

The Modernized French Defense

**Volume 1:
Winawer**

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The Modernized French Defense

Volume 1: Winawer

David Miedema

Thinkers Publishing 2019



Key to Symbols

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

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Preface

Here we are, together on this page, both interested in the French Defence with 3.♘c3 ♗b4. Before telling you what you can learn from this opening, let me tell you a little story about my journey in the French. I started playing the French after reading John Watson's *Play the French*, which improved my play a lot. I learned that the French is a positional yet concrete opening, and many of my young opponents couldn't grasp its subtleties. Moreover, many opponents were far less prepared against 1...e6 than against 1...c5 or 1...e5.

Unfortunately those days would end. During the 2008 Dutch Youth Championships (U20), I understood that everyone would throw 7.♔g4 in the Winawer at me. In that respect, my opening preparation was simple: I'd study the Winawer for Black very intensively and the problem would be solved. In reality, I faced many difficulties. Novelties I'd find in the evenings were promptly refuted by the engine the next morning; I was constantly thinking about the French, but I couldn't quite make it work. There was this strange, inexplicable feeling in my stomach, some might call "butterflies". I had fallen in love with a chess line! Despite my two losses in the crucial games, I still believed I had a great repertoire with countless novelties to show for it.

Which line was that?

Alas, that variation, with 7...0-0 and 8...♘bc6, is almost refuted nowadays. Thus, I was obliged to spend a considerable amount of time adjusting my repertoire to present a sound recommendation for this book. I devoted three months to learning a completely new, sharp line – namely, the Poisoned Pawn Variation, characterized by 7...♔c7 8.♔xg7 ♖g8 9 ♗xh7 cxd4. Fortunately, this tactical jungle has proven to be an excellent fighting zone. After seven months, the result, here before you, is a massive update on the Winawer Variation.

Usually one imagines the classical writer sitting, pondering behind his desk in his book-lined study. Well, not this one. I have travelled and lived in various places during the writing process. Part One was conceived in Krakow, Poland. A wonderful place with wonderful people and memories I am fond of. Then, surrounded by the golden wheat fields of Denmark, I discovered that my old pet line has been refuted forever. Although I would love to share the new things I have found there, there is

no point devoting a lot of space to a bad line. The second part, then, was mostly written in the hamlet of Mollerup, Denmark.

Lastly, to round it all up and make the final checks, I went to Plovdiv, Bulgaria – the oldest city in Europe! This is where all the move-orders and transpositions finally started to make sense. I am thankful for all these places. Travelling really broadens the horizon, and I would recommend you to take this copy with you to start a journey on your own.

But wait. Why should you take this journey?

Well, chess is sport. To win, you must cause your opponents to err. The Winawer is very difficult to face for those who have not studied it properly. This means you'll often win simply by learning the lines well. Along the way, you'll get better at closed and unbalanced positions and suddenly, you'll know how to play with a "bad bishop"!

Well, chess is also art. Rest assured, you'll experience true aestheticism with this opening. From strange queen manoeuvres to stunning sacrifices and more, the journey will be like exploring a new city, finding beauty around every corner.

Along this journey, you must have had some support.

Yes, I did, there is a long list. Reaching from the inventors of chess to the Spokoj bar in Krakow, where I wrote most of the book. But let's not forget everything in between. I would like to thank: my parents for solving my childhood boredom with chess; the volunteers of my old chess club in Eindhoven for teaching the youth every single week; the late Theo van den Berkmortel for showing me the key ideas in the French; Jos Sutmuller for his flawless bad-bishop exchanges in 10,000 blitz games; everyone who aided me to play international open tournaments when I needed it the most; my school for allowing me to be in France instead of the classroom; *NIC Yearbook* for publishing my first survey; the families I've lived with as a chess trainer; the friends who support my passion for chess, especially the ones at Sint Anna 74; the clubs that keep me in their team, even though I have a bad season; Thinkers Publishing and the editorial team for their hard work and offering me this opportunity; and last but not least, my brave opponents who play 3.♘c3 and do not take 3.exd5. Just in case I have mistakenly skipped you, know that I am addressing you right now. I might just have saved you for another volume.

What about the next volume?

Well, that will cover everything apart from 3.2c3. I will start a new journey to complete that. After studying that book as well, you should be armed with a complete 2020-ready French repertoire.

