

Now 15...g6? 16 Qh4! fxe5 17 fxe5 Nxe5 18 Qg3 is effectively winning for White because a knight move like 18...Nc6 allows 19 Rxf7 Kxf7 20 Rf1+ Kg8 21 Qf4!.

### 16 Bf2!?



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! 16 Rfd1! (Diagram 22) threatens 17 b4 and emphasizes White's considerable advantage.**

For example, 16...Nf8 (Black needs to get his knight out of the way; 16...h6? 17 b4! axb4 18 cxb4 Bxb4 19 Rab1 and the bishop can't move in view of Bxd7, while e6 hangs in other lines) 17 b4! Bxd4 (this time 17...axb4 18 cxb4 Bxb4 fails to 19 Be8! Rc7 20 Rab1) 18 Bxd4 Qd8 19 bxa5 Qxa5 20 c4! etc.

### 16...Nf8 17 Qe2

17 Nf3 Bd7 18 Bd3 Bxf2+ 19 Rxf2 prepares an eventual g4. The key is that White still controls d4.

### 17...Bd7 18 Rfd1 Ng6 19 g3 Nf8 20 h4 (Diagram 23)

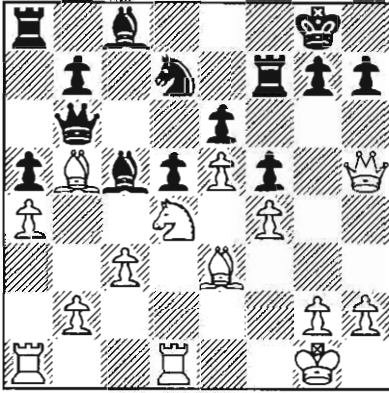


Diagram 22 (B)

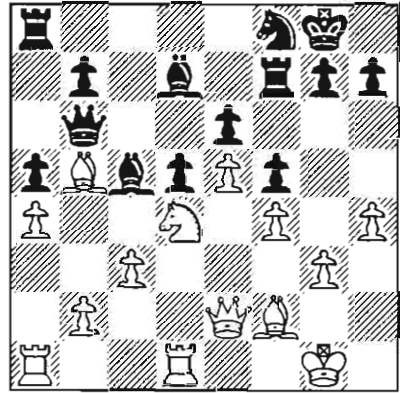


Diagram 23 (B)

20 Bd3 still looks best. White's advantage should be well within manageable bounds in what follows, taking into account a few slips around the time control.

20...Rc8 21 Rd2 h6 22 h5 Qd8 23 Bxd7 Rxd7 24 Nb5 b6 25 Bd4 g5 26 hxg6 Rg7 27 Kf2 Rxc6 28 Rh1 Qe7 29 Qh5 Qg7 30 Rh3 Nd7 31 Qe2 Kh7 32 Qe3 Be7 33 Kg2 Nc5 34 Bxc5 Bxc5 35 Qf3 Rg8 36 b3 Qe7 37 Rd3 Rg4 38 c4 dxc4 39 bxc4 Rd8 40 Rh1 Rxd3 41 Qxd3 Rg7 42 Qf3 Qe8 43 Rd1 Kg8 44 Rd3 Kh7 45 Kf1 h5 46 Nd6 Bxd6 47 exd6 h4 48 Qh1 Kg8 49 Qxh4 Qc8 50 Rd4 Qc6 51 Kf2 Qxa4 52 Rd2 Qb4 53 Qd8+ Kh7 54 Re2 Qc5+ 55 Re3 Qd4 56 Qh4+ Kg8 57 Qd8+ Kh7 58 Qh4+ Kg8

½-½ S Smagin-V Moskalenko, Moscow 1995.

**C) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3**

In this section we'll look at other responses to 7 Nb3:

---

**C1: 7...a5**

**C2: 7...f6**

**C3: 7...Qb6**

---

**C1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3 a5!? 8 a4 (Diagram 24)**

8 Be3 is also possible.

**8...Qb6**

One could argue that if Black now plays 8...c4 9 Nbd2, White has gained because

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

...b5 is held up. On the other hand, when ...b5 does come it will open the b-file. Perhaps we should call it an even trade.

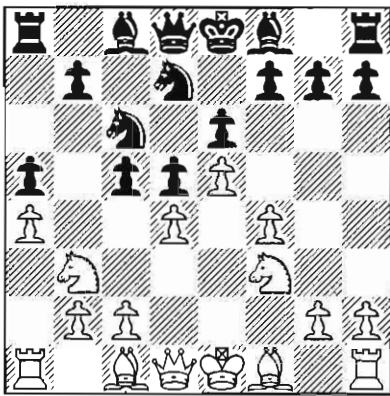
**9 Rb1 cxd4 10 Nbx d4 Bb4+ 11 c3 Bxc3+?!**

Now the fireworks start. Most of what follows is forced.

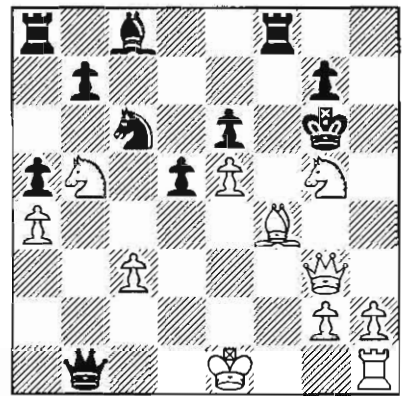
**12 bxc3 Qxb1 13 Nb5 0-0 14 Bd3 Qa2**

14...Qa1? 15 0-0 gives White the dual threat of 16 Bxh7+ and 16 Qc2, when a trap of the queen is imminent.

**15 Bxh7+ Kxh7 16 Ng5+ Kg6 17 Qd3+ f5 18 Qg3 Ndx e5 19 fxe5 f4 20 Bxf4 Qb1+ (Diagram 25) 21 Kd2**



**Diagram 24 (B)**



**Diagram 25 (W)**

Or 21 Ke2! Qxh1 (21...Qc2+ 22 Bd2 and wins) 22 Nxe6+ Kf7 23 Qxg7+ Kxe6 24 Qg6+ Kd7 25 e6+ and mate follows shortly.

**21...Qa2+ 22 Ke1!?**

This doesn't throw the win away, but easier is 22 Ke3! d4+ 23 Kd3! Nb4+ 24 cxb4 Qb3+ 25 Kxd4.

**22...Rxf4!? 23 Nh3+?**

23 Nxe6+! Kf7 24 Qxf4+ Kxe6 25 Rf1 will eventually win.

**23...Kh7 24 Nxf4 Qb1+ 25 Kd2 Qa2+ 26 Ke3 Qc2 27 Nd3 Qxa4 28 Nd4 Nxd4 29 Qh4+ Kg8 30 Qd8+ Kh7 31 Qh4+ Kg8 32 Qd8+ Kh7 33 Qh4+ Kg8**

½-½ R.Bellin-M Drasko, Milan 1997.

**C2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3 f6 (Diagram 26) 8 exf6**

Among White's options are:

a) 8 c3 fxe5 9 fxe5.

b) 8 c4!? fxe5 9 dxe5!? Nb6! (Black should avoid 9...d4 10 Ng5! Qe7 11 Bd3 g6 12 h4 or 12 Ne4) 10 cxd5 exd5 11 Bb5. White has the idea of Qc2 to force a commitment of Black's c-pawn, as in the line 11...a6 12 Bxc6+ bxc6 13 0-0 Be7 14 Qc2 c4 15 Nbd4.

**8...Qxf6 9 Be3 Bd6 10 g3 cxd4**

Or 10...c4 11 Nbd2 0-0 12 Bg2 Qg6 13 a3 (preventing ...Nb4).

**11 Nbx d4 0-0 12 Bg2 e5 13 fxe5 Ndx e5 14 0-0 Ng4 15 Bg5 Qg6 16 c3 h6 17 Bd2 Nxd4 18 cxd4 Be6 19 Qb3 Rf7 20 Nh4 Qh5 21 Rfe1 Re8 22 Rxe6 Rxe6 23 Bxd5 Ree7 24 Rf1 Nf6 (Diagram 27) 25 Rxf6! gxf6 26 Bf3**

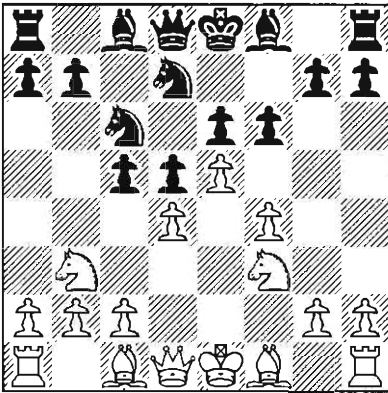


Diagram 26 (W)

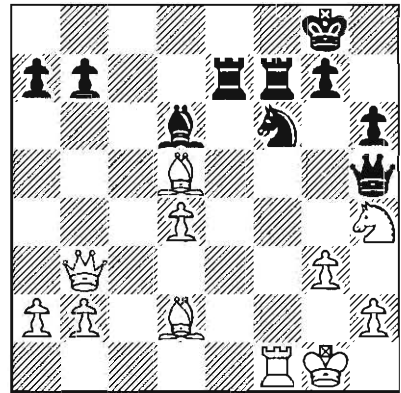


Diagram 27 (W)

A beautiful queen trap! The entire fifth rank is covered.

**26...Qxh4 27 gxh4 Kh7 28 Qd5 Bc7 29 Qf5+ Kh8 30 Bxh6 Bb6 31 Bd5 Bxd4+ 32 Kf1 Re5 33 Qc8+**

1-0 I.Glek-B.Socko, Playchess 2004.

**C3) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Ngf3 Nc6 7 Nb3 Qb6 (Diagram 28)**

Black threatens 8...c4 9 Nbd2 Nxd4.

**8 c3!?**

8 dxc5! Nxc5 9 Be3 a5 10 a4 seems to retain a limited advantage. Again, undisturbed control of d4 is White's primary goal.

**8...a5**

This is both flexible and logical. Black wants to force concessions from White.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 9 a4 Be7

Another possibility is 9...cxd4 10 Nbx d4 Nc5. The move 9...Be7 intends ...f6, but with a bishop on f6 White will be able keep the centre under control.

10 Be2 f6 11 exf6 Bxf6 12 0-0 cxd4 13 Nbx d4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 0-0 15 Be3 (Diagram 29)

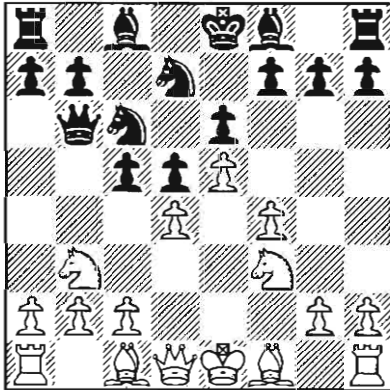


Diagram 28 (W)

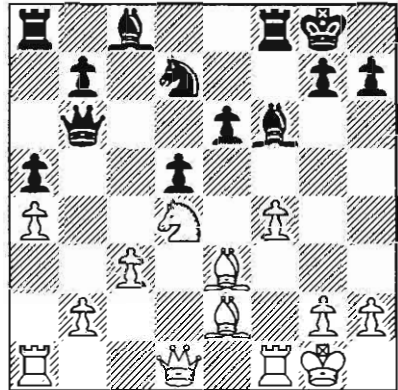


Diagram 29 (B)

White is better placed because of the inactive bishop on c8. Now Black resorts to a dubious freeing idea:

### 15...e5? 16 Nf5 Qe6

(S.Smagin-M.Schaefer, German League 1999) At this point, instead of 17 Bg4?, 17 fxe5! is very strong. For example, 17...Nxe5 (17...Bxe5 18 Qxd5!) 18 Bc5 Rf7 19 Bh5 Rc7 20 Bd6 Rd7 21 Bxe5 Bxe5 22 Qf3 etc.

## Characterization of 7 Nb3

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♠ ♠
Attacking Nature	♠ ♠ ♠
Positional/Strategic Nature	♠ ♠ ♠
Risk	♠ ♠
Reward	♠ ♠ ♠
Theoretical Depth	♠ ♠

## Chapter Seven

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# Swearing in Church

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6 (Diagram 1)

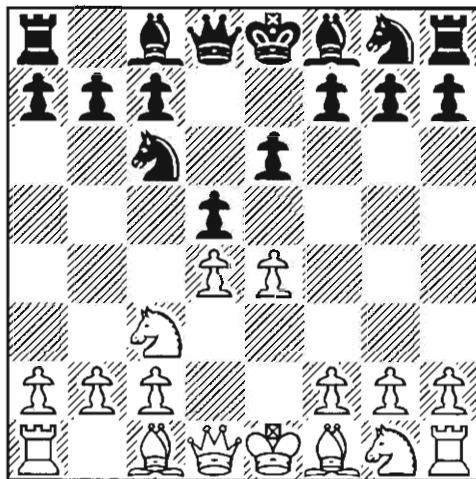


Diagram 1 (W)

When experienced players use 3 Nc3, they are probably well prepared for the established moves 3...Bb4 and 3...Nf6, and will often employ a specialty system against them. While there is no reason to avoid main lines solely on that account,

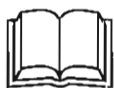
## Dangerous Weapons: The French

sometimes it's fun and rewarding to limit the opponent's options and present a few problems for him to solve at an early stage of the game.

How about on move three?

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6**

I first wrote about this move in 1996, inspired by a brief article by Helmut Reefschräger, a German IM who has been playing 3...Nc6 for over 40 years (recently drawing with and almost defeating the young star Daniel Stellwagen). In a 1986 article, he credited GM Hecht for inspiring him, and indeed Hecht has played a great number of groundbreaking games with the move over the years. The two Germans' many contributions to this defence have spanned several decades, so I've designated the 3...Nc6 complex as a whole the 'Hecht-Reefschräger System'.



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: Of course, 3...Nc6 was played occasionally by various players in the first half of the century, and indeed Nimzowitsch used the move order 1 e4 Nc6 2 d4 e6 3 Nc3 d5 on several occasions to arrive at the starting position (2...d5 3 Nc3 e6 is another route – who would have dreamed that 3...e6 might be the best move here in this 1 e4 Nc6 Nimzowitsch Defence line?).**

Nimzowitsch played the starting position of the Hecht-Reefschräger four times that I know of. It's also interesting that super-grandmasters including Korchnoi, Petrosian, and recently Morozevich and Topalov have experimented with the move. But the current flowering of 3...Nc6 has come from contemporary players such as GMs Eduardas Rozentalis and Ludger Keitlinghaus, as well as many other titled and correspondence players who have become dedicated followers of the knight development. Today it is an accepted and increasingly popular move.

### What's behind 3...Nc6?

---

Blocking the c-pawn has traditionally been considered an offence to the principles of the French, and Nimzowitsch himself compared it to 'swearing in church'. The reasoning was that White's predominant structure, the 'pawn chain' on d4 and e5, can best be attacked by...c5. That, of course, is not possible with a knight on c6. Indeed, masters used to shake their heads sadly at the poor amateur who showed his lack of understanding by playing 3...Nc6. Today, however, the attack on the front of the pawn chain by ...f6 has become as common as the one on the base. The moves are often played in tandem; but whether or not ...c5 is included with ...f6, the main goal is to compel White to play exf6 and grant Black a central majority. For this scenario, 3...Nc6 is ideal: it saves a tempo by omitting ...c5 and keeps the move ...c6 in reserve to strengthen Black's d5-pawn, a factor that takes on added significance when ...e5 is played. Naturally all of this is too abstract to be confirmed on the grounds of logic alone, so we'll have to investigate concrete lines to see how it plays out in practice.

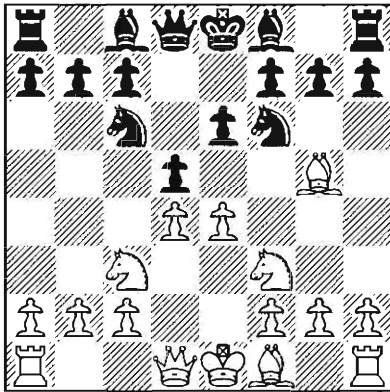
## Illustrative Games

□ P.Leko ■ A.Morozevich

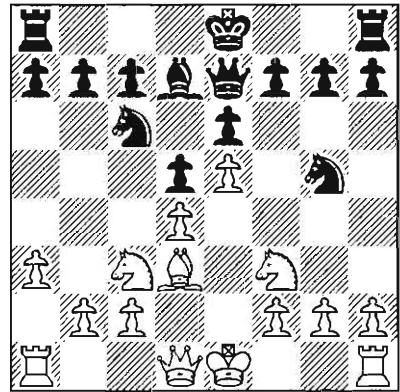
Frankfurt Rapidplay 2000

This contest between super-grandmasters provides a good test for what most books consider the 'main line' of the Hecht-Reefschläger.

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 Bg5 (Diagram 2)**



**Diagram 2 (B)**



**Diagram 3 (W)**

Originally 4 Nf3 and 5 Bg5 was the primary way in which leading players responded to 3...Nc6 and it is still the most popular approach. We will be looking at a host of 4th-, 5th-, and 6th-move alternatives when we 'look a little deeper' below.

**5...Be7 6 e5 Ne4**

A retreat to d7 would be passive, particularly since both of Black's freeing moves ...c5 and ...f6 work better and achieve more with Black's good dark-squared bishop on the board.

**7 Bxe7 Qxe7 8 a3**

Leko feels that it is worth spending a tempo to prevent the move ...Qb4, and the rook's pawn also prevents ...Nb4 in the event of Bd3. After 8 Bd3, we will be looking at 8...Nxc3 and 8...Qb4 9 Bxe4 dxe4 10 a3.

**8...Bd7**

This modest move develops a piece and contemplates playing ...0-0-0. Regardless of the direction in which Black castles, we will often see the manoeuvre ...f6 and ...Be8-g6/h5.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Hecht and Reefschläger have also used a less ambitious treatment that closes the position to a great extent: 8...Nxc3 9 bxc3 Na5 10 Bd3 Bd7 (10...c5) 11 0-0 c5 12 Re1 0-0-0 with equality, J.Hawksworth-H.Reefschläger, London 1984. Here 12...0-0 is safer, but going queenside isn't bad either. I prefer 8...Bd7.

### 9 Bd3

In retrospect, White might want to look for something else.

### 9...Ng5! (Diagram 3)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! Black's idea is ...Nxf3+ followed by ...Nxd4, and it's not easy to meet!**

9...Nxc3 and 9...f5 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 Bxf5 exf5+ are known alternatives.

### 10 Be2!?

It seems as though White is already resigned to a small inferiority. 10 Nxc3 Qxc3 11 Bf1 is thoroughly depressing for White; among other things, Black could play 11...f6.

Since White's obvious alternatives allow Black to carry out his plan, perhaps White should resort to trickery:

a) A poor choice is 10 h4? Nxf3+ 11 Qxf3 Nxd4 (even 11...f6!? favours Black) 12 Qg4 Nc6 13 Qxc3 0-0-0.

b) Likewise, 10 0-0 Nxf3+ 11 Qxf3 Nxd4 12 Qg4 c5 13 Qxc3 0-0-0 would be uninspiring.

c) 10 Ng1! may be best. It looks silly but threatens h2-h4 or f2-f4 and tries to solidify White's centre. Nevertheless, Black stands well enough after 10...f6 and now:

c1) 11 f4 Nf7 12 Nf3, when White's centre remains intact but he has lost a lot of time. In fact, this is a good time for Black to play the typical French Defence move 12...g5!? (Diagram 4).

After foregoing ...c5, Black is now attacking the base of White's *other* pawn chain! This is effective; play might continue 13 Qd2 (13 exf6 Qxf6 14 Ne2 gxf4 15 0-0 0-0; or 13 fxg5 fxe5 14 dxe5 Nxc3! 15 0-0 0-0-0) 13...fxe5 (13...gxf4 14 Qxf4 fxe5 15 dxe5 transposes) 14 dxe5 (or 14 fxe5? g4; 14 Nxe5?! Nf5 15 dxe5 gxf4 16 Qxf4 0-0-0 with ideas of ...Rdf8, ...Rg8, ...Qg7 etc., and Black has a clear advantage) 14...gxf4 15 Qxf4 Rf8 16 Qg3 0-0-0 and again Black will harass the queen with ...Rg8.

c2) 11 exf6 Qxf6 12 Nge2 is logical. Then 12...Nf7 threatens the d4-pawn, which can lead to 13 Bb5 0-0 14 0-0 a6 15 Bxc6 Bxc6 16 f4 (preventing ...e5) 16...Nd6 17 b3! (preventing ...Nc4) 17...Be8! (this is stronger than 17...Ne4 18 Nxe4 dxe4 19 Qd2) 18 Qd2 Nf5 19 Rae1 b6 with the idea ...c5, and Black has some initiative in the centre.

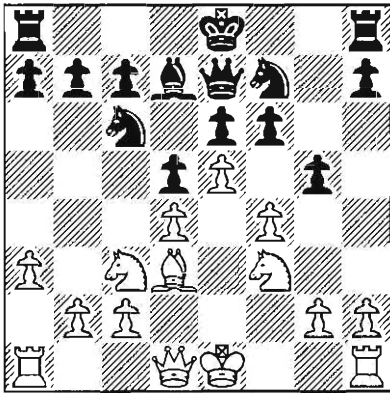
### 10...Nxf3+ 11 Bxf3 f6

A thematic attack on the e-pawn that characterizes most lines of the 3...Nc6 system. Victor Korchnoi played the only other game that I've seen with the 9...Ng5 idea: 11...Qh4!? 12 Ne2 f6 13 g3 Qh6 14 exf6 Qxf6 15 Bg2 e5!? (15...0-0 16 0-0 Ne7 planning ...b6 and ...c5 is a good plan) 16 0-0!? exd4 17 Nf4 0-0-0 18 Nxd5 Qd6 and Black had more space and a slight edge in S.Puc-V.Korchnoi, Moscow 1960.

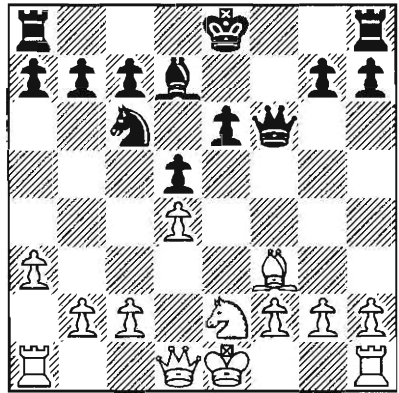
**12 exf6**

White can't defend both d4 and e5, so he exchanges.

**12...Qxf6 13 Ne2 (Diagram 5)**



**Diagram 4 (W)**



**Diagram 5 (B)**

White has salvaged his d-pawn at the cost of passivity. In spite of the bad bishop on d7, Black stands better. His goal is ...e5, although for now the bishop on f3 discourages that.

**13...0-0-0 14 0-0 h5!**

Simple and strong. Now there isn't much to be done about ...g5-g4.

**15 c3 g5 16 Nc1 g4 17 Be2 e5**

Finally, this thematic break. Black has more active pieces and an extra central pawn. Leko responds by trying to keep the position closed.

**18 Nb3 Kb8**

18...exd4! 19 Nxd4 (19 cxd4 Rde8) 19...Rhe8 obviously favours Black, but Morozevich wants to secure his king before taking action.

**19 Bb5!? e4?!**

Black's first mistake. Better was 19...exd4! 20 cxd4 (20 Bxc6 Qxc6 21 Qxd4 h4 with an attack; White's knight on b3 is misplaced) 20...a6 (or 20...h4 21 Nc5 Bf5 22 Bxc6 Qxc6 23 Rc1) 21 Bxc6 Bxc6 and now 22 f3? Ba4! is awkward, but 22 a4 Rde8 23 f3

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

g3! 24 hxg3 h4 25 g4 h3! is also very promising for Black.

**20 Nc5 Bc8 21 Qa4!?**

21 Qb3! looks better.

**21...Rd6**

This move and the position in general are typical of those in the Chigorin Defence to the Queen's Gambit Declined. Morozevich has been a leading practitioner of that opening.

**22 Rae1 h4 23 Re3 Rhd8**

The computer thinks that here and on the next few moves 23...h3 24 g3 is the equivalent of two pawns ahead for Black, but I think that Morozevich is right not to close things up so drastically when he can attack with open lines instead.

**24 Bxc6 Rxc6 25 b4 Qg5 26 Rfe1 Rh6 27 c4**

27 Qb5 contains the primitive threat of Nxe4, but 27...a6 is one good answer, in view of 28 Nxe4?? Qxe3.

**27...g3! (Diagram 6)**

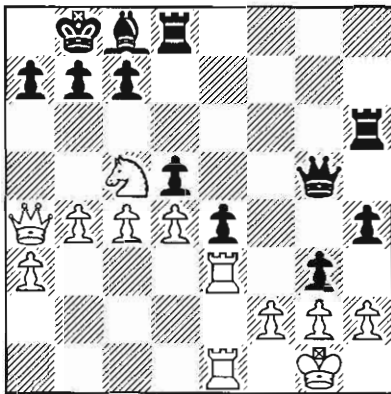


Diagram 6 (W)

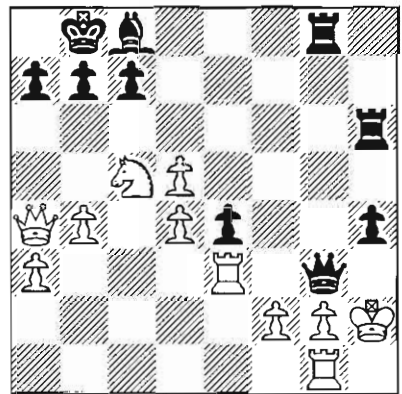


Diagram 7 (W)

**28 cxd5**

After 28 fxg3 hxg3 29 h3 (or 29 Rxg3 Qh4 30 Qb3 Qxh2+ 31 Kf2 dxc4 32 Qe3 Qh4! and Black wins after, for example, 33 Ke2 b6 34 Na4 Bg4+ 35 Kd2 Rxd4+!); 29 hxg3 is answered by 29...Rdh8) 29...Qf4! 30 Qc2 Bxh3! the attack is overwhelming.

**28...gxh2+ 29 Kxh2 Rg8 30 Rg1 Qg3+! (Diagram 7) 31 Kh1**

31 Rxg3 hxg3 is mate.

**31...Qxf2 32 Rc3 h3 33 g3 h2 34 Rgc1 Rxg3 35 Rxg3 Qxg3 36 Rf1 Rg6 37 Nd7+ Ka8 0-1.**

But not 37...Bxd7?? 38 Rf8+ Bc8 39 Rxc8+! Kxc8 40 Qe8 mate.

After that hard-fought struggle I'll show a less-elevated miniature. But the treacherous trap at the end shouldn't distract you from the game's positional lessons.

□ **W.Spoelman** ■ **D.Stellwagen**

Hoogeveen 2003

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 Bg5 Be7 6 Bd3 (Diagram 8)

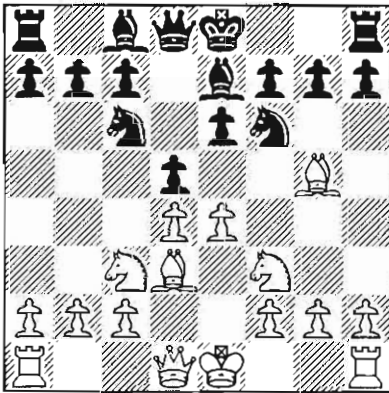


Diagram 8 (B)

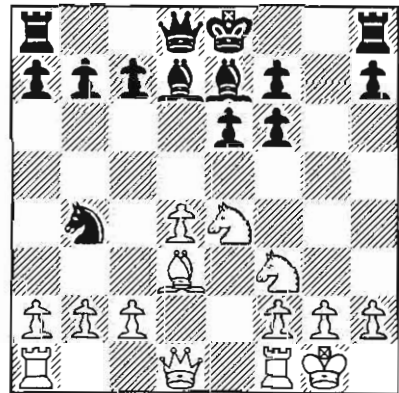


Diagram 9 (W)

This time White chooses to keep things flexible and not cooperate by ceding the e4-square to Black's knight. He also doesn't expose his central pawns to the kind of undermining they can be subjected to after e5.

**6...dxe4 7 Nxe4 Nb4**

Black contemplates exchanging off White's bishop on d3 and, as the game goes, clears c6 for his own bishop.

**8 0-0 Bd7**

Stellwagen delays ...Nxd3 because after Qxd3 White has connected rooks and is ready to advance his central pawns.

**9 Bxf6**

In several chapters of this book I extensively cite Neil McDonald, one of the world's leading French experts. On *ChessPublishing.com*, he offers the following analysis: 9 Ne5 Nxd3 10 Qxd3 Nxe4 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 Qxe4 0-0-0 13 Rfe1 f6 14 Nxd7 Qxd7 15 c3 (not 15 Rad1 e5!; nor 15 Qxe6? Qxe6 16 Rxe6 Rxd4) 15...Rde8, which he shows as leading to equality.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 9...gxf6! (Diagram 9)

This has been a strategy in the French Defence for at least 100 years! In most positions, recapturing with the bishop is preferable, because ...gxf6 creates some serious weaknesses; notice the squares h5 and h6, inviting occupation by White's pieces. But in a significant minority of cases Black is able to use the g-file for direct attack upon White's king (or at any rate his kingside). The viability of this concept tends to be dependent upon the presence of a bishop attacking along the long diagonal from b7 or c6. That doesn't guarantee the soundness of the idea but gives it a fighting chance. Many a player of White has succumbed to the dangerous attack that can result.

### 10 Bc4

And this is White's standard response to a ...gxf6 set-up. He wants to enforce d4-d5 if possible, because that would both cut off the long diagonal and put pressure upon e6. It just happens that in this variation Black had the potential to eliminate White's good bishop by ...Nxd3, so 10 Bc4 serves a double purpose.

### 10...Bc6 11 Qe2

White meets the coming wing attack with central play.

### 11...Qd7 12 Bb3 0-0-0 13 c4 f5! (Diagram 10)

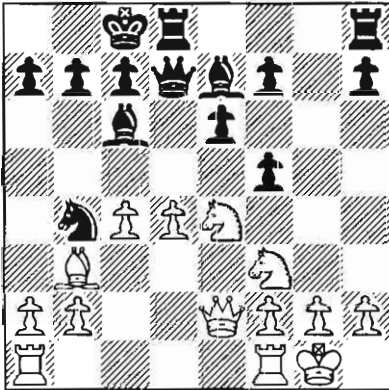


Diagram 10 (W)

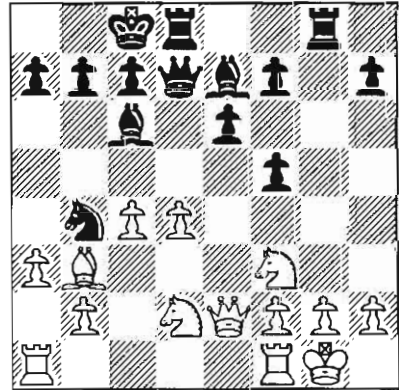


Diagram 11 (B)

See how moves 11 and 13 emphasize control of the light squares.

### 14 Ned2

14 d5!? exd5 15 Ne5! Qe6 16 Nc3 is the kind of counterattack that White wants to achieve to create weaknesses in Black's camp. Here, however, it will cost a pawn and fail to block off the c6-bishop following ...dxc4, so only part of White's goal is achieved. For example, 16...dxc4 17 Bxc4 Bd5 18 Nxd5 Nxd5 19 Rfd1 c6 and

Black's position still seems preferable, especially with the pin on the knight on e5 after the natural 20 Bxd5 cxd5 21 Rac1+ Kb8.

#### 14...Rhg8

Now the target on g2 requires tending.

#### 15 a3? (Diagram 11)

White wants to force Black's knight to the awkward square a6 before defending his king or undertaking central action by playing d5. Unfortunately, he's missed something tactical, and should have given his king room by 15 Rfd1 (when Black creates problems on d4 with 15...Bf6 16 a3 Na6), or covered d4 by 15 Qe3. Strange to say, 15 g3 Bf6 leaves the d-pawn indefensible, even by indirect means.

#### 15...Qxd4!!

Oh no! This hardly seems fair, especially with Black's knight hanging on b4.

#### 16 Nxd4

Unfortunately, White can already resign! It's not the d-pawn, but the threats to White's king. The obvious 16 axb4 loses to 16...Rxb4+ 17 Kxg2 Qg4+ 18 Kh1 Rxd2!, cleaning up; or 17 Kh1 Rxh2+! 18 Kxh2 Qf4+ 19 Kh1 Qh6+ 20 Kg1 Rg8+ 21 Ng5 Qh1 mate.

#### 16...Rxb4+ 17 Kh1 Rg8+ 19 Qg4 Rxb4+ 0-1

It's worth storing this tactic in your files: 18 Kxg1 Rg8+ 19 Qg4 Rxb4+ is mate!

□ J.Klovans ■ E.Rozentalis

Bern 1992

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 e5 Ne4 6 Bd3 Bb4 (Diagram 12)

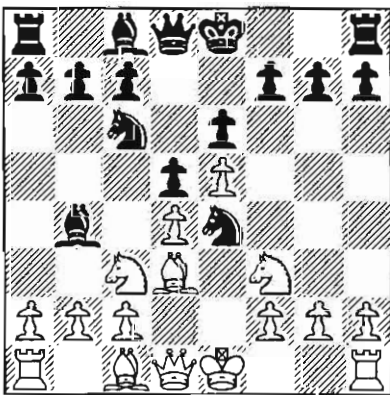


Diagram 12 (W)

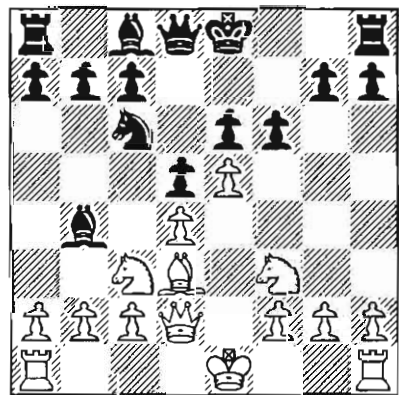


Diagram 13 (W)



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** The actual move order used in this game was 5 Bd3 Bb4 6 e5 Ne4, an extremely common transposition.

Here is the second most popular variation of the Hecht-Reefschläger System. White has achieved his pawn chain and is developing rapidly with the intention of exploiting the classical advantages of space and central piece placement. Black is also developing quickly and clearing his back rank in an apparently ad hoc manner. But as a result of the central confusion he will have a straightforward opportunity to challenge White's centre by playing ...f6, while distracting him with the threat to his d4-pawn.

### 7 Bd2

In the theory section I'll talk about the only other logical move, gambiting the pawn by means of 7 0-0.

### 7...Nxd2 8 Qxd2 f6 (Diagram 13)

I like this move best, although 3...Nc6 experts have often played 8...Bd7 with the idea of developing and anticipating Bb5 before playing ...f6. The main point of 8...Bd7, however, is to prepare ...Qe7 and ...0-0-0 under the right circumstances. A recent game, M.Borriss-N.Firman, German League 2006, saw 9 a3 Be7 10 0-0 a6!? 11 Ne2!? Nxd4! 12 Nexd4 c5 13 c3 (13 Ne2 c4 is about equal) 13...cxd4 14 Nxd4 Bc5 15 Rad1 Rc8 with Black close to equality.

### 9 a3

See the theory section for 9 Bb5, 9 0-0 and 9 exf6.

### 9...Be7!?

I recommend 9...Bxc3 in the theory section, because I prefer to break up White's centre without loss of time. But the bishop retreat preserves the bishop pair and has its adherents.

### 10 Ne2

Two alternatives of note:

a) 10 h4 fxe5 11 dxe5 0-0 12 Qe2 Qe8 13 0-0-0 Qh5 14 Rde1 Bd7 15 Rh3 Rf4 16 Kb1 Raf8 with pressure, M.Chandler-E.Rozentalis, German League 1991/92.

b) 10 exf6 Bxf6 11 Bb5, and now instead of 11...0-0 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Na4! Qd6 (H.Stefansson-J.Hjartarson, Reykjavik 1992) when 14 Qe3! Re8 15 Ne5 Bxe5 16 dxe5 Qf8 17 Nc5 yields a nice advantage for White, 11...Qd6!? would cover e5 and prepare ...Bd7. The immediate 11...Bd7 is also definitely worth looking into, a possible continuation being 12 0-0 0-0 13 Rfe1 Ne7 14 Qe2 c6 15 Bd3 Nf5! 16 Bxf5 exf5 17 Ne5 f4!, or 15...c5!? 16 dxc5 Qc7.

### 10...fxe5 11 dxe5 0-0 12 h4 Rxf3!

A typical French exchange sacrifice, exploiting the loose state of the pawn on e5.

## 13 gxf3 Nxe5 (Diagram 14)

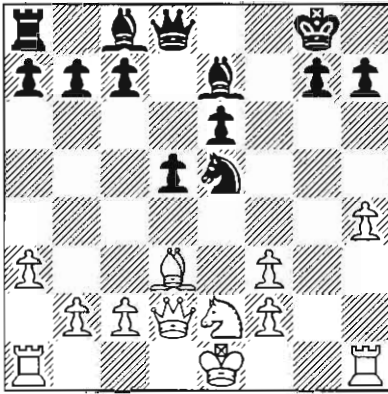


Diagram 14 (W)

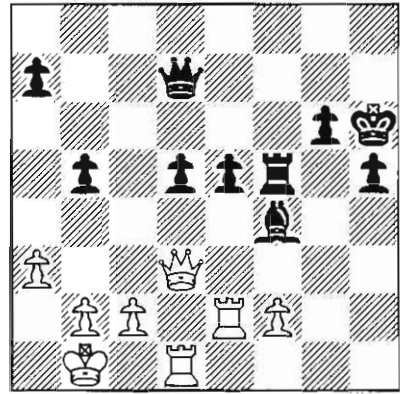


Diagram 15 (W)

## 14 Qe3

A previous game, G.Kuzmin-E.Rozentalis, Soviet Ch., Leningrad 1990, had continued 14 0-0-0 Qf8 15 f4 Ng4 with a pawn, central majority, and good piece play for the exchange.

## 14...Bd6 15 0-0-0 Qf6

15...c5 threatens ...c4 and begins the advance in the centre, but the queen move is also good.

## 16 f4 Nxd3+ 17 Qxd3 Bd7 18 h5 Rf8 19 h6 g6 20 Kb1 b5!? 21 Rhg1 c5 22 Nc3!

White can't wait around, so he generates counterplay with the threat of Ne4.

## 22...Bxf4 23 Ne4 Qe7 24 Nxc5 Bxh6

24...Qxc5? 25 Rxc6+! would turn the tables.

## 25 Nxd7 Qxd7 26 Qh3 Bf4 27 Rge1 Rf5

Black prepares ...e5. His mobile and unopposed central pawns are a result of the decimation of White's d4/e5 pawn chain.

## 28 Re2 h5

28...e5? is premature: 29 Qb3!.

## 29 Rde1 e5!

This is by no means necessary, but it is well thought out.

## 30 Rd1 Kh7 31 Qd3 Kh6! (Diagram 15)

The point of Black's previous few moves. Now d5 falls but the h-pawn is too strong.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

**32 c3**

32 Qxd5 Qxd5 33 Rxd5 h4 is similar.

**32...h4 33 Ree1 Rh5 34 Qxd5 Qxd5 35 Rxd5 h3 36 Kc2 h2 37 Rh1 Rg5 38 Rd8 Rg2 39 Kd3 Rxf2 40 Ke4 Kg5 0-1**

A nice finish. Black will march his king to g2.

## Looking a Little Deeper

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**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6**

There are quite a few ways in which White can attack 3...Nc6, and the theory is deeper than in some of the other chapters, so I'll offer more detail.

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**A: 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 Bg5**

**B: 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 e5 and other 5th Moves**

**C: 4 e5**

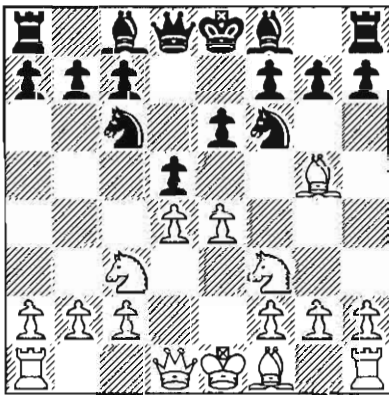
**D: Other 4th Moves**

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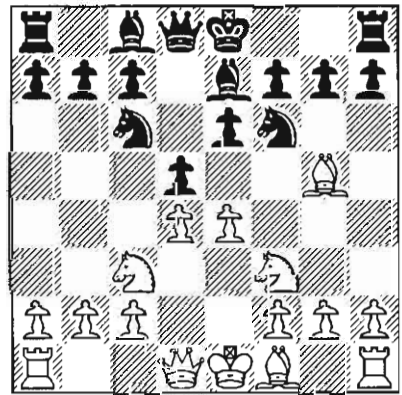
**A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nf3 Nf6**

I should mention that Black can play 4...Bb4 here, or even 4...Nge7, but I'll stick with one recommendation.

**5 Bg5 (Diagram 16)**



**Diagram 16 (B)**



**Diagram 17 (W)**

The logic behind this move is undeniable: (a) it develops with tempo, since 6 exd5 7 Bxf6 is too great a positional threat to ignore; (b) Black is discouraged from

making his desired move ...Bb4 (see the next note); (c) after Black plays ...Be7 and White plays e5, he will exchange his bad bishop on g5 for Black's good one on e7, leaving Black with his problem light-squared bishop.

### 5...Be7 (Diagram 17)



**ROLL THE DICE! Hecht has actually tried 5...Bb4?!, which seems to lose outright to 6 e5 h6 7 Bh4 g5 8 Nxc5. However, instead of 8...hxc5 9 Bxc5, which is pretty hopeless, Black can mix it up by playing 8...Ne4!.**

For example, 9 Ngxe4 (9 Qh5 Nxc5 10 f4 Kd7!? 11 fxg5 Nxd4 isn't clear: 12 Qxf7+!? Qe7 13 Qxe7+ Bxe7 14 0-0-0 Nf5) 9...Qxh4 10 Nf6+ Kd8 11 g4!? (or 11 a3 Be7 12 Nh5 Rg8 followed by ...Qxd4) 11...Be7 12 Nh5 f5! with approximate equality. White maintains some advantage after 5...Bb4, of course, but much less than you'd think, and you might want to give this a whirl sometime – definitely a good blitz weapon!

### 6 e5

Alternatively:

a) 6 Bd3 dxe4 7 Nxe4 Nxe4 (I like 7...Nb4!, which is examined in the illustrative game Spoelman-Stellwagen) 8 Bxe7 Nxf2 (8...Qxe7 9 Bxe4 Qb4+?! 10 c3 Qxb2 11 0-0 gives White a strong attack) 9 Bxd8 (or 9 Kxf2?! Qxe7) 9...Nxd1 10 Bxc7 Nxb2 wins a pawn at the potential cost of leaving Black's knight stranded. Objectively that may be all right, with equal chances, but in practice it's risky and preparation is called for.

b) 6 Bxf6 Bxf6 is a common alternative that has never posed too much of a threat: b1) 7 e5 Be7 8 h4 b6 9 Qd2 Bb7 10 Qf4 h6 11 0-0-0 Qd7 12 Rh3 Bf8 13 Nh2 0-0-0 14 h5 f6 is unclear, P.Zvara-L.Keitlinghaus, Prague 1991; or 8 Bd3 Nb4 9 Ne2 Nxd3+ 10 Qxd3 b6 11 0-0 c5 12 c3 a5 13 Qe3 Ba6 14 Rfe1 Bxe2 15 Rxe2 c4 16 h3 b5 17 Nh2 b4 with a small advantage to Black although White is hardly suffering, W.Groenegrass-H.Reefschläger, Bad Oeynhausen 1964.

b2) 7 Bb5 0-0 (**Diagram 18**) and now:

b21) 8 Bxc6?! (this only seems to help Black's central attack) 8...bxc6 9 Qd2 c5 10 exd5 exd5 (10...cxd4! 11 Nxd4 exd5 12 0-0 transposes to the next note) 11 0-0 (N.Ninov-J.Dancourt, Cappelle la Grande 2006) and here 11...cxd4 12 Nxd4 Bb7 is sound, while another good line is 11...Bg4 12 Ne5 cxd4! 13 Nxc4 dxc3 14 bxc3 c6 with a small advantage to Black because of the pawn structure.

b22) A better move is 8 Qd2. The game J.Koch-E.Prie, French Ch. 1992, went 8...Nb8!? 9 0-0 c6 10 Be2 b6 11 Rad1 Ba6 12 e5 Be7 13 Rfe1 c5 with a level position. After the game continuation 14 Bxa6 Nxa6 15 Ne2 c4!? 16 c3 b5 17 a3 Nc7, with the idea of ...a5, White lacked the forces to succeed on the kingside and Black broke through on the other wing.

6...Ne4 7 Bxe7 Qxe7 8 Bd3 Qb4 (Diagram 19)

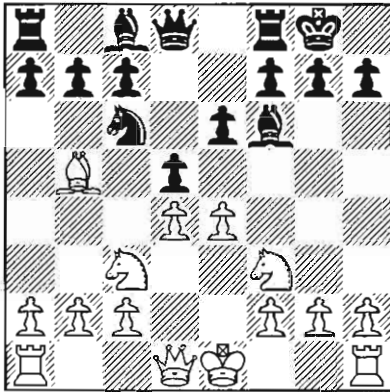


Diagram 18 (W)

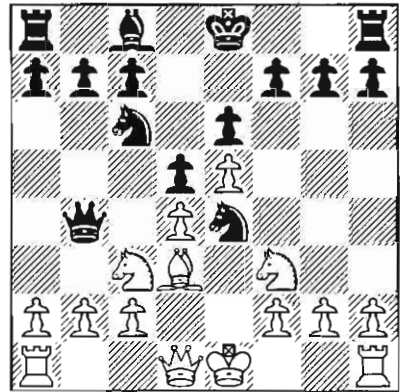


Diagram 19 (W)

Black can also go for the usual ...f6 plan: 8...Nxc3 9 bxc3 f6 10 exf6 Qxf6 11 0-0 Bd7 12 Rb1 (12 Re1 0-0-0 13 Qd2 h6) 12...0-0-0 13 Re1 Rdf8 14 Qd2 h6 15 Bb5 g5 16 Bxc6 Bxc6 17 Ne5 Be8. I prefer White in most of these positions, but they're quite playable for Black.

**9 Bxe4**

Bosch thinks that there is insufficient compensation after 9 0-0 Nxc3 10 bxc3 Qxc3, and I agree. Black has no weaknesses, and White can't easily exploit the dark squares without a dark-squared bishop. One plan is ...Qa3-e7 and ...f6. This depends upon your tastes, because 8...Nxc3 is a safe option.

**9...dxe4 10 a3 Qxb2 11 Nxe4 Qb5! 12 Ned2!?** (Diagram 20)

**12...Na5**

After 12...0-0 13 c4 Qb2 14 Rb1 Qxa3 15 0-0 (L.Bronstein-P.Zarnicki, Buenos Aires 1988) White has a nice attack. One defensive try is 15...Qd3 16 Rb3 Qf5, when objectively Black is probably okay but of course will have to endure some suffering in return for the pawn.

**13 c4 Qd7**

13...Nxc4? loses a piece to 14 Qe2.

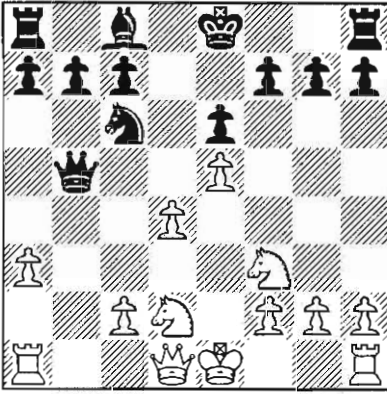
**14 0-0 b6 15 Rc1 Bb7 16 Nb3 Qa4!?**

Or 16...Nxb3 17 Qxb3 0-0 18 Rfd1 Rad8, and without the move d5 White has no advantage.

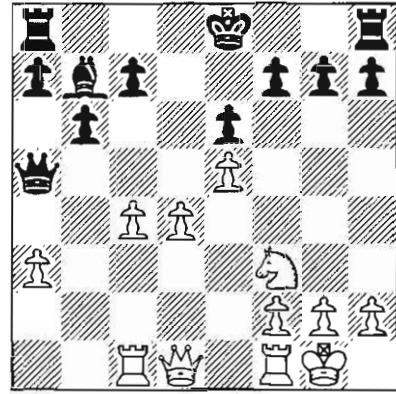
**17 Nxa5 Qxa5** (Diagram 21)

(P.Keres-A.Lein, Baku 1961) Now instead of the overambitious 18 Ng5?! h6 19

Qh5 0-0 20 Nh3 Rad8, with a large advantage for Black, White should have settled for 18 Qb3 Rd8 19 Rfd1 with equality.



**Diagram 20 (B)**



**Diagram 21 (W)**

**B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 e5**

The alternatives do not constitute threats to the validity of 3...Nc6 but are frequently played:

a) After 5 Bd3, the players can transpose to our main line by 5...Bb4 6 e5 Ne4. But I like 5...Nb4 (**Diagram 22**), winning the good bishop on d3, which may possibly constitute a disincentive to White's move order (as opposed to 5 e5 Ne4 6 Bd3). Simen Agdestein employed 5...Nb4 against Karpov in the first game of their 1991 match in Gjovik, which continued 6 Bg5 Be7!? (6...Nxd3+! 7 Qxd3 dxe4 8 Nxe4 Be7 of J.Hjartarson-P.Meister, German League 1993, is a clean approach) 7 e5 Nd7 8 Bxc7 Qxe7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Re1 c5 11 dxc5 Nxc5 with a limited advantage for White (Black won after a late blunder; interestingly, Agdestein also scored a draw against Karpov in the line 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 e5 b6).

Returning to 5 Bd3, Black's most common move is 5...Bb4, when 6 e5 Ne4 transposes to the illustrative game J.Klovans-E.Rozentalis, but White has two alternatives:

a1) 6 Bg5 dxe4 7 Bxe4 (**Diagram 23**) and now:

a11) 7...h6 8 Bxf6 Qxf6 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qd3 Bd7 11 Rad1 Rad8 12 Rfe1 Bd6 and at most White has a small advantage, T.Wedberg-E.Kengis, Haninge 1992.

a12) Very interesting is 7...Qd6!? 8 Bxf6 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 gxf6 10 0-0 f5 11 Bd3 Bd7, and 12 Re1 0-0-0 or 12 Ng5 h6 13 Qh5 Qf8 with double-edged play. Black has a variety of ideas including bringing rooks to the g-file and a bishop to c6. Both his f- and h-pawns can be used as hammers if White plays g3.

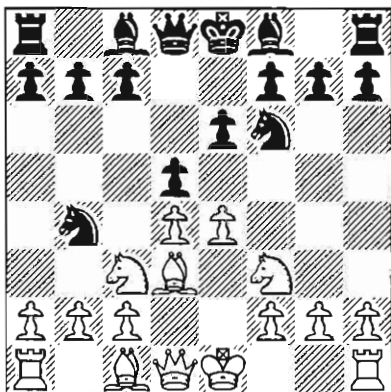


Diagram 22 (W)

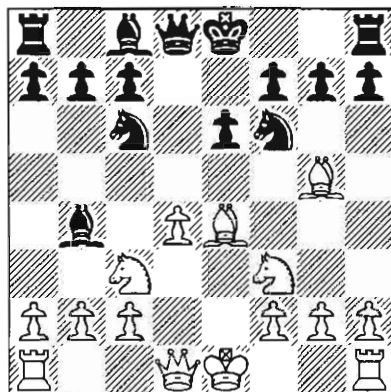


Diagram 23 (B)

a2) 6 exd5 exd5 7 0-0 is less bothersome for Black than the line 5 exd5 exd5 6 Bb5 below. One example went 7...Bg4 (another idea is 7...Bxc3 8 bxc3 0-0) 8 h3?! (8 Re1+ Be7 9 Be2 0-0 gives equality) 8...Bxf3 9 Qxf3 Nxd4 10 Qe3+?! (10 Qf4 Bxc3 11 bxc3 Ne6 12 Qb4 Qc8 and ...c5 is slightly better for Black) 10...Ne6 11 Qe2 0-0 12 Rd1 c6 13 Bf5 Re8 14 Qf3 Qc7 15 Ne2 Bc5 16 Nf4 Nd4 17 Qd3 Nxf5 18 Qxf5 Re5 19 Qd3 Rae8 with a winning position (both ...Re1+ and ...g5 are threatened), R.Vlasak-H.Reefschläger, Velden 1995.

b) 5 exd5 exd5 6 Bb5, and here 6...Bb4!? is the most popular move, tempting White to break the symmetry. Then 7 Ne5 0-0! (**Diagram 24**) is Hecht's idea. A plausible line would be 8 Nxc6 bxc6 9 Bxc6 Rb8 (or 9...Ba6!? 10 Bxa8 Re8+ 11 Be3 Qxa8, when I think that Black has plenty for the exchange) 10 0-0 Rb6 11 Ba4 Bxc3 12 bxc3 Ne4 13 Qf3 (or 13 Bd2? Rg6 with a real attack, practically winning already) 13...Qh4 and White's extra pawn doesn't count for much.

More conventional is 7 0-0 0-0 8 Bg5 (Kosyrev has drawn a series of short games after the symmetrical 8 Bxc6 bxc6 9 Ne5 Bxc3 10 bxc3 Ne4, but it would be more interesting to play 9...c5! or 9...Ba6 10 Re1 Re8 11 Nc6 Bxc3! 12 bxc3 Rxe1+ 12 Qxe1 Qd7 13 Ne5 Qa4 with dynamic equality) 8...Bxc3 9 bxc3 Qd6 10 Qc1 Nh5! (more enterprising than the 10...Ne4 11 Bf4 Qd8!? of O.Müller-H.Reefschläger, German League 1991, although White has difficulty digging up any advantage in that case) 11 Re1! (11 Rb1 Bg4 and 11 h3 Bf5 are worse) 11...f6 12 Bd2 Na5!?, which was unclear in N.Short-G.Hertneck, Dortmund 1986.

### 5...Ne4 (Diagram 25)

Black takes advantage of the fact that 6 Nxe4 dxe4 will win the d-pawn to establish himself in the centre. Now White almost always plays one of two critical moves:

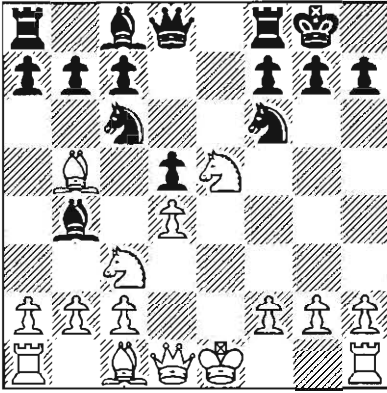


Diagram 24 (W)

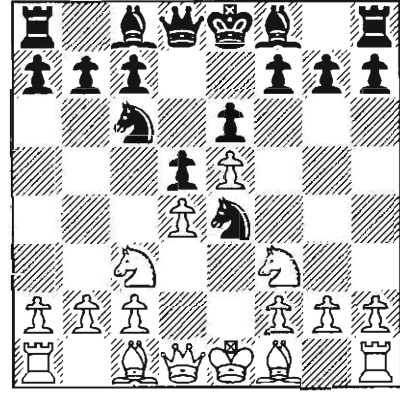


Diagram 25 (W)

B1: 6 Ne2

B2: 6 Bd3

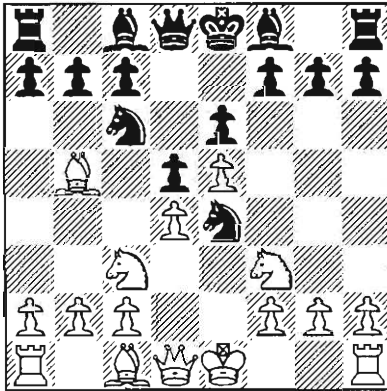


Diagram 26 (B)

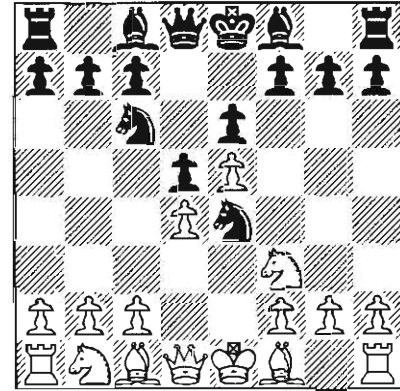


Diagram 27 (B)

a) The rare move 6 Bb5 (**Diagram 26**) has more than one answer; for example, simply 6...Bd7 has been played. It's particularly hard to see what White has gained after 6...Bb4. Then Black can follow up with ...f6 and ...0-0; or he can play an early ...Bd7 (which can win a tempo in view of the threat ...Nxe5). With the bishop on d7, although it's not at all necessary, he might pursue the strategy of ...f6, ...Qe7-f7 and ...0-0-0, with an option of what to do with his bishop on b4. In one game, van

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

der Wiel even played the move ...Bf8 before implementing this plan! At any rate, the ...Bd7 resource is reason enough to discourage 6 Bb5.

b) I've only found one game (!) with 6 Nb1 (**Diagram 27**), although it has a similar logic to 6 Ne2 intending 7 Ng3, which is to reroute to d2 and challenge the knight on e4 without the drawback of having White's pawns doubled on c3. One difference is that Black can respond to this plan with ...Nxd2, whereas in the 6 Ne2/7 Ng3 line, capturing on g3 opens up lines for White and must be undertaken with great care. A possible line after 6 Nb1 would be 6...f6 (or 6...Be7 7 Nbd2 0-0 8 Bd3 f5!?) 7 Nbd2 (7 Bb5 Bd7 is already equal; then 8 Be3!? Qe7 9 Bxc6 Bxc6 10 0-0 0-0-0 implements the ...0-0-0 plan, O.Braslavsky-P.Limbourg, Hagen 1999) 7...fxe5 8 Bb5!? (8 Nxe5 Nxe5 9 dxe5 Nxd2 10 Bxd2 Qh4! prevents Qh5+ and prepares ...Bc5 and ...0-0; for example, 11 Bd3 Bc5 12 0-0 0-0 13 Qe2 Bd7 14 Be3 Bb6!? 15 Bxb6 axb6 16 Kh1 c5 with the easier play because of the two open files) 8...Nxd2 9 Bxd2 exd4 10 Nxd4 Qh4!? 11 Nxc6 a6 and Black is at least equal because, as so often happens, he retains his two unopposed central pawns.

### B1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 e5 Ne4 6 Ne2 (Diagram 28)

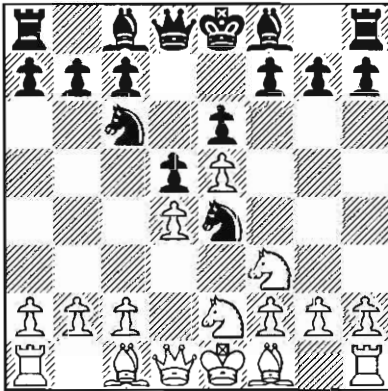


Diagram 28 (B)

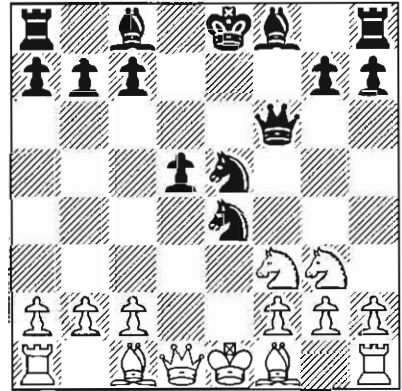


Diagram 29 (W)

This is a particularly important challenge to the soundness of 4...Nf6 (and thus to the main line of 3...Nc6). In *Opening for White according to Anand* (vol. 6), Alexander Khalifman devotes a whole chapter to demonstrating an advantage versus 3...Nc6. In the end, he depends upon the efficacy of 6 Ne2 to make his argument. White's idea is that the knight on e4 is primarily useful as a method by which to double White's pawns, and if the knight can be exchanged by Ng3 and Bd3, White will remain with greater space and activity, unburdened by queenside weaknesses. In the meantime he is able to firm up his centre with c2-c3.

**6...f6**

As always, Black attacks e5.

**7 Ng3**

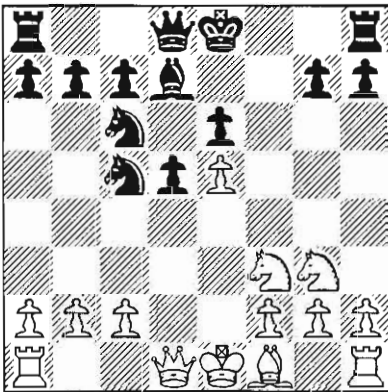
**DANGEROUS WEAPON! 7 exf6 gives Black what he wants.**

a) 7...Qxf6 8 Ng3 e5 9 dxe5 Nxe5 (**Diagram 29**) 10 Qxd5? (also poor is 10 Be2?! Bb4+! with the idea 11 c3? Nxc3 12 bxc3 Bxc3+ 13 Bd2 Bxa1 and wins; White's best move is 10 Nxe4 dxe4 11 Nxe5 Qxe5, but I prefer Black) 10...Bb4+ 11 c3 Nxf3+ 12 gxf3 Nxc3 13 bxc3 was played in T.Luther-L.Keitlinghaus, German League 1990. Although the game was drawn, Black had multiple opportunities to win; for example, instead of Keitlinghaus's 13...Bxc3+, Black could have played the more direct 13...Qxc3+ 14 Kd1 (14 Ke2 Qxa1, or 14...Qe1+ 15 Kd3 Be6) 14...Bd7! and wins, as you can quickly confirm.

