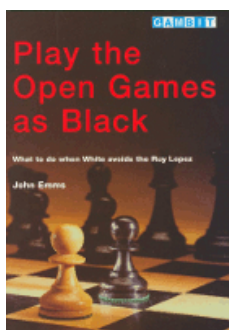




COLUMNISTS

The Openings Explained

Abby Marshall



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The Openings Explained

The Scotch Four Knights [C47]

The topic this month is the Belgrade Gambit in the Scotch Four Knights; specifically, what Black should do against the Belgrade. I'm using [*Play the Open Games as Black*](#) by John Emms, which is excellent for anyone who plays 1...e5 against 1.e4, which should be most players under 2000 in my opinion. Of course there are many other good openings against 1.e4, but I was taught that open games, full of tactics and piece play, are the most important to a player's initial development. Emm's book was published in 2000, which is ancient by today's standards, but the basic ideas and lines still hold. It's my objective to make this column focus more on verbal explanations and less on dense analysis.

Theory

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.d4

The Scotch Four Knights Gambit.

4...exd4 5.Nd5



This is the Belgrade gambit. I saw it a lot as a kid because it sets a trap from move five: the e-pawn is poisoned. There are some fantastic variations involved with taking the pawn, but I do not recommend it for Black. The Belgrade is harmless, yet it's important to know what to do.

5...Be7

This is the line that I play. There is another option that I will also investigate.

5...Nb4!? Why not copy White and move a knight? 6.Bc4 White develops another piece and defends the d5-knight, which had two attackers on it. 6...Nbx d5 Black trades the rogue knight for the centralized one. 7.exd5 Bb4+ This move disrupts White's position. I will further examine the 5...Nb4!? variation in the first illustrative game.

5...Nxe4 This line gets crazy, and I do not recommend it. It may be fine for Black, but it involves too much study for a line that doesn't come up very often. 6.Qe2 This is the idea. The pin and the knight on d5 create a threatening iconography. 6...f5 Only move. 7.Ng5

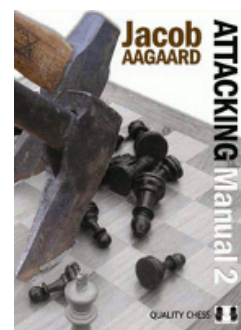
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The Four Knights
by Jan Pinski



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by Jacob Aagaard



I can't remember all the tricks, but if someone plays this, it's very likely that they at least know this line and Black players have to constantly be on their guard.

6.Bf4

White has a multitude of choices here, but they are not difficult to play against.

6.Nxd4 White immediately restores material equality. Taking the pawn still looks risky to me. 6...Nxd5 Black first eliminates the intruding knight. (6...Nxe4 7.Nf5 0-0 8.Qg4 Bf6 9.Nh6+!? Kh8 10.Qxe4) 7.exd5 Nxd4 Second, Black eliminates the threat of Nf5 and does not waste a tempo with his attacked knight. 8.Qxd4 0-0 9.Be2 Bf6



This looks extremely equal to me. Black can play ...d6 or consider ...b6 and ...Bb7 to attack the advanced d-pawn.

6.Bb5 This is another non-anxiety inducing move. 6...0-0 Black calmly develops and waits for White's aggressive play to prove something. 7.0-0 d6 8.Bxc6 bxc6 9.Nxf6+ Bxf6 10.Nxd4 This is a classic example of the two bishops versus a weakened pawn structure. I prefer Black's two bishops in this open position. 10...c5 Black advances the weak pawn and takes more control of the center. 11.Ne2 Ba6 12.Re1 Rb8 13.c3 Re8



Black easily has the initiative.