Lisbon 2019

David Miedema

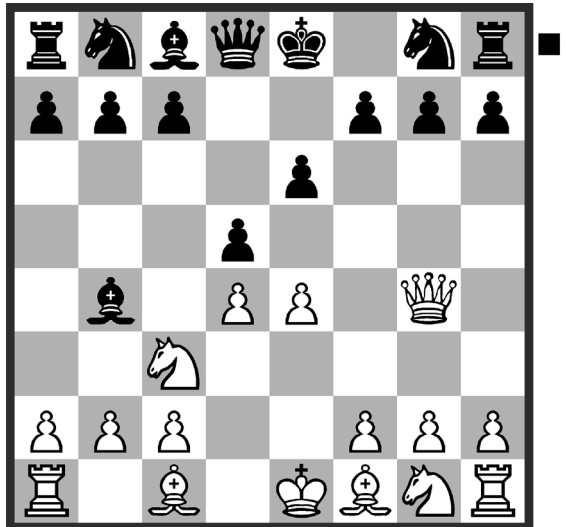
Part I

Deviations Before Move Seven

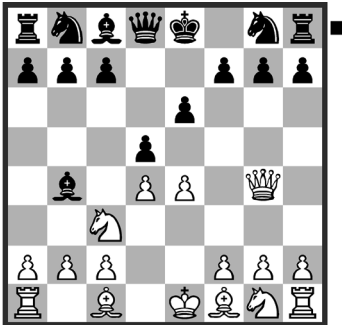


4. ♔g4?! – The Impatient Queen

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3
♙b4 4. ♔g4



1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘c3 ♙b4 4. ♚g4?!



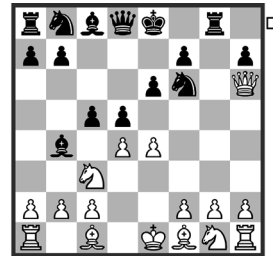
Position after: 4. ♚g4?!

With this variation we will start our investigation of White's sidelines on move 4. This queen move is premature in my opinion. I would recommend White players who like this line to take a more serious look at 4. a3 and 6. ♚g4, because the queen sortie on move 4 gives Black a lot of extra options. Basically, 4. ♚g4 is premature because the centre still has tension to be resolved. This gives Black several options to seize the centre, as we will see.

4... ♘f6 5. ♚xg7 ♖g8 6. ♚h6 ♖g6!

The immediate attack puts the question to the queen. It's best to see where it goes first, in order to stay flexible.

A) 6... c5 This move looks good at first, but after 7. a3 and the doubling of pawns on c3, ...c7-c5 appears not to be



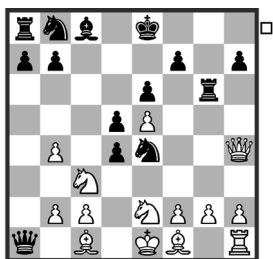
Position after: 6... c5

that useful, and to have long-term drawbacks. 7. a3 ♖g6 [7... ♙xc3+ 8. bxc3 dxe4 9. ♘e2 Now we have transposed to the 4. a3 variation, which is considered better than 4. ♚g4.] 8. ♚h4 ♚a5 9. ♘ge2 cxd4 10. e5



Position after: 10. e5

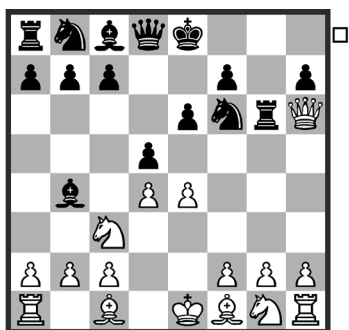
With a difficult position for both sides. Fortunately Black has better than this. Berg has analysed this position extensively in his GM repertoire series, but he gives many variations where White can get a perpetual check. I want to win with Black; in tournament play winning is more important. So let's make it easier for ourselves and more difficult for our opponent. Here you can enjoy some humans struggling in complications. 10... ♘e4!? 11. axb4 ♚xa1



Position after: 11... ♖xa1

12. ♘b5 [12. ♘xe4! dxe4 13. ♔d1! led to an advantage for White, e.g. 13... ♘c6 14. ♘g3 d3!? 15. ♘xe4 and now after the natural 15... dxc2+ White plays 16. ♔d2! and the engines give him +4, no need for further details!] 12... ♘c6 13. f3 d3 14. cxd3 ♘xe5 15. dxe4 ♘d3+ 16. ♔d1 ♙d7 17. ♘d6+ ♔f8 18. ♖xh7 ♙e8 19. e5 ♘xc1 20. ♖h8+ ♔e7 21. ♖h4+ ♔f8 22. ♖h8+ ♔e7 23. ♖h4+ ♔f8 24. ♖h8+ ½-½ To, N (2301) – Nagy, E (2223) Budapest 2015.