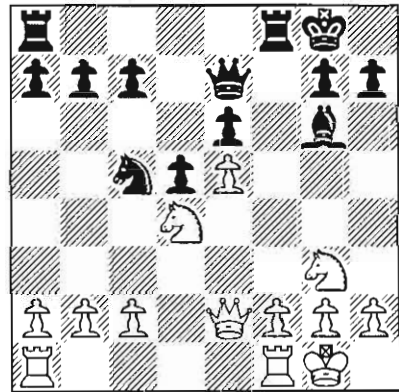
b) Also perfectly fine is 7...Nxf6, when White's play was a bit slow in W.Maringer-H.Reefschläger, Velden 1996: 8 c3 Bd6 9 Bf4 0-0 10 Bxd6 Qxd6 11 Ng3 e5 12 dxe5 Nxe5 13 Nxe5 Qxe5+ and Black had the superior centre. Instead, 8 Ng3 Bd6 9 Bd3 0-0 is equal.

**7...fxe5 8 dxe5**

The best try for the advantage. J.Hector-E.Rozentalis, Malmö 1997, went 8 Bb5!? exd4 9 Nxe4 dxe4 10 Nxd4 Qd5! 11 c4? (McDonald gives long analysis beginning with 11 Nxc6! a6! 12 Ba4 Bd7! 13 c4! Qxd1+ 14 Kxd1 Bc5! leading to an equal game) 11...Bb4+! 12 Kf1 Qd6 and Black was a pawn up for almost nothing.

**8...Bd7 9 Be3 Bc5 10 Bxc5 Nxc5 (Diagram 30)**

**Diagram 30 (W)**



**Diagram 31 (W)**

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We are following V.Gashimov-B.Heberla, Artek 2000, which Khalifman uses as his main line. He says of this position: 'Black's knights are totally misplaced on the c-file and his counterplay is nonexistent. White can patiently prepare his kingside onslaught.' That doesn't seem to be the case, and at any rate it's an odd description. I will show the original game with (a) **11 Bb5**, and then his suggested improvement (b) **11 Qd2**.

### a) 11 Bb5!? Qe7

Or 11...0-0 12 Bxc6 Bxc6 13 Nd4 Qg5; for example, 14 Qe2 Bd7 15 0-0 (15 b4? Qf4!) 15...Qf4 16 c3 Na4 and ...c5. I prefer Black here, and in general 11...0-0 achieves equality.

### 12 Qe2

Preventing the pseudo-threat 12...Nxe5 by protecting b5, even though 12 0-0 Nxe5?! 13 Nxe5 Bxb5 14 Qh5+ is slightly better for White after 14...Kd8 15 Nf7+ Kd7 16 Nxh8 Bxf1 17 Nf7. Therefore after 12 0-0 Black should simply play 12...0-0 with a promising game.

### 12...0-0 13 Bxc6

13 0-0-0 is weaker due to 13...Na5! 14 b4 c6! or 14 Bxd7 Nxd7.

### 13...Bxc6 14 Nd4 Be8

When this bishop gets to g6 it will be better than either of White's knights.

### 15 0-0 Bg6 (Diagram 31) 16 Rad1 Na4 17 c3 a6 18 Qd2 c5 19 Nde2 b5 20 b3 Nb6 21 Qe3 a5!

21...Nd7 22 Nf4 Bf5 is almost equal but slightly awkward for White.

### 22 Nf4 Bf5?!

22...Be8! leaves *White's* knights out there doing nothing. Then Black can continue his queenside attack with a meaningful advantage.

### 23 Nxf5 Rxf5 24 Nd3 Nd7

(V.Gashimov-B.Heberla, Artek 2000) Black is now only slightly better.

### b) 11 Qd2 0-0 12 Qe3 Qe7 13 0-0-0 Be8

Khalifman: 'This is a logical transfer of the bishop to a more active position'. True, but Black can also strike out on the queenside by playing 13...Na4! (Diagram 32).



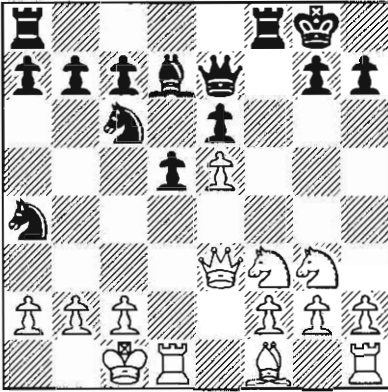
**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** It's amazing how a single move can so dramatically demonstrate the vulnerability of White's king, even though he has no weaknesses on the queenside.

a) 14 Qd2 a5!? (or 14...Be8) 15 Kb1 b5! 16 Bxb5 Nxe5 17 Nxe5 (after 17 Bxd7 Nxf3! 18 gxf3 Qxd7 the open b-file guarantees Black a strong attack and substantial ad-

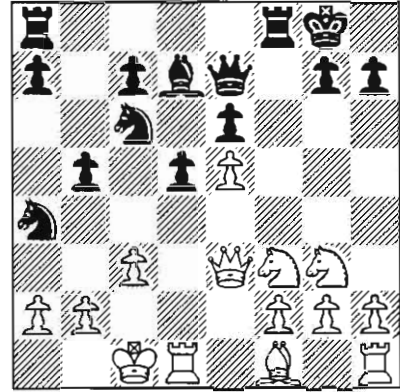
vantage, while ...Rf7 will defend Black's own kingside) 17...Bxb5 18 Rhe1 Rab8 with an attack that will soon bear fruit.

b) 14 a3 b5! and simply ...b4 will follow with an effective attack unless White tries 15 c3 Na5 or 15 Qb3 Rab8 16 Be2 Nc5 17 Qe3 b4, both of which are clearly very bad for him.

c) 14 c3 b5! (**Diagram 33**) 15 Bd3 (or 15 Bxb5 Nxb2! 16 Kxb2 Rfb8 and Black is clearly better) 15...Na5 with ...Nc4 to come.



**Diagram 32 (W)**



**Diagram 33 (W)**

#### 14 h4

At this point Khalifman gives 14...Bg6 15 h5 Be4 16 Nd4 Nxd4 17 Rxd4 a5 18 f3 Bf5 19 Ne2 h6 20 g4 and 21 Rg1 with White standing better. But in this case Black can improve by 14...Na4! 15 Rd2! Qc5 16 Qxc5 Nxc5 17 h5 h6, with equal chances.

Conclusion: The move 6 Ne2 poses no real threat to the Hecht-Reefschläger System. The note to Black's 13th move above is a striking example of Black's queenside play when his opponent plays 0-0-0.

#### **B2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 e5 Ne4 6 Bd3 (Diagram 34)**

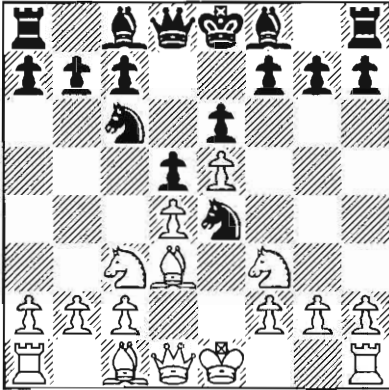
6 Bd3 is a natural developing move that puts the question to the knight on e4. This variation has been second only to 5 Bg5 Be7 6 e5 in popularity over the years.

#### **6...Bb4**

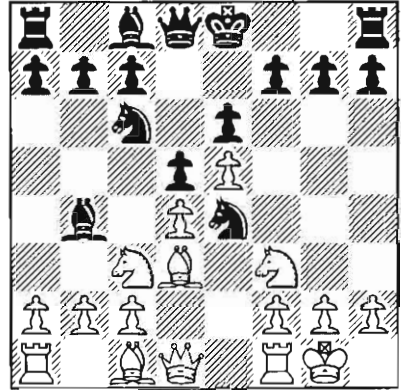
If Black wants to avoid the gambit in the next note or simply move into a different pawn structure, he can play 6...Nxc3 7 bxc3 Be7!? (7...b6 8 0-0 Na5 9 Nd2 c5 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 Nb3 Be7 was G.Kosanovic-Z.Nikolic, Becici 1993) 8 h4 h6 9 h5 Na5 10 Nd2 c5 (L.Stein-P.Benko, Stockholm 1962). Probably White has a theoretical edge, but a double-sided battle lies ahead with plenty of chances for both players.

**7 Bd2**

Everyone seems to agree that 7 0-0!? (**Diagram 35**) isn't a very good gambit, but it's certainly dangerous. Psakhis, for example, gives 7 0-0 a '?!' and other analysts agree because of 7...Nxc3 8 bxc3 Bxc3 (incidentally, if he doesn't feel like defending, Black can decline the pawn by 8...Be7!?!; for example, 9 Rb1 b6 10 c4 Nb4, L.Couso-L.Karlsson, Stockholm 1992, when Black seems to have enough positional plusses to claim equality) 9 Rb1 and now:



**Diagram 34 (B)**



**Diagram 35 (B)**

a) Van der Weide cites an interesting possibility in the game J.Koch-E Prie, Paris 1989: 9...Bb4 10 Ng5 Be7 11 Nxh7 g6 12 Nf6+ Bxf6 13 exf6 Qxf6 and 'a pawn is a pawn'. He also gives 11 Qh5 g6 12 Qg4 Nb4, when Black stands well. Here Tiemann suggests 12 Qh6 instead, saying that after 12...Bf8 White has pressure, but in fact he's clearly worse because of either 13 Qh4 h6 or 13 Qh3 Nxd4.

This whole line deserves notice! I like it if only because 9...Bb4 gains a useful tempo in getting back to e7.

b) 9...h6 (**Diagram 36**).

Here White can play 10 Ba3 a5 11 Bb5 Bd7 12 Qd3 Bb4. Van der Weide says that 'several games have shown that White has not enough compensation' in this position.

That is true, yet I think White has possibilities of compensation for the pawn if he foregoes forcing lines and builds up slowly. For example, 10 Be3 Bd7?! (10...Ne7! is solid, intending ...0-0 and ...Nf5 if necessary, e.g. 11 Rb3 Ba5 12 Bd2 Bb6!; 10...Na5 is also more accurate than the text) and now:

b1) 11 a3?! Na5!? (11...Ba5 and possibly ...Ne7 looks better, concentrating upon the central squares) 12 Nd2 (12 Be2!? wins after 12...Qe7?? 13 Qd3; however, 12...Nc4!

13 Bxc4 dxc4 14 Rxb7 Bc6 is unclear) 12...Qe7 (12...Qh4!?, followed by ...Qe7 after one of White's pieces is displaced, might interfere with White's plans a bit) 13 Qg4 0-0-0 14 Nb3 (G.Pitl-D.Werner, Budapest 2003). Now Black played the slow 14...Bc6?, but he would have maintained the advantage with 14...f6! or 14...f5.

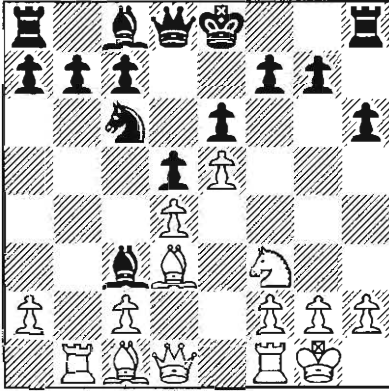


Diagram 36 (W)

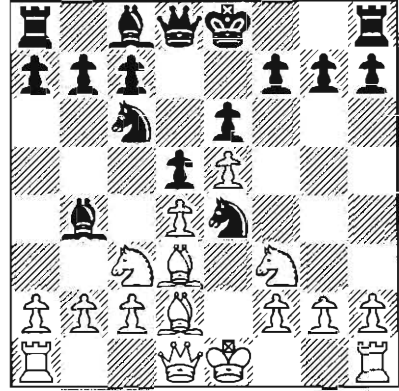


Diagram 37 (B)

b2) McDonald analyses 11 Rxb7 Na5 12 Rb1 c5! 13 dxc5 Nc6 'and White's centre is collapsing', but then 14 Bb5! looks effective; for example, 14...Nxe5 15 Nxe5 Bxb5 16 Nxf7! Kxf7 17 Rxb5 yields a definite advantage. Perhaps this is not winning, but it casts a shadow over 10...Bd7 due to 11 Rxb7.

Let's return to 7 Bd2 (**Diagram 37**).

### 7...Nxd2! 8 Qxd2 f6

As we have seen, ...f6 is the key move in almost all variations, as it is after the other main move 8...Bd7, which I won't be examining. But a fascinating exception is 8...Be7!? 9 0-0 (9 0-0-0 Nb4 10 Be2 c5 creates queenside counterplay which compensates for White's space and kingside possibilities) 9...Bd7 10 Rfe1!? g5! (**Diagram 38**) 11 h3?! (Ironically, the tempo saved by White by not having to play a3 was spent on 10 Rfe1, but this uses up the only retreat square for the knight on f3! Thus he moves the h-pawn, but 11 h4! seems to be better: 11...g4 12 Ng5 Nxd4 13 Qf4 Bxg5 14 hxg5 c5 15 Qxg4 Qe7, when everything is up for grabs.) 11...h5! 12 g4 (12 Ne2 g4 13 hxg4 hxg4 14 Nh2 Bb4! 15 c3 Qh4 16 Qf4 Be7 17 Qg3 Qh6, with ...0-0-0 to follow, gives Black a nice advantage) 12...Nb4 13 Bf1 hxg4 14 hxg4 c5! (remember this ...Nb4/...c5 manoeuvre; it is often good in situations where White has thwarted Black's preferred plan with ...f6) 15 dxc5 Bxc5 16 a3 Nc6 (**Diagram 39**) 17 Rad1 (17 Nxc5?! Rg8 and 17 Qxc5? Qxc5 18 Nxc5 Nd4! are good for Black) 17...a6 18 b4! (18 Kg2 is met by 18...Be7!? followed by ...Qc7 and it's not clear how White reorganizes; 18 Qxc5? is bad on account of 18...Qxc5 19 Nxc5 Rg8) 18...Be7

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(18...Bb6 is more active; the tradeoffs between the two moves are unclear) 19 Ne2 (perhaps heading for h5 via g3, but also defending White's king and hoping for a timely c4) 19...Qc7 20 Ng3 0-0-0 21 c4!? (21 b5? axb5 22 Bxb5 Nxe5! 23 Nxe5 Bxb5 leaves White too exposed; the idea is that 24 Nxf7? Bc5 threatens both ...Qxf7 and ...Qxg3 mate, and White loses after the forced 25 Ne5 Rdf8 26 Re3 d4 27 Ree1 d3) 21...dxc4 22 Bxc4 Kb8 (or 22...Nxb4!? 23 axb4 Bb5) 23 Qe2 f6 24 exf6 Bxf6 25 Ne4? (25 Qe4! Rhf8 26 Nh5 Be7 would give White a stable formation to counteract Black's activity) 25...Nd4! 26 Qd3 Bc6 (threatening ...Qh7, among other things) 27 Kg2 Qf4 28 Nxd4 Bxe4+ 0-1 A.Zhigalko-N.Firman, Hengelo 2001. Upon a recapture, 29...Rh2+ mates in two. An instructive and entertaining game.

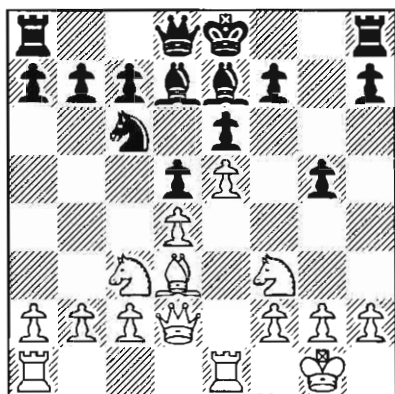


Diagram 38 (W)

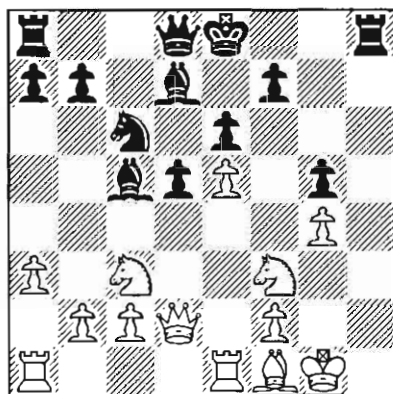


Diagram 39 (W)

Back to 8...f6 (Diagram 40).

### 9 a3

Or:

a) 9 exf6 Qxf6 10 0-0 (McDonald gives 10 Bb5 Bd7 11 Bxc6 Bxc6 12 0-0 0-0 with equality) 10...Bd7 (10...0-0 is equal; ...Bd6 can follow) 11 Rae1 0-0-0 equalizes. The immediate threat of ...Nxd4 forces White to waste time.

b) 9 Bb5 Bd7 10 Bxc6 Bxc6 11 a3 Be7 12 0-0-0 0-0 13 Kb1 (13 Rhe1 fxe5 14 Nxe5? allows 14...Bg5) 13...Be8!?, with the ideas ...Bh5 and ...c5, is promising for Black.

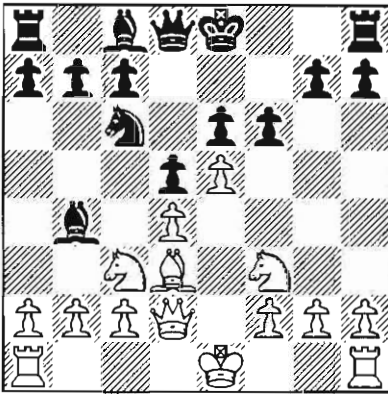
c) 9 0-0 fxe5 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 dxe5 0-0 12 a3 Be7 (12...Ba5!?) 13 Ne2 c5 leaves Black with two bishops and equality, H.Weichert-H.Reefschläger, Detmold 1967.

### 9...Bxc3

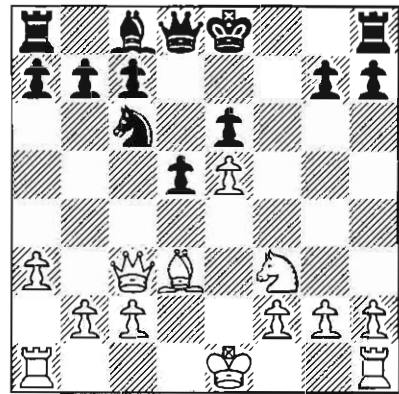
I think that it's best to gain time to break up the centre, although there have been many games with 9...Be7, including the illustrative game Klovans-Rozentalis above. In order to avoid congestion and to accelerate the idea of ...0-0-0 by ...Qe7,

even 9...Bf8 has been tried!

**10 Qxc3 fxe5 11 dxe5 (Diagram 41)**



**Diagram 40 (W)**



**Diagram 41 (B)**

11 Bb5 exd4!? (or 11...0-0!? 12 Bxc6 exd4! 13 Nxd4 bxc6 14 Nxc6 Qf6! 15 Qxf6 gxf6, M.Babula-M.Matlak, Czech League 2005) 12 Bxc6+ bxc6 13 Qxc6+ Bd7 14 Qc5 Qe7! 15 Qxc7 (Black has the better minor piece and a superior centre after 15 Qxd4 c5) 15...0-0 with full control of the centre, I.Ibragimov-S.Peric, Foxwoods 2005.

**11...0-0**

Black can pursue his long-castling idea with 11...Bd7 (intending ...Qe7) 12 Qc5!? (12 h4 Qe7 13 0-0-0 0-0-0 14 h5 Rdf8 is very cooperative of White, V.Aveskulov-K.Stupak, Lviv 2006) 12...Qe7 13 Qxe7+ Kxe7 14 0-0 Raf8 15 Rfe1 Be8 (F.Ott-L.Keitlinghaus, Bad Neuenahr 1989). He has the idea of ...Bh5 and f-file play.

**12 h4 Qe7 13 Qd2 Bd7**

McDonald mentions 13...Rxf3!? 14 gxf3 Nxe5 15 0-0-0 Bd7 and feels that White is slightly better, but I think that Black has sufficient compensation.

**14 Qe3 Be8 15 c3 Bh5 16 Nd4 Nxd4!?**

McDonald prefers 16...Nd8 intending ...c5.

**17 cxd4 Qf7 18 Rc1 c6 19 f3 Bg6**

Tiemann assesses this position as unclear.

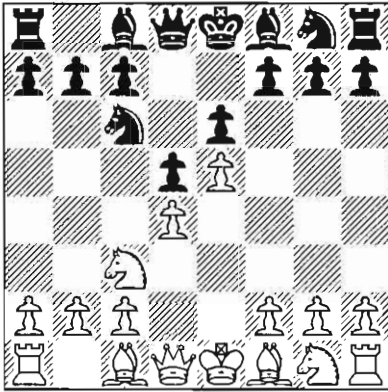
**20 Be2 h6!?**

20...a5! would stake out queenside space and create chances on that wing. Black should have plenty of play.

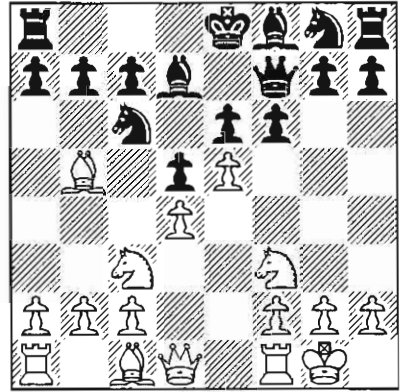
**21 g3 Bh7 22 Kf2 Qe7 23 Kg2**

White has an edge, J.Hjartarson-E.Rozentalis, Tilburg 1994.

**C) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 e5 (Diagram 42)**



**Diagram 42 (B)**



**Diagram 43 (W)**

This advance is natural, of course, hemming in Black's pieces, but it comes without that gain of tempo we've seen in the previous two sections.

**4...f6**

I recommend this as the most confrontational move. But it's worth noting that a number of strong players, including Nimzowitsch and contemporary experts, have preferred 4...Nge7 here.

**5 Bb5**

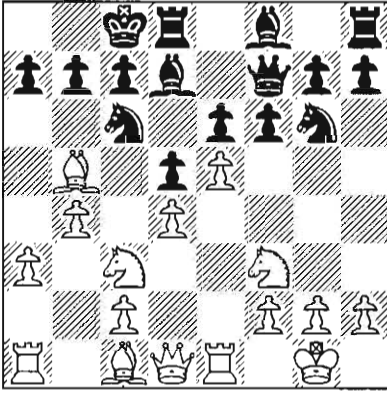
5 exf6?! Nxf6 6 Nf3 Bd6 gives Black precisely the open lines he wants. In R.Jaenig-H.Reebschläger, Seefeld 2003, play continued 7 Bg5 0-0 8 Bd3 Qe8! 9 Qe2 Qh5 10 Bxf6?! Rxf6 11 0-0-0 Bd7 12 Kb1 Raf8 13 Bb5 (13 Nb5 Qg4, or 13...a6!? 14 Nxd6 cxd6 15 h3 Nb4 16 Rhe1 Nxd3 17 Qxd3 Bb5 with very active pieces) 13...Nb8!? 14 Bxd7 Nxd7 15 Qb5 Nb6 (Black still has an edge) 16 Ne2 a6 17 Qa5 Rxf3! 18 gxf3 Rxf3 (or 18...Qxf3). Black will soon pick up a second pawn for the exchange and maintain an advantage.

**5...Bd7 6 Nf3 Qe7 7 0-0 Qf7 (Diagram 43)**

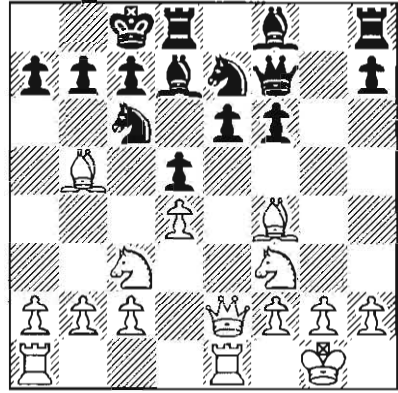
Remarkably, this rearrangement of Black's pieces by ...Bd7 and ...Qe7-f7 has been played many times and held up well. Black's plan is simple: castling queenside and (usually) ...Nge7-g6, followed by ...fxe5 when appropriate. White needs to be ready to recapture with a piece on e5 in order to get any advantage. Assuming that he is ready to do so he should attack on the queenside by either launching his pawns forward or trying piece play with Na4-c5. Here are two examples:

a) 8 a3 0-0-0 9 b4 Nge7 10 Re1 was played in S.Maus-L.Keitlinghaus, German League 1992, and now instead of 10...h6? 11 Qd3 g5 12 exf6 Qxf6 13 Na4 with a

clear advantage for White, Black could play 10...Ng6 (**Diagram 44**).



**Diagram 44 (W)**



**Diagram 45 (B)**

I'll give some sample analysis: 11 Bd3 a6 (not 11...fxe5? 12 Bxg6! Qxg6 13 b5 etc.) 12 b5 axb5 13 exf6 (13 Nxb5 is answered by 13...fxe5 14 dxe5 Bc5; one beneficial effect of ...fxe5/dxe5 is the clearance of c5 for one of Black's pieces, usually a bishop or knight) 13...gxf6 14 Nxb5 e5 15 dxe5 fxe5 16 c4! Bc5 (16...dxc4? 17 Qa4!) 17 Bg5!? (17 Qa4?? Nh4 wins! There follows 18 Qa8+ Nb8 19 Be2 Rdg8 20 Kh1 Rxg2 21 Rb1 Bc6) 17...dxc4! 18 Bxd8 Rxd8 19 Bxg6 Qxg6 with a real attack.

b) 8 Re1 0-0-0 and now:

b1) 9 a4 Bb4 10 Bd2 Nge7 11 Ne2 Bxd2 12 Qxd2 fxe5 13 dxe5 Rhf8 14 Ned4 Qf4 15 Re3 Nxd4 16 Nxd4 c5 17 Bxd7+ Kxd7 18 Nb5 Nc6 19 Qe2 a6 (B.Michiels-K.Van der Weide, Groningen 2001), and here Bosch suggests that 19...Kc8 'followed by ...Kb8 gives Black a slight advantage due to his nice centre.'

b2) 9 Qe2 Nge7 10 exf6 gxf6 11 Bf4 (**Diagram 45**) and now:

b21) 11...Bg7 12 Qd2 e5 13 dxe5 d4 (S.Kindermann-de la Villa Garcia, Moscow Olympiad 1994) and here White's simplest route to an advantage is 14 Bxc6! Nxc6 (14...Bxc6 15 Ne4) 15 e6 dxc3 (or 15...Bxe6 16 Nb5 intending 16...Rd7? 17 Bxc7) 16 exd7+ Rxd7 17 Qxc3.

b22) Bosch says, 'after ...Ng6/...Re8 or ...Bg7 things are unclear'. Indeed, 11...Ng6 looks fine; for example, 12 Bg3 Re8 13 a4 h5 14 h4 e5 15 dxe5 Ngxe5 16 a5! a6 17 Bxa6! Nc4 18 Bxc4 Rxe2 19 Bxe2 Nb4 with a satisfactory game, or 17 Bxc6 Bxc6 with equality, since 18 Bxe5? fxe5 19 Nxe5? Qf5 wins for Black.

Conclusion: We can see that with skillful play Black has no disadvantage after 4 e5, and that he can pose White as many problems as he himself has to face.

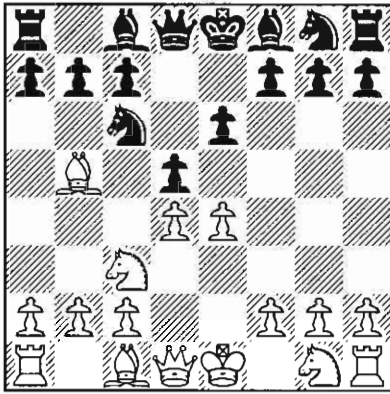
## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### D) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nc6

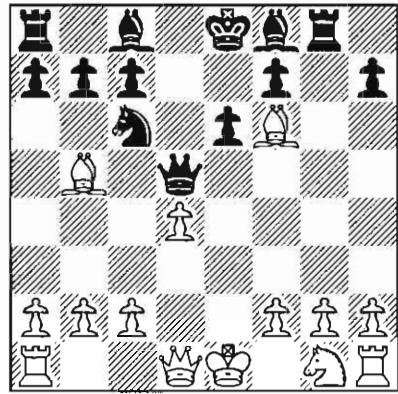
Now we have to turn our attention to the several fourth-move alternatives to 4 Nf3 and 4 e5:

a) 4 exd5 exd5 5 Bb5 is far less common than 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 exd5 exd5 6 Bb5 (see Line B). McDonald analyses 5...Bb4 (intending ...Nge7) 6 Bxc6+ bxc6 7 Nge2 Nf6, adding 'In fact I already prefer Black here. He can dissolve the doubled pawns with ...c6-c5 as required, or even try ...Ba6, when White has no compensation for the two bishops.'

b) 4 Bb5 (**Diagram 46**)



**Diagram 46 (B)**



**Diagram 47 (W)**

leaves Black a variety of unbalancing ideas. Apart from the obvious 4...Nge7, here are some excerpts:

b1) 4...Nf6 is the normal line.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Now 5 Bg5 can be met by 5...dxe4 6 Nxe4 (or 6 Bxf6 gxf6 7 Nxe4 f5 8 Nc3 Bg7) 6...Qd5! – a powerful pawn sacrifice.

Play continues with 7 Nxf6+ gxf6 8 Bxf6 Rg8 (**Diagram 47**) 9 Qd3 Rg6 10 Be5 Bd7 11 Bxc6 Bxc6 12 Ne2 (Z.Erdelyi-D.Werner, Budapest 2005), and apart from the slightly advantageous 12...Qxg2, Black could have played McDonald's suggestion 12...Rxc2! when White cannot castle queenside as the pawn on a2 drops. The play might continue 13 Nf4 Qa5+ 14 c3 Rg5 15 f3 (15 Rf1 Bb5) 15...Rxe5+! 16 dxe5 Qxe5+ 17 Ne2 Rd8 18 Qc2 Be7! and wins. This would an exceptionally favourable outcome, but theory's current assessment is that Black can maintain equality after 4...Nf6.

b2) Another response is simplification by 4...dxe4 5 Bxc6+ (Black's point is 5 Nxe4?! Qd5) 5...bxc6 6 Nxe4 Qd5, when F.Grzesik-H.Reefschläger, German League 1984, continued 7 Qf3 Bb7 8 Be3 0-0-0 9 Nc3 Bb4 10 Qxd5 cxd5 11 Nf3 f6 12 a3 Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 Ba6 14 h4 Ne7 15 Kd1 Kd7 with equality.

b3) 4...Bb4 5 e5 Bd7 6 Qg4 Nge7!? (**Diagram 48**).

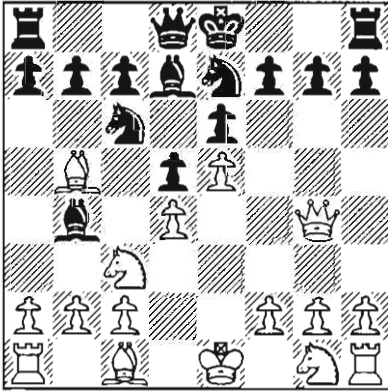


Diagram 48 (W)

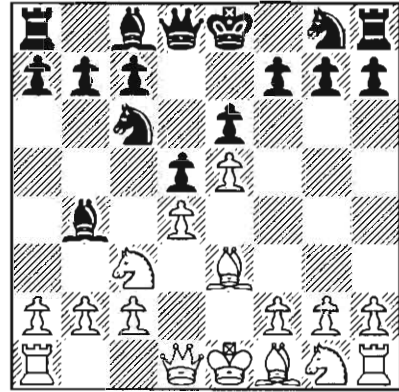


Diagram 49 (B)



**ROLL THE DICE! This is a speculative but energetic sacrifice.**

7 Bxc6 (after 7 Qxg7 Rg8 8 Qxh7 Nxd4 9 Bf1!? c5 10 a3 Ba5 followed by a quick ...0-0-0, Black has a central advantage and a lead in development, more than enough compensation for a pawn) 7...Bxc6 8 Qxg7 Rg8 9 Qxh7 Rxc2, and a sample line might be 10 Nf3 Kd7! 11 Qxf7 Qh8 12 Ng5 Qg8! 13 Qxg8 Rxc8. Black is two pawns behind but has every positional plus; in particular, the outpost on e5 and White's weak h- and f-pawns are major issues.

The sounder 6...Kf8!? was seen A.Gara-I.Radziewicz, Budapest 2002: 7 Nf3 f5 8 exf6!? Nxf6 9 Qh4 Ne4! 10 Bg5 Nxc5 11 Nxc5 h6 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Qf4+ Qf6 14 Qxc7, and here simplest was 14...Ke7 15 Nf3 Rxc8 16 Qe5 c5 with plenty of compensation for a pawn.

c) One way to answer 4 Be3 is by 4...Bb4 5 e5 (**Diagram 49**). Now D.De Vreugt-A.Rustemov, German League 2001, went 5...Nge7 6 Bd3!? Nf5 7 Bxf5 exf6 8 Qd3 Be6 9 Nf3 h6 10 h4 Qd7!? 11 h5. At this point, 11...Be7 12 Ne2 0-0-0 is a fairly normal position from the Advance Variation. One possible continuation is 13 Nf4 Rdc8 14 0-0-0 g5 15 hxg6 fxg6 16 Nxe6 Qxe6 with equal chances.

5...f6 is also fully playable, and 5...Nh6!? strikes me as a promising continuation,

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

since 6 Bxh6 (else ...Nf5) involves a second move of White's bishop. Then 6...gxh6 7 Nf3 can be answered by the normal-looking 7...0-0 8 Be2 f6 9 exf6 Qxf6, or the eccentric 7...Bf8!? 8 Bd3 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qe2 f6 and the position is by no means clear. After capturing on e5, Black might begin his favourite journey ...Bd7-e8-g6/h5, or ...Ne7-g6.

## Conclusion

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All things considered, there's good reason why considerable attention has been focused on 3...Nc6 in the last three years. It stakes a claim to the centre and offers complex play without much risk. Black also enjoys a great deal of flexibility, as there tends to be more than one satisfactory move at most key junctures.

## Characterization of 3 Nc3 Nc6

---

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♠ ♠ ♠
Attacking Nature	♠ ♠ ♠
Positional/Strategic Nature	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Risk	♠ ♠ ♠
Reward	♠ ♠ ♠
Theoretical Depth	♠ ♠ ♠

## Chapter Eight

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# A Surprise in the Winawer

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 cxd4!? (Diagram 1)

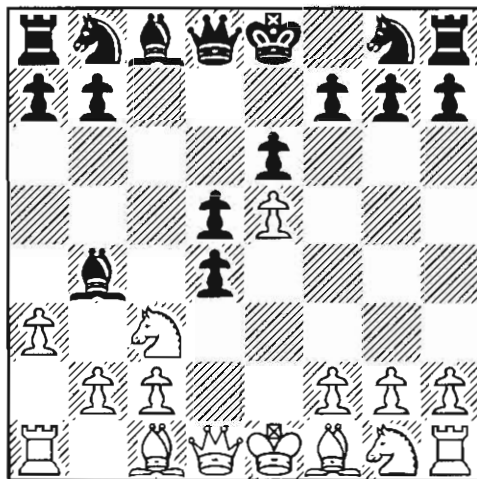


Diagram 1 (W)

Let's say that your opponent is one of those booked-up players who has played 100 Internet Chess Club games with the main line of every opening in his repertoire. Even the most dedicated fan of the Winawer (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4)

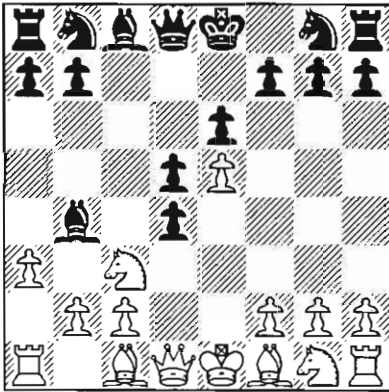
## Dangerous Weapons: The French

might hesitate to contest the latest move in some 7 Qg4 mega-variation. You might want to find out what your opponent's understanding of Winawer positions is by putting him on his own, but at the same time not completely departing from familiar structures. Here's one way to do that:

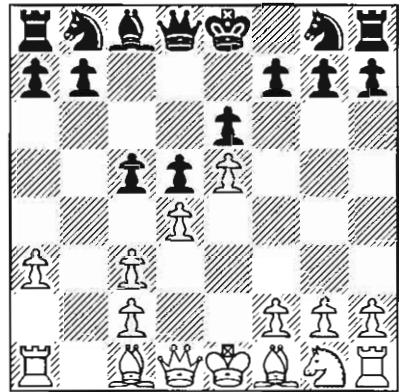
**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3**

These moves have appeared in thousands of games for almost a century. White expects to encounter either the main line 5...Bxc3+ or the less popular but deeply analysed 5...Ba5. He or she may be quite surprised when you cavalierly dash off...

**5...cxd4!?** (Diagram 2)



**Diagram 2 (W)**



**Diagram 3 (B)**

This normal-looking move has been generally dismissed on the basis of some early contests from the 1930s, games in which even many of contemporary annotators' suggestions have gone unexplored. I am convinced that this verdict has been a hasty one. The logic behind 5...cxd4 can be seen by a comparison with the customary 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 (Diagram 3).

Assuming that from Diagram 2 White plays the normal 6 axb4, both variations involve trading Black's good dark-squared bishop for a knight. They can also share doubled c-pawns if White responds to 6 axb4 dxc3 by playing bxc3, either now or later. Generally speaking, these variations are characterized by the opposition of White's space and bishop pair to Black's superior pawn structure and central pressure.

From Black's point of view, there are two important things in his favour when he chooses the 5...cxd4 lines:

a) White's pawn on e5 is not protected by one on d4 (compare 5...Bxc3+ 6 bxc3), so White's pieces can become tied to defending that pawn, and Black can more easily

force a dissolution of it.

b) Since White loses valuable time by playing an early  $bxc3$ , he will often sacrifice a pawn on the queenside and leave Black with a material advantage.

That said,  $5...cxd4$  also has two significant drawbacks:

a) After  $6 axb4$ , White's pawn structure is such that the move  $b4-b5$  can open the dangerous  $a3-f8$  diagonal for his dark-squared bishop.

b) The lead in development that Black often enjoys in the  $5...Bxc3+$  variation doesn't manifest itself if White gambits a pawn on the queenside.

This chapter will be organized a little differently than most others, with the illustrative games split into separate sections. Having in mind the lack of games in the particular main lines that I have chosen, presenting a meaningful survey of existing 'theory' is difficult. I'll use the illustrative games themselves to include all of the main-line material that I wish to present.

White normally answers  $5...cxd4$  with  $6 axb4$ , the obvious and seemingly automatic move which wins the bishop pair. But the innocent-looking recapture on d4 with the queen has its intricacies. Ultimately, Black will gain equality (or better) with accurate play. Here follows a game with  $6 Qxd4$  which examines various aspects of the move.

## Illustrative Game

□ K.Therkorn ■ M.Humme

Germany 2004

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 cxd4 6 Qxd4 (Diagram 4)

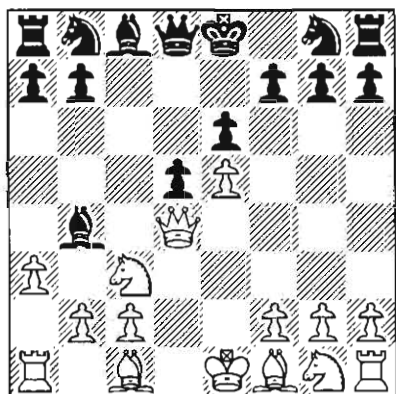


Diagram 4 (B)

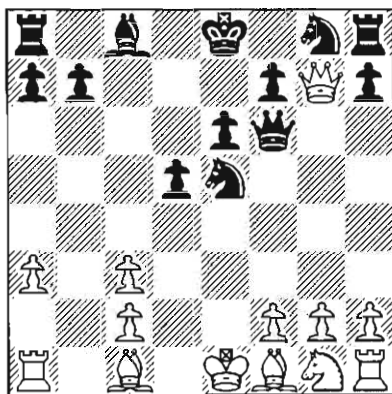


Diagram 5 (W)

6...Nc6 7 Bb5



**BEWARE! Here's a trap you'd rather not run into: 7 Qg4 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 Nxe5 9 Qxg7 Qf6? (Diagram 5) 10 Bh6! Ng4? (10...Ng6 11 Qxf6 Nxf6 12 Bg7) 11 Bb5+ Kd8 12 Qf8+ Kc7 13 Qc5+ Kd8 14 Qd6+ 1-0 Agapiev-Abraham, Karlovac 1927.**

In fact, 8...Nxe5 is usually given a '?', but it's not so clear.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! Instead of 9...Qf6?, Minev analyses 9...Ng6 as follows: 10 Bd3 Qf6 (10...N8e7? 11 Bg5) 11 Bh6 (he appends an '!' to this move). But he apparently missed that simply 11...Ke7! 12 Qxf6+ (or 12 Bxg6 Nxh6) 12...Nxf6 is fine for Black.**

After 7 Qg4 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3, Black can also play 8...Nge7! 9 Qxg7 Rg8 10 Qxh7 Nxe5, which isn't completely clear but I like Black's centre pawns. This is an example of the standard Winawer pawn sacrifice on g7.

7...Ba5

Black chooses the line that allows him the most fun, retaining his bishop to attack the centre. The duller 7...Bxc3+ and 7...Bd7 are also played.

8 Qg4

Alternatively:

a) 8 Nf3 Nge7 9 0-0 and now:

a1) 9...Bd7 10 Qg4 Ng6 11 Bd3 Bc7 12 Re1 Qb8 with the better chances is Botvinnik's analysis, widely quoted. Then 13 Bf4 Nxf4 14 Qxf4 isn't so easy. 14...f5 15 Nb5 0-0 16 c4 Ne7 could follow, but more fascinating is 14...0-0, intending 15 Bxh7+ Kxh7 16 Qh4+ Kg8 17 Ng5 Rd8 18 Qh7+ Kf8 19 Qh8+ Ke7 20 Qxg7 Bxe5 when White has many tries but he may not completely equalize! For example, 21 Nxd5+ exd5 22 Nxf7 Rg8 23 Nxe5+ Rxg7 24 Nxc6+ Kd6 25 Nxb8 Rxb8. Going back, White can play it safe with 15 Nb5, e.g. 15...f6 16 Nxc7 Qxc7 17 Qh4 h6 18 exf6 Rxf6 19 c4 Raf8.

a2) 9...0-0 10 Qg4 f5 11 exf6 Rxf6 12 Bg5 (M.Yudovich-M.Botvinnik, Moscow 1931) and instead of Botvinnik's 12...Rf8?, 12...Bxc3! 13 bxc3 Rf8 was correct. This is probably the best line for Black to go into.

b) 8 Bd2 keeps a path open for White's queen to the kingside, but it's slow: 8...Nge7 (or 8...Bd7) 9 Qg4 0-0 10 f4 f6 11 Nf3 (C.Burchardt-V.Jaeck, Mainz 1997) and here 11...fxe5 12 fxe5 Nf5 was the easiest course, with the advantage (centre and activity).

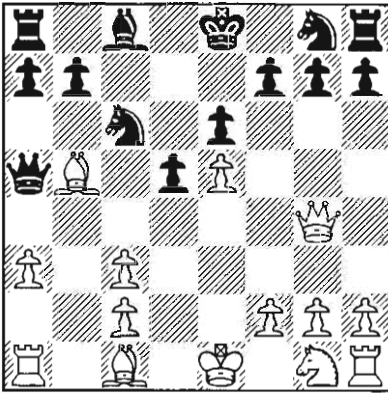
8...Bxc3+

There are two other plausible moves here:

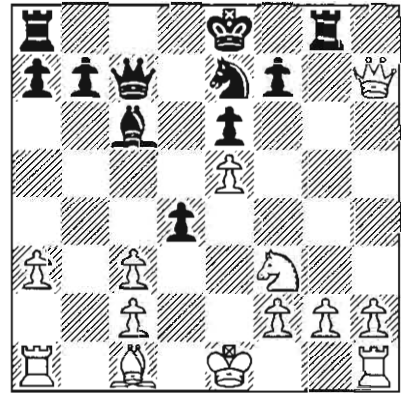
a) 8...Kf8!? 9 Bxc6 Qc7! 10 Nge2 Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 bxc6 12 Bf4 Ba6.

b) The most enterprising line is 8...Nge7! 9 Qxg7 Rg8 10 Qxh7 (10 Bxc6+ bxc6 11 Qxh7 Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 reaches note 'b' to Black's 9th move); for example, 10...d4 (or 10...Rxc2) 11 b4 dxc3 12 bxa5 Qd5 13 Qd3 Qxe5+ 14 Kf1 Bd7 15 Nf3 Qg7 16 g3 0-0-0. I recommend that Black use 8...Nge7 if he wants to play for a win and also so that he doesn't have to study the lines in the notes to 10 Qb4 below!

**9 bxc3 Qa5 (Diagram 6)**



**Diagram 6 (W)**



**Diagram 7 (W)**

9...Kf8 is perhaps playable but Black can do better. One line then is 10 Bxc6 bxc6 11 Be3 Ba6 12 Bc5+ Ne7 13 Nf3 Kg8 14 Qg5!? Ng6 15 Qxd8+ Rxd8 16 Bxa7.

A promising idea is 9...Nge7 10 Qxg7 Rg8 11 Qxh7 Qa5 12 Bxc6+ bxc6 13 Ne2 Ba6.

**10 Qb4!?**

a) 10 Qxg7 Qxc3+ is ridiculously complicated. A key variation goes 11 Ke2 (11 Kd1 Qd4+ 12 Ke2 is also unclear) 11...Qxa1 12 Nf3 (not 12 Qxh8 Qxc1 13 Qxg8+ Ke7) 12...Bd7 13 Qxh8 0-0-0 14 Rd1 Qc3 15 Bd3 f6 16 Bd2 Qb2 17 Bf4 (or 17 c3 fxe5 18 Nxe5 Nge7 19 Qf6 Nxe5 20 Qxe5 Nc6) 17...fxe5 18 Nxe5 Nge7 19 Qf6 Ng6 20 Nxc6 Nxf4+ (20...Qxf6?? 21 Nxa7 mate) 21 Qxf4 Bxc6 and Black is slightly better! Alas, there are countless deviations for both sides.

b) Another potentially chaotic move is 10 Bd2: 10...Nge7 11 Bxc6+ bxc6 12 Qxg7 Rg8 13 Qxh7 Rxc2 14 Ne2 Qa4 15 Ng3 Qg4 16 Qd3 Qh4 can be called unclear.

**10...Qc7! 11 Nf3 Bd7 12 Bxc6 Bxc6 13 Qg4**

This is greedy.

**13...Ne7! 14 Qxg7 Rg8 15 Qxh7 d4! (Diagram 7)**



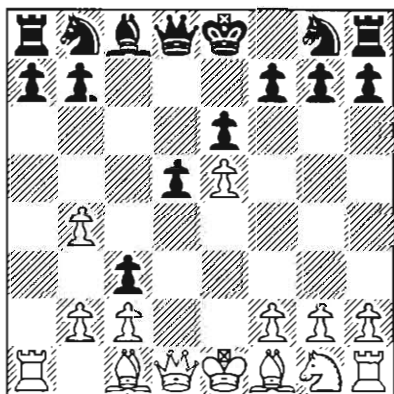
Instead White should play 8 Nf3 (**Diagram 9**) with the following variations:

a) 8...Nh6 9 Bxh6 gxh6 10 0-0-0 (or 10 Nbxh4 Qb6 11 0-0-0 Bd7 12 Be2 Rc8! with attacking prospects; upon 13 Qf4, 13...Bg7 intends ...0-0 and ...f6) 10...Qb6 11 Qf4 Rg8! (not 11...Bd7? 12 Qf6 Rg8 13 Nd6+ Bxd6 14 exd6 Qd8 15 Qxh6) 12 Nd6+ (or 12 Nbxh4 Bd7) 12...Bxd6 13 exd6 Qc5 14 Bd3 Bd7 15 Bxh7 Rh8 16 Qxh6 (16 Bd3 0-0-0) 16...0-0-0. This is still not clear.

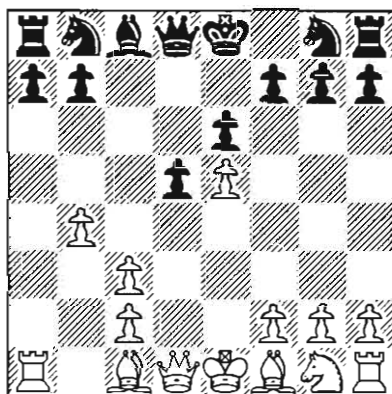
b) 8...f5 9 Qg3 Nh6 10 Nbxh4 Nxd4 11 Nxd4 Qb6 (11...Nf7? 12 Bb5+) 12 Bb5+ Bd7 13 Bxd7+ Kxd7 (d7 is a good square for the king in many French Defence variations) 14 c3 Nf7 15 0-0 g5!? with a balanced game. Black can play on both sides of the board, and 16 f4 Be7 17 fxg5 Nxg5! 18 Bxg5 Rag8 is more than adequate.

Returning to 6 axb4:

**6...dxc3 (Diagram 10)**



**Diagram 10 (W)**



**Diagram 11 (B)**

Now White has two really important moves:

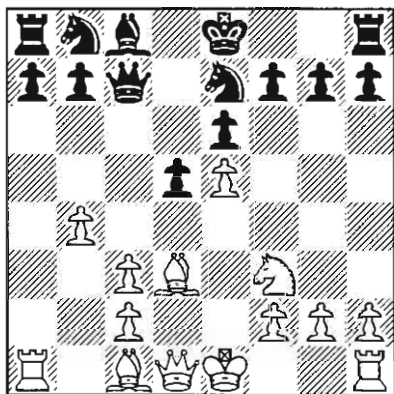
**A: 7 Nf3**

**B: 7 Qg4**

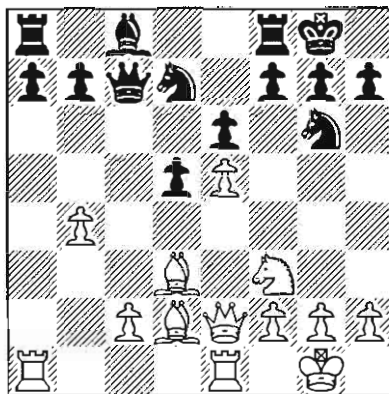
7 bxc3 (**Diagram 11**) is generally disparaged although it probably isn't that bad. Oddly enough, there are more high-class games with this move than the more respectable ones! (the most widely-quoted game is Botvinnik-Model): 7...Qc7 (7...Ne7 may be the best move order; the same variations and ideas apply) 8 Nf3 (8 Qd4 Nc6 9 Bb5 Nge7 10 Bf4 0-0 'with initiative', according to Psakhis; in this line, Adams-R.Fine, St Louis 1941, went 10 f4!? 0-0 11 Qc5 Bd7 12 Bxc6 Nxc6 13 Nf3 b6

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

14 Qe3 a5, when Black stood better due to White's weaknesses and slow development) 8...Ne7 9 Bd3 (**Diagram 12**) and now:



**Diagram 12 (B)**



**Diagram 13 (W)**

a) 9...Nd7 10 0-0 (this pawn sacrifice is virtually forced, since 10 Qe2?? loses to 10...Qxc3+) 10...Nxe5 11 Bf4 Nxf3+ 12 Qxf3 e5 (White seems to have some compensation, but Black's centre serves as both protection and a weapon) 13 Bb5+ Kf8 (13...Bd7 14 Bxd7+ Kxd7 gives Black the advantage as well) 14 Bg3 Bf5?! (14...f6! 15 Rfe1 Bf5 consolidates; Black's pieces are as good as White's and he has the centre and an extra pawn) 15 Qe3! f6 16 f4 e4 17 Rxa7 Rxa7 18 Qxa7 Kf7, when Black still has the more comfortable game although the material is even, M.Botvinnik-A.Model, Moscow 1927.

b) Another satisfactory line is 9...Ng6 10 0-0 Nd7 11 Re1 Qxc3 12 Bd2 Qc7 13 Qe2 0-0 (**Diagram 13**), as seen in Em.Lasker-G.Maróczy, New York 1924. This has been assessed as clearly better for Black, but the results have been split in many games since. Probably the second player has a small advantage, but must play carefully to avoid White getting an attack.

Returning to 6...bxc3, I should repeat that because there are so few games overall in these lines, and generally only one with the move that I'd like to recommend, the use of illustrative games with notes will replace the 'Looking a Little Deeper' section. Going over these variations, it's easy to see how wide open the 5...cxd4 variation is for independent thought.

### **A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 cxd4 6 axb4 dxc3 7 Nf3**

Considered best by all the major writers, some of whom only refer to the following game. Everyone seems to agree that 7 Nf3 produces an advantage, but I don't

think so, in part because the course of this opening is just about forced if White wants to prove that.

## Illustrative Game

□ J.Nunn ■ V.Eingorn

Reykjavik 1990

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 cxd4 6 axb4 dxc3 7 Nf3 (Diagram 14)

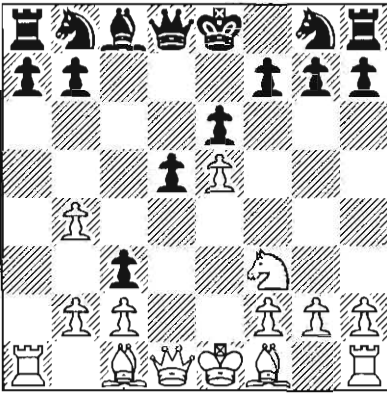


Diagram 14 (B)

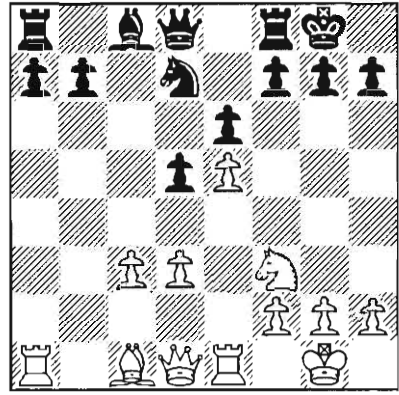


Diagram 15 (W)

7...Ne7 8 Bd3 Nd7

A good reorganization. Black has tried various set-ups, but this is arguably the most logical, since the e7-knight can go to either c6 or g6. Nunn provides the line 8...Qc7 9 Ra3! cxb2 10 Bxb2 Nbc6 with a small advantage for White (and not 10...0-0? 11 Bxh7+! Kxh7 12 Rc3 Qb6 13 Ng5+ Kg6 14 Rg3 etc.).

9 0-0 Nc6

9...Ng6 10 Re1 cxb2 11 Bxb2 0-0 keeps the pawn, but White has a bind and many attacking opportunities.

10 Re1 Nxb4

The point. Black wants to simplify as much as possible to neutralize any attack.

11 bxc3 Nxd3 12 cxd3

Nunn gives 12 Qxd3 b6 13 Ba3 Nc5 with Black slightly on top.

12...0-0 (Diagram 15)

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

White obviously has some compensation for the pawn, since he commands more space, has the unopposed dark-squared bishop, and prospects of attack on the kingside. The question is whether it's enough.

### 13 Ra4 f6

Nunn and others have questioned this move, suggesting 13...f5. Then 14 Ng5 Nc5! 15 Rh4 h6 looks good for Black and 14 exf6 is considered in the next note. Of course, White has slower ways of playing.

### 14 Rg4

Malmstig and Johansson give 14 exf6 Qxf6! (even Nunn's 14...Nxf6 15 Ne5 Bd7 16 Rh4 isn't clear at all), when they claim that 'Black stands excellently' with his extra pawn and central control. They offer 15 Bg5 Qxc3 (Nunn gives 15...Qg6 16 Be7 Re8 17 Bd6 as clearly better for White) 16 Rh4 e5!. In general 14 exf6 looks obliging, but is still worthy of examination.

### 14...Nxe5!?



**ROLL THE DICE! Perhaps this is playable, but it's very risky and apparently inferior to the later move 14...Qc7!, which we'll return to at the end of the game.**

14...fxe5? falls short after 15 Bh6 Rf7 16 Ng5 Rf6 (16...Re7 17 Bxg7) 17 Bxg7 Rg6 18 h4!.

### 15 Nxe5

Nunn provides the drawing line 15 Rxe5!? fxe5 16 Bh6 Rf7 17 Nxe5 Rc7 18 Bxg7 Rxg7 19 Rxg7+ Kxg7 20 Qg4+ Kf8 21 Qf4+ Kg7! 22 Qg4+.

### 15...fxe5 16 Rxe5 Rf5

After 16...Rf7, 17 Be3! is best, to play Bd4. Black is in trouble after 17...Bd7 (or 17...b5 18 Bd4 Rb8!? 19 Reg5 Rbb7 20 Rg3! Kh8 21 Qh5 Qf8 22 Rh3; Nunn gives 17...a5 18 h4 b6 19 h5 Raa7 20 Qa4) 18 Bd4 Qa5 19 Rg3 (19 Reg5 e5) 19...Re8 20 h4! (intending Qh5) 20...Ree7 21 Qh5 Bb5 22 c4 Bc6 23 Qh6 etc. A great example of a bishops-of-opposite-colour attack.

### 17 Qe2 g6 18 Bh6?!

Nunn criticizes this move and suggests 18 c4 with the idea of Bb2, with a small advantage. White has the chances, of course, but with the reduced material Black may be able to stabilize matters after 18...Bd7 19 Bb2 Qf8. This seems critical after 14...Nxe5.

### 18...Kf7 19 h4 (Diagram 16) 19...Bd7?

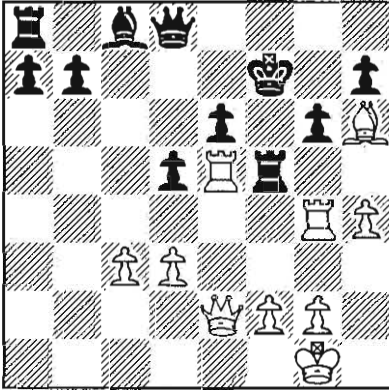
According to Nunn, 19...a5! was unclear. Probably 20 c4 should follow anyway.

### 20 Rb4!

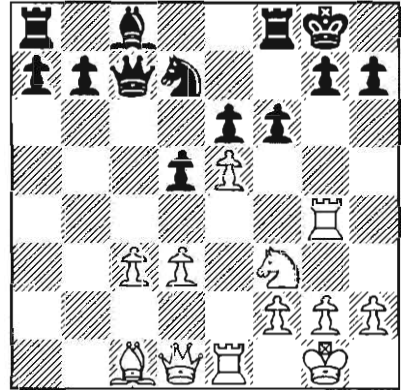
Now both Rxb7 and g4 are threatened.

**20...a5?**

The computer generates 20...Qc7 21 Bf4 Qc6 22 g4 Qxc3 (Nunn gave 22...Rxe5 23 Qxe5) 23 gxf5 Qxb4 24 fxe6+ Bxe6 25 Qf3 (25 Rxe6 Qxf4) 25...Qb1+ 26 Kg2 Re8 27 Be3+ and Black can't adequately defend.



**Diagram 16 (B)**



**Diagram 17 (W)**

**21 Rxb7 Qc8 22 Rxf5+ exf5 23 Qb2!**

Threatening both Qb5 and c3-c4.

**23...a4 24 Qb5 Ke6 25 Rb6+ 1-0**

An impressive game, one which had a lot to do with relegating 5...cxd4 into the discard pile. But the game L.Rydholm-E.Malmstig, correspondence 1997, saw the improvement 14...Qc7! (**Diagram 17**) 15 Bh6 (15 Be3? Nxe5) 15...Rf7 16 d4 Qxc3! (safer are 16...a5 and 16...f5!) 17 Rg3 Qb4 18 h4 b5 19 h5 a5 20 Bd2 Qa4 21 Qb1 f5 22 h6 g6 23 Ng5 Re7 and Black was clearly better.

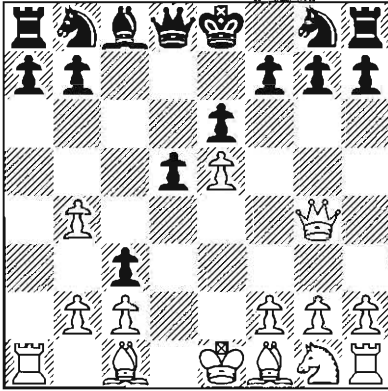
I think that Black has plenty of chances after 7 Nf3, but in this game the decision on move 14 was the crucial one.

**B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 cxd4 6 axb4 dxc3 7 Qg4 (Diagram 18)**

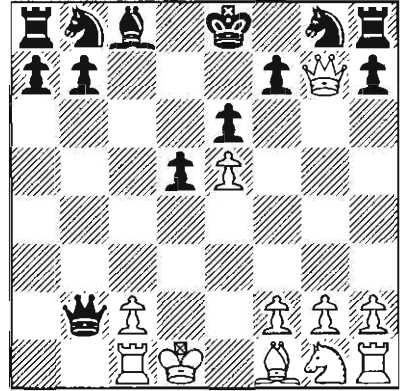


**BEWARE! This direct attacking move has been considered less effective than 7 Nf3, but in fact Black has to play extremely carefully.**

If you want to play 5...cxd4, you need to study these lines concretely. Over the board, it's too easy to get slaughtered by White's bishops and space if you haven't learned specific lines.



**Diagram 18 (B)**



**Diagram 19 (B)**

For the average player I'm going to recommend the relatively safe and stable 7...Kf8 in response to 7 Qg4. However, dynamic players have preferred to play 7...Ne7 and sacrifice the g- and h-pawns for activity, as in other lines of the French Winawer. So I'm going to give one illustrative game with each move. Note that the popular 7 Qg4 cxb2 8 Bxb2 Qb6 is not recommended. Although it is often met by 9 b5 and sometimes by 9 c3, White's key move is the same as against 7...cxb2 8 Bxb2 Qe7, namely, 9 Qxg7! Qxb4+ 10 Kd1 Qxb2 11 Rc1 (**Diagram 19**). Then there are several games and some analysis, but I think that in the end, if White knows the precise way to play, he will get a favourable endgame with quite good winning chances. Black may be able to defend that, but he has no positive opportunities. One main line goes 11...Nc6 12 Qxh8 Kf8 13 Nf3 Nb4 14 Kd2 Na2 15 Bd3 Qb4+ 16 Ke3 Nxc1 17 Rxc1, when Black has various moves but fails to fully equalize.