6.Bc4 The c4-square is the normal home for the Italian bishop. 6...0-0 As in the previous variations, Black develops quietly. 7.Nxd4 (7.0-0 This allows an

interesting imbalance. White gives up a pawn for the initiative and a better pawn structure, although it will be one pawn short. 7...Nxe4 8.Re1 Nf6 9.Nxe7 + Nxe7 10.Qxd4 d5 This is all pretty much forced. White has definite compensation for the pawn, but Black has good defensive resources and the center. 11.Bg5? Too fancy. White should just retreat his bishop with a tense game. 11...Nf5! 12.Bxf6 Nxd4 13.Bxd8 Nxc2



Black is going to end up a couple of pawns ahead.) 7...Nxd5 8.Bxd5 Nxd4 9.Qxd4 Bf6 10.Qd3 c6 11.Bb3 d5! Black follows the same pattern as before, exchanging pieces to reveal White's overextension. Now Black is castled and has control over the center. 12.0-0 White chooses development over material. (12.exd5 The pawn deficit is not a problem for Black. 12...Re8+ 13.Kf1 cxd5 14.Bxd5 Be6 Black has everything developed while White languishes behind with trapped rooks and an undeveloped bishop. Play may continue 15.Bxe6 Qxd3+ 16.cxd3 Rxe6 17.Be3 Rc8) 12...dxe4 Black starts to take the initiative. 13.Qxe4 Re8 14.Qf3 Be6 15.Bxe6 Rxe6 16.Be3 Qa5 Black activates the queen and looks to White's weak queenside. (16...Bxb2 17.Rab1) 17.c3 Qb5 18.Rab1 a5 This frees the a-rook to move because it had been guarding the a-pawn, and restricts White's vulnerable queenside pawns. 19.Rfd1 Re7 20.Bd4?!



White would do better to sit tight and not allow weaknesses or Black to get further into the white position. 20...Bxd4 21.cxd4 Rd8 22.Rd2 Qg5 Black is better. An isolani in the endgame is going to be no fun for White.

6...d6

White develops a piece and makes an immediate threat to c7. Black again responds with a natural move.

7.Nxd4

Now, instead of eyeing f5, the knight is looking at b5.

7...0-0

Black avoids any complications and finishes development.

8.Nb5



8.Nxc6 bxc6 9.Nc3 White has doubled Black's pawns, but also opened files for the black pieces. 9...Rb8 10.Rb1 Re8 11.Bd3 Bg4 12.Qd2 d5 Black gets a firm hold in the center as well. 13.0-0 Bb4



Both sides have a stake in the center, Black has active pieces, and White has the better structure.

8...Nxd5

Black removes the threat to the c-pawn.

9.exd5 Ne5 10.Qd2

10.Be2 This is similar to 10.Qd2. 10...Ng6 11.Bg3 f5 Black gains space and keeps the initiative by making threats. The e6-square is not weak, because White has no way to take advantage of it. 12.f4 Bf6 13.c3 Re8 14.0-0 a6 15. Nd4 Bxd4+ 16.cxd4 Bd7 17.Re1 Qf6 The blocked nature of the position is unfavorable to the white bishops. Still, White has open files, and Black has the possibility of taking advantage of the white pawns. It's equal.

10...c6 11.Nc3

11.dxc6 bxc6 12.Nd4 Qb6 Black is better developed and creates immediate threats. It is not wise to open the center when you are behind in development and uncastled.

11...Ng6 12.Be3 c5



White is not going to surrender the center by taking on c6, so Black focuses

on the d4-square.

13.Be2 f5 14.f4 Bf6 15.Nd1 Qe8 16.0-0 b5 17.Bf2 a6 18.Bf3 Ra7 19.g3 Re7

Black has an edge because he controls more space. I don't know what White is planning. This position will be examined in the second game.

Van Haastert, E – Golod, V

Dieren, 1998

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.d4 exd4 5.Nd5 Nb4



This is the other option available to Black. I think the decision of which variation to play depends on how comfortable you are with the resulting positions rather than evaluations, since 5...Be7 is more sound.

6.Bc4

6.Nxd4 Nxe4 This makes a picturesque position. This is part of the point of 5...Nb4: the d5-knight is now attacked and unprotected. 7.Nb5 (7.Nf5 With the bishop still on f8, this is not scary. 7...c6 8.Nxb4 Bxb4+ 9.c3 Qf6!