B) 6... dxe4 A lot of games feature this move, but I dislike it because White can choose to transpose to the 4. a3 and 7. ♘ge2! line. Oh and by the way, this also scores great for White.



Position after: 6... ♗g6!

Back to 6... ♗g6.

(see diagram previous column)

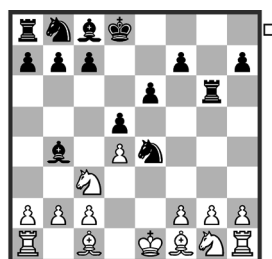
7. ♖e3

The most played option but not the best.

7. ♖h4! It's White who needs to equalize, actually.

A) 7... ♗g4 Just in case you need a draw. I mean, if you win one rating point that's worth it, right? Coward!
8. ♖h6 ♗g6 [8... c5!? transposes to variations with ...c5 above.] 9. ♖h4=

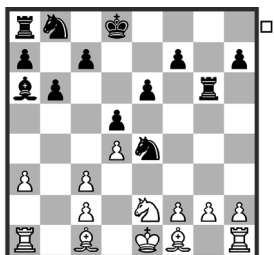
B) 7... ♘xe4 8. ♖xd8+ ♔xd8



Position after: 8... ♔xd8

The queen exchange is advantageous for White, but we get piece activity in return. 9. ♘ge2 [9. a3 looks more active. 9... ♙xc3+ 10. bxc3 ♘xc3= White has some compensation but it's not enough.] 9... b6! After exchanging the bad bishop, Black must have the slightly better position. Exchanging bad bishops is a priority because the centre will be very fixed af-

terwards, which means good/bad bishops will be more relevant. Hence the exchange. 10. a3 [10. f3!? ♖xc3 11. bxc3 ♘d6= With a nice equal position to fight in.] 10... ♘xc3+ 11. bxc3 [11. ♖xc3?! ♖xc3 12. bxc3 ♘a6= And Black gets all he ever wanted. A big house, a beautiful partner and a bad bishop swap.] 11... ♘a6=



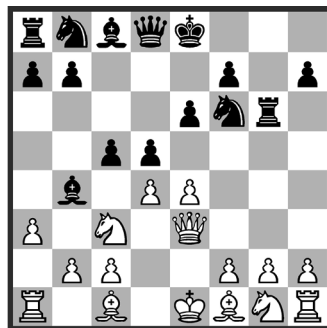
Position after: 11... ♘a6=

This position is equal but easier to play for Black. The longer I spend thinking for White, the less I can come up with a sensible plan. Moreover, I like the positional control over the light squares.

7... c5

Now the move is justified because of the unfortunate position of the white queen. Instead, 7... ♖xe4 was played in Alekhine – Euwe 1935. This is less to the point. 8. a3 ♘xc3+ 9. bxc3 c5 Black lost the option of preserving his bishop. We need that bishop to maintain the balance.

8. a3



Position after: 8. a3

8... ♘a5!

Taking on c3 would strengthen White's centre. After 8... ♘a5 White has three options: 9. ♖e2, 9. ♘d2 and 9. b4.

A) 8... cxd4!? is worth considering. 9. ♙xd4 ♖c6 10. ♙d3 ♘xc3+ 11. ♙xc3 e5! 12. ♘b5 d4



Position after: 12... d4

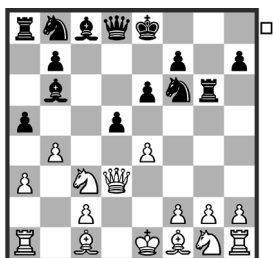
The only bad thing about this variation is that we are closing the position when we have an advantage in development. This is counterintuitive to me, so I don't prefer this way of playing, even though it's a nice equal position.

B) 8... ♙a5? does not work, but it does illustrate White's options: 9.