## Illustrative Games

□ J.Jones ■ P.Wallis

British Championship, Chester 1952

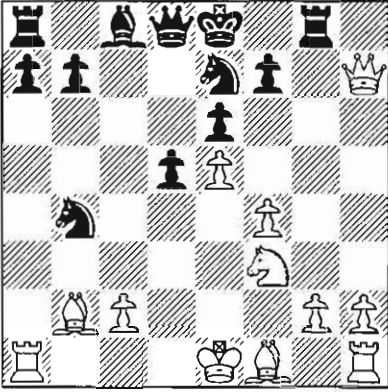
**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 cxd4 6 axb4 dxc3 7 Qg4 Ne7 8 Qxg7**

Sometimes White plays 8 Nf3, now that his queen is aiming at Black's kingside. A sample continuation is 8...Ng6 9 Bd3 Qc7 10 0-0 Nc6 11 Re1 0-0 and now:

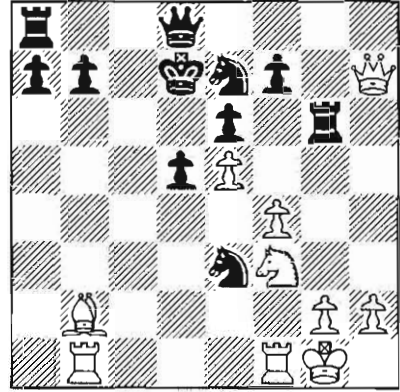
a) 12 Bxg6 fxg6 (this is the standard recapture, both to open the f-file and, more importantly, to keep the idea of ...h6 in the position; in some cases, ...Bd7-e8-g6 may follow) 13 bxc3 Ne7 14 b5 Qxc3 15 Ba3 Re8 16 Rec1 Nf5 17 Bb4 Qc7 and Black had some advantage in M.Chovanec-J.Fabiani, correspondence 2002.

b) 12 Ra3!? Ncxe5 (12...cxb2 13 Bxb2 a5 14 bxa5 Rxa5 looks about equal) 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 Bxh7+! Kxh7 15 Qh5+ Kg8 16 Rxc3! Nc4 17 b3 e5 18 bxc4 f6 19 Rg3 Be6 20 cxd5 Bxd5 21 c3 is a tad better for White, but nothing that can be converted.

**8...Rg8 9 Qxh7 Nbc6 10 f4 cxb2 11 Bxb2 Nxb4 12 Nf3 (Diagram 20)**



**Diagram 20 (B)**



**Diagram 21 (W)**

12 c3 Na6!? (12...Qb6) 13 Nf3 Qb6 14 Bc1 Nc5 is complicated. A possible line is 15 Rb1 Qa5 16 Bd2 Ne4 17 Ng5 Nxc5 18 fxc5 Qc7! 19 Bb5+ Bd7 20 Bxd7+ Kxd7 21 0-0 Raf8 22 Rxf7 Rxf7 23 Qxf7 b6 and there's no convenient way to protect e5, although the game is still up for grabs.

**12...Rg6!**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! An ingenious move, simply cutting White's queen out of the defence. Now ...Nxc2 is threatened.**

**13 Bb5+!?**

13 Bd3 Nxd3+ 14 cxd3 Rxc2 is again not clear but Black seems fine. 13 0-0-0!? looks very risky but may be the right move.

**13...Bd7 14 Bxd7+ Kxd7 15 0-0 Nxc2 16 Rab1 Ne3 (Diagram 21) 17 Rf2!?**

17 Ba3! is more interesting, e.g. 17...Nxf1 (17...b6 is also good) 18 Bxe7 (18 Rxb7+ is met by 18...Kc6) 18...Qg8! 19 Rxb7+ Kc6 20 Qxg8 Raxg8 21 Rxa7 Nd2!.

**17...Qb6**

Black has emerged from the opening with a large advantage. The game continued 18 Rc1 Nxc2 19 Bd4 Nh4+ (19...Qb3!) 20 Kh1 Rc8 21 Rcf1 Qb4 22 Qxh4 Nf5 23 Qh7 Rg7 24 Qh5 Nxd4 25 Ng5 Nf5 and Black won shortly.

□ H.Rudolf ■ H.Teske

German League 2004

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 cxd4 6 axb4 dxc3 7 Qg4 Kf8 (Diagram 22)

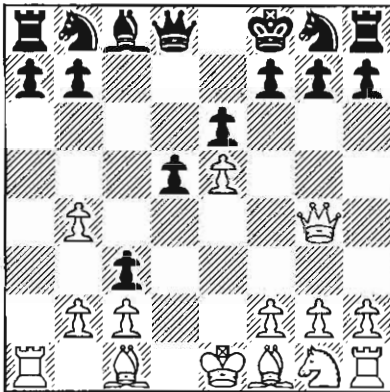


Diagram 22 (W)

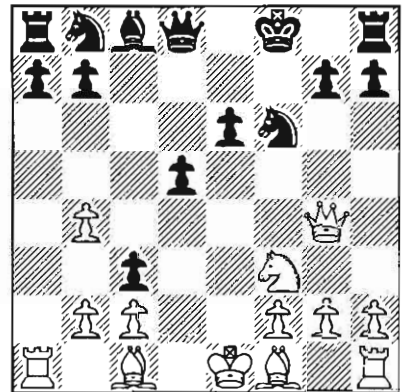


Diagram 23 (W)

This is the move for those who are comfortable with winning a pawn and don't mind having to defend for quite a while (if White plays well). Black must play precisely in order to stay out of trouble, so it's worth learning concrete variations.

### 8 Nf3

White's main and logical move.

a) After 8 f4, one good solution is 8...cxb2 9 Bxb2 Qb6, because White's queen is cut off from the defence of b4 and d4. For example, 10 b5 Nh6 11 Qe2 Nd7 12 Qf2!? (or 12 Nf3 Nf5 13 g4 Ne7 14 Bd4 Qc7 15 Bg2 h5 16 h3 Ng6 17 Qd2 hxg4 18 hxg4 Rxh1+ 19 Bxh1 Kg8 and I prefer Black) 12...Qxf2+ 13 Kxf2 Nc5 14 Ba3 b6 15 Bxc5+ bxc5 16 b6 a5 with advantage.

b) After 8 bxc3, I like 8...Qc7 9 Qg3 Nd7! 10 f4 f6! 11 exf6 Ngxf6. One funny line is 8...f6 9 Bd3 Nc6 10 Nf3 fxe5!? 11 b5 Nf6 12 Qg3 e4 13 bxc6 exf3 14 c7 Qd7 15 gxf3. White has tripled pawns, doubled pawns, and six isolated pawns, but it's likely that he stands better!

### 8...Nd7!?

An active alternative for Black is 8...f5 9 exf6 Nxf6 (Diagram 23) 10 Qf4! (10 Qh4 is met by 10...e5!, intending 11 Nxe5?? Qe7 12 f4 cxb2 13 Bxb2 Qxb4+) 10...Nc6 11 b5 e5 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 Qxe5 Kf7. For example, 14 Qxc3 (or 14 Be2 Re8 15 Qxc3 Bg4 16 f3 Bf5 followed by ...Rc8 or ...Qe7) 14...Bf5 15 Be3 Rc8 with the idea 16 Qe5? (16 Qd4! Rxc2 17 Be2 is critical) 16...Bxc2 17 Rxa7 Re8 18 Rxb7+ Kg8 19 Qd4 Qa5+ etc.

**9 Bd3 Qc7 10 Qd4! Ne7**

A different approach is 10...cxb2 11 Bxb2 Ne7.

**11 b5**

11 Qxc3 Qxc3+ 12 bxc3 Ng6 13 Be3! Ndxе5 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Bxa7 Kg8! 16 Ke2 f6 17 Bc5 Rxa1 18 Rxa1 Kf7 is only slightly better for White, if that.

**11...cxb2 12 Bxb2 Nc5**

Putting a knight on c5 is key to Black's defence against Ba3.

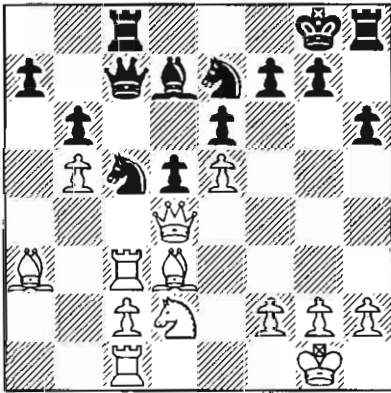
**13 0-0 b6**

13...Bd7 is a bit more accurate, because it discourages White from moving his queen to the kingside.

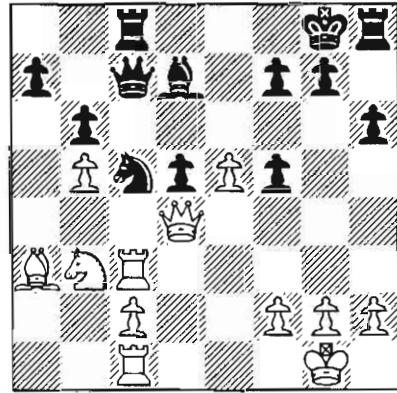
**14 Ra3! Bd7 15 Rc3 h6**

15...Rc8 16 Ba3 Kg8 is very solid; for example, 17 Rb1 h6 18 h3 Ng6 19 h4 Be8 20 h5 Nf8 21 Ra1 Qe7 with equal chances.

**16 Ba3 Rc8 17 Nd2 Kg8 18 Rc1 (Diagram 24)**



**Diagram 24 (B)**



**Diagram 25 (B)**

**18...Nf5!?**

It's going to be difficult for Black to hang on to his extra pawn in any case. Here he has two moves that are easier to play and, once again, give him clear equality but probably no more than that:

a) 18...Ng6!? 19 f4 (or 19 Nf3 Be8 – 19...h5!? – 20 h4 Nf8 21 h5 Nfd7) 19...Qb8 (with the idea of ...Nxd3) 20 Be2 Kh7.

b) 18...a6!? 19 Nb3 (19 bxa6 Nc6) 19...Bxb5 20 Nxc5 Bxd3 21 cxd3 bxc5 22 Rxc5 Qd7 with no problems.

**19 Bxf5 exf5 20 Nb3! (Diagram 25) 20...Kh7?**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Black is still okay at this point, and 20...Nxb3! 21 cxb3 Qb7 equalizes; for example, 22 Rxc8+ Bxc8 23 Bd6 Be6 24 Rc7 Qa8 25 Qa1 d4! 26 Qxd4 Kh7. But after 20...Kh7 White takes over key squares and the initiative.

### 21 Bxc5 bxc5 22 Rxc5 Qb8?

22...Qb7 is undoubtedly best, but White has all the chances.

### 23 c4! a6 24 cxd5 Bxb5 25 d6

White has regained his material and has a winning advantage, although Black managed to fight his way to a 114-move draw!

White's play in the opening looks hard to improve upon, whereas Black had reasonable alternatives between moves 10 and 15 that need to be investigated. By move 18, White had compensation for Black's extra pawn and Black had easier ways to equalize than the one chosen. Remember, however, that this is almost entirely my own analysis, which indicates the scope for creative research in these lines.

## Conclusion

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In my opinion 5...cxd4 is a legitimate and interesting option in the main line of the Winawer Variation, which itself might be considered the main line of the entire French Defence! It seems that Black can play on even terms with 7 Nf3, while after 7 Qg4 he has the interesting choice of the risky 7...Ne7 and cautious 7...Kf8.

The one thing that might bother the prospective 5...cxd4 player is the care with which he must conduct his defence; Black's position can be overrun if he plays inaccurately. But the same thing can be said about the more conventional 5...Bxc3+; clearly very specific preparation is called for in both cases. The real issue is whether White's attack can find its way through Black's solid pawn structure. In most lines White must sacrifice a pawn if he is to have a serious opportunity of doing so, which means that Black has good prospects of a material reward in the long term.

## Characterization of 5 a3 cxd4

---

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Attacking Nature	♠ ♠ ♠
Positional/Strategic Nature	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Risk	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Reward	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Theoretical Depth	♠ ♠

## Chapter Nine

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# Waiting and Outflanking

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 h6 (Diagram 1)

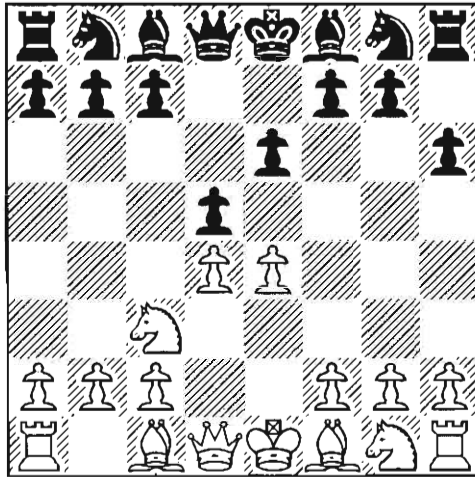


Diagram 1 (W)

An even stranger solution to Black's 3 Nc3 woes is the outrageous 3...h6!?. I didn't even know that this variation existed until reading about it in Jeroen Bosch's *Secrets of Opening Surprises, Volume 2*. Judging from a random survey of players who

use the French Defence, many others must have shared my ignorance. Bosch attributes it to the IM Emmanuel Bricard, who played it as early as 1987 and has continued to do so since, although IM Milan Babula used it in 1965, 1971 and who knows when else. More recently, it has been taken up enthusiastically by GM Nikolay Legky who with Bricard has led the theoretical way, and 3...h6 has also been used by GMs Malakhatchko, Eingorn, Barua, Arencibia, and Valerij Popov, as well as by WGM and US Women's Champion Anna Zatonskih.

Nevertheless, theory hasn't been kind. Finkel, in annotating several games, assigns it a '?!'; Pedersen gives no less than nine choices for Black's 3rd move, but not 3...h6; and Khalifman generously allows that 'White cannot immediately acquire enough advantage to win'. 3...h6 escapes the attention of Minev, who looks at nearly every irregular move in the French universe. Likewise with Tiemann, who is always thorough. Psakhis fares the best, giving us brief excerpts of two of the games below; he finds an advantage for White in only one of them, and a slight one at that.

As if to emphasize that general neglect, I have found only 82 games with 3...h6 (out of well over 100,000 games with 3 Nc3). However, most of them have appeared in the last three years.

### What is Black's idea?

---

Much as is the case with 3 Nd2 h6 (an increasingly respectable line), Black wants to see what White is doing and makes a non-committal move that happens to be useful in most circumstances, particularly those in which White makes a serious attempt for advantage. This strategy is typical of modern opening play, and increasingly applied by players of both colours to achieve their ends. Briefly, White has three main moves to attack Black's position (others will be seen below):

- a) 4 e5 sets up an Advance Variation structure in which, after 4...c5, White cannot support his centre by playing c2-c3.
- b) 4 Nf3 allows 4...Nf6 with the idea 5 e5 Ne4. Then 6 Nxe4?! is poor because after 6...dxe4 Black's pawn on h6 prevents 7 Ng5. Notice that this is an improvement for Black over 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Ne4, because in the latter instance 5 Nxe4 dxe4 6 Bc4! is effective (alas, I've spent a long time trying to make this position work for Black, unsuccessfully).
- c) 4 Bd3 Nc6! introduces the dual 'threats' of 5...Nxd4 and 5...Nb4, as we will see.

What are White's advantages? Obviously he has an extra move in hand – well, it appears so to the untrained eye, since 3...h6 can't possibly be *that* useful, can it? In none of the variations above does he seem to have any immediate problems, so he can calmly develop and expect that to lead to the better game. We shall see...

## Illustrative Game

□ A.Delorme ■ N.Legky

French League 2003

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 h6 4 Bd3 Nc6 (Diagram 2)

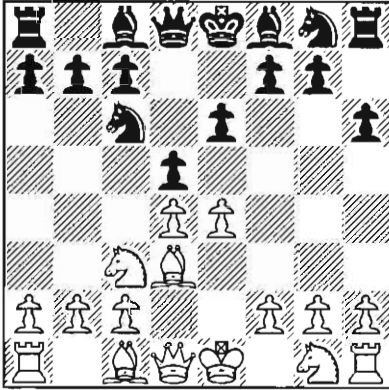


Diagram 2 (W)

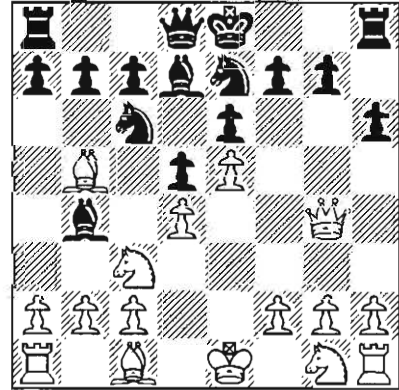


Diagram 3 (W)

Recently Black has been taking to blocking his c-pawn whenever he feels like it! See the variations 3 Nc3 Nc6 (Chapter 7) and 3 Nd2 Nc6 (Chapter 14). Indeed, why do we need to move the c-pawn? Here, Black's idea is to force White to defend against 5...Nxd4, after which he can exchange White's bishop by means of 5...Nb4.

### 5 Nf3

White has more than one alternative here:

a) McDonald mentions 5 Bb5!?. This is almost exactly the variation 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Bb5, which is treated in Chapter 7 and considered harmless. Because White has played Bd3-b5, Black has the extra move ...h6. Is that a good thing? It might hurt him in McDonald's sample line 5...Nf6 6 e5 Nd7 7 Nf3, when 7...f6? 8 Nh4! is strong. But there are two good alternatives:

a1) 5...dxe4 6 Bxc6+ (6 Nxe4?! Qd5) 6...bxc6 7 Nxe4, and in the 3 Nc3 Nc6 line, Black equalized by 7...Qd5 8 Qf3 Bb7 followed by ...0-0-0. In that line the move Ng5 is one way for White to try for a small advantage, but here it's impossible because of ...h6. Even better may be 8...Ba6 9 Ne2 Nf6! 10 Nxf6+ (10 N2c3 Bb4) 10...gxf6 11 Qxd5 cxd5, when Black has two strong bishops and ideas of ...c5 and ...Rb8.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

a2) 5...Bb4 6 e5 Bd7 (threatening 7...Nxe5!) 7 Qg4 Nge7 (**Diagram 3**) is a typical French Defence pawn sacrifice:

a21) 8 Qxg7 Rg8 9 Qxh6 Nxd4 10 Bd3, and 10...Rxf2 gives good chances. Black can also play 10...Nef5 with the idea 11 Qh7 Rxf2 12 Qh8+ Ke7 13 Qf6+ Kf8, or 11 Qh3 Bb5!

a22) 8 Bd3! h5!? (or 8...g6 9 a3 Ba5!?) 9 Qxg7 (9 Qf4 Ng6! 10 Bxg6 fxd6, and now 11 Nf3 Ne7 or 11 Qg3 0-0!) 9...Rg8 10 Qh7 Nxd4 11 a3 Ba5 12 Kf1 c5 13 Qxh5 Qc7 with a lot of play for one pawn.

b) 5 Be3 is too passive to cause Black any difficulties. A sample line might be 5...Nb4 (or 5...dxe4 6 Nxe4 Nb4 7 Be2 Nf6; also interesting is 5...Bb4!? 6 e5 b6 7 Qg4 Bf8 8 0-0-0 Bb7 9 a3 Qd7 10 f4 Nge7 11 Nf3 Na5) 6 Be2 dxe4 7 Nxe4 Bd7 (7...Nf6 8 Nxf6+ Qxf6 is boring but probably equal) 8 Nf3 Bc6 9 Ng3 Nf6 (a complicated line would be 9...h5 10 h4 Bd6 11 c4 Nf6 12 a3 Ng4! 13 Bg5 f6 14 Bc1 Bxg3 15 fxd3 Na6 16 b4 Be4) 10 0-0 Ng4 11 Bd2 h5. This is balanced, based upon the idea 12 h4? Bxf3 13 Bxf3 Qxh4.

We return to 5 Nf3 (**Diagram 4**):

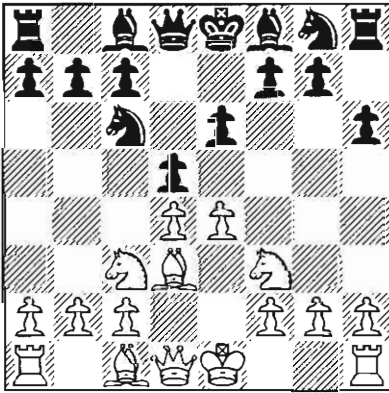


Diagram 4 (B)

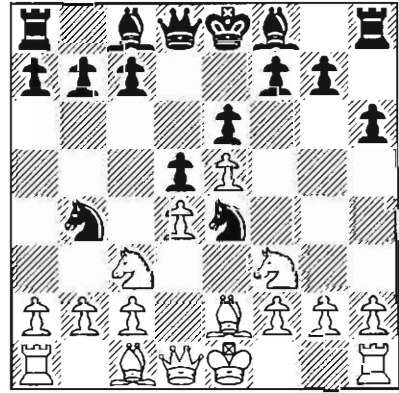


Diagram 5 (W)

### 5...Nb4 6 Be2

The important 6 Bb5+ and various options on the next few moves will be examined in 'Looking a Little Deeper'.

### 6...Nf6 7 e5 Ne4! (Diagram 5) 8 Be3

Or:

a) Definitely not 8 Nxe4? dxe4 9 Ng1 (because of 3...h6, there's no 9 Ng5) 9...Qxd4! 10 c3 (10 Qxd4 Nxe2+ 11 Kd1 Nxd4) 10...Nd3+ 11 Bxd3 Qxd3 12 Qxd3 exd3 and even if White manages to win back his pawn it will be at the cost of unleashing

Black's bishop pair. For example, 13 Kd2 (13 Be3 b6 14 Nh3 Ba6 15 Nf4 0-0-0 16 0-0-0 c5) 13...b6 14 Kxd3 Ba6+ 15 c4 (15 Kc2 Bf1!) 15...0-0-0+ 16 Kc3 Rd1 17 b3 Bb7 18 f3 Bc5 etc.

b) 8 a3!? is a main line that we'll see in the theory section.

**8...c5**

Counterattacking. Now White must resolve the central situation.

**9 dxc5 Nxc3 10 bxc3 Nc6 11 0-0 Qa5 12 c4**

Bosch points out that 12 Nd4 transposes to O.De la Riva Aguado-N.Legky, French League 2004, which you will see in the theory section, with one more move for both sides due to White playing 6 Bb5+/Be2 and Black, ...c6/...c5.

**12...Bxc5 13 cxd5 exd5**

Black often assumes an isolated queen pawn in these lines.

**14 Nd4**

14 Qxd5 is too greedy to gain the advantage: 14...Bxe3 15 Qxa5 Bxf2+ (15...Nxa5 16 fxe3 0-0 17 Rab1 b6 18 Nd4 Bd7, with the idea ...Rae8, is about equal) 16 Rxf2 Nxa5 17 Nd4 (17 Bb5+ Ke7!) 17...0-0 18 Raf1 Bd7 19 Bf3 Nc6 20 Nxc6 Bxc6 21 Bxc6 bxc6 and the game is level.

**14...Bxd4 15 Bxd4 0-0 16 f4 Bf5! (Diagram 6)**

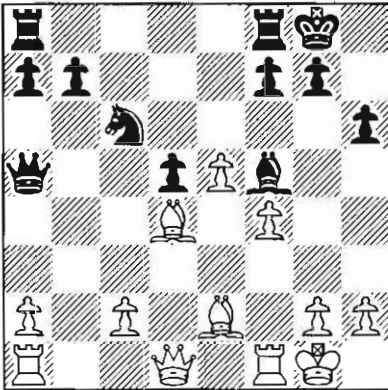


Diagram 6 (W)

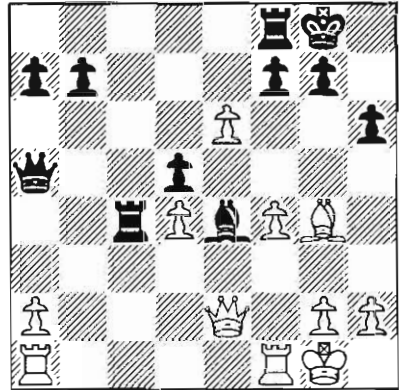


Diagram 7 (W)

On this blocking square the bishop stymies White's attacking chances.

**17 c3 Rac8 18 Bg4!?**

18 Bd3 Nxd4 19 cxd4 Bxd3 20 Qxd3 Rc3 pits White's potential kingside attack versus Black's on the queenside. For example, 21 Qd2 Qa3 (21...Rfc8 22 f5!) 22 Rab1 (after 22 f5? Rd3 23 Qf4 Qa4! the d-pawn falls) 22...b6 23 Rfd1 Rfc8 with pressure

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

on White's weaknesses.

**18...Nxd4 19 cxd4 Bc2!?**

19...Bxg4 20 Qxg4 Rc2 is more active.

**20 Qe2 Rc4 21 e6!?**

Maybe 21 Rac1! Qa4 22 e6.

**21...Be4! (Diagram 7)**

This centralized piece holds everything together.

**22 Rac1 Rxc1**

Or 22...b5!.

**23 Rxc1 fxe6 24 Bxe6+ Kh8 25 f5 Qa3 26 Rf1 b5 27 Qxb5?**

McDonald correctly suggests 27 Qd2.

**27...Bd3?**

But here he thinks that this forces a winning endgame, which doesn't prove to be the case. Instead, 27...Qxa2! was very strong: 28 Rf2 (guarding against mate on g2) 28...Qa1+ 29 Qf1 (29 Rf1 Qxd4+) 29...Qxd4 and Black is clearly winning, even though it will take some time to bring the point home.

**28 Qc5 Qxc5 29 dxc5 Bxf1 30 Kxf1 Rb8**

The great endgame expert Karsten Müller comments that what follows is a good example of the rook's superiority. Although White picks up the d-pawn and would seem to have excellent chances to win, Black achieves a drawn position. Then he even wins when White doesn't play accurately.

**31 c6 Rb1+ 32 Ke2 Rc1 33 Bxd5 Rc5 34 Be4 Kg8 35 Kd3 Kf8 36 Kd4 Rc1 37 Ke5 Ke7 38 g4 Rg1! 39 Bd5?**

Müller analyses 39 Kd5 to a draw.

**39...Rxc4 40 Be6 Kd8 41 Kd6 Rd4+ 42 Bd5 Rd1 43 h4 Rd2 44 h5 Rd1 45 Ke6 Kc7 46 Bb3 Rh1 0-1.**

## Looking a Little Deeper

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**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 h6 (Diagram 8)**

We now look at White's two main moves:

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**A: 4 Nf3**

**B: 4 Bd3**

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Alternatively:

a) 4 Be3 Bb4 5 e5 c5 6 dxc5 Ne7 7 Nf3 Nf5 8 Bd2 Bxc5 9 Bd3 Nc6 (O.Letreguilly-

E.Bricard, St Affrique 2002). Black has counterplay according to Psakhis, and indeed he has developed smoothly with equal chances.

b) 4 exd5 exd5 5 Bd3 Nf6 6 Nge2 c5 7 dxc5 Bxc5 (notice that ...h6 has prevented Bg5, a normal Exchange French move) 8 Bf4 0-0 9 Qd2 Nc6 10 a3 (preventing ...Nb4) 10...Re8 11 0-0 a6 with equality, A.Skripchenko Lautier-E.Bricard, Montpellier 1998. Here 11...Ne5 is also good.

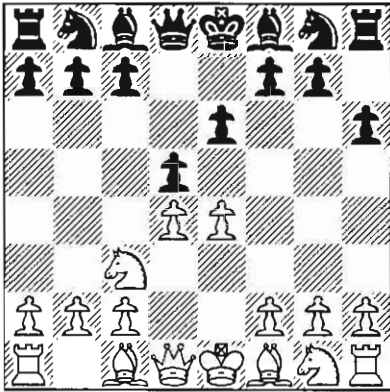


Diagram 8 (W)

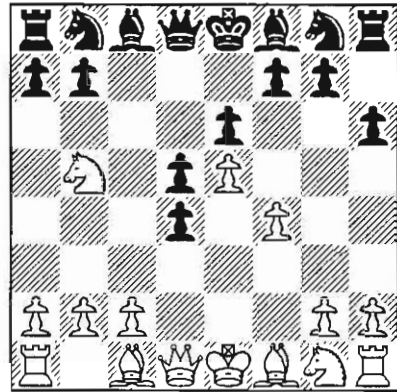


Diagram 9 (B)

c) 4 a3 (a slightly silly move that at any rate prevents ...Bb4) 4...Nf6!? (4...dxe4 5 Nxe4 Nf6 6 Nxf6+ Qxf6 is equal, because while White has played the useless a3, Black's pawn on h6 negates the usual Nf3/Bg5 idea) 5 Bd3 (5 e5 Nfd7 gives a position in which the trade-off a3/...h6 is obscure; one line is 6 Nf3 c5 7 dxc5 Nc6 8 Bf4 Bxc5, which by analogy with similar French lines should be equal) 5...c5 6 dxc5 dxe4 7 Bb5+ Bd7 and the game seems to be balanced, W.Phillip-M.Babula, Havirov 1971.

d) 4 e5 is seldom seen, since Black gets a pleasant form of the Advance Variation following 4...c5 5 f4 cxd4 (5...Nc6!? 6 Nf3 allows White to consolidate a little, although 6...cxd4 7 Nxd4 Nxd4 8 Qxd4 Ne7 appears sound enough) 6 Nb5 (**Diagram 9**). Black has no difficulties; for example, 6...Nc6 (or 6...Bb4+ 7 Bd2 Bc5 8 Qg4, G.Lettieri-G.Borgo, San Marino 2006, and easiest here was 8...Kf8 9 b4 h5!) 7 Nf3 Bb4+ 8 Kf2!? Nge7 9 Nbx4 0-0 (or 9...Bc5) 10 c3 Bc5 11 Bd3 Qb6 (11...f6!? 12 exf6 Rxf6 yields typical French pressure) 12 Ke2 Bd7?! 13 Nb3! f6 14 Nxc5 Qxc5 15 Be3 Qa5 16 b4 Qc7 17 b5? Nxe5! 18 fxe5 fxe5 19 Nd2 e4 and White can resign, C.Vernay-N.Leguy, French League 2005.

**A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 h6 4 Nf3 Nf6**

Now the material divides into:

A1: 5 e5

A2: 5 Bd3

A1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 h6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 e5 Ne4 (Diagram 10)

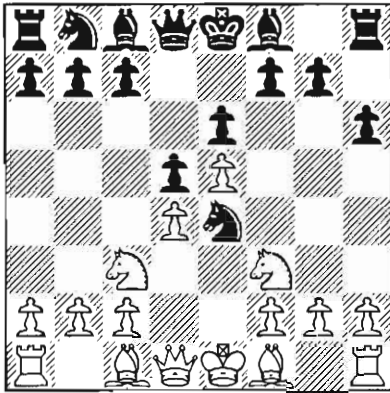


Diagram 10 (W)

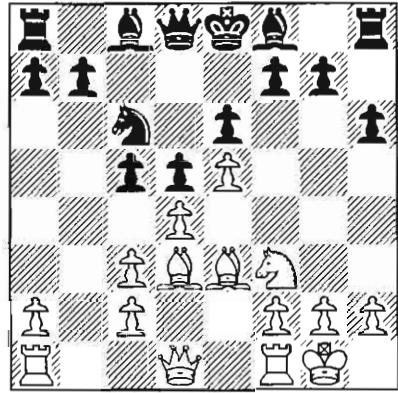


Diagram 11 (B)

6 Bd3



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Again, we see that after 6 Nxe4?! dxe4, the pawn on h6 prevents 7 Ng5.

The main alternative is 6 Qd3!? Bb4 7 a3 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 b6 9 Qe3 Ba6 10 Bxa6 Nxa6 11 Qd3. Finkel calls this slightly better for White, but the light squares are a problem. A simple approach is 11...Nb8 12 c4 Nc6 13 cxd5 exd5 14 0-0 0-0 15 c4 Na5 16 cxd5 Qxd5, when Black's light-square control suffices for easy equality.

**6...Nxc3 7 bxc3 c5 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Be3 (Diagram 11) 9...Qa5**

A significant decision. 9...c4!? 10 Be2 gives Black two possible plans: one is 10...Qa5 11 Qd2 Ba3 12 Rab1 b5 followed by ...b4; Black can also choose 10...Ba3!?, preparing to put his king on the queenside and later turn to affairs on the other wing.

**10 dxc5!?**

White makes room for his pieces on d4 and reserves the idea of c4, but weakens his pawns.

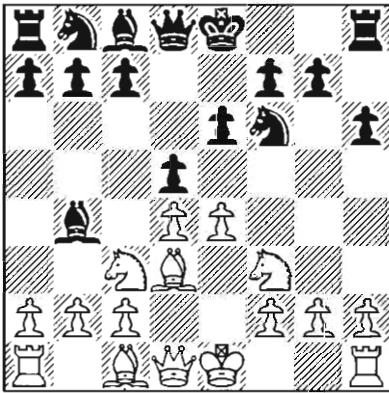
**10...Qxc3**

Now:

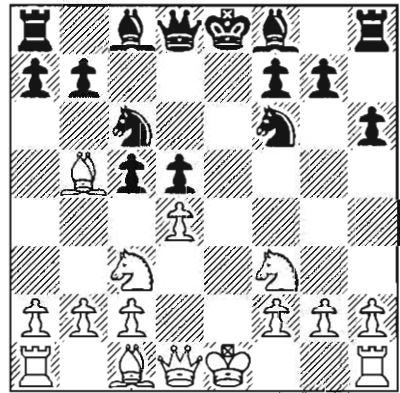
a) 11 Rb1 a6 12 Rb3 Qa5 13 Qb1!? Bxc5 14 Rxb7 Bxe3 15 fxe3 0-0 dissipates White's initiative.

b) 11 Nd4 was played in M.Bluvshstein-N.Legky, Montreal 2003. Now Bosch suggests 11...Bd7!? 12 Nb5 Qxe5 13 Re1 (more challenging is Finkel's 13 Qd2 Rc8 14 Bf4 Qf6 15 Bd6, but Black's position holds together after 15...Be7 16 Bxe7 Kxe7 17 Nd6 Rb8, with the ideas ...b6 and ...Rfd8) 13...a6 14 Nd6+ Bxd6 15 f4 Qxe3+!? 16 Rxe3 Bxc5 and White has all the problems to solve.

**A2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 h6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 Bd3 Bb4 (Diagram 12)**



**Diagram 12 (W)**



**Diagram 13 (W)**

This has been the most successful move over the past couple of years. Nevertheless, 5...c5 looks interesting and perfectly playable:

a) 6 e5 Nfd7 7 Be3 Nc6 8 dxc5 Bxc5 9 Bxc5 Nxc5 10 0-0 0-0 is either equal or very close to it. In these positions Black can usually counter the occupation of d4 with queenside activity. And the more ambitious alternative 7...c4!? 8 Be2 Bb4 deserves consideration, preparing ...0-0, ...Nc6, and ...f6.

b) 6 exd5 exd5 7 Bb5+ (7 0-0 c4 8 Re1+ Be7 9 Bf1 Bg4 10 h3 was played in D.Stavast-W.Van Rijn, Groningen 2003; instead of the game's 10...Bh5, the easiest solution was 10...Bxf3 11 Qxf3 Nc6 12 Be3 0-0 with well-placed pieces and queenside action in store) 7...Nc6! (**Diagram 13**) and now:

b1) 8 Qe2+ Be7 9 dxc5 0-0 10 Be3 Re8 is a type of gambit position that French players might be familiar with from the 3 Nd2 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 Bb5+ Nc6 variation: 11 Na4 Bg4 12 0-0 Qa5 13 Bd2 Bxf3 14 gxf3 Qc7 and White's weaknesses outweigh his extra pawn.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

b) 8 0-0 Bd6 9 Re1+ Be6 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 Nd4 0-0 12 Nxc6? bxc6 13 Bxc6? Ng4! wins for Black after the lengthy forced line 14 Rxe6 Qh4! 15 Be3 Bxe3 16 Rxe3 Qxf2+ 17 Kh1 Nxe3 18 Qg1 Qxg1+ 19 Kxg1 d4! 20 Bxa8 dxc3 21 Be4 cxb2 22 Rb1 Rb8.

Isolating Black's d-pawn is an interesting strategy, but ultimately I think that the second player's activity will give him good chances, in part because White uses up a move to play Bd3 and then Bb5+.

### 6 e5

6 exd5 exd5 7 0-0 0-0 has led to some quick draws of late, but either side can choose to turn this into a fight.

### 6...Ne4 (Diagram 14)

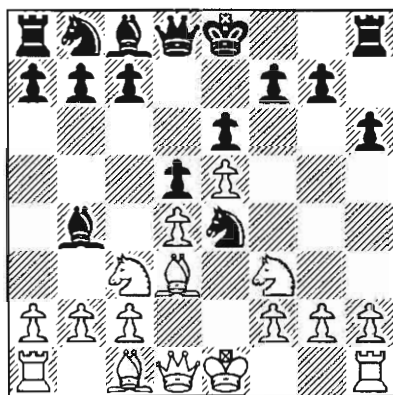


Diagram 14 (W)

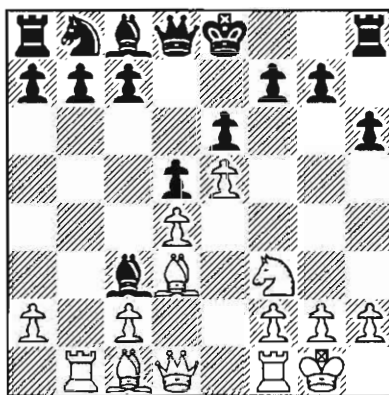


Diagram 15 (B)

### 7 0-0!?

Everyone seems to sacrifice this pawn! The duller alternative is 7 Bd2 Nxd2 (7...Bxc3!?) 8 Qxd2 c5 (or 8...0-0 9 a3 Be7 10 0-0 b6 followed by ...c5 and/or ...Ba6) 9 0-0 cxd4 10 Nxd4 0-0 with equality – Black plans ...Nc6 and ...f6.

### 7...Nxc3 8 bxc3 Bxc3 9 Rb1 (Diagram 15) 9...c5

9...Nc6 is an obvious alternative.

### 10 Rb3

After 10 dxc5 Qa5 11 Rb3, Black can try to force the pace with 11...Nd7 (in order to win the c5-pawn) 12 Bb5 0-0 with the idea 13 Bxd7 Bxd7 14 Rxb7?? Bb5.

### 10...cxd4 11 Ba3 a6

...and White didn't have much to show for two pawns in A.Horvath-G.Borgo, Zemplinska Sirava 2004.

**B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 h6 4 Bd3 Nc6**

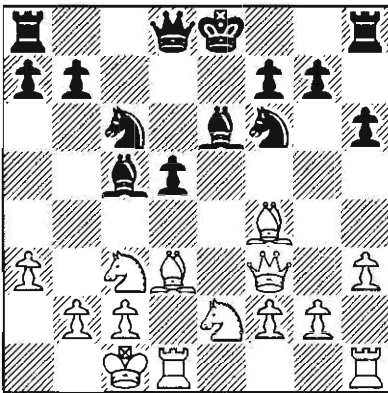
Leading 3...h6 expert Bricard has played 4...Bb4, which is a good second (dangerous?) weapon. There can follow 5 exd5 (5 Qg4 dxe4 6 Qxg7 Qf6 7 Qxf6 Nxf6 8 Bc4 Nc6 is given as equal by Psakhis) 5...exd5 6 a3 (or 6 Qf3 Nc6 7 Nge2 Qf6!? 8 Qxd5 Nge7 9 Qf3 Qxf3 10 gxf3 Bf5 and Black had plenty of play for the extra doubled pawn in A.Van Elst-E.Bricard, Toulouse 1998) 6...Be7 7 Qf3 Nf6 and now:

a) One possibility is 8 Qg3.

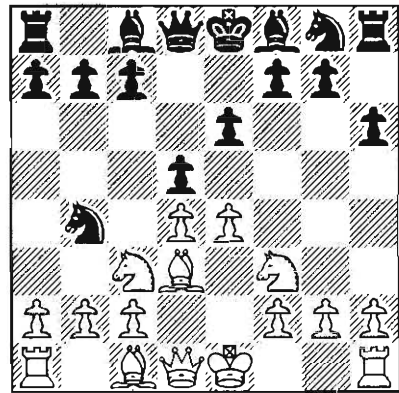


**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Here Finkel gives 8...Nh5 9 Qf3 Nf6 with a repetition. But 8...0-0 is less obliging (and more fun), since 9 Bxh6?! Ng4 threatens ...Nxb6 and ...Bh4. At that point White's best move would be 10 Bf4, but 10...Bh4 11 Qf3 Nxf2 12 g3 Nxb1 13 gxh4 Qxh4+ 14 Kf1 Nc6! still leaves him worse.

b) 8 h3 c5 (8...0-0! 9 Nge2 c5 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 0-0 Nc6 transposes to the game without allowing White to play as in the next note) 9 dxc5 Nc6 10 Nge2 (Finkel suggests that 10 b4!? deserves attention, and indeed after 10...a5 11 Rb1 axb4 12 axb4 0-0 13 Nge2 White has the advantage; to counter this, Black should play the move order given in the previous note) 10...Bxc5 11 Bf4 Be6 (11...0-0 12 0-0-0 Be6 13 g4 transposes into the next note) 12 0-0-0 (**Diagram 16**).



**Diagram 16 (B)**



**Diagram 17 (W)**

White has a small advantage according to Finkel. That seems doubtful: 12...a6!? (Finkel gives 12...0-0 13 g4 with initiative, but even then Black seems to hold his own by playing 13...d4! 14 Ne4 Be7, and 15 N2g3!? Nd5 or 15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 16 Qe4 g6! with the idea 17 Bxh6 Bd5) 13 Bc4 d4 14 Bxe6 fxe6 15 Ne4 Nxe4 16 Qxe4 Qf6 17 Bg3 was played in L.Fressinet-E.Bricard, French Championship 2002. Instead of

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

the game continuation 17...0-0 18 Nf4 Rhe8 19 Nd3, 17...0-0 looks more natural, when White doesn't seem to have much, if anything, after 18 Rhe1 Rae8 or 18 Nf4 Rae8 19 Nd3 Bb6.

### 5 Nf3 Nb4 (Diagram 17)

And now:

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**B1: 6 Be2**

**B2: 6 Bb5+**

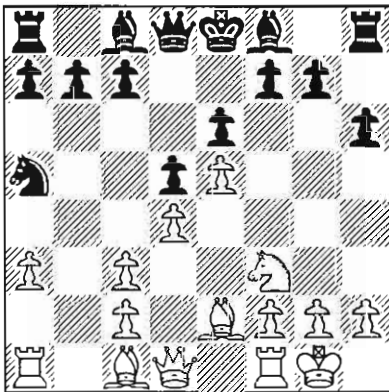
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White has a nice lead in development after 6 exd5 exd5 7 Bf4 Nxd3+ (7...c6!? 8 0-0 Bd6) 8 Qxd3 c6 9 0-0-0, but Black's structure was sufficient to spare him problems in R.Ponomariov-N.Legky, Odessa 2005, following 9...Nf6 10 Ne5 Be7 11 f3 0-0 12 Kb1 Be6 13 g4 Nd7!.

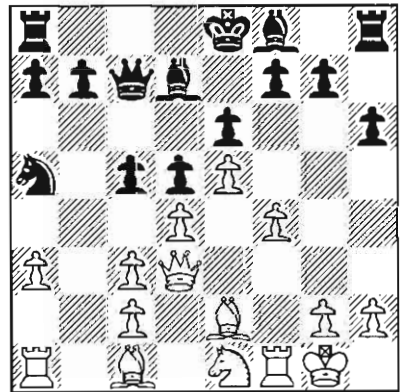
### B1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 h6 4 Bd3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nb4 6 Be2 Nf6 7 e5 Ne4 8 a3

8 Be3 and 8 Nxe4 were seen in our illustrative game; 8 0-0 c5 9 Be3 Nc6 transposes to Line B2 with one tempo less for both sides.

### 8...Nxc3 9 bxc3 Nc6 10 0-0 Na5 (Diagram 18)



**Diagram 18 (W)**



**Diagram 19 (W)**

Bosch points out that this is Black's seventh straight knight move! The main point is that ...Na5 serves to prevent c3-c4, and ...c5 will probably follow. Black has no structural weaknesses, so he is more likely to be able to counter White's substantial lead in development. If he plays ...c5, we enter into some kind of Winawer Variation but with Black's bishop pair intact. Whether that is an advantage is not

clear yet, but at least his notoriously vulnerable dark squares are covered by the king's bishop.

### 11 Qd3

Bosch suggests 11 Ne1, presumably with the same idea but retaining the option of Bd3 and perhaps Qg4 or Qh5 later. Whether that improves is open to debate, since it is rather time consuming; one factor is that after 11 Qd3, White's queen can swing to g3 or h3.

### 11...Bd7

Another reasonable move is 11...c5; for example, 12 dxc5 Qc7! (12...Bxc5?? 13 Qb5+) 13 Nd4! Bd7! (13...Bxc5 14 Qg3!) 14 Nb5! with the idea 14...Qxe5 15 g3 Qb8 16 Bf4 e5 17 Qxd5 exf4 18 Bh5!. But here 14...Qxc5! 15 Be3!? Qxb5 16 Qxb5 Bxb5 17 Bxb5+ Kd8 18 f4 g6 leaves White with weaknesses in return for the two bishops.

### 12 Ne1 c5 13 f4 Qc7 (Diagram 19) 14 g4!?

Naturally, the break f4-f5 is White's goal.

### 14...0-0-0 15 f5 Be7 16 Ng2 Bg5!

A knight on f4 would be very strong, so Black prepares to simply remove it.

### 17 Bf4 Nc6 18 Bg3 Qa5 19 Rad1

Not 19 h4?, because of 19...c4 20 Qf3 (20 Qd1 Qxc3) 20...Bd2.

### 19...h5 20 fxe6 Bxe6 21 gxh5 c4 22 Qf3 Qxa3 23 Bf4 Be7

Eingorn suggests 23...Bh6 24 Bxh6 gxh6.

### 24 Bd2 Qb2

24...Kb8 is also playable.

### 25 Ne3

(V.Gashimov-V.Eingorn, Bled Olympiad 2002) Now Black went wrong by 25...Bg5? 26 Nxc4! dxc4 27 Bxg5 Rde8 28 Qe4 (or 28 d5! Nxe5 29 Qe3), and White went on to win. Instead, 25...Qb6 was fine. White can't break through on the queenside, so he should move fast to do something on his kingside, perhaps by simplifying via 26 Nf5 Rdg8 27 Nxe7+ Nxe7. But I still prefer Black.

### B2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 h6 4 Bd3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nb4 6 Bb5+ (Diagram 20) 6...c6

Unfortunately 6...Bd7?, trying to trade off Black's bad bishop for White's good one, fails to 7 Bxd7+ Qxd7 8 Ne5! Qd8 (8...Qd6 9 a3 Nc6 10 Nb5 Qd8 11 exd5 exd5 12 Qe2 Be7 13 Bf4 is a disaster) 9 a3 (or 9 Qe2 dxe4 10 a3) 9...Nc6 10 exd5 exd5 11 0-0 Nf6 12 Re1 Be7 13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 Qe2, when White's advantage is extremely large.

### 7 Be2 Nf6 8 e5 Ne4 9 a3

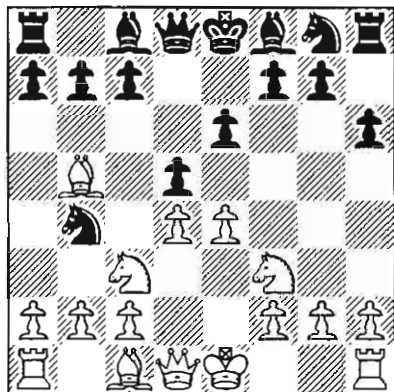


Diagram 20 (B)

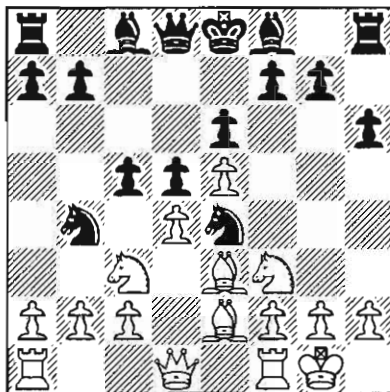


Diagram 21 (B)

White can try to gain a tempo by avoiding or delaying this move: 9 0-0 c5 10 Be3 (Diagram 21) (Black creates light-square problems for White after 10 a3 Nxc3 11 bxc3 Nc6 12 Ne1 Qa5 13 Bd2 Qa4 14 Nf3 b6, S.Vratonjic-B.Certic, Petrovac 2004, intending 15 Qb1 Ba6!) 10...Nc6 (after 10...Nxc3 11 bxc3 Nc6, 12 c4! looks good for White; this is a key break in this line) 11 Bd3 (11 dxc5 Nxc3! 12 bxc3 Qa5 13 Nd4!? was O.De la Riva Aguado-N.Legky, French League 2004, and here 13...Nxe5! 14 Nb5 Bd7 or 14...Be7 is correct and unclear) 11...Nxc3 12 bxc3 c4 13 Be2 Qa5 14 Bd2 Bd7 was played in B.Tuvshintugs-A.Zatonskih, US Ch., San Diego 2006. The complex struggle that followed is full of characteristic French Defence themes. There are many inaccuracies by both sides, but Black is never in trouble: 15 Ne1 Ba3 16 Rb1 0-0-0 17 f4 f5 18 exf6 gxf6 19 Bg4 Bd6 20 Rb2 Qc7 21 Qf3 Ne7 22 Qe2 f5 23 Bh5 Rh7 24 g3 Rg7 25 Ng2 Ng8 26 Rfb1 b6 27 Rf1 Nf6 28 Bf3 Kb8 29 Kh1 Rh8 30 Bh5 Ba4 31 Ne1 Qc8 32 Rb1 Ne4 33 Rf3 Rhg8 34 Rb2 Qd8 35 Kg2 Qh4 36 Re3 Nxc3 0-1. We return to the main line with 9 a3 (Diagram 22):

**9...Nxc3**

9...Qa5!? 10 0-0 Nxc3 11 bxc3 Na6 looked very bad after 12 Bd2 c5 13 c4 Qa4 14 cxd5 exd5 15 dxc5!? Bxc5 16 Bb4 Bxb4? 17 axb4 Qd7 18 e6! Qd6 19 Bb5+ Kf8 20 exf7 Nc7 21 Re1 with a winning position for White, W.Spoelman-H.Galje, Hooegeveen 2004. But 12...Qa4!?, controlling the light squares, is an improvement. Then White can straighten out his pawns by playing 13 Qb1!; for example, 13...b6 14 Qb3 Qxb3 15 cxb3, but 15...Nc7 16 a4 Be7 17 a5 Ba6 18 c4 Kd7! gives Black a solid game and approximate equality.

**10 bxc3 Na6 11 0-0**

This time, 11 c4!? can be answered calmly by 11...Be7 12 0-0 0-0 13 c3 Nc7. One possible line is 14 cxd5 exd5 15 Qc2 (or 15 Bd3 Bg4 16 Bc2 Bh5 with the idea of

...Ne6) 15...b6 16 Bd3 Bg4 17 Nd2 c5 18 h3 Bd7 19 a4 Ne6! 20 Nf3 Rc8 with equal chances.

11...c5 12 c4 Nc7!? (Diagram 23)

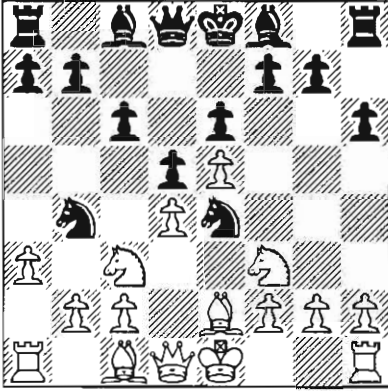


Diagram 22 (B)

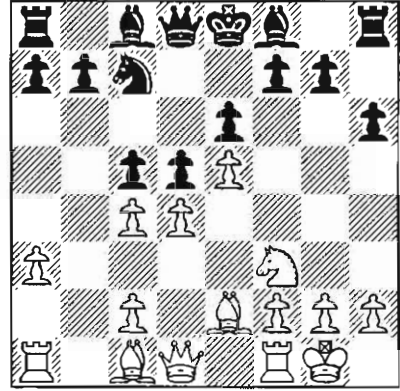


Diagram 23 (W)

Or 12...Be7 13 cxd5 exd5 14 c4 0-0 15 cxd5 Qxd5.

13 cxd5

(A.Zatonskih-E.Cosma, Marseille 2006) Now Black should play 13...exd5 14 c3 c4!?, when White's potential pawn advance on the kingside looks dangerous, but Black can successfully blockade on the light squares.

### Characterization of 3 Nc3 h6

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♠ ♠ ♠
Attacking Nature	♠ ♠
Positional/Strategic Nature	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Risk	♠ ♠ ♠
Reward	♠ ♠ ♠
Theoretical Depth	♠ ♠

# Chapter Ten

## Two for the Price of One

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Ng8 and  
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 Bf8 (Diagram 1)

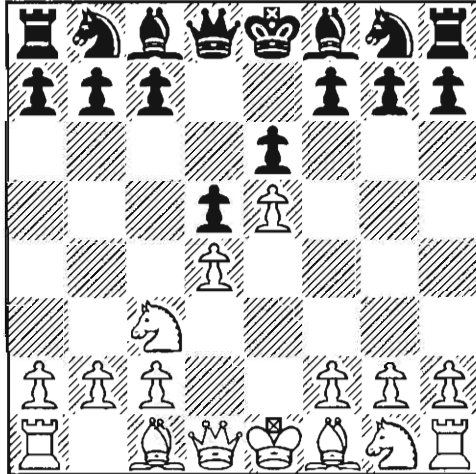


Diagram 1 (W)

In this chapter we have something for the lazy player! Imagine these two scenarios:  
a) Ten minutes before the round you find the name of your opponent, and consult your shiny new laptop to see if you can find his games. You've got the black

pieces. After the nearly compulsory 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5, you see that he plays 3 Nc3. Against your Winawer System with 3...Bb4, he specializes in the pesky 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 c5 5 Qg4 variation, one that you don't have enough time to look into. What to do?

b) After dawdling over a big meal with old chess friends, you arrive at the tournament hall. Your opponent is rated 200 points higher than you and always plays 1 e4. You don't have a computer, but fortunately you have a friend who has played him numerous times. 'Tell me what he plays against the French!', you plead. It turns out that he plays 3 Nc3. In your Classical System with 3...Nf6, you find yourself happy with the positions after 3...Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7, but can't quite remember how to defend against the latest theory after 3...Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4. Worse, he's played 20 games in that line and appears to be booked to the hilt.

In both scenarios you can draw upon the same solution! Against the opponent who plays 3...Nf6 4 e5 (**Diagram 2**), you trot out 4...Ng8!. And against the opponent who plays 3...Bb4 4 e5 (**Diagram 3**), you confidently slide your bishop back to its beginning square: 4...Bf8!. In either case you reach the position illustrated in Diagram 1.

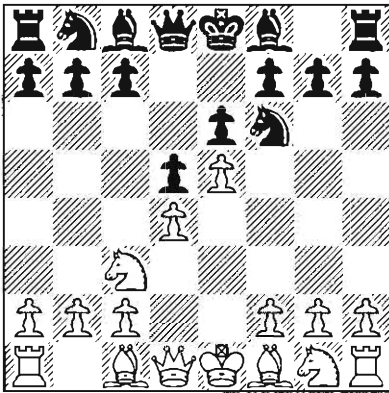


Diagram 2 (B)

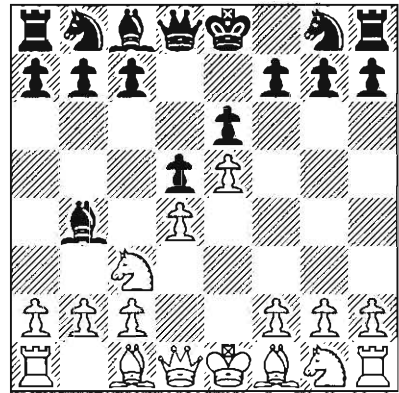


Diagram 3 (B)

The latter order is particularly obscure. Apart from Tiemann's book about 3 Nc3, I haven't seen any book that even mentions the move 4...Bf8!? (after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5), although it transposes to 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Ng8!?, which is somewhat better known. And Tiemann himself gives different games and solutions to each move order.

## Ideas

There are four main ideas behind this retrograde strategy:

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

- a) By playing Nc3, White has forfeited his natural defence of d4, which consists of the move c3, so the possibility of breaking it up by ...c5 increases.
- b) Black's knight is better placed on g8 than d7 for the purposes of attacking d4, since it can come to f5 via e7 or h6, and sometimes will take the place of the other knight on c6.
- c) In the normal Winawer, when you have the bishop on b4 instead of f8, you encourage a3 as a response to c5. Not so with the bishop still sitting on f8. In addition, you don't have to worry about the Qg4 move that is such a bother after 3...Bb4, and you should be able to respond to White's choice of set-ups with an appropriate bishop development, e.g., on e7, c5, g7, or even back to b4.
- d) In any event, your opponent will be thrown upon his own resources. This comes with the psychological advantage that he can feel compelled to refute what is 'obviously' a bad system. Thus we often find White overextending.

## Disadvantages?

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Let's face it: in just four moves, you've managed to both give up valuable territory and ruin your development! In other words, you're depending completely upon your structural superiority (with a touch of flexibility) to compensate for White's well-defined advantages. In fact, this system is one of the few in this book in which you can play logically, if not necessarily precisely, and consistently end up in positions in which you stand slightly worse. Why? Because Black can easily end up with a lack of manoeuvring room, when each of his natural pawn breaks may come with drawbacks. Naturally none of this has to happen, but it means that positional understanding is at a premium, as is a familiarity with standard positions.

## Strategies

---

Black's strategy varies, but in a majority of games ...b6 and ...Ba6 is played at some point in order to exchange Black's worst bishop for White's best. The two most prominent practitioners of the ...Ng8/...Bf8 system have been Petrosian and Bronstein. Petrosian in particular liked to play the French Defence in a closed fashion (see also 3 Nc3 Nc6). Thus he sometimes skipped ...Ba6 and used the queenside fianchetto ...Bb7 in conjunction with ...Nc6. If you think about it that's a structural mirror image of the King's Indian Defence, including White's d4/e5 structure! We also see a great number of games in which he played the system 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 b6, and now 5 a3 Bf8, 5 Nf3 Bf8, and 5 Qg4 Bf8. In one database that I have (unfortunately missing many games that appeared in print), there were ten such games, with Petrosian winning six, losing one, and drawing two. I know: that's nine games. But the tenth game was an exhibition versus a team of TV viewers, and he only lost by trying to win a completely drawn position.

Anyway, to begin with, here is one of Petrosian's most instructive efforts:

## Illustrative Games

□ J. Arnason ■ T. Petrosian

Tallinn 1983

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Ng8!?



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** Apart from 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 Bf8, this position can also arise from a number of lines.

a) 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Ng8 (as played by various grandmasters, including Petrosian!) 3 d4 d5 4 Nc3 e6.

b) 1 e4 Nf6 2 Nc3 d5 3 e5 Ng8 4 d4 e6. In these two examples, Black's last move 4...e6 is not unreasonable, in view of 4...Bf5 5 g4.

c) 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nc3 e6 3 e4 d5 4 e5 Ng8.

5 f4 (Diagram 4)

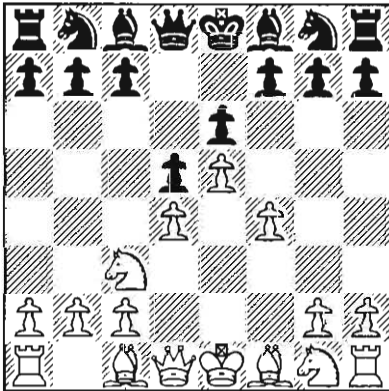


Diagram 4 (B)

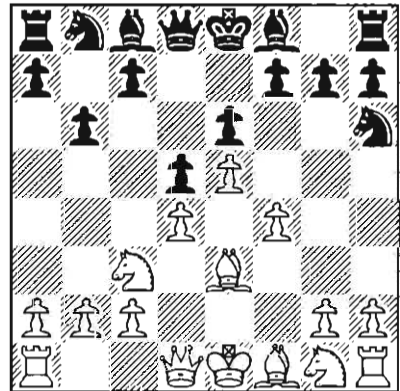


Diagram 5 (W)

White logically tries to establish a big centre. He seems to be a tempo or two ahead of the main line Classical Variation; of course, it's not so simple. We will see that 5 Nf3 is the main alternative.

### 5...b6

Black's usual idea in this system is to play ...Ba6 and exchange light-squared bishops, although as mentioned ...Bb7 is also possible. A non-trivial advantage of ...b6 is that it supports ...c5 and allows Black to retake with a pawn if White chooses to play dxc5.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### **6 Be3 Nh6 (Diagram 5)**

The knight development is characteristic of the system, eyeing the outpost on f5 and keeping the bishop's diagonal open. This is the real difference between ours and the Classical System: instead of ...Nf6-d7, Black loses a tempo by ...Nf6-g8-h6, but finds a better post for his knight. He also leaves open ideas such as ...f6 and ...Nf7.

### **7 Nf3 Qd7**

Black emphasizes light-square play in this variation. Here he has the idea of speeding up ...0-0-0, and hopes to gain a tempo if White plays 8 Be2 or 8 Bd3 next. For example, 8 Be2 Ba6 or 8 Bd3 Ba6 leads to White having made an extra move if he wants to play Bxa6.

### **8 Qd2 Ba6**

It's interesting that in this game Petrosian never plays the superficially automatic ...Nf5 or the potentially weakening ...h5 that normally comes with it. Those are legitimate moves, of course, which have their place in many situations.

### **9 Bxa6**

Arnason mentions 9 0-0-0!?. In response, Black might attack via 9...b5 and ...b4.

### **9...Nxa6 10 Bf2!?**

In reply to 10 h3, 10...Nf5 11 Bf2 h5 (to prevent g4, and intend ...h4 in many cases) 12 g3 c5 would be natural.

### **10...c5 11 h3?**

A better line is 11 Qe2 c4 (after 11...cxd4 12 Nxd4 Nc5 13 g4 White gets an initiative) 12 h3 Bb4!? (12...b5 13 g4 b4 14 Nd1 seems to favour White).