Black develops the queen to make some potential threats. 10.Qf3 (10.Nxg7+ Kd8! Mate is threatened. 11.Qf3 Bxc3+ 12.bxc3 Qxg7-/+) 10...Nxc3! 11.a3 Qe5+ 12.Kd2 Ne4+ 13.Kc2 Bf8! I love this. Black slips all the way back with a winning position, up two pawns.) 7...Nxd5 8.Qxd5 Nc5 Black retreats the knight out of danger. Going back to f6 is not an option because of 9.Qe5 and the double attack on the king and the c7-pawn. 9.Be3 (9.Bc4 Ne6 10.Bf4 c6 11.Nd6+ Bxd6 12.Qxd6 Nxf4 13.Qxf4 Qe7+ Generally, this kind of position is dead equal, but Black is up a pawn.) 9...Ne6 (9...c6? This is not a threat. 10.Nd6+) 10.Nxa7 c6 11.Qd2 d5 12.Nxc8 Rxc8 White has the two bishops, but Black has the center. It's dynamically equal with chances for both sides.

6...Nbx5

The main point of 5...Nb4 was to get rid of the imposing d5-knight.

7.exd5 Bb4+

Black develops with tempo and remains up a pawn for the time being.

8.Bd2

8.Kf1 Well, this move is of course legal. 8...0-0 9.Qxd4 Be7 10.Bg5 d6 Black sets up a solid defensive structure, waiting to take advantage of the awkward White development with the king on f1 and the undeveloped rook on h1. 11. Re1 h6 12.Bh4 Re8 13.h3 Bd7 14.g4 c5! Black is better. If White takes en passant, Black has the center with 15...bxc6. If White retreats, Black has control over the important d4-square and can think about queenside expansion. I wouldn't worry about the white attack because the black king is quite secure and White has poor piece coordination.

8...Qe7+

Black is still up material, so it serves Black's advantage to trade. White's aggression is now a distant memory.

9.Qe2 Bxd2+



10.Kxd2

10.Nxd2 The pressure is of the d4-pawn, which is still an extra pawn for Black.

10...Qxe2+ 11.Kxe2 c5 12.dxc6 bxc6!?

Black unbalances the position. The a-pawn loses its neighbor, but Black has the center. 12...dxc6 The position is now dead level.

13.Nxd4 d5 14.Bd3

14.Bb3 c5 15.Ba4+ Ke7 16.Nb3 Ba6+ 17.Kf3 Kd6 I'm not sure what good the white bishop is doing on a4. 18.a3 Rab8 19.Rab1 Bc4 20.Rhd1 h5 Black has all the play, although it is still about equal.

14...c5

Black exerts more control over the center.

15.Nb5

15.Bb5+ Bd7 16.Bxd7+ Kxd7 17.Nf5 Rhe8+ 18.Kf3 Re5 The bishop exchange has helped Black, who now has an active king and active pieces. Notice that the white rooks have not even moved from their starting squares.

15...0-0 16.b3

White preemptively nullifies pressure on the b-file.

16...Be6 17.c4?!

It's a general rule that when you are worse you do not move your pawns, because each pawn movement leaves undefended squares behind. This eventually weakens your position. Most importantly, this move wastes time. Where are the white rooks?

17...Rfe8 18.Kf3 Rad8 19.Rhe1 Re7 20.Nc3

I'm not a fan of this move because it allows Black to quickly seize the initiative. 20.h3 is a better try. The white king will be solidly placed on f3, which is not such a bad square for it.

20...Rde8



21.Rec1 d4 22.Na4 Bg4+ 23.Kg3 Re5-/+ 24.f3 Bd7 25.Nb2

This is the another knight move that I dislike. 25.Kf2 Nh5 26.g3 is better. White should not fear the doubling of his a-pawns if Black trades bishop for a knight.

25...Nh5+ 26.Kf2 Nf4



This is a superb square for the knight, which makes Black's next move confusing to me.