♘ge2 cxd4 10. axb4 ♚xa1 11. ♘xd4 e5 12. ♘b3+.

9. ♘ge2

A) 9. b4 Not the best option. 9... cxd4! 10. ♚xd4 ♙b6 11. ♚d3 a5! ♞



Position after: 11... a5! ♞

Opening up the position is always a good thing when you're ahead in development. The white queen definitely made too many moves.

B) 9. ♙d2?



Position after: 9. ♙d2?

This very normal-looking move is a mistake

B1) 9... ♘g4? Despite the big urges to attack a queen, don't do it, control yourself! In most positions the knight loses control over the centre after ...♘g4. 10. ♚d3± 0-1 (31) Velcheva, M (2283) – Socko, M (2440) Ostrava 1999.

B2) 9... ♘c6! 10. ♙b5 cxd4N [10... ♘g4?! DON'T DO IT, like really. 11. ♚d3 cxd4 12. ♚xd4∞ 1-0 (28) Miladinovic, I (2599) – Calandri, F (2115) Assisi 2003.] 11. ♙xc6+ bxc6 12. ♚xd4



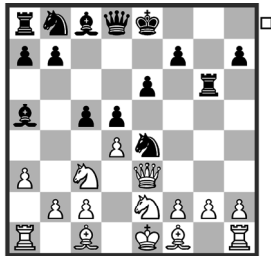
Position after: 12. ♚xd4

12... c5! 13. ♚xc5 d4 14. 0-0-0 ♙b6 15. ♚e5 dxc3 16. ♙xc3 ♚c7 ♞ And Black is close to winning.

9... cxd4

The only way to create any problems. Often exchanging something will let you keep the initiative.

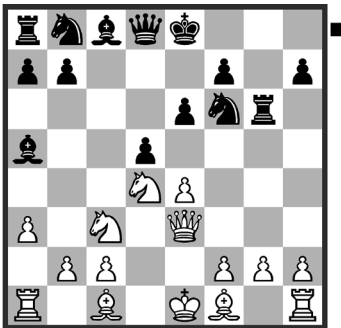
9... ♘xe4?! is not direct enough.



Position after: 9... Nxe4?!

10. dxc5± [10. b4 is also an option.
10... cxb4? An instructive mistake, Black gives up the fight for the centre.
11. Nxe4 dxe4 12. axb4± 1-0 (34) Varga, Z (2457) – Birnboim, N (2319) Balatonlelle 2009.]

10. Nxd4



Position after: 10. Nxd4

White gets another knight in the centre.

10... Nxe4 11. Qd2

11. b4 The other sensible option, but that's pushing the bishop to the right

place. 11... Qb6! 12. Nxe4 dxe4 13. c3 Qd5



Position after: 13... Qd5

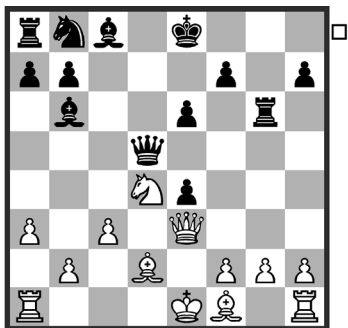
Preparing to attack the pinned piece again. 14. Qd2 e5 Showing muscle. 15. Nc2 This is the sensible option, not getting in anyone's way. 15... Qxd2+ 16. Qxd2 Due to the central majority and the pressure on the g-file I think Black can safely claim an edge. For example: 16... Nc6 17. Qe3



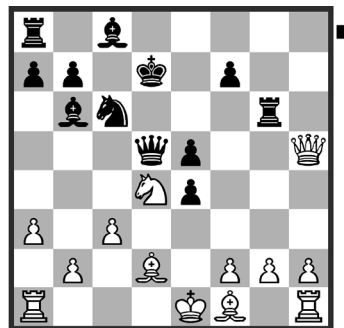
Position after: 17. Qe3

17... Qc7! 18. h4 f5 19. Qe2 f4 20. Qh5 fxg6 21. Qxg6+ hxg6 22. Nxe3 Qf7 The bishops will perform magic later on.

11... Qb6 12. Nxe4 dxe4 13. c3 Qd5



Position after: 13... ♖d5



Position after: 17. ♖h5

The same idea as the variation above still works. Black takes over the centre and gets an advantage, e.g.