### **11...cxd4 12 Nxd4 Bb4**

Petrosian is contemplating ...Nc5-e4 and at the same time he might increase his pressure by ...Rc8.

### **13 a3 Bxc3 14 Qxc3 Nc5 (Diagram 6) 15 g4 Ng8!**

Now that the f5- and g4-squares are unavailable, Black's knight heads for the queenside. Such slow ideas are possible in a closed position. Of course, ...Nf6-g8-h6-g8 is hardly a classical way to go about things.

### **16 0-0-0 Ne7 17 f5!**

White needs open lines on the kingside before he gets in trouble on the other wing.

### **17...Ne4 (Diagram 7)**

The opening is over and we see that Black is better placed.

### **18 Qf3 Nc6! 19 Nxc6 Qxc6**

Petrosian sets a little trap.

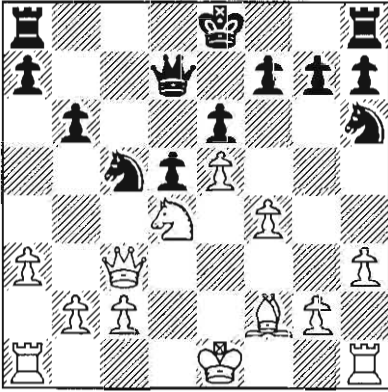


Diagram 6 (W)

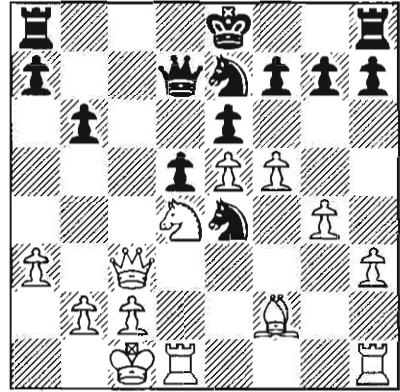


Diagram 7 (W)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Amazingly, Black already stands better because of his wonderful outpost on e4.

#### 20 Bd4

White sees it: 20 Bh4? exf5! 21 gxf5?? Qh6+.

#### 20...0-0-0!?

20...Rc8 21 Rh2 Qa4 is another way to play it, with ...0-0 at the right moment. But that is obviously riskier.

#### 21 h4 Kb8 22 Rh2 Rd7 23 Kb1 Rc8 24 Qd3 Rdc7 25 Rf1 Qd7

It's not clear how either side should proceed, but the idea of ...Rc4 and ...b5-b4 is attractive for Black.

#### 26 Rf3 Qa4 27 Qd1 Rc4 28 Rd3

Protecting the bishop, since 28 Bg1 would remove it from defending the queen-side.

#### 28...Qa5 29 h5 Qb5 30 Rb3 Qd7 31 Rf3 Qd8!? 32 Rd3 Qc7 33 Rf3?! f6! (Diagram 8)

Arnason queries this, but I'm not sure why, since it takes over the centre; also, it may be the only way to make progress. Some form of ...b5-b4 was another plan, perhaps in conjunction with ...a5.

#### 34 fxe6 fxe5 35 Bg1 Qd6 36 Rf7!

An enterprising defence. Otherwise, lines such as 36 e7 Qxe7 37 Qxd5 Nf6 followed by ...Rxc4 are depressing for White.

#### 36...R4c7?!

36...Qxe6 37 Rxc7 is nothing special, but the tactical shot 36...Ra4! (Diagram 9)

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

would threaten ...Nc3+ as well as ...Rxa3 and tie White to defence. In that case Black would soon win material. For example, 37 Qc1 (37 Rh3 Ng5; 37 Qd3 Nc3+ 38 Kc1 Rxc4) 37...Rc7 is simple and good, since Black wins the e-pawn. A strong alternative would be 37...Qxe6 38 Rxc7 d4, which threatens moves such as ...d3 and, again, ...Nc3+.

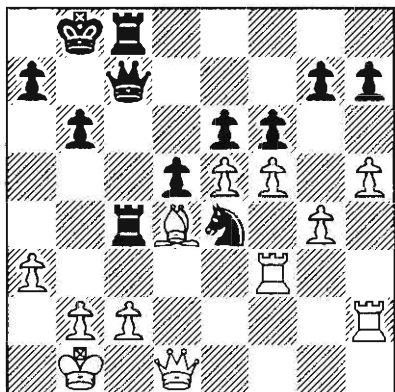


Diagram 8 (W)

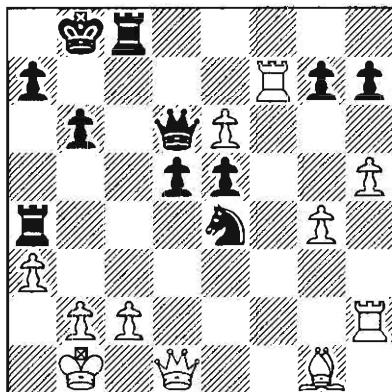


Diagram 9 (W)

### 37 Re2?

As Arnason points out, 37 e7! is much stronger. He even prefers White slightly after 37...Rxe7 (in fact, 37...Re8! keeps a small but certain advantage for Black after 38 Rxc7 Rxe7 39 Rxe7 Rxe7 40 Rg2 h6) 38 Rxe7 Qxe7 39 Qxd5 Nf6 40 Qf3.

### 37...Qxe6 38 Rxc7 Rxc7 39 Bh2 g6

39...Kb7 40 Qd3 Rc4! looks more accurate, with ideas of ...Rd4 and ...Qg4. But in any event Black is still a clear pawn up with greater control over the centre.

### 40 Qd3 Kb7 41 hxg6 hxg6 42 Qf3 Rf7

42...Rc4!.

### 43 Qg2 Ka6!?

43...b5! would stop White's next move, his only positive resource.

### 44 c4! Qc6?

44...Rc7! is risky, but seems to work after 45 cxd5? Qxd5 and 46 Rxe4 Rc4! or 46 Qxe4 Qd1+ 47 Ka2 Rc1.

### 45 cxd5 Qc4! 46 Re1! Qd3+ ½-½

Arnason gives 47 Ka2 (47 Ka1? Nd2 48 Bxe5 Nf3 wins for Black) 47...Qxd5+ 48 Ka1 Rc7! 49 Qe2+ b5 50 Rd1, and the easiest conclusion would be 50...Qb3! 51 Bxe5 Rc4 52 Kb1 with equality.

In spite of the result, it's clear that Black stood better most of the game, and was winning at a few junctures.

□ K.Berg ■ D.Bronstein

Gausdal 1990

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Ng8 5 Be3 (Diagram 10)

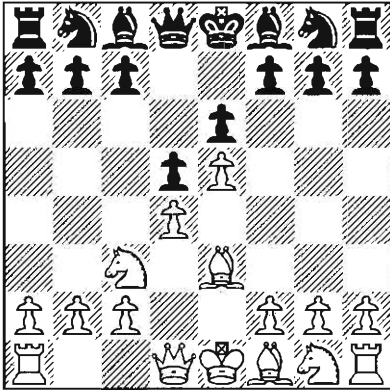


Diagram 10 (B)

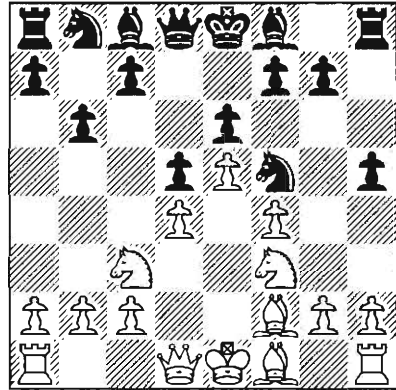


Diagram 11 (W)

White tries to prevent ...c5 and aims for an f4/Nf3 Classical structure.

### 5...Ne7

5...Nh6 6 Bxh6 gxh6 7 Qh5 c5 8 dxc5 Nd7 9 Nf3 Nxc5 followed by ...Bd7 and a quick ...0-0-0 is interesting; the two bishops may compensate for Black's weak pawns. The move ...Nh6 is a typical French idea, and is more effective when White's bishop has already developed and must take two moves to capture on h6.

### 6 f4

6 Nf3 Nf5 7 Bd3 Be7 8 0-0 0-0 looks fairly harmless. Black can play for ...c5; for example, 9 Qd2 b6 10 Bxf5 (10 g4?! Nxe3 11 fxe3 c5 12 e4 Nc6 and Black stands slightly better; or 10 Ne2 Ba6) 10...exf5 11 Bg5 Be6 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Qf4 Rd8 14 Ne2 c5 15 Ng3 g6 16 dxc5 bxc5 17 Ng5 Qf8 18 Qa4 (18 Qh4?! h6 19 Nh3 Nd7) 18...Nd7 and Black has equalized. Note how there's plenty of ideas for both sides in these positions.

### 6...Nf5 7 Bf2 h5!?

This is the usual set-up, anchoring the knight on f5. Since g4 was not yet a threat, Black could have also tried 7...b6.

### 8 Nf3 b6 (Diagram 11)

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Introducing the standard plan of ...Ba6, but also supporting ...c5.

### 9 g3!?

Preventing ...h4 and preparing an eventual h2-h3 and g2-g4, a theme that becomes important in the game. A more obvious continuation is 9 Bd3, when play might typically go 9...Ba6 (9...Be7!?) 10 0-0 (or 10 Bxf5 exf5 11 Nh4 g6 12 Qf3 c6 13 0-0-0 Be7 14 Qh3 Bc8 15 Nf3 Be6 16 Bh4 Na6) 10...Bxd3 11 Qxd3 h4 12 Nd1 c5 13 dxc5 bxc5 14 c4 d4 15 Qe4 Nd7 with a complex position which is hard to assess.

### 9...Ba6!?

9...Bb4! 10 Qd2 Ba6 is a better move order, because then 11 Bxa6 Nxa6 12 Qd3 Qc8 prepares ...c5, while 11 a3 is met by 11...Bxf1 12 Rxf1 Be7.

### 10 Bxa6 Nxa6 11 Ne2!?

11 Qe2! Qc8 12 a3! Be7 13 0-0-0 c5 14 h3 cxd4 15 Nxd4 Nxd4 16 Bxd4 Nc5 17 f5! gives White a strong initiative.

### 11...Qd7 12 0-0 c5 (Diagram 12)

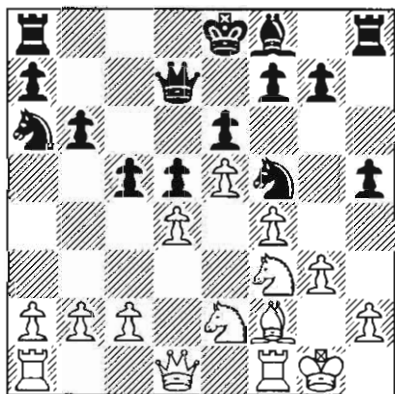


Diagram 12 (W)

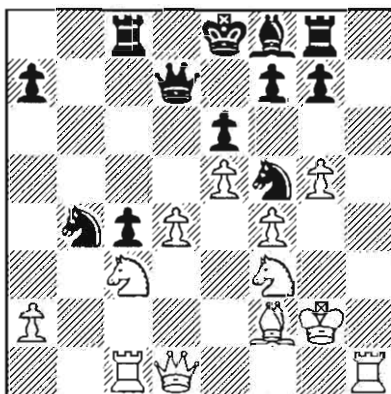


Diagram 13 (W)

This appears to be an attack on d4, and indeed has the idea of exchanges and ...Nc5.

### 13 c3 c4!



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Black is now better, with a pawn attack on the queenside and relative equilibrium on the king-side.

### 14 h3 b5

14...Be7 would be a disincentive to g4; for example, 15 Kg2 Nc7 16 g4?! hxg4 17

hxg4 Nh6! 18 Rh1 0-0-0 etc.

### 15 Kg2

15 g4 hxg4 16 hxg4 Nh6 makes White attend to g4, and 17 g5 Nf5 is very comfortable for Black.

### 15...b4?!

Again it would be better to play 15...Be7 intending 16 g4 hxg4 17 hxg4 Nh6 18 Rh1 0-0-0; compare this to the game.

### 16 g4! hxg4

Or 16...Nh6!? 17 g5 Nf5 18 Nh4!.

### 17 hxg4 Nh6 18 Rh1 Rg8 19 g5 Nf5 20 b3?!

20 Ng3! offers mutual chances. Now Black breaks through on the queenside.

### 20...Rc8 21 Rc1 bxc3 22 bxc4 dxc4 23 Nxc3 Nb4 (Diagram 13)

Establishing the outpost on d5. Things have gone wrong for White.

### 24 Ne1 Nd5

24...Ne7! was strong – Black has total control over d5 and a choice of which pieces to put there.

### 25 Nxd5 Qxd5+ 26 Nf3 Qc6 27 Qc2 Be7?

Black should play 27...c3!, after which White will not be able to hold.

### 28 d5!

Bronstein undoubtedly missed this.

### 28...Qxd5 29 Qa4+ Kf8

The idea is 29...Qc6 30 Rxc4!.

### 30 Rhd1 Qe4 31 Qa6 Rc7 32 Qb5 Rc8 33 Qa6 Rc7 34 Qb5 Rc8 35 Qa6 Rc7 ½-½

A hard-fought struggle. Overall, Black had more opportunities than White, but the opening seemed relatively balanced.

## □ B.Rogulj ■ I.Zaja

Croatian Team Championship, Medulin 1997

### 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 Bf8 5 Nce2 (Diagram 14)

White frees his c-pawn to protect d4, and sets up as he does in the Classical line 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Nce2.



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** It's worth pointing out that White can even reach the Advance Variation by playing the strange-looking 5 Nb1!?, although I guess this is unlikely given that he has already spurned the opportunity to do so on move three.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 5...c5

5...h5 6 f4 Nh6 is similar to the 5 f4 variation, although there's always a question of when to play ...h5. R.Guglielmi-F.Vareille, Cannes 1989, continued 7 Nf3 b6 8 c3 Be7 9 g3 Nf5 10 Bh3 g6!? 11 0-0 Qd7 12 Kh1 c5 13 Qc2?! Nc6 14 Qd3, and here Black might well play 14...a5 intending ...Ba6, but the game continuation 14...Bb7 15 Be3 0-0-0 was also reasonable, especially when White was forced to cede his good bishop after 16 a4? c4 17 Qd2 Na5 18 Nc1 Bc6 19 Bxf5 gxf5.

### 6 c3 Nc6 7 Nf3 (Diagram 15)

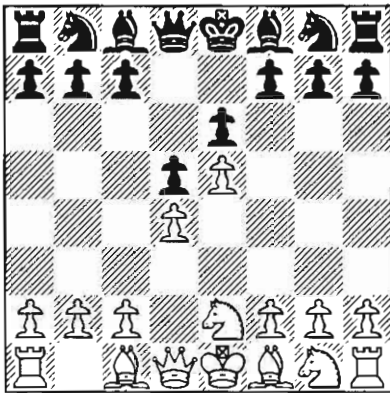


Diagram 14 (B)

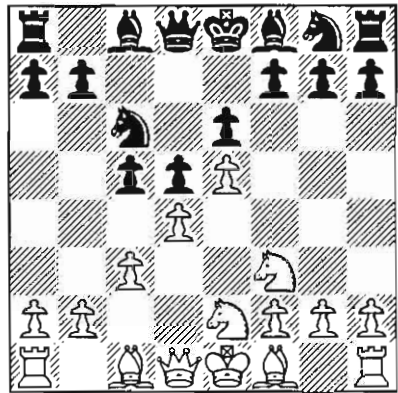


Diagram 15 (B)

One of the points of having Black's knight on g8 rather than d7 is to discourage f2-f4; for example, 7 f4 Nh6 8 Nf3 Qb6 9 g3 Be7 10 Bg2 0-0 11 0-0 cxd4 12 Nexd4 Nf5 13 Kh1 Nfxd4 14 cxd4 Bd7. White has to figure out a way to develop, whereas Black has useful moves such as ...Rac8, ...f6, ...Nb4 with ...Bb5, etc.

### 7...f6!?

Here we have the typical French Defence break, unsupported by development but exploiting the position of White's knight on e2. A good alternative was 7...cxd4 8 cxd4 Nge7 (8...Nh6!? 9 Bxh6 gxh6 10 Nc3 Bg7 11 Qd2 0-0 12 Bb5 f6 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 exf6 Qxf6 is unclear). Here's some sample analysis: 9 Ng3 Qb6 (9...Ng6 10 h4) 10 Be2 Nf5 (White answers 10...h5 with 11 h4 Ng6 12 Bd3 Bb4+ 13 Kf1) 11 Nxf5 exf5 12 0-0 Be6 13 Bf4 h6 14 h4 Be7 (Diagram 16).

This is a characteristic position. White should be advancing on the queenside and restraining Black's potential advance on the kingside. Black plays for ...0-0-0 and ...g5. Extending the analysis a bit further, we might have the continuation 15 Qd2 0-0-0 16 Rac1 (16 a4 and 16 Rab1 are alternatives) 16...Kb8 17 Rfd1 Rg8 18 h5 g5! 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 Bxh6 Rh7 21 Ng5? (21 Bf4! Rgh8 22 g3 is equal) 21...Rxb6 22 Nxe6

Rgh8 23 f4 g5! 24 Nc5 Ka8 25 fxg5 Rh4! and the pressure on d4 is too much for White to handle.

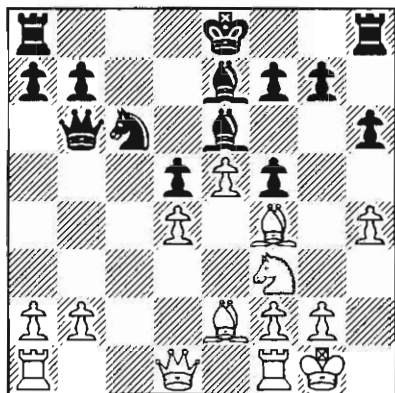


Diagram 16 (W)

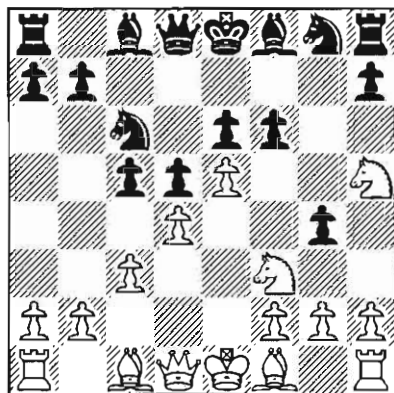


Diagram 17 (W)

### 8 Nf4

8 exf6 Nxf6 with the idea ...Bd6 and ...0-0 may already be better for Black, who has active development and an extra centre pawn.

### 8...g5!



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** This is another standard idea, simply insisting upon winning the pawn on e5. Not surprisingly, it has to be calculated for every individual position in which it might arise.

### 9 Nh5

9 Nd3?! is met by 9...g4 10 Ng1 c4.

### 9...g4 (Diagram 17) 10 Nxf6+?

10 Ng1! fxe5 11 dxe5! (Black is clearly better after 11 Qxg4 cxd4 12 Nf3 dxc3 13 bxc3 Nf6 14 Nxf6+ Qxf6) 11...Qh4! 12 Ng3 Nxe5 13 h3 Bd7 14 Be2 Qe7 15 hxg4 0-0-0 is extremely complex.

### 10...Nxf6 11 Bg5 Be7 12 exf6 Bxf6 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 Ne5 Nxe5 15 dxe5 Qxe5+ 16 Be2 Bd7

With his extra pawn Black stands clearly better. I'll give the rest of the game without notes:

17 0-0 h5 18 Qd2 0-0-0 19 Rae1 Qd6 20 f4 gxf3 21 Bxf3 Bb5 22 Be2 Bc6 23 Rf6 Rdf8 24 Rxf8+ Qxf8 25 Bf3 Qd6 26 Qg5 d4 27 Bxc6 bxc6 28 Qg6 Rd8 29 Qxe6+ Qxe6 30

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Rxe6 Kc7 31 Kf1 Rb8 32 Re2 Kd6 33 c4 Rf8+ 34 Ke1 Rf5 35 Kd2 Rf1 36 Kd3 Rd1+ 37 Ke4 Rf1 38 Kd3 Rd1+ 39 Ke4 Rf1 40 b3 a5 41 Kd3 Rc1 42 Ke4 a4 43 Kf5 Rc3 44 h4 axb3 45 axb3 Re3 46 Rf2 Rg3 47 Re2 Rg4 48 Re6+ Kd7 49 Rf6 Rxh4 50 Ke5 Kc7 51 b4 d3 52 bxc5 Rxc4 53 Rf7+ Kb8 54 Rd7 Rxc5+ 55 Ke4 Rd5 0-1

## Looking a Little Deeper

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Ng8 (or 3...Bb4 4 e5 Bf8)

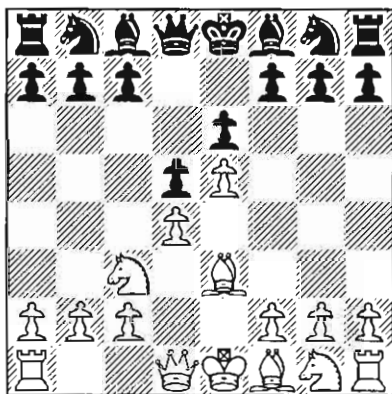
At this point White usually plays one of two moves:

**A: 5 f4**

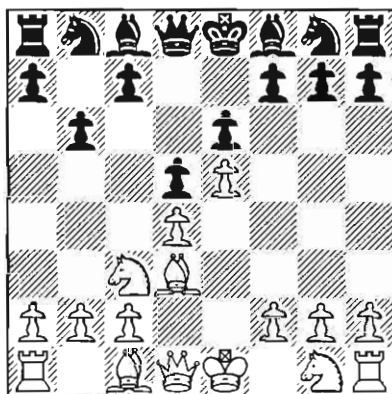
**B: 5 Nf3**

5 Nce2 was covered in the previous illustrative game. Others are seldom used but legitimate all the same:

a) 5 Be3 (**Diagram 18**).



**Diagram 18 (B)**



**Diagram 19 (W)**

We saw this in Berg-Bronstein above. Here are some additional ideas:

a1) 5...b6 6 f4 Nh6 7 Nf3 Qd7 8 Bb5 c6 9 Ba4 (now Nce2 followed by c3 and Bc2 would reorganize to White's advantage, but there's not enough time) 9...a5! (threatening to win a piece) 10 a3 Nf5 (or 10...Ba6) 11 Bf2 h5 12 0-0 Be7 13 Ne2 b5 14 Bb3 a4 15 Ba2 Qd8 16 Nc1 (16 c3 Nd7 17 Bb1 Bb7 18 Bxf5 exf5 19 Qd3 g6 20 Nd2 Nf8 21 Kh1 Ne6 gives balanced play; a comparison of the minor pieces is useful in reaching this assessment) 16...Nd7 17 Nd3 Nb6 18 g3 Nc4 19 Qe1 Qb6 20 h3 Bd7 21 Kg2 0-0-0 22 Qe2 Rdg8 23 g4 hxg4 24 hxg4 Nh6 25 g5 ½-½ J.Fleck-T.Grabuzova,

German League 1995. Black has somewhat the better of things after 25...Nf5 26 Rh1 f6.

a) 5...Ne7 6 Bd3 b6 7 g4!? (to prevent ...Nf5 and grab space; this is also directed against ...h5) 7...Ba6 8 Nf3 Bxd3 9 Qxd3 h5! 10 gxh5 Rxh5 11 Ne2! Nbc6 12 Ng3 Rh8 13 h4 Qd7 14 Bd2 a5!? 15 a4? (15 a3!? a4 with the idea ...Na5 and ...Nc4 or ...c5) 15...Ng8 (15...Nb4! 16 Qb3 c5 wins the centre) 16 c3 with an advantage to White because of his greater command of space, M.Corden-J.Ball, Birmingham 1975.

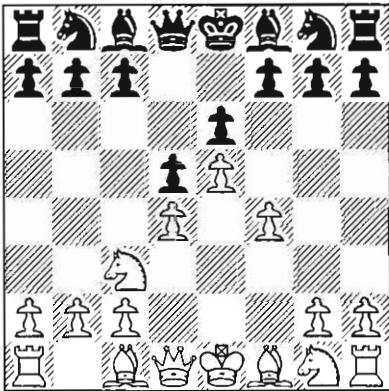
b) 5 Bd3 b6 (**Diagram 19**) and now:

b1) 6 Nf3 Ba6 7 0-0 Bxd3 8 Qxd3 Nc6 9 Ne2 (9 a3 Nge7!) 9...Nb4 10 Qd1 c5 11 c3 Nc6 12 Nf4 g6 13 c4 Nge7 14 cxd5 Nxd5 15 Nxd5 Qxd5 and Black has equality, J.Fleck-W.Gscheidlen, German League 1984.

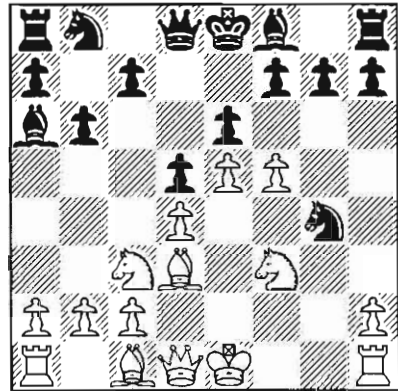
b2) It makes sense to put the c3-knight back on e2 when it doesn't block the light-squared bishop, but this still uses time: 6 Nce2 Qd7 7 Nf3 (7 Ng3 Ba6 8 Nf3 c5 9 Bxa6 Nxa6 10 Qe2 Nc7 11 Be3 Qb5!? 12 Qxb5+ Nxb5 is equal, K.Seeck-M.Carl, Kropp 1993) 7...Ba6 and we have transposed to note 'b2' to White's 7th move in Line B.

c) 5 Qg4 h5 6 Qf4 b6 (Tiemann awards this an '!') 7 Nf3 Ba6 8 Bxa6 Nxa6 9 0-0 Nh6 with mutual chances, according to Smyslov.

**A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Ng8 5 f4 (Diagram 20)**



**Diagram 20 (B)**



**Diagram 21 (B)**

### 5...b6

This is the most common plan but by no means the only one:

a) 5...c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Be3 cxd4 8 Nxd4 Nxd4 (8...Bd7) 9 Bxd4 Ne7 is a sort of standard position in which the knight on g8 shows its worth, but Black lags in development: 10 Bc5!? (White can play simply 10 a3 to stop ...Bb4, when after 10...Nf5 11 Bf2 Be7

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

12 Bd3 he should have some advantage, although a manageable one) and now:

a1) 10...Nf5 11 Bxf8 Kxf8 is unclear. Black's king is very badly placed, but he has ...Qb6, and after 0-0-0, a combination of moves such as ...Ne3, ...Bd7, ...Rc8 that put White's king position under similar scrutiny. But he should avoid 11...Qh4? 12 g3 Nxc3 13 hxc3 Qxh1 14 Bxc7 Rg8 15 Bf6!

a2) 10...b6 11 Bd6? (11 Bb5+ Bd7 12 Bxd7+ Qxd7 13 Bd6 Nf5 14 Bxf8 Rxf8 15 Qf3 Rc8 with a modest edge for White) 11...Nf5 12 Bxf8 Qh4+! 13 g3 Nxc3 14 hxc3 Qxc3+ 15 Kd2 (15 Ke2 Ba6+) 15...Qxf4+ 16 Ke1 Qg3+ 17 Kd2 Qf4+ 18 Ke1 Qxe5+! 19 Qe2 Qxe2+ 20 Bxe2 Kxf8 was Wang Zili-D.Gedevanishvili, Sydney 1991. Black's four passed pawns on the kingside should outweigh the extra piece, although White did manage to win this top-level battle.

b) 5...Nh6 6 Nf3 b6 7 Bd3 Ba6 and now with 8 g4!? White sacrifices a pawn for the sake of attack. This is not as foolish as it may look at first, because he immediately breaks down Black's crucial blockade of f5: 8...Nxc4 9 f5 (**Diagram 21**) 9...Bxd3 10 Qxd3 Nc6 11 h3 Nh6 12 Bxh6 gxh6 13 Rg1 (13 f6!?) 13...Qd7 (It's hard to be enthusiastic about Black's position: after 13...Bb4, in order to get Black's bishop out before a3 and f6 comes, McDonald gives 14 fxe6 fxe6 15 Rg7; a tougher defence is 13...exf5! 14 Qxf5 Bb4 15 Rg7 Qe7 16 0-0-0 Bxc3 17 bxc3 Nd8! 18 Rdg1 Qe6, although 19 Qh5 with the idea of Nh2-g4 keeps the pressure on) 14 a3!? (14 f6!) 14...0-0-0? 15 f6 (Bladez2-Alefzero, Internet 2005). Black's bishop and rook are out of play, which must be very bad for him. He should have prevented f6 by 14...exf5! 15 0-0-0 Be7; for example, 16 Ne2?! 0-0-0 17 Nf4 Rhg8 and Black stands well. A better try for White is 16 Rde1 0-0-0 17 Rg7 Qe6! 18 Ne2 Bf8 19 Nf4 Qd7 20 Rg2 Be7. Then 21 Rg7 Bf8 apparently only draws, but what else?

Returning to 5...b6 (**Diagram 22**):

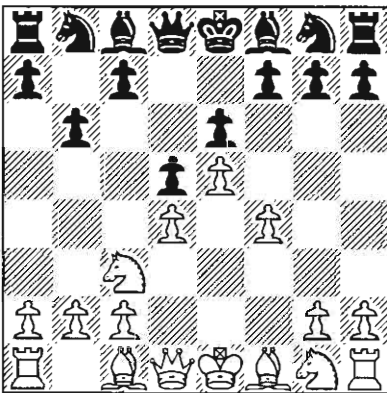


Diagram 22 (W)

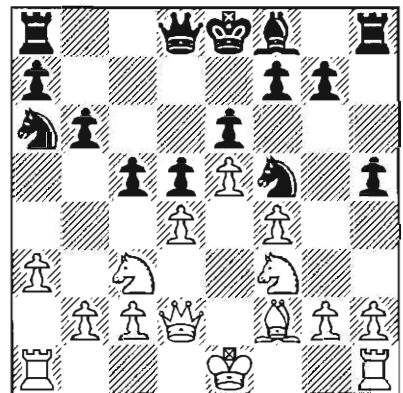


Diagram 23 (W)

6 Nf3 Qd7 (the set-up 6...Nh6 7 Be3 Nf5 8 Bf2 h5 is familiar by now) 7 Be3 c6!? 8 h3 h5 9 Rg1 Ba6 10 Bxa6 Nxa6 11 Qe2 Nc7 12 g4 0-0-0 13 0-0-0 Kb7 14 Kb1 and White's position looks a little better but he needs a plan, B.Macieja-J.Gonzalez Rodriguez, Internet Chess Club 2000.

### 6...Nh6 7 Nf3 Nf5!?

In the illustrative game above, Petrosian played ...Qd7 and worked on the queen-side without playing this move.

### 8 Bf2 h5 9 Qd2

9 Bd3 might be met by 9...Be7 10 Qe2 a5!? 11 0-0-0 Ba6, and White's space gives him an edge, but nothing exceptional. Black can make moves such as ...a4 and a well-timed ...c5.

### 9...Ba6 10 Bxa6 Nxa6 11 a3!? c5! (Diagram 23) 12 0-0-0

Or 12 0-0, when 12...Rc8 (12...c4 is a good alternative) is a flexible move that keeps the options of ...cxd4 and ...c4 open. For example, 13 dxc5 Bxc5 14 Nb5 Qd7 15 Nbd4 Bxd4 16 Nxd4 Nxd4 17 Bxd4 Nc5 with equal chances.

### 12...c4

(Al\_Mohammad-Larselona, Playchess 2003) Black has genuine prospects for a queenside attack and the position is in dynamic balance.

### B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Ng8 5 Nf3 (Diagram 24)

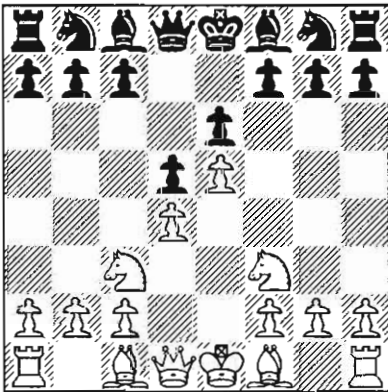


Diagram 24 (B)

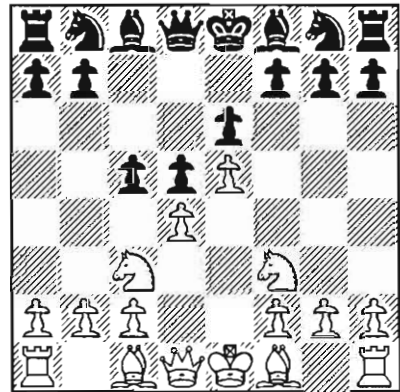


Diagram 25 (W)

Instead of concentrating upon permanent protection of e5 (as 5 f4 did), White simply develops.

### 5...b6

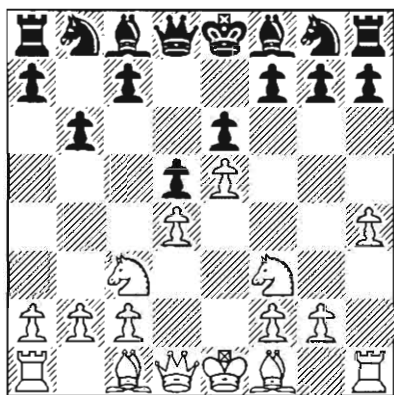
## Dangerous Weapons: The French

The most interesting alternative is 5...c5 (**Diagram 25**), again relying upon the transfer of Black's knight to f5 in order to pressure d4: 6 Be3 (6 Bg5 Be7 7 Bxe7 Nxe7 8 dxc5 Nd7 9 Qd4 Nc6 10 Qe3 Qa5 11 Bb5 Qb4 12 0-0-0 Qxc5 may be a bit better for White but is fully playable) 6...cxd4 7 Nxd4 Nc6 8 f4 Nge7 (a different and perhaps better approach would be 8...Bd7 9 Bd3 Qb6 10 Ncb5 Bc5 11 c3 Nxd4 12 cxd4 Bb4+ or 9 Be2 Nh6 10 0-0 Bc5) 9 Ncb5! Ng6 10 Qd2 a6 11 Nc3 Be7 12 g3 (White should hold a small advantage at this point; Khalifman suggests 12 0-0-0 0-0 13 Kb1) 12...Bd7 13 Bd3 f6!? 14 0-0 (or 14 exf6 Bxf6 15 Bxg6+!? hxg6 16 0-0-0 Rc8 17 Qd3 Kf7 18 Kb1 Na5 with counterchances) 14...fxe5 15 Nxc6 Bxc6 16 Bxg6+ hxg6 17 fxe5 Qc7 18 Bd4 0-0-0 was about equal in M.Apicella-J.Mercier, French Ch. 1990.

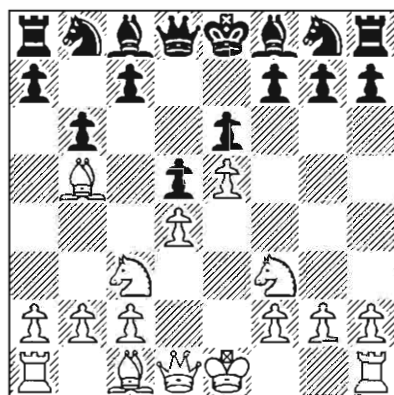
### 6 Bd3

There are two key alternatives:

a) 6 h4 (**Diagram 26**) tries to gain space on the kingside; it is a typical move in many lines of the 5 Nf3 variation:



**Diagram 26 (B)**



**Diagram 27 (B)**

a1) 6...Ba6 7 h5 Bxf1 8 Kxf1 h6 (White would win too many dark squares if allowed to play h6) 9 Bf4 Qd7 10 a4!? Nc6 11 Qe2 Nge7 12 Nb1!? (a logical but slightly elaborate reorganization) 12...g5!? (this kingside assault is more interesting than 12...Na5 13 Bd2 Nec6, as occurred in N.Mitkov-I.Zaja, Bozen 1998) 13 hxg6 (or 13 Bd2 Bg7 with the idea ...f6) 13...fxg6 14 Nbd2 Bg7 15 Kg1 (15 Nb3 Rf8! 16 Bd2 g5) 15...g5!? 16 Nxc6! 0-0! 17 Nh3 Nxd4 18 Qg4 Ndf5 19 Nf3 Qe8 and Black beats off the attack with ...Qg6.

a2) 6...Qd7 7 h5 h6 (the same standard structure as in 'a1') 8 Bf4 Ba6?! (8...Ne7! 9 Be2 Ba6 10 Bxa6 Nxa6 11 Qe2 Nb4 12 0-0-0 c5 13 dxc5 bxc5 14 a3 Nbc6 and Black can build up queenside chances) 9 Bxa6 Nxa6 10 a4 c6 was I.Cheparinov-

L.Karlsson, Gothenburg 2005. Apart from 11 0-0 Nc7 12 a5, as played, there was 11 a5! b5 (or 11...Qb7 12 0-0 Ne7 13 axb6 axb6 14 Qe2 with advantage) 12 0-0 b4 (12...Ne7 may be best) 13 Ne2 c5 14 dxc5 Nxc5 15 Ned4 when White obviously has the upper hand.

b) 6 Bb5+ (**Diagram 27**) is given an '!' by Tiemann: 6...c6 (6...Bd7 7 Bd3 c5!?) 7 Bd3 (C.Lutz-J.Fries Nielsen, Copenhagen 1995, became completely blocked after 7 Ba4 a5 8 a3 Ba6 9 Ne2 Bxe2 10 Qxe2 b5!?) 11 Bb3 a4 12 Ba2 Nd7 13 c3 h6 14 Bb1 Ne7 15 Bd3 Qc7 16 h4 Nb6 17 h5 Nc4; I suspect that White can do better) 7...Ba6 8 Ne2 (Psakhis cites 8 0-0 Ne7 9 Ne2 Ng6 10 Bg5 f6 (?) 11 exf6 gxf6 12 Nf4! 'with better prospects for the first player', A.Suetin-B.Gulko, Moscow 1970; obviously 10...Be7 is correct) 8...Bxd3 9 Qxd3 Ne7 10 Nf4 (all normal moves thus far; White undoubtedly stands a little better here, but it's nothing to panic about) 10...Ng6!? 11 Nh5! (**Diagram 28**).

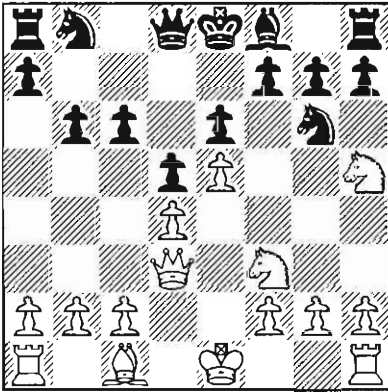


Diagram 28 (B)

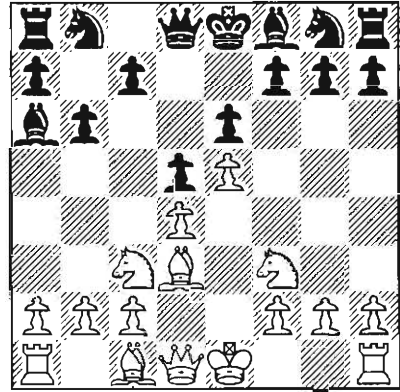


Diagram 29 (W)



**BEWARE!** This is one of White's most effective moves in several lines of the ...Ng8/...Bf8 system. It prevents the development of the bishop on f8 and makes it difficult for Black to unwind.

Here he has just enough resources: 11...Nh4! 12 Ng5? (rare and slow-developing defences often provoke overambitious responses; nevertheless, Black doesn't stand badly after 12 0-0 Nd7! 13 Re1 g6, for example 14 Nf6+ Nxf6 15 Bg5 Be7 16 Bxh4 Ne4 17 Bxe7 Qxe7 18 Nd2 Nxd2 19 Qxd2 0-0 20 Rac1 c5) 12...Nxc2+ 13 Kf1 Nh4 14 Nxh7 (14 Rg1 Nf5, and the blocking square f5 will interfere with White's attack) 14...Qc8! 15 Qh3 (15 Nxf8 Rxh5; or 15 Ng3 Be7 16 f4 Nd7 17 Ng5 c5) 15...Rxh7 16 Qxh4 Nd7 17 Qg4 c5 (White's position is an utter mess) 18 Bf4?! (but there's really nothing good: 18 c3?! cxd4 19 cxd4 Qc4+ 20 Kg2 Nxe5; 18 dxc5 Qxc5 19 Qe2 Rc8 20 c3 Qc4!) 18...cxd4 19 Kg2 Qxc2 20 Ng3 Qxb2 and Black won,

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

B.Abramovic-Z.Nikolic, Skender Vakuf 1980.

### 6...Ba6 (Diagram 29)



**BEWARE! Watch out for the idea 6...a5? 7 Ng5! Be7 8 Qg4 (or 8 h4) 8...Nh6 9 Qh5. There are only so many non-developing moves Black's position can stand.**

### 7 Bxa6

Alternatively:

a) 7 0-0 Bxd3 8 Qxd3 Ne7 9 Ne2 Qc8! 10 Nf4 Qa6 11 b4 Qxd3 12 Nxd3 a5! (12...Nec6?! 13 Bd2 Nd7 14 a4 left White clearly better in D.Vargic-I.Zaja, Medulin 1997) 13 c3 (13 b5 c6) 13...axb4 14 cxb4 Nec6 15 b5 Na5 (15...Nb4 16 Nxb4 Bxb4 is also fine) 16 Bd2 Ba3, or 16...Nc4, and the game is level.

b) 7 Ne2 (Diagram 30).

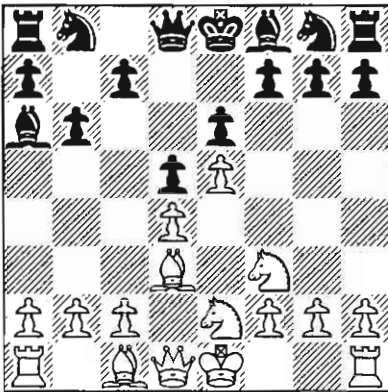


Diagram 30 (B)

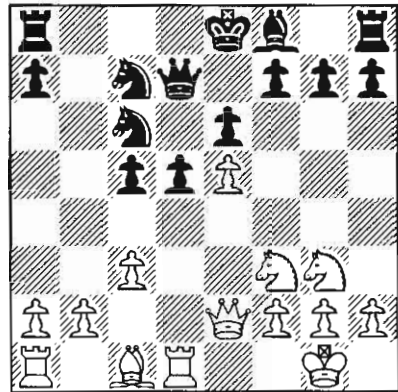


Diagram 31 (B)

This is a solid plan for White, with these possible continuations:

b1) 7...Bxd3 8 Qxd3 Qd7 9 0-0 c5 (9...Nc6 10 Bd2 Nge7 11 Rac1 0-0-0 12 a4 was B.Abramovic-Z.Nikolic, Vrnjacka Banja 1988, when Tiemann gives White the advantage 'because of the insecure position of Black's king') 10 c3 c4!? (10...Nc6 may be better, because dxc5 is not yet a threat) 11 Qc2 Nc6 (A.El Hamido-E.Grant, Buenos Aires Olympiad 1978). At this point, Khalifman gives 12 Ng3 b5 13 b3 Rb8 14 Be3 Ba3!? 15 Nh5 g6 16 Bh6! with a small advantage for White. Indeed, 16...Bf8 17 Bxf8 Kxf8 18 Ng3 must be good for the first player.

b2) 7...Qd7!? 8 0-0 (8 Nf4 Ne7 9 h4 Bxd3 10 Qxd3 Qc6 11 Be3 Nd7 12 a4 Ng6 13 Nh5, W.Wittmann-J.Nogueiras, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1984, and Tiemann pre-

fers White; the players agreed a draw after 13...f6 14 exf6 gxf6 15 Qb5, but White is clearly better in the final position) 8...c5 9 c3 Ne7 10 b3 (10 Ng3 Nec6 11 Nh5 Qb7 12 Be3 Nd7 13 a3 Bxd3 14 Qxd3 c4 15 Qc2 was K.Seeck-M.Carl, Bad Segeberg 1995; Black seems to get enough play with 15...g6! 16 Ng3 h6 intending ...Be7 and ...0-0-0) 10...Bxd3 (10...Ng6! is more accurate) 11 Qxd3 Nbc6 (11...Ng6 12 h4 h5) 12 Rd1 with a small advantage for White according to Khalifman. A plausible continuation would be 12...Ng6 13 h4 (13 dxc5? Bxc5) 13...cxd4 14 cxd4 Nb4 15 Qb1 Be7 16 h5 Nh4 17 Nxb4 Bxb4 18 h6 f5; White is positionally better, but it's a double-edged position.

b3) Perhaps the noncommittal 7...Ne7 is the best idea, intending 8 0-0 Ng6.

**7...Nxa6 8 Ne2 Qd7 9 0-0 c5 10 c3 Ne7 11 Ng3 Nc6 12 dxc5 bxc5 13 Qe2 Nc7 14 Rd1 (Diagram 31)**

White has the initiative according to Psakhis, following B.Gulko-D.Bronstein, Kiev 1969. That game continued 14...Be7 15 Ne4 0-0 16 Be3 c4 17 Nc5 Qc8 18 b4?! (18 b3! and White has a small edge after, for example, 18...Na5 19 Qc2) 18...cxb3?! (18...f6! would be at least equal) 19 axb3 a5 20 c4 Rb8 21 Rac1 Rd8 22 cxd5 Nxd5 23 Bg5 Bxg5 24 Nxb3 h6 with equality.

## Characterization of the ...Ng8/...Bf8 System

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣
Attacking Nature	♣
Positional/Strategic Nature	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣
Risk	♣ ♣ ♣
Reward	♣ ♣ ♣
Theoretical Depth	♣ ♣ ♣

## Chapter Eleven

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# A Leap of Faith

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nh6 (Diagram 1)

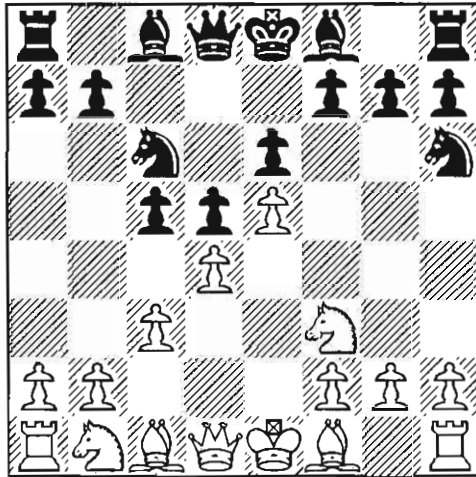


Diagram 1 (W)

The Advance Variation, **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5** (Diagram 2), has always had its adherents. White decides to immediately claim space and restrict Black's pieces: notably his knight on g8, which can no longer be developed on f6, and his bishop on

c8, which is directly blocked. By far the most frequently-played moves are as follows:

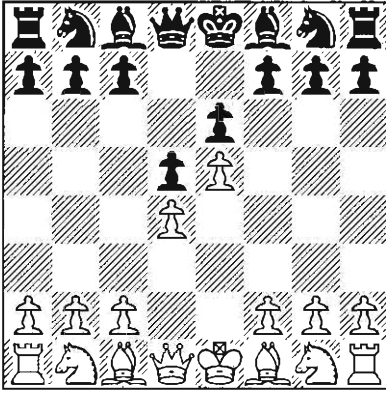


Diagram 2 (B)

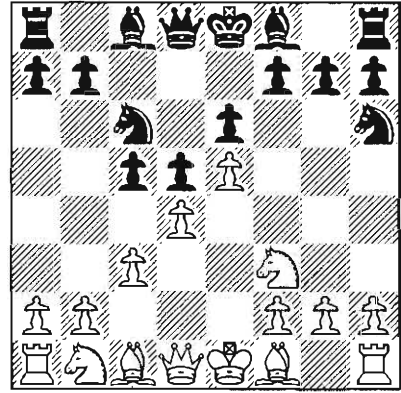


Diagram 3 (W)

### 3...c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3

Black has attacked the pawn on d4 while White has bolstered it with c3 and Nf3. Now 5...Qb6 has appeared in thousands of master games, and 5...Bd7 is the main alternative. I'm proposing that you play...

### 5...Nh6!? (Diagram 3)

Remember what we just said about this knight not being able to go to f6? With 5...Nh6, Black plays flexibly, not wishing to commit his queen to b6 or his bishop to d7 before it's clear where they are best placed. Furthermore, ...Nh6 is a relatively 'fast' move, in that if White plays slowly Black can make the no-nonsense moves ...f6, ...fxe5 and ...Nf7, putting pressure on White's most important square e5. But Black also has the option of playing ...Nf5 if White's set-up makes that move effective.

Right away the question arises: what about 6 Bxh6 (or Bxh6 on one of the next few moves)? After all, this leaves Black with weak doubled h-pawns as well as specific weaknesses on h5 and f6. It must have been this possibility that for decades prevented 5...Nh6 from being played at master level, at least not more than very rarely. Today, however, allowing doubled rook pawns has become much more common, and players have found that in many variations of the French they are compensated by other advantages:

- a) Black gets the two bishops, a long-term advantage.
- b) Without his dark-squared bishop White will find it difficult to attack Black's king, and he will have one less defender of the key squares d4 and e5.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

c) The move ...f6 gains in value, especially because Black can play ...Bg7 without loss of tempo and put more pressure on e5.

d) The open g-file can be useful for one of Black's rooks, and since ...f6 will generally open the f-file, Black can get a nice set of rooks staring down at White's king-side.

All in all, we can say that Black's knight move is a leap of faith, but that there are reasons to be faithful.

Naturally White has multiple ways of meeting such a flexible move. Among top players, Sveshnikov's idea of playing dxc5 in conjunction with Bxh6 has been played as much as any other. We'll start with an example of that strategy.

## Illustrative Games

□ D.Morosi ■ D.Luppi

Correspondence 2002

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6

The actual sequence of moves in this game was 1 e4 c5 2 c3 e6 3 d4 d5 4 e5 Nc6. I've transposed the moves into the far more common French Defence order.

5 Nf3 Nh6 6 dxc5 Bxc5

An instructive game with the same motif was A.Khalifman-G.Kaidanov, Moscow 1987: 6 Bxh6 gxh6 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 Bd3 f6! (**Diagram 4**)

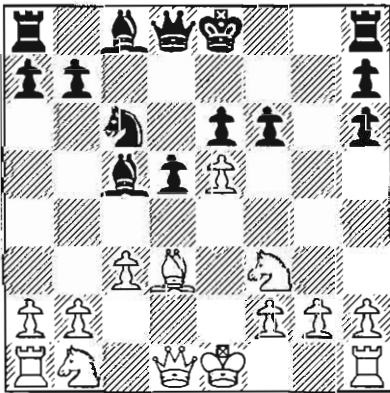


Diagram 4 (W)

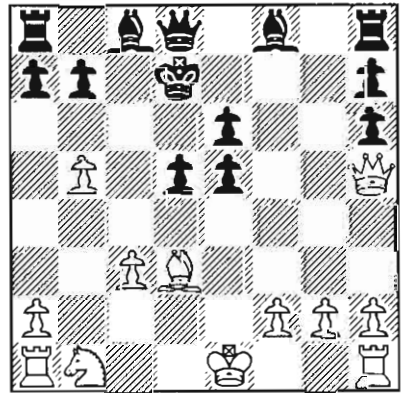


Diagram 5 (W)

9 b4 Bf8! 10 b5 (otherwise Black will win the centre by either capturing the pawn on

e5 or forcing its exchange by ...Bg7; for example, 10 Qe2 Bg7 11 exf6 Qxf6, or here 11 Bb5 0-0 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 0-0 a5!, threatening ...Ba6 and ...axb4 and answering 14 Re1? with 14...axb4 15 cxb4 fxe5 16 Nxe5 Rf5!) 10...Nxe5 11 Nxe5 fxe5 12 Qh5+ Kd7 (**Diagram 5**) (another typical French idea: in many positions from all sorts of variations the king is well placed on d7, defended by its pawn majority and allowing for superior coordination of Black's forces) 13 Qxe5 Rg8 (Khalifman feels that Black already has some advantage; his two bishops, kingside attack and mobile centre more than make up for the looseness in his position) 14 g3 Bd6 15 Qe2 Qf6 16 0-0 (16 Bxh7 Rg7 17 Bd3 wins a pawn but uses up precious time and allows 17...e5!) 16...b6 (not a bad move, but 16...e5! followed by ...Kc7 and developing the c8-bishop is better) 17 a4!? Bb7 18 a5 (a logical plan to gain queenside play in the face of Black's build-up; 18 Nd2!? is another try, when it would be dangerous for Black to grab the c-pawn) 18...bxa5 19 Rxa5 Bc5 20 Ra4! Rg5? (20...e5! is still a good move, happily going into 21 Bxh7 Rg7 22 Bc2 Rf8) 21 Rg4?! (21 Nd2! with the idea 21...Qxc3 22 Nf3 would finally give White his share of the centre and neutralize Black's attack) 21...Rxf4 22 Qxg4 Rf8 23 Qe2 e5 24 Nd2 e4 25 Nxe4 (a desperate attempt, since White stands horribly after both 25 Bc2 Qxc3 26 Nb1 Qc4 with the idea 27 Qd2?? e3 and 25 Bb1 Qxc3 26 Kg2 Qb2!) 25...dxe4 26 Bxe4 Bxe4 27 Qxe4 Qf3! 28 Qxf3 Rxf3 29 c4 Rc3 30 Rd1+ Kc7 31 Rd5 Rxc4 32 Rh5 Kb6 33 Rxh6+ Kxb5 0-1.

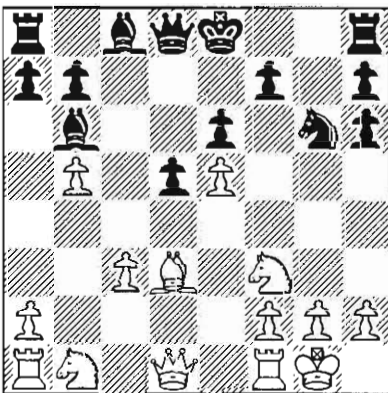
**7 b4**

White decides to make Black commit with his bishop and discourages it from retreating to f8 as we saw in Khalifman-Kaidanov.

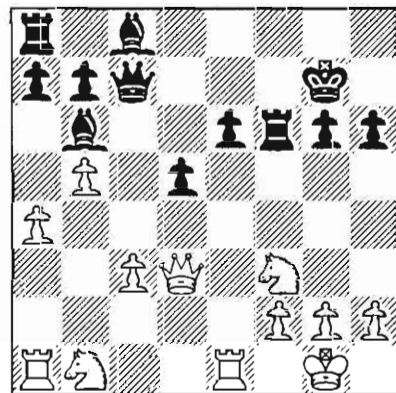
**7...Bb6**

We will see more about this main line in the theory section, so I'll keep the opening notes brief and let you enjoy the game.

**8 b5 Ne7 9 Bxh6 gxh6 10 Bd3 Ng6 11 0-0 (Diagram 6)**



**Diagram 6 (B)**



**Diagram 7 (W)**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Here we have a standard position. The moves leading up to it and alternatives will be examined in the theory section.

Black's kingside has been weakened but he has the bishop pair in return. In addition, White's queenside is compromised and his e-pawn requires support.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Although many players have used this system as White, I don't think it poses any threat to Black, and in fact White has to think about how to equalize if Black uses his pieces aggressively.

### 11...Qc7!

This is the best move, attacking e5, holding down c4 and even reserving queenside castling if appropriate. 11...0-0 is playable, but then White has more leeway developing his pieces and his practical results have been better than those when facing 11...Qc7.

### 12 Re1

Alternatively:

a) It's not smart to surrender the e-pawn when ...0-0-0 is still an option: 12 Qd2 Nxe5 13 Nxe5 Qxe5 14 Qxh6 Bd7 15 a4 0-0-0 favours Black's bishops and centre.

b) 12 Qe2 0-0!? (or 12...Bd7! 13 Rd1 0-0-0, when again we see a potential advantage of delaying ...0-0-0) 13 c4!? f5 (13...Nf4 14 Qd2 Nxd3 15 Qxd3 dxc4 is balanced) 14 cxd5 Qg7!, threatening ...Nf4, and Black stands well.

### 12...0-0 13 a4 f5!?

A good move, although a more typical approach would be 13...f6 14 Bxg6 hxg6; for example, 15 Qd3 Kg7 16 exf6+ Rxf6 (**Diagram 7**). This may not seem so impressive for Black in view of White's control of e5, but for the moment the attack on f2 prevents the occupation of the outpost. Check back in a few moves: 17 Ra2 Bd7 18 Ne5 Raf8 (again f2 is a major problem for White) 19 Kh1! Rf5! (19...Be8 20 f3) 20 f4 Be8 21 g3 g5 etc. Black's two bishops are important, but you can especially see the power of the open f-file. This is just analysis, but much of the play was effectively forced in order to avoid a disadvantage.

### 14 Ra2!?

14 Qc1 Qg7 15 c4 Ba5! 16 Re2 Bc7 17 cxd5 exd5 18 Qe3 Nxe5! 19 Nxe5 Re8 wins the critical e-pawn.

### 14...Qg7! 15 Qc1!?

15 Qd2 Bd7 (15...Ba5! looks better) 16 c4 would be a more accurate version of this plan.

### 15...Bd7 16 c4 Ba5! 17 Re2 dxc4 18 Bxc4 Kh8 19 Rac2 Rac8 20 Na3 (**Diagram 8**)

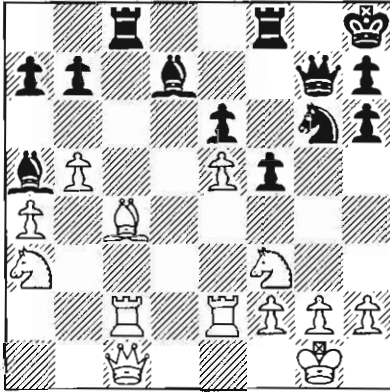
White lacks good squares for his pieces and has to protect his vulnerable e-pawn

while taking care not to let Black's bishop pair become active.

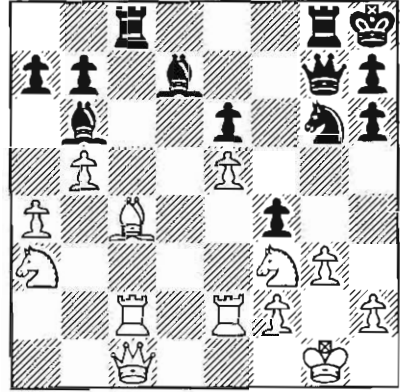
**20...Bc7 21 Qe3 Bb6 22 Qc1 Rg8!**

Threatening ...Nf4.

**23 g3 f4! (Diagram 9)**



**Diagram 8 (B)**



**Diagram 9 (W)**

The decisive assault begins.

**24 Kh1 fxf3 25 fxf3 Rg8 26 Rc3 Rf5**

Just like that, the e-pawn falls. There was little way to prevent this, however, and Black has had the better game for some time.

**27 Re4 Nxe5**

27...Rcf8! is also strong.

**28 Nxe5 Rxe5 29 Rf4 Rf5 30 Rcf3**

30 Rxf5 exf5 threatens ...Be6, ...f4 and other attacking moves.

**30...Rxf4 31 Qxf4 e5 32 Qe4 Bg4! 33 Rf1 Bh3 34 Rf3 Bd4 0-1.**

White can hardly move a piece. On 35 Qd5, 35...Qg5! wins shortly.

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□ J.Eklund ■ M.Johansson

Correspondence 1989

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**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nh6 6 Bd3**

White reasons that a natural and active developing move can't be bad, particularly against a knight move to the rim.

**6...f6!? (Diagram 10)**

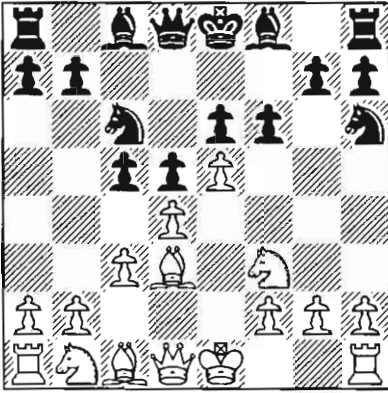


Diagram 10 (W)

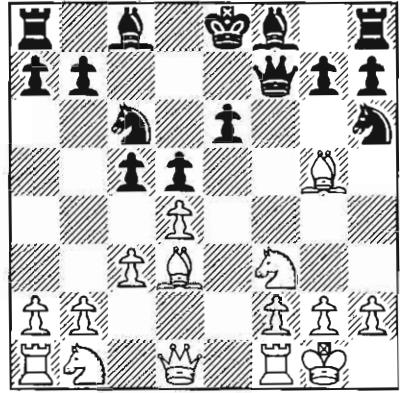


Diagram 11 (B)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** This direct assault upon the front of White's centre is hardly ever seen, but it's dynamic and, I think, effective.

The advantage of 5...Nh6 (over, for example, ...Nge7) is that Black now has the idea of ...Nf7 to hit e5 again. Specifically, the sequence 1...fxe5 2 dxe5 Nf7 is a major concern for White. Furthermore, there will be lines in which White plays Qh5+ and Black will render it harmless by responding with ...Nf7. The similar 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 f6 will be seen in the theory section, as well as the normal 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 Nf5.

### 7 Bxh6

7 exf6 gives up the centre for development: 7...Qxf6 8 Bg5 (8 0-0 is also possible) 8...Qf7 9 0-0 (**Diagram 11**). Black has two approaches to this position:

a) 9...cxd4 10 cxd4 Nf5! (or 10...Bd6! 11 Nc3 0-0) 11 Ne5 Nxe5 12 dxe5 Bc5 with equality. For example, 13 Qc2 (or 13 Nc3 0-0 14 Rc1 b6) 13...Bb6 14 Bxf5 Qxf5 15 Qxf5 exf5 16 Nc3 h6 17 Bd2 Be6 18 Rfd1 Kf7 and Black's d-pawn is not a problem, while 19 Nb5 Bd7! 20 Nd6+ Ke6 doesn't help White's cause.

b) 9...c4!? 10 Bc2 Bd6 11 Nbd2 0-0 and Black has no problems: 12 Bh4 Nf5 (12...Bd7?? allows 13 Ng5 or 13 Bxh7+) 13 Ng5 (or 13 Bg3) 13...Qg6 14 f4 h6 15 Nh3 Bd7 and Black is considering ...b5-b4. This position is unclear, with chances for both sides.