27.Rc2 Nxd3+

I don't like this move because I love the strength of the f4-knight. It's curious, because an often repeated mantra is not to trade pieces when you have more space. After thinking about this and talking about it with other players, I think this piece of advice is mistaken. Often it makes a lot of sense to trade because your advantage carries into the endgame. Here, however, trading is unsatisfactory. Black would do better to slowly improve the position with 27...Bc6 .

28.Nxd3 Bf5 29.Nxe5 Bxc2 30.Re1 f6 31.Nc6 Ra8

Black's advantage is not as good with more pieces off the board. White gains some play.

32.b4

32.Re7 a5 33.Rd7 This is the obvious plan. White's activity should hold the position.

32...Ba4 33.b5?

33.Ne7+ Kf8 34.Nd5 The bishop is preferable to the knight, but White has

good drawing chances.

33...a6

Black quickly mops over the over-extended pawns.

34.Rb1 Kf7 35.Ke2 Ke6 36.Kd2 Kd6 37.a3 g5 38.h4

38.h3 axb5 39.cxb5 Bxb5 40.Nxd4 cxd4 41.Rxb5 Rxa3 Even this is still a little unclear if Black can win. Rook endings are so drawish, and it pays to know them.

38...gxh4 39.Nb4 cxb4 40.Rxb4 axb5 41.cxb5 Kc5 0-1

Prié, Eric (2435) - Van der Wiel, John (2550)

FRA-NED Cannes (9), 1990

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.d4 exd4 5.Nd5 Be7 6.Bf4 d6 7.Nxd4 0-0 8.Nb5 Nxd5 9.exd5 Ne5 10.Qd2 c6 11.Nc3 Ng6 12.Be3 c5 13.Be2 f5 14.f4 Bf6 15.Nd1 Qe8 16.0-0 b5 17.Bf2 a6 18.Bf3 Ra7 19.g3 Re7

This is where we left off in the theory section.

20.c3



This dulls the scope of the black bishop on the diagonal.

20...Nh8

If a student of mine played this move, I would want to slap her hand. In closed positions, however, it's not taboo to play such slow, ugly moves because time is less important when there is limited piece engagement.

21.Ne3 g5!?

Black could also advance on the queenside. 21...Qd7 22.Rae1 a5 23.Bg2 b4.



22.Rae1 gxf4 23.gxf4 Ng6

Black goes right back and attacks the isolated f-pawn.

24.Ng2 Rff7

Black doesn't have serious attacking threats, so trades are fine. Black has a little more space and active pieces, which will be felt in the middlegame as well as the endgame.

25.Rxe7 Rxe7 26.Re1 Rxe1+ 27.Bxe1 Bg7 28.Bf2 Qe7 29.b4

This move makes sense. The white bishops are prepared for queenside play and White wants to combat Black's space advantage.

29...cxb4 30.cxb4 Qf6 31.Ne1?

White's weak pawns makes his position slightly vulnerable, and with this knight retreat White allows Black to ravage his position. When playing 29.b4, White was not sufficiently aware of the new weaknesses he had created.

31...Qc3! 32.Qxc3 Bxc3



It's interesting how quickly White's position falls apart.

33.Nd3 Bb7 34.Bb6 Bd2 35.Bc7 Nxf4 36.Nxf4 Bxf4 37.h3 Kf7 38.Kf2 Kf6 39.Ke2 Ke5 0-1

White's pawn falls and the two extra pawns easily will win.

Lessons Learned

1. Learn to be comfortable with imbalances. In some variations, Black has a pawn vs. White's initiative, or Black has a bishop vs. knight.
2. Even though White's play is aggressive, Black responds with simple, quiet moves (Be7, 0-0).
3. Watch out for tactical tricks.

Further Reading

[*Play the Open Games as Black*](#) by John Emms. It has a very good section on the Belgrade.

Practitioners

This is not a popular opening at the highest levels, but club players love it. It can also surprise an unwary opponent, so maybe it's something to take up as White?!

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