14. ♖h3 ♘c6

14... ♘d7!? 15. ♙e3 ♙xd4 16. ♙xd4 e5 17. ♖h5



Position after: 17. ♖h5

17... ♖d6! [17... ♖b3 Decentralizing gets you into trouble. 18. ♙e3 ♖xb2 19. ♖c1± This is worth considering but it will be a pain to play against the bishops.] 18. ♙e3 ♘f6 19. ♖d1 ♖c6= Black's central presence compensates for the bishop pair.

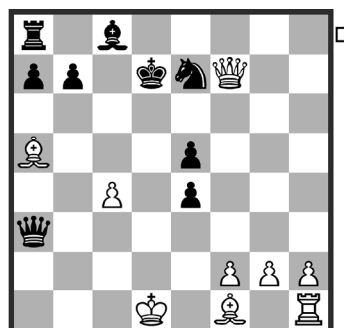
15. ♖xh7 e5 16. ♖h8+ ♙d7! 17. ♖h5

In this position Black has many interesting possibilities. I have selected a fighting option which gives White a lot of options to go wrong!

17... ♖d6! 18. c4 ♖xd4 19. ♖xf7+ ♘e7 20. ♙c3 ♙a5 21. ♙xa5 ♖xb2

This part was all forced.

22. ♖d1 ♖xd1+ 23. ♙xd1 ♖xa3=



Position after: 23... ♖xa3=

With a wildly interesting position. Black can give a perpetual if he chooses. I'd invite you to check your pockets right now. Yes, you can feel a draw in your pocket! This position is at least equal.



Conclusion

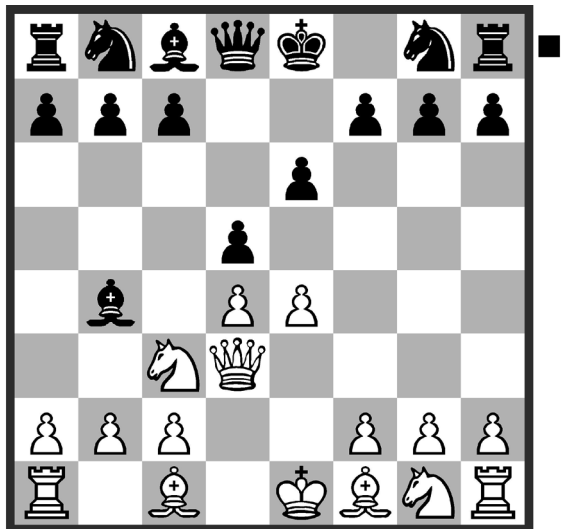
To summarize, 4. ♖g4 is an inferior move which can only be used as a surprise. In my opinion White should play 6. ♖g4 in the line with 4. a3. There Black has to exchange his bishop on c3 before it can choose to play ...♙a5 as in our main line here. I only like the move ...c5 when the white queen is on e3. Otherwise we should

just take on e4 and exchange into the endgame. White players get this kind of endgame quite often, but Black has a pleasant position after the exchange of his bad bishop. I would recommend you to remember those two things: ♖e3 is met with ...c5 and otherwise, entering an endgame and exchanging the bad bishop will work.



4. ♔d3 – The Clever Queen

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3
♙b4 4. ♔d3



Chapter Guide

Chapter 2 – 4. ♔d3 (The Clever Queen)

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘c3 ♙b4 4. ♔d3

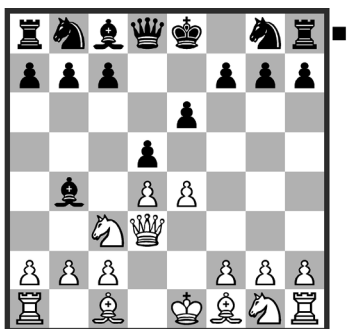
1) 4... ♘e7 23

2) 4... dxe4 5. ♙xe4 ♘f6 6. ♙h4 ♙d5 27

3) 4... dxe4 5. ♙xe4 ♘f6 6. ♙h4 ♘c6 29

1) 4... ♞e7

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♞c3 ♞b4 4. ♕d3



Position after: 4. ♕d3

Most people are very surprised when they meet a sideline like this. And it is definitely tempting to immediately go into refutation mode. 4. ♕d3 is an exception. This is a very decent move and it is actually quite hard to fully equalize. I believe this is the best of the minor alternatives for White. I consider 4. e5, 4. a3, 4. exd5, and 4. ♞e2 to be the main alternatives.