### 7...gxh6 8 Bb5

Strengthening the e5 point is logical, but it's a bad sign if White already has to move his bishop twice.

### 8...Bg7 (Diagram 12)

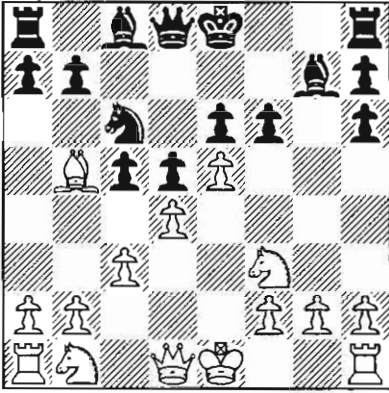


Diagram 12 (W)

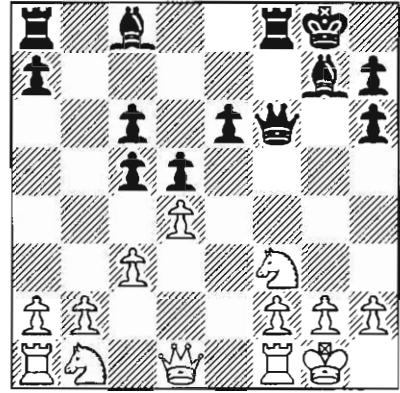


Diagram 13 (W)

This basic set-up will be familiar to experienced French Defence players, since it applies to more than the Advance Variation. Black's two bishops, pressure on the centre, and open f-file are a combination that has won many a point.

### 9 exf6 Qxf6 10 0-0

Since Black didn't interpolate ...cxd4, 10 dxc5 has to be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, he needn't be worried after 10...Qe7!? (10...0-0 11 Nbd2 e5!? is another idea), because 11 b4? is too weakening following 11...0-0 12 Bxc6 (12 0-0? Nxb4) 12...bxc6 13 0-0 (or 13 a3 e5) 13...a5 etc.

### 10...0-0

Threatening the d-pawn.

### 11 Bxc6 bxc6 (Diagram 13) 12 dxc5?!

12 Nbd2 tries to hold on to the centre. In that case Black can expect only a small advantage following 12...cxd4 (12...Rb8 13 Nb3! c4 14 Nc5 Rxb2 15 Re1 gives White counterplay based upon Black's horrendous bishop on c8) 13 cxd4 c5 14 dxc5 Rb8 15 Rc1 Rxb2 16 Rc2.

### 12...e5

Now things look very bad for White.

### 13 Nbd2!

Hoping to give up a piece for three pawns. This looks desperate, but it's hard to find anything that works. For example, 13 Qa4 Bd7 14 Nbd2 (14 Na3 e4 15 Nd4 Qh4! threatens ...Be5) 14...e4 15 Nd4 Qg5 16 N2b3 Bh3, and even if Black foregoes the win of the exchange he will stand to win by 17 g3 Rac8 18 Rad1 h5 19 Qxa7 h4; with moves like ...e3, ...hxg3, and ...Be5 in store, White can resign.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 13...Bb6 14 Re1 Rae8!?

White was anticipating 14...e4 15 Nxe4 dxe4 16 Rxe4 when Black is naturally better but has a lot of weak pawns.

### 15 Qa4! Bd3 16 Qxa7

16 Qh4! was best, when Black probably has to play 16...Qxh4 17 Nxh4 e4. Then White's knights are poorly placed, to say the least, and ...d4! is the immediate idea. One line would be 18 Nb3 Rb8 19 Rac1 a5 20 Nxa5 Rxb2 21 Nxc6 Rf4 22 g3 Rxf2 etc.

### 16...e4 17 Re3 h5! 18 Qc7 Bh6 19 Qg3+ Kh8 20 Rae1 Rg8 21 Qh4 Qg6 22 Qg3 Qf7 0-1.

Black never actually captured anything in the last 11 moves! But now 23 Qh4 Bxe3 24 Rxe3 Rg4 25 Qh3 exf3 finishes matters off.

## Looking a Little Deeper

### 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nh6

Now White's main moves are:

A: 6 dxc5

B: 6 Bxh6

C: 6 Na3

D: 6 Bd3

E: 6 a3

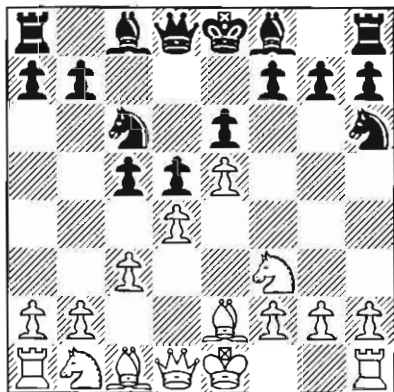


Diagram 14 (B)

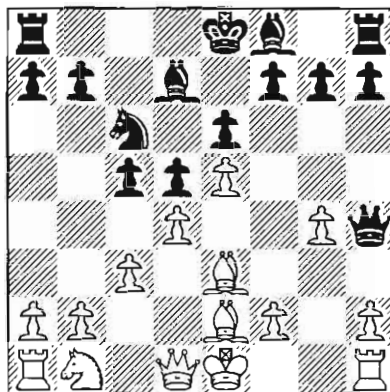


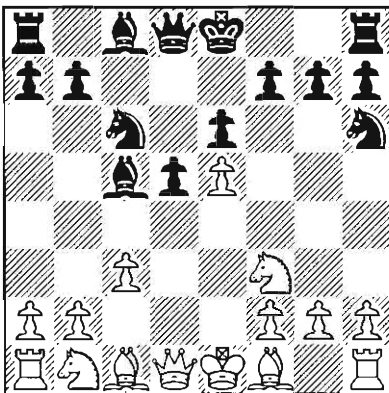
Diagram 15 (W)

6 Be2 (**Diagram 14**) is slow. For one thing, White may not wish to allow Black to reach some older main lines such as 6...Qb6 or 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 Qb6. To make that clearer, suppose that the main line of White's Advance Variation repertoire is 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Qb6 6 a3. By playing 6 Be2 he's eliminated that possibility. But he also gives Black more freedom to attack his centre. Thus 6...f6 is still a good move which would get more tests were 6 Be2 more common. Other lines include the following:

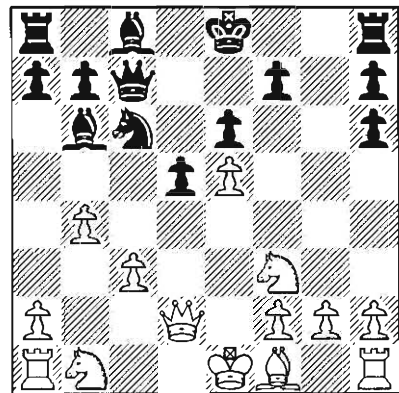
a) 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 (7 Bxh6 gxh6 8 cxd4 f6 9 0-0 Bg7 10 Bb5 0-0 11 Bxc6 bxc6 is an equal position of a type that we see in other lines) 7...Nf5 8 Nc3. This is a well-established older variation that results in equality after 8...Qb6 9 Na4 Qa5+ 10 Bd2 (10 Nc3 Qb6 11 Na4 Qa5+ repeats, or Black can play 11...Bb4+ 12 Kf1 Qd8 with an unclear position) 10...Bb4 11 Bc3 b5 (or 11...Bxc3+ 12 Nxc3 Qb6 13 Bb5 0-0) 12 a3 Bxc3+ 13 Nxc3 b4 14 axb4 Qxb4. At the very least this is evidence that White gains no advantage in answering 5...Nh6 by 6 Be2.

b) 6...Nf5 is more ambitious because White doesn't gain c3 for his knight: 7 g4!? (7 b3!? is possible, but not 7 0-0? cxd4 8 cxd4 Qb6) 7...Nh4 8 Nxb4 Qxb4 9 Be3 Bd7 (**Diagram 15**) 10 0-0 (or 10 Nd2 cxd4 11 Nf3 Qd8 12 cxd4 h5! 13 gxh5 Rxh5 14 h4 Ne7 15 Ng5 Rh8 16 Bd3 Nf5 17 Bxf5 exf5 18 Qb3 Qa5+!? 19 Bd2 Qb5 with at least equality, V.Kupreichik-V.Moskalenko, Lvov 1988) 10...Qd8 (10...h5! looks better: 11 g5 Ne7! 12 Bd3 c4 13 Bc2 Nf5 14 Bxf5 exf5 and Black has a nice advantage) 11 Nd2 Qb6 12 Rb1 cxd4 13 cxd4 a5 14 Kh1 a4 15 f4 h5 16 gxh5 Ne7! 17 Bf2 Bb5 (getting rid of the bad bishop but also preventing an exchange of White's bishop for his knight on f5) 18 b3 Bxe2 19 Qxe2 a3 20 b4 Nf5 21 Rfc1 Be7 22 Nf1 Kd7 ½-½ G.Sax-I.Glek, German League 1994 (again we see the black king on d7).

**A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nh6 6 dxc5 Bxc5 (Diagram 16)**



**Diagram 16 (W)**



**Diagram 17 (W)**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

We saw two examples of this popular system in our first illustrative game. Now I'll fill in some details.

### 7 b4

White has also captured on h6: 7 Bxh6 gxh6 8 b4 Bf8! (this can be avoided by playing 7 b4 first, as in the main line) 9 b5 Ne7 10 Bd3 Bg7 11 0-0 Ng6 (Black has completed his ...Bf8-g7 reorganization and targets the e-pawn; the knight on g6 also eyes f4 in some lines) 12 Bxg6! (another line is 12 Re1 0-0 13 Nbd2 f6 14 exf6 Qxf6 15 Rc1 Nf4) 12...hxg6 13 c4 0-0 14 cxd5 exd5 15 Nc3 d4! 16 Qxd4 (or 16 Ne2 Bg4 17 Nfxd4 Bxe5) 16...Qxd4 17 Nxd4 Bxe5 and the two bishops on an open board ensure a healthy advantage, E.Sveshnikov-I.Glek, Moscow 1991.

### 7...Bb6

Now 7...Bf8 doesn't make much sense, since the bishop can't go to g7.

### 8 b5

Rather than chase Black's knight to the defence of the kingside, White can try 8 Bxh6 gxh6 9 Qd2, but then 9...Qc7 (**Diagram 17**) hits the e-pawn keeps White honest. S.Dvoirys-O.Nikolenko, Sochi 2005, continued 10 Qf4 (10 Bb5 Bd7 11 Bxc6 Bxc6 12 Qxh6? is met by 12...d4!, or here 12 0-0 Rg8) 10...f6 11 Qxf6, but Black could have played 10...f5! 11 Qxh6?! Rg8!. Now 12 a4? is bad on account of 12...Rg6 13 Qh4 Qg7 14 g3 Bd8 15 Qh3 Rh6 16 Qg2 Nxe5. The best that the computer engine can do for White is 12 Qh5+ Kf8! (even 12...Qf7 13 Qxf7+ Kxf7 14 b5 Na5 gives clear compensation for a pawn) 13 Qh6+ Rg7 14 Qf4 Rg4 15 Qh6+ Kg8, when Black plays comfortably for the win.

### 8...Ne7

8...Na5 9 Bxh6 gxh6 10 Qd2 wins the h6-pawn. Black may be able to get compensation by ...Bd7, ...Qe7, ...0-0-0, ...Kb8 and ...Rc8, but the line doesn't seem necessary.

### 9 Bd3

9 Bxh6 gxh6 10 Bd3 Ng6 11 0-0 Qc7! is Morosi-Luppi, our first illustrative game above.

### 9...Ng4!?

9...Ng6 10 0-0 Ng4!? would transpose.

### 10 0-0 Ng6 (Diagram 18) 11 Bxg6

11 Qe2 f6! (11...Qc7 forces 12 Bxg6 anyway, but White has gained something by keeping Black's queen away from the kingside) 12 Bxg6+ (or 12 exf6 Qxf6 13 Bg5 Nf4!) 12...hxg6 13 exf6 gxf6! (**Diagram 19**). Black's superb centre dominates the play; for example, 14 Qc2 Kf7 15 h3 e5! 16 hxg4 e4 17 Nbd2 Bxg4! with a winning attack, or 14 h3? Qc7! with the idea 15 hxg4 Qh7.

### 11...fxg6

In the French, this recapture is correct 90% of the time. But right here I think that

11...hxc6 was just as good. Then a typical line might be 12 Qa4! Nh6 13 Bf4 Bd7 14 Qb3 Nf5, or 12 h3 Nh6 13 Bf4 a6! 14 Qb3 Nf5.

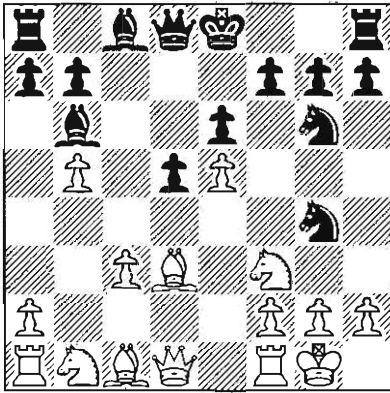


Diagram 18 (W)

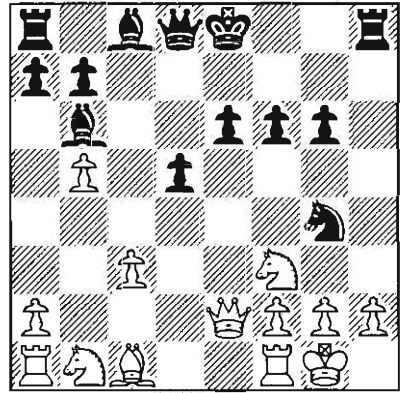


Diagram 19 (W)

### 12 h3

Collins suggests the more active 12 Ba3. After 12 h3 Black seems to get the better of it.

### 12...Nh6 13 Bxh6!? gxh6 14 Nbd2 0-0 15 c4 a6!

We are following A.Grischuk-E.Bareev, Cannes (rapid) 2001. Black's bishop on c8 is bad but his other pieces work together better than White's and he is activating his rook on a8. Over the next few moves, Black's bishop pair becomes a serious asset: 16 Qe2 axb5 17 cxd5!? exd5 (also good is 17...Qxd5 18 Ne4 Qc4) 18 Qxb5 Ra5 19 Qb4 Bc5 20 Qc3 Ba7 21 a4, and here 21...Rf4! was the easiest way to keep the initiative and clear advantage.

### B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nh6 6 Bxh6 gxh6 (Diagram 20)

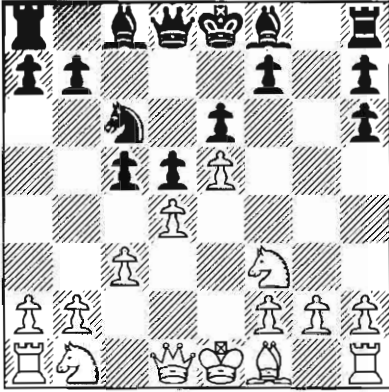
The immediate capture hasn't been played much in recent years. It seems to be widely acknowledged that the direct approach cooperates with Black's plans and leads to full equality. However, it's a good line for showing Black's standard counterplay.

### 7 Be2

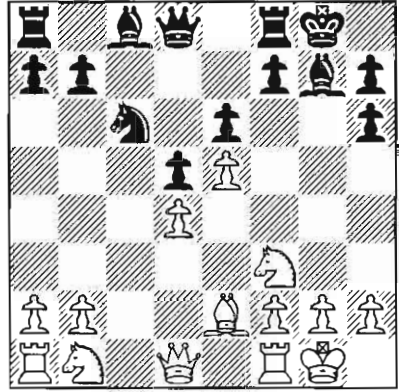
a) 7 Bd3 Qb6 forces White to defend somewhat awkwardly after 8 Qd2 (8 Qb3 is met by 8...Qxb3 9 axb3 cxd4 10 cxd4 Nb4) 8...Bg7 9 0-0 cxd4 10 cxd4 f6 11 Nc3 fxe5 12 dxe5 0-0.

b) 7 Bb5 Bd7 threatens ...Nxe5. Then a plausible continuation is 8 Qe2 Qb6 9 0-0 0-0-0 with an interesting imbalance.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French



**Diagram 20 (W)**



**Diagram 21 (W)**

c) N.Short-I.Glek, Cap d' Agde (rapid) 1996, saw 7 dxc5?! Bxc5 8 Bd3 (8 b4 Bf8! and ...Bg7 is effective, both attacking e5 and defending Black's king; compare this with 6 dxc5) 8...f6. Now we've transposed to Khalifman-Kaidanov in the first illustrative game above. But instead of 9 b4 Bf8!, the game proceeded 9 exf6 Qxf6 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bc2 Rf7! 12 Nbd2 Bd7 13 Nb3 Bb6 14 Qe2 e5 15 Rad1 e4 16 Ne1 Raf8 and Black had completely taken over: 17 Rxd5 Qxf2+ 18 Rxf2 Rxf2 19 Qxf2 Bxf2+ 20 Kf1 Bb6+ 21 Ke2 Bg4+ 22 Kd2 Rf2+ 23 Kc1 Be3+ 24 Nd2 Rc2 25 Bb3 Rxe1+ 26 Kc2 Bd1+ 27 Kb1 Bxb3 mate (0-1).

### 7...cxd4

Or 7...f6 8 0-0 cxd4 9 cxd4 Bg7.

### 8 cxd4 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0 (Diagram 21) 10 Nc3

10 Na3 f6 11 exf6 Qxf6 12 Nc2 Bd7 13 b4 Be8 14 b5 Ne7 15 Ne3 Ng6 16 a4 Nf4 left Black with some advantage in H.Nakamura-G.Antal, Budapest 2002.

### 10...f6 11 exf6 Qxf6

Now Black eliminates White's d-pawn and takes over the centre.

### 12 Qc2 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 Qxd4 14 Bd3 Bd7 15 Bxh7+ Kh8 16 Bd3 Rac8 17 Qe2 e5

Black has an obvious advantage, N.Djuric-D.Larino Nieto, Herceg Novi 2005.

### C) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nh6 6 Na3 (Diagram 22)

Answering one move of a knight to the rook's file with another! White intends to shore up his centre with the move Nc2. This manoeuvre is frequently played in the Advance Variation, notably in lines such as 5 Nf3 Ne7 6 Na3 cxd4 7 cxd4 Nf5 8 Nc2 or 5 Nf3 Bd7 6 Be2 Nge7 7 Na3 Ng6 8 h4! (before Black settles in with ...Be7

and ...0-0, e.g. 8 Nc2 Be7 9 0-0 0-0 and ...f6) 8...cxd4 9 cxd4. Now, as in our main line, 9...Bxa3!? 10 bxa3 weakens White's pawns but cedes the dark squares to White. After 10...h6! 11 h5 Nge7 12 0-0 (A.Grischuk-A.Graf, Bled Olympiad 2002), I think that Black should have tried 12...0-0!? intending moves like ...Nf5, ...f6 and eventual play on the queenside. However, compared to the 7...Bxa3 lines, White's extra space on the kingside and better-placed pieces make this a much riskier proposition for Black. The normal continuation is to leave the knight on a3 and play 9...Bb4+ 10 Kf1 h6 11 Nc2 Be7. You can see both the advantages and drawbacks of Na3-c2 in this position.

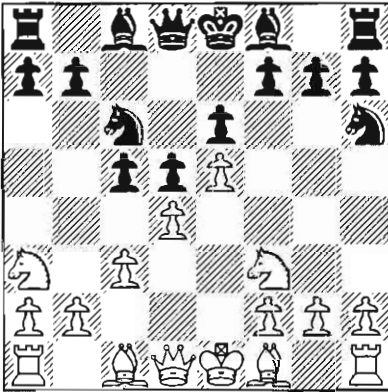


Diagram 22 (B)

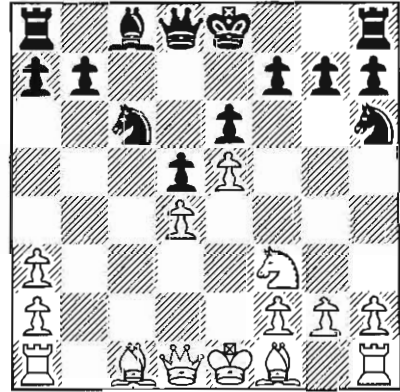


Diagram 23 (B)

### 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 Bxa3!? 8 bxa3 (Diagram 23)

Over the years, few players made this capture on a3, in either this or similar positions. White gains the two bishops and his bishop on c1 appears to have the potential for free reign over the dark squares all over the board. I have to admit that when playing and writing about the French I didn't take this idea very seriously. But recently I've begun to realize how useful Black's knights can be here and how difficult it is for White to achieve anything on the dark squares. There is no knight to occupy the internal weakness on d6, for example, and a bishop there can easily be chased away. In the meantime, Black can either simplify by means of ...Qa5+, or force White to defend d4 and exchange minor pieces, eliminating any serious attack on his king. On the queenside, White's lack of a b-pawn means that the squares c3 and c4 are undefended, which can be a significant advantage in an endgame or queenless middlegame. Furthermore, White lacks his conventional space grab by b4 that occurs so often in the Advance Variation. I think that this particular version of the ...Bxa3 idea is superior to those in several other Na3 variations because these advantages can be exploited quickly.

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For the record, the main line has been 7...Nf5 8 Nc2, when many moves and sequences have been tried. I think that one of the better lines begins with 8...Bd7; for example, 9 Bd3 Qb6 10 0-0 a5 (10...Nfxd4?? loses to 11 Nfxd4 Nxd4 12 Be3 Bc5 13 b4) 11 a3 (11 Bxf5 exf5 12 Be3 Nd8! 13 Rb1 h6 14 h4 Be7 15 h5 Ne6 16 g3 g5 was H.Jonkman-M.Gurevich, Vlissingen 1997; Gurevich recommends 11 Rb1) 11...a4 12 Bxf5 exf5 13 Nfe1 Na5 14 Nd3 Nb3 (or 14...Bb5) 15 Rb1 Be7 16 Nf4 Be6, P.Haba-S.Kristjansson, Pardubice 2002.

### 8...Nf5

This is more ambitious than 8...Qa5+ 9 Qd2, which also seems quite playable:

a) Black can try to occupy one of White's newly-created queenside weaknesses by 9...Qa4!? 10 Rb1 a6 11 Bd3 Nf5 12 Bc2 Qa5 13 Bxf5 exf5 14 0-0 0-0, and now things turned tactical in M.Vasicek-J.Gdovin, Czechia 1995: 15 Qg5!? Qa4 16 Qh4 Qc2! 17 Be3 Qxa2 18 Bh6! gxh6 19 Qxh6 f4! 20 Qg5+ (20 Ng5? Qc2; 20 Rfc1?! Bf5) 20...Kh8 21 Qf6+ Kg8 ½-½. Obviously there are a lot of options, and keeping the queens on involves some risk.

b) 9...Qxd2+ 10 Bxd2 Nf5 11 Bc3 0-0 12 Bd3 was J.Mora Manez-F.Gomez Gomez, Spanish Team Ch. 1994. As in many two-bishops-versus-two-knights positions, the side with the knights should open lines and define the play: 12...f6! (instead of the game's 12...Bd7) 13 exf6 (13 0-0 fxe5 14 dxe5 Bd7 give Black a comfortable position) 13...gxf6!? (13...Rxf6 is playable, but it cedes e5) 14 Bxf5 (14 0-0 is answered by 14...Nd6! with ...Nc4 in store, either before or after developing with ...Bd7 and ...Rac8 or ...Ne7) 14...exf5 15 Kd2 Re8 16 Rab1 b6 17 Rhe1 Re4! (**Diagram 24**)

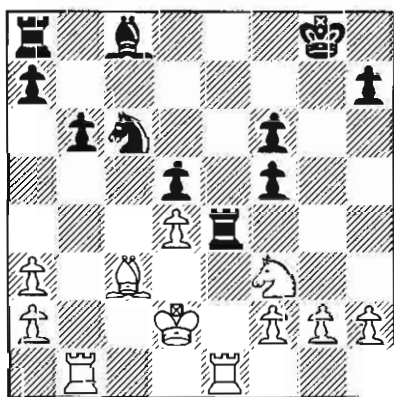


Diagram 24 (W)

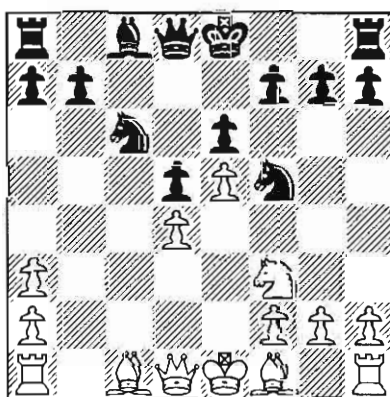


Diagram 25 (W)

(17...Bd7 and even 17...Ba6!? 18 Nh4 Re4! are also possible). If left alone in these positions, Black's knight can eventually head for c4. Equality seems the fair assessment for 8...Qa5+ as a whole.

Let's return to 8...Nf5 (Diagram 25).

**9 Bb2**

Apparently worse are 9 Qd2 f6 10 g4 Nh6 and 9 Be3 Qa5+ (or 9...Nxe3 10 fxe3 f6!?) 10 Qd2 Qxa3.

I.Zaitsev-K.Mesropov, Moscow 1996, went 9 Bd3 Qa5+! (not 9...Nfxd4? 10 Nxd4 Nxd4 11 Qg4) 10 Bd2 (or 10 Qd2 Qxd2+ 11 Bxd2 Nfxd4) 10...Qxa3 11 Qb1. Mesropov's 11...a6 was sound, but 11...Nfxd4! 12 Nxd4 Nxd4 13 0-0 Nc6 leaves the burden of proof on White to show compensation.

**9...Bd7**

With the bishop on b2, 9...Qa5+ 10 Qd2 Qxd2+ 11 Kxd2 0-0 or 11...Bd7 looks perfectly playable. Black has a queenside outpost to play with, supported by an open file. Only the great potential strength of the bishop pair makes this an unclear situation.

**10 Bd3!**

10 h4 0-0 11 g4?! Nh6 12 Rg1 f6! exploits White's f-file issues; for example, 13 exf6 Qxf6 14 g5 Qxf3 15 Qxf3 Rxf3 16 gxh6 Rf7, when after an exchange on g7 White has five isolated pawns remaining!

**10...Nh4!? (Diagram 26)**

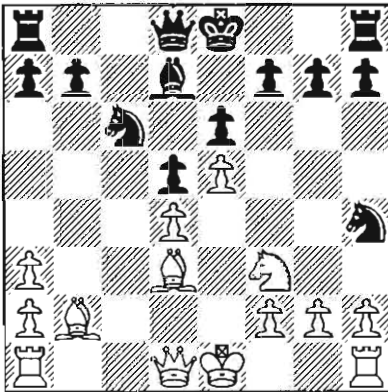


Diagram 26 (W)

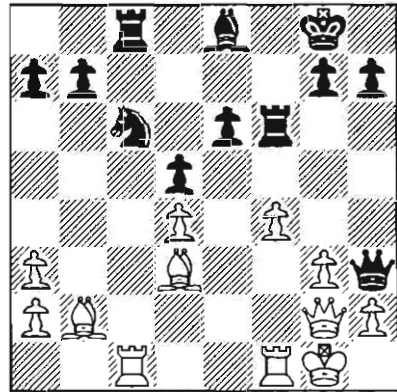


Diagram 27 (B)

Black reasons that White will have a difficult time attacking without a knight on the board. The main option is 10...0-0, and 10...Qa5+ is still interesting.

**11 Nxh4 Qxh4 12 0-0 Rc8 13 Rc1 0-0 14 Qd2 f5**

14...f6 may be more accurate.

**15 exf6!?**

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15 f4! keeps Black's bishop under restraint.

### 15...Rxf6 16 g3

(F.Mossakowski-A.Blees, Wichern 1995) Although 16...Qh5!? worked out well in the game, a more pointed move would be 16...Qh3!; a possible continuation being 17 f4!? (or 17 f3 Be8 18 Rfe1!? Rxf3 19 Bf1 Qh5 with the idea 20 Be2 Rf2!) 17...Be8! 18 Qg2 (**Diagram 27**) 18...Qxg2+! 19 Kxg2 Bg6 20 Bxg6 Rxg6. Black has a classic good-knight-versus-bad-bishop position, although White's better rooks keep the game within bounds; for example, 21 Bc3 (preventing ...Na5; 21 f5 is answered by 21...Rf6 22 fxe6 Rxe6) 21...Rf6! 22 Bb4 Kf7 and ...Ke8-d7 follows. I prefer Black in these positions, although his advantage shouldn't suffice to win.

### D) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nh6 6 Bd3 cxd4 7 cxd4

7 Bxh6!? gxh6 8 cxd4 was played in A.Grischuk-E.Bareev, Panormo 2001. Now the most direct solution seems to be 8...Bg7! 9 Nc3 f6 10 0-0 (10 Bb5 0-0 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 exf6 Qxf6 13 0-0 Rb8 14 Qe2 Qf4 15 Rfd1 Rb4!? is an example of the kind of dynamic imbalance these lines produce) 10...0-0 11 Re1 (11 Qc2 fxe5 12 Bxh7+ Kh8) 11...fxe5 12 dxe5 Bd7 13 Bc2 Be8 14 Nd4 Nxd4 15 Qxd4 Bg6 (or 15...Qg5!?) with a slight edge for Black.

### 7...f6

In the illustrative game Eklund-Johansson above, we examined 6 Bd3 f6. The interposition of 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 amounts to a trade-off: it does free c3 for White's knight, but it also means that dxc5 is no longer an option for White; in particular, he must find another answer to the attack on the d4-pawn.

Black can also play 7...Nf5 (**Diagram 28**).

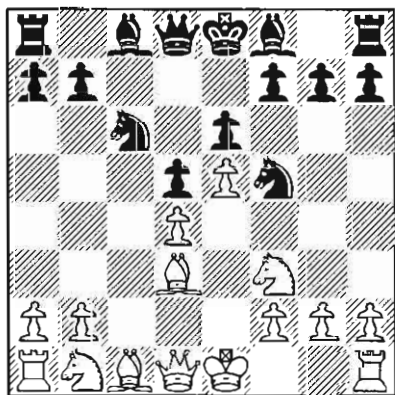


Diagram 28 (W)

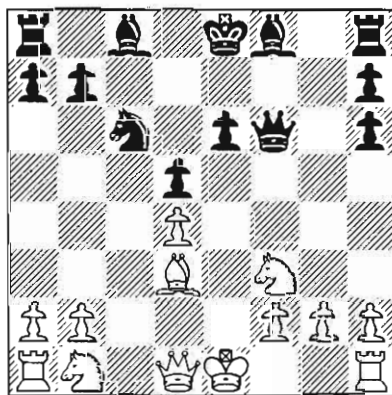


Diagram 29 (W)

This is one of the most popular positions in the Advance Variation, since it can

arise in several ways. Present theory indicates equality, but if White plays safely Black won't have many winning chances. Furthermore, there are hundreds of games and variations to study, which might not be to everyone's taste. For the record, a popular line is 8 Bc2!? Qb6 9 Bxf5 exf5, e.g. 10 Nc3 (10 0-0 Be6) 10...Be6 11 Ne2 h6 12 h4 0-0-0 13 Kf1 Kb8 14 Kg1 Be7 with equal chances. You may want to look into 7...Nf5 if you don't like some aspect of 7...f6.

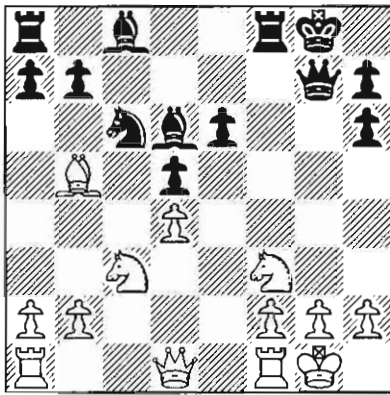
**8 Bxh6 gxh6 9 exf6 Qxf6 (Diagram 29) 10 Bb5**

White increases his grip on d4 and e5. The sequence 10 0-0 Bd6 11 Nc3 0-0 results in a position in which Black will combine threats against d4 with pressure down his open kingside files.

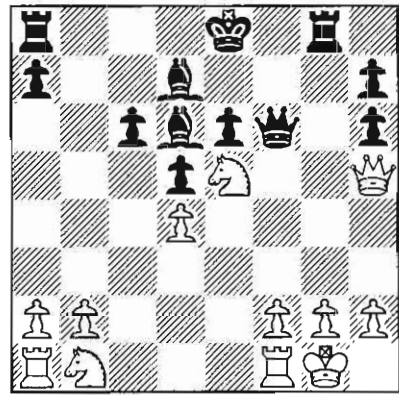
**10...Bd7**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! Better is 10...Bd6! 11 0-0 0-0. After 12 Nc3, 12...Kh8 is plausible, but more interesting is 12...Qg7 (Diagram 30).**



**Diagram 30 (W)**



**Diagram 31 (B)**

This intends 13...Rf4!, attacking the d-pawn and strengthening Black's position on the f-file. A possible line would be 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Qe2 Rf4 15 Kh1 Bd7 16 Rae1 Rb8 17 b3 Rb8 18 Ne5 Bxe5 19 dxe5 c5 with good central play. This continuation would fully justify the move 7...f6.

**11 0-0 Rg8?!**

Here Black gets another chance to play 11...Bd6!, with equal prospects.

**12 Bxc6 bxc6**

In this way Black opens his b-file and strengthens d5. Nevertheless, this is not an

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automatic recapture because he can find that his bishop on d7 is just too cramped.

### 13 Ne5!?

13 Nbd2! Bd6 14 Re1 Rb8 15 Nb3 intending Ne5, Rc1, etc. gives White the better game. Over the next few moves both sides play inaccurately.

### 13...Bd6 14 Qh5+?! (Diagram 31)

White merely encourages Black to improve his king position. Instead, 14 f4 is a solid move that gives White a small advantage.

### 14...Kd8

Better is 14...Ke7! 15 f4 c5 followed by ...Rab8.

### 15 Nf7+?! Kc7 16 Nxd6 Kxd6 17 Rd1 Rg5?

Black's activity and development are easy to underestimate in these lines. Here he has 17...Raf8! 18 Qe2 (18 Rd2 Rg5 19 Qe2 e5) 18...Rg4! 19 Qe3 e5 with equality.

### 18 Qe2 Rg8 19 g3 h5 20 Nd2 h4 21 Nf3

Once White wins e5 he is in a dominating position.

### 21...Rg4 22 Ne5 Re4 23 Qc2

Black can no longer defend, Chess64-Sonnygarcia, Playchess 2002.

## E) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Nh6 6 a3 (Diagram 32)

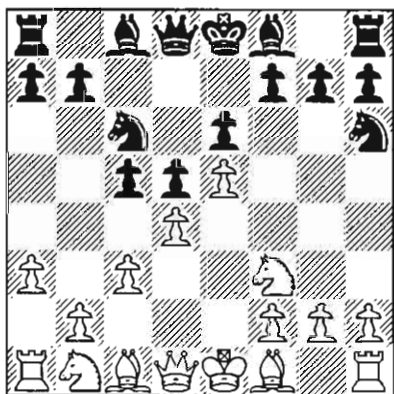


Diagram 32 (B)

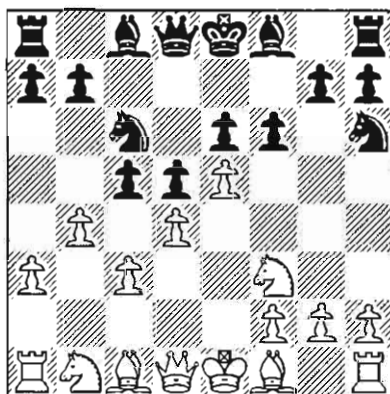


Diagram 33 (B)

You will probably encounter this move sometime, if only because so many players use 6 a3 versus 5...Qb6. There are significant differences, however, in that Black can make more dynamic moves than 6...Qb6.

### 6...f6!

There is no subtlety here: Black wants to tear down White's centre. Instead, 6...Nf5 7 b4 cxd4 8 cxd4 transposes to a main line. Black also has choices such as 6...c4 and 6...a5!?

### 7 b4!? (Diagram 33)

This is the consistent move and probably the best way to try to make something out of the position. Unfortunately, I can't find any examples of it. Other moves present no real difficulties:

a) 7 exf6 Qxf6 8 Bg5 Qf7 9 Bb5! Bd6 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 0-0 0-0 12 Qe2 (or 12 b4 Bd6 13 Nbd2 Nf5 with at least equality) 12...Qh5 13 Nbd2 Bd6! 14 Bh4 Nf5 15 Bg3 Nxc3 16 fxg3 e5 17 Nb3 (C.Samuelsen-C.Jepson, Torshavn 2003), and here simply 17...a6 18 Bxc6 bxc6 leaves Black with a big centre and two active bishops.

b) 7 Bb5 Nf7 8 Bf4 (8 exf6 Qxf6 9 0-0 cxd4 10 cxd4 Bd6 illustrates how the knight on f7 can be useful by covering e5 and g5) 8...g5!? (8...Bd7) 9 Be3 g4 10 Ng1 cxd4 11 cxd4 fxe5 12 Qxg4 exd4 13 Bxd4 e5 14 Qe2 Bd6 and Black's centre clearly outweighs any other factor.

c) 7 Bd3 Nf7! 8 Qe2?! (8 exf6 Qxf6 9 Be3 c4 10 Bc2 Bd6 at least equalizes) 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 Qc7 (or 9...fxe5 10 dxe5 g5! 11 h3 Bg7) and now 10 exf6? ran into 10...Nxd4! 11 Nxd4 Qxc1+ 12 Qd1 Qxd1+ 13 Kxd1 gxf6 in J.Valmana Canto-I.Salgado Lopez, Mondariz 2004.

### 7...Nf7!? (Diagram 34)

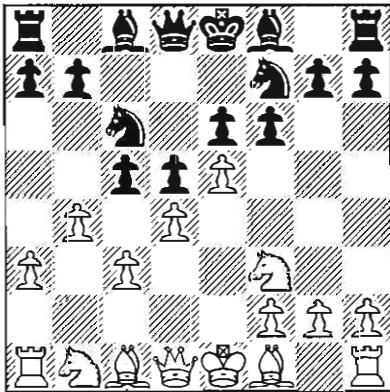


Diagram 34 (W)

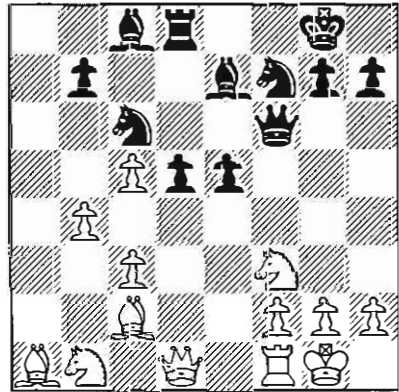


Diagram 35 (W)

What follows is analysis, which is wide open to improvement. Another logical course is 7...cxd4 8 cxd4 fxe5 (8...Nf7 9 b5 Na5 would be interesting, although White's centre and space advantage stay intact) 9 dxe5 (White should avoid 9 Bxh6? gxh6 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 dxe5 Qc7 12 f4 a5, or here 12 Qh5+ Kd8!, when

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

White's centre and queenside are both attacked. Black also stands well after 9 Nxe5 Nxe5 10 dxe5 Nf7 11 Bb2 a5!) 9...Nf7 10 Bb2, and now 10...a6 or even 10...g5!? is unclear.

### 8 exf6 Qxf6

8...cxd4?! is ill-timed in view of 9 b5 Na5 10 fxg7 Bxg7 11 cxd4.

### 9 dxc5!

9 bxc5 e5! frees Black's light-squared bishop, and the pawn grab 10 dxe5? (10 Be3 looks equal) 10...Nfxe5 11 Qxd5 Be6 12 Qe4 Bxc5 merely gives Black a large lead in development.

### 9...a5!? 10 Bb2 Be7 11 Bd3 0-0 12 0-0 axb4 13 axb4 Rxa1 14 Bxa1 e5 15 Bc2 Rd8 (Diagram 35)

Black has enough for a pawn.

## Conclusion

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I don't see anything which threatens 5...Nh6 on a fundamental level. If there were anything wrong with the knight development it would have to be a line with Bxh6. Indeed, 6 dxc5 Bxc5 7 b4 Bb6 8 Bxh6 is the most popular continuation at the top levels. However, the resulting positions are at least playable and I think promising for Black. This is probably one of the best systems in this book to use on a practical and theoretical level. My guess is that we'll probably see a lot more of 5...Nh6 in the years to come. In any case, you should have fun including it in your repertoire.

## Characterization of 5...Nh6

---

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	⚠ ⚠ ⚠
Attacking Nature	⚠ ⚠ ⚠
Positional/Strategic Nature	⚠ ⚠ ⚠ ⚠ ⚠
Risk	⚠ ⚠ ⚠
Reward	⚠ ⚠ ⚠ ⚠
Theoretical Depth	⚠ ⚠ ⚠

## Chapter Twelve

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# What can you do to me?

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6 (Diagram 1)

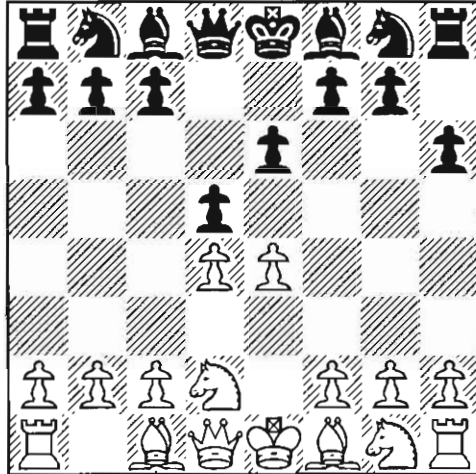


Diagram 1 (W)

White's most popular response next to 3 Nc3 is 3 Nd2, the Tarrasch Variation:

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 (Diagram 2)**

With this knight move, White protects his pawn on e4 without the risks that are

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

inherent in variations such as the Winawer (3 Nc3 Bb4) or the MacCutcheon (3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4). In those cases White must play in a less controlled environment, largely because of Black's strategy of doubling White's c-pawns by ...Bxc3. Furthermore, with a knight on c3, the move ...c5 can't be met by c3, so White's d4/e5 centre is in more danger of being broken up.

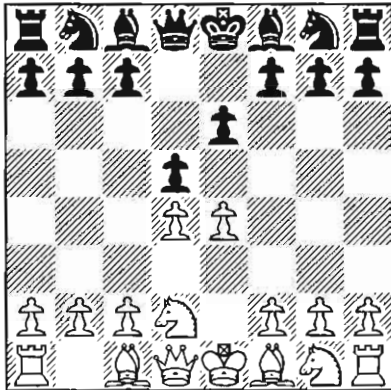


Diagram 2 (B)

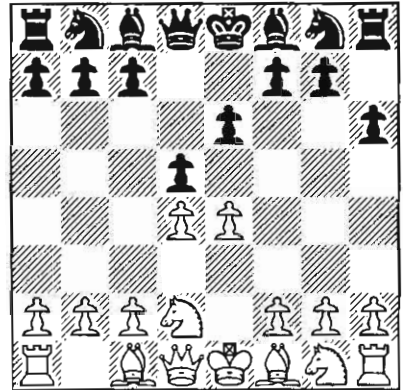


Diagram 3 (W)

After 3 Nd2, Black is faced with a fundamental decision about his strategy. Traditionally, this decision has been broken down into three major options:

- Attacking the pawn on e4 by 3...Nf6;
- Liquidating the centre by 3...c5;
- Surrendering the centre, as represented by 3...dxe4.

Another strategy, that of attacking d4 by 3...Nc6, has always been held in lesser regard. Recently, for good reasons, it has sprung to the forefront of theory and practice, and I have devoted Chapter 14 to this move.

What room does that leave for other moves and ideas? In this chapter, we will investigate a rather shocking move that has been played by grandmasters and other strong players:

### 3...h6!? (Diagram 3)

What's going on here? How can a non-developing and potentially weakening move like this be taken seriously? Part of the answer to that question is simplicity itself: although White's knight serves an essential defensive function, it is otherwise dubiously placed on d2! Right off, it blocks White's bishop on c1 and the queen on d1 (which otherwise provides protection to the pawn on d4). Furthermore, the knight is passively situated and controls nothing on Black's side of the board. Of course, that's hardly reason to condemn the move 3 Nd2, it just means

that White's knight will almost certainly have to move again in order to justify its existence and 'free' White's game.

How should Black respond to this general situation? Forgetting about 3...h6 for a moment, let's consider the two main responses to the Tarrasch Variation. The first is 3 Nd2 Nf6, when 4 e5 Nfd7 usually follows. Then whether White plays 5 Bd3 or 5 f4, his knight on d2 traditionally goes to f3 within a few moves; for example, 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ne2 followed by Nf3 or 5 f4 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ndf3. There are exceptions, but because of the closed nature of the position the knight will have little problem moving to a useful square. Black's other normal move is 3...c5, when again the knight on d2 will find a constructive function in every line, for example after the popular 4 exd5 Qxd5 5 Ngf3 cxd4 6 Bc4 Qd6 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Nb3, or 4 exd5 exd5 5 Ngf3 Nc6 6 Bb5 Bd6 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 0-0 Nge7 9 Nb3 etc.

With that in mind, let's return to 3...h6. We can now see how this semi-waiting move has a certain logic in that White still needs to find a use for his knight. He has the move, but must commit something in order to make progress. Black is challenging White, saying: 'What can you do to me?' As we will see below, every White move has some drawback, and in very important lines involving natural development by White, the move ...h6 will have concrete benefits for Black! This will be shown by examples and analysis.

## Illustrative Game

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□ J.Shaw ■ V.Eingorn

Bad Wiessee 2003

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This game by Eingorn is the best known of 3...h6 encounters, having appeared in *Chess Informant* and having been featured in Jeroen Bosch's *Secrets of Opening Surprises* article. The game itself isn't spectacular, but the excitement and instruction come in the notes.

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6 4 Ngf3**

This is White's most important try. Other ideas are covered in the theory section, as are alternatives for both sides on the next few moves.

**4...Nf6 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bd3 c5 7 c3 Nc6**

At this point Black commits to a central strategy. Several players have opted for a bishop exchange with ...b6 and ...Ba6.

**8 0-0 g5! (Diagram 4)**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Black's simple idea is to win White's key central d-pawn by playing ...g4.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Without 8...g5 there would not be much point to 3...h6. By comparison with the same position after 3...Be7, we see that:

- Black's pawn on g5 is better protected;
- Black's bishop might go to g7;
- Black's queen has a path to the kingside in the event of ...g4 or ...f6/exf6.

These are positive qualities that outweigh Black's relative loss in development.

Eingorn mentions 8...cxd4, but after 9 cxd4 Black has lost his option of ...c4, so White can defend his centre by Nb3.

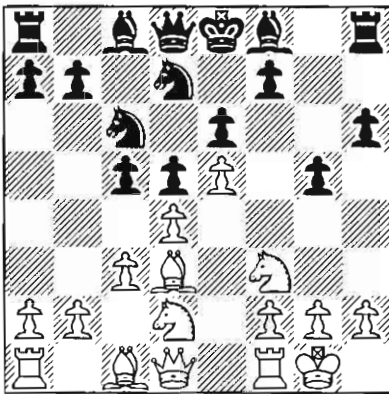


Diagram 4 (W)

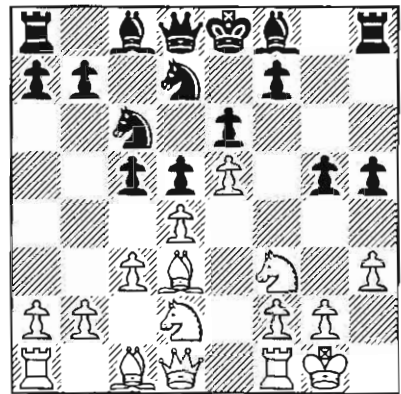


Diagram 5 (W)

### 9 dxc5

This clears d4 for a knight in the event of ...g4. On the other hand, it weakens the centre and helps Black to develop.

Instead, 9 h3 is the thematic idea, examined in the theory section under a slightly different move order. In this exact position it runs into the problem of 9...h5! (**Diagram 5**). Now White has several tries:

a) 10 dxc5? g4 11 Nd4 Ncxe5 attacks the bishop on d3 and threatens ...gxh3 as well as moves such as ...Bxc5, and ...Qg5 or ...Qh4.

b) 10 Nb1?! attacks g5, but simply 10...g4 11 Ng5 Qb6 breaks down the centre. Then 12 hxg4 cxd4 13 gxh5 Ndxe5 is an easy way to handle the position, since White's centre collapses and h5 is weak, a sample line going 14 cxd4 Nxd3 15 Qxd3 Qxd4 16 Qh3 Ne5!? 17 Nc3 Bd7 18 Be3 Qg4 19 Qxg4 Nxxg4 etc.

c) 10 g4 looks best, but still not equal after 10...hxg4 11 hxg4 Qb6!. This attacks d4, which is hard to defend; for example, 12 Re1 cxd4 (12...Be7 13 Qa4 Nf8 14 dxc5 Bxc5 15 Re2 Bd7 16 Qc2 Be7 gives level chances) 13 cxd4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Qxd4 15 Nb3 Qa4!?. Black is a pawn to the good and has prepared a convincing answer to

16 Bxg5 Rg8 17 f4 (Diagram 6):

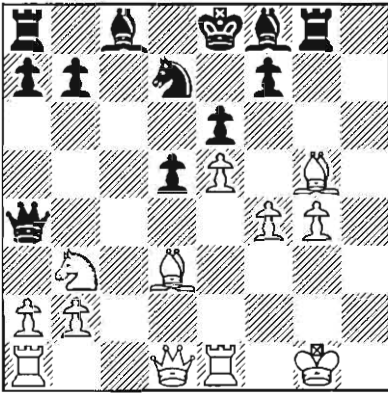


Diagram 6 (B)

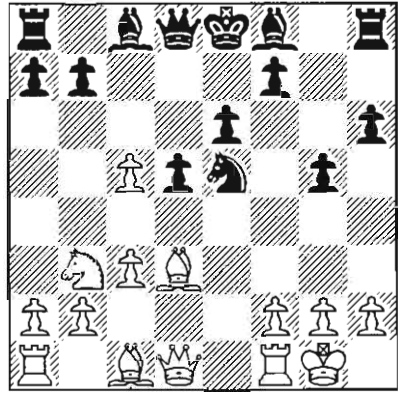


Diagram 7 (B)

17...Rxg5! 18 fxg5 Qf4 with a strong attack on both the king and White's weak pawns, for example:

c1) 19 g6 Qg3+ 20 Kf1 Bg7! 21 gxh7+ Kxf7 22 Qd2 Qh3+ 23 Kf2 Qh4+ 24 Kf1 Kg8 and ...Nxe5 follows; e.g., 25 Qg2 Nxe5 26 Re3 Nxd3 27 Rxd3 Bd7 28 Kg1 Rf8 29 Rc1 Rf4 30 Rg3 Bxb2! 31 Rh3 Qf6.

c2) 19 Kg2 Nxe5 20 g6 f6! (this is stronger than 20...Nxd3 21 gxh7+ Ke7) 21 Rf1 Qg5 22 Bb5+ Bd7 23 Bxd7+ Kxd7 and White's king is so exposed that Black will probably end up with three passed pawns!

**9...Bxc5**

9...g4!? 10 Nd4 Nxe5 is also playable but not equal: 11 Bb5! Bxc5 12 f4! gxf3 13 N2xf3. Bosch says that 9...Ndx5 10 Bb5 Nxf3+ 11 Nxf3 Bxc5 12 c4 'gives considerable play for the pawn'.



**BEWARE!** Even though 9...Ndx5 10 Bb5 isn't clear, Black would be on the defensive anyway after 9...Ndx5 10 Nxe5! Nxe5 11 Nb3! (Diagram 7), which maintains equal material and contains the scary idea of f4.

**10 Nb3 Bb6**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Alternatively, 10...Bf8!? (Diagram 8) returns to the ...g5/...Bg7 theme and is not bad!

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

For example, 11 c4 dxc4 12 Bxc4 Bg7 13 Bb5 0-0 14 Bxc6 bxc6 is fine for Black. To make up for his weak c-pawn, Black has two bishops, the b-file and pressure on e5. White's trouble with e5 may lead him to playing 11 Bb5!, e.g. 12...Bg7 12 Re1 Qc7 13 Qe2 0-0! (threatening e5 again) 14 h4! g4 15 Nfd4 Ndx e5 16 Bxc6! bxc6 (or 16...Nxc6 17 Qxg4 e5 18 Nf5 Bxf5 19 Qxf5 Qd6 20 Be3 Ne7, which is level) 17 Bxh6! Bxh6 18 Qxe5 Qxe5 19 Rxe5 with equal play, Black's bishop pair and terrific centre being countered by White's control over c5.

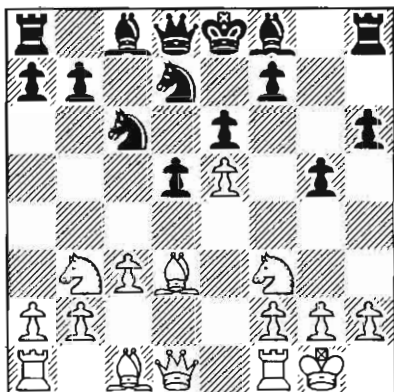


Diagram 8 (W)

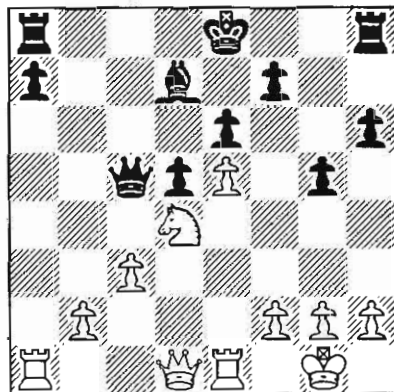


Diagram 9 (B)

### 11 Re1 Qc7!?

A tad slow. As always in the ...h6/...g5 positions, 11...g4! is critical. One line would be 12 Nfd4 (12 Nfd2? Qh4 13 g3 Bxf2+! 14 Kxf2 Qxh2+ 15 Kf1 Qxg3 is good for Black) 12...Nxe5 13 Bf4 Qf6 14 Bg3 h5 (or 14...Nxd3 15 Qxd3 0-0) 15 Bb5 Ng6 and White has to prove that he has enough for his pawn.

### 12 Bb5 Nc5?

Much better is 12...a6 13 Ba4 Kf8! 14 Bxc6 bxc6, although with this degree of simplification, Black's kingside weaknesses seem more important than usual.

### 13 Be3! Nxb3 14 axb3 Bd7 15 Bxc6 bxc6 16 b4

Surprisingly, 16 Bxb6! Qxb6 17 b4 c5 18 bxc5 Qxc5 (18...Qxb2 19 Qd4) 19 Nd4 transposes to the game!

### 16...c5

The move 16...a5!? may improve slightly, but it doesn't change the fundamentals.

### 17 bxc5 Bxc5 18 Bxc5 Qxc5 19 Nd4 (Diagram 9)

White has a good knight versus a bad bishop and Black has very serious weaknesses.

**19...Rb8 20 Ra2 a5 21 Nb3?**

Why? White has a large advantage after 21 Qf3!.

**21...Qc4! 22 Rxa5 Ba4 23 Nd2 Bxd1 24 Nxc4 dxc4 25 Rxd1 0-0**

Now Black has enough pressure on White's pawns to hold the draw.

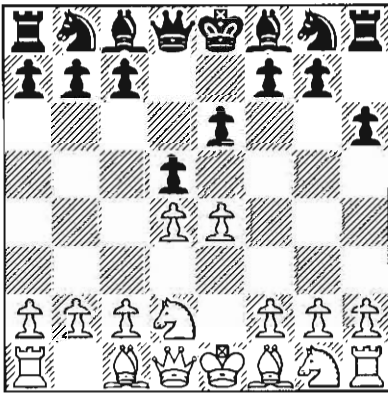
**26 Rd2 Rfd8 27 Rxd8+ Rxd8 28 g4 Rb8 29 Rc5 Rxb2 30 Rxc4 Re2 31 Rc5 Re1+ 32 Kg2 Kg7 33 c4 Kg6 34 h3 h5 35 Kf3 h4 36 Rb5 Rh1 37 Kg2 Rc1 38 Rc5 1/2-1/2**

Black will win the e-pawn and then hold tight after 38...Kg7 39 Rc8 Re1 40 c5 Rxe5 41 c6 Rc5.

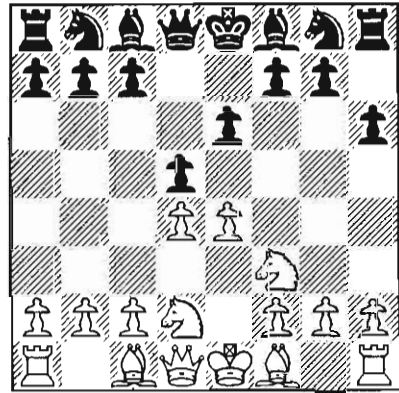
All in all, Black had opportunities for advantage in the early opening, and the game was balanced until the inaccuracy on move 12. This is good news for 3...h6, since White's moves were extremely natural ones.

## Looking a Little Deeper

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6 (Diagram 10)**



**Diagram 10 (W)**



**Diagram 11 (B)**

Now we look more systematically at the variations, keeping in mind that there is very little analysis on 3...h6 so that I'll be supplying almost all of the notes:

**A: 4 Ngf3**

**B: 4 Bd3**

**C: 4 c3 and others**

**A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6 4 Ngf3 (Diagram 11)**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Again, this is by far the most common response and the only one with a coherent theoretical structure. It develops a piece to its natural square, is relatively non-committal, and is a move that White makes in almost every variation of the Tarasch. If you play 3...h6 you will see 4 Ngf3 in most of your games.

### 4...Nf6

Although ...c5 is a standard answer to various fourth moves by White, here it makes no sense. To see why, compare this with 3 Nd2 c5 4 Ngf3, when few people would play 4...h6?. One good line for White is 4...c5? 5 exd5 exd5 6 Bb5+ Nc6 (or 6...Bd7 7 Bxd7+ Nxd7 8 0-0 Ngf6 9 Re1+ Be7 10 Qe2) 7 0-0, intending 7...Bd6 8 c4!, when Black is far behind in development.

After 4...Nf6, White has:

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**A1: 5 e5**

**A2: 5 Bd3**

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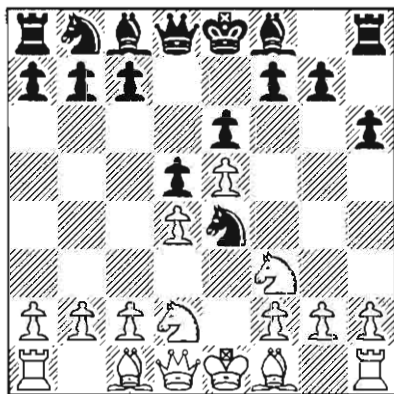
### A1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5

This initiates the most thematic challenge to the 3...h6 system. After 5 e5 we get the standard French pawn structure that characterizes most of the variations of that opening.

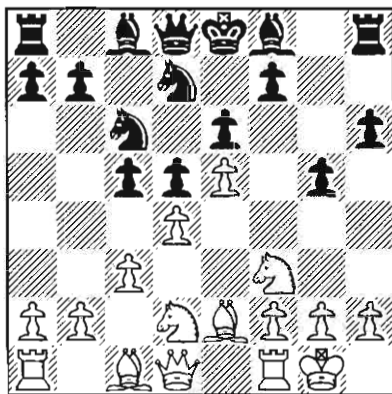
### 5...Nfd7



**BEWARE: 5...Ne4?! (Diagram 12) is dubious in this position.**



**Diagram 12 (B)**



**Diagram 13 (W)**

It has an advantage in that White cannot indulge in 6 Nxe4 dxe4 7 Ng5??, his normal response to ...Ne4. However, development by 6 Bd3 Nxd2 7 Bxd2 leaves White a full tempo ahead over the sister variation 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Ne4 5 Bd3 (with this move order 5 Nxe4 dxe4 6 Bc4 is probably Black's most serious problem) 5...Nxd2 6 Bxd2, when 6...c5 is only slightly better for White, if that. With ...h6 and Nf3 inserted, however, we have continuations such as 7...c5 8 dxc5 (or 8 c3 Qb6 9 b3) 8...Bxc5 9 0-0 Nc6 (9...0-0 might even run into 10 Qc1!?, threatening Bxh6, although naturally 10 c3 is also good) 10 c3 0-0 11 b4! Bb6 12 b5 Na5 13 Qa4! Bd7 14 Qg4 f5 15 exf6 Qxf6 16 Rae1 (intending total domination via Ne5) 16...Bc7 17 Be3 Rad8 18 Bd4! e5 19 Qg3!, when either Black's e-pawn will fall or he is forced to accept a very large positional disadvantage after 19...exd4 20 Qxc7 Qb6 21 Qxb6 axb6 22 Nxd4!, or 22 cxd4 Nc4 23 Re7.

### 6 Bd3

Two alternatives for White:

a) 6 Be2 (if White develops slowly, his centre can more easily fall under pressure) 6...c5 7 c3 Nc6 8 0-0, and now:

a1) At this point 8...Be7 is safe and probably best: 9 Nb3 c4!? (9...0-0 is also satisfactory) 10 Nbd2 b5!, switching to a traditional pawn-chain attack via ...b4. White is a long way from mounting any sort of kingside attack.

a2) 8...g5 (**Diagram 13**) is always a candidate.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON! 9 h3?! h5 is frightening for White, who has no obvious answer to ...g4.**

Instead, 9 Nb3! shores up d4 (notice that if the bishop were on d3, then Nb3 would fail to...c4). After 9 Nb3, play might continue 9...c4!? (9...g4 10 Ne1 h5 is asking for an early f4) 10 Nbd2, and here 10...Bg7 11 Ne1 0-0 is of interest, preparing ...f6 or perhaps ...Ne7-g6.

b) 6 c3 c5 7 a3!? (**Diagram 14**) is another way to avoid the main lines with Bd3. It was played in F.Vallejo Pons-A.Morozevich, Monaco 2004, a rapidplay game between two players with an average rating of 2700!

The idea is to play b4, to stabilize the centre and gain space, and to cover b4 against intrusions by Black's knight or bishop.

b1) Morozevich played 7...Be7, the game continuing 8 Bd3 (8 b4!) 8...a5 9 b3 (another idea is 9 0-0 a4 10 Re1 Nc6 11 Bc2 b5 12 Nf1, heading for the kingside) 9...b6 10 Bb5!? Na6 11 0-0 Nc7 12 Be2 a4 13 b4 Ba6 and Black got rid of his bad bishop, achieving full equality.

b2) The most interesting game after 7 a3 is Yeo Min Yang-Goh Wei Ming, Singapore 2004: 7...a5! 8 Be2 Nc6 9 Nf1, and now:

b21) The game went 9...b6!? (a safe move, again trying to exchange bishops) 10

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Bb5 (or 10 Ng3 Ba6 11 Bxa6 Rxa6 12 0-0 g6!?, stopping Nh5, when 13 Qa4 Qc7 14 Be3 Bg7 intends ...0-0 and...f6) 10...Qc7 11 Qa4 Na7 12 Bd3 Bb7 (there's nothing wrong with 12...Be7 either) 13 Ne3 (13 Bf4 Bc6 14 Qc2 Bb5!? achieves what Black has been after, with approximate equality; or the ambitious 13...Be7 14 Ne3 g5 15 Bg3 h5) 13...Bc6 14 Qd1 b5 (or 14...Bb5) 15 0-0 Rb8 16 Ne1 b4 17 a4!? g6!? (to hold up f4-f5, but Black can also work on the queenside, e.g. 17...c4! 18 Bb1 Nb6 with the idea 19 f4 bxc3 20 bxc3 Nxa4!; for all that, White seems to have an advantage in this stage of the game) 18 f4 h5 (dissuading g2-g4) 19 Nf3 Nc8?! (a bit passive, heading for e7; 19...c4 20 Be2 b3 was an option) 20 c4! Ne7. White definitely has the better of it now by virtue of his greater territory, and 21 b3! would consolidate that advantage.

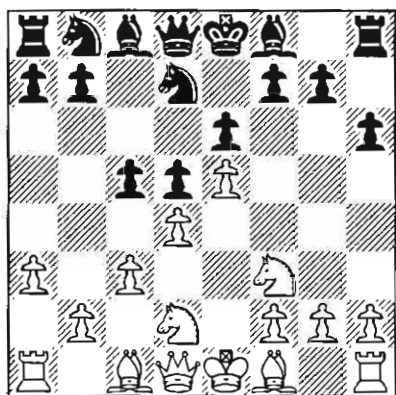


Diagram 14 (B)

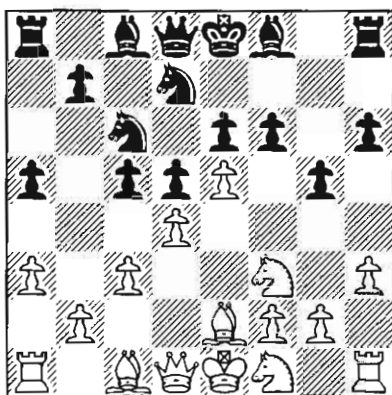


Diagram 15 (W)

b22) The 3...h6 player has to be tempted by 9...g5!, which does indeed look effective: 10 h3 (10 Ng3? g4 11 Ng1 cxd4 12 cxd4 Qb6; or 10 Ne3 h5 11 h3 a4!? with the idea 12 Nh2 Be7 13 Bxh5 cxd4 14 cxd4 Nxd4! 15 Bxf7+ Kxf7 16 Qxd4 Nc5!) 10...f6 (Diagram 15) 11 exf6 (as usual, Black will gladly allow a check on h5 in return for the centre: 11 N3h2?! fxe5 12 Bh5+ Ke7, when Black's centre shields his king and White will have to activate Black's pieces in order not to lose his entire centre on d4) 11...Qxf6 12 Ne3 cxd4 13 cxd4 Qg7! (to answer h4 with ...g4) 14 0-0 Bd6 followed by ...0-0. Black's activity gives him a balanced position and good practical chances on the kingside.

Returning to 6 Bd3 (Diagram 16).

### 6...c5

Black's alternative plan with ...b6 is seen in many move orders. One of them is 6...b6 7 0-0 a5 (Diagram 17). Black wants to get rid of his problem bishop via ...Ba6, a manoeuvre that we see in many French Defence Variations (he may not have

liked 7...Ba6 because of 8 Bxa6 Nxa6 9 c4, threatening Qa4 with control of the queenside). After 7...a5:

a) A typical move for White would be 8 c4. Let's look at a few ideas: 8...Ba6 (not 8...Be7? 9 cxd5 exd5 10 e6! fxe6 11 Bg6+ Kf8 12 Qe2 Nf6 13 Re1 Nc6 14 Ne5!) 9 Qa4 is a logical option; for example, 9...Be7 10 Rd1 0-0 11 Bb1! (with the idea of Qc2) 11...c5?! (11...Re8 12 cxd5 exd5 13 Nf1 Nf8 is stronger) 12 Qc2 f5 13 cxd5 exd5 14 e6 Nf6 15 Qxf5.

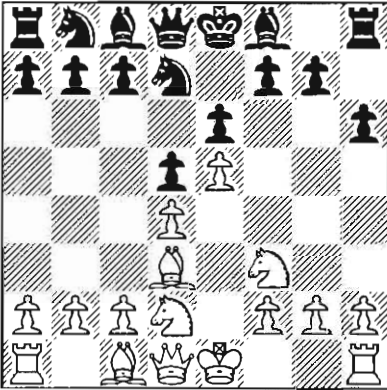


Diagram 16 (B)

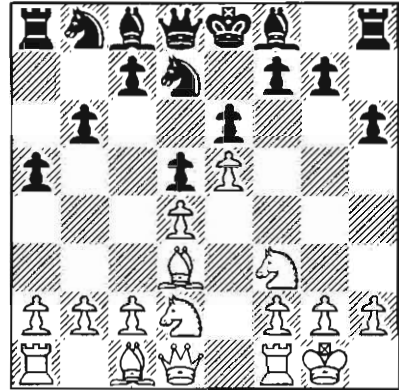


Diagram 17 (W)

b) 8 a4!? Ba6 9 Qe2 Qc8 10 Rd1 Bxd3 11 Qxd3 Qa6 (Black aims for good versus bad bishop, although he will still be short of space) 12 c4 Nc6 13 b3 Nb4 14 Qb1 Be7 15 Ba3 c6 16 Ne1 0-0 17 Nd3 Rac8 18 Nxb4 (18 f4 would strengthen White's centre; it's about equal at this point of the game) 18...axb4 19 Bb2 f6?! 20 Qg6! Rf7!. This position arose in E.Szylar-E.Bricard, Toulouse 1998. Black is protecting g7 and preparing ...Nf8, eliminating any serious attack. The position is level and Black went on to win.

### 7 c3

A decent alternative is 7 c4, which attacks Black's centre but weakens White's. Then:

a) G.Ginsburg-V.Eingorn, Metz 2003, continued 7...cxd4 8 cxd5 Nc5! (8...exd5 9 e6! fxe6 10 Bg6+ Ke7 11 Nb3!? yields an unclear attack; I'd rather be White!) 9 Bb5+ Bd7 10 Bxd7+ (**Diagram 18**) 10...Qxd7?! (a key juncture) 11 d6! Qb5 12 Nxd4 Qb4 (12...Nd3+ 13 Kf1 Qc5! 14 N2b3 Qc4 attacks e5, but White has 15 Qe2 Nxe5 16 Nb5!) 13 N4f3 Nd3+ 14 Kf1 Nc6 15 Qe2 Nf4 16 a3 Qa4 17 b3 Nxe2 18 bxa4 Nc3, and here 19 h4 0-0-0 20 Nc4 Nxa4 21 Bf4 might have been the easiest way. The opening favoured White but needn't have. 10...Nbx4?! looks better, when 11 d6 Nd3+ 12 Kf1 N3xe5 wins a pawn, and 11 dxe6 Nd3+ 12 Kf1 fxe6 13 Nb3 N7xe5 14

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Qh5+ Nf7 isn't clear: Black's weaknesses are compensated by his extra pawn and White's king position.

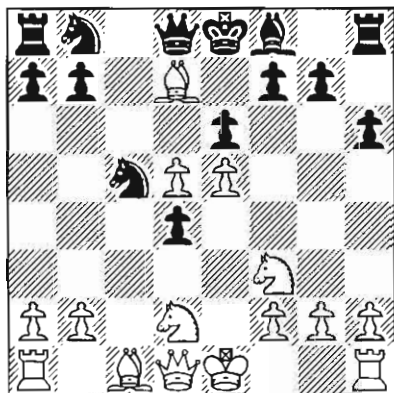


Diagram 18 (B)

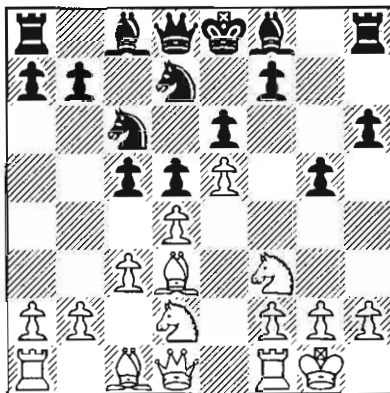


Diagram 19 (W)

b) Ginsburg offers 7...dxc4 8 Nxc4 cxd4 (8...Nc6 9 dxc5!? Nxc5 10 Bc2 Qxd1+ 11 Bxd1 b6 12 0-0 Ba6 13 Be2 Be7 and the game is level; here 9 0-0 cxd4 transposes to 8...cxd4) 9 0-0 Nc6 10 Be4 with initiative, although 10...Bc5 11 a3 Nb6 12 Qc2 Nxc4 13 Qxc4 Bb6 intending ...Bd7 and ...Rc8 looks fine for Black, who can always give his pawn back in the interest of quick development.

Overall, equality is the correct assessment after 7 c4.

### 7...Nc6

7...b6 is another version of the ...b6 plan: 8 Qe2 a5 9 0-0 Ba6 10 c4 Nc6 11 cxd5 Bxd3 : 12 Qxd3 Nb4! 13 Qe4 Nxd5 14 Qg4 (ambitious; the alternative was 14 Nc4 b5 15 Ne3! N7b6!) 14...cxd4 (14...h5! 15 Qe4 Qc7) 15 Nc4 Qc7 16 b3!? (16 Nd6+ Bxd6 17 exd6 Qxd6 18 Qxg7 0-0-0 19 Qxd4 Kb7 may be slightly better for White, but the knight on d5 is a rock) 16...g6 (perhaps 16...d3 was best) 17 Nxd4!? (White's position is the more harmonious one after 17 Qxd4! Bc5 18 Qd3) 17...Nxe5 18 Nxe5 Qxe5 19 Bb2 (19 Nf3! Qxa1? 20 Qa4+ Kd8 21 Bg5+ hxg5 22 Rxa1) 19...Bd6 20 g3 0-0 21 Rfe1 (A.Purtov-V.Shtyrenkov, Alushta 2004), and here Black can play 21...Qg5 with a solid extra pawn.

### 8 0-0

The non-developing 8 Nf1 was a bit too experimental in S.Lukey-A.Wohl, Wanganui 2005: 8...Qb6 9 dxc5 Nxc5!? (9...Bxc5 10 Qe2 Qc7 looks stronger) 10 Bc2 Ne4 11 Ne3 Bc5 12 0-0 Ng5 (12...Bxc3!?) 13 Nxc5 hxg5 14 b4!? (14 Ng4! Be7 15 Qf3 secures everything) 14...Be7 15 Re1 (15 Ng4 a5) 15...Bd7 16 Qe2 Rc8 17 Bb3 a5 was equal. Going back, Black can also play 8...cxd4! 9 cxd4 Qb6 10 Bc2 Bb4+, forcing 11

Kc2, when 11...Be7 should favour Black, who has the ideas ...f6 and ...Nb4.

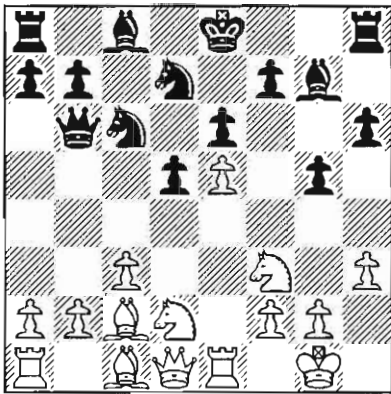
**8...g5! (Diagram 19)**

At first, preventing dxc5 by 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 g5 seems logical, but 10 Nb3! shows the difference.

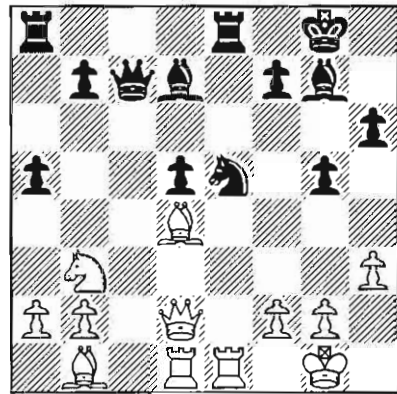
**9 h3 Qb6!?**

9...h5! is consistent and strong – see the note to White’s ninth move in the illustrative game Shaw-Eingorn.

**10 dxc5 Nxc5 11 Bc2 Nd7 12 Re1 Bg7 (Diagram 20)**



**Diagram 20 (W)**



**Diagram 21 (W)**

White must lose his centre pawn, but finds dynamic counterplay:

**13 c4! 0-0**

Black should avoid 13...Ndxe5? 14 cxd5 exd5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Nf3.

**14 cxd5 exd5 15 Nb3 Ndx5 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 Be3 Qd8 18 Bd4**

White has counterplay for his pawn. In particular, Black’s d-pawn is weak.

**18...Re8 19 Qd2**

A later choice was 19 Re3, as played in K.Van der Weide-Y.Visser, Dutch League 2005, when the game was immediately drawn! I suspect that Black still stands better, but he probably feared White’s attack.

**19...Bd7!**

Black has ...Ba4 in mind. 19...b6?! 20 Bc3! a5 21 Nd4 may even favour White.

**20 Rad1 Qc7 21 Bb1 a5 (Diagram 21)**

This is the game V.Jansa-N.Legky, French League 2004. Unfortunately, my database’s notation to this highly instructive game breaks down hereabouts. Perhaps

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

22 Rc1 was played.

### 22 Nc1!? Qd6 23 Bd3??

According to the database, the game was drawn at this point. My guess is that some other move came first, such as 23 Bc3, because 23 Bd3?? would pretty obviously lose to 23...Nf3+ 24 gxf3 Bxd4 (threatening ...Qg3+ and ...Bxh3). There might follow 25 Bh7+ Kxh7 26 Qxd4 Rxe1+ 27 Rxe1 Bxh3, with two extra pawns and the better position for Black. The point, however, is that Black was equal in this important line and could even have seized the initiative on move nine.

### A2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6 4 Ng3 Nf6 5 Bd3 (Diagram 22)

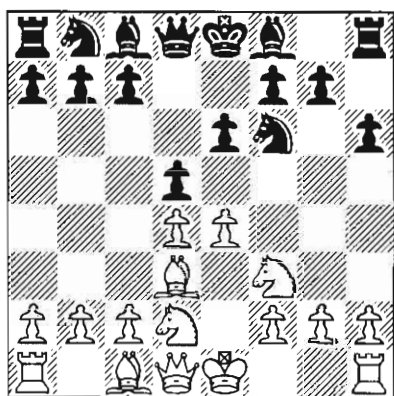


Diagram 22 (B)

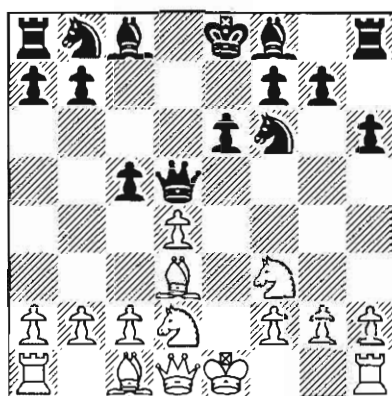


Diagram 23 (W)

White plays it safe, not wishing to commit his centre and expose it to attack. Naturally, this also makes life easier for Black.

### 5...c5

There are two major continuations:

---

#### A21: 6 c3

#### A22: 6 dxc5

---

6 exd5 lacks any force after 6...Qxd5 (**Diagram 23**), a position that has led to several short draws; for example, 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 0-0 (8 Qe2 0-0 9 Ne4 Be7 10 Bd2 Nbd7 11 c4 Qc6 12 Bc3 ½-½ W.Zaw-Yu Shaoteng, Bangkok 2004) 8...b6 9 Nb3 Be7 10 Bf4 Bb7 11 c4 Qd8 12 Ne5 Nc6 13 Nxc6 Bxc6 14 Qe2 Qd7 ½-½ S.Dolmatov-V.Popov, St Petersburg 2004.

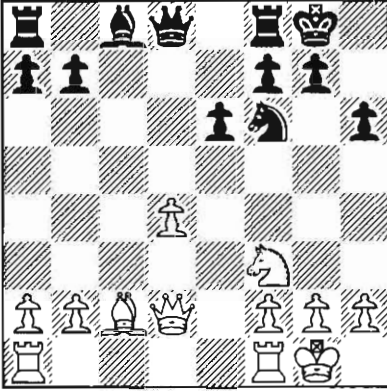
**A21) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3**

This appears uninspired but can produce double-edged positions.

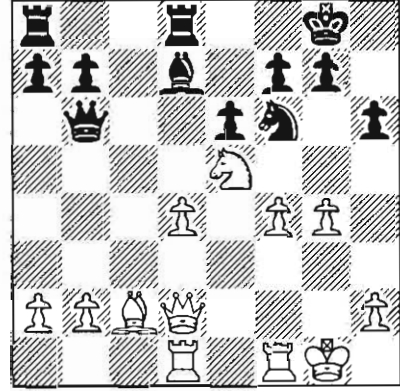
**6...cxd4 7 cxd4 dxe4 8 Nxe4 Bb4+ 9 Bd2**

9 Nc3 is more like a standard isolated queen's pawn position, which is arguably equal. Black's pawn on h6 stops White from playing the typical Bg5, but it may expose him to a battery of bishop and queen down the b1-h7 diagonal.

**9...Bxd2+ 10 Qxd2 Nxe4 11 Bxe4 Nd7 12 0-0 Nf6 13 Bc2 0-0 (Diagram 24)**



**Diagram 24 (W)**



**Diagram 25 (B)**

We've arrived at an isolated queen's pawn position which you'd think would favour Black because of the two piece exchanges. In fact, there are many instances in which such exchanges can even enhance the activity which is associated with having the isolated pawn. Here the pawn on h6 makes it difficult for Black to occupy d5 (...Nd5 is met by Qd3), but the absence of White's dark-squared bishop makes a kingside attack more difficult to carry through.

We are following the game V.Nevednichy-V.Eingorn, Bad Wörishofen 2002:

**14 Ne5 Qb6?!**

Black's pieces end up without that much to do, so this is a good place to look for improvements. He should fianchetto to activate his bishop. The obvious course is 14...b6 15 Rfe1 Bb7, when at first sight 16 Re3 with the idea of Rg3 looks a little awkward for Black, but 16...Rc8 17 Rg3 Kh8 keeps the balance. 14...Qd6!? is also logical, reserving the idea of ...b6.

**15 Rad1 Rd8 16 f4! Bd7 17 g4! (Diagram 25)**



**BEWARE! White launches a shameless attack, weakening his kingside. But what is Black to do?**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 17...Bb5 18 Rf2 Nd7!? 19 Qe3 Rac8

19...Nxe5 20 fxe5 threatens Qe4, and 20...Qc6 21 g5! doesn't help Black.

### 20 Bb1!

20 Nxd7 Rxd7 21 Qe4 Rc4! is a standard way of meeting the Qh7+ idea: Black has made room for his king to run over to e7 and in the meantime counterattacks in the centre: 22 Qh7+? (22 Rfd2 Bc6! 23 Qh7+ Kf8 24 Qh8+ Ke7 25 Qxg7 Bf3 26 g5! saves White just in time, as 26...Bxd1 27 Qf6+ Ke8 28 Qh8+ Ke7 29 Qf6+ is a draw by perpetual check) 22...Kf8 23 Qh8+ Ke7 24 Qxg7 Rxd4 25 Rxd4 Rxd4 and White's kingside advances have come back to haunt him.

### 20...Rc7!? 21 h4! (Diagram 26)

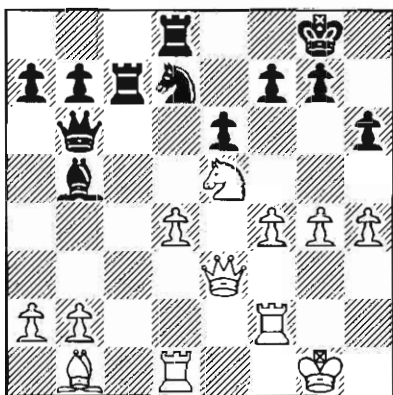


Diagram 26 (B)

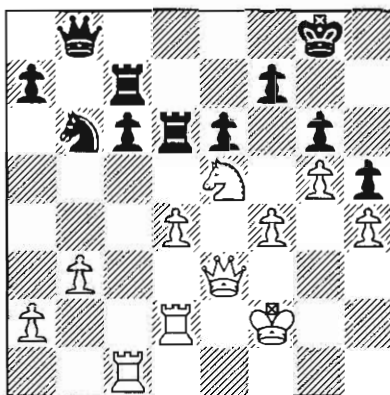


Diagram 27 (W)

White has only one idea – to get at the king – but it's difficult to come up with a counter-plan for Black.

### 21...Nf8

21...Nf6 runs into 22 g5 Nd5 23 Qg3 (23 Qe4 f5!) 23...h5 24 f5 with a strong attack.

### 22 g5 h5!? 23 Rfd2?!

23 f5! exf5 24 Bxf5 makes it hard for Black to defend against direct attack.

### 23...g6 24 Be4 Bc6!?

Allowing White play along the c-file, which is more important than his isolated pawn. Now the players jockey for a while.

### 25 Bxc6 bxc6 26 Kf2 Rd5 27 Rc1 Nd7 28 Nc4 Qb8 29 b3 Nb6 30 Ne5 Rd6 (Diagram 27) 31 Rdc2

This is slow. 31 Qe4 Nd5 32 Rc4 keeps the pressure on.

### 31...Nd5 32 Qe4 Ne7 33 Rc4 Qb6 34 R1c2? Nf5!

Suddenly Black gets pressure on the d-pawn.

**35 Nf3??**

Severe time pressure obviously intervened here. The game finished quickly now:

**35...Rd5 36 Kg2 Nd6 37 Qd3 Nxc4 38 bxc4 Rd8 39 c5 0-1**

This is probably the least likely of lines to give Black trouble, but he has to be careful. The decision on the 14th move was important in that regard.

**A22) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 Bd3 c5 6 dxc5 dxe4**

Forcing matters. Otherwise, 6...Bxc5 7 e5 Nfd7 (7...Ng4 falls short to 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Qe2 Qc7 10 Nb3 Bb6 11 Bf4) 8 0-0 Nc6 9 Nb3 Bb6 10 Qe2 g5!? is worth looking into, not only stopping Bf4 but threatening ...g4 in certain circumstances.

**7 Nxe4 Nxe4 8 Bxe4 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 Bxc5 10 Ke2 (Diagram 28)**

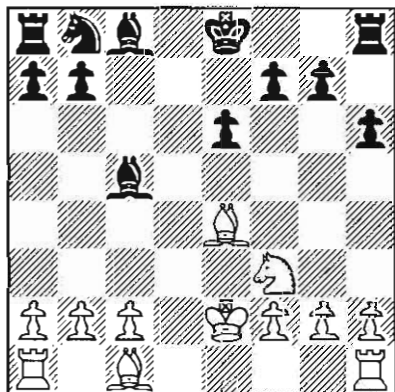


Diagram 28 (B)

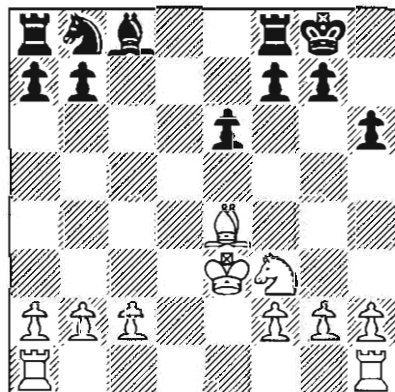


Diagram 29 (B)

This position arises more or less by force after 6 dxc5. The correct method for Black is not self-evident.



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** We reach almost the same position in the variation 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Bd3 c5 5 dxc5 Nf6 6 Ngf3 (6 Qe2 is normal, to avoid what follows) 6...dxe4 7 Nxe4 Nxe4 8 Bxe4 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 Bxc5 10 Ke2, except that in our case Black has the extra move ...h6 in play!

This makes almost no difference, although there is one line after the 3...Be7 sequence in which White plays Bg5, so at least that is eliminated.

**10...0-0?!**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

Black should look at alternatives here:

a) As in the position after 3...Be7, the correct move is 10...Nd7! in order to chase away or exchange White's light-squared bishop: 11 Be3! (just in time; otherwise Black would push his central majority and enjoy a clear advantage) 11...Bxe3 12 Kxe3 Nc5 (gaining the bishop-versus-knight advantage in return for a deficit in space) 13 Nd2! (13 Rad1?! Nxe4 14 Kxe4 b6 and once the rooks are exchanged, Black will have bishop versus knight with mobile central pawns) 13...Nxe4 14 Nxe4 Ke7 (or 14...Bd7) 15 Rhd1 b6 with no advantage to either side.

b) Black's other strategy is to use his centre pawns: 10...f5 11 Bd3 Nc6 12 Be3 Bd6 13 Nd4?! (13 Rhd1! is not clear) 13...Nxd4+ 14 Bxd4 e5 15 Bb5+ Ke7 16 Bc3 Be6 and Black's centre pawns gave him the advantage in C.Graf-K.De Francesco, Munich 2005. The game continued 17 Rhe1 a6 18 Ba4 Bc4+ 19 Kd1 Rhd8 20 Kc1 Ke6? (20...e4!) 21 Bxe5! Bxe5 22 f4 Rd5 23 Bb3 Rc8 24 fxe5 g5 25 c3 Bxb3 26 axb3 Rxe5 27 Rxe5+ Kxe5 when Black still retained a nice advantage in space.

### **11 Be3! Bxe3 12 Kxe3 (Diagram 29)**

Donev assesses 12 fxe3 f5 13 Bd3 Nc6 14 e4 as equal. As he points out, this prevents Black's central majority from making progress.

### **12...f5**

12...Nd7 is still best, although 13 c3 (13 c4!? Nc5 14 Bc2 a5 15 Rhd1 Bd7) 13...Nc5 14 Bc2 lets White retain his space and time advantages with an edge.

### **13 Bd3 Nc6 14 Rad1 e5**

Black gets his pawns rolling, but they aren't supported.

### **15 Bc4+ Kh7 16 Bd5! e4 17 Bxc6 bxc6 18 Ne5**

We are following D.Marciano-E.Bricard, French Ch. 1997. White has a fairly clear positional advantage: the pawn on c6 is vulnerable and, more importantly, White's knight or his rooks may take up residence on juicy squares such as c5 and a5.

Again, we see that Black can equalize after 5 Bd3. While the play can be intricate, neither side risks a great deal if he knows the theory and ideas.

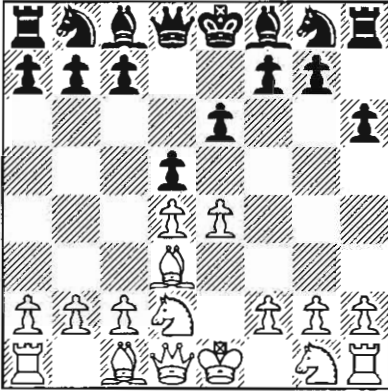
### **B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6 4 Bd3 (Diagram 30) 4...c5**

This is the move that goes best with 3...h6; Black takes a full share of the centre. He should avoid 4...Nf6?! 5 e5 Nfd7, when both 6 Ne2 c5 7 c3 Nc6 8 Nf3 and 6 f4 give White positions that are essentially a tempo up on normal variations arising from 3 Nd2 Nf6.

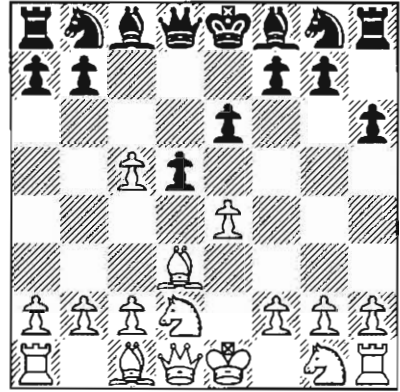
4...Nc6!? is playable. Then White can secure himself against ...Nb4 by playing 5 c3 (5 Ne2 develops quickly but allows harassment by 5...Nb4, when 6 Bb5+ Bd7 gets rid of Black's bad bishop). One continuation from here is 5...dxe4 (5...e5?! 6 exd5 Qxd5 can be met by 7 Be4! Qd7 8 d5 Nce7 9 Ngf3 with quick development) 6 Nxe4

e5! (6...Nf6 7 Nf3 gives White a small but secure advantage) 7 Nf3 exd4 (7...Bg4!? 8 Qb3 Bxf3 9 gxf3! Qd7 10 d5 Nd8 11 Be3 should favour White) 8 Nxd4 (8 0-0 dxc3 9 Re1 Be7) 8...Nxd4 9 cxd4 Bb4+, equalizing. This is all unexplored territory.

**5 dxc5 (Diagram 31)**



**Diagram 30 (B)**



**Diagram 31 (B)**

The alternative 5 c3 Nc6!? 6 Ngf3 Nf6 7 e5 Nd7 returns us to the 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5 line above. 5 c3 dxe4 6 Nxe4 cxd4 7 cxd4 is another typical isolated queen's pawn position; there could follow 7...Nc6 8 Nf3 Be7 9 0-0 Nf6, or 8...Bb4+!? 9 Nc3 Nf6.

**5...Bxc5**

5...Nf6 is also fine, when we have something similar to the Tarrasch variation with 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Bd3 c5 5 dxc5 Nf6. Since Black sometimes plays ...Bxc5 after 3...Be7, he may be said to have 'gained' a tempo when he plays ...Bxc5 in one go. The extra move is ...h6, which could prove weakening, but can also help Black in two ways. The obvious one is that the move ...g5 might be useful, and the other is that ...h6 can help Black to castle because he will avoid combinations involving Bxh7+ at a later stage.

**6 Ngf3 Nf6**

6...Nc6 7 c3 Nf6 8 Qe2 Qc7 (8...0-0 9 0-0 e5!? looks like a reversed Slav Defence; there might follow 10 b4 Bd6 11 Bb2 Be6 with an unclear position, while 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Ne4 is met by 11...Bb6) 9 0-0 (**Diagram 32**), as in A.Zozulia-A.Rosmuller, Vlissingen 2005, is actually a Colle System!



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION!** This could have arisen from 1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 e3 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nbd2 e6 6 Bd3 Qc7 7 0-0 Be7 8 dxc5 Bxc5 9 e4 h6 10 Qe2, a standard Colle position in which ...h6 is in fact considered the best defensive system!

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

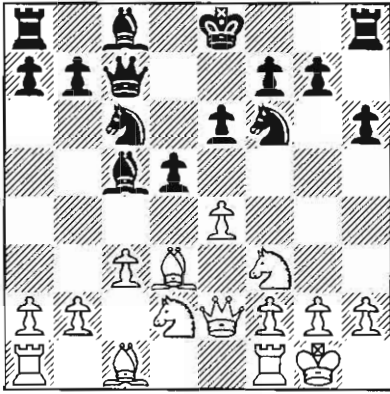


Diagram 32 (B)

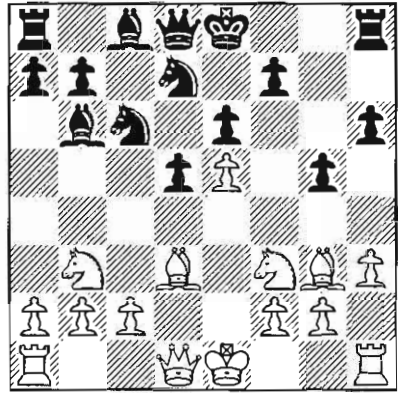


Diagram 33 (B)

### 7 e5!?

Normally this isn't played so early. 7 Qe2 would probably transpose to the lines just given.

### 7...Nfd7

The dynamic 7...Ng4 8 0-0 Nc6 is definitely worth considering. In the 3...Be7 lines this would fall short, but here the move ...h6 supports ...g5 at the right moment. For example, 9 Nb3 Bb6 10 Bf4 g5 11 Bg3 h5! 12 h4 (or 12 h3 h4) 12...gxh4 13 Bxh4 Qc7 with unclear complications.

### 8 Nb3 Bb6 9 Bf4 g5!?

Black doesn't have to commit so early on. He stands well after 9...Nc6!, when 10 Qe2 0-0 prepares 11 0-0 f6! 12 exf6 Rxf6 and ...e5 follows; for example, 13 Bg3 e5 14 Nxe5? Ndx5 15 Bxe5 Re6.

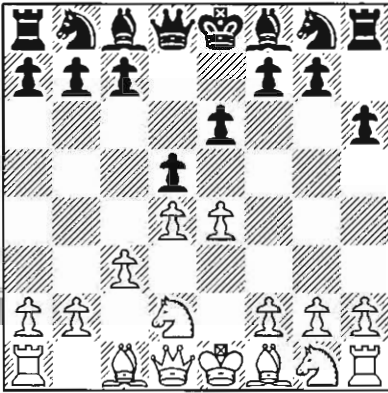
### 10 Bg3 Nc6 11 h3! (Diagram 33)

The game S.Midoux-E.Bricard, Toulouse 1998, continued 11...Qe7? 12 c3 Nc5 13 Nxc5 Qxc5, when 14 0-0 would have preserved a clear advantage for White, both in the centre and on the kingside. It's hard to find a plan for Black.

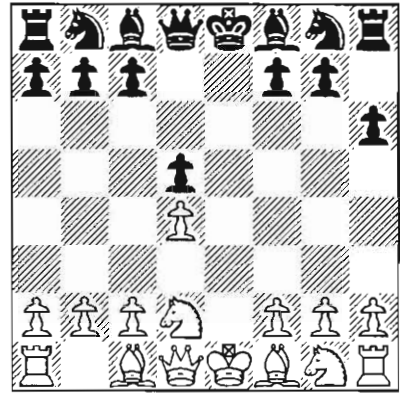
The risky-looking 11...f6! may be best: 12 exf6 (12 Bg6+ Kf8) 12...Qxf6 13 Qe2 a5 14 a4 0-0 15 c4, to prevent ...e5, is hard to assess. Probably White stands somewhat better because Black will have to trade pieces to clear his back rank.

### C) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 h6 4 c3 (Diagram 34)

This is a modest continuation that is primarily used to reduce White's risk and hope for a slight advantage.



**Diagram 34 (B)**



**Diagram 35 (W)**

To complete the examination of 3...h6 I should mention a couple of other moves:

a) Oddly enough, 4 exd5 exd5 (**Diagram 35**) leaves White, in spite of having an extra piece developed, in danger of becoming worse! The problem is that he has difficulty in coordinating his forces. The knight on d2 blocks off White's bishop on c1, but if it moves to b3 it has little influence (the move ...b6, for example, restricts it completely). Obviously f3 is a better square for the knight; however, White's two kingside minor pieces need squares as well, and it is difficult to get everything out without a logjam. For Black, the insertion of ...h6 isn't useless, because it allows ...Nf6 without having to worry about Bg5. Unfortunately, I haven't found a single game in which 4 exd5 was played, but Black should have no difficulties with any set-up that includes ...Nf6, ...Bd6 (or ...c5), and ...Bf5 or ...Bg4.

b) It's also strange that 4 e5 hasn't been tried more, although again the knight on d2 is not ideally placed. Here are two possibilities after the natural 4...c5 5 c3 Nc6 (**Diagram 36**):

b1) 6 Ngf3 cxd4 (6...Nge7!? 7 Bd3 cxd4 8 cxd4 Nf5 is another method, especially since after 9 Bxf5 exf5 10 0-0 Be6 Black's normal strategy is to play ...g5, which as it happens is already supported by ...h6) 7 cxd4 Qb6 8 Nb3 a5! with the idea 9 a4? Bb4+ and the king will have to move. Instead, 9 a3 a4 10 Nc5 Bxc5 11 dxc5 Qxc5 12 Be3 gives White some compensation for the pawn.

b2) 6 Bb5 Bd7 (or 6...Qb6) 7 Bxc6 (7 Ngf3 is met by 7...Nxe5!) 7...bxc6 8 Ne2 cxd4 9 cxd4 c5 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 0-0 Ne7 12 Nb3 Bb6 was A.Rafie-M.Bjelajac, Playchess 2004; apart from the bishop pair, Black will be able to extract concessions by attacking e5.

#### 4...c5

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

The most logical answer. As is the case with 4 Bd3, 4...Nf6?! 5 e5 Nfd7 allows either 6 Bd3 c5 7 Ne2 Nc6 8 Nf3 or 6 f4, with a clear advantage in both cases.

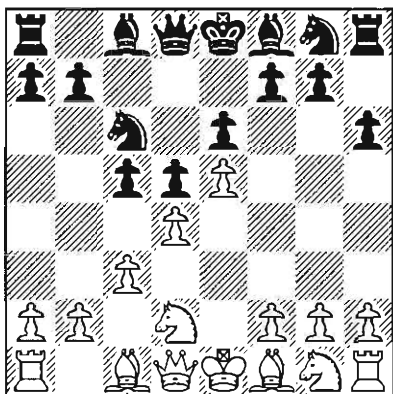


Diagram 36 (W)

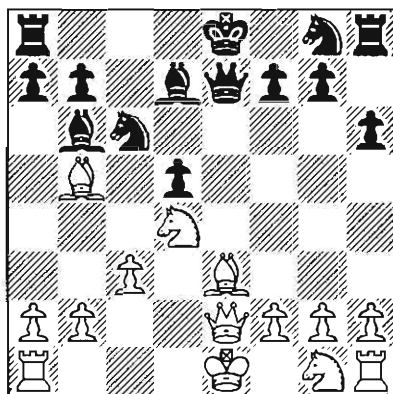


Diagram 37 (B)

### 5 exd5

5 Bb5+ will usually transpose; for example, 5...Bd7 6 Bxd7+ Nxd7 7 exd5 exd5 reaches the note to White's sixth move.



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** After 5 dxc5 Bxc5 the normal move is 6 Ngf3, when 6...Nf6 7 Bd3 Nc6 8 0-0 Qc7 9 Qe2 is a natural sequence which gives us the same position that we discussed in Line B beginning with 4 Bd3 c5 5 dxc5 Bxc5 6 Ngf3 Nf6 etc.

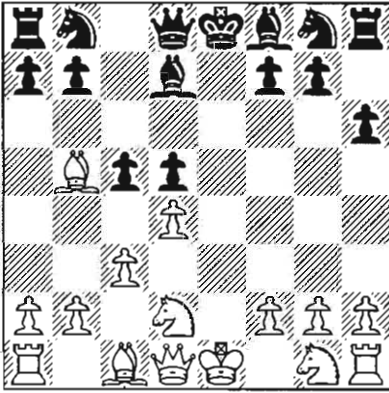
White can also play 6 Nb3 Bb6 (an active spot for the bishop) 7 exd5 exd5 8 Bb5+ Nc6 9 Qe2+ Qe7!? (challenging his opponent to contest an equal endgame; 9...Nge7 10 Nf3 0-0 is a standard position, considered fully equal, in which Black can play ...Bg4, ...Re8, and/or ...Nf5 as appropriate) 10 Nd4?! Bd7 11 Be3 (Diagram 37) 11...Bxd4!? (Black isolates White's d-pawn to take advantage of his piece placement; he also stands somewhat better after 11...Nxd4 12 Bxd7+ Kxd7 13 cxd4 Qb4+ 14 Qd2 Ba5!, or here 13 Bxd4 Bxd4 14 cxd4 Rc8!) 12 cxd4 (12 Bxc6 Bxc3+) 12...a6 13 Ba4 (13 Bxc6 Bxc6 14 Nf3 Nf6 15 a4 stops ...Bb5 but Black remains active after 15...0-0 16 0-0 Rfe8; or 13 Bd3 Nb4! with the idea 14 Bb1 Bb5) 13...Nf6 14 Nf3 (G.Putzbach-V.Eingorn, Hamburg 2005) and although 14...Nb4 led to a complicated position ultimately won by Black, the best move was simply 14...0-0! threatening ...Nxd4.

### 5...exd5

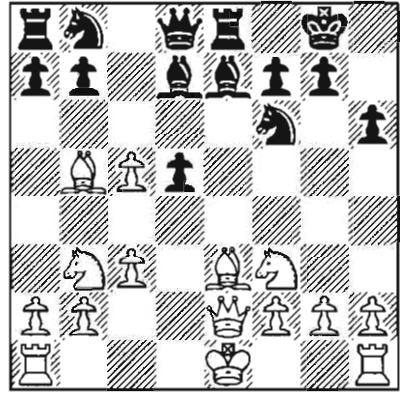
Recapturing with 5...Qxd5 is playable if unambitious: 6 Ngf3 cxd4 7 Nxd4 (or 7 Bc4 Qh5 8 cxd4 Nc6 9 0-0 Nf6) 7...Nf6 8 N2f3 Bc5 9 Be2 Nc6 10 Nxc6 Qxc6 11 0-0 Qc7 12 Bd3 0-0 13 Qe2 b6 14 Ne5 Bb7 with equality, S.Kudrin-S.Atalik, Lindsborg 2003.

**6 Ngf3**

Or 6 Bb5+ Bd7 (**Diagram 38**)



**Diagram 38 (W)**



**Diagram 39 (B)**

and now:

a) 7 Bxd7+ Nxd7 8 Ne2 Ngf6 9 Nf3 (D.Lokshin-R.Starace, correspondence 2000) and the natural continuation is 9...Bd6 10 dxc5 Nxc5 11 0-0 0-0 with equality.

b) 7 Qe2+ Qe7 (or 7...Be7, which may transpose to the 6 Ngf3 main line) 8 Bxd7+ Nxd7 9 dxc5 Nxc5 and Black's control of the light squares (in particular d3) and smooth development at least make up for his isolated pawn.

**6...Nf6**

Normally Black's g8-knight will go to go to f6 rather than e7, since Bg5 has been prevented.

**7 Bb5+ Bd7 8 Qe2+**

The most ambitious move. 8 Bxd7+ Nbx7 9 0-0 Be7 10 dxc5 Nxc5 is a standard, balanced position similar to various lines with Bb5+ in the French Tarrasch.

**8...Be7**

A gambit that is a slight variant on one of the 3 Nd2 c5 main lines. It offers good chances in both cases.

**9 dxc5 0-0 10 Nb3 Re8 11 Be3 (Diagram 39)**

White continues to protect the c-pawn.

**11...a6!?**

11...Qc7 has been played in a couple of games:

a) 12 0-0 Ng4 13 Rfe1 Bg5! 14 h3 Bxe3 15 Bxd7 Nxd7 16 hxg4 Bxc5 with equality,

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

N.Bouchet-N.Legky, French League 2005.

b) 12 h3 a6 13 Bd3 a5!? 14 0-0 Na6 15 Qc2 a4 16 Nbd4 Nxc5 is also equal, T.Gharamian-N.Legky, French League 2004.

The nice thing about positions like this is that no pieces have been exchanged, so the play can go in any direction.

### 12 Bd3

12 Bxd7 Nbx d7 allows Black to recapture the c-pawn with no problems. With 12 Bd3 we are following the game M.Womacka-V.Eingorn, Bad Wiessee 2005.

### 12...a5!?

12...Ba4 recovers the c-pawn, but Eingorn is more ambitious.

### 13 a4 Ng4 14 0-0 Bf8?! (Diagram 40)

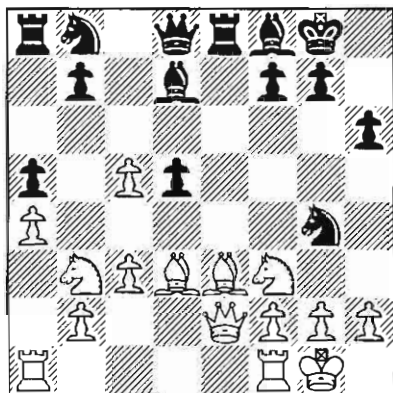


Diagram 40 (W)

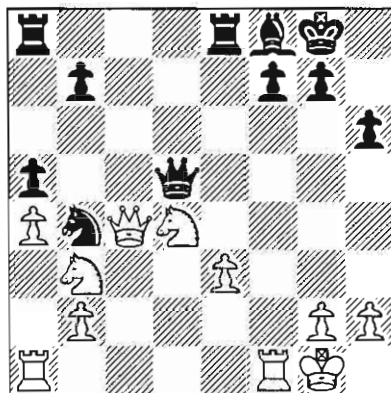


Diagram 41 (W)

Risky. 14...Na6 is more direct.

### 15 c4?

Now Black's pieces spring into activity. 15 Bc2! has the idea Qd3, and now 15...Nxe3 (15...Na6 16 Qd3 Nf6 17 Rfe1) 16 fxe3 opens the f-file and strengthens White's grip on d4.

### 15...Na6! 16 c6

16 cxd5?! Nxc5 attacks a4 and b3, while ...Nxe3 remains a threat.

### 16...Bxc6 17 Nfd4 Nxe3

17...Qh4! 18 h3 Nxe3 19 fxe3 Nc5 keeps the initiative.

### 18 fxe3 Nb4 19 cxd5 Bxd5 20 Bc4 Bxc4 21 Qxc4 Qd5! (Diagram 41)

Whether or not White exchanges queens, his weaknesses have become too exposed. Black has the advantage here, and Eingorn went on to win this position.

## Conclusion

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I see no theoretical problem with 3...h6, and practice thus far has revealed no holes. This can be attributed to the paradox that, having played 3 Nd2, White doesn't really have a useful move that doesn't have specific drawbacks. Thus Black can take his time with the 'semi-useful' 3...h6.

## Characterization of 3 Nd2 h6

---

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♠ ♠ ♠
Attacking Nature	♠ ♠
Positional/Strategic Nature	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Risk	♠ ♠
Reward	♠ ♠ ♠
Theoretical Depth	♠ ♠

## Chapter Thirteen

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# One Rook Pawn Deserves Another

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 a6 (Diagram 1)

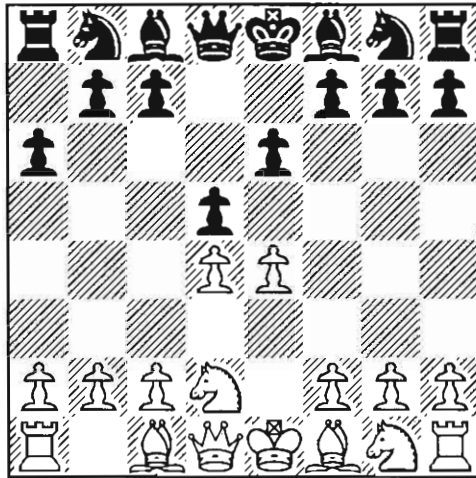


Diagram 1 (W)

Anyone who has slogged through the preceding chapter about 3...h6 must be wondering what move *can't* be played against the Tarrasch Variation. There are several moves devoid of reason (3...Bc5?!, 3...Qd6?, 3...h5?), but the addition of 3...h6 to the ranks, along with the elevation of 3...Nc6 and 3...Be7 to main-line

status, has seen players looking more seriously at previously rejected moves such as 3...b6 and 3...g6 (John Emms mentioned to me that he only equalized against Murey's 3...Nd7). In this chapter we examine another slow, semi-waiting move that asks White to commit himself.

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 a6!? (Diagram 1)**

Fortunately, it won't take me too long to explain the philosophy behind this move, since the essence of it has been covered in the introductory remarks to the previous chapter (3 Nd2 h6). White's knight on d2 is to be left in the lurch, and the only question is by which semi-waiting move this is best done. Looking at it in this light, the modest 3...a6 gains in stature. It not only waits for a commitment by White but performs some useful functions:

- a) Since Black is very likely to play ...c5 soon, the potentially disruptive move Bb5(+) is prevented, and the lack of a pin on c6 and d7 gives Black a better chance to break down White's centre by ...f6.
- b) If White responds to ...c5 modestly by playing c3, variations arise in which Black can meet the move exd5 with ...Qxd5.
- c) The move ...b5 can be effective in several ways, one of which is to launch a traditional attack by ...b4, another to simply develop a bishop on b7. Furthermore, ...b5 serves to shelter Black's queen if it later comes to b6.
- d) Last, but not least, Black will often try to make use of ...a6 by exchanging his bad bishop via ...Bd7-b5.

These are relatively small gains, to be sure, but again White is posed with the difficulty of making a useful move without allowing Black new ways to attack.

It may not surprise you that we see some of the same names playing 3...a6 as did 3...h6, including Eingorn and Legky. But the comparison fails at that point because 3...a6 has been much more popular through the years and has been played by luminaries such as Botvinnik, Korchnoi, Topalov along with a number of strong grandmasters. In most of the games in this chapter (excluding correspondence games), the opponents' average Elo is above 2400, with a considerable number well over 2500, and a couple in the stratosphere.

This regard of highly-ranked players for 3...a6 can partially be explained by the relative popularity of 3...a6 4 Ngf3 c5, transposing into 3...c5 4 Ngf3 a6. One of Black's ideas is to avoid lines in which White plays 3...c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 Bb5+.

It will not surprise you, however, that I have dodged these conventional ways of using 3...a6 and recommended something out of the ordinary.

## Illustrative Games

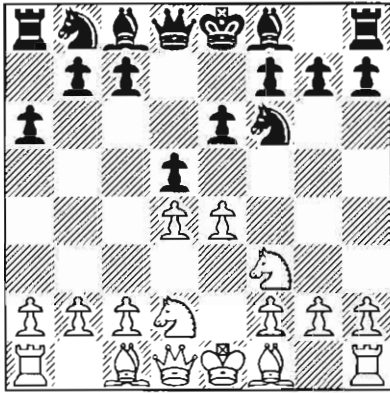
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□ P.Wells ■ G.Jones

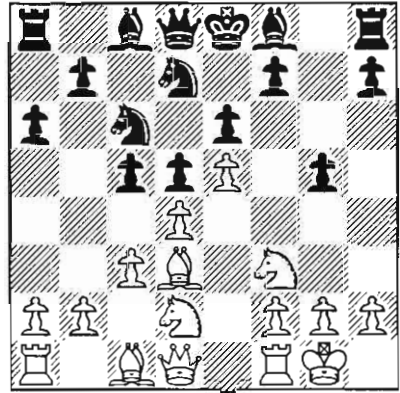
Hereford 2006

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**1 d4 e6 2 e4 d5 3 Nd2 a6 4 Ngf3 Nf6!? (Diagram 2)**



**Diagram 2 (W)**



**Diagram 3 (W)**

This is an irregular move, the point of which will be seen shortly. There is scads of theory on the move 4...c5.

**5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bd3 c5 7 c3 Nc6 8 0-0 g5 (Diagram 3)**

Black plays as he did with 3...h6. The move 8...g5 is not the only continuation but is consistent with Black's strategy, which was to wait for Ngf3 before playing...Nf6 and then launch a kingside pawn advance.

See the theory section for alternatives on this and the next few moves.

**9 dxc5**

In the analytical section we will see 9 h3 as well. One interesting comparison between 3...h6 and 3...a6 is that with the former, White often helps to support his pawn on e5 by playing Bb5; that is no longer possible here. The same reasoning applies when Black attacks e5 by playing ...f6 and White tries to maintain his pawn on that square.

**9...g4 10 Nd4 Ncxe5 (Diagram 4)**

A key decision; see the theory section for 10...Ndx5.

**11 Be2**

11 Bc2 is an important and perhaps better alternative: 11...Bxc5 (11...Nxc5 12 f4 gxf3 13 N2xf3; 11...Qh4 12 b4!) 12 f4 (after 12 N2b3 Bd6 13 f4 gxf3 14 Nxf3 Ng4! 15 h3 Ngf6 White's position is solid but he must be wary about his opponent's centre pawns and g-file) 12...gxf3 13 N2xf3 Ng4 14 Bf4 (14 Qe2 Qc7) 14...e5!? 15 h3 exf4 16 hxg4 Nf6 17 Re1+ Kf8 is messy, unclear, and fun to look at!

**11...Nxc5**

11...Bxc5 leads to fascinating play after 12 Bxg4 (12 f4 gxf3 13 N2xf3 Nxf3+ 14 Bxf3 Qh4 prepares...Rg8 and ...e5 or...Ne5 – that has to be at least equal) 12...Nxg4!? (12...Qh4 keeps the initiative, and 12...Rg8 13 Bxe6 fxe6 14 Nxe6 launches a dangerous attack; there's plenty of room for creativity here, which is certainly a motivation for playing 3...a6) 13 Qxg4 Nf6 14 Qh4 Rg8 15 N2b3 and it's anybody's guess as to who is doing well.

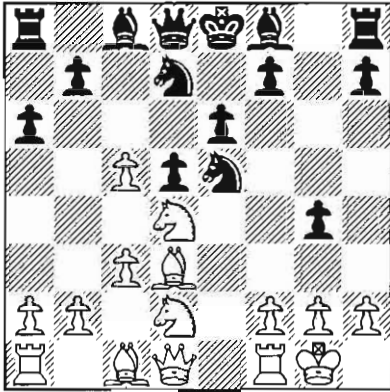


Diagram 4 (W)

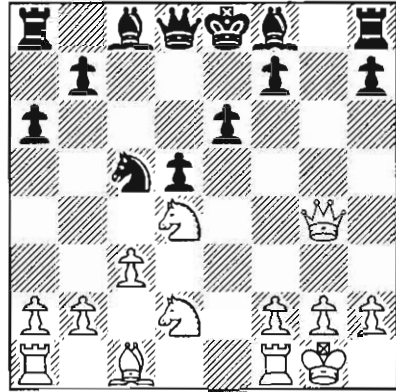


Diagram 5 (B)

**12 Bxg4**

12 f4!? gxf3 13 N2xf3 yields unclear attacking chances for the pawn.

**12...Nxg4 13 Qxg4 (Diagram 5) 13...Qf6**

More ambitious is 13...e5! 14 Qg3 (or 14 Qe2 Qe7!? 15 N4b3 Nxb3 16 Nxb3 Rg8 17 Kh1 Bf5) 14...f6, threatening ...exd4, when Black's bishops and centre at least make up for the looseness in his position.

**14 Qg3 Be7**

14...Qg6! aims for a simplified position with the bishop pair. Black's timing renders this idea harmless.

**15 N4b3 Qg6 16 Nxc5 Qxg3 17 hxg3 Bxc5 18 c4 dxc4 19 Nxc4 b5!? 20 Be3 bxc4 21 Bxc5 Bb7**

The opposite-coloured bishops lead to a draw.

**22 Rad1 Rd8 23 Bd4 Rg8 24 Bf6 Rxd1 25 Rxd1 Bd5 26 Rd4 Rg6 27 Rf4 h5 28 Kh2 Rg4 29 f3 Rxf4 30 gxf4 c3 31 Bxc3 ½-½**

This next game illustrates some standard French themes that seldom arise in the 3...a6 variations, mainly because White shies away from playing this way. They do, however, apply to this particular combination of Nd2 and e5.

□ D.Navara ■ R.Tibensky

Olomouc 1999

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 a6 4 e5 (Diagram 6)

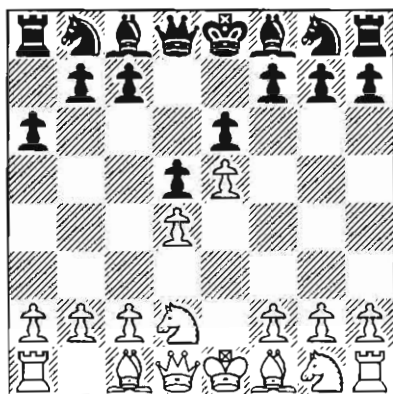


Diagram 6 (B)

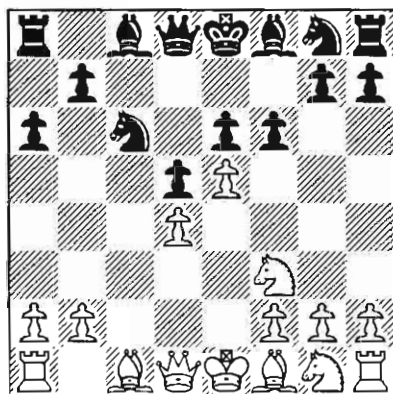


Diagram 7 (W)

The move 4 e5 introduces a sort of Advance Variation with the moves Nd2 and ...a6 in. This is an obscure trade-off: the knight on d2 gets in the way of White's pieces and doesn't fit in too well with this structure, but on the other hand, the move ...a6 isn't doing a great deal.

4...c5 5 c3 Nc6 6 Ndf3

The only good way to hold the centre together, since 6 Ngf3 Qb6 is strong.

6...cxd4

6...f6 7 exf6 Nxf6 also worked out well in K.Szczepkowska-M.Krupa, Warsaw 2004: 8 Bd3 Bd6 9 Ne2 0-0 10 0-0 e5 11 dxe5 Nxe5 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 and Black stood better.

7 cxd4 f6! (Diagram 7)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** 7...f6 is an original and enterprising move that at first sight appears to be risky, but it attacks White's centre before he can get set up to properly defend it. This idea may even put 4 e5 under a cloud.

8 exf6

Or:

a) 8 Bd3 Nh6!? (8...Bb4+ 9 Bd2 Bxd2+ 10 Qxd2 Nh6 is a safer version of this idea: 11 exf6 Qxf6 12 Ne2 0-0 with equal chances) 9 exf6 (9 Bxh6 gxh6 gives Black the two bishops and allows him to attack the centre via ...Bg7 and ...Qc7 or ...Qb6) 9...gxf6 10 Ne2 Nf7 and Black follows up with ...e5. This would be a fascinating position to test, and I'd be happy to play Black.

b) Moves like 8 Nh4?, neglecting development to discomfit the king, seldom work in the French. Among other lines, Black could play 8...fxe5 9 Qh5+ g6 (9...Kd7!?) 10 Nxg6 Nf6 11 Qh4 Bb4+ 12 Kd1 Ne4! 13 Qxd8+ Nxd8 (or 13...Kxd8) 14 Nxh8 Nxf2+ 15 Kc2 exd4 etc.

8...Qxf6 9 Bd3 h6 10 Ne2 Bd6 11 0-0 Nge7 (Diagram 8)

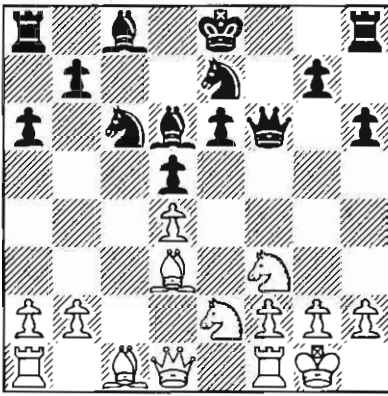


Diagram 8 (W)

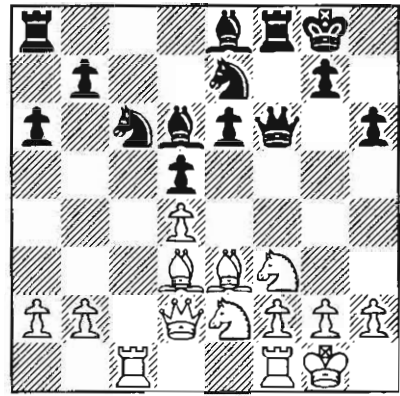


Diagram 9 (W)

This is a typical French position similar to one that can arise, for example, from the 3 Nd2 Nf6 variation. The main positional struggle seems to be between White's weakness on d4 and Black's on e6, but the move ...e5 can transform the position, and other minor-piece themes will prove important.

12 Be3 Bd7!?



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** 12...0-0! is attractive, since the move ...e5 is difficult to stop and ...g5 can also cause White problems. I already prefer Black.

13 Rc1 0-0 14 Qd2 Be8! (Diagram 9)

For those familiar with various French Defence variations, this move will come as no surprise. It has the double purpose of ...Bh5, forcing White's important knight away from f3, and ...Bg6, trading Black's bad bishop for White's good one.

15 Ng3

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

It is vital to stop ...Bh5.

**15...Bg6 16 a3 Bxd3 17 Qxd3 Ng6!? 18 Rfe1 Nh4!**

Much better than 18...Nf4? 19 Bxf4 Qxf4 20 Re3, when White has traded his bad bishop and has very well-placed pieces.

**19 Nd2!?**

19 Nxh4 Qxh4 is another matter. Black has a variety of ways to threaten White's kingside, for example by doubling rooks along the f-file first and then looking for ...e5.

**19...Ne7 20 Rc3 Nef5 21 Nb3?!**

White is ignoring his kingside. He should simplify by 21 Nxf5.

**21...Rae8**

21...Nxe3! 22 Qxe3 e5! achieves what Black wants out of the position.

**22 Rc2 Re7**

Black has numerous tempting options (22...e5!?), and now White lets himself in for yet another idea:

**23 Rce2? Nxg2! 24 Kxg2 Nh4+ 25 Kf1 Qf3 26 Rc2 Bxg3! 27 hxg3 Nf5**

Now ...Nxg3 cannot be stopped and the game is over. In what follows Black foregoes some more decisive continuations in order to make life easy for himself.

**28 Kg1 Nxg3 29 fxg3 Qxg3+ 30 Kh1 Qxe1+ 31 Bg1 Rf5 32 Rh2 Ref7 33 Nd2 Rg5 34 Qe3 Qxe3 35 Bxe3 Rg3 36 Re2 Rf5 37 Kh2 Rxe3 0-1**

## Looking a Little Deeper

---

3 Nd2 a6 has been played quite a bit but there isn't a tremendous amount of theory attached to several of the infrequently-used that lines I have chosen. We'll examine:

---

**A: 4 Ngf3**

**B: 4 Bd3**

**C: 4 e5**

---

A few other moves are seen from time to time but they are at best harmless:

a) 4 g3 (**Diagram 10**) is meant to be a safe move but it is slow and the light-square weaknesses created can be a real problem. H.Haseloff-K.Zschaebitz, Berlin 2000, illustrates what can happen if White isn't careful: 4...c5 5 dxc5 Bxc5 6 Nb3 (6 Bg2 Nf6 7 exd5 exd5 frees Black's pieces; for example, 8 Ngf3 Qe7+ 9 Qe2 Qxe2+ 10 Kxe2 0-0 11 Nb3 Re8+ 12 Kf1 Ba7 with an obvious plus) 6...Bb6 7 exd5 Nf6!? (7...exd5 8 Bg2 Nf6 is simple and good) 8 c4?! (8 dxe6? is awful in view of 8...Bxf2+!

9 Ke2 Qxd1+ 10 Kxd1 Bxe6; better was 8 d6 Ne4 9 Nh3 0-0 10 Bg2 Nxd6, although I'd rather be Black with his extra centre pawn) 8...exd5 9 c5 Bxc5! 10 Nxc5 Qa5+ 11 Bd2 Qxc5 12 b4 Qe7+ 13 Ne2 (Black is in charge after 13 Qe2 Be6 – or 13...Ne4! 14 Bg2 Nc6 with the idea 15 Nf3 Bg4 – 14 Nf3 Nc6 15 a3 Ne4) 13...Nc6 14 Bg2 Bg4 (emphasizing the light-square weaknesses inherent in 4 g3) 15 f3 Bd7 16 a3 Ne5 17 0-0 Bb5 18 Bc3 0-0 with a large advantage which includes a superb outpost on c4 and a weakness on e3 to exploit.

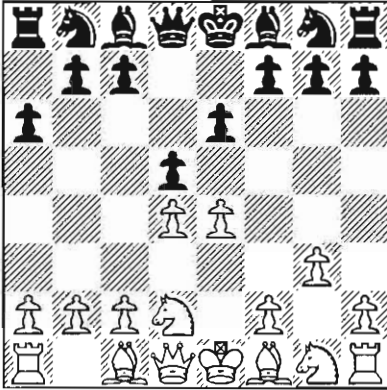


Diagram 10 (B)

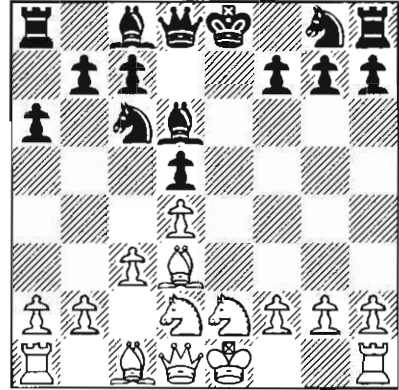


Diagram 11 (B)

b) 4 c3 c5 (4...Nf6?! 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bd3 or 6 f4 is the main line of the 3 Nd2 Nf6 variation, with Black having spent a tempo on...a6, which is only of moderate value in this particular position) 5 Ngf3 Nc6 can transpose to other lines. If Black so chooses, it may also result in an isolated pawn position, e.g. 6 Bd3 cxd4 (6...Nf6 7 e5 Nfd7 is our main 4 Ngf3 continuation; notice that the inclusion of White's Ngf3 justifies ...Nf6; this is true in most of the lines that we look at) 7 cxd4 dxe4 8 Nxe4 Be7 9 0-0 Nf6 10 a3 0-0 with equality, N.Short-P.Kiriakov, Port Erin 1999.

c) 4 exd5 exd5 is harmless and even offers Black positive prospects because White's knight on d2 hasn't really a good square to go to without blocking off other pieces. One example is A.Zapata-E.Vladimirov, Salamanca 1991: 5 Bd3 Bd6 6 Ne2 Nc6 7 c3 (Diagram 11) 7...Qf6!? (7...Nge7; or 7...Bg4) 8 0-0 Nge7 9 Re1 Bf5 (Vladimirov mentions 9...Bg4!? 10 Nf1 0-0 with equality) 10 Bxf5 Qxf5 11 Ng3 Bxg3!? 12 hxg3 0-0 13 Nf1 Qd7 14 Bf4 Ng6 15 Qh5 Rfe8 16 Ne3 Rad8 (this is equal) 17 Re2?! Re4 18 Qf3? Rxd4! 19 cxd4 Nxd4 20 Qh5 Nxf4 21 gxf4 g6 and Black is winning material.

**A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 a6 4 Ngf3 Nf6!?** (Diagram 12)

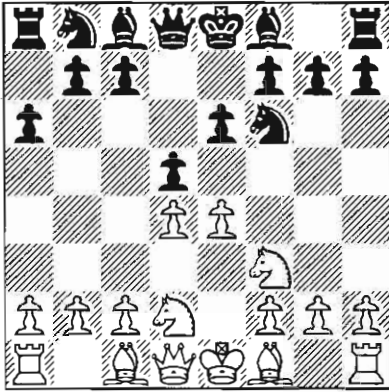


Diagram 12 (W)

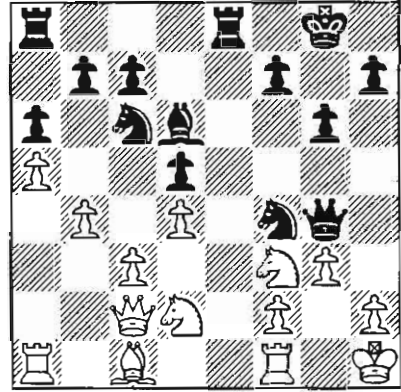


Diagram 13 (B)

This is unusual when compared to 4...c5. Instead, 4...Bd7?! with the idea of ...Bb5 has been played surprisingly often and is a standard motif after 3...a6; compare this with the 4 e5 c5 5 c3 lines below. Nevertheless, I think that Black's strategy is more difficult to sustain when White hasn't played e5 yet. One important variation is 5 exd5 exd5 6 Ne5 followed by Bd3 and 0-0.

### 5 e5

White has two alternatives:

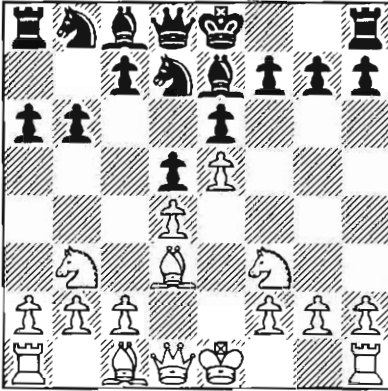
a) After 5 exd5 exd5 we have a typical French Exchange Variation where White gets his kingside pieces out quickly but is stuck with the knight on d2, which can get in the way of his development. The position is probably objectively equal. A nice example for Black was A.Malevinsky-B.Maryasin, Beltsy 1979: 6 Bd3 Bd6 7 0-0 0-0 8 c3 Bg4 9 Qb3 Nc6 10 a4 Re8 11 a5 Qd7 12 Qc2 g6 13 b4 Nh5! 14 g3 Bh3 15 Rd1 Qg4 16 Kh1 Nf4 17 Bf1 Bxf1 18 Rxf1 (Diagram 13) 18...Re2 (18...Nh3! leaves White with almost nothing to do while Black uses the e-file and brings his last pieces to the kingside) 19 Ng1 Rae8 20 Qd1 (20 Bb2 Nh3 21 Kg2 Bxg3! 22 hxg3 Nf4+ 23 Kh2 Qh5+ mates) 20...Nd3!? (20...Nh3! 21 Nxe2 Rxe2 threatens...Nf4 and...Qh3, as well as...Ne7-f5, and will win shortly) 21 Nxe2 Rxe2 22 Kg1 and here Black could have played 22...Bxg3! (or 22...Nxd4! 23 cxd4 Bxg3!) 23 fxg3 (23 hxg3 Nxf2) 23...Nxd4! 24 cxd4 Qxd4+ 25 Kh1 Nf2+ 26 Rxf2 Qxf2 27 Qg1 Re1 28 Qxe1 Qxe1+ 29 Kg2 f5 (or any advance), when White can hardly move.

b) White can try to keep things flexible by 5 Bd3 c5 6 dx5 (6 e5 transposes to 5 e5, since 6...c4? 7 Bxc4 dxc4 8 exf6 is unsatisfactory for Black), which leads us to an ending type that also arise after 3...h6: 6...dxe4 7 Nxe4 Nxe4 8 Bxe4 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 Bxc5 10 Ke2 (Wang Yu-Gong Qianyun, Wuxi 2006). As is the case after 3...h6, 10...Nd7! is the safest move in this position, with equality. White's only serious

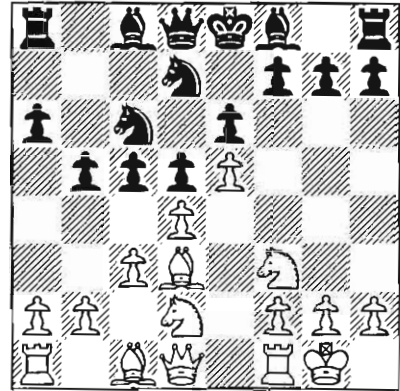
idea is 11 Be3 Bxe3 12 Kxe3, when 12...Nc5 exchanges his bishop.

**5...Nfd7 6 Bd3**

a) 6 Nb3 is sound but lacks punch. An original treatment is 6...Be7 7 Bd3 b6!? (**Diagram 14**).



**Diagram 14 (W)**



**Diagram 15 (W)**

With the knight on b3 and bishop on d3, playing for...c5 is a logical idea due to the threat of ...c4. E.Schulzke-K.De Francesco, German League, continued 8 0-0 c5 9 dxc5 bxc5 10 c4 Nc6 11 Qe2 a5!? 12 Bf4 (12 cxd5 exd5 13 e6 is more ambitious; there might follow 13...fxe6 14 Ng5!? Nf8 intending 15 Bb5 Bd7 16 Bxc6 Bxc6 17 Nxe6 Nxe6 18 Qxe6 Qd6) 12...Nb4 13 Bb1?! (13 Nbd2 Nxd3 14 Qxd3 Ba6 15 b3) 13...a4 (13...dxc4! 14 Nbd2 Nd5 15 Bg3 c3) 14 Nbd2 a3 ½-½

b) In S.Rublevsky-V.Topalov, Frankfurt 2000, Topalov answered 6 c4 by 6...dxc4 (6...c5 was natural) 7 Bxc4 Nb6 8 Bb3 Bd7 9 0-0 Bc6, when White's greater space and easy development is balanced by Black's pressure on his backward pawn along an open file and his wonderful d5-square (which is probably best utilized by ...Bd5 and ...Nc6).

**6...c5 7 c3 Nc6 8 0-0 g5**

I find 8...b5 (**Diagram 15**) particularly instructive, because it reflects upon the variation as a whole.

Although the Ngf3 variations with this kind of piece and pawn set-up are very popular for White at the moment of writing, I think a lot of that has reflected the particulars of the lines being examined. There's some question what White would actually like to do in these lines once his basic formation is established. For Black, leaving his queen on d8 and bishop on f8 has the advantage that the queen can come to the kingside, while he has g7 available for his bishop if he attacks with

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...g5 at some point. That doesn't mean that the move 8...b5 is best, but at least there is in some sense in waiting to see how White will try to make progress. As indicated in the chapter introduction, ...b5 serves to shelter Black's queen when it comes to b6 and it permits ...Bb7 in some cases. In addition, the textbook attack on White's pawn chain by ...b4 is consistent with the position. Here's some sample analysis:

a) 9 Re1 (White's idea is Nf1-g3, but by weakening f2 he encourages ...Qb6 and the attack on d4) 9...Qb6 (this prevents White's idea of Nf1, because the d-pawn will truly hang; 9...Rb8 is also interesting, simply preparing ...b4) 10 dxc5 (10 a4 can be met by 10...bxa4!? 11 Qxa4 cxd4 12 cxd4 Nb4 13 Bf1 Bb7) 10...Bxc5 (now defence of f2 becomes a factor) 11 Re2 (exciting play might follow after 11 Qe2 Ndx5!? – 11...g5!? – 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 Qxe5 Bxf2+ 14 Kh1 Bxe1 15 Qxe1 f6 16 Nf3 e5 17 Be3 Qd6) 11...g5!? (11...Qc7 is an alternative) 12 Nxc5 (or 12 h3 h5 13 Nxc5 Ndx5) 12...Ndx5 13 Nb3 h6! 14 Nh3 (Black meets 14 Nxc5 hxg5 15 b4 with 15...Qc7!) 14...Bd6 (or 14...Nxd3 15 Qxd3 Be7) 15 Bc2 Bb7 16 Be3 Qc7 with a dynamically balanced game.

b) 9 a3 to enforce b4 makes sense, but that will require a gambit after 9...Qb6 (9...c4 10 Bc2 Be7 is again fuzzy; Black will attack via ...a5 and ...b4) 10 b4 cxd4 11 cxd4 Nxd4 12 Bb2 Nxf3+ 13 Nxf3 (**Diagram 16**), with uncertain consequences; the extent of White's compensation is not clear.

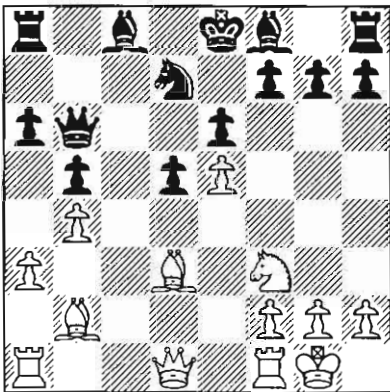


Diagram 16 (B)

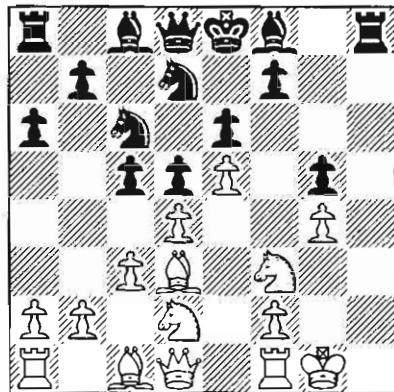


Diagram 17 (B)

c) 9 dxc5 is plausible, but by no means as effective as when ...g5 has been played, e.g. 9...Ndx5 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Nb3! (11 Be2 Bxc5 and 11 Nf3 Nxd3 12 Qxd3 Bxc5 give Black an extra pawn for nothing) 11...Nxd3 12 Qxd3 Be7 13 Bf4 Qd7!? (preventing c6) 14 Rfe1 0-0 15 Qg3!? a5 16 Rad1 a4 17 Nd4 Bxc5 18 Bh6 Bxd4 19 cxd4 f5 20 Rxe6 f4 21 Qg5 Ra7 (threatening ...Qxe6) and Black has much the easier game.

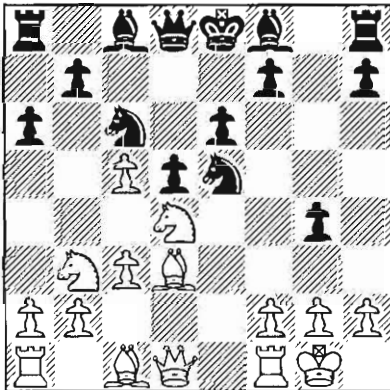
**9 dxc5**

The most important alternative is 9 h3, as it is in the lines from the preceding chapter with 3...h6 and a later ...g5. A.Dgebuadze-N.Legky, Metz 2001, went 9...h5! 10 g4 hxg4 11 hxg4 (**Diagram 17**). This is the standard picture when White directly opposes ...g5. Black would like to use the h4- and f4-squares, in some cases by playing ...Nf8-g6-f4/h4. The game continued 11...Qb6 12 Qa4 (after 12 Re1!? cxd4 – 12...Be7 and 12...Bg7 are good options – 13 cxd4 Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Qxd4 15 Nb3 Qa4 White has insufficient compensation; for example, 16 Bxg5 Rg8 17 f4 Rxg5! 18 fxg5 Qf4) 12...Qa7! 13 Nxg5 cxd4 14 Ndf3 (14 cxd4 Rh4! or 14...b5 15 Qd1 Qxd4) 14...b5 15 Qd1 Ndx5 (15...dxc3! 16 bxc3 Ndx5 leaves White struggling to justify his material deficit) 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 cxd4, and now 17...Nxd3 18 Qxd3 Qc7 would have been strong. For example: 19 Qg3 Qxg3+ (or 19...Bd6 20 Qf3 Qe7 21 Bf4 Rg8) 20 fxg3 Bg7 21 Be3 f6 22 Nf3 e5 23 g5 e4 24 gxf6 Bxf6 25 Ne5 Bg7; or 19 f4 Qc4! 20 Rd1 Rh4 21 Qf3 f6 22 Nh3 e5. It seems that 11...Qb6 is simply better for Black.

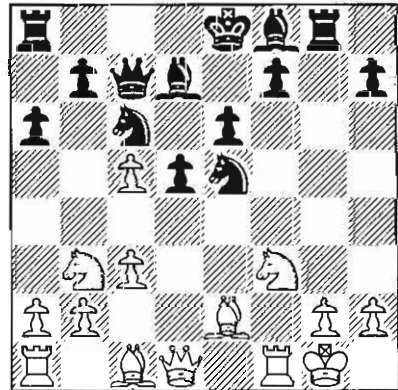
**9...g4 10 Nd4 Ndx5!?**

In our illustrative game we saw 10...Ncx5 here, but 10...Ndx5 is also playable. The resulting variations are very hard to assess, as is indicated by the analysis of M.Adams-N.Legky, French League 2001, the game that we're now following.

**11 N2b3! (Diagram 18)**



**Diagram 18 (B)**



**Diagram 19 (W)**

**11...Bd7?!**

11...Nxd3! 12 Qxd3 e5 13 Re1 (13 Nxc6 bxc6 14 Qg3 Qc7 15 f4 gxf3 16 Qxf3 Bg7 is unclear, but Black's centre is impressive) 13...Bg7 14 Bf4 Qc7 15 Bg3 Ne7! gives approximately equal chances. Black can always play ...f6 if necessary.

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### 12 Be2 Rg8 13 f4! gxf3 14 Nxf3 Qc7?! (Diagram 19)

Dubious, although 14...Nxf3+ 15 Bxf3 is better for White, who has ideas such as Bh5 and Bf4.

### 15 Ng5?!

15 Nxe5! Nxe5 16 Qd4 Bg7 17 Qh4 threatens Qxh7 and stops Black from castling. That would be quite awkward for the second player.

### 15...Rg7

Much better was 15...Be7! 16 Nxh7 (16 Nxf7!? Nxf7 17 Bh5 apparently falls just short after 17...Ncd8 18 Qf3 Bxc5+ 19 Kh1 Rg6 20 Bxg6 hxg6 21 Nxc5 Qxc5 22 Qg3 Bb5) 16...f5!, when ...Rg7 is a real problem, even after 17 Bh5+ Kd8.

### 16 Bh5 Be7 17 Nf3?!

17 Nh3 keeps a small positional advantage.

### 17...0-0-0?

Black still could hold the balance after 17...Ng4!, contemplating ...0-0-0 and/or ...Nf6.

### 18 Bh6 Rgg8 19 Nfd4?!

The exchange of errors goes back and forth. In such a terribly complex position, even super-grandmasters will have difficulties. 19 Bf4! was strong.

### 19...Bg5 20 Bxg5 Rxg5 21 Be2 Rdg8 22 Rf2 (Diagram 20)

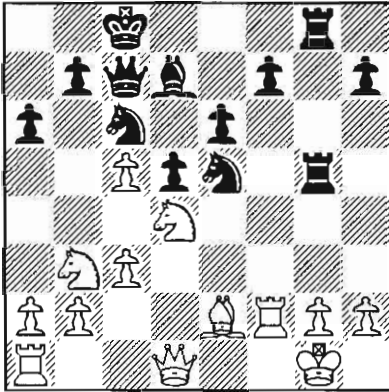


Diagram 20 (B)

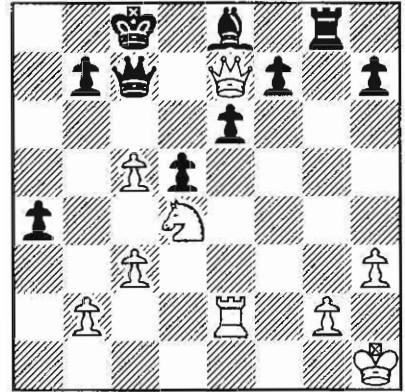


Diagram 21 (W)

### 22...Ng4

Or 22...Nc4!

### 23 Bxg4 Rxg4

Now ...e5 becomes threatening, so White changes the structure.

**24 Nxc6 Qxc6**

Also possible is 24...Bxc6. Black stands better at this point of the game.

**25 Qe2 a5!? 26 a4 Be8!? 27 h3 Rxa4 28 Rxa4 Qxa4 29 Nd4 Qc4 30 Qh5 Qd3**

Or 30...Qxc5 31 Qxh7 Rg5.

**31 Qh4 a4 32 Qe7 Qd1+? 33 Kh2 Qe1 34 Re2?**

34 Nf5 was correct. It's likely that time pressure played an enormous role here.

**34...Qg3+ 35 Kh1 Qc7?? (Diagram 21)**

35...Qf4! keeps Black well on top.

**36 Rxe6! Bd7?**

But 36...Qf4 37 Re1 is depressing.

**37 Rd6 Be6? 38 Rxe6! 1-0**

Quite a battle, and evidence that Black can hold his own in this opening.

**B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 a6 4 Bd3 c5**

Now 4...Nf6?! would defeat the purpose of 3...a6, because after 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bd3 or 6 f4, Black has entered the main lines of 3 Nd2 Nf6 with the 'lost' tempo ...a6. I repeat this observation at several junctures in order to make the distinction clear.

After 4 Bd3 c5, we have:

**B1: 5 dxc5**

**B2: 5 exd5**

**B3: 5 c3**

**B1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 a6 4 Bd3 c5 5 dxc5 Nf6 6 Qe2**

The alternative 6 exd5 is not as safe as it looks: 6...Qxd5 7 Ngf3 Bxc5 8 Qe2 Nbd7 9 c4 Qh5 10 a3 a5 11 Ne4 Nxe4 12 Bxe4 Nf6 13 Bc2 Bd7 14 Bf4 Qg4 15 Bg3 Bc6 and White will suffer the doubling of his f-pawns to his disadvantage, A.Ivanov-Y.Shulman, US Ch., San Diego 2006.

**6...Bxc5 7 Ngf3 Nc6 (Diagram 22)**



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: We've reached a position that often arises via 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 c5 4 Ngf3 a6 5 dxc5 Bxc5 6 Bd3 Nf6 7 Qe2 Nc6.**

Interestingly, Black is a tempo ahead on the same position that can be reached via 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Bd3 c5 5 dxc5 Nf6 6 Qe2 Bxc5?!, because his bishop hasn't stopped off

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on e7 before capturing on c5. However, Black's extra tempo isn't a pure blessing, because in that 3 Nd2 Be7 variation the capture ...Bxc5 is usually delayed or even foregone so that a knight can capture on c5 if desired.

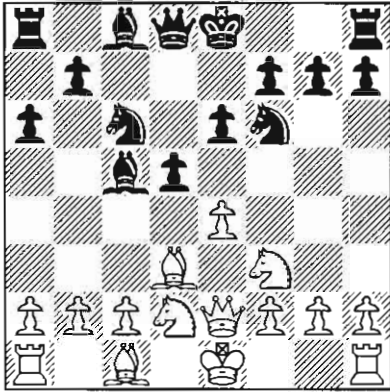


Diagram 22 (W)

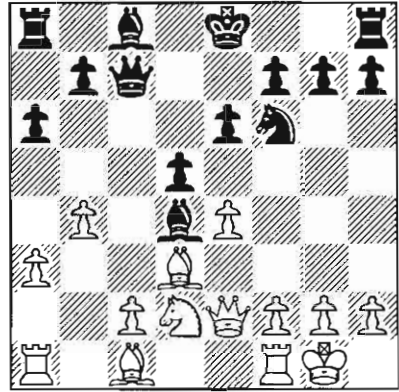


Diagram 23 (W)

**8 a3**

The most popular move, intending b4, but also preventing ...Nb4.

**8...Qc7 9 0-0 Ba7**

9...Bd7!? has also been played.

**10 b4**

Black is more than comfortable after 10 exd5?! Nxd5.

**10...Nd4 11 Nxd4 Bxd4 (Diagram 23) 12 Rb1**

12 Ra2!? e5 13 c4 Bg4 14 Qe1 dxe4 15 Nxe4 Nxe4 16 Qxe4 was played in M.Brodsky-V.Moskalenko, Donetsk 1998. Apart from the equal 16...Be6 17 Rc2 f5 18 Qe2 0-0 19 c5 Kh8, as played, Psakhis gives the dynamic line 16...f5!? 17 Qd5 Qe7, intending 18 h3 Bh5 19 Bxf5? Bf7 20 Qf3 Bxc4.

**12...0-0 13 c4 dxc4 14 Nxc4 e5 15 Be3 Rd8 16 Rbc1 Be6 17 Na5 Qb6 18 Bxd4 Rxd4 19 Qe3 Rad8**

(L.Gofshtein-L.Psakhis, Herzliya 1993) Black is somewhat better due to his d-file pressure and the good-versus-bad bishops.

**B2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 a6 4 Bd3 c5 5 exd5 Qxd5 (Diagram 24)**

Again this active recapture. If you're looking for an alternative, 5...exd5 6 dxc5 Bxc5 is one of the easier isolated pawn positions to play because Black has developed rapidly and White's bishop on d3 reduces his control over d4. Black can set up with ...Nc6, ...Nge7-f5, and ...Qd6 or ...Qf6, or he can put his knight on f6; for

example, 7 Nb3 Bb6 8 Nf3 Ne7 9 0-0 Nbc6 10 c3 Bg4 11 Re1 Qd6.

After 5...Qxd5, 6 dxc5 Nf6 transposes to 5 dxc5 (Line B1), with satisfactory play for Black. But there are two other moves of interest:

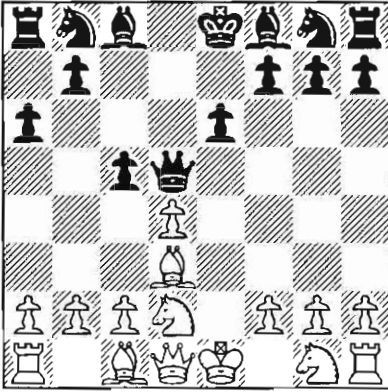


Diagram 24 (W)

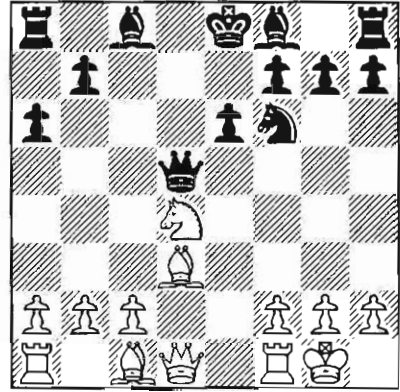


Diagram 25 (B)

**a) 6 Be4!?**

This is the most interesting move, gambiting a pawn. It hasn't been played, as far as I know.

**6...Qxd4 7 Qf3!**

Not 7 Ngf3?! Qd8 8 0-0 Nf6.

**7...Nf6**

Black must be careful to continue developing: 7...Qd7? 8 Nc4 loses, and 7...Ra7!? 8 Ne2 Qd8 9 Nc4 is difficult.

**8 Ne2**

8 Bxb7 Bxb7 9 Qxb7 Qd5! 10 Qc8+ Ke7 is unclear but Black seems to stand well enough; for example, 11 Ngf3 Nbd7 12 Qc7 g6 13 0-0 Bg7.

**8...Qd7 9 Nc4 Nxe4!**

A nice exchange sacrifice.

**10 Nb6 Qc6 11 Nxa8 b5 12 Nc7+**

Or 12 Bf4 Qxa8 13 Bxb8 Bb7!.

**12...Kd8 13 Bf4 Nd6 14 Qxc6 Nxc6**

Black recovers his material. This analysis is wide open to improvements.

**b) 6 Ngf3 cxd4 7 0-0 Nf6 8 Nb3 Nc6 9 Nbx d4 Nxd4 10 Nxd4 (Diagram 25)**



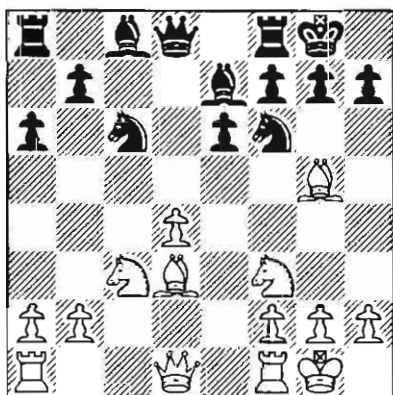
**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** Experienced French Defence players may recognize this position as one that is extremely close to the main line of the 3 Nd2 c5 4 exd5 Qxd5 variation.

The differences are that Black's queen is on d5 (usually Bc4 and ...Qd6 are interpolated), and that White has chosen the less critical d3 square for his bishop. At this point, the moves 10...Bd6 and 10...Be7 are fully playable, and 10...b5!? is ambitious and unclear.

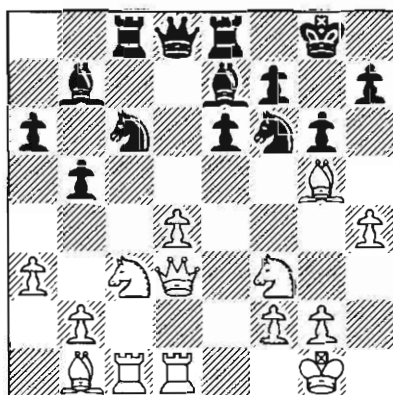
**B3) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 a6 4 Bd3 c5 5 c3**

Here Black can continue to play flexibly with 5...Nc6, or head for an isolated pawn position with...

**5...cxd4 6 cxd4 dxe4 7 Nxe4 Bb4+ 8 Nc3 Nc6 9 Nf3 Nf6 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bg5 Be7 (Diagram 26)**



**Diagram 26 (W)**



**Diagram 27 (B)**

**12 a3**

12 Rc1 Nb4 13 Bb1 b5 14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Be4 Nd5 16 Qb3 was agreed drawn in A.Deviatkin-L.Gutman, Pardubice 2002.

**12...b5**

Generally this expansion offers better counterplay than ...b6 does against the Bg5/Bb1/Qd3 set-up that White uses here.

**13 Rc1 Bb7 14 Bb1 Rc8 15 Qd3 g6 16 Rfd1 Re8 17 h4 (Diagram 27)**

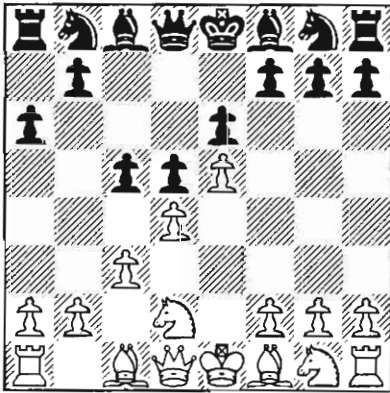
This is P.Mohapl-R.Tibensky, Tatranska Lomnica 1998. Both sides have made normal moves (although White often tries for Rfe1 and Rad1 instead). Now Black should play 17...Na5! 18 Ne5 (18 Ba2 Nc4 19 Rc2 Nd5) 18...Nd5! with excellent

play. Instead the game continued 17...b4? 18 Na4! (threatening to occupy an ideal outpost on c5) 18...a5 (18...bxa3 19 bxa3 Nd7!?) 19 Qb5 (19 Nc5!) 19...Ba8 20 Qb6? Nd5 21 Qa6 bxa3 22 bxa3 f6 23 Bd2 Bxa3 24 Bxa5 Nxa5 25 Rxc8 Qxc8 26 Qxa5 Bb4 27 Qa7 Re7 28 Nb6 Rxa7 0-1.

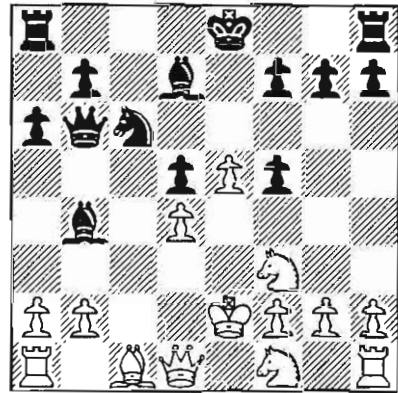
**C) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 a6 4 e5**

Black's approach in the illustrative game Navara-Tibensky is the one I recommend versus 4 e5. But I'll briefly examine a few other ideas for Black in this variation.

**4...c5 5 c3 (Diagram 28)**



**Diagram 28 (B)**



**Diagram 29 (W)**

Now there are two lines for Black:

**a) 5...Nc6 6 Ndf3**

6 Ngf3!? is worth looking into (this move makes it hard to defend d4, but may be underestimated):

a) 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 Qb6 8 Nb3 a5 is a standard way to attack the centre. If White plays 9 a4, 9...Bb4+ forces the king to move, but the gambit 9 a3!? a4 10 Nc5! is much more interesting.

b) 6...Qb6 7 Nb3 c4 8 Nbd2 f6 also deserves consideration.

c) 6...Nh6!? 7 Bd3 Qb6 8 Nf1? (better is 8 dxc5 Bxc5 9 0-0, which challenges Black to break down e5; and 8 0-0!? cxd4 9 cxd4 Nxd4 10 Nxd4 Qxd4 11 Nf3 is a promising gambit, although ...a6 comes in handy in such positions!) 8...cxd4 9 cxd4 Bd7 (threatening ...Nxd4) 10 Bc2 Bb4+ 11 Ke2 Nf5 12 Bxf5 exf5 (**Diagram 29**) (now Black has the light squares, as often happens after Bxf5; here the results are devastating) 13 a3 Be7 14 Qd3?? (but things were out of hand anyway) 14...Nxe5 15 Qc3 (15 Nxe5 Bb5) 15...Bb5+ with a pawn and killing attack, M.Gruber-D.Thielen, Wattens

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1994. But White had good options along the way, and of course 6...Nh6 may not be the best approach.

Going back to 6 Ndf3, in our main game above we saw 6...cxd4 7 cxd4 f6!. Not surprisingly, the most frequent option is to directly attack d4 with perhaps ...Nh6-f5 and ...Qb6. For example:

**6...cxd4 7 cxd4 Nge7 8 Bd3 Nf5 9 Ne2 Be7 10 a3 Qb6**

10...Bd7 is a reasonable alternative.

**11 h4 Be7 12 h5 Na5!**

This is V.Kupreichik-S.Dolmatov, Yerevan 1982. The players have arrived at a complex position containing chances for both sides.

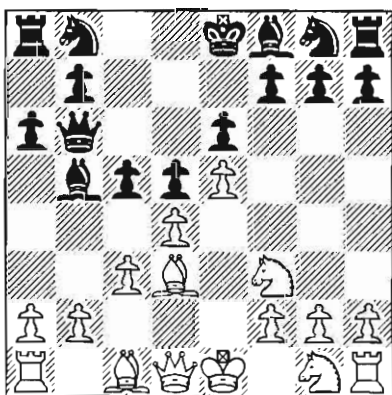


**BEWARE!** Note that 12...Ncxd4?? 13 Nfxd4 Nxd4 14 Be3 wins. This indirect defence of d4 can be a life-saver for White.

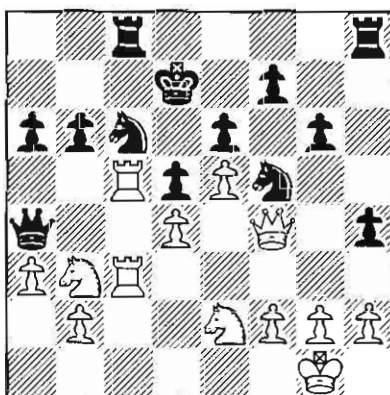
b) 5...Qb6

With this move Black has a very different idea.

**6 Ndf3 Bd7!? 7 Bd3 Bb5 (Diagram 30)**



**Diagram 30 (W)**



**Diagram 31 (W)**

Black plays to exchange his bad bishop for White's good one. This is a favourite strategy of some 3...a6 fans. I think that it's fine as long as Black doesn't fall too far behind in development.

**8 Ne2 Nc6 9 0-0 Bxd3 10 Qxd3 Nge7**

For the next 15 moves or so White's space gives him some advantage, but nothing that Black can't deal with, and White finally blunders. Obviously that has nothing

to do with the opening. I would say that ...Bd7-b5 often has this effect: it poses problems for the opponent and entails little risk. On the flip side, White retains his greater control of space and therefore some advantage.

**11 Ng3 h5 12 Bg5 Ng6 13 Rfe1 cxd4 14 cxd4 Qb5 15 Qe3 Rc8 16 Rec1 Kd7 17 Nd2 h4 18 Ne2 Be7 19 Bxe7 Ngxe7 20 Rc5 Qb6 21 Nb3 Nf5 22 Qf4 g6 23 Rac1 Qb4 24 R1c3 b6 25 a3 Qa4 (Diagram 31) 26 g4?? hxg3 27 hxg3 Ke8**

Black won in H.Blanco-J.Borges Mateos, Cuban Ch., Santa Clara 2006.

## Conclusion

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Black has yet to run into serious difficulties following 3...a6. The most important line looks to be 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5, when Black's idea of ...b5 is untested. All in all, 3...a6 looks like an entertaining line to play!

## Characterization of 3 Nd2 a6

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Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♣ ♣
Attacking Nature	♣ ♣ ♣
Positional/Strategic Nature	♣ ♣ ♣ ♣
Risk	♣ ♣
Reward	♣ ♣ ♣
Theoretical Depth	♣ ♣

## Chapter Fourteen

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# A Debasing Strategy

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6 (Diagram 1)

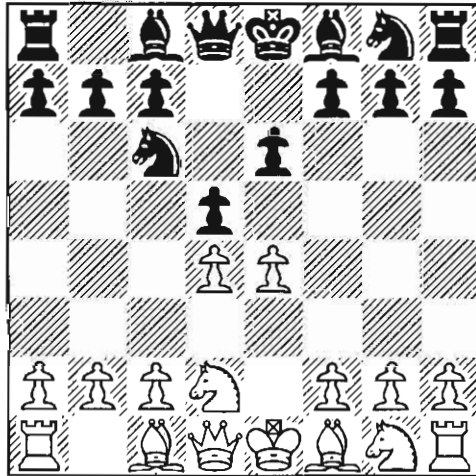


Diagram 1 (W)

The move 3...Nc6 introduces the Guimard Variation of the French Tarrasch. It has been played for many years, but was always thought to be somewhat weaker and less logical than the main replies to the French Tarrasch, namely, 3...Nf6 and 3...c5. I myself had never felt highly of it until I saw that Neil McDonald was including

win after win for Black in his *ChessPublishing* column! He also provided a lot of analysis to support the theoretical grounds for those successes. In the last couple of years, use of the Guimard Variation has exploded among grandmasters and masters. Top players who have used the opening over a period of years include, among others, Vaganian, Ian Rogers, Hug, Drasko, Vlatko, Kruppa and Riazantsev; I should also mention the correspondence player Thomas Müller. These are players who have used 3...Nc6 on more than an experimental basis, and there seem to be a raft of French Defence players who are moving in that direction.

Why has the Guimard had a lukewarm reception among players over the years? Mainly because 3...Nc6 blocks the c-pawn and prevents ...c5, which attacks the base of White's potential pawn chain. This ...c5 advance has traditionally been thought to be an essential part of French Defence strategy. However, as I hope that this book demonstrates, that limitation of ...Nc6 is compensated for by a number of virtues. In the case before us, the knight on c6 attacks d4 directly, compelling a response, and it also helps to control e5. That is not true of any other 3rd move, and accounts for the fact that after White plays e5 (as he does in all major variations), ...f6 becomes a more effective move. Attacking the front of the pawn chain in various openings has become routine in recent years, probably contributing to the closer attention being given to the Guimard.

Remember too that White's knight on d2, apart from limiting his bishop on c1, blocks his queen from the defence of d4. This means that 4 Ngf3 is the most serious move (we deal with 4 c3 below), so that the Tarrasch knight can't easily jump over to the kingside as it does in other variations. It has to go somewhere, and will probably end up on b3, away from the kingside, or have to use precious time re-routing via f1 to e3 or g3.

Needless to say, Black pays a price for these benefits, or no one would play 3 Nd2! As suggested above, the inability of Black to attack d4 by means of ...c5 means that White needn't devote many resources to the protection of that square. In fact, Black will sometimes go through strange gyrations to re-establish pressure on d4; for example, ...a5, ...Na7, ...b6, and ...c5. Furthermore, Black has to deal with the possibility of Bb5 at many junctures, not so much as to double his pawns as to further White's control of e5 and thus make ...f6 a less desirable move.

The Guimard Variation has become very theoretical of late, meaning that players and authors have devoted a lot more attention to specific ways of handling the opening. Psakhis devotes 30 pages to it, and that was before recent discoveries have had such a positive effect on its reputation! We'll try to find a path through that expanding theory that doesn't overburden you with details.

## Illustrative Games

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□ P.Pazos ■ R.Fandino Reyes

Havana 1999

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1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5 Nd7 6 Be2 (Diagram 2)

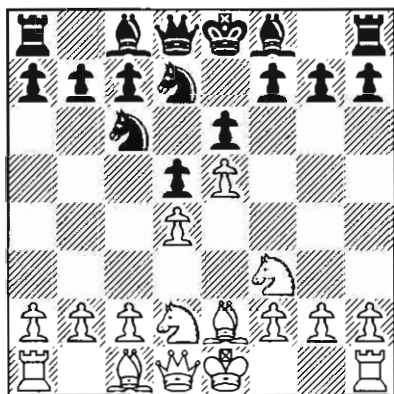


Diagram 2 (B)

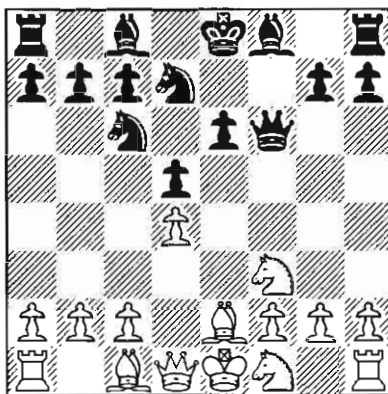


Diagram 3 (B)

White plays a modest-looking move with quite a bit of poison in it. Some authors consider this variation to be the most important one of the whole opening.

**6...f6**

Our thematic break. We will see the solid 6...Be7 in the theory section.

**7 exf6 Qxf6**

The slower 7...Nxf6 is infrequently used. The idea is to set up the standard formation ...Bd6/...0-0 and then ...e5, or ...Qe8-h5, or ...Bd7-e8-h5. White seems to get a slight edge in the main lines.

**8 Nf1! (Diagram 3)**

This painfully slow move is White's point in playing 6 Be2. The concrete idea is to hinder ...e5 by having a knight on e3 to grab the d-pawn. It turns out that without ...e5, Black has to work hard to get counterchances, and may have to return White's lost time in the process.

**8...Bd6**



**BEWARE! 8...e5?! 9 Ne3 e4 10 Nxd5! Qd6 11 Bc4! is an ancient piece sacrifice. Black has recently hit upon hard times after 11...exf3 12 0-0!.**

**9 Ne3 0-0 10 0-0 (Diagram 4) 10...Nb6!?**

An important decision. This move defends d5 and gets out of the way of the bishop on d7. While this is logical, most top players prefer 10...Qg6, as described

in the theory section below.

### 11 h3

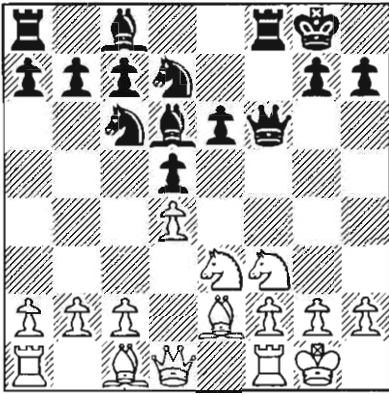


Diagram 4 (B)

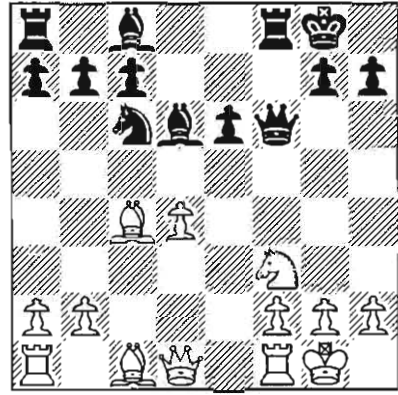


Diagram 5 (B)

White plays carefully, perhaps too carefully. One logical way to play for the advantage was 11 c4, to frustrate ...e5. In view of the threat of 12 c5, Black naturally plays 11...dxc4 12 Nxc4 Nxc4 13 Bxc4 13 Bxc4 (**Diagram 5**). This is a key position for 10...Nb6. Both sides have isolated pawns, but White looks better positioned to put pressure on e6 and perhaps occupy e5. It turns out that Black has compensating factors based upon his somewhat quicker development. His rooks will be connected next move, and he has the f-file, which helps him to make distracting threats on the kingside. Finally, he may be able to get a knight to d5, from where it will perform both defensive and offensive tasks. Typical play would be 13...Bd7 (13...Kh8 is the natural option, but I like getting developed quickly – it would be nice to get this bishop to c6) 14 Re1 Na5!? (or 14...h6!, which not only defends against g5 intrusions but prepares to attack with ...g5 at the right moment; play could go 15 Be3 Rad8 16 Rc1 Kh8 17 Bd3!? e5 18 Bb1 Bf5 with equality or better) 15 Bd3! Bc6 16 Be4 Bd5! (or even 16...Bxe4 17 Rxe4 when White has neutralized Black's long diagonal hopes and left the knight out of play on a5; however, Black has the better bishop and his outpost on d5 can no longer be challenged, so it's not obvious that the first player can get anything; 16...Ra8 17 Bg5 Qf7 also looks playable) 17 Qc2 h6! with the idea 18 Bh7+ Kh8 19 Ne5?! Nc6! 20 Ng6+ Kxh7 21 Nxf8+ Kg8 22 Nd7 Qh4 (22...Bxh2+ 23 Kxh2 Qh4+ 24 Kg1 Bxg2 25 Kxg2 Qg4+ draws) 23 h3 Rd8 24 Ne5 Nxd4 25 Qg6 Bxe5 26 Rxe5 Qf6! 27 Qxf6 gxf6 and White has to return the exchange, still a pawn down.

The other way to go is 11 Ng4 immediately (similar to the game but more flexible). For example, 11...Qg6 (11...Qe7 12 Bg5! Qf7 13 Nfe5 Nxe5 14 Nxe5 Bxe5 15 dxe5

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

favours White) 12 h3 Bd7!? 13 Bd3! Qe8 14 Ng5! g6, with ideas of ...Nxd4 and ...e5, although White retains some advantage after 15 Nf3 (15 c3 e5!) 15...e5 16 Nfxe5 Nxe5 17 Nxe5 Bxe5 18 dxe5 Qxe5 19 Bh6. This sort of line is playable, but lends credence to 10...Qg6.

### 11...Bd7!?

I think the interesting and bold 11...e5! is better. 12 Nxd5 Nxd5 13 dxe5 Nxe5 14 Qxd5+ Be6 is unclear, but Black seems to have plenty for a pawn in view of 15 Qxb7 Nxf3+ 16 Bxf3 (16 Qxf3? Qe5 17 Qg3 Qxe2) 16...Qe5 17 g3 Rab8 18 Qe4 Bxh3.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** The move 11...e5 is typical of the Guimard, which is a more aggressive system than it may at first appear.

### 12 Ng4 Qe7 13 Re1!

13 Bg5 Qe8 doesn't achieve much.

### 13...Rae8 14 Bd3?!

Just asking for a tactical riposte. McDonald suggests that White retains some advantage with 14 c3, which may be so, because the consistent solution is 14...e5!? 15 dxe5 Nxe5 16 Ngxe5 Bxe5 17 Nxe5 Qxe5, when Black's extra centre pawn may not quite compensate for what are a potentially a strong set of bishops: 18 Be3 Qd6 19 Qd2! (19 b4 Rxe3!?) 19...a5!?, and White's advantage is definite but within bounds.

### 14...Rxf3! 15 Qxf3 Nxd4 16 Qd1 e5 (Diagram 6)

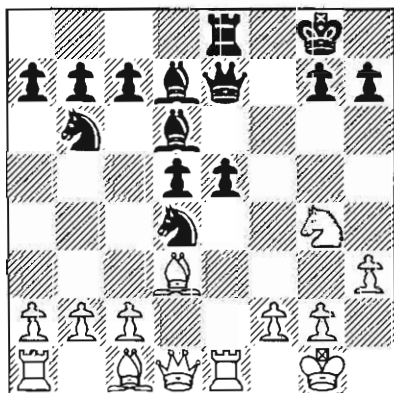


Diagram 6 (W)

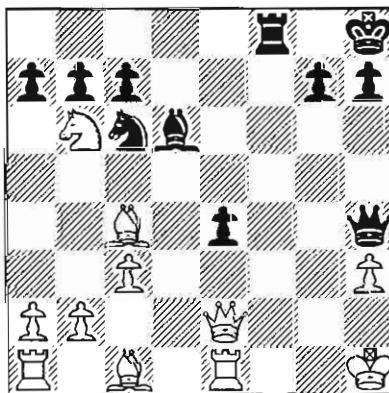


Diagram 7 (W)

This is a fairly typical French exchange sacrifice. Black's centre and attacking chances give him more than enough compensation.

**17 Ne3?! Rf8?!**

17...Qh4! is practically winning.

**18 c3 Nc6?!**

Black is giving his opponent chances. 18...Qh4! 19 cxd4 e4! still wins material after White's best defence 20 Rf1 exd3 21 Ng4! h5 22 Ne5 Qxd4 23 Nxd7 Nxd7 24 Qxh5 (or 24 Qe1 Ne5) 24...d2 25 Bxd2 Qxd2.

**19 Nxd5!**

This subjects White to a heavy attack. In fact, anything else is awful, so it's worth a go.

**19...Qf7!**

A double attack, but still...

**20 Nxb6?!**

No better is 20 Ne3 e4! 21 Bxe4 Qxf2+ 22 Qg3 23 Nf1 Rxf1+. But White could have tried 20 Be4! Qxf2+ 21 Kh2! Qh4 22 Re3 with complications in which it looks like he can survive and maintain the balance.

**20...Qxf2+ 21 Kh1 Bxh3! 22 gxh3 e4 23 Qe2**

Or 23 Bc4+ Kh8 24 Qe2 Qh4, leading to the same position.

**23...Qh4 24 Bc4+ Kh8 (Diagram 7) 25 Qe3?**

Finally White truly slips. 25 Be6! still leads to double-edged complications: 25...Rf2 (25...axb6 26 Be3!) 26 Qe3 cxb6 27 Rd1! (after 27 Bd2 Qf6! Black is a rook down but will win, e.g. 28 Bg4 Ne5!) 27...Bc7! (27...Bf4 28 Qxf4 Rxf4 29 Bxf4 Qxf4 30 Rf1 is unclear) 28 Bd2 Qf6!? 29 Bd5!? and Black might have to accept 29...Rf3 30 Qxe4 Rxh3+ with a draw. But Black let White off the hook on both move 17 and 18.

**25...Bg3! 26 Bf1? 0-1.**

Allowing 26...Rxf1+, but 26 Be6 Bxe1 27 Qg1! e3! 28 Bxe3 Qe4+ 29 Kh2 Qxe6 30 Qxe1 Rf3 will do the trick. A good demonstration of the source of Black's play.

□ V.Rasik ■ L.Cernousek

Ostrava 2005

**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5 Nd7 6 Bd3 f6 (Diagram 8)**

This is quite a test for the Guimard. If Black can get away with ...f6 right after White has played Bd3, his position must be resilient indeed. The main alternative is 6...Nb4, attacking the bishop and preparing ...c5.

**7 exf6**

With this exchange, White plays for a positional advantage. 7 Ng5!? is the attempt at refutation that is examined in the theory section.

**7...Qxf6**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

7...Nxf6 is a rarely used option. Black's idea is ...Bd6, ...0-0 and ...e5, but his control over the e5-square itself is the main problem and I don't trust this line if White plays for Bb5 and Ne5.

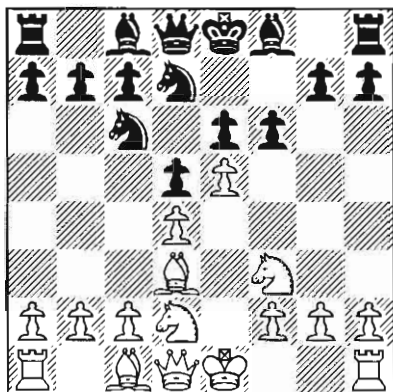


Diagram 8 (W)

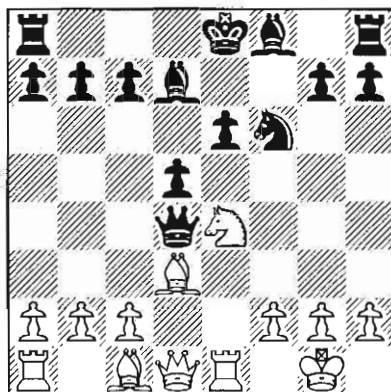


Diagram 9 (W)

8 0-0 Bd6



**BEWARE! 8...Nxd4? is extremely risky.**

McDonald gives 9 Nxd4 Qxd4 10 Re1 Nf6 11 Ne4! Bd7 (**Diagram 9**) 12 Nxf6+ (12 Nd6+? Bxd6! was played in M.Zlatic-B.Sebestyén, Paks 2003, with the idea 13 Bg6+ hxg6 14 Qxd4 Bxh2+ 15 Kf1 Bb5+ 16 Re2 Be5! 17 Qxe5 Rh1 mate) 12...Qxf6 13 Qh5+ g6 14 Qxd5 and as McDonald says, 'Black is in trouble'!

9 c4!

This is the only serious challenge to Black's plan. Otherwise ...e5 will follow in short order.

9...0-0 10 c5 Be7

Here I think that 10...Bf4! (**Diagram 10**), with the idea of ...e5, is better: 11 Qc2 g6 12 Nb3 e5 13 Bb5 e4 (or 13...Bxc1 14 Qxc1 Nxd4 15 Nfxd4 c6!) 14 Bxf4 Qxf4 15 Ne1 Nf6 and Black has the freer play. Faced with the ideas of ...Ng4 and...Bf5, White should break via 16 f3! when among other lines Black has 16...Qe3+ 17 Qf2 Ng4! 18 Qxe3 Nxe3 19 Rf2 Bd7 with a small advantage.

11 Nb3 h6

11...e5 might lead to unclear play following 12 Ng5!? e4 13 Nxh7! Kxh7 14 Qh5+ Kg8 15 Qxd5+ Qf7 16 Qxf7+ Kxf7 (16...Rxf7 17 Bc4) 17 Bxe4. Although White's ex-

tra pawns aren't passed (the usual criterion for three pawns versus a piece), I still think he has slightly better chances.

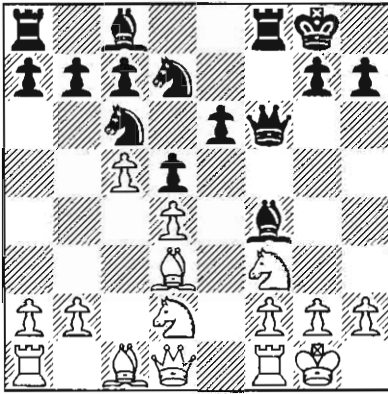


Diagram 10 (W)

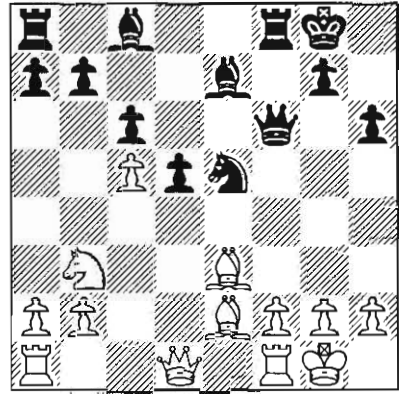


Diagram 11 (W)

**12 Be3 e5! 13 dxe5 Ndx5 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Be2**

15 Bc2 c6 16 Bd4 Qf4 is about equal.

**15...c6 (Diagram 11)**

This position shows a recurring theme in the Guimard, one that contributes to its appeal. In most normal Tarrasch variations that include White's e5 advance, Black plays ...c5. Assuming that this is followed by ...cxd4/cxd4 and ...f6 in some order, most lines have White settling for exf6. After Black recaptures with a piece, we then have the extremely common situation in which the move ...e5 will leave him with an isolated pawn.

Okay, if you can follow that you're either awfully good or a confirmed French Defence player! Here is a 'real-world' example of what I just said: 3...Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 c3 c5 6 Bd3 Nc6 7 Ne2 cxd4 8 cxd4 f6 9 exf6 Nxf6 10 Nf3 Bd6 11 0-0 0-0 (or 11...Qb6 12 Bd2 e5 13 dxe5 Nxe5 14 Nxe5 Bxe5 15 Nc3, or 15 Bc3) 12 Bf4 Bxf4 13 Nxf4 Qd6 14 g3 e5 15 dxe5 Nxe5 16 Nxe5 Qxe5 17 Qb3. In these lines Black gets an isolated d-pawn. Not surprisingly, this situation also comes up in other French Variations in which d4 and e5 have been played.

Now if we return to Rasik-Cernousek, we see that Black is able to play ...c6 and avoid all the problems associated with the isolated pawn.

**16 Rc1 Qg6 17 Bh5 Qh7!?**

17...Qe4! 18 Bd4 Nd3 19 Rc3! Nf4 20 Rg3 is again level.

**18 Rc3! Bf5 19 Nd4 (Diagram 12)**

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

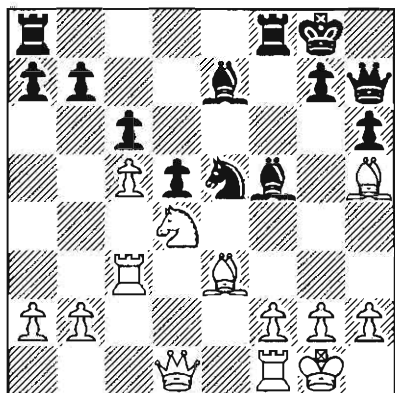


Diagram 12 (B)

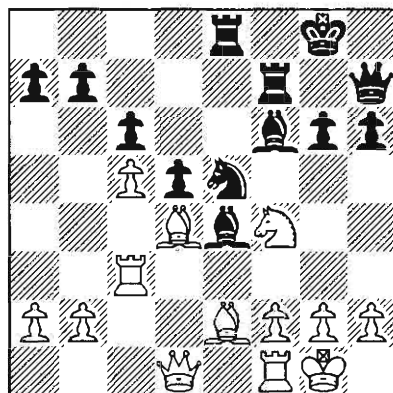


Diagram 13 (B)

**19...Bg6!?**

19...Nc4! looks fine.

**20 Be2 Rae8 21 Ne6!?**

21 Qb3 is another idea, forcing Black to do something about his b-pawn: 21...Rb8  
22 Qa4!? a6 offers chances for both sides.

**21...Rf7 22 Nf4 Be4 23 Bh5?!?**

White could maintain some sort of balance by playing 23 f3! Bf5 24 Bd4, although I prefer Black because of his centre (for example, 24...Nd7!).

**23...g6 24 Be2 Bf6 25 Bd4 (Diagram 13) 25...Qh8!**

Black's funny manoeuvres with his queen continue. 26...Nf3+ is threatened.

**26 Rg3 Kh7 27 Bc3?**

A mistake, but White is worse in any case.

**27...Qf8!**

The queen finally finds her most effective spot. Both 28...Bh4! and 28...Qxc5 are threatened.

**28 Nd3 Nxd3 29 Bxd3 Qxc5 30 Qg4? Bxd3 0-1**

White resigned in view of 31 Rxd3 Bxc3 32 Rxc3 Qxf2+!

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□ S.Tiviakov ■ S.Vysochin

Cairo 2002

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**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5 Nd7 6 Nb3 (Diagram 14)**

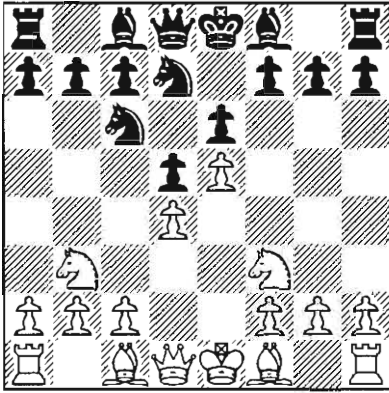


Diagram 14 (B)

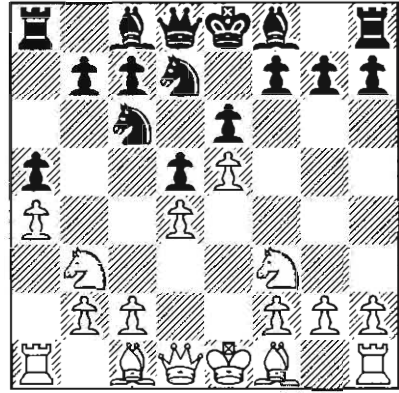


Diagram 15 (B)

This continuation could be called the most 'positional' of White's choices, although it can naturally become lively if lines open quickly. White unmasks a diagonal for his bishop, covers d4, and watches over the c5-square. On the negative side, this knight has little mobility, since it can not normally go to c5 or a5, all the more so if Black plays ...b6. The knight can also be attacked by ...a5-a4 and by the common reorganization ...b6 and ...c5-c4.

White's strategy is to use his territorial advantage to keep Black cramped. Black may pursue his plan of ...f6, but White has quicker access to e5 via Bb5, Bf4 and Re1, so he will be able to exert more pressure on that point. Therefore Black will usually attack on the queenside in this variation before turning his attention to the other flank.

### 6...a5

I'll concentrate upon this advance, which gives Black room to operate on the queenside. Another move is 6...Be7, in some cases simply waiting to see whether he wants to play ...a5 afterwards.

The move 6...f6 is not that good, but not as bad as it turned out in the amusing miniature M.Tal-R.Vaganian, Dubna, 1973: 7 Bb5 fxe5 8 dxe5 Nc5? 9 Ng5! Bd7? 10 Bxc6 bxc6 (10...Bxc6 11 Nxc5 Bxc5 12 Nxe6 Qe7 13 Qg4!) 11 Qh5+ g6 12 Qf3 1-0!

### 7 a4 (Diagram 15)

This would seem forced, since ...a4 is in principle undesirable for White. However, upon occasion he has played 7 Bf4, so that the knight on b3 won't hem in the dark-squared bishop on c1. Then M.Chandler-J.Timman, Amsterdam 1984, continued 7...Be7!? (Drasko suggests simply 7...a4 8 Nc1 a3 9 b3 f6, which is fine; the straightforward 9...Bb4+ 10 Bd2 Bxd2+ 11 Qxd2 f6 12 Nd3 0-0 is also satisfactory for Black)

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

8 h4 h6 9 Rh3 b6!? 10 Rg3 Bf8!? 11 h5 Bb7 with the ideas ...Ne7 and ...Qc8/...Ba6. This is unclear, and in any case unlikely to prove best play. 7...a4 is safe and sound.

### 7...Be7 8 Bb5

This standard move helps to prevent Black from breaking down the e5-square with ...f6. In contrast, 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 f6 10 exf6 Bxf6 has the idea of ...e5, and Black can also play 10...Nxf6, since White is not ready to occupy e5 with pieces. After Black opens up his pieces by playing ...fxe5, a White pawn on e5 is generally much less bothersome than a piece there.

### 8...Na7! (Diagram 16)

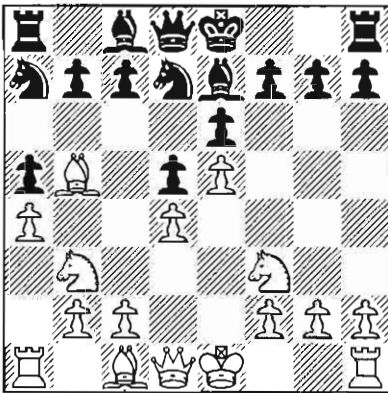


Diagram 16 (W)

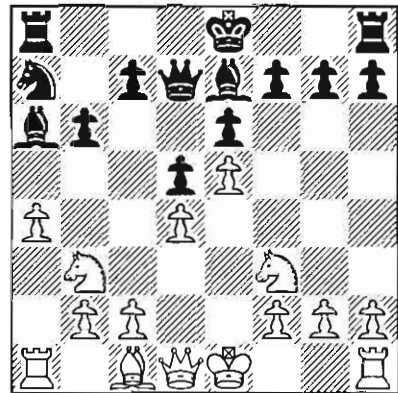


Diagram 17 (W)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** This is a typically paradoxical French Defence idea. White's moves have been directed towards restraining ...f6, but now after ...b6, he will have to deal with the twin ideas of ...c5 and ...Ba6.

Of course, Black's forces are well away from the kingside, but White isn't really able to organize anything in that sector.

### 9 Be2!

The most accurate move. White obviously doesn't want to allow 9...Nxb5, gaining the bishop pair, and there are two realistic alternatives.

First, the bishop can retreat to d3, but then after ...b6 and ...c5, the position of the knight is particularly unfortunate and it is difficult not to lose significant time in the face of ...c4. We will look at 9 Bd3 in the analytical section.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** White can also win a pawn by 9 Bxd7+ and 10 Nxa5. But Black achieves a number of major advantages after 9...Qxd7! 10 Nxa5 b6 11 Nb3 Ba6 (Diagram 17), preventing White from castling.

Black has two bishops and a growing lead in development. White still has greater command of space, but he has difficulty coordinating. J.Shaw-Y.Kruppa, Cappelle la Grande 2000, continued 12 Bg5 0-0 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 14 Qd2 Nc6 15 Nc1 f6 (with his well-placed pieces, Black opens lines to activate his rooks) 16 Ne2 fxe5 17 Nxe5 (17 dxe5 is better, but Black has a variety of ways to keep the initiative; for example, 17...Rf5! and now 18 0-0 Rxf3! 19 gxf3 Nxe5 or 18 Ned4 Nxd4 19 Qxd4 Qf7! 20 Qc3 Rf4!) 17...Qh4! (**Diagram 18**) (a clever move that attacks f2 and indirectly hits d4) 18 g3? (18 Nxc6 Rxf2! 19 g3 Qf6 and e2 falls; 18 Nf3! Rxf3! 19 gxf3 Bxe2 20 Kxe2 Nxd4+ 21 Kd1 Rf8! is still strong for Black) 18...Nxe5!? (even stronger was 18...Qe4! 19 f3 Rxf3 20 Nxf3 Nxd4!!) 19 Qe3 (better was 19 gxh4 Nf3+ 20 Kd1 Nxd2 21 Kxd2 Rxf2, but this is no fun for White) 19...Nf3+ (or 19...Qe7! 20 Qxe5 Qb4+ 21 Kf1 Bxe2+ 22 Kxe2 Qxb2) 20 Qxf3 Rxf3 21 gxh4 Raf8 22 Rf1 Rh3 23 a5 Rb8 24 Rh1 Rxh4 25 f4 bxa5 26 Rxa5 Rxb2 27 Kd2 Bxe2 28 Kxe2 Rxc2+ 29 Kd3 Rc4 0-1.

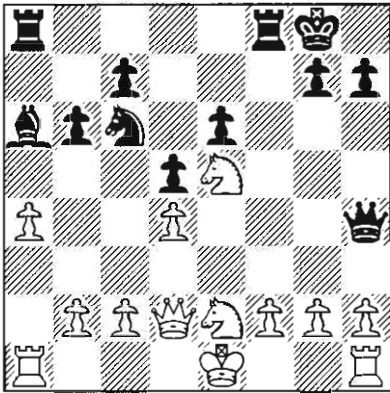


Diagram 18 (W)

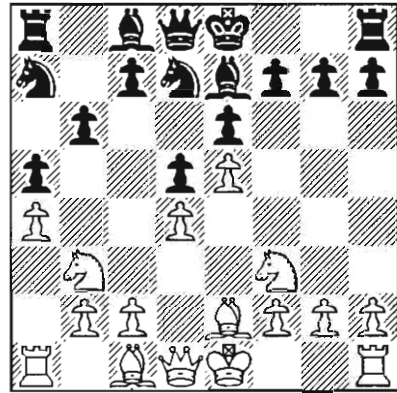


Diagram 19 (W)

### 9...b6 (Diagram 19)

Black prepares to play 10...c5 and be able to answer 11 dxc5 with 11...bxc5. Although he sometimes plays ...c5 without a preparatory ...b6, it tends to be a bit worse for him or at best equal after exchanges on c5; in any case, Black has few winning chances. The other advantage to ...b6 is that Black would like to play ...Ba6 and exchange off White's good bishop.

### 10 0-0

Tiviakov gives 10 h4 with initiative and a small advantage, but 10...c5 doesn't look

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

bad, for example:

a) 11 Ng5 cxd4 12 f4 Nc5.

b) 11 h5!? c4! 12 Nbd2 f6 13 h6! g6 14 exf6 Bxf6 15 0-0 Nc6 16 c3 0-0 17 Re1 (or 17 b3 cxb3 18 Nxb3 e5 19 Bb5 Bb7) 17...e5 18 dxe5 Ndxe5 with activity and equal prospects.

c) 11 c3 Nc6 (alternatives include 11...c4 12 Nbd2 0-0, and 11...Qc7!? 12 exf6 Nxf6 13 Ne5 Nd7) 12 Bg5 0-0 13 0-0 Ba6 and Black exchanges his bad bishop for White's good one, with equality.

### 10...0-0 11 Be3 c5 12 c3

12 c4 cxd4 13 Nbx4 Bb7 14 cxd5 Bxd5 prepares ...Nc5. In S.Hmadi-A.Beliavsky, Tunis 1985, White sacrificed a pawn with 15 Nf5!? Nc6 16 Nxe7+ Qxe7 17 Rc1 (the e-pawn was going anyway) 17...Ncxe5 18 Nxe5 Nxe5, and had some compensation but perhaps not quite enough.

### 12...Nc6 13 Ne1

White prepares f4, both for attacking and defensive purposes.

### 13...Ba6

The exchange of bishops fulfils Black's initial aims from the opening.

### 14 Bxa6 Rxa6 15 f4 f5! (Diagram 20)

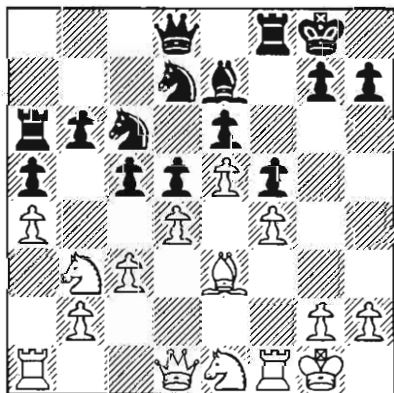


Diagram 20 (W)

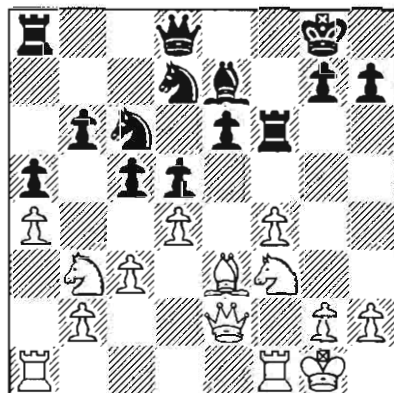


Diagram 21 (B)

Tiviakov gives this move a '?!', but I think that it's reasonable and to the point. If Black can successfully block White on the kingside, he has all the queenside chances (based, for example, on the move ...b5).

### 16 exf6 Rxf6

Upon other piece captures, Black's c-pawn hangs.

**17 Qe2 Ra8 18 Nf3 (Diagram 21)**

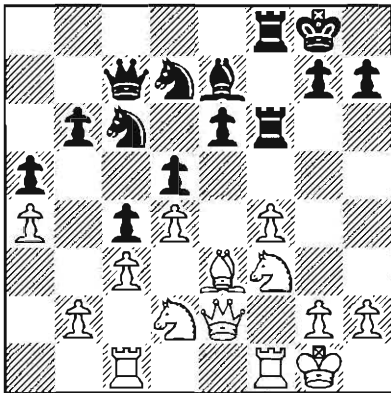
Tiviakov assesses this as somewhat better for White, but I doubt it. Although White has a nice outpost on e5, it can't be occupied without exchanges, and Black's e-pawn is relatively easy to defend. As we will see, White's weak e4-square can become a factor, but more importantly, Black has much the better bishop and can attack on the queenside.

**18...Qc7 19 Rac1 c4!?**

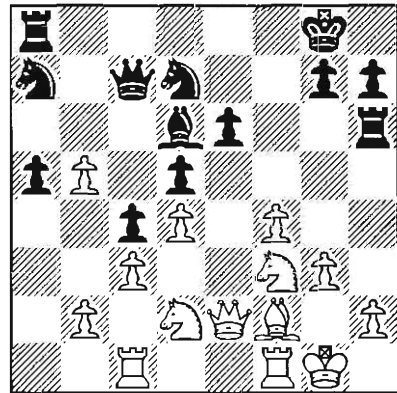
This move is fine, but not necessary. From Black's perspective, one good thing about the interpolation of a4 and ...a5 is that now c3-c4 by White gives up the b4-square. Therefore simply ignoring White and doubling rooks by 19...Raf8 is fine, e.g. 20 c4 (or 20 Ne5 Ndx5 21 fxe5 Rxf1+ 22 Rxf1 Rxf1+ 23 Qxf1 cxd4 24 cxd4 Nb4) 20...Nb4! 21 dxc5! (21...Qc6 was threatened and there isn't much else positive to do) 21...Nxc5 22 Nxc5 bxc5 with at least equality (22...Bxc5 23 g3 Rd8!? is unclear).

**20 Nbd2 b5?**

Again, 20...Raf8! (Diagram 22) was good (a queenside break with ...b5 can be attended to later). For example:



**Diagram 22 (W)**



**Diagram 23 (W)**

a) 21 Ne5?! Nxe5 22 fxe5 Rxf1+ 23 Rxf1 Qc6 24 Qg4 Rxf1+ 25 Nxf1 Nf8 26 Qd1 b5 (or 26...Qe8 27 Nd2 Qg6! 28 Qb1 Qg4 29 Nf3 Ng6) 27 axb5 Qxb5 with an obvious advantage.

b) 21 Ng5 Bd6 (or 21...h6 22 Nh3 Bd6! 23 g3 Ne7) 22 Ndf3 h6 23 Nh3 Ne7! (with twin ideas of ...Nf5 and clearing c6 for Black's queen) 24 g4 Qc6 25 Ra1 Bc7 26 Nh4 (26 Ne5?! Bxe5 27 dxe5 Rg6 intends ...Nc5 – Black stands clearly better) 26...R6f7 intends ...Nf6-e4 (Black has an outpost too!). Then 27 g5?! is too radical in view of 27...Nf5!? 28 Nxf5 Rxf5 29 gxh6 gxh6 and White's bishop on e3 is horrible.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

### 21 axb5 Na7 22 Bf2

'!' according to Tiviakov, and a good move. But the computer finds a decisive continuation for White: 22 f5! Rxf5 (22...exf5? 23 Bg5) 23 Bf4! Qxf4? (23...Rxf4 24 Qxe6+ Kh8 25 Qxe7 is a stronger defence) 24 Qxe6+ Rf7 25 Ne5! Qe3+ 26 Kh1 Nxe5 27 Rxf7! etc.

### 22...Rh6

Not 22...Qxf4? 23 Bh4.

### 23 g3!? Bd6 (Diagram 23)

23...Nxb5 24 f5! Nf8 25 Ne5 Rf6 26 g4 should favour White. The rest is inaccurately played.

### 24 Ne5?! Nxb5 25 Ndf3 a4?

A blunder. Black can keep his disadvantage to a minimum by 25...Nxe5 26 fxe5 Be7 27 Be3 Rg6, hoping for a queenside attack.

**26 Ng4! Rg6 27 Nh4 Nf8 28 Nxc3 Bxc3 29 Ne5 a3 30 bxa3 Rxa3 31 Be1 Qa7 32 Kh1 Rb3 33 Qg4 Qa3 34 Rd1 Nxc3 35 Bxc3 Rxc3 36 Nxc6 Re3 37 f5 1-0**

## Looking a little Deeper

---

### 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6

White's main two moves here are:

---

**A: 4 c3**

**B: 4 Ngf3**

---

Other fourth moves are harmless:

a) 4 exd5 exd5 is a favourable version of the Exchange Variation (3 exd5 exd5) because the knight doesn't belong on d2. French players should study 3 exd5 exd5 examples to understand the difference. Now 5 Ngf3 Nf6 is simplest, e.g. 6 c3 (or 6 Bd3 Nb4 and if the bishop moves, 7...Bf5) 6...Bd6 7 Bb5 0-0 8 0-0 Bg4.

b) 4 Ne2 can be answered by, among other things, 4...dxe4 5 Nxe4 Nf6 6 Bg5 Be7.

c) 4 Bb5 a6 (simplest; otherwise 4...Bd7 has been played, also without difficulties) 5 Bxc6+ bxc6 6 Ngf3 c5 7 0-0 cxd4 8 Nxd4 Bb7 with active play.

### A) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6 4 c3

Played more often than you would imagine by good players, especially considering Black's response:

### 4...e5! (Diagram 24)

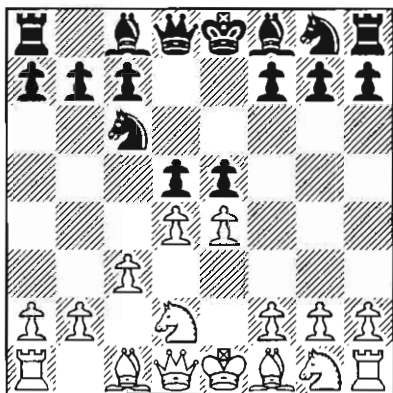


Diagram 24 (W)

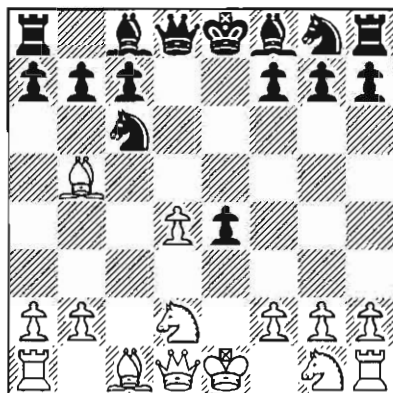


Diagram 25 (W)

Black takes the opportunity to prevent White from setting up a cramping pawn chain with e4-e5. The loss of tempo is compensated by the threat to e4 and White's passively-placed knight.

### 5 exd5

a) 5 dxe5 is lesser known: 5...dxe4 (5...Nxe5 is also considered equal, but White may have a little edge) 6 Nxe4 (6 Qa4!? is most easily answered by 6...f5 or 6...Qd5 7 Qxe4 Qxe5, but it can also lead to the pawn sacrifice 6...e3!? 7 fxe3, after which among other moves Black could try 7...Bd7 8 Ngf3 Qe7 9 Qf4 0-0-0 10 Bc4 Nh6 11 0-0 Re8 with equal chances) 6...Qxd1+ 7 Kxd1 Bf5!? 8 Ng3 0-0-0+ 9 Ke1 Bg4 10 f3 Bd7 11 f4 f6! and White's king is exposed.

b) 5 Bb5 exd4 6 cxd4 dxe4 (**Diagram 25**):

b1) 7 Bxc6+ bxc6 8 Nxe4 Bb4+ 9 Nc3 Nf6 (9...Qe7+ 10 Nge2 Ba6 11 Be3 Nf6 is equal) 10 Nge2 0-0 11 0-0 Re8 with the typical structure-versus-two bishops trade-off.

b2) 7 Nxe4?! Bb4+ (or 7...Qd5!) 8 Nc3 Qd5 (8...Nge7) 9 Qe2+?! Nge7 10 Nf3 0-0 and, with ...Bg4 threatened, Black is a shade better, O.Ivkina-E.Gorovykh, St Petersburg 2006.

### 5...Qxd5 6 Ngf3 exd4 7 Bc4 Qh5 (**Diagram 26**)

7...Qf5 is also played, but I like this better.

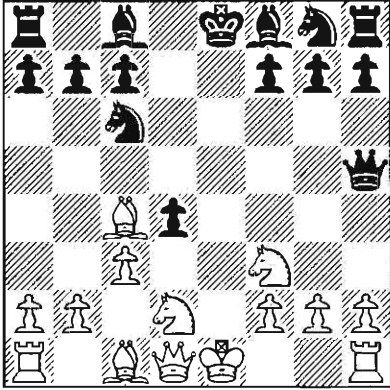
### 8 cxd4

8 0-0 is a gambit (played by the young Fischer!) that is most easily declined by playing 8...Nf6 (**Diagram 27**) and now:

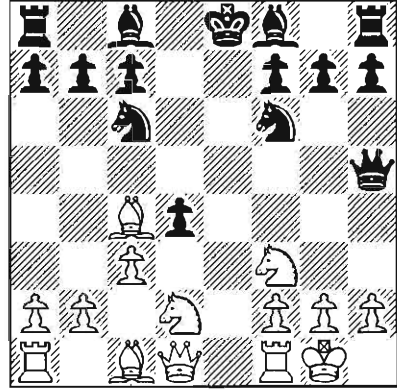
a) 9 Qe1+?! Be7 10 Nxd4 0-0! 11 Be2! (11 Nxc6 Bd6! 12 Ne7+ Kh8 and ...Re8 follows) 11...Bg4 12 Nxc6? Bd6! and Black wins material, R.Fischer-R Byrne, US Championship 1965/66. After 12 Bxg4 Nxd4 13 N2f3 Nxd4 14 cxd4 Bd6, Mednis

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

says that White has good prospects for an equal game, but 15 h3 Nf6 is clearly better for Black because of his better pieces and control of d5 in front of the isolated queen's pawn.



**Diagram 26 (W)**



**Diagram 27 (W)**

b) 9 cxd4 Be7 (9...Be6!? 10 Bxe6 fxe6) 10 Re1 (10 d5!? Nxd5 11 Ne4 Nb6!) 10...0-0 11 Nf1!? (11 h3 is better, according to McDonald, when 11...Bd6 follows) 11...Bg4 12 d5 Rad8 13 Ng3 Bxf3 14 gxf3? (a big mistake; 14 Nxh5 Bxd1 15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 16 Rxd1 Nd4 is about equal) 14...Qh4 15 Qd3 Bc5 16 Bb3? (16 Be3 Ne5; 16 Kg2 Nb4! 17 Qb3 b6 with a winning position for Black) 16...Bxf2+ 17 Kxf2 Qxh2+ 18 Kf1 Qxg3 0-1 L Vajda-C Bauer, Zagan 1997.

### **8...Be6!?**

It is Black's turn to sacrifice a pawn, although 8...Nf6 is quite playable.

### **9 Qe2**

The similar 9 Bxe6 fxe6 10 Qb3!? 0-0-0 11 0-0 Nf6 12 Qxe6+ (12 Ne4!? may be better) 12...Kb8 gives Black superior development, open files and pressure on the d-pawn: 13 Ne4 Nxe4 14 Qxe4 Re8 15 Qd3 Bd6 16 Bd2 g5! with good attacking chances, Xie Jun-L. Brunner, Shanghai 1995.

### **9...0-0-0 10 Bxe6+**

This is awfully risky. Probably 10 0-0 Bd6 11 Bxe6+ fxe6 12 h3 is the way to go, when Black can be happy with his game.

### **10...fxe6 11 Qxe6+?! Kb8 12 0-0 Bd6 (Diagram 28)**

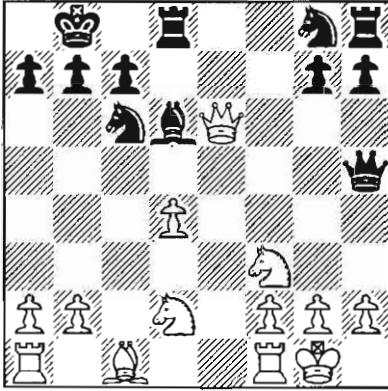
Threatening ...Nxd4!.

### **13 h3**

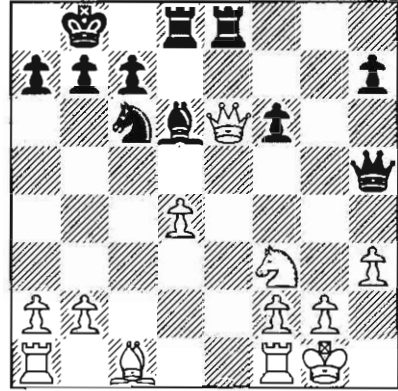
13 Nb3 Re8! (Psakhis gives 13...Rf8, which is also not bad) 14 Qc4 Rf8! (threatening

...Rxf3) 15 Nbd2 (15 Ne5 is met by 15...Nxd4! 16 Nxd4 Qxe5 17 f4 Qe4) 15...Nf6 16 h3 Nd5 and Black has ideas of ...Nf4, along with ...Rf6-g6 etc.

**13...Nf6 14 Ne4 Rhe8 15 Nxf6 gxf6 (Diagram 29) 16 Qc4**



**Diagram 28 (W)**



**Diagram 29 (W)**

Or 16 Qxf6 Rg8 17 Kh1 Rdf8 18 Qh6 Qb5 19 Rg1 Nxd4! 20 Nxd4 Qe5 21 Nc6+! bxc6 22 f4 Qe2 and Black enjoys the better pieces.

**16...Rg8**

16...Ne7!? 17 Kh1 Nd5 turns it into a positional pawn sacrifice.

**17 Kh1 Qg6**

17...Rg7! 18 Rg1 Rdg8 19 Bd2 Ne7! offers serious kingside pressure which ties down White's forces. Black threatens 20...Rxc2, which on the previous move would have failed to Qxg8+.

**18 Rg1 Qe4!?**

Black has at least enough compensation after 18...Nb4! 19 a3 Nd3 20 Be3 Rde8.

After 18...Qe4, M.Walker-Z.Harari, London 2005, continued 19 Bd2? (19 a3 is stronger, meeting 19...Ne5 with 20 Nd2!) 19...Rxc2? (19...Ne5! 20 Nxe5 fxe5 21 Rae1 Qh4 – with the idea of ...c5 – 22 Re2 exd4 gives Black an important passed pawn and some edge) 20 Kxc2! Ne5 21 dxe5! Qxc4 22 exd6 with a small advantage for White. But you can see how unattractive this line can be for him.

**B) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5**

5 Bd3 Nb4! equalizes immediately; for example, 6 e5 Nd7 7 Nb3 Nxd3+ 8 cxd3 (or 8 Qxd3 Be7 9 0-0 b6 10 a4 b6 and ...Ba6) 8...Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Be3 b6.

**5...Nfd7 (Diagram 30)**

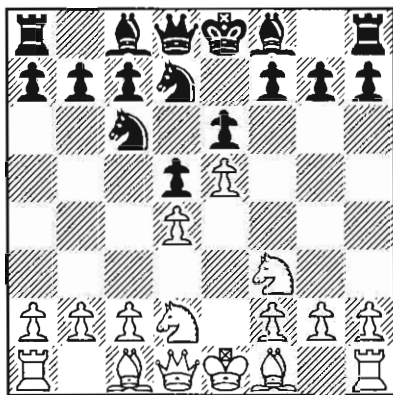


Diagram 30 (W)

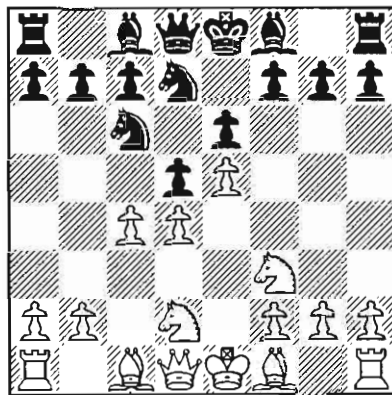


Diagram 31 (B)

Here we will look at:

**B1: 6 Bd3**

**B2: 6 Be2**

**B3: 6 c3**

**B4: 6 Bb5**

6 Nb3 was covered exhaustively in the illustrative game Tiviakov-Vysochin. Most other moves such as 6 b3 can be answered by 6...f6 with the usual themes. The most important of the rarely-played alternatives is 6 c4 (Diagram 31).

For example, 6...Be7!? (after 6...dxc4 7 Nxc4 I like the simple 7...Nb6!, when Kramnik's move 8 a3 can be met by 8...Ne7, e.g. 9 Bd3 Nxc4 10 Bxc4 Bd7 11 0-0 Bc6 or 9 Nxb6 axb6 10 Bd3 Bd7 11 0-0 Ba4 12 b3 Bc6 13 b4 Nf5!) 7 cxd5 (or 7 Be2 f6 8 exf6 Bxf6 9 0-0 0-0 10 Nb3 a5!, V.Spasov-M.Drasko, Belgrade 1994) 7...exd5 8 Bb5 0-0 9 0-0 a5 10 Re1 (K.Arkeil-J.Plaskett, British League 2004), and here McDonald suggests 10...Na7 11 Bd3 c5 with an attack on d4.

**B1) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5 Nd7 6 Bd3**

This is an aggressive and extremely important move.

**6...f6**



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** The main alternative is 6...Nb4 7 Be2 c5 8 c3 Nc6, when 9 Bd3 (Diagram 32) transposes to a normal Tarasch Defence line, that is, 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 c3 c5 6 Bd3 Nc6 7 Ngf3, with two more moves for each side!

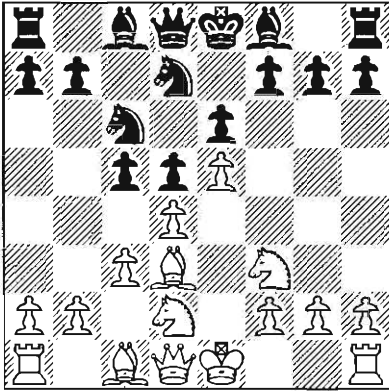


Diagram 32 (B)

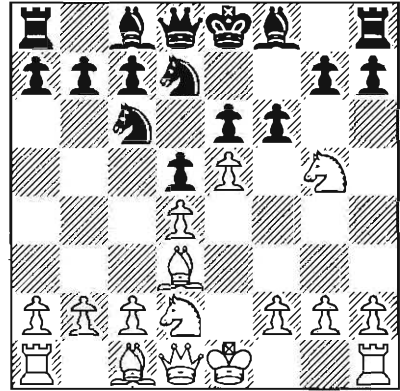


Diagram 33 (B)

You should note that in this position, if we now play 9...h6 or 9...a6, we have transposed to a line of the 3...h6 or 3...a6 defences to 3 Nd2, as described in the two preceding chapters!

But the inclusion of the 'extra' move Be2 doesn't seem to help White if he doesn't move the bishop back to d3. For example, 9 0-0 a5 (or 9...f6 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 Re1 Bd6 12 dxc5 Bxc5 13 Nb3 Bb6 14 Nbd4 0-0 15 Bd3 Qd6 with control of the centre, R.Ramesh-L.Ravi, Visakhapatnam 2006) 10 Bb5 Be7 11 Re1 Na7 12 Bf1 0-0 13 dxc5 Nc6 14 Nb3 a4 15 Nbd4 Nxc5 with easy equality, A.Timofeev-Zhang Pengxiang, Taiyuan 2006.

### 7 Ng5!?! (Diagram 33)

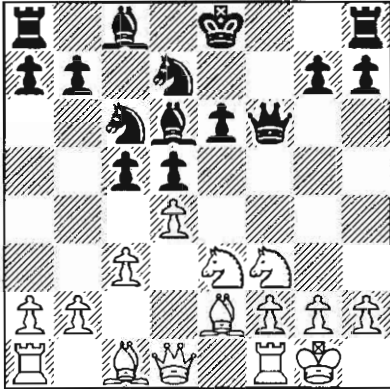
This is the critical line that we didn't look at in our illustrative game. White doesn't want to give up his centre pawn on e5, so he tries to exploit Black's backward development and goes for the immediate kill. Very dangerous for both sides!

White can also play as he did after 6 Be2 with 7 exf6 Qxf6 8 Nf1 (8 0-0 Bd6 9 c4 was analysed in the illustrative game Rasik-Cernousek) and now:

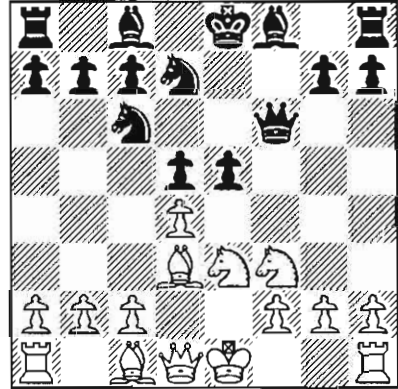
a) 8...Bd6 is a normal option. White's bishop on d3 is aggressively placed, but it can also get in the way of the d-pawn's defence and can itself be a target: 9 Ne3 (9 Bg5 Qf7 10 Bh4 e5 looks fine, as 11 Ng5 Qg8 would merely be decentralizing) 9...Nb4! 10 Be2 (or 10 0-0 Nxd3 11 Qxd3 0-0) 10...c5 11 c3 Nc6 12 0-0 (Diagram 34) 12...cxd4 13 cxd4 Qe7!?! (or 13...Qf7!?!; in either case the idea is to prepare ...Nf6 and perhaps ...Qc7) 14 Ng4 0-0 15 Bg5 Qf7 16 Bh4 Qh5 17 Ne3 Nf6 18 Bg3 Bxg3 19 hxg3 Bd7, or 19...Qh6, in both cases with a good game. I suspect that 8...Bd6 is the best way to achieve equality and a promising position against 8 Nf1.

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b) 8...Nb4!? is also playable: 9 Bg5 (or 9 Be2 c5 10 c3 Nc6 11 Ng3 cxd4 12 Bg5 Qf7 13 cxd4 Bd6) 9...Qf7 (Black can also capture on d3 before playing ...Qf7) 10 Ng3 h6 11 Be3 Nxd3+ 12 Qxd3 Bd6 13 0-0-0 0-0 and Black intends ...c5 or ...b6 and ...c5 with full-fledged play. Another good plan at this point would be ...c6 with the idea of ...e5.



**Diagram 34 (B)**



**Diagram 35 (B)**

c) 8...e5!? (this allows a degree of simplification and may not be a clear way to equality) 9 Ne3 (**Diagram 35**) 9...Nb6 (9...Nxd4!? of J.Degraeve-I.Zaragatski, Cappelle la Grande 2006 seems best answered by 10 Nxd4! exd4 11 Nxd5 Qe5+ 12 Qe2 Kd8!? 13 Qxe5 Nxe5 14 Bg5+ Kd7 15 0-0-0 Nxd3+ 16 Rxd3 with a slight advantage) 10 dxe5 Nxe5 11 Nxe5 Qxe5 12 0-0 Bd6 13 f4 Qf6 14 c4 Bd7! 15 Nxd5 Nxd5 16 cxd5 Bc5+?! (16...0-0! is better) 17 Kh1 0-0-0 (A.Kveinys-A.Budnikov, Katowice 1991). Black has some compensation for the pawn in view of the vulnerable d-pawn. But whether it's fully worth the material is another matter.

**7...Ndx5!**



**BEWARE! 7...fxg5? 8 Qh5+ g6 9 Bxg6+ hxg6 10 Qxg6+ Ke7 11 Ne4! turns the game in White's favour: 11...Ndx5 12 dxe5 Nxe5 13 Qf6+ Kd7 14 Qxe5 etc.**

**8 dxe5 fxg5 9 Qh5+ g6! 10 Bxg6+ Kd7 (Diagram 36)**

A handy square for the king in the French Defence. Now White's forces are extended and the counterattack begins. The first threat is ...Nxe5, but the move ...Bg7 is coming, which will hit g6 and e5.

**11 f4!?**

Or:

a) 11 Nf3?? loses to 11...hxg6 with the idea 12 Qxh8 Bb4+.

b) 11 0-0!? Nxe5 12 Bd3 was played in V.Chernov-F.Hilmer, Hassloch 2006. I think that Black stands satisfactorily in any case, but his easiest course at this point is 12...Nxd3! 13 cxd3 Bd6 14 Nf3 h6 and Black's king should escape to the queenside, a central pawn ahead. Of course, White can still try to create some problems by, for example, occupying e5 and advancing his queenside pawns.

**11...gxf4 12 Bd3 Qe8 13 Qg5 Be7!?**

13...Nb4 also looks good: 14 Qxf4 Nxd3+ 15 cxd3 Qg6, when 16 0-0 Be7 17 d4 Rf8 (Diagram 37) 18 Qe3 Rg8 19 g3 b6 gets Black's pieces to the kingside quickly.

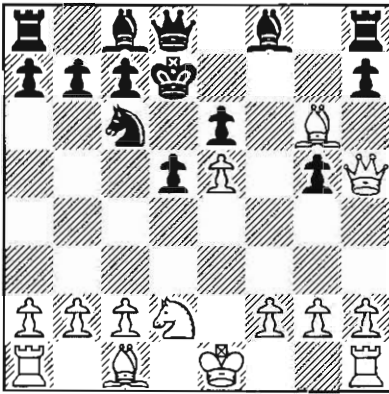


Diagram 36 (W)

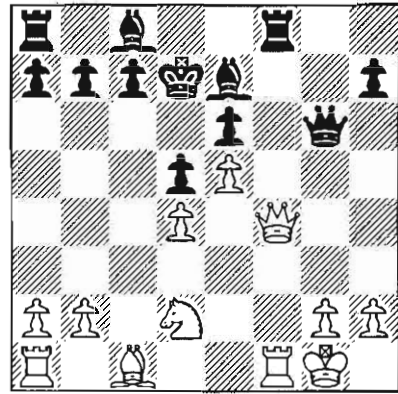


Diagram 37 (W)

**14 Qxf4 Rf8 15 Qa4 Qh5 16 Nf3 Bb4+!?**

16...Kd8!? would intend ...Bd7 or even ...Nxe5.

**17 c3**

Not 17 Bd2? Rxf3! 18 gxf3 Qxf3 19 Rg1 Qe3+.

**17...Rxf3! 18 gxf3 Qxf3 19 Rf1 Qxd3 20 cxb4 Qe4+ 21 Kd1 Qd3+ 22 Ke1 Qe4+?!**

This was agreed drawn in N.Ristic-J.Elbilia, French League 1997, but 22...Qd4 would have been a very promising way to play on.

Conclusion: 6 Bd3 f6 7 Ng5!? still has some possibilities, but for now Black has the better of it. 6 Bd3 f6 7 exf6 is less dangerous to Black than 6 Be2 f6 7 exf6.

**B2) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5 Nd7 6 Be2 (Diagram 38) 6...f6**

For those who don't like this move, 6...Be7 is a respectable alternative and has been played with fair success. Two ideas are 7 0-0 0-0 8 c4 f6! and 7 Nf1 0-0 8 Ne3

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

f6 9 exf6 Nxf6 10 0-0 Bd6. This latter line is worth comparing with our main line 6...f6 7 exf6 Qxf6 8 Nf1 Bd6 9 Ne3.

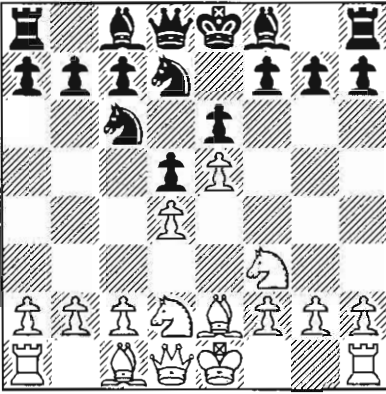


Diagram 38 (B)

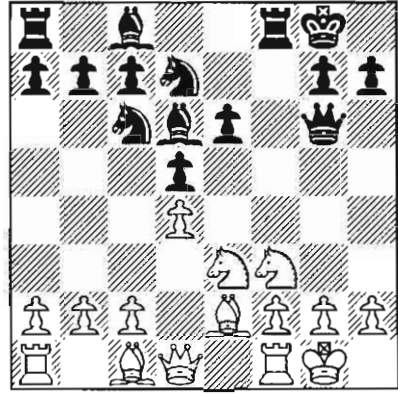


Diagram 39 (W)

### 7 exf6 Qxf6



**ROLL THE DICE! A remarkable idea is 7...gxf6!?. By risking this move you take your life in your hands, but this might be worth a shot.**

The only game that I've discovered is V.Contoski-T. Müller, correspondence 1987: 8 0-0!? Bg7 9 Re1 (9 Nb3 0-0 10 Re1 Nb6 11 Bb5 Qd6 12 c3 a6 13 Bxc6 Qxc6 14 Bf4 Nc4 15 Qc1, and here Black can play 15...a5 16 Bh6 Rf7 or 15...Bd7 16 Nc5 b6 17 Nxd7 Qxd7 18 b3 Nd6) 9...0-0 10 Nf1 Re8 11 Ng3 Nf8 with a fine game. Going back, 8 Nh4 Nxd4 9 Bh5+ Ke7 is critical, e.g. 10 c3 Nb5 and ...Nd6. This is only for the very brave!

### 8 Nf1 Bd6 9 Ne3 0-0 10 0-0 Qg6 (Diagram 39)

This can be considered the very main line of the 6 Be2 variation. 10...Nb6 was explored above, in the illustrative game Pazos-Fandino. Since most grandmasters prefer 10...Qg6, we should examine it with some care. Clearly the idea of ...e5 takes on less importance for the time being. Instead, Black plans to reorganize by ...Nf6 and, for example, ...Bd7 (or ...b6) before undertaking further central activities.

### 11 c4

11 g3 Nf6 12 Nh4 Qe8 13 f4 has been played several times and certainly puts the clamps on e5, but at the cost of creating interior weaknesses. D.Popovic-J.Todorovic, Obrenovac 2004, went 13...Ne7 14 Bd3 c5 (or 14...b6 with ...c5 to fol-

low) 15 c3 b6 16 Qe2 Ne4 17 Ng4 Bb7 18 Nf2 Nf5! 19 Nxe4 dxe4, and on the consistent 20 Bxe4 Bxe4 21 Qxe4, 21...Nxh4 22 gxh4 cxd4 23 cxd4 Rd8 leaves White with that horrid bishop we keep seeing.

### 11...Nf6 (Diagram 40)

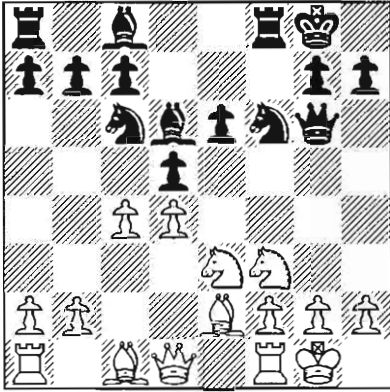


Diagram 40 (W)

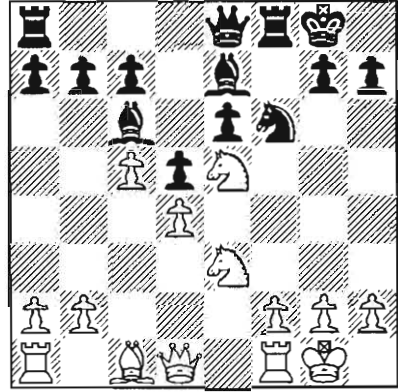


Diagram 41 (W)

### 12 c5

a) 12 Bd3 Ne4! 13 cxd5 exd5 14 Nxd5 Bg4 yields a powerful attack for the sacrificed pawn: 15 Qb3 Kh8 16 Bxe4 Qxe4 17 Re1 Qg6 18 Ne5 Bxe5 19 dxe5 Bf3 20 g3 Nd4 21 Qc3 (G Benz-A.Prystenski, correspondence 1995), and in this position 21...Qg4! would be almost decisive: 22 Ne3 Qd7 23 b3 Bc6 etc.

b) 12 b3 Bf4 (McDonald suggests that 12...Ne4 is worth considering) 13 Nc2 Ne4 14 Bd3 Bd7 15 Bxf4 Rxf4 16 Ne5 Nxe5 17 dxe5 Qf7 and both sides had chances in T.Petrik-Zhang Pengxiang, Turin Olympiad 2006.

### 12...Bf4

I think that 12...Be7! 13 Bb5 Bd7 14 Bxc6 Bxc6 15 Ne5 Qe8 (Diagram 41) deserves strong consideration. At first this looks bad for Black, but the knight on e5 can soon be challenged and White may remain with a bad bishop. Following, for example, 16 N3g4 b6 17 Nxc6 Qxc6 18 Ne5 Qe8, the c5-pawn is attacked and if White captures on b6, ...Bd6 and in some cases ...c5 can follow. Otherwise, White can try 19 b4 (19 c6 Bd6) 19...a5 20 cxb6 cxb6 21 bxa5 Rxa5!. This reflects the 'principle' that a single strong square (here e5) is usually not enough to maintain a significant advantage.

### 13 Nc2

Here 13 Nc4! is another problem, e.g. 13...Nd7 14 Bxf4 Rxf4 15 Ne3 b6 (15...Nf6 16 Nc2 Bd7 17 b4 a6 18 a4) 16 Bd3 Qh6 17 cxb6 axb6 18 Rc1 Bb7 19 Bb5 Ndb8 20 a4

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and Black is at a loss for a plan.

**13...Ne4!? 14 Bxf4 Rxf4**

We have been following S.Rublevsky-R.Vaganian, Poikovsky 2005. Black's treatment looks suspicious after 15 Bb5!, when Bxc6 is looming. One possibility is 15...Ng5 16 Nxg5! Qxg5 17 Bxc6 bxc6 18 Qd2 Bd7 19 Rae1 Raf8 20 f3 with a large advantage for White. All this lends more weight to deviating earlier.

Conclusion: Although White tends to play 6 Nb3 or 6 Bb5 these days, 6 Be2 is still a challenging line. If all the complications following 6...f6 are intimidating (or too much work), you might want to play 6...Be7, which is a simple and safe option. In the 6...f6 lines, there are some interesting places to investigate; for example, the eccentric 7 exf6 fxf6!? might appeal to the risk-taker, and 12...Be7 in the main line looks promising.

**B3) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5 Nd7 6 c3**

In some senses this is a waiting move: White will probably want to play c3 at some point anyway, but now he can wait for Black's move before committing his bishop to b5, d3 or e2.

**6...f6! (Diagram 42)**

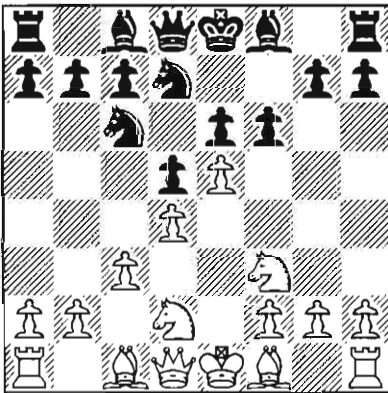


Diagram 42 (W)

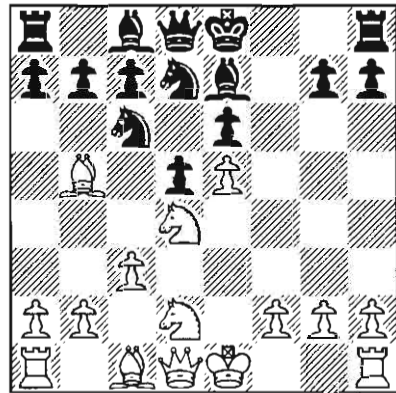


Diagram 43 (B)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** This is Black's most aggressive move, trying to demolish the centre.

6...Be7 is safer but less exciting. After 6...f6, White has several popular tries, all used by grandmasters.

**7 Nh4**

This is the most critical move. It threatens to blow Black off the board, but more importantly (since that's not usually possible), prepares to construct an impenetrable central structure by means of f2-f4.

At this point White has frequently turned to two alternatives, both challenging:

a) 7 Bb5 fxe5 (7...a6 has been adequate for equality in several games, but I prefer the dynamic text move) 8 dxe5 Be7 and now:

a1) 9 0-0 0-0 10 Re1 a5 11 Nf1 Nc5 12 Ng3 Bd7 (threatening 13...Nxe5!) 13 Bf1 Be8 14 Nd4 Bg6 was I.Solomonovic-M.Drasko, Herceg Novi 2006; Black has played the standard French manoeuvre to activate the c8-bishop and secured equality.

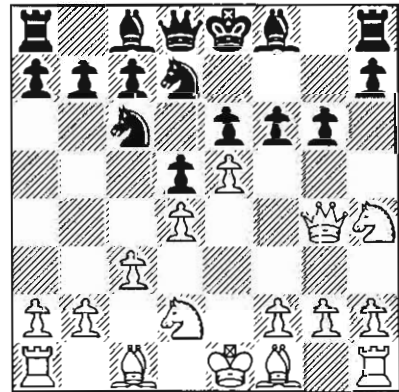
a2) 9 Nd4 (**Diagram 43**) was seen in V.Kotronias-S.Halkias, Kalamata 2005. In the game 9...Nxd4 10 cxd4 0-0 11 Bd3 was better for White, but I think that Black can take a risk and play 9...Ndx5!. For example, 10 Qh5+ (or 10 f4 a6 11 Qh5+! Kd7 12 Qxe5 axb5 13 Qxe6+ Ke8 14 Qe2 Kf7, intending ...Re8, with equal chances) 10...Kf8! 11 N2f3 g6 12 Qh6+ (12 Nxc6 Nxc6 13 Qh6+ Kg8 14 Bxc6 bxc6 15 0-0 Qf8! is unclear: Black's king is in poor shape but he has two bishops and a central majority) 12...Kg8 13 Bxc6 (13 Nxc6? Nxf3+ 14 gxf3 bxc6 15 Bxc6 Rb8 is good for Black) 13...Nxf3!+? (13...Nxc6 is equal) 14 Nxf3 bxc6 15 Ne5! Bf6 16 Qf4 Kg7 with equality after 17 Qh6+ (17 Nxc6? Qd6!) 17...Kg8.

b) 7 exf6 Qxf6 and now:

b1) 8 Be2 is slow. V.Moliboga-Y.Kruppa, Kiev 2005, continued 8...e5! 9 dxe5 Ndx5 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Nf3 c6 (**Diagram 44**).



**Diagram 44 (W)**



**Diagram 45 (B)**

This is the picture of what I meant about avoiding the isolated pawn: Black's pawn on c6 holds up the d-pawn in a way that doesn't happen in most variations with 3...Nf6 and 3...c5.

## Dangerous Weapons: The French

b2) 8 Bb5 Bd6 9 0-0 (9 Nf1 e5) 9...0-0 10 Nb3 (or 10 Qa4 a6! 11 Bxc6 bxc6 with the idea 12 Qxc6? Nb6!) 10...e5! 11 dxe5 Ndx5 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 (N.Karapanos-I.Nikolaïdis, Aghia Pelagia 2004), and Black has at least equality in view of 13 Qxd5+ Be6 14 Qe4 c6 15 Be2 Bd5, with a powerful attack.

Let's return to 7 Nh4. Now the play gets very tactical:

### 7...g6!

7...Qe7!? seems to leave Black a little worse after 8 Qh5+ g6! 9 Nxg6 Qf7 10 Nf4 fxe5 11 dxe5 Ndx5 12 Be2 or 12 Nb3. In this line, 8...Qf7 9 Qxf7+ Kxf7 10 f4 and 8...Kd8 9 Ndf3 do not improve.

### 8 Qg4 (Diagram 45)



**BEWARE! 8...fxe5? runs into 9 Nxg6! hxg6? 10 Qxg6+ Ke7 11 Ne4! dxe4 12 Bg5+ Kd6 13 Bxd8 and wins. 9...Nf6 is stronger, but 10 Qh4 is still very good for White.**

After 8 Qg4 Black has tried a number of moves. I'll present them in abbreviated form:

a) 8...Qe7 9 f4 f5 (9...g5!? hopes for 10 exf6?? Nxf6! 11 Qxg5 Rg8, but 10 Qh5+ might lead to 10...Qf7 11 Qxf7+ Kxf7 12 fxg5 fxe5 13 Nb3 exd4 14 Nxd4 and I prefer White) 10 Qh3 Qf7 (**Diagram 46**) was K.Shanava-J.Turner, Pardubice 2005.

White has the standard advantage that he frequently gets after f4 (Black could use the move ...c5 now!). Most moves lead to advantage: 11 Be2!, 11 Nhf3, 11 Bd3, and 11 Ndf3!?, as played in the game.

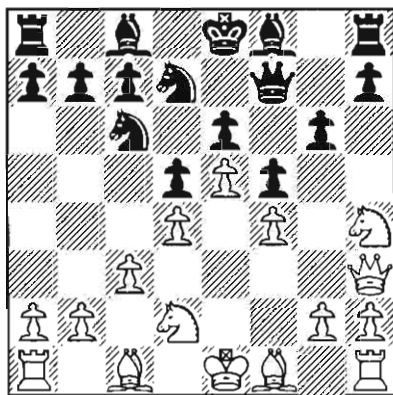


Diagram 46 (W)

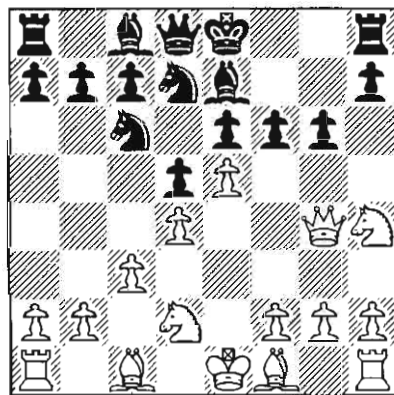


Diagram 47 (W)

b) 8...Bg7!? 9 f4! (9 Qxe6+? loses the initiative and frees Black's bishop on c8:

9...Ne7 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 Qe2 0-0 12 Qd1 Ng4! 13 Nhf3 Nf5 14 Nb3 Nh4! with a strong initiative, G.Jones-Y.Visser, Groningen 2004) 9...Ne7!? (K.Shanava-L.Cernousek, Olomouc 2005), and apart from 10 Bd3, as played, McDonald suggests the even better 10 Nb3! a6 11 Be2 c5 12 0-0. Other ninth moves also favour White; for example, 9...fxe5 10 fxe5 Ndx5 11 dxe5 Nxe5 12 Qg3, or 9...Qe7 10 Bb5.

c) Since every move above has some drawbacks, I think that the untried 8...Be7!? (**Diagram 47**) may be best. Black has two threats: 9...f5 and 9...fxe5. Play might continue:

c1) 9 f4?? f5 and 9 Qxe6?? Nb6 are both winning for Black.

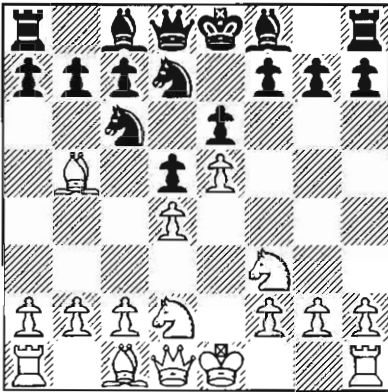
c2) After 9 Qh3, threatening 10 Nxc6, Black plays 9...Kf7! 10 Ndf3 fxe5! 11 dxe5 Ndx5 12 Bh6 Kg8 with advantage; here 10...g5!? 11 exf6 Bxf6 12 Qg4!? gxh4 13 Ng5+ Bxg5 14 Qh5+ Ke7 15 Bxg5+ Nf6 16 Qxh4 Kf7 is also possible.

c3) 9 Nxc6 Rg8! 10 Qxe6 (or 10 Qh5 Rxc6 11 Qxh7 Nf8 12 Qh5 f5) 10...Rxc6 11 Qxd5 fxe5 12 Bd3 Rg7 and Black's extra piece ensures him of the better game.

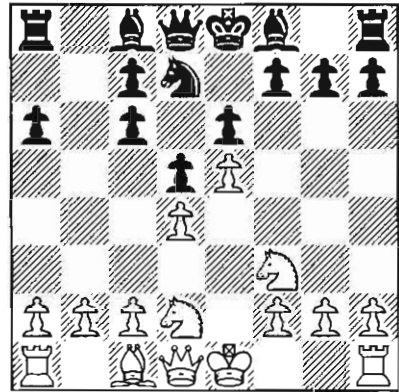
c4) 9 exf6 Bxf6 10 Ndf3 (10 Qxe6+? Kf8) 10...e5 11 Qe6+ Qe7 12 Qxe7+ Kxe7 13 dxe5 Ndx5 and the play is roughly level.

Conclusion: 6 c3 is a deceptively sharp line in which you'd better have done some homework!

**B4) 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Nc6 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5 Nd7 6 Bb5 (Diagram 48)**



**Diagram 48 (B)**



**Diagram 49 (W)**

This fairly popular move is not considered very strong because White voluntarily gives up his good bishop without gaining e5 as an outpost in return. Nevertheless, he gains time in so doing and tries to make immediate inroads into Black's position. The resulting play is often rather tactical.

6...a6



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: 6...a5 has the same idea as 6 Nb3 a5: to prepare ...Na7 and/or ...b6 with ...Ba6. After 7 0-0 Be7 8 c3 Na7 9 Bd3 c5 10 Re1, the move 10...Nc6 transposes to the familiar Tarrasch line 3...Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Ngf3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Bd3 Be7 8 0-0 a5 9 Re1, but with White having a tempo more!**

That tempo, Re1, may or may not be useful! It assists with the manoeuvre Nf1-g3, but uses up a retreat square for the f3-knight in the event of ...g5-g4. The added protection to White's e-pawn may also serve him in lines with dxc5.

So 10...Nc6 is double-edged. Instead, Black might want to play 10...b5!?, intending ...b4, an option not always open to him. One feels that White has a small edge, but with plenty of creative ideas available for both sides.

6...Be7 is one of the better options, with a possible transposition to 6 Nb3 after 7 Nb3 a5 8 a4 Na7. A tricky possibility is 7 0-0 a6 8 Bxc6 bxc6, when White has had to enter into a 0-0 line that is considered less effective than the main text.

**7 Bxc6 bxc6 (Diagram 49) 8 Nb3**

Or:

a) 8 c4 c5 9 cxd5 exd5 10 0-0 and I think simplest is 10...cxd4!; for example, 11 Nxd4 c5 12 N4b3 (12 e6 Nb6! 13 exf7+ Kxf7 14 Nc6 Qc7 15 Nf3 Bd6 16 Nfe5+ Kg8 17 f4 Be6 is equal) 12...Be7 13 Nf3 Bb7 and Black stands well.

b) At this point 8 0-0 c5 avoids the double capture that could occur after 8 Nb3 c5.

**8...c5**

8...a5 has also been played.

**9 Bg5**

9 Na5? wastes time due to the trick 9...c6! 10 Nxc6?? Qb6, winning the knight.

**9...Be7 10 Na5!? (Diagram 50)**

The only move that seriously fights for the better game.

**10...Nxe5!**

The alternative is 10...Nb8!? 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 c3 0-0 13 0-0, and White is better developed with a central superiority. McDonald suggests 13...Bd7, but I like White.

**11 dxe5**

Perhaps 11 Nxe5 Bxg5 12 Nac6! is better, and D.Salinnikov-S.Lavrov, Tomsk 2003, continued 12...Qd6! 13 Qh5 0-0 14 dxc5 Qxc5 15 Qxg5 f6 16 Qd2 fxe5 17 Nxe5. After the best move 17...Rb8, Black has activity but White has the powerful outpost on e5. This adds up to some sort of dynamic equality.

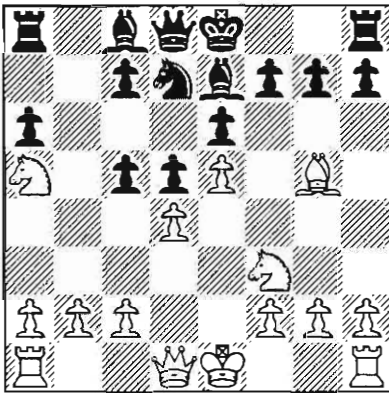
**11...Bxg5 12 Nc6 Qd7 13 Nxg5 (Diagram 51) 13...h6!**



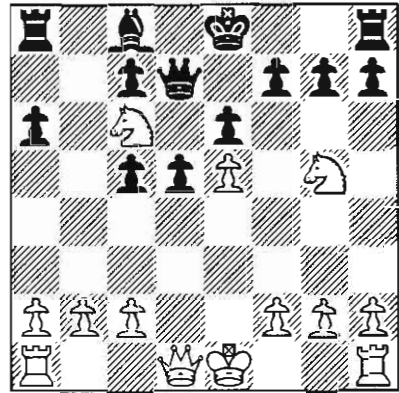
**ROLL THE DICE! The fascinating 13...Qxc6!? is risky after 14 Qh5, and seems to give White something.**

a) After 14...Qd7 15 Nxf7 Qd8!, 16 0-0-0! maintains an advantage. McDonald points out that 16 Nf6+? Ke7 wins for Black!

b) Pedersen gives 14...g6 15 Qf3 Qd7 16 Qf6 0-0 17 h4 (he assesses 17 0-0-0 Qd8 18 Ne4 as a slight advantage for White, something that is not clear to me) 17...Qd8 18 h5 Qxf6 19 exf6 h6 20 hxg6! fxg6 21 Rxh6 Rxf6, which he considers unclear, but then 22 f3 with the idea 0-0-0 puts great pressure on Black.



**Diagram 50 (B)**



**Diagram 51 (B)**

### 14 Qh5?

White should try 14 Nxf7! Qxf7 15 0-0, although Black's centre and bishop are a good antidote to White's search for play based upon Black's doubled pawns. For example, 15...0-0 16 Qd2 Bd7 17 Na5 (L.Yudasin-M.Drasko, Tbilisi 1985), which is unclear after 17...c4. McDonald suggests 15...a5 16 Qd2 (16 f4?? Bb7 traps the knight) 16...a4 17 Qc3 Qf8, which is also hard to assess after either 18 Na5 or 18 Nd4.

### 14...0-0! 15 Na5 Qa4 16 Nb3 hxg5 17 0-0

We are following J.Gallagher-R.Vaganian, Calvia Olympiad 2004. Black did well with 17...Qf4. but even better is Pedersen's line 17...c4! 18 Nd4 c5 19 b3 cxb3 20 Nxb3 Qh4! 21 Qxh4 gxh4 22 Nxc5 Ra7 'followed by ...Rc7'. Fun stuff!

In summary, after 6 Bb5 a6 Black is happy with his bishops and potential activity stemming from ...c5, but White has rapid development and attacking chances. Thus far the advantages seem to cancel each other out and result in equality.

## Conclusion

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The Guimard is a particularly rich variation that can stay positional or become tactical in unpredictable ways. As much as any other variation for Black in this book, it requires and will repay concrete study. The most important thing is to be very clear which line you plan to use against which initial move order, that is, from moves four through nine. Then you need to look at a lot of examples to see how to handle those resulting positions, again with an eye to what order of moves will best serve you. Fortunately, if you know a little theory, any bad positions that you may fall into will be of a positional nature and not ones in which you will be checkmated. Because of Black's typical piece disposition, however, your own freeing move ...e5 will often give you more than equality and produce kingside chances. I highly recommend this defence.

## Characterization of 3...Nc6

---

Characterization	Score (max 5)
Difficulty	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Attacking Nature	♠ ♠ ♠
Positional/Strategic Nature	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Risk	♠ ♠ ♠
Reward	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠
Theoretical Depth	♠ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠

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