White breaks the rule “Don't get your queen out too quickly”, yet this time, it is justified. The queen, being a woman, likes to have many tasks at the same time. And here she is covering e4 and c3, getting out of the way for queenside castling and preparing a kingside swing all at the same time. We need to react appropriately or we will end up worse. Black can consider four moves here. 4... c5 and 4... ♞c6 are

interesting but only as a surprise. 4... ♞e7 is a very serious move, as it is recommended by authors like Berg, Watson and Williams. I have made some proper research on this move and I believe the winning chances are decent, but objectively it is not the best. Don't worry, I will demonstrate a bit about this move as well. I think if you really need a win, this might be a safer bet as the pawn structure is less drawish.

Last but not least, the very logical move 4... dxe4, which I have chosen as my main line. The main reason is that I have found two very decent continuations to play for a win. The play is quite forced and White has few options to deviate. I like that. So, after 5. ♕xe4 ♞f6 6. ♕h4 Black has two interesting plans:

1) 6... ♕d5 (subchapter 2), a centralizing move I really like. Queens will be exchanged, so endgame lovers put your hands up!

2) 6... ♞c6 (subchapter 3), intending ...♞e7 and ...♞f5 is my chosen main line. It scores very poorly, but I have some novelties to make you ready for battle.

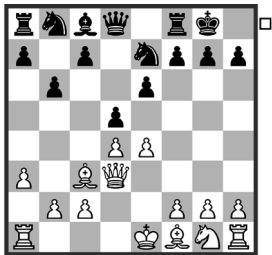
4... ♞e7!?

This is the big alternative here. Depending on the situation and the opponent, I might prefer this line, actually.

5. ♖ge2!

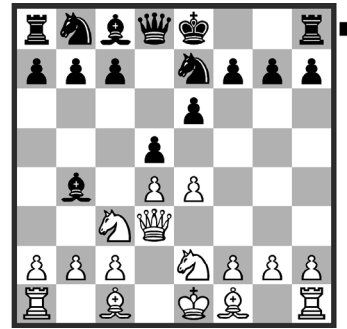
I have been unable to equalize against this move. 5. ♖ge2 is a useful waiting move, postponing the c1-bishop's choice, so it is still able to go to f4. Berg most notably recommends ...♘bc6, but if you listen very carefully you can hear your c-pawn cry after that move.

5. ♕d2 Most authors see this as their main line. But it's not the best move.
5... 0-0 6. a3 ♕xc3 7. ♕xc3 b6



Position after: 7... b6

Preparing to hit the queen and exchange our semi-bad bishop. The centre is not closed yet, so be careful; your bishop does not fit the stereotype of bad just yet. 8. ♖f3 Here Black has a wide array of options to get a position to play for a win. 8... ♕a6 [8... ♕b7 9. ♕d3 dxe4 10. ♕xe4 ♕xe4 11. ♖xe4 ♖d5=] 9. ♕xa6 ♘xa6 10. ♖d3 ♘b8= At least equal.



Position after: 5. ♖ge2!

5... ♘bc6

A) 5... b6 I tried to make this work, but White gets the upper hand. 6. ♕f4! 6... ♕a6 [6... dxe4 7. ♖xe4 ♘bc6 8. 0-0-0 0-0 9. ♕g5± And White is ready to launch an attack on the kingside.] 7. ♖g3 0-0 8. 0-0-0 ♕xe2 9. ♕xe2 [9. ♕xc7 is a little more risky. I prefer the bishop pair instead of a shaky pawn. 9... ♖d7 10. ♘xe2±] 9... ♕xc3 10. ♖xc3 dxe4 11. ♖xc7±

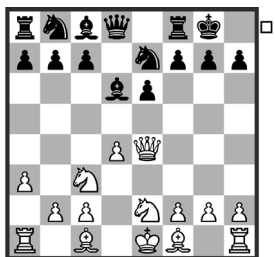


Position after: 11. ♖xc7±

And Luke Skywalker is crushing all hopes for the dark side. I actually used to own a *Star Wars* chess set with two Luke Skywalker/Yoda pieces. Of course, if anyone was losing they would claim

“the force” magically made all the pieces fly from the table.

B) 5... 0-0 is the computer's choice. 6. a3 dxe4 7. ♖xe4 ♕d6!?N



Position after: 7... ♕d6!?

8. h4! ♖bc6 9. ♕d2 e5 10. 0-0-0 ♕f5 11. ♖e3± I'm quite afraid of the white attack, which will arrive first.

C) 5... ♖d7 I really like this flexible move and it is Black's best bet. After 6. ♕d2 0-0 7. 0-0-0!? we have a very complicated position.

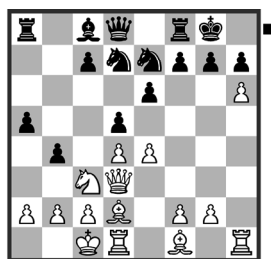


Position after: 7. 0-0-0!?

C1) 7... c5?! A very normal move but not the best. 8. exd5 exd5 9. dxc5?! [White should have played 9. a3!N c4 10. ♖f3± with great attacking chances.] 9... ♖xc5= 0-1 (30) Kupper,

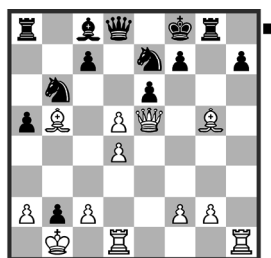
P (2310) – Dgebuadze, A (2425) Leon 1996.

C2) 7... a5!∞ This variation is double-edged, but I must admit it's not to my taste. Nevertheless, Black should be no worse objectively and can try to win! For example 8. h4!? b5!? 9. h5 ♕xc3 10. ♖xc3 b4 11. h6



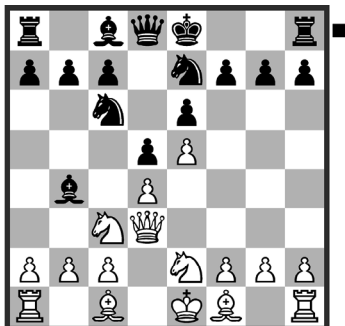
Position after: 11. h6

Now we enter a very forced line. [11. ♖a4!? ♕a6 12. ♖e3 ♕xf1 13. h6 g6 14. ♖hxf1=] 11... bxc3 12. hxg7 cxb2+♠ Mamma mia, here we go again! 13. ♖b1 ♖xg7 14. ♕g5 ♖h8 15. ♖g3 ♖f8 16. exd5 ♖b6 17. ♖e5 ♖g8 18. ♕b5



Position after: 18. ♕b5

18... ♖g6! 19. ♕h6+ ♖e7 20. ♕g5+=

6. e5!

Position after: 6. e5!

In closed positions pawn breaks are very important. The c-pawn is starting to cry a little louder now. Note that compared to the 4. Nge2 variation White has not played a3 yet. This is advantageous for White because Black's attack will be a little slower.

6... b6

6... 0-0 7. Qg5! f6 [7... h6 8. Qh4 doesn't help Black.] 8. exf6 gxf6 9. Qh6 Rf7 10. 0-0-0± The white king is safer than Black's, hence White has a plus.

7. a3

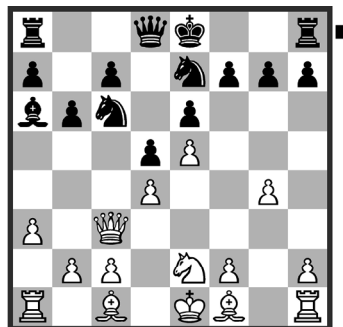
The move ...b6 signifies that Black is going for a positional setup, so White

can take a deep sigh of relief. No pawn storms today.

7... Qxc3 + 8. Qxc3!

8. Nxc3 a5=

8... Qa6 9. g4! ±



Position after: 9. g4!±

With a wildly interesting position, but I do believe White can claim an edge.

It's very easy to make mistakes as Black in this cramped position.

9... h5?!

This standard counter is not possible.

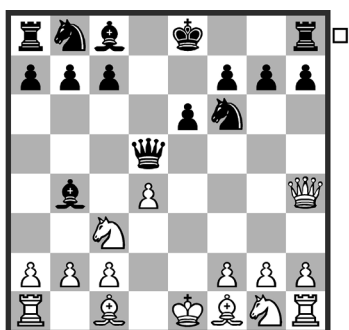
10. gxh5 Qc8 11. Rg1 Rhx5 12. Rxc7 ±

2) 4...dxe4 5. ♖xe4 ♘f6 6. ♖h4 ♖d5

1. e4 e6 2. d4 d5 3. ♘c3 ♙b4 4. ♖d3
dxe4 5. ♖xe4 ♘f6 6. ♖h4

6. ♖d3?! c5 7. dxc5 0-0

6... ♖d5!?



Position after: 6... ♖d5!?

This queen move is very interesting, and definitely worth checking out if you like endgames.

7. ♙d2

A) 7. ♘ge2!? ♖f5! [7... 0-0!?!; 7... ♖e4?! 8. ♖xe4 ♘xe4 9. a3±] 8. ♖g5 0-0 [8... ♖g6 9. ♙f4=] 9. ♖xf5 exf5 10. a3 ♙a5=

B) 7. a3 is an attempt to grab the advantage of the bishop pair in exchange for the damaged structure. 7... ♙xc3+ 8. bxc3 ♖e4+ This scores best and is the best. 9. ♖xe4 ♘xe4



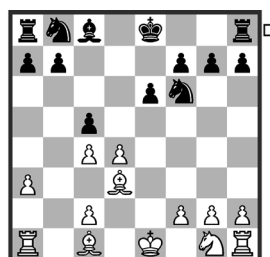
Position after: 9... ♘xe4

B1) 10. ♙b2 ♘d6 11. a4 [11. c4 b6 12. c5 ♘b7! ♖ Did anyone cheer, "Hurray, a long-term weakness!"]? 11... b6 12. a5 ♙a6 13. ♙xa6 ♘xa6 14. axb6 axb6=

B2) 10. ♙d3 ♘xc3 11. ♙d2 ♘d5

B3) 10. c4 This is the most critical.

B3.1) 10... c5 was played by French expert Milan Drasko. Milan has a very original repertoire, it's always a pleasure to see his games for inspiration. Despite the fact that 10...c5 equalizes, I still prefer 10... b6!N (see below). 11. ♙d3 ♘f6



Position after: 11... ♘f6

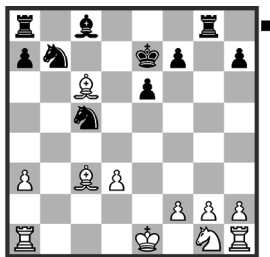
12. c3?! [Better is 12. f3! cxd4 13. xd4 0-0= .] 12... b6 13. f3 b7 14. dxc5 bxc5 15. b1 e4 0-1 (52) Batricevic, S (2232) – Drasko, M (2508) Cetinje 2008.

B3.2) 10... b6!N 11. d3 d6 12. c5 [12. f4 a6 13. c5 bxc5 14. dxc5 b7=] 12... $\text{b7!}=$



Position after: 12... $\text{b7!}=$

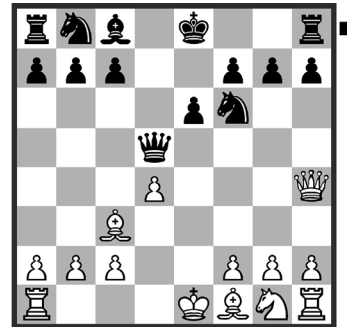
Again this strange looking knight move works. That's the only thing I would like you to remember. Play could continue: 13. f4 bxc5 14. xc7 cxd4 15. e4 a6 16. c6+ e7 17. e5 d3 18. cxd3 ac5 19. xc7 g8 20. c3



Position after: 20. c3

Throughout this variation it is very hard to play the White side.

7... xc3 8. xc3



Position after: 8. xc3

8... e4+

8... $\text{d7!?$ is also worth considering. 9. f3 b5 10. xb5+ xb5 11. g3 0-0 12. d5 h5 13. xc7 xd5 14. e5 f6=

9. xe4 xe4

Now there are a lot of ways for White to go wrong.

10. e2!

The best, solving opening problems with development is always best!

A) 10. b4?! c6 11. b5 d7 12. a3 d6 13. xd6 cxd6= In this equal position it's easier to play Black.

B) 10. f3?! xc3 11. bxc3 b6 With a little advantage because of the better pawn structure.

10... c